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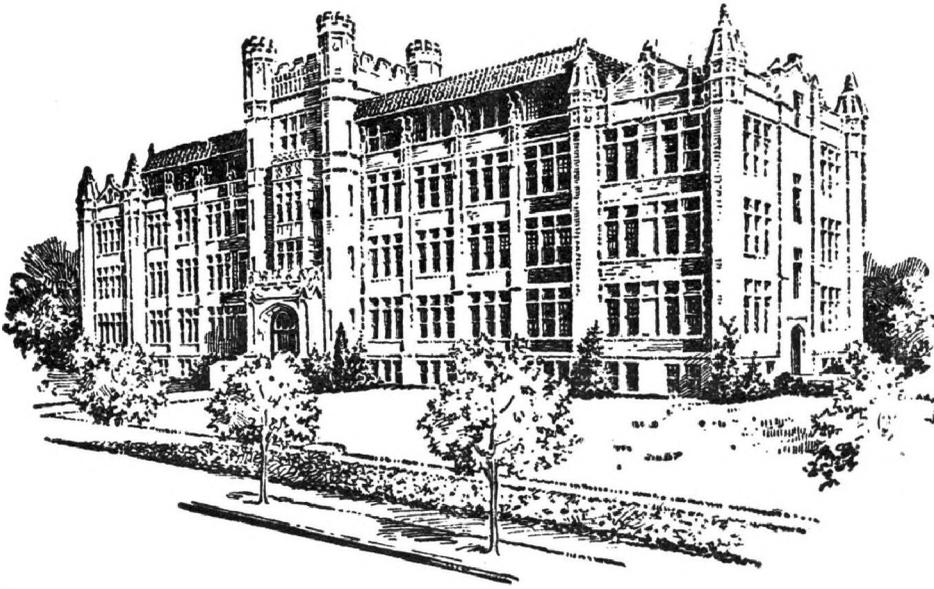
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Volume CI

Number 3

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"Stop clowning!"

... HE WHISPERED



—but when I began to play

I HAD been trying—unsuccessfully—to make an impression on Helen for weeks. But she didn't seem to see me at all. Naturally, I was pretty downhearted at the turn affairs had taken. For, at the beginning of our acquaintance, she had certainly been far more friendly with me than now. Utterly perplexed, I turned to her brother for advice. "Forget it," he laughed. "Helen isn't annoyed by anything you've done. It's something you haven't done. . . . Oh, I say, I'm sorry!" he broke off suddenly, red as a beet. "What were you going to say?" I demanded. "What haven't I done?" "It's nothing. Just a slip of the tongue," he evaded clumsily. But I insisted that he tell me and at last he consented.

"Well, you know, Helen has always been fond of music. I once heard her say she could never care for anyone who didn't know how to play some instrument or other. Of course, that's ridiculous. Lots of perfectly nice people—congenial, charming—have no musical ability. But you know how girls are. Once they get a notion, they stick to it, come what may!" I almost broke out into three cheers at Jerry's explanation. But that would have spoiled my secret—the secret I had kept so well all these months. Instead, I said, "I wish you had told me this before. For I can play a bit, you know—*one-finger stuff*."

He laughed. "Why

not try it at the party to-night? It ought to show her your heart's in the right place, anyway!"

A Dramatic Surprise

That night I sat down at the piano and did a chop-stick version of "Yes, We Have No Bananas!" to everybody's intense delight.

Calls of "What technique!" "When are you going to give a Carnegie Hall recital?" came from all over the room. But suddenly Jerry was at my side.

"Stop clowning!" he whispered. "Helen thinks I put you up to this to make fun of her!"

Instead of jumping up and apologizing to Helen, as he expected me to, I calmly swung into the opening bars of that beautiful ballad, "Garden in the Rain."

At first, astonishment kept them silent, but before long the whole crowd was singing—even Helen.

It must have been an hour before they allowed me to leave the piano. During that time I had played everything they asked for—songs, dance music, classical selections, jazz. . . .

My Secret

"Why on earth didn't you tell me you knew how to play?" demanded Jerry as we went home. "Why have you been keeping it a secret? I distinctly remember you once said you couldn't play. Yet-to-night. . ."

I looked at Helen. "There was a special reason for playing to-night," I said. "I couldn't have done it months ago. Even last year Jerry's remark about my not

being able to play, wouldn't have been an exaggeration.

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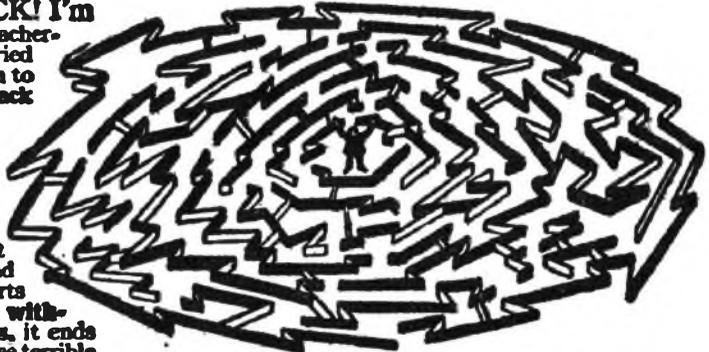
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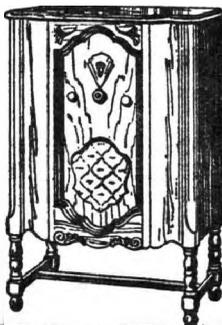
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Sweetheart of Destiny

By

Eleanor Elliott Carroll

She wanted so much from life! Alison Candler, the pampered daughter of a wealthy American resident of Ceylon, set out to seek the romance she demanded, and thought she had found it in the person of a good-looking young Englishman, who introduces himself as Larry Ford, and tells her that he is in search of an acquaintance of her father's. Alison does not reveal her real name for fear her father will hear of her escapade with Larry, and then and there begins a series of bewildering complications in which Destiny plays a leading rôle.

"Sweetheart of Destiny" is a novel which rouses the reader to the keenest interest. In the hands of a less-gifted author some of the situations might seem unreal, but so skillfully is this fiction done that the men and women come to flesh-and-blood life on the pages of the book, and it is simply impossible to put it aside until the last page is read.

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THE WINDS

By Bert Cooksley

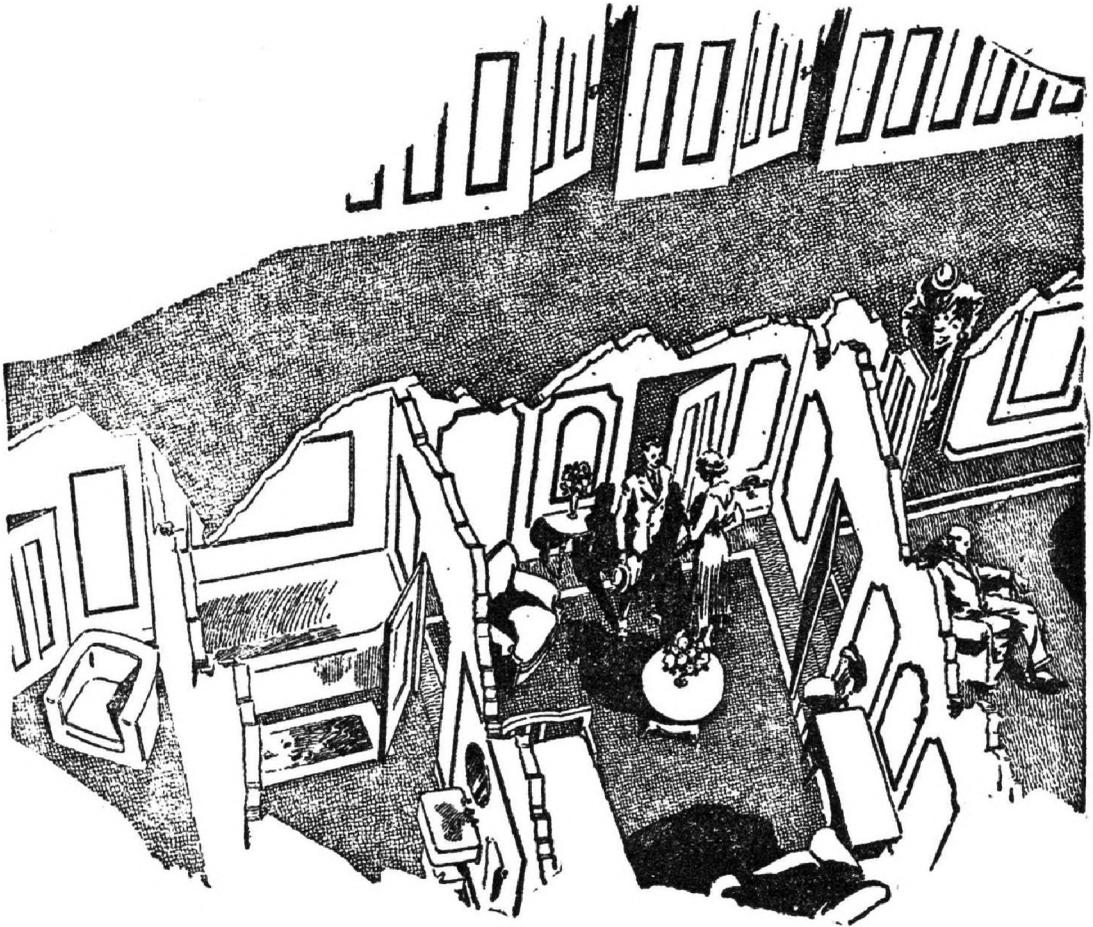
WHEREVER the world winds carry,
To farm or hill or fen,
The words sweep by
Like a far-off cry:
"Go down to the sea again,
Go down where the spars
Sweep up the stars
And meet the sea again!"

Wherever the world winds hurry,
By camp or cabin door,
The words swing out
Like a far-off shout:
"Go down to the sea once more,
Go down to the gales
That strip the sails
And meet the sea once more!"

They follow me over the highroads
And into the towns of men,
Till I turn and know
That I've got to go
To the world of the ships again,
To the world of gulls,
Of squalls and lulls
And the world of my heart again!

A Movie Star Murdered at
a Gala Reception—And the
Transatlantic Liner at Noon
Would Sail With the Secret.

RIGHT



CHAPTER I.

AN ASSIGNMENT.

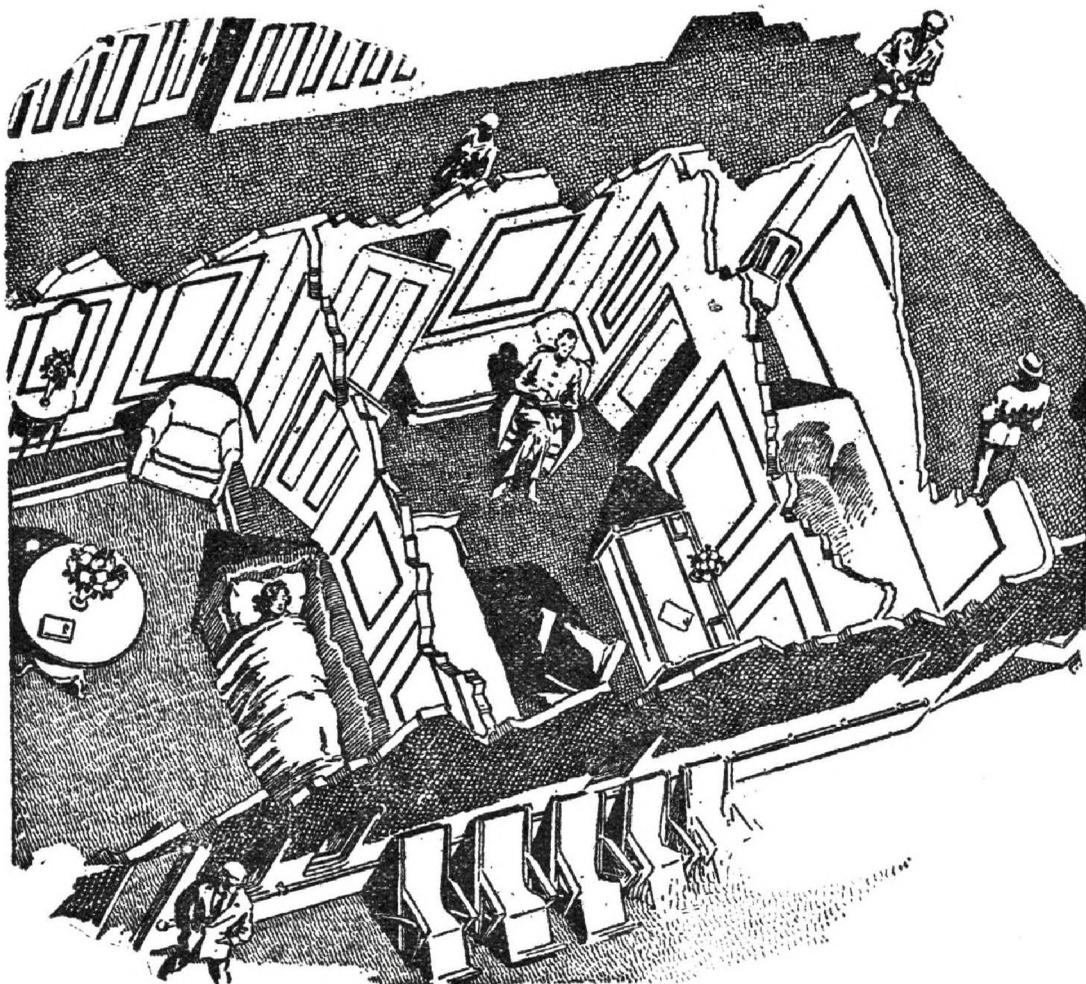
TONY'S place was filling up rapidly with the after-theater crowd—actors, vaudevillans, playwrights, society folk, chorus girls, shady characters, and those well known in professional circles whose single ambition then was to quench a thirst. It was the proud boast of the speakeasy owner that his narrow basement floor, cluttered up with wicker chairs and

porch tables, was the smart rendezvous of New York's celebrities.

In a corner sat Gregg of the *Examiner*, frowning into an empty glass, lending an attentive ear to O'Grady, who was discoursing on the evil days into which journalism had fallen. Gregg was wiry and dark, and not hard to look at, even in his seedy gray suit. His pal, once a famous reporter under Pulitzer and Bennett, now held a berth on the *Examiner's* copy desk, that haven of has-beens.

OFF *the* SHIP!

By SEAN O'LARKIN



The younger man listened vaguely until his eyes rested upon a swarthy-skinned, thick-lipped little gnome of a man in immaculate evening clothes. Sitting alone at a near-by table, this gnome sipped at a champagne cocktail, nervously watching the door and each newcomer. The reporter wondered what would be worrying "Lippy" Lorers.

He knew Lippy of old. The gnome was one of the town's prize, unjailed racketeers. He had been arrested for

murder twice, tried once and acquitted. And many times the police dragnet had gathered him up, only to release him a few hours later for lack of evidence.

Lippy was no law unto himself, but he was shrewd and clever, and he had never done time in the "big house." He was not a mob leader nor did he have a lust for power. Rather he preferred to be another's first lieutenant—on a salary basis—with his boss guaranteeing him every possible protection.

Gregg knew that Lippy had been re-

cently tied up with Sam Valcory, the bootlegger who catered to society's taste in cut liquor. Valcory, scion of an old Murray Hill family, had recouped his personal fortune in the rôle of first-class violator of the Eighteenth Amendment. And it had been rumored, the reporter recalled, that Lippy and Valcory had reached the parting of the ways.

Whom was Lippy Lorers working for now? And why on earth should he be so worried, so tense and nervous? Gregg was puzzled and mildly interested in the racketeer. But for the grace of God, he might be in Lippy's boots! They were both wage earners—despite the difference in wages! Honesty and chasing news paid him seventy-five dollars a week; dishonesty, dealing in death, and breaking the law, yielded Lippy a cool thousand a week.

And here they were sitting in Tony's with the town's élite, one another's equal, the racketeer sipping champagne at two dollars the glass; the reporter gulping poor Scotch at a dollar a throw. Gregg smiled to himself. He sure did like money, needed it badly—but he wouldn't change places with Lippy for a million proffered on a silver platter.

His reverie was interrupted by the appearance of a tall, sandy-haired youth in shiny serge. The latter approached Lippy swiftly and the racketeer nodded to him, his hands trembling excitedly.

"It's all set!" the tall youth said.

"O. K. I'm ready to go the limit!" Lippy retorted crisply. "What about the split?"

"You're to have the cut you asked."

"Good! And is she wise?"

"Not to all the details."

Lippy's face relaxed into a crude smile. "O. K. We'll meet later at Harrigan's."

He dismissed the youth and called for his check. Gregg was aware that some plot was under way—probably the landing of a liquor consignment from

"Rum Row." Harrigan's, he remembered, was a Long Island road house frequented by the choicer members of the underworld. But why did Lippy stress the fact that he was willing to "go the limit"? What did that involve? And there was a woman mixed up in the business afoot.

The thought of trailing Lippy entered Gregg's head. He might be rewarded with a story or a piece of lead in his stomach. His eyes fell upon his glass again, and he saw that O'Grady had had it filled. The drink was downed, and when he looked up again, Lippy was gone. So Gregg settled back in his chair and promptly forgot him and his plot.

"Say, Joe," he grinned, "if you get me cockeyed enough, I'll ask Martel for a raise in the morning. What with the price of red-eye going up in these fancy joints, I ought to be getting more money—to keep up with the high coast of guzzling!"

"You haven't nerve to ask for a raise!" O'Grady scoffed. "You tackle the hardest stories without fear of failure or trouble—but like the rest of us, you're afraid to ask a city editor for five more a week."

"I'm after fifteen more," Gregg confided. "Haddle of the *Star* gets eighty-five, and I've beaten the pants off him time and again. I'm worth as much to the *Examiner*. But—hell! think of it, Joe! New York's the biggest city in the world and its newspapers pay the lousiest salaries to reporters. Seventy is top on the *Examiner*, the leader in the evening paper field! And the morning paper men get a hundred and better—for rewriting the stuff we evening fellows dig up!"

O'Grady nodded sympathetically. "I know. And if you don't like it you can give your job to a school-of-journalism boy who'll take it for twenty per—so's he can develop into a Richard Harding Davis!"

Gregg, slightly in his cups, grew furi-

ous at the thought of his low salary. Why he'd turned in some of the *Examiner's* biggest scoops! He didn't even get a thank-you. And nobody ever suggested giving him a raise. He shuddered at the fate of Joe O'Grady. One of the brilliant reporters of his day, he was pulling down sixty-five on the copy desk—after twenty-seven years in the racket. The younger man boiled. Hell, he'd gotten over the idea of romance and adventure in chasing news around town. He wasn't getting anywhere—or any money to put by.

Tony, the urbane proprietor of this Fiftieth Street speakeasy, called to Gregg. A finger indicated the vacant telephone booth.

"H'm, call for me," the reporter muttered, getting reluctantly to his unsteady feet.

"Who's the gal who knows where to find you?" O'Grady chuckled.

"Friend of mine," Gregg said mysteriously as he started off through the maze of tables. The reporter recognized dozens of faces among those who wished to be known as bohemians when they drank—Park Avenue fraternizing with Broadway; he vaguely acknowledged a few friendly nods. Lord, was he tight? He felt light headed. And he wondered who on earth had tracked him by phone to Tony's.

He picked up the receiver and disguised his voice. "Ullo?"

"That you, Gregg?" It was Martel, his city editor. "Thought I'd find you there. Are you still sober?"

"Uh-huh."

"Run over to the *Largentine* at pier No. 103. Dolores Duganne is giving a midnight preview of her new talkie on the steamer. And find out why she's sailing to-morrow under the name of Helen Lake. There's a story there. I've had a tip. I have it that she's broken her engagement to Caspar Morelle, the fancy surgeon, to marry Lord Karivan. And the morning papers will

carry Lady Lois Montbanne's announcement of her engagement to Morelle."

Gregg's cloudy mind cleared as though a veil had been whisked away. Forgotten was the bliss of the whisky sodas; now he was alert, the tumblers of his brain clicking to his editor's orders.

Martel went on: "Morelle was pretty sweet on Duganne. Find out what caused the break—who gave who the gate. They're all big names and it'll make a swell exclusive—if you can get it!"

"Oh, I can get it—if there's a story there," Gregg said confidently. "By the way, Mr. Martel——" He hesitated abruptly.

"Yes, Gregg?"

"I—I'd—I'd like a raise, Mr. Martel!"

Dead silence.

"About ten dollars—or five?" Gregg's voice weakened.

Further dead silence.

"Well—well, I'll be shoving off for the *Largentine*."

"All right, Gregg. If you get a story, go to the office and write it. Then take the morning off. G'-night."

Martel hung up, leaving his reporter with the feeling that he'd made an ass of himself.

Perhaps he should have waited till morning to ask about that raise. He hoped Martel wasn't sore. But—hell! Martel didn't hesitate to route him out of a speakeasy where he was spending his own time to give him a night assignment. And for all his trouble, he could have the morning off! He liked that!

"H'm," he muttered, "if I'd waited, I'd have lost my nerve. The question is popped! Now Martel knows I'm after more dough—and that's something!"

He went back to O'Grady and told him about the night assignment. They had another drink and settled their bills—which left the reporter a dollar in his

jeans. O'Grady reluctantly lent him a fiver.

"Well," O'Grady said, apropos of Gregg's request for the raise, "no answer isn't bad news—exactly. Martel might have said no then and there. Do a good job on this yarn and ask him again to-morrow."

Reaching the street, Gregg found a cab and was whirled over to pier No. 103 on the Hudson River. A sinuous procession of taxis and private motors disgorged men and women, in resplendent evening dress, under a striped awning at the pier entrance. Liveried ushers directed them to elevators and to the gangway that would land them on the S. S. *Largentine* whose grand salon was the scene of the preview.

The Pictorial Guild, Dolores Duganne's company, was sparing no expense to impress this selected audience that it was about to behold a very unusual photo play. Such is the psychology of movie companies when their latest film products are not really unusual.

Gregg was not deceived by this use of an ocean liner for a movie party. It had become an old New York custom to use liners for debutante parties, club dinners, charity balls and stag affairs. People who wouldn't go to a conveniently located function gladly dashed to the river front for the sake of novelty—and the freely flowing beverages to be found at such functions.

Devoid of an invitation card, Gregg trod the red carpet laid from gutter to elevator, ascended to the upper pier level and pursued more red carpet winding toward the gangway. The latter was brightly illuminated with batteries of blue-white Klieg lights. Movies were being taken of the guests climbing aboard the liner—because the Pictorial Guild hoped that the new Duganne talkie would make celluloid history.

As the reporter passed a pile of packing cases, part of the *Largentine's* cargo,

he was accosted by a stout little man who popped from behind a crate.

"Good evening, sir," he beamed. "Going to the party?"

"Uh-huh."

"Can I send you up a case of the finest to-morrow? I get my stuff right off the ship. Eighty dollars the case only——"

Gregg laughed uproariously. "Say, do I look like eighty bucks? Look at these pants of mine! I need a new suit before I go in for case loads of hard stuff!"

The stout man retreated to his crate. He saw now that the reporter's suit was seedy and that his battered brown hat was of a very early vintage.

"And if your stuff ever saw a ship," Gregg added as a parting shot, "then I'm Mussolini!"

A bootlegger drumming up orders within the customs lines was a good story, Gregg thought. He'd write a few paragraphs on it. And he wondered, too, what he'd bring "right off the ship"!

At the foot of the gangway, a movie official thrust the reporter aside, demanding a ticket. "We're letting no gate crashers into this party. I don't care who you are."

Undaunted, Gregg stood by and watched the faces of the old and young, the rich and near rich and professional invitation seekers. He knew many of them. Haddle of the *Star*, a smug, collegiate sort of fellow—a school-of-journalism graduate reporter—turned up in evening clothes.

He waved an engraved invitation at the *Examiner* man. "Coming aboard? There's a swell story—if you can get it!"

"Oh, I'll get it," Gregg grinned sarcastically. "Read the *Examiner* to-morrow!" It was a boast but he didn't like Haddle. The man was not popular on Park Row, for his methods were not altogether ethical. But he brought the

news to the *Star* and that sheet cared not how it was gathered.

Gregg started. Wasn't that Sam Valcory going up the gangway? It was. He recognized the sallow gray skin of the aristocratic bootlegger, the sagging shoulders, the shiny bald head. Valcory was something of a man-about-Broadway and then Gregg remembered he used to be seen in night clubs with Dolores Duganne—before movie fame lifted her from the chorus of the "Vani-ties."

He was wishing he knew who was already aboard the liner when he saw Lady Lois Montbanne, swathed in a simmery silk wrap making her way out of the press of people. This impecunious member of the English nobility, who mixed Mayfair with merchandising, to eke out an existence while settling her cap for a rich husband, was unescorted. Gregg thought that odd. And she was announcing her engagement to Doctor Morelle in the morning papers!

Another familiar face was that of Hugh Masone, the publisher and backer of Broadway shows. Handsome, with a summer tan, military in bearing, he bowed right and left and went up to the ship's reception deck. Gregg knew him for an ardent admirer of Duganne, and a man who was once reported married to her.

Social Registerites, matinée idols, minor Hollywood queens, speakeasy habitués, movie critics, débutantes, roto-gravure sportsmen, men who'd be safer behind prison bars—one by one they filed up the long gangway bridged from pier to liner. Gregg was amused by the motley variety of the invitees. Tomorrow, the quality of Duganne's newest picture would be bruited about by Broadway—and the public would want to see what the élite had seen.

Doctor Morelle shot from the crowd, threw a card to the movie factotum, and mounted the gangway. He was not in tuxedo, but wore a trim suit of brown

tweed. A Park Avenue surgeon who cut well and charged even better, he was above sartorial law. And Gregg noticed that his fine face was tense and frozen. Had he come to join Lady Montbanne or for a final word with Duganne, whose name was now coupled with that of Lord Karivan, the English multi-millionaire, whose fortune was founded in African diamond mines?

Just then First Officer Ruthers of the *L Argentine*, well set up in his uniform of blue and gold braid, came down the pier. He and Gregg were old friends from the days when the latter was a ship-news reporter. They greeted each other and Gregg explained his plight.

"Follow me," Ruthers said. "I'll get you aboard—though they're very particular to-night."

Gregg paid no attention to this last remark until he was halfway up the gangway in Ruthers' wake. Ahead on the deck, he saw Kildane and Sergeant Murtha from police headquarters. They were closely inspecting each guest and they nodded solemnly to the reporter.

"God knows when Duganne will turn up!" Ruthers said when they reached the deck. "I'm a committee of one appointed by the captain to meet her. We're old friends. But we can't start the show without her."

"What're the cops doing on board?" Gregg asked casually.

Ruthers, evasive, hesitated. "Oh, they're here to keep order."

The reporter didn't believe him. Something was afoot that required the eagle eye of the law. But what? Surely not the presence of liquor at the party. That was a job for the Federal men.

They watched more newcomers and Gregg found his eyes fastened upon an immaculate figure with averted face. The man was not anxious to be recognized, but he had had a ticket and was coming up the gangway.

It was the thick-lipped gnome—Lippy Lorers.

Gregg saw Kildane and Sergeant Murtha nod to him and he passed on into the great reception hall. Murtha left his partner and sauntered in after Lippy.

"I'm ready to go the limit! Is she wise?" Lippy's words uttered in Tony's reëchoed in Gregg's ears. Instinct told him that the racketeer's business of the night involved the *Largentine*—and some woman aboard.

CHAPTER II.

DOUBLES.

GREGG strolled over to Kildane's side. "What's Lippy doing on a bust like this?"

The detective eyed him shrewdly and smiled. "Oh, Lippy goes everywhere. No hard feelings between us boys nowadays!"

"But Murtha tailed him inside."

"Did he?" Kildane continued to smile noncommittally.

"Are you boys here in the interests of art—or business?"

"Oh, we heard 'Hell's Playmate' was a swell picture, so we got excused from duty and ran over here." Sarcasm crept into Kildane's voice. "Murtha and I just love the talkies."

"Uh-huh, I'll bet you do."

Gregg was satisfied. The cops were on the *Largentine* for a reason—and a damn good one—and even First Officer Ruthers was privy to it. Haddle, too, mentioned a story! The reporter wondered if the *Star* man knew why the cops were there.

Returning to Ruthers' side, Gregg leaned over the rail with him. "You said you knew Duganne?"

"Yes. We grew up together on the same street in Liverpool. She's really Dotty Duggan—but that'd never do in the movies."

"Ah, an old flame of yours?"

The ship's officer grinned sheepishly.

"Well, I once had hopes. But when

I was at sea—in the East—she came to America—and became famous."

Gregg pressed on: "So there was an understanding? You two were engaged?"

The ship's officer reddened.

"Not officially. But all that was six or seven years ago." His eyes brightened appreciatively. "By Jove! There she is now. I'd never have known her—if it wasn't for that glorious hair of hers!"

A raucous cheer went up from the dock. Men and women were milling about a mop of curly red hair, forgetting good manners in an effort to see the face beneath the hair. The crowd broke under the command of cameramen and Gregg beheld the ravishing milk-white beauty of the Titian-headed Dolores Duganne—born Dotty Duggan. She wore an ermine wrap despite the tepid August night and her arms were heavy laden with American beauty roses. She did her best with a free hand to blow kisses to her admirers as she climbed the gangway.

Closer and closer she came. Gregg thought her the most luscious beauty his tired eyes had ever fallen upon. The pure sparkle of a diamond tiara twinkled in her flaming locks. Behind her, somberly dressed in black, marched her maid, carrying two bags, obviously jewel cases.

Ruthers stepped forward with outstretched hand. "Hello, Dotty! Awfully glad to see you. Welcome to the *Largentine*!"

"Dolores is the name, Mr. Ruthers," the queen of Hollywood reprimanded him with flashing gray eyes. "I left Dotty back in Liverpool." She did not take his hand but strode past him across the breadth of D deck into the reception hall of the liner.

Unabashed by her rebuff, but with tightened, contemptuous lips, Ruthers trailed after her by way of escort, chatting amiably. She suffered him to lead

her up the broad, mauve carpeted stairs whose beautifully wrought-iron balustrades twisted upward and downward between walls of polished mahogany. They entered the grand salon from C deck.

Gregg was about to start after them when Dolores Duganne, in a neat, blue-tailored traveling suit and small, gray-cloche hat swam past his vision, from the head of the gangway. His eyes flew to the head of the grand stairway. There she was, too, in ermine and diamond tiara, entering by way of the salon door.

He blinked. Something was radically wrong, and he was sure that Tony's drinks had worn off. Yet was he seeing things?

The girl in blue gave a stateroom number on B deck to a steward, and followed him up the stairs. Gregg's feet sent him after them, and he noticed that the girl covered her face with her hands as she passed the entrance to the salon whence Duganne had gone. On B deck, the steward threw open the door of stateroom No. 150, an outside room, and the girl in blue entered.

When Gregg poked his head in the door, the girl was seated on the edge of a berth drawing off her gloves. She glanced up at him and smiled, toying with a garnet signet ring fast on a right-hand finger.

"Miss Duganne?" he asked experimentally.

The girl removed her hat and the reporter marveled at her wondrous red hair. She was the image of the girl in ermine and diamonds.

"No," she said, "I'm Gerda Galaston. You've made the usual mistake."

"I'm a reporter. The *Examiner*. Sorry to have troubled you."

The fact that he was a newspaper man startled her. "Please—please don't let it be known that I'm on the *Largentine*."

"That's all right."

"I'm Miss Duganne's double—but it isn't known I'm sailing with her tomorrow."

So Duganne was sailing. And her double was being mysterious about her presence on the ship. Gregg made mental notes.

"I'll bet you do all of Miss Duganne's dirty work," he laughed—"jumping off cliffs and out of airplanes——"

"That's not quite it. I merely play in scenes such as driving an automobile, riding horseback or climbing hills in the background. I'm supposed to help save Dolores' energies for the important close-ups and big scenes. Of course, I do things that might result in injury to her——"

"And if you break your neck," Gregg laughed, "the Pictorial Guild still has Dolores Duganne's neck for future pictures."

"It's all part of the business. We look startlingly alike——"

"I don't think so. You're better looking!"

She ignored this gallant interruption.

"—and I don't mind playing the double."

"You should be starred in your own name," Miss Galaston." Gregg was very emphatic in that declaration.

Instead of being pleased by the compliment, the girl knitted her brow and her eyes, as gray as the Duganne's, smoldered. "That's impossible while Dolores—while she's a star." She shrugged her shoulders and sighed. "However, I'm well paid and I don't mind playing second fiddle."

"Will I see you at the preview?" Gregg smiled. "I want you to show me the scenes you played in—as Miss Duganne's double."

She arose and placed a hand on his arm imploringly. "Please—please don't let it be known that I'm aboard—or that Miss Duganne is sailing tomorrow."

CHAPTER III.

THEME SONG.

"Huh? I've come over here to interview Miss Duganne about her sailing. And say, you might have been recognized on the pier. You came aboard right after the star."

"No, people were too busy looking at her to see me." She held his eyes. "I can trust you—about me?"

"Sure. I won't let on that I know you're here."

Gerda Galaston thanked the reporter and thrilled him with her smile of gratitude. But, enamored as he was of her, he could not forget his duty. He was after information primarily.

"Is it true that Miss Duganne is going to marry Karivan when she gets to England?" he inquired, as though on second thought.

The girl stared hard at him. "I'm sure I don't know."

"She's broken her engagement to Doctor Morelle, I understand?"

"Dolores has not discussed her personal affairs with me." The girl's tone was cold, forbidding.

"Lady Montbanne is announcing her coming marriage to Morelle in to-morrow's papers," Gregg added.

Gerda Galaston bit her lip and he knew that she was surprised by that news. She bade him good night and walked to the door. He was confident that her evasiveness had put him on the right track. There was something in the broken Morelle engagement and the Karivan-Duganne nuptials that held a story!

When the door closed behind him, Gregg was aware, too, that a strange, frightened air engulfed the girl—the star's physical duplicate. Why was she so secretive about being on the *L Argentine*—and about Dolores Duganne's plans? And the suggestion that she should be a movie star in her own right had startled her.

His sixth sense—his nose for news—cautioned him to remain sober. Something was in the wind!

GREGG made his way down to C deck by way of the grand stairway and, passing through an antechamber used as a writing room, found himself in the rear of the grand salon. This was a lofty, spacious chamber decorated in the florid, gilt tradition of Louis XIV. A hundred or more gilt chairs were filled with the town's celebrities, whose eyes were directed toward a large silver screen which temporarily obscured Ledoux's famous portrait of Anne of Austria over the marble fireplace.

The center of the room was dotted with a few deep tapestried chairs reserved for Duganne, Captain Sinnerton of the liner, and the movie company executives. Gregg was surprised to note that Doctor Morelle was missing from the assemblage while his former fiancée, the red-headed star, and his potential betrothed, Lady Montbanne, sat on either side of the captain in the tapestried chairs.

Hugh Masone and Ruthers were part of that group. Lippy, the racketeer, was alone and immobile, on the port side while Valcory, the bootlegger, sat with a few friends, glowering moodily, on the starboard side of the room. The two erstwhile partners in the liquor traffic were in full view of each other but each appeared to be oblivious of the other's presence.

The red-headed star, on word from First Officer Ruthers that the projection machine was ready, rose and faced her guests. She wore a pale-yellow lace gown. "I hope you all will like my new picture, 'Hell's Playmate.' It is a wonderful picture, and I consider it my greatest masterpiece. The Pictorial Guild made it at a cost of nearly a million dollars.

"And I hope you all will like it. It's my first talkie—and as some say, my first singie. I've done only my best,

and I hope that you all will like it." She was about to sit down when Ruthers whispered to her.

"Oh, I forgot to say that the projection machine and talkie apparatus can only show one reel at a time, so between reels you all can stroll on deck for a few minutes. Later there will be a buffet supper in the ship's bar—I mean, in the lounge."

Everybody laughed at her reference to the bar and hoped she really meant bar. Gregg was amused by her manner of speech and accent. This child of the Liverpool slums—though her press agents gave her birthplace as Chicago—spoke with an imitation Southern accent laden with traces of cockney.

Just as the lights went out, Gregg noticed Haddle of the *Star* saunter in. Now where had he been all this time? What was he up to? The reporter had already spotted the two detectives, Kildane behind Duganne's chair, and Murtha by the door near Lippy Lorers.

A little later Gregg's heart gave an eager jump. A figure he remembered was blocked in silhouette in the doorway. The light from the writing room fell on brown hair and brown tweed-covered shoulders.

Doctor Morelle entered and dropped into a chair near Haddle.

And where had he been since coming aboard? Gregg's curiosity was overflowing. He decided to tackle Duganne for information immediately after the first reel and then waylay Morelle for his side of the Duganne-Montbanne-Morelle triangle.

"Hell's Playmate" was the usual banal plot of the eternal triangle, and it held no interest for the *Examiner* man. He was more concerned with the elements of drama pent up in that salon. He hardly noticed Duganne's canned voice as she spoke her lines amateurishly.

His surprises were not over. Another form, lithe and well poised, hesitated at the threshold of the darkened

room. It was a woman in a white satin evening gown and her hair was hidden beneath a turban of pearly chiffon. Gregg recognized Gerda Galaston—who didn't want anybody to know she was on the *Largentine!* She lost herself in the darkness of the chamber.

He ran over his mental notes: Within that room were two women who were physical duplicates; there was an eminent surgeon engaged to a movie actress and engaged to a member of the English nobility. Was the actress throwing him over for a British lord?

And there was Masone, who helped the actress out of the chorus ranks, and Ruthers, who was a childhood sweetheart of hers; there was Sam Valcory who used to be seen in night clubs with the actress and his former bootleg partner, Lippy Lorers, racketeer and killer, who a little more than an hour ago expressed a willingness to "go the limit" on some job afoot.

Was Dolores Duganne involved in his plans or Gerda Galaston or Lady Montbanne? And last but not least, there was Haddle, who was out to get some hot story—by hook or crook.

"I've had hunches before," Gregg told himself with a grin, "but none as good as this one. There's a swell yarn loose in this room, and I mean to get it—and that fifteen-buck raise!"

A golden voice suddenly filled the salon and even the hard-boiled reporter experienced an electric thrill. Dolores Duganne was singing from the screen, and the lyrics and music of her song promised to be a hit:

"Sweetheart, come back to me;
Beloved, can't you see
That I've only loved—only you!
Oh, sweetheart, come back to me!"

The voice that sang was luscious and sweet, suddenly different from the cockneyized-Alabama accent of Duganne. The tune was poignant and music flooded from the singer's heart.

Gregg knew right away that some one doubled for Duganne's voice and he wondered if it mightn't be Gerda Galaston—if she mightn't be there on the screen singing a song that the real star's voice could never render.

"Sweetheart, Come Back to Me" was obviously the theme song of "Hell's Playmate." Its first rendition was roundly applauded and presently when the motif recurred in another scene, the audience couldn't help but hum a few bars of it. It was a catchy tune.

Reel one ended and the lights went up. Duganne was given an ovation and she rose to accept this homage to her histrionic talents. As she swept the room with shining bright eyes, she caught sight of Morelle and Gregg saw her mouth open in a little gasp. It looked like a gasp of fear to him.

The surgeon could do nothing but get up and greet her, taking her trembling hand and pressing it to his lips gallantly. Lady Montbanne rose, too, and Morelle merely nodded to her—who was announcing her betrothal to him! Ruthers glowered and Masone seemed ill at ease. Did they know about Duganne's engagement to Lord Karivan and fear a scene by Morelle on the eve of her departure for London?

Then the red-headed star saw Gerda Galaston and Gregg, caught an exchange of glances between them. Duganne seemed perturbed but noting her double's nervous beckoning of her head, she excused herself from the group and followed Gerda out on the starboard deck.

Gregg went after them and as he reached the door, he bumped into Lippy who was headed for the deck, too, an unlighted cigarette in his hand. The racketeer nodded to the reporter, probably recognizing him as a man who covered his trial for the murder of "Dropper" Tanner, and stepped out on deck.

The two women—star and double—were at the rail bathed in the warm

moonlight. Below them was the black velvety water of the Hudson hemmed in by wharves, shipping and buildings, all painted a snow blue by the midsummer moon. While Gregg was not an eavesdropper, he tried to catch a phrase of their conversation, but the tooting of tugboat whistles defeated him.

But he could see that Gerda was excited and that Duganne was now more uneasy than perturbed, and she listened attentively. As the two actresses started to move forward, they came face to face with the reporter.

Duganne went up to him. "Are you the reporter who said Doctor Morelle has announced his engagement to Lady Montbanne? And is it true?"

Gregg nodded. "I've been told it's true—and that she's doing the announcing. And is it true you're sailing tomorrow to marry Lord Karivan in London?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then you broke your engagement to Doctor Morelle?"

"I'll not discuss the matter. Come along, Gerda." Duganne spoke tartly and strode off toward a flight of stairs leading up to B deck. There was a lot more Gregg wanted to ask but he decided to bide his time.

Sam Valcory's appearance on deck with Lady Montbanne drew the reporter's attention. Her fiancé, Morelle, was distinguished by his absence from her side. And when Gregg looked to Lippy, he saw that gnome of a man shooting up the stairs in the wake of the actresses.

Valcory was about to offer his companion a cigarette when First Officer Ruthers came to the door and called out that reel two was about to begin and they went in. Gregg went up the stairs after Lippy—throbbing with curiosity. Something was up!

B deck was dimly lighted, but a dull glow streamed from four open windows. A man's feet, the rest of him obscured

by shadow, stood in the path of the window light. Gregg knew that Lippy was listening and he saw a cigarette butt fall to the deck and a foot crush it out. Lippy had seen the reporter and quickly went into the reception hall.

The reporter picked up the discarded cigarette and holding it to the window light, saw that it bore the imprint of "Abdullah," an imported Egyptian brand. Then voices reached his ears through the open windows.

"I can carry it off!" one woman said.

"And I'll go through with my end of it," another replied. "We'll settle this once and for all time!"

They were the voices of Gerda and Duganne but Gregg found himself unable to distinguish them. Was Gerda imitating the star's voice? And why should she?

The windows were curtained and he could not see into the stateroom; yet its location suggested that of Gerda Galaston. Or did Duganne have a stateroom on the same deck—since she was sailing at noon, too?

The lights went out and a door slammed, blotting out the voices. Gregg ran to the deck door in time to see Gerda with her pearly turban go into a stateroom while Duganne in her yellow lace dress, tripped lightly down the stairs to the salon, humming her theme song.

The reporter returned to the preview and in the darkness watched and listened to the second part of "Hell's Playmate." During the next intermission, he saw Valcory go into the bar where several other guests were already gathered about bottles of champagne.

Haddle had vanished. Duganne remained in her chair with the captain, Masone and Lady Montbanne.

The first officer was acting as master of ceremonies, rounding up guests for reel three while Doctor Morelle brooded moodily in a corner, his eyes transfixing those of Lippy, the racketeer, who

tried to appear unconcerned, unaware that the surgeon was staring at him. Was there something between the two?

Gregg's hunch whispered to him: "Watch Duganne. She's in trouble. The cops are watching over her. And watch the cops!"

Valcory did not return for reel three, and Gregg remembered seeing him last in the bar, where he seemed to prefer straight rye to art. When the lights went out again, he unconsciously watched Morelle and Lippy whose shadowy forms he could now discern. He saw Lippy get up a few minutes later and go out on the starboard deck, quickly, hurriedly. Morelle left a moment later via the writing room and the reception hall.

Gregg was tempted to see if they met, but he decided to stay close to Duganne. Whatever happened, would happen to her. Of that he was convinced—by instinct! The movie plot went its tedious way, the theme song was plugged to strengthen weak scenes and presently the reel ended.

As the lights went on, the reporter snapped out of his chair with a gasp.

Duganne was neither in her place nor in the room. Masone and Ruthers were also missing. Gregg hadn't seen them leave. And Lady Montbanne, apparently aware that something was amiss, moved swiftly to the starboard deck.

The two detectives from police headquarters were apprehensive and worried. They had not seen the red-headed star depart, and by the way they flew out of the room, it was obvious they meant to seek her.

Instinct embraced Gregg with both arms and swept him to the starboard deck in Sergeant Murtha's wake.

"Seen that movie actress about?" the cop asked.

"No. What's up?"

"Oh, nothing much. But we've been told to keep an eye on her. She's been threatened!"

"H'm! Black Hand stuff?"

"Don't know. But she's a quick one—the way she hops about. Tell Kildane or me if you see her."

Gregg went to the stairs leading to B deck after promising to help the detective. So Duganne had been threatened—with death or bodily harm! And the police were really concerned about it. That was news!

Reaching B deck, he saw Lippy leaning against a stateroom door that gave on the promenade. It was near the windows through which he had heard the actress and her double talking. The racketeer saw him and nervously moved aft, affecting the air of a man taking a casual saunter.

Gregg decided to arouse Gerda Galaston and have her help him find the star and get at the bottom of what was an insidious undercurrent of foreboding. He went into the ship's corridor to reach room No. 150.

Masone, glancing at his watch, bumped into the reporter in the deck doorway. Each man muttered an apology and the publisher stepped back to permit the reporter to enter the corridor.

Before Gregg turned into the cabin corridor lined with closed doors, Lady Montbanne came out of it and went down the grand stairs. Her face was deathly white and she was trembling.

The reporter went up to No. 150 and rapped on the door. There was no reply. Then he caught sight of a steward and asked him where Miss Duganne's—or Miss Helen Lake's—stateroom was. The star was traveling under the name of Lake. As he was talking to the man, Sam Valcory came out of No. 146, started with twitching lips at the sight of the two, and went off toward the grand stairs.

"There's a Miss Lake occupying No. 146," the steward said. "Shall I knock?"

"Please."

There was no response to the steward's knocking on the panels of No. 146. The man explained: "She has the rooms—bedrooms—on either side of this one, sir—No. 144 and No. 148. I'll try them." He knocked on each door and got no answer. "I guess she's not here, sir."

Gregg felt fearful. He could not explain why. But something was wrong! Valcory had come out of Duganne's suite. Had he been prowling in there? And why was he so obviously and nervously startled?

Going back to the head of the grand stairs, the reporter found Masone still there. The publisher spoke to him:

"Are you looking for Miss Duganne?"

"Yes. Have you seen her?"

"I think I saw her go into the salon just a moment ago." From where they were standing, they could see down the stair well and both doors to the salon.

The reporter was about to descend when he caught sight of Doctor Morelle coming in from the deck. Apparently the surgeon, walking with his head bowed, did not see them for he turned sharply into the corridor, knocked on No. 146 and, receiving no answer, thrust open the door. He appeared to be nervous and angry.

The room was dark, Gregg saw, and Morelle turned up the light. Duganne's voice sank out to him from somewhere in the stateroom:

"Sweetheart, come back to me."

Morelle closed the door and, more faintly, Gregg heard:

"Beloved, can't you see
That I've only loved—only you!
Oh, sweetheart, come back to me!"

The star was singing her theme song from "Hell's Playmate" to her former fiancé in an odd, unreal sort of voice. Gregg was astounded. She had been in that room all the while and had not

responded to the steward's knockings. And Morelle had the audacity to push his way right in!

The door of No. 144 opened and First Officer Ruthers stepped out into the passage. He tried to retreat on seeing the reporter and Masone and then went off in the other direction. A moment later, Haddle, of all people, came out of No. 148, glanced at Gregg, and went white. He passed the two men with a nod and went down the stairs to the salon.

Ruthers and Haddle had been in the rooms adjacent to the star's when the steward knocked. They had not answered. What joint scheme were they up to?

Gregg decided on impulse to kill two birds with one stone. Duganne and Morelle were in No. 146. He would beard them for the news of their broken engagement in one quick interview.

But as he went up to the door, it was flung open by Morelle. The two men stared at each other. The surgeon's eyes were bloodshot and bewildered. He lurched against the doorpost and Gregg saw that one of his supporting hands was reddish—bloody.

"Get the police!" the doctor gasped. "She's dead!"

Gregg fell back, astounded. His next impulse was to rush into the room and make a mental picture of the details—to ascertain what had happened. Before he sprang forward, out the corner of his eye, he saw a woman in a yellow lace evening gown dart out of room No. 148 and into No. 150.

Dolores Duganne! Her face was ashen!

He brushed by Morelle and found himself in a drawing-room. It was profusely filled with flowers. On a chaise longue a girl reclined. There was a gash in her forehead and bluish marks discolored her white throat.

It was Gerda Galaston! Dead! Murdered!

CHAPTER IV.

THE MURDERER'S MISTAKE.

INSPECTOR CLAY—better known as "Smart Set" Clay—from a station in the East Sixties—sat in Dolores Duganne's drawing-room on the S. S. *L Argentine* making notes as Gregg told his eyewitness story of the death of Gerda Galaston. The inspector had been summoned by Captain Sinnerton, and was now in charge of the case. He was a stony, grayish man in his late fifties who owed his nickname to his unusual knowledge of what was going on in the upper strata of New York life.

Gregg, with the concise preciseness of the good journalist, told his story of seeing Doctor Morelle enter the room and come out after the girl had stopped singing with bloody hand—of his finding the strangled body on the chaise longue.

He likewise had specified the positions in which he had come upon other figures who were somehow connected with the case—Lady Montbanne, Lippy Lorers, Hugh Masone, First Officer Ruthers, Sam Valcory, Haddle of the *Star* and the redhead star herself—of their proximity to the scene of the crime before, during and after its commission.

As he finished, Gregg accepted a cigarette from Inspector Clay and glanced at the sheet-covered body, lying where it had been found, awaiting the arrival of the medical examiner and the fingerprint experts from headquarters. The hands were uncovered and Gregg observed that the girl's garnet ring was missing.

"You've been a great help to me, Gregg," Clay said. "I shan't forget it. With your eye and nose for facts, you've told me lots. If I can throw this story your way, I'll do it. Count on me."

"Thanks, inspector. What's your next move?"

"Well, you know I've got Doctor Morelle isolated across the corridor in No. 147—under guard. He's not under

arrest—but he will be before the night is over. It's an open-and-shut case as far as I can see."

"What's his alibi?"

"He's refused to talk, thus far. But I'm having him in—now that I've got your version of what happened. We'll try to sweat him a bit." Clay was emphatic in the last words.

"Does the room show anything? Signs of struggle?"

Clay shook his head. "It doesn't. But I'm leaving the search to the print men." He went to the door and told one of his men in the passage to fetch the surgeon.

Gregg wandered over to a writing desk and looked down into the wastepaper basket beside it. There was a crumpled ball of paper in it. He called this to the inspector's attention and the latter retrieved it, smoothing it out on the desk and reading it.

"Well, I'll be damned." He passed the paper to the reporter who read the following in hastily scrawled block letters:

DOLORES: Must see you at once in your stateroom.

CASS.

Gregg nodded. "Looks like a note from Caspar Morelle."

Clay agreed. "I suppose you saw Murtha and Kildane on board. They were supposed to be here to stop something like this. Miss Duganne asked for police protection because her life was threatened. She had nothing definite except that some one phoned her, she said, and told her she'd never leave the country alive."

The entrance of Captain Sinnerton interrupted Gregg's next question. The skipper was excited and distraught. "Inspector, what am I to do? We have about one hundred and fifty people on board—guests at the preview—and some of them want to go home—go ashore."

"My orders were that no one is to leave the ship—no one is to board it

except the police," Clay snapped. "And the second and third-class gangways are to be removed. The first-class gangway is covered by my plain-clothes men."

"That's all been done, inspector," Sinnerton said. "But the scandal of it—the *L Argentine's* reputation—"

"—be damned. I'm looking for evidence to convict a murderer. Morelle might not be in on this alone. And I don't mean to let an accomplice of his slip through my fingers by letting one hundred and fifty people go ashore at this time. Break open your cellar and let them have more of that quarter-million-dollar booze supply you've got. They won't mind waiting then—and the Pictorial Guild can foot the bill. This case will be swell publicity for them."

Sinnerton resented the inference that the *L Argentine* was serving its own liquor in violation of the law. But such was the fact, and he departed, ruffled. The inspector winked at Gregg and told him he'd already advised the movie people to buy more wine for the preview guests. Murder or no murder, it would be a gala night for all with a decent thirst!

"Now about this note," he said, "Morelle evidently wanted a word with the star alone. We know he was in love with her, quite deeply in love, and that she was throwing him over for Karivan. Movie stars love to marry titles these days, you know. He came in here, mistook Galaston for his former fiancée, thought she was bluffing when she denied her identity—and got mad and strangled her."

"But the girl sang that song to him: 'Sweetheart, Come Back to Me,'" Gregg pointed out. "She must have recognized him. Perhaps they were in love once, too, and she thought she might have a chance with him—with Duganne out of the picture."

"H'm!" Clay was impressed with this logic. "I guess we'll have to pump him for that."

Morelle was brought in and he carefully avoided the body with his eyes. He was haggard and showed the unmistakable signs of being under a great strain.

"I think you'd better talk now, Doctor Morelle," Clay said. "Come clean, and things'll go easier for you in the long run."

"What can I say?" the surgeon cried. "I'm ruined. Who'll believe a word I utter?"

"Let's decide that. You killed Miss Galaston?"

Dumbly, Morelle shook his head. "I swear before God I didn't!"

"Well, what then?"

"I came up here to have a word with Dolores—we were engaged until I received a note from her this afternoon after her train got in from Hollywood—saying that she was going to marry Karivan. I'd heard rumors of that, but I refused to believe it."

"So you came to the preview to demand an explanation?"

Morelle nodded in agreement. "I couldn't understand her sudden change of heart. We met in the salon and then I waited for a chance to see her alone. When I thought she'd gone to her cabin—I knew she was sailing on this ship—I went after her."

"And you didn't like her explanation—so you strangled Miss Galaston—by mistake—thinking her to be Miss Duganne?" Clay shot at him. "That's it. You mistook the star's double—for your fiancée!"

The surgeon shook his head, bewildered. "That's not true. The girl—the girl was dead—when I entered this room!"

Clay grinned. "That's a helluva story to expect me to believe. You sent this note to Miss Duganne?" He produced the crumpled paper they'd found.

Morelle stared at it. "No! I never wrote this. I swear it."

"Come, doctor, we're not children to

swallow your alibi. Miss Galaston was alive when you entered this room. She was heard singing Miss Duganne's theme song as you entered the room."

Morelle dropped into a chair and covered his face with his hands. The blood was not completely washed off the stained member and Gregg shuddered.

"I—I can't understand that," Morelle said. "I did hear her sing, too. But when I went over to her—she was dead—strangled. She might have been delirious—and sang just before she expired."

Clay laughed and took another tack. "You had been in love with Miss Galaston at some time—possibly before you changed your affections to the star?"

"You're mad!" Morelle cried. "I scarcely knew Miss Galaston!"

"She knew the star had given you the gate, she knew you were meeting Miss Duganne in this room—and she came here to see you first." Clay was trying to hypothecate the scene. "She pleaded with you—reminded you that you once loved her. Didn't she greet you as 'sweetheart'? And to silence her—lest she spoil your chances with the star—you choked the life out of her. Perhaps you lost your temper—but you did kill her!"

"This is insane—madness. I can't understand it all!" the surgeon sighed dejectedly. "I had no reason to want to kill any one. I tell you the girl was dead when I laid eyes on her. I'm a doctor—and I'm familiar with death when I see it!"

"You admit hearing the girl sing as you turned on the light. She recognized you then."

"I heard her sing. Yes. And then I found she was dead." The surgeon seemed to recover himself through anger. He straightened his shoulders and glared defiantly at Clay. "But I didn't touch her!"

"There was blood on your hand when you came out of this room!"

Morelle bit his lip and frowned. "I know. When I saw the gash in her forehead and the blue marks on her throat, I wasn't sure she was dead. She might have been unconscious. So I tried to revive her. In lifting up her head, the blood must have gotten on my hand."

Clay smiled blandly and shook his head. He wasn't believing that sort of thing. "You loved Miss Duganne very much?" Morelle nodded. "Then why is your engagement being announced to Lady Montbanne in the morning papers?"

The surgeon's mouth fell open.

"This is news to me. Lady Montbanne and I are good friends—but I am not engaged to her."

"Was Miss Galaston trying to blackmail you—because of something she knew about you?" Clay flashed. "Something you might not want Miss Duganne or Lady Montbanne to know? You tried to silence her—possibly in the heat of passion—and meaning to scare her—killed her!"

"This is absurd!" Morelle sneered. "I didn't kill the girl—or have any reason to want to scare her or silence her. That is all!"

"I don't believe you, Doctor Morelle," Clay snapped impatiently. "And I'm arresting you for the girl's murder."

Morelle staggered to his feet, horrified. Then his shoulders drooped. "I suppose everything is against me."

"Pending further investigation on board, I'll lock you in a cabin across the hall—with a detective." Clay summoned his man and ordered him to stay in the stateroom with Morelle—to see that the distraught man made no attempts at escape or suicide. Gregg watched the surgeon march out with his head wabbling on his shoulders.

When they were alone again, Gregg spoke up.

"Inspector, there may be something in his story."

"Impossible. We have him cold. His alibi is nervy but won't hold water with any jury."

"But remember there were other persons in this room and the adjoining rooms. I saw them outside the doors or leaving the staterooms. Morelle is a cool number. I don't think he'd forget himself in anger—and kill. There's the ring of truth in what he says."

"You're being deceived, my boy. He's a clever killer—but he can't fool me. However, I mean to find out what the others were doing around this cabin at the time of the crime. By the way, what time was it when Morelle entered this room?"

Gregg didn't know exactly. He suggested asking Masone who had looked at his watch a few minutes before Morelle went into No. 146.

"All I need now is the motive to cinch the case," Clay said. "And if it doesn't concern Galaston, it involves Duganne. Either Morelle killed Galaston because she had something on him—or he mistook her for Duganne and choked her as soon as the door closed on him—while you were outside."

Gregg pondered. He repeated Lippy's threat "to go the limit"; he pointed out that Lady Montbanne was announcing her engagement to Morelle and might not want any further interference from the star; that Valcory preceded the surgeon in the room where the girl was; that Ruthers had come out of No. 144; that Haddle and Duganne had been in No. 148.

They took a look into the adjoining staterooms. Both No. 144 and No. 148, connecting with the drawing-room were bedrooms and off them were small baths. The star's ermine wrap was in No. 148 on the bed and in No. 144 were the jewel cases Gregg had seen Duganne's maid carry aboard together with the maid's black cape and hat.

"Where's the maid?" Clay asked. "Looks as if this was to be her room."

"I didn't see her at the preview. But she's aboard somewhere."

Clay went to the door and gave orders that all named by Gregg were to be rounded up immediately and brought to the drawing-room. And he asked that Miss Duganne, last seen going into room No. 150, the dead girl's room, be summoned at once.

"I'll get at the bottom of this. I've got the killer and all I need is the motive," he said, rubbing his hands contentedly.

"I think you're wrong, inspector." Gregg spoke quietly. "You may be right in saying that the murderer killed Galaston mistaking her for Duganne—but I don't believe Morelle is the murderer you want."

"Prove it."

"It's just a hunch—and my hunches haven't been far off to-night. They're in good working order."

"To hell with hunches. Don't you believe your own eyes? You saw Morelle come in here, you heard the girl sing, you saw him come out with blood on his hands and you found the body a moment later. What more than that do you want?"

"I want to know what the others were doing in or about this suite. I want to know what Lippy was doing outside that door." He pointed to a door that led from the drawing-room to the deck. "There was a woman involved in whatever he was up to to-night!"

Inspector Clay didn't want to believe the reporter, but somehow, he felt that his theory about Morelle was none too strong. Gregg saw all this in the doubt that stole across the stony face.

CHAPTER V.

A LADY LIES.

DETEKTIVE KILDANE came in with Hugh Masone. The publisher regarded the body sympathetically and bowed to the inspector.

"Mr. Masone, you were at the head of the stairs looking at your watch when Mr. Gregg entered the corridor outside from the deck. What time was it?"

Masone thought a moment. "I don't quite recall. It must have been about twelve fifty or one o'clock. I just happened to look at my watch to see how late it was."

"What were you doing on this deck?" Clay asked abruptly.

"I'd come up to see if Miss Duganne was in her cabin. She's sailing to-morrow and I wanted to talk over a few business details before I went ashore."

"You saw her?"

"No, I knocked on this door, but got no answer. I was on my way back to the salon when I encountered the reporter here." Masone smiled at Gregg.

"That was between twelve fifty and one. You can't be more precise about the time?"

"Well, I'd say it was closer to one o'clock."

"You knew Miss Galaston?"

"Rather well. She was Miss Duganne's double. We'd met at parties and in the studio in Hollywood. You see, I'm one of the directors of the Pictorial Guild and I more or less discovered Miss Duganne."

Clay grunted. "I know. You found her in the 'Vanities' chorus and you put your money on her and made her a movie star—all in about three years' time." Clay had Broadway history at his finger tips.

"You spent quite a lot of money developing Miss Duganne?"

Masone laughed. "Naturally. One has to in the business of star making. Personal publicity and advertising and picture exploitation aren't cheap."

"How did you protect your investment, Mr. Masone? What would have happened to your money if Miss Duganne had left the pictures or died?"

The publisher reddened. "Well—why, she was insured, and I was desig-

nated as beneficiary. It was a two-hundred-thousand-dollar policy."

"H'm!" Clay said. "I dare say that's customary. I've heard of it being done before—insuring stars for the company's protection. And Miss Duganne's pictures have been successful?"

This seemed to embarrass Masone.

"Well, not quite. We've about broken even so far. I'm not much in the hole as a loser on my investment. But I expect 'Hell's Playmate' to clean up!"

"It ought to," Clay sneered, "with this murder publicity!"

"It has its own merits, inspector," Masone said with annoyance. "Are you intimating that the murder was necessary to help the film?"

"No, I'm not. But since you've taken that tack, let me ask this: Have you ever mistaken Miss Duganne for Miss Galaston or vice versa? They look so much alike."

"Oh, I used to. But knowing them so well, I could easily tell the difference."

"How?"

"Not by any particular marks. It was just something in their eyes and mouths—the way they walked and gesticulated. When you know twins you can do that, inspector."

"H'm, so I've heard. Wasn't there a rumor recently that Miss Duganne wanted to terminate her contract with you before marrying Lord Karivan?" Clay spoke casually, indifferently, but he was intent.

"You're very well informed, I must say, inspector," Masone laughed. "Yes; that's true. Miss Duganne did not want to be under any contractual obligations after her marriage."

"She was afraid, maybe, that you'd insist on her playing and being billed as Lady Karivan? It would have been a sensation—the richest woman in England playing in American films!"

"Perhaps that was on her mind. But

she agreed to make one more picture before we tore up the contract. She was going to London to announce her engagement to Karivan, and then return to our New York studios to make the last picture."

Inspector Clay thanked the publisher and dismissed him. He took out a memo book and made several notes and, by the time he was through, the door was thrown open and Murtha ushered in Miss Duganne. The star was reluctant to enter the scene of the murder.

"Please, inspector—spare me this!" she cried from the passage. "The body is still in there—my nerves! I won't have it!"

Clay deferred to her temperamental outburst and told the detective to bring her into No. 144. The investigation was continued in that room with the star seated on the edge of her bed while the inspector and Gregg found chairs.

The red-headed girl was upset and tremulous. Her eyes darted from one man to the other inquiringly.

"He couldn't have done it!" she blurted out. "Caspar isn't the type. You mustn't arrest Doctor Morelle!"

Clay feigned great surprise. "How do you know we arrested Doctor Morelle?"

The girl's face went white with terror. She had stepped into a trap of her own design. Supposedly isolated in room No. 150, she could have no knowledge of Morelle's part in the crime or his arrest—unless she had been out of the room at some time—when her eyes gave her cause for suspicion—fear.

"I—I heard a steward talking about it—outside my door. And the detectives in the corridor."

"What do you know about the dead girl?"

"Very little. Miss Galaston and I only met in the studio. We had nothing in common socially."

"Mr. Masone said he'd seen you on parties together."

"Possibly we were at some large affairs at the same time. I really don't remember. I believe Miss Galaston came from Milwaukee. A casting director at my studio noticed her close resemblance to me and hired her as my double. You'll have to get the true facts about her from the studio. I'm too upset to think clearly."

Clay's face hardened perceptibly. He knew that the girl was acting, that she really had full command of herself.

"A moment before the body was found by Mr. Gregg here," he said softly, "you were seen running out of this bedroom, No. 148, into the next stateroom, No. 150—Miss Galaston's."

The girl met his gaze with incredulity. "That's not true. Whoever said that must be mistaken. After leaving the salon when reel three was over, I went direct to Miss Galaston's room. She asked me to meet her there—to tell me something important. I don't know what it was about."

Clay fished out the hand-printed note to the star, signed by Doctor Morelle, and passed it to her without comment. She read it and handed it back to him. "I never saw this before," she said in a low voice.

"You deny receiving this note and being in this bedroom just before the body was found?" Clay snapped. The girl nodded to him. "Have you been in the bedroom this evening?"

"Yes. Gerda and I came up here after reel one to put on some make-up. We were here only a minute."

"And what she had to tell you—that was so urgent—developed between reels one and three?"

"Evidently."

Clay tried to learn if Gerda Galaston had any enemies, what her relationship to Morelle might have been, how she came to be in the drawing-room, but the star could tell him nothing. She had no idea what the case was all about.

"Why should Morelle kill your dou-

ble unless he mistook her for you?" Clay demanded. "You jilted him. You drove him mad, until he wanted to kill you. And then he killed an innocent girl instead!"

"That's not true!" Dolores Duganne screamed, rising from the bed. "He had no reason to want to kill me! I didn't jilt him. It was he who threw me down!"

"Oh, that's it? For Lady Montbanne?"

She inclined her head in agreement.

"But you were sailing to meet Lord Karivan—to become his fiancée."

"Yes; when I heard Caspar was going to marry Lois Montbanne, I—I lost my head. Karivan was after me to marry him, but I loved Caspar. When I heard about Lois and Caspar, I accepted Karivan."

"H'm, tangled love lives!" Clay said sarcastically. "When did you hear about the Morelle-Montbanne engagement?"

"Oh, ages ago—a week ago!"

"That's odd. Doctor Morelle didn't know about it till I told him a few minutes ago. You never checked up with him to see if your information was true?"

She shook her head and stared at the door. Gregg thought she was planning a dash for freedom for she resembled a caged creature. Clay was wearing down her composure.

He asked about the threat she received and again the star spoke hesitantly, unconvincingly. "I just reached the Ritz from the train," she said, "when I received a phone call. The voice was muffled and I couldn't make out whether it was a man's or a woman's. I was told that I'd never leave New York alive—and the party hung up!"

"You've received crank messages like that before—demands for money—death threats?" Clay suggested.

"Yes; but this time I was truly fright-

ened. No one seemed to know I was going to the Ritz except——”

Here she caught herself and refused to disclose the name of the person.

The inspector shot his final bolt. “Just before Mr. Gregg found Doctor Morelle and the girl’s body in No. 146, he knocked on No. 150 to speak with Miss Galaston. If you were in there all the while, why didn’t you answer the door?”

The girl stared at the reporter. He seemed to be some sort of a Nemesis to her—for it was his evidence that was tripping her up. Yet what had she to cover? Why did she flounder about with her answers?

“I—I mustn’t have heard him,” she said.

“It’s impossible not to hear a rap on one of these doors. Shall we go to No. 150 and make a door knocking test in there?” Clay said angrily.

The girl took a few steps toward the door, trying to steady herself, as though she had had too much to drink.

“You weren’t in No. 150, but in this very room, No. 148!” Clay blazed. “You know something about the murder of Gerda Galaston. I think you’re trying to shield Morelle, the killer!”

The star screamed. She wheeled about. “Whatever I know—I know he didn’t do it! But I’m not shielding him—or any one else! That’s all you’ll get out of me! You can——” She sagged forward and fell across the bed, unconscious.

“I’ll be damned!” Clay grunted. “Just when we were getting somewheres with her she passes out!”

CHAPTER VI.

LIPPY MOVES.

INSPECTOR CLAY virtually commandeered the S. S. *Largentine* after Dolores Duganne was carried by Gregg back to her double’s stateroom. He marveled at how light and feathery she

was, and though he had his idea about her brand of truth, he laid her tenderly on the bed. The ship’s doctor was roused out of his berth and he was closeted with the star, trying to revive her.

One by one, with the exception of Lippy Lorers, the inspector quizzed each of the other persons seen near stateroom No. 146 around twelve thirty a. m. Lippy was strangely missing. He had not gone ashore and there was no reason to suspect that he had jumped overboard and swum to a near-by dock. So an intensive search was instituted for him.

The questionees were brought, one at a time, into the sitting room of an unoccupied suite on B deck near Duganne’s and briefly quizzed by Clay. Then they were isolated individually in inside cabins bordering the corridor patrolled by the police.

Meanwhile, the star’s rooms and scene of Gerda Galaston’s death was turned over to the headquarters’ experts and Doctor Hale, the chief medical examiner. Finger-print men scoured the two bedrooms and baths and the drawing-room while the technical men searched for telltale marks and made measurements and diagrams of the location of the pieces of furniture—all of which might be needed when the killer was brought to trial on a first-degree murder charge, carrying the death penalty—the chair.

Gregg sat at the inspector’s elbow, scanning each face and making notes on backs of envelopes and the ship’s stationery he found in a writing table. He never carried copy paper or a notebook, looking upon them as the tools of a school-of-journalism reporter.

Sam Valcory was the first witness, so-called. He admitted being in room No. 146 prior to one o’clock and glowered at the reporter, who was the obvious police informant. He said that Gerda Galaston was sitting in the chaise longue and had invited him in when he

knocked. He wanted to see the star and was told by her double that she was down in the salon.

Clay glanced at Gregg. That didn't jibe with Duganne's tale. The actress said she was told by Gerda to meet her in No. 150. Surely Gerda knew where the star was when she spoke to Valcory.

The society bootlegger admitted having been friendly with the star, and that he used to take her about to night clubs before she joined the Hollywood constellations. However, rather perturbed, he denied Clay's insinuation that he was ever in love with the actress.

As for Gerda, he knew her but slightly. She was on parties, he remembered, and once he had danced with her and remarked on her close likeness to Miss Duganne.

"Who was her escort on these parties?" Clay inquired.

Valcory racked his brain. "I think—I think it was a newspaper man named Haddle. I couldn't swear to it."

Then the inspector, drawing from his infinite fund of theater-world gossip, surprised the bootlegger.

"Didn't Miss Duganne throw business your way? Didn't she get her friends in the movie colony here to buy your liquor, Mr. Valcory?"

The bald-headed man spluttered.

"Yes; a few years ago when she was just breaking into the movies—she helped me that way—on a commission basis."

"I understand she knew an awful lot about your racket. She couldn't know too much, could she?"

Valcory didn't know how to take this and he bridled indignantly. "I don't know what you mean. My business is more or less aboveboard."

"Oh, I know that," Clay grinned. "I know you pay plenty protection." He switched his line of questioning swiftly. "Did you ever mistake Miss Galaston for Miss Duganne?"

Gregg watched the bald-headed fellow. To him the question was pertinent and obvious. Clay was toying with the idea that Valcory might have had some reason to kill Duganne and mistook the double for her.

"Why—er—I can't remember. I don't think so. As I've said, I've seen very little of Miss Galaston. I don't remember seeing her on the same party with Miss Duganne."

That really wasn't an answer to Clay's query, but he let it pass.

"Was Miss Galaston alive when you left her?"

Valcory blanched. "Of course she was." His voice rose to a shout. "Are you trying to accuse me of——"

"I'm only asking questions," Clay smiled. "By the way, is it true you dropped a lot of your money in the October stock-market crash last year?"

"I don't see that it is any of your business."

Clay grinned. "I guess 'Yes' is the answer to that one. How well do you know Doctor Morelle?"

Valcory explained that they were very good friends. Gregg guessed the surgeon was one of the bootlegger's better customers. And Valcory could give no reason for the surgeon killing either the star or her double, or mistaking one for the other. In fact, he was positive that Doctor Morelle was not given to quick tempers or murder.

Clay was overly polite in his thanks and Valcory was relegated to a cabin, despite his protests, and Lady Montbanne was ushered in. The Englishwoman was rather pretty and in her early thirties. She wore clothes well and stressed the air of the *grande dame* about her.

She was naturally nervous and fearful of the notoriety this unpleasant incident would bring to her. Hers, she let Clay know, was an old name in England and it had never been touched by the breath of scandal.

Her voice was low and constrained, and Gregg knew that she was holding herself from the brink of hysteria. She knew both Duganne and Miss Galaston, and was quite certain she could tell them apart. A woman's intuition was her reason for this. No, she bore no ill will toward the star and had no fear of her recapturing Doctor Morelle's affections.

"When did Doctor Morelle become engaged to you?" Clay asked.

"Why—er—this afternoon."

"You saw him? Where, please?"

"Oh, he telephoned to me."

"He proposed marriage by telephone?" Clay chuckled. "That's highly original. Tell me about it."

"He called up—I was at my hotel—and asked me if I loved him. I did and I told him so. It was then that he suggested that we marry—and that I make the announcement and set a date."

"Just like that!" The inspector was highly amused. "You knew he had broken with Miss Duganne?"

"No, but I surmised as much. I was expecting it. She was very cool to him, not replying to his letters and she was in Hollywood since last spring. They hadn't seen each other in all that time."

The woman spoke plausibly and Gregg found himself believing her. Yet hadn't Morelle told them a few minutes ago that he was merely the English-woman's friend and knew of no engagement?

Clay did not press the point in the reporter's mind. Instead he asked her what she was doing in the vicinity of the star's suite before one o'clock.

"I thought I saw Doctor Morelle come up here. I wanted a word with him. I didn't know Miss Duganne was sailing or that she had a suite on the ship."

"Are you certain you didn't enter room No. 146?"

The woman's eyes grew wild and she bowed her head, sobbing. "I—I did

push my way into the room. Miss Galaston was in there. I excused myself and went out."

"The girl was alive then?"

Lady Montbanne shrieked and clapped her hand over her mouth. "Is—is she dead? Is that why you're questioning me?"

Clay nodded ominously. "And Doctor Morelle is under arrest for her murder. Are you sure you weren't seeking Miss Duganne to have an understanding with her about Doctor Morelle—to make certain she would make no claim to him?"

The woman went mute. Words would not leave her lips though she tried to speak, making incoherent sounds. Gregg saw that she was stunned, and Clay sent her off to another cabin. He asked Ruthers to come in.

The first officer, despite the fact that he had been seen slinking out of room No. 144, was quite calm and self-possessed. He said he knew Dolores Duganne as Dotty Duggan, had grown up with her in Liverpool. He had never met Miss Galaston.

There was a boy-and-girl romance between him and the star at one time, but that was all over. He grinned sheepishly as he told of this. No, he never resented Duganne's success or the fact that she had turned him down. Life was like that, he said.

"You play the races, don't you, Mr. Ruthers?" Clay said. Gregg stood in awe of the policeman's knowledge of people in all walks of life. He certainly earned his name—"Smart Set" Clay.

The officer admitted that he did. And on further questioning, he said he had been a heavy loser recently, blaming the fact that he did his betting often while at sea by radio and didn't have a good chance to study all the entries in a given race.

"You're in need of money now, I take it?" Clay went on.

"I'm always in need of it."

"What were you doing in room No. 144 shortly before one a. m.?"

"I was looking for Dotty—Dolores, I mean. I wanted a chat with her," Ruthers replied without hesitation.

"So you wander into passenger's bedrooms looking for them. Room No. 144 is a sleeping room."

"Why, I knocked on that door, and I thought I heard a voice tell me to come in."

Ruthers was suave, and Gregg took a dislike to him. The man was lying with a straight face.

Ruthers went on to say that when he found the room empty, he realized his mistake and left it. No, he did not look into the drawing-room nor did he knock on that door. He forgot about its being part of that suite. Nor did he hear voices or any one in the drawing-room while he was in the bedroom.

Without asking him how long he was in the bedroom or what he had been doing there with the door shut, Clay dismissed him. Murtha escorted him to a separate cabin to which he went willingly, saying that he would do all he could to help the police—though he had no idea what they were questioning him about.

Haddle was next on the list. Like Ruthers, he was collected and had a ready story. He admitted being in room No. 148 for the purpose of ascertaining if it was true that Miss Duganne were really sailing under the name of Helen Lake. Her luggage tags told him as much and he was satisfied. Yes, he knew he had no right to enter the room, but he was after news—and no harm had been done.

"What did Miss Duganne say to you when she came in?" Clay asked quietly.

Here Haddle shifted his gaze guiltily. "She didn't see me. When I heard the knob turn, I slipped into the bathroom, leaving the door ajar."

"And what did Miss Duganne do?"

"She powdered her nose, looked over

her luggage and put her ear to the drawing-room door. Some one must have been in there that she didn't want to meet, for, after listening a bit, she went out into the corridor."

"You were seen coming out of that room first!" Clay blazed. "You're lying to me!"

Haddle shook his head, bewildered. He had been trapped.

"She told me to say that," he blurted out. "I'll tell you what happened. I went into the room and found her listening at the door. She was startled and when I began to question her about her engagement to Lord Karivan, she put her finger to her lips. I waited and I couldn't hear anything in the next room. She whispered to me to meet her in the salon and made me promise to tell the story I gave you—if I was ever questioned."

"How much did you say she promised you?" Clay sneered, and he knew he hit home by the shame that came to the *Star* man's face. "You left her listening at the drawing-room door?"

"I did."

"You were rather fond of Miss Galaston, weren't you—taking her about to parties when she was in town?"

Haddle explained that he knew the girl casually and had invited her out. He denied that there was any love affair between them or that there was any reason for him to lose his temper with her. But he had been fond of her. No, he had not seen her on board the *Largentine* during the preview.

"Say, what's all this police questioning for, anyway?" he demanded.

The inspector told him to shut up, and he was sent away protesting and proclaiming his rights as a citizen to know why he was being forcibly detained. Clay said he could wait and find out or go toast himself!

Miss Helstrom, the star's maid, had little to tell. She said she left her things in No. 144, locking the jewel cases in

a closet, and then went for a walk on deck. She watched part of the preview through a window from the promenade and looked in at the people making merry in the bar.

No, she knew nothing about either the star's or her double's personal affairs. Miss Duganne had just hired her before leaving Hollywood. Clay sent her into No. 144 to examine the jewel cases—which he and Gregg had seen lying on a table—and not locked in a closet!

"What a fancy pack of liars!" Clay commented when he was alone with the reporter.

"No one has told a straight story yet. They were all up to something, and now they're covering up. You may be right in saying Morelle didn't do the job. And we're not through with Miss Duganne by a damn sight. She knows who was in the next room with Gerda before she died—and possibly what happened in there."

"Lippy's the man I'm counting on," Gregg said. "He had his ear to the deck door to the drawing-room—if he didn't just come out of that room."

There was a distant rattle of gunfire. Clay sprang to his feet. "Revolver shots! And on this ship—or I'm a liar, too!"

A moment later, a detective burst into the room. "Lippy is holding us off on the boat deck. He winged Carruthers and he's barricaded behind a large ventilator."

"H'm, very interesting!" Clay growled, running into the corridor. "I've got that boy where I want him now! He's made the wrong move this time!"

CHAPTER VII.

MEDICAL OPINION.

THE boat deck was shrouded in the dull blue light of the waning moon. It was a quiet, ghostly setting only disturbed by the shrill cry of a river boat

and the almost inaudible *lap-lap* of the Hudson's waters far below against ship's plates and wharf piles.

Gregg reached the deck from behind the wireless house, a narrow cubicle running abeam, with sparkling tentacles flying upward to the antennæ that ranged between the spiry masts. Five plain-clothes men were covering either side of the house, watching a point aft on the starboard side. Clay demanded an account of the situation.

"We were looking for Lippy," said a man named Brady, "when we spotted a white shirt coming out from between two davits down that way." He indicated the vicinity of a huge, square ventilating shaft. "We hailed him and got a shot for an answer. We gave him some lead as he went behind the ventilator, and he sent a piece into Carruthers' arm—just a nick, but it's bleeding badly. The radio man is binding it up in the wireless room."

"Is there anybody on the other side of the ventilator to head him off?" the inspector asked savagely. "We can't afford to lose Lippy after this break of his!"

"Yeah. Two men are back there. That's why we're holding our fire now."

Gregg held his breath on seeing Clay's next move.

The inspector stepped out from the shelter of the wireless house, gun in hand, and strode toward Lippy's hiding place. Midway, he paused.

"It's Clay, Lippy. I'm asking you to come out and stop this nonsense."

"Get back, inspector!" Lippy sang out. "I mean to get off this ship—if I have to shoot my way off!"

"What's troubling you, Lippy?"

"I'll not be framed!"

The inspector tried to reason with him, assuring him that nobody wanted to frame him. He was invited to go below and answer a few questions.

"What would we frame you for?" Clay asked innocently.

"That movie star's death! That reporter saw me near the room—and I know you damn cops!" Lippy was belligerent.

"Movie star? What do you mean?"

"You know Duganne is dead. Don't try any tricks on me!"

This was interesting to Gregg. The racketeer knew something of what went on in stateroom No. 146—and he thought Dolores Duganne was the person murdered. He certainly was necessary for interrogation by the police, and might give the link that would complete the peculiar chain of circumstances surrounding Gerda's death.

"You're being a fool, Lippy. We can riddle you! Come out and talk to me." Clay was insistent now. "You've made this mess for yourself and you can't get away from us."

"The hell I can't!" Lippy punctuated his cry with a pot shot at the inspector, who dove to cover behind a deck funnel near the ventilator.

He called back to his men to climb on top of the wireless house and the dining salon skylight and fire down on the racketeer. Lippy laughed at these orders and there was a sudden *rat-tat-tat* of bullets biting into metal. Gregg heard a metal door being opened.

Clay seemed to understand the meaning of this and he ran out from cover to Lippy's hiding place. No shot greeted him, but a second later the ventilator reverberated with a dull, hollow thudding noise.

Gregg was puzzled. The thud seemed to echo from the bowels of the ship.

"Go below!" Clay screamed to his men. "He's jumped down the ventilator shaft. Find out where it ends!"

Running back to the main stairs, Clay met Captain Sinnerton, who, alarmed, had come on deck to find out what the shooting was for. He said the ventilator shaft ended in the first-class kitchens three decks below, on D deck. Clay made him lead the way.

They raced down the stairs while frightened guests, coming out from the bar, stared after them with wide eyes. At the doors to the kitchen, Sinnerton hesitated and produced a pass-key.

"He can't get out of there," he assured the inspector. "All doors to the kitchens and pantries are locked. He's bottled up!"

The door was opened and the lights switched on. Gregg beheld a sea of hot tables, stoves and overhead racks freighted with copper pots and pans of all sizes.

"Come out, Lippy," Clay commanded. "You're cornered. And if you open fire on us, by God I'll show you no mercy!"

There was no response. Had Lippy really dropped as far as these kitchens?

Sinnerton, with frightened eyes, led the way to the lower end of the ventilator. The wire mesh door swung idly on its hinges. It had been recently thrust open.

"It's like a mail chute," Clay observed. "When Lippy dropped his fall was broken by hitting the bend up there. He slid into the wire door and burst it open. He's in here somewheres!"

A systematic search of the ovens, now cold, was begun. Clay boldly led the way, his released automatic firmly gripped in his hand. The ovens and the spacious cookers and the hot tables and the lockers, all good hiding places, failed to reveal the racketeer. The ports were too small for a man to squeeze through to drop into the river outside. It was evident that Lippy had dropped into this chamber; but where was he? The garbage chutes to the outer river were locked, the doors to the pantries and dining room on the next deck were locked. Yet Lippy had vanished.

"I'll be damned!" Clay growled. "There's not a trace of him."

The other detectives scanned the floor for dusty footprints. There were none. The inspector's eyes were afire with baffled rage.

Gregg studied the clusters of pots and pans overhead. In many places they were thickly grouped and the hanging lamps cast their weird shadows on the ceiling. Did he see those far corner pans move?

"Inspector," he whispered, "don't look up. But walk over to that corner under the pots and pans. He's up there on the rack."

Clay nodded and murmured instructions to his men to cover the spot with their guns. Then he calmly sauntered to the corner till he was directly under the kitchenware indicated by the sharp-eyed reporter.

"Drop your guns, Lippy!" Clay snapped. "I know you're up there—and my men are ready to rake you with lead!"

An automatic crashed to the wooden floor from the cluster of pots.

"Now drop the other gun, Lippy. You always carry two—one for each armpit!"

The second gun fell. Clay picked the two up while Lippy, his clothing now grimy and rumpled, swung easily from the rack and dropped lightly to the floor. He grinned at the inspector.

"All right," he said. "Now what's next?"

"Come with me. We've got a lot of talking to do," Clay said and prodding the racketeer in the back with his gun, shoved him toward his men gathered at the kitchen door.

They were about to leave when the sound of a key in the distant pantry door echoed in the room. Clay hesitated and watched the door open. A sailor, a little old man, came in with a time clock slung over his shoulder on a strap. He paid no heed to the police, after saluting Captain Sinnerton, and went to a wall stand where he inserted a key in his clock and pressed a lever.

"He's the fire watch," Sinnerton explained. "He makes the rounds of the ship at night and punches his clock. We

have to be careful of fire and loiterers, you know—especially in port."

The oil sailor moved toward the door where they were standing. His eyes fell on Lippy and lighted up.

"So they got you!" the fire watch said suddenly to the racketeer. "And I'll bring charges against you, too."

"What's this?" Clay demanded of the man. "Have you seen this fellow before?" He pointed to Lippy.

"That I have, sir—twice before to-night. And he assaulted me and knocked me down just because I asked him what he was doing in a boat on A deck."

By degrees, Clay got the man's story out of him. He was making his rounds on the boat deck when he saw Lippy climb down from a boat. He demanded to know what Lippy was doing on the boat and, for an answer, the racketeer punched him in the face, knocking him down. When he picked himself up, Lippy had vanished so the fire watch went off to report the matter to the sergeant-at-arms.

"What was he doing on the boat?" Clay asked.

"He was flashing a flash light, sir. He was signaling to some one on the next pier. I saw a light flashing from there, too, sir."

"He's nutty," Lippy broke in. "I've got no flash light."

"I'd like to believe you, Lippy, but I can't." Clay turned to the fire watch again. "You said you saw him twice to-night?"

"Aye, I did. The first time I saw him coming out of No. 146 on B deck. I remember him because of his funny lips. He saw me, sir, and looked back into the room and said to some one in there: 'Thank you. Good night!' I could see into the room. A woman was lying on the couch, tiredlike."

"What time was that?" Clay snapped eagerly.

"I'd just punched twelve forty-five on the starboard B deck stand, sir."

"Was—was the woman alive? Could you tell?"

The fire watch shook his head. "I didn't notice, sir. But she didn't answer him, sir. At least, I didn't hear her."

"I tell you he's cuckoo!" Lippy sneered. "He's in his second childhood—imagining things!"

Clay thanked the fire watch and led Lippy back to the cabin where he had been examining the parties involved in the puzzling case. Lippy seated himself coolly and lighted a cigarette, smiling sardonically at the inspector. Only when he fully recognized the *Examiner* reporter did his eyes betray concern, which he quickly veiled with a frozen, mute grin.

"Now, Lippy, tell us what you know about the death of Dolores Duganne," Clay began, using the star's name instead of Gerda's in view of the racketeer's remark on the boat deck. "You were in her cabin to-night. The fire watch saw you come out and Mr. Gregg here saw you outside her drawing-room door—on deck."

"I wasn't in the room," Lippy insisted. "I was walking on deck and happened to lean against the door to light a cigarette."

On a question from Clay, Gregg denied seeing Lippy light a cigarette. He was positive the man didn't have one in his hand then.

"How did you know Miss Duganne was dead?" Clay asked.

Lippy had a ready reply. "When I was on the boat deck I heard the cops say so. And when I heard them say they were looking for me, I laid low. I'm not going to be framed, and I'm not going to talk now without a lawyer."

Clay was kindly. He pointed out that Lippy's behavior certainly was odd and that it would go better with him if he answered a few questions. But the racketeer shook his head.

Lippy grew pale when he saw the inspector take out his automatic and grip it by the muzzle, hammer fashion. Clay strode over to Lippy, caught him by the throat and jerked him to his feet, knocking the cigarette from his thick lips.

"You'll talk, Lippy. I've no time to waste. Or, by God, I'll make you talk!" He raised the gun menacingly, meaning to bring it down on the racketeer's head.

"Go ahead. Beat me up. But I won't talk."

Clay slipped the gun back into his pocket and then sent a smashing blow into the racketeer's face. Lippy toppled over backward and smashed into the chair. He was raised up and hit again. He covered his face with his hands and blubbered, but still stubbornly refused to talk.

"You have to deal with some of them this way," Clay said to Gregg. "They know no other language except pain, these birds!"

The inspector's third degree was interrupted by the appearance of the medical examiner. He was ready to give his preliminary report on the causes of Gerda Galaston's death. Lippy was thrown back into his chair where he cowered, though listening intently.

"Death was caused by asphyxiation," the doctor said quickly. "Strangled by the pressure of two hands applied to the windpipe. The wound on the left temple was probably caused by a fall. It's only skin deep."

"Was death instantaneous?" Clay wanted to know.

"I'd say so."

Clay flashed a meaningful look to the reporter. If the girl died instantly, then Doctor Morelle was the killer. Hadn't she been heard singing as he entered No. 146? Morelle's story was cock-and-bull stuff!

"Any idea about the time, doctor?"

"It's hard to say, inspector, but I'd put her death at about twelve forty-five.

She's been dead about two hours, but I'm only guessing."

"How about one o'clock?"

"I'd say it was closer to twelve forty-five that she died."

Clay glowered at Lippy. "No wonder you're tight-mouthed, you rat. She was dead when you went into the room—if you didn't choke her yourself."

"You can't hang that on me, Clay!" Lippy sneered. "I didn't kill anybody."

"I don't think Miss Galaston put up any struggle," the doctor went on. "There are no signs of any. I think she was taken by surprise."

At the mention of Gerda's name, Lippy's eyes grew large. He couldn't believe his ears. He thought Duganne was the dead woman!

"You're surprised, Lippy. You thought it was Duganne that you bumped off. But you got her double by mistake."

The little thick-lipped gnome couldn't answer.

Hitchens, one of the technical men, spoke up. "Our investigation shows no sign of a struggle either. The room is in good order. The finger-print men have some stuff, and they'll need the prints of those who were in the rooms to check up. But I did find this unlighted cigarette under the radiator."

He handed the inspector an Abdullah. Clay showed it to Lippy and the racketeer seemed to collapse inwardly.

"So you were in the room, Lippy?"

"I'll tell you this much, Clay." His voice quavered. "I did go in to see Miss Duganne and she told me——"

"She wasn't dead?"

"No; she told me to get out. I was getting a cigarette ready and I must have dropped it."

"What did you want to see her about?"

"I wanted to tell her I was through with Valcory—that I was going in business for myself, and that I'd like her help. She'd been helping Valcory get

rid of stuff in Hollywood and I thought I could cut in there."

"But you were talking to Miss Galaston in No. 146——" Clay roared.

"I didn't know it. I thought she was Duganne!"

So Lippy, who said he was ready "to go the limit" in a matter involving a woman, mistook Gerda for Dolores. Gregg wondered if "going the limit" meant killing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DELIVERY.

LIPPY retreated into his silence once more. He refused to explain his remarks in the speakeasy about "going the limit," the woman involved in the plot he had afoot, or what the plot was. To all queries he shook his head doggedly and kept his mouth shut. Nor would he admit that he was signaling from the *Largentine* to some one on the next pier.

Clay, unable to break down the racketeer's silence, gave up temporarily, swearing with the choicest of epithets. Gregg's ears buzzed and even Lippy was startled by the oaths heaped upon him. He was sent to a cabin under guard while Clay took time off to do a little thinking.

"What do you make of it, Gregg? We've heard a lot of lies and the case still points to Morelle as the killer. He was the last man to see the girl alive and his story about finding her dead is fishy. All the others, liars that they are, are agreed that she was alive when they saw her."

"If we could only establish the minute of her death, we'd be somewhere," the reporter said. "And as for motives, there are dozens—pointing to each one."

Hitchens came in again with Miss Helstrom, the star's maid. The technical man was abashed because he forgot to report that the wardrobe in No. 144 had been broken open.

"What about those jewel cases, Miss Helstrom?" Clay asked.

"I'm here to tell you. I left them in the closet, safely locked up. There really isn't much in them—only about ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry. Miss Duganne left her real valuables in a safe deposit in Hollywood. But when I got into my room, I found these policemen looking at the cases. They were on a writing table and had been found there. Some one took them from the closet, sir."

Clay barked out orders when Hitchens said the cases showed finger prints. He instructed the print men to get the markings of every suspect locked in the cabins. The man went off to do this so that the prints on the jewel cases might be compared.

Gregg, who was watching Miss Helstrom closely, noticed that she seemed uneasy and did her best to avoid the inspector's cold gaze. What was wrong with her? An idea occurred to him—an old police trick—and he whispered to Clay.

The inspector eyed the maid sharply. "Miss Helstrom, were you ever in prison?"

The woman gasped and terror flared in her somber eyes. "No; I never was."

"Are you sure?" Clay took a paper from his pocket, glanced at it and then at the maid. "You'd better tell the truth."

The bluff that Gregg concocted worked. The woman leaned back against the wall.

"Well; I was arrested once. I was innocent, though."

"What for?"

"It was in San Francisco, sir. A lady I worked for accused me of stealing a valuable diamond ring. Later the ring was found in her hand bag, and she gave me some money so I wouldn't sue her for false accusation."

"Did Miss Duganne know this when she hired you?"

Miss Helstrom shook her head. Clay instructed that she be isolated in a cabin, too.

"You're turning the *L Argentine* into the Tombs!" Gregg laughed when the maid was taken away. "You've got eight people detained aboard. Not to mention the rest of the one hundred and fifty guests in the bar."

"It's got me, Gregg! I'd move the lot of them to headquarters and sweat them there if it wasn't for the prominence of some of them. The police can't afford to make a mistake at a time like this. Masone and Valcory have influence in this man's town—and so have Morelle and Lady Montbanne for that matter. And I'd hate to think of the row Duganne would make if we took her downtown!"

"I've got a lot of theories, but they don't lead anywhere."

"So've I. But shoot yours first, Gregg."

They lighted cigarettes and Gregg gave his views. "The jewel cases give us a new light to go by. Ruthers and Miss Helstrom were in No. 144 where they were. Either of them might have gone there to filch the sparklers when Gerda opened the door from the drawing-room. Frightened out of their wits, one of them might have grabbed her by the throat."

"Not a bad hunch!" Clay commented. "But Morelle and you heard Gerda singing before you found the body. Lippy and Valcory swear they saw her alive. Explain that one."

"Remember Duganne was in No. 148 listening at the drawing-room door. Haddle told us that. If Ruthers or Helstrom killed her, Lippy and Valcory saw a dead woman when they went into the room. You couldn't expect them to admit that—and incriminate themselves.

"And we can't prove yet that they did see a dead woman. Then comes the Duganne angle. She heard Morelle come—possibly she saw him and at the

same moment, saw the dead body. On the chance that some one might be in the hall, she sang her song to give the impression that Gerda was alive when Morelle went in. Haddle wasn't in the room then, you know."

"That's wild imagination on your part, Gregg. The woman is too rattle-brained to think so quickly—it's incredible!" Clay discounted that theory scoffingly. "What about Lady Montbanne?"

"Either she spoke to Gerda as she said—or saw the girl strangled—and naturally won't involve herself."

"And Masone?"

"The same goes for him. He either talked to Gerda or saw that she was dead and is keeping mum. You really can't blame them. Consider this: Duganne might have had something on Valcory that would come out in further investigation; if he admitted finding Gerda dead, he'd have to explain that he didn't kill her to shut her mouth. It'd be a nasty bit of explaining. Lady Montbanne feared Duganne might win Morelle back and might want her out of the way. Both of them, if they were out to kill, might have mistaken Gerda for Duganne in their excitement."

"H'm. And Masone, being hard up, might have killed the girl by mistake, wanting the insurance money—two hundred thousand dollars cold cash!"

"That's another angle. And still Morelle might have done it out of revenge for being jilted. Yet we have his word that he isn't engaged to Lady Montbanne against hers that he proposed and was accepted yesterday afternoon by telephone! That needs explaining, as does the threat against Duganne's life, that came by phone. Did some one other than Morelle phone the Englishwoman and impersonate him?"

"You ought to write fiction, Gregg," the inspector laughed. "You're guessing wildly. You want me to believe that some one is framing Morelle."

Gregg let his eyes meet Clay's slowly and he inclined his head.

"I think just that. Our killer is clever and uncanny in his or her calculations. If we get at the truth of this, I'm sure Morelle went to No. 146 at a certain time because the killer knew he'd find the body—and possibly he found with it—thereby incriminating him!"

"Whose body though? Duganne's or Gerda's? I still think the killer made a mistake." Clay was emphatic.

"You got me there."

"Let's have a look over the drawing-room and find out what the print men know." The inspector got up and went to the door. He turned the knob and pulled.

The door did not open.

"Hell! We're locked in!" Clay roared and began pounding on the panel with his fists. "Something's wrong."

Presently Murtha opened the door. Clay glared at the key that was in the lock. Some one had turned it on the outside, deliberately locking in the reporter and the policeman!

The next thing that the inspector saw were the open doors on the opposite side of the passage. The cabins in which he had put the suspects were empty, even Doctor Morelle's.

"What's the meaning of this, Murtha?" he bellowed. "Who let those people out?"

Murtha took one look and almost dropped to the floor. "I—I don't know."

"Why aren't there any of our men on guard in this corridor?"

"Didn't you send them all to the gangway to watch the guests leave?" Murtha asked and knew that something had gone amiss.

"I did not!" Clay exploded. "Jump to the gangway and don't let any of the people we were questioning off the boat. The others can go!"

Clay rounded up his men at the gangway and learned that, as yet, none of

the suspects had gone ashore. He watched every face and had his men get the names and addresses of the guests still aboard and insisted that they properly identify themselves.

While some one hundred and fifty men and women, many the worse for their bar experiences, staggered to the pier, Clay got the story of the suspects' release from Murtha and Kildane.

A fair-haired youth, rather tall, had come aboard. He said he was from the homicide bureau and produced his credentials, a badge, since none of Clay's men knew him. After wandering about the bar and salon, he told Murtha that the guests were to be let ashore—on Inspector Clay's orders—and entering the passage, instructed Kildane to release the suspects—on Inspector Clay's orders. Then he told the men to gather at the gangway and scrutinize all who left the *Largentine*.

"That left him alone in the passage!" Clay roared. "And he locked me in my room!" He cursed the men for not coming to him for confirmation of those orders and scored them for not bringing the supposed homicide bureau man to him.

Gregg interrupted him to question Murtha. "What did this fellow look like?"

The detective described the youth who had come into Tony's earlier in the evening to report to Lippy Lorers. But how did the youth get his instructions to do what he did?

Clay was flabbergasted when the last of the guests were cleared. None of the suspects had been seen going ashore, and the men on duty at the gangway swore that none of them had gone ashore before the inspector came along. Clay sent for the captain and went to the commander's cabin to await him. There he telephoned for the reserves.

"I'll scour this boat from stem to stern!" he cried. "I'll have every deck

patrolled, and I'll have every living soul on the ship brought to me in the salon to identify himself."

Gregg spoke up. "Captain, are there any more phones aboard that are connected with the shore?"

The captain understood in a flash. "Why, most of the cabins on B deck have phones, and I think they're connected up with the shore switchboard. You see many people who are sailing come aboard and while we're still in dock, they transact business and phone to friends."

Clay tore out of the captain's cabin and went to B deck. Every room in which a suspect had been housed had a phone. And when Clay tested them, Central's cheery voice inquired: "Number, please?"

Which one of the suspects had telephoned the fair-haired youth, instructing him to release the men and women held by the police? It was a clever ruse, releasing all. The finger of suspicion was still leveled at eight persons instead of at one!

And when Clay tried the key that had locked him in, he found it was similar to those in the doors of the other cabins.

Doctor Bisbee, the ship's surgeon, entered the passage, headed for Dolores Duganne's room, now No. 150.

"Where's your patient, doctor?" Clay shouted to him.

"Still in her room. She came to a little while ago!"

Clay dashed to No. 150 and unceremoniously threw open the door. The red-headed movie star was on her feet, standing at the cabin telephone. She was just replacing the receiver.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KILLER'S INTENTION?

TO whom were you telephoning?" Clay demanded of the actress as the girl cowered against the wall, surprise on her face.

"I was trying to reach my lawyer," she said in a strange voice. "I will not have you persecute me any more. My nerves are simply frayed! I cannot stand your sort of inquisition! Nor will I!"

The inspector grinned, and asked what luck she had with her lawyer and the girl said there was no answer to her call. Given the lawyer's name and phone number, Clay put in a call and received no reply. But suspicion never left his eyes. Some one had telephoned to a confederate off the *Largentine*—knowing the ship's phones were connected with the shore—and Duganne had been caught red-handed at the phone. Furthermore, he had every reason to believe her a poor liar, in view of her evasive responses and Haddle's story.

The captain, when asked, informed the inspector that there was no way of checking the calls from the ship. It was a service supplied gratis by the line and the cabins, connected by an automatic switchboard, communicated directly with central.

Clay invited the star to be seated and, while he took a chair facing her, Gregg and the ship's doctor stood at the door. The reporter studied the intense calm that the girl held, masklike, over her features.

"In view of your outburst before, and what we've come to learn," Clay said to her, "I must question you further and insist upon the truth. If you continue to evade me, I shall lock you up."

"You won't dare arrest me. On what charge?"

"There's such a thing as a material witness," Clay smiled. "Surely you've been in a movie where there was a material witness involved—some one arrested because of what he knew and refused to divulge—or because he'd be safer with his knowledge, behind bars."

"I've answered you truthfully."

Duganne grew submissive on realizing the truth of the inspector's intimation.

She feared arrest and its scandal above all things. Gregg knew it would mean ruin for her as a movie actress—innocent as she might be.

"I don't think so. You were in No. 148 shortly before one o'clock and you knew there was some one in the next room, No. 146, where your double's body was found."

"You're mistaken!"

With an impatient cry, Clay told her Haddle's story—of how he came upon her listening at the connecting door and of her suggestion that he tell a different story—of her bribing him.

"Haddle saw you in No. 148. Mr. Gregg saw you come out of the room and run into No. 150," Clay barked. "What about it?"

The girl's fingers fluttered over the bosom of her yellow lace gown, and that old look of a trapped animal came into her gray eyes. She shot a glance at Gregg and he knew she would make an admission. Somehow, he felt guilty—responsible for her plight—and oddly enough, regretted his part in enmeshing her in her own lies. He found her suddenly quite likable, terribly human in her terror.

"All right, Mr. Clay; I was in there. But——"

"Ah, let's have the 'but.'"

"Haddle's story is not true. Gerda insisted that I meet her again, after our first talk, and suggested my drawing-room. We were there for a moment, when there was a knock on the door. I didn't want to see any one else, in view of the threat I received, so I stepped into No. 148, telling Gerda to go to the door and send the party away. I listened to see who it was but heard no voices, not even Gerda's. There was the sound of a closing door presently, and still Gerda did not call to me. I didn't know whether she was alone or not."

"What time was this?"

Clay seemed to believe the actress.

"I think it was about twelve forty-five or twelve fifty. I saw a clock somewhere, but I can't quite remember."

The girl's voice had grown stronger since she saw that Clay was interested. "How long I waited, I do not know. Possibly three or four minutes. The connecting door was suddenly thrown open and Mr. Haddle came into the room where I was. I remember seeing him on parties somewhere. He was startled by my presence in the room, apologized, and went quickly into the corridor before I could ask him what he wanted."

"And the connecting door was still open? You saw Gerda?"

"The door was open but a draft slammed it shut. I realized that the drawing-room door to the deck had been opened. No; I didn't see Gerda then, but I waited, listening at the door. The room was very quiet, and I thought Gerda had gone out. I was about to return to No. 146, when the deck door opened and closed again and immediately after that, the corridor door to No. 146 opened. A few seconds later I heard a voice murmur: 'My God! Oh, my God!'"

"A man's or a woman's voice?"

"I—I couldn't tell. It was hoarse and low. I didn't hear whoever it was leave the room, but presently the door to the passage opened again and then I heard Gerda sing 'Sweetheart, Come Back to Me,' to whoever had entered. Then, when the song was ended, a voice said: 'Blood!' I became frightened. Something had happened in there—to Gerda. I didn't want to be found in the next room. Then as I started to leave, I heard a laugh, a low hysterical laugh. I knew—somehow—that it was Doctor Morelle. So I fled to Gerda's room, terrified, not knowing what had happened."

"You know now that Gerda Galaston was murdered!" Clay said emphatically.

She nodded. "But I know, too, that

Doctor Morelle didn't kill her. He couldn't have. He isn't that sort. He's a fine man."

"Yet the singing ceased when he entered the room. Gerda was alive when he entered," Clay insisted. "Explain that!"

"I—I can't, except that it didn't sound like Gerda's singing voice that I heard."

"Do you want us to believe that Doctor Morelle is a ventriloquist?" Clay laughed sarcastically. "I think you've cinched part of our case against Morelle, Miss Duganne. Now I want to know why Morelle wanted to kill you—or Gerda. Did he mistake her for you?"

The bewildered girl shook her head doggedly. "He couldn't have. He knows us both quite well." She caught her breath and then ventured, "Perhaps some other woman was in that room, and impersonated Gerda's voice."

"Who? You?" Clay shot at her. "That would mean the girl was dead when Morelle got there and found you there. Quick witted, he made you sing, to give you both an alibi, and then he sent you off, out of the room, and concocted his crazy alibi."

Dolores Duganne's mouth fell. Gregg's heart raced madly. Had the inspector touched upon the solution of the singing? The girl's look seemed to betray her. She tried to give a negative answer.

"Did you kill Gerda Galaston?" Clay demanded ominously.

"No! no! I swear it! I didn't do it!"

The actress was frantic, hysterical. She wrung her hands and tried to rise but could not. "I loved her! I had no reason to want to kill her!"

"You loved her?" Clay sneered. "You told us before you hardly knew her. You were in that room when Morelle entered and he's lying to protect you and your good name. Right?"

"No! No!" The girl's breath failed. The blood was drained from her face

and as the ship's doctor sprang to her side, she keeled over, unconscious. Clay cursed her for fainting again and strode out of the room, leaving her to the ministrations of the doctor.

As Gregg followed him, he looked back at the star. Her eyes were partly open, watching them go out. She had feigned her swoon! But the reporter decided to keep this to himself for the present.

Entering the star's suite, Clay was presented with the findings of the finger-print experts, by Sergeant Drew, the police department's Bertillon expert. Fortunately, the prints of the suspects had been gathered for checking purposes before their release was effected by the ruse of the tall, fair-haired youth.

"I've found the marks of Valcory, Morelle, Miss Helstrom, Ruthers, Haddle and Miss Duganne in this suite," Drew said. "Nothing doing on the others."

"How about the jewel cases?" Clay wanted to know. "And the closet where the maid said she put them?"

"The closet was forced, though the marks are hard to see," Drew said. "It hadn't much of a lock. On the jewel cases were found the maid's prints—and Ruthers'."

"Ruthers'?" Clay turned to Gregg. "Your hunch might not be so far off after all. Gerda might have surprised him with the cases and got her neck squeezed for her trouble!"

Gregg scrutinized the star's drawing-room a second time. The body had not yet been removed, and, with its covering sheet, occupied the chaise longue. There were three other chairs, deep and roomy, a writing desk and straight-backed chair, a screened radiator under one window and a telephone upon it. The reporter tested the phone and was surprised to find that it did not work. All the others on B deck that they had tried were in good order.

Murtha stuck his head in at the door.

"Haven't got 'em yet, inspector. God knows where they could have disappeared to. And I'll swear they didn't leave the ship." He was referring to the released suspects.

"Light every damn light on board," Clay blazed. "Don't miss so much as a cupboard. Search her from top to bottom, crew's quarters, engine room, coal bunkers and all. Empty the water tanks and the swimming pool. If they're aboard, we'll get them. And watch the decks. The killer might jump and try to swim out of this trap. The only way off the ship now is the guarded first-class gangway!"

Gregg was puzzled. "I can't understand what's driven them all into hiding. The killer would hide and so might his accomplices. But the others—the maid, for instance. Why should she hide?"

"I've got an idea about her. If Ruthers didn't get caught with the jewel cases in his hands, she might have."

"I don't think the jewel cases are behind this murder," the reporter said. "There's something else—something far more insidious—something that drove the killer to terrifying Miss Duganne with a death threat and framing Doctor Morelle. I don't believe the surgeon proposed to Lady Montbanne, as she says, but I do think his entry to Miss Duganne's room was carefully timed."

"By Masone? He had a watch in his hand when you saw him before Morelle came along."

"If Masone is the killer, I can't understand his carelessness in betraying an interest in the time of night. A man who has a pat alibi as to where he was at a certain hour, minute, and second, is too open to suspicion," Gregg pointed out. "Masone isn't an idiot!"

A shriek shattered the quiet that followed Gregg's words. Clay blanched. It came from room No. 150—where Dolores Duganne was.

They ran out into the corridor, and

found it empty. Not even a plain-clothes man in sight. Clay drew his gun and kicked open the door to No. 150. It was dark, and he turned up the lights, after fumbling for the switch.

The red-headed star was lying across the bed, her tousled hair and head hanging down toward the floor. Gregg thought she was dead until he heard her moan.

The ship's doctor came running in with a bottle of smelling salts. He was amazed at the scene and helped the girl to a more comfortable position on the bed.

The same telltale marks of the murderer were upon her, the reporter saw in a flash. Her throat was cruelly bruised from the pressure of ruthless fingers. Some one had tried to strangle her.

Clay shouted to the doctor to revive her as speedily as possible. He had to talk to her. He wanted to know who had attacked her. And it was obvious now—the intention of the killer! Dolores Duganne was marked for death, and Gerda Galaston had been killed by mistake. The reporter and the inspector exchanged these views.

In a few minutes, the girl opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling. She was in great pain and it marred the serene beauty of her pale, drawn face. Soon she found words and the doctor massaged her throat. Gregg gave her water.

"Well, what happened?" Clay demanded bluntly of her.

"I—I fainted. Then I seemed to regain consciousness and I asked for smelling salts. The doctor said he would get some, and I remember seeing him go out."

She spoke with great effort. Gregg noticed that now, as before, when she was quizzed, her Southern accent had vanished. And she spoke with no trace of cockney either. "Then I heard some one at the door and it opened a little."

She shuddered, and Gregg wondered

again if she were acting. He couldn't get the notion out of his head.

"Some one was watching me from the passage. A hand slipped through the opening and felt for the switch. The lights went out and I was too terrified to scream, then. Some one rushed across the cabin, fell heavily upon me, and I felt two hands close about my throat. I found my voice, and screamed, and then I—I couldn't breathe any more. I was strangling. I couldn't struggle. I fainted again, I guess."

Gregg listened to her story as though he were in a queer, unreal sort of dream. His eyes were riveted on a dressing table where Gerda Galaston had laid out some of her toilet articles. Among cold-cream jars, perfume bottles, face lotions and tooth paste—in plain view to any one who looked at the spot—was a bottle of smelling salts.

Yet Dolores Duganne had sent the doctor out of the room to get another such bottle from his own supplies. Hadn't she seen the dead girl's bottle? Hadn't the doctor?

He remembered that the girl had not really fainted the last time Clay cross-examined her. She pretended then. The awful thought came to him. Was she pretending now? Did some one really assault her—or for some peculiar reason of her own, had she simulated that attack upon herself?

He decided he must find a way to speak to the girl alone. Women murderers were old stories to him. He could easily believe she was capable of killing, yet there was another mystery about her that he wanted to plumb. He was convinced the solution of the case was in that pretty head of hers!

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER.

YOU have no idea whether you were attacked by a man or a woman?" Clay was asking the star.

"No, I haven't. It was dark, and it

all happened so suddenly, and I was terrified."

"Earlier, you told us about the death threat you received by phone at the Ritz. You said only one person knew you were staying there. Who was that?"

"I didn't tell you before because I'm not definitely sure the person did know I'd go to the Ritz. But Lady Montbanne was the name I had in mind."

"Did you ever have words with her over Doctor Morelle? Both of you loved him."

"No; never. We were always good friends."

Clay decided it was little use questioning the girl. Though she was in pain, that old look of self-possession had returned to her eyes. She was capable of being evasive again—and wasting his precious time with half truths and lies. He left her with the ship's doctor and found a detective whom he stationed at her door to circumvent any further attack upon her. He was convinced that the killer meant to get her.

Returning to the scene of Gerda's murder, Clay winked at the reporter. "I'm going beyond the law now—and you can watch me—and professionally look the other way. The motive for the attack on Duganne might be among her effects. I'm going through her luggage without her permission. No time for a court order now!"

Gregg thought it a good idea. With the aid of the finger-print men, they opened the suit cases and hatboxes and shoe cases in the bedrooms with keys they found in the star's hand bag. Her trunks were probably still on the dock or temporarily in the hold, and could be seen later. But the various pieces of luggage seemed to hold precisely what they were designed to hold—clothing, lingerie, hats, shoes, toilet articles and reading matter.

One compartment of a valise yielded up the star's contract with the Pictorial

Guild, calling upon her to make seven pictures over a period of two years—at a salary of four thousand five hundred dollars a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Gregg felt a cold chill run down his spine when Clay showed him those figures. They seemed Gargantuan, as compared with his seventy-five dollars per. He hoped with greater sincerity that his work on this case would bring him the desired fifteen dollars more a week—or at least ten dollars.

There was an amendment to the contract, canceling the last three pictures scheduled and agreeing that only one more would be made and that in New York. This clause was signed by the star and Hugh Masone and confirmed his story of his business relationship with her. Gregg studied the signatures that signed away a good many of the star's four-thousand-five-hundred-dollar weeks, and he prayed he'd soon see Martel's name on a slip to the *Examiner's* cashier boosting his own pay. His knack for facts, stored away the observation that the "H" in Hugh Masone's name was made similar to Huddle's "H" in his signature. He had had notes from the *Star* reporter in the past.

Catching himself musing over such irrelevancies, he saw Clay, disappointed with the results of his search, turn to the star's hand bag finally. It yielded a check book, a twenty-thousand-dollar letter of credit, several hundred dollars in crisp one-hundred-dollar bills and small currency. There were lipsticks, eyebrow pencils, powder compacts, perfume vials, an address book, and, in the cover flap, a square mirror. Clay was about to put the bag down when Gregg noticed a bit of white protruding from behind the mirror.

He drew it out and it proved to be an unaddressed envelope.

"You've got cat's eyes, Gregg!" the inspector laughed, and he drew a sheet of Ritz stationery from the envelope. Gregg read over his shoulder.

In a feminine handwriting, presumably Duganne's, was the following communication, without any salutation or signature:

I'm through with you and all your rotten schemes. You've spoiled my chances before, but you'll never do it again. I got your letter before leaving Hollywood and I saved it. It'll make swell reading for the police and I'm going to the police if you bother me again. I appreciate what you've done for me and particularly your introduction to Karivan, but I'm through with you now. I telegraphed "No," and I mean it. Get some one else to do your dirty work. - I know I've said all this before, but this time I mean it. If you cross me again, you'll have to kill me to shut my mouth. And I know enough about you to send you to the chair!

"It's rather emphatic, isn't it?" Clay grinned. "And it's just my luck that she put the letter she refers to in a safe-deposit box—probably in Hollywood!"

"Perhaps not. Women who make threats like that usually keep the means for making good close at hand," Gregg said. "You haven't looked in the jewel cases yet."

Clay gaped and went into No. 144. The jewel cases were still dusty with the print powder used in photographing the marks. Keys to the two cases were in the bunch found in the hand bag.

For a great satellite in the celluloid constellation who was traveling abroad, her jewels were nothing to rave about. There were several fine diamond pieces, and a beautiful sapphire ring, but none of the star's famous pearls were there. Clay could find no letter in the thick leather boxes.

"Guess you're wrong this time?" he said to Gregg.

"If you'll indulge my wild imagination, inspector, look for a secret compartment. There might be a hidden flap in the lid or in the bottom for love letters and the like. A jewel case isn't romantic without a secret compartment."

"Shut up!" Clay growled as he fin-

gered the tops and bottoms of the boxes. His eyes were animated. His fingers had found a loose bottom in one case. Turning it over, the bottom fell out and with it a letter addressed to the star at her Hollywood address. It had been sent on August 1st by air mail from New York.

The inspector tore the letter in his haste to open and read it. Like Duganne's note, this bore no salutation or signature. Nor was there any letter-head or clew as to the sender's identity. They read these typewritten words:

Just one more job. Please. We stand to pull off our biggest haul and you're needed to get the lowdown. You can do it in a day—the day before you sail. I know you're not interested in the money end of it, but I need you, since you're the only person who can get the layout easily. You've done as much before. Help me and go on to Karivan and nobody will be any the wiser. Telegraph "Yes" or "No."

The writer concluded with a more sinister note:

"If you go back on me, you know I can spoil the Karivan business for you. I've heard your threats before. You really can't go to the police without incriminating yourself. And you know the lengths to which I've gone—so don't put a rope around your neck.

Clay was ecstatic. "This letter would never convict anybody but it gives me the lever I want to budge a confession out of Duganne. She seems to be up to her neck in something that spells murder. Get that line about 'a rope around your neck'?" She's an accomplice before the fact in some skullduggery!"

"The second letter sounds like a man's," Gregg put in.

"Yet she writes in her letter that the party introduced her to Karivan. Mightn't that be Lady Montbanne who has access to English society?" the inspector pointed out. "Or the Helstrom woman might have been instrumental in bringing them together. She's a mysterious cuss! Any one of our suspects

might have written the threatening letter."

Gregg couldn't understand why the star's letter was not addressed—nor why it was undelivered and in her hand bag. Clay suggested that she might have intended to give it to the party it was intended for—at the preview—or mail it from the ship so that it would be delivered when the *Largentine* was at sea. He was of the opinion that the murderer did not know when Duganne was expected in New York.

"At any rate, she didn't fear the party who threatened her," the reporter observed. "She writes as though she were used to such threats—but was determined this time."

"And what could the boat haul be?" Clay was laughing. "It's getting clearer. She was Valcory's tip-off woman. She got him big orders and sent him lists of possible customers. And Lippy was trying to sign her up because they used to work together for Valcory. And how do we know Ruthers wasn't running liquor to pay his losses on the ponies? And there's Lady Montbanne; she's poor but she lives well and has a swanky Park Avenue flat. Where does her cash come from? These letters concern bootleg deals—stuff right off the boat—and killings in such deals are rather common these days. What a story for you, Gregg: a movie star, the nation's favorite, a cog in a gigantic bootleg machine!"

Gregg saw the possibilities of the story. He almost believed in it. But somehow he was sorry for the girl in the next cabin. She certainly appealed to him, no matter what she'd done!

CHAPTER XI.

THE RAID.

THE inspector expressed his intention of interviewing the star a third time and confronting her with the letters. His mind was made up: she might either

talk or he would arrest her forthwith. With the eight other suspects missing, hidden somewhere on the ocean liner, he was going to make certain of her at least—under lock and key!

"We're forgetting one thing, inspector," the reporter said. "Lippy was up to something to-night. Probably some rum-running stunt! He was ready to go the limit in Tony's and the deal involved a woman somehow. Yet we find Lippy attending this preview and loitering around Duganne's suite. And now we learn that the suspects you had bottled up were released by the very lad whom I saw in the speakeasy talking to Lippy."

"You mean?"

The reporter grinned, nodding. "Uh-huh; Lippy's business was aboard the *Largentine*. I'll give you ten to one on it! And either Gerda or Duganne is the woman involved."

"It's Duganne. Gerda was killed by mistake. Oh, if I could only get my hooks into him—and Valcory." A new thought occurred to Clay. "I've a notion that Valcory and Lippy haven't split. The rumor is just a trick—a ruse to hide their real purpose from the police. And Valcory preceded Doctor Morelle in this drawing-room. If the girl was dead, as Morelle says, when he entered—then Valcory knew that she was dead or he turned that trick!"

The reporter remarked on the likelihood of the theory. He couldn't understand the inability of the police to locate the missing suspects. Surely all eight persons—if they were still aboard—couldn't be invisible much longer.

They returned to stateroom No. 150, the mysterious letters in Clay's pocket. Dolores Duganne was lying on her bed with wet compresses about her mauled throat. She saw the inspector come in and closed her eyes to him while the doctor covered them with a wet cloth. Gregg noticed this move on her part—and the doctor's.

"Is she asleep?" Clay asked. "If she is, wake her up!"

The doctor demurred but the inspector stood over him and brusquely shook the girl's shoulder.

"Miss Duganne! I'm not through with you! And I know you're not asleep! I saw your eyes watching me as I came in." There was a savage note in his voice now.

The girl stirred. "You're a nightmare, inspector. I hardly believe you're real," she murmured.

"I'm real enough," he sneered. "Now I've just been through your luggage——"

She sat bolt upright in bed, glaring at him. "How dare you——"

"I'm daring a helluva lot to-night. I found some letters that need explaining. You wrote a note of warning from the Ritz—an unaddressed note—informing some one that you were through with him or her—and that if they didn't let you alone, you'd go to the police with incriminating evidence you've got. What's it mean?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

Clay showed her the two letters. She read them and as Gregg observed, as if for the first time, her lips tightened and she shook her head slowly. "I've never seen these before. I didn't write that note nor did I receive the other letter."

Clay told her where he found them and demanded a sample of her handwriting. Paper was found in the writing desk and the girl copied the first few lines of the note found in her hand bag.

The handwriting, while similar in many respects, did differ. And Gregg knew that the star had made no effort to disguise her penmanship in the test.

"There's but one conclusion to draw from this, if we're to believe her," Clay said, taking the reporter aside, "the killer or somebody planted those notes

knowing that the police would find them after the murder."

"And we know First Officer Ruthers and the maid handled the jewel cases," Gregg whispered. "If one of them is guilty, what are they trying to do to the actress? What's their frame-up game so far as she's concerned?"

"Vengeance of some sort possibly. Or else the letters are just a smoke screen to complicate matters."

Gregg couldn't believe the latter. "Murderers aren't that smart. Those letters are real—and have some significance—a direct bearing on the case. The actress knows about them but refuses to be incriminated in the plot they suggest. She refused to go through with her end of the deal and some one is out to put her away!"

"Sounds plausible." Clay was disappointed though. "But she's standing pat, and we can't make her open her mouth, the way we could do with Lippy." Gregg saw his fists clench.

Sergeant Murtha, breathless and excited, knocked and entered. He drew the inspector out into the passage. "Hell's broken loose! The captain is going nuts!"

"What's wrong now?"

"The ship's being raided—for violation of the Volstead act!" Murtha blurted out between gasps. "Department of justice men and a treasury official are seizing the *L Argentine's* liquor—because it was openly dispensed while the ship was inside the twelve-mile limit. Some one tipped 'em off to the party the movie people threw to-night!"

"That's nothing to get excited about," Clay sneered. "It doesn't help my troubles—or add to them."

"But the justice men are taking the stuff off the ship!" the sergeant cried. "They've told our men to get out of the way and go to hell. Our search is being held up. And the captain says there's about one hundred thousand dollars' worth of the finest stuff in the ship's

stores. The *Largentine* is noted for its rare champagnes and wines and old whiskies and brandies!"

"Let them take it. I don't care. It's none of our business. But see that they don't let our eight 'friends' get off with the liquor."

Clay wasn't interested in the Federal men's raid. He had a murder—a complicated affair—on his hands!

Yet, curious, he and the reporter trailed after Murtha to C deck, forward, where about fifty roustabouts in dungarees were opening the hatches and getting the cranes set. The steam winches were being started up by the ship's crew under the supervision of plain-clothes men wearing the badges of revenue agents. Captain Sinnerton paced among them, blustering, threatening and pleading.

Gregg saw a convoy of ten motor trucks on the pier, standing ready to receive the contraband liquor. The internal revenue department was acting with neatness and dispatch. This raid had all the earmarks of being cleverly organized and well timed. The *Largentine* had broken the law and the Federal government meant to punish—swiftly and surely, before the ship's company had time to enjoin it in the courts and sail away with the liquor aboard.

Gregg knew that the serving of the ship's liquor at the movie party was a direct and flagrant violation of the law and that the Federal authorities, while taking drastic action, were well within their rights in making the seizure.

Captain Sinnerton went over to Clay's side. "My God! This is outrageous! First, people are openly insulted by having their hips slapped as they leave the pier after seeing a ship off. Now the revenue people dare to come aboard and seize my stock—the line's personal property. It's outrageous, I say!"

"They've got the goods on you, captain," Clay laughed. "I'll bet they had agents at the party and their testimony

is already in affidavit form, sworn out before a United States commissioner dragged out of bed less than an hour ago. You've seen his order to give up your stuff?"

The captain nodded. "They've got papers. And they're threatening to libel the ship—to seize it, too, and prevent our noon sailing!"

He went on to explain that he had been trying to reach the company officials by phone. Something was the matter with the lines and the second officer had gone ashore to use a pay station on the pier. He was beside himself with rage, and meant to go to the President of the United States with the case. The *Largentine* was being unfairly prosecuted, he said, and pointed out that liquor was sold on ships flying the American flag!

"But not in American ports!" Clay explained. "They've got you on a technicality—and they've got you good."

A dignified man, who spoke with an important manner, came up to them. "I'm really very sorry to have to do this, captain, but orders from Washington are orders!" He introduced himself as James Nearlo of the treasury department. "We have been instructed to seize the liquor aboard and as soon as court opens—I don't hesitate to tell you—a libel action will be instituted to seize the ship."

"We're sailing at noon!" the captain roared.

"If your lawyers are successful in getting a stay against the government's injunction," Nearlo smiled. "Liquor was sold at a movie preview held aboard last night and early this morning. We have witnesses. The law has been flagrantly violated and Washington means to make an example of this ship!"

The captain's nautical profanity was drowned out by the *chug-chug* of the winches. Rope cradles filled with liquor cases soared out of the hold, swung over the intervening space between ship and

pier by the cranes and were deposited within a few feet of the waiting trucks. The roustabouts on the dock made speedy work of the loading.

Gregg was amazed at the fast pace at which the Federal men worked. They had stepped in, flashed their credentials and before the captain could yell "Jack Robinson" his famous cellar was being whisked ashore by his own apparatus—winches and cranes. The cradles of cases shot through the air from the hold with the rapidity of extraordinary fire from a trench mortar.

The names on the liquor cases fascinated the reporter and gave him a dry feeling in his throat. Château Yquem, Pommard, 1902, Châteauneuf du Pape, Anjou, Piper Heidseick, Haig & Haig, Courvoisier, the brandy of Napoleon, rare Chartreuse, Grand Fine de Louis Phillippe, Johnny Walker, Benedictine, Pol Roger, 1910, Pouilly de St. Clair, 1904, Old Smuggler, Three Star Hennessy, Guinness' Stout, Bass' Ale, Cointreau d'Assas—the names were a kaleidoscopic whirl of the best in the connoisseur's ken!

"I can't understand why my man hasn't come back," the captain fumed. "Surely the pier phones are working! He must have reached some one in the firm by now. This outrage must be stopped!"

"It'll be a dry sailing!" Clay chuckled and winked as he let Gregg draw him aside.

"O. K. my leaving the ship!" the reporter said. "I want to do some telephoning myself. I know a fellow in Washington and I can get the lowdown on this. I need it for my story about what's happened to the *Largentine* in the past five hours."

The inspector agreed and passed the reporter down the first-class gangway, while he ordered a stricter vigilance for the missing murder suspects in the vicinity of the liquor unloading. He even put his men in the ship's hold to see that

none of them climbed into the rope cradles to be slung ashore with the liquor cases. And each roustabout would have to identify himself properly before passing out of Clay's cordon.

Gregg, on his way to the pier's reception hall where he knew of telephones, passed the line of trucks and dodged out of the path of three, already loaded, that were making for the ramp to the street. No one paid any attention to the reporter.

He had made up his mind to rouse the *Examiner's* Washington correspondent out of bed and have him, in turn, awaken the secretary of the treasury. An explanation from the treasury department would be news in itself, for the raid on the popular liner was daring.

Likewise, such a telegraph dispatch from the national capital would act as a stop-gap in the presses until the veil of secrecy was lifted from the Galaston murder mystery. Clay certainly had bottled up his reports on the case, for headquarters had given out nothing to the reporters on the night trick there. Otherwise, the pier would be filled with morning paper men and photographers.

With the exception of Haddle, he had this yarn all to himself. And if he watched his step, he knew he could trim the *Star* man, beat him to the streets with extras. And the scoop out to bring in that extra fifteen dollars a week he wanted so badly.

He found the telephones—two booths. As he pushed open the door of one, the body of a uniformed man toppled out and sprawled on the flooring. Gregg recognized the second officer—the man sent by the captain to phone the company's officials of the government raid.

There was blood on the officer's head. He had been struck from behind, but he still breathed, with heavy, labored efforts. What had happened to him—Gregg wondered. Who attacked this man and why?

The reporter, seeing the man stir,

knelt at his side and helped him sit up. "What struck you?"

The officer's speech was thick. "I—I don't know. I was about to step into the booth when I heard footsteps behind me. Before I could turn around—the lights went out. God, but my head hurts!"

"Go back to the ship and report that to Inspector Clay!"

"Who're you—giving me orders?"

"A police officer! Hurry up!" Gregg wanted Clay to know about this attack, and he didn't want to waste time going back. The Washington call had to be put through.

The second officer got up and staggered off toward the gangway as Gregg got a sleepy-voiced Central. "Give me long distance!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE FAIR-HAIRED YOUTH.

AFTER Gregg gave his number in Washington, specifying that the charges be reversed because he was short of change, he had to wait about five minutes. It was in his mind that the murderer might have gotten clear of the ship and had attacked the second officer. But why? There was nothing to gain by such a move.

The officer had seen no one, had only heard footsteps behind him. Then he remembered that the ship's telephone connections with the shore were out of order. Was that done deliberately? Did some one want to cut off those aboard the liner from any communication with the city?

Grover, the Washington man, spoke up. Gregg identified himself.

"The Federal men here have just raided the *Largentine* and are carting off one hundred thousand dollars' worth of liquor," he said. "A Mr. Nearlo of the treasury department is in charge and seems to have the seizure papers. He's also threatening putting a libel on

the ship itself—from violating of the Volstead. Can you check up with the secretary on it? I've got the story sewed up on this end so far and we might put over a swell exclusive."

Grover was an alive sort of fellow, and he told Gregg to hold the wire. "I'll use my other phone and get the secretary. If a stunt like pulling the *Largentine* came off, Washington is back of it. He'll know about it and give reasons."

Gregg waited. Three minutes—five minutes—seven minutes. Dimly, he could hear the man in Washington using his other phone. He'd gotten somebody on the wire.

"I've got his house," Grover shouted to Gregg. "The butler hates to wake him up—but I told him it was police business. That always sells 'em on snapping to it!"

Again the reporter waited on the Washington correspondent. The latter was speaking again! To the secretary of the treasury, a man who never equivocated with the press. If the treasury department was behind the raid, he would frankly admit it, Gregg knew.

Gregg heard a "Thank you" and then Grover's voice sounded again in his receiver. "I got him. He says he knows nothing of such a raid. If one is being pulled, it is being done without the knowledge or consent of the treasury department. And get this: He knows nobody in his bureau by the name of Nearlo! And if I know my man, he knows everybody of any rank or importance in the whole damn administration."

"I've had a notion there was something phony about the raid," Gregg said. "They could have waited till daylight to take off the liquor. I wonder——"

"Yeah, he said it might be a hijacking job, too. He's getting in touch with his own men in New York and also the police. You'd better tip off your friend

Clay and the captain and tell them Washington disowns Mr. Nearlo. You'll have some department of justice men over there pretty pronto. They'll investigate Nearlo."

"Thanks a lot!"

"I'll file a wire on this and more I got from the secretary. S'long!"

Gregg hung up and his one thought was to get back to Clay. This would make the inspector's ears burn! He was on hand to unravel a murder mystery and some one was hijacking the *Largentine's* liquor right under his nose. He was sure of it now. The supposed government men showed too much intensive organization, they were too quick and ready to get the one hundred thousand dollars' worth of liquor off the ship! Already some of that stock was speeding through the city—to what destination—a Federal storehouse or a bootlegger's barn?

He stepped out of the phone booth as two more trucks rumbled by and coasted down the ramp. Hell, the job must be almost completed! He hoped Nearlo was still on the liner. Clay could nail him and sweat him. If he was a government man, the inspector could say the secretary of the treasury repudiated him. If he wasn't, Clay would have one bird for his night's labors!

Something blunt was jabbed into his back. "Stick 'em up!" a voice commanded, and Gregg was not slow to obey.

"Who're you phoning to?"

"My wife," Gregg lied glibly. "I was telling her I'd be home to breakfast."

"Who're you?"

"A reporter."

Gregg's heart was playing a tattoo on his ribs. He knew the voice of the man with the gun—invisible behind him.

It was that of the fair-haired youth who reported to Lippy in Tony's speak-easy. And he saw it all now. Lippy was the hijacker. He had conceived the raid and had staged it effectively—thus

far. This was the job he had in mind. And Dolores Duganne was the woman who knew something about it. Of that, the reporter was certain!

"Your wife live in Washington?" the fair-haired youth sneered.

"No; that was the exchange I gave!" Gregg wished he had a wife whom he could call back and convince the youth. His flesh went cold, apprehensive of personal danger.

"I'm taking no chances," the youth snapped. "Slug him, Louie!"

Gregg cried out as a great pain exploded in the center of his brain. Something hit him at the base of the skull. He felt his knees weaken, sag and give way. As he fell, he clutched the air like a drowning man trying to get to the surface.

Then darkness—a horrible, empty, silent blackness—swallowed him up.

CHAPTER XIII.

VALCORY.

WHEN Gregg opened his eyes again, he was lying in a berth in one of the *Largentine's* cabins. The ship's doctor had just finished bandaging his splitting head.

"You got a nasty wallop!" the doctor commented. "Just like the second officer's. And I thought you'd never come out of it! Feel all right."

"I'd like a drink."

Bisbee went to the washbasin and filled a glass of water.

The reporter pushed this away from him. "Don't be silly. I said a drink!"

The doctor laughed and reached to his hip pocket. Gregg took the flask and his lips sucked in a long, fiery flow of bona-fide Scotch.

"That's better," he grinned. "I guess I'll live. Where's Clay?"

"He's gone to the engine room! His men have just rounded up one of the missing people!" the doctor laughed. "Think of it! Those eight have been

under cover for nearly seven hours—and they've only got one of them!"

Gregg decided he couldn't afford to be under the weather when news was breaking. So, bad head or no bad head, he bolted from the cabin, calling a word of thanks over his shoulder to the doctor. He found the stairs and flew down the steps to the bowels of the liner. The location of the engine room was familiar to him from his ship news days but when he reached its door, he saw no sign of Clay or the police.

The muffled report of an automatic reached his ears. From the engine room. And there was a thud on the metal door he was about to open. The bullet!

The door swung away from him and Sam Valcory, the society bootlegger, shot into his arms as the metal portal clanged shut. The impact of the man's body knocked Gregg off his feet, but he caught at the bootlegger's coat lapels and they went down together. Then the reporter threw his arms around the man and held him fast.

"We won't try to get up," Gregg said. "We'll just lie here and wait for the cops. They want to talk to you."

Valcory struggled to free himself, gasping and panting, but Gregg had the man's arms pinned to his sides.

"Let me go!" Valcory pleaded. "I'll pay you anything—any sum you name!"

"Tell it to Sweeney!"

"It's—it's not the cops I'm afraid of—it's the other!" There was no mistaking the terror in Valcory's voice.

"What other?"

"The killer! The killer! For God's sake let me go!"

Gregg was impressed and concerned. The killer was still loose on the liner then. Valcory knew. Was he or she in the engine room? Had the killer fired that shot at the bootlegger? Gregg began to regret his predicament—lying there on the floor with Valcory a prisoner in his arms. What if the killer

found them? He or she was after Valcory, meaning to kill him!

Still another thought occurred to the reporter. "Don't try to kid me, Valcory! The cops have the goods on you! I think I've got the killer in my arms!"

Valcory swore and screamed and renewed his efforts to break the viselike grip that held him. He was fighting mad now.

And then his efforts suddenly ceased! He had heard something. The knob to the engine-room door was turning.

Gregg held his breath and strained his eyes in the dim light. Who was behind that metal door? The killer? He had one consolation if it was the killer! There'd be two bullets fired—one for Valcory and one for him—but he would at least have the satisfaction of knowing who killed Gerda Galaston before he died.

The door was moving. It swung open and a laugh rang out.

Clay stepped through the opening with his automatic ready. "You, Gregg—and with our first prize in hand! I thought he had a gun and I was cautious about opening the door! Get up, Valcory."

Gregg released his prisoner and the two men scrambled to their feet together. The inspector's men closed in around the bootlegger while Clay glared at him.

"Of all the damn fools!" he cried. "Why didn't you stop when I shouted. I could have plugged you if I really meant to. But a bullet over your head didn't help matters!"

He explained that one of his men had found Valcory hiding under one of the giant turbines in the shadows of the grease pans. Valcory's evening clothes could do service now for an oiler, black, greasy and grimy as they were. The reporter quickly repeated the bootlegger's words to him, his offer of a bribe to free him and his fear of the killer.

But what really interested Clay was

the reporter's story about the possibilities of the government raid really being a hijacker's job. He thought the inspector would collapse as the man's face lost its blood.

The presence of the fair-haired youth on the pier seemed to cinch the theory in Clay's mind. Hadn't he tried to silence the reporter because of the Washington call? It was all clear now. Clay meant to cart off to headquarters everybody involved in the Galaston killing—including Dolores Duganne!

"This case'll bust me," he groaned. "God, hijacking right smack under my nose. The public will never understand how we were tricked. Us cops are supposed to be omniscient!"

He explained to Gregg how he was brought from the pier. The second officer came back to the ship, reported the attack on him and Murtha and Kildane were sent to the pier phone booths to look around. They found the reporter huddled up in one of the booths where the fair-haired youth and his invisible henchman, Louie, had unceremoniously dumped him.

"How the guy got off the boat after coming aboard and posing as a homicide man is more than I can fathom!" Clay said, scratching his head. "I wonder if there is a way off that we don't know about. Perhaps we're sitting by a gopher's hole—and the seven other gophers we want have gotten out the other end!"

He had Valcory though, and he meant to make the most of it. They took him up to the cabin on B deck that Clay used for his inquiry and threw him on the bed.

"Now, Valcory," Clay barked, "I'm going to get the truth out of you—or I'm going to send you to a hospital. I mean it!"

"Lock me up! Do anything—but get me off this ship!" the bootlegger pleaded. "My life's in danger. I know it—now that she's dead!"

"So you want us to believe you didn't kill Gerda Galaston?"

"I swear it. I didn't kill her!"

"Then who did? You seem to fear some one."

Instead of replying, the man pressed his lips together and shook his head.

"You mean you know and you won't answer!" Clay jerked the man to his feet and drew back his fist. "To hell with your influence in this town. You talk or I'll——"

Fear unloosened Valcory's tongue. "I don't know who the killer is—but I know I'm marked. After that detective let me out of the cabin, he told me to go to the captain's cabin. I started there but got lost and on the dark deck a voice whispered to me: 'Valcory, you're next. You know too much!' I ran and, somehow, I got into the engine room and stayed there. I tell you I'm marked for death!"

"What do you know then—that might incriminate some one else? Did you see Gerda Galaston strangled? You went into the drawing-room about the time it happened!"

"No, I didn't see her killed. But I'll tell the truth now. She was dead when I got in there. I said, 'My God!' and backed out. But I didn't want to get involved so I lied and said she was alive when I saw her."

"Now tell us about Miss Duganne. If she isn't working for you—in your racket—who is she working for? Who has she been working with these past few months—giving tips on buyers and probably tips, too, on stuff that can be hijacked?"

"I—I don't know. We parted two years ago. I thought she'd given up all that sort of thing."

"Who's your tipster now? Lady Montbanne?"

Valcory shook his head. "No, she's in it for herself. But I guess she's getting out if she's going to marry Morrelle!"

"Who told you she was going to marry him?"

"It was all over the ship to-night—I guess she spread it."

Clay caught the reporter's eye. The Englishwoman was doing a solo in the bootleg racket. That accounted for her wealth despite no apparent income. And now she was turning respectable to marry the surgeon. They remembered, too, that Lady Montbanne was the only person who knew Duganne spent the day at the Ritz. They got that from the star herself. And Lady Montbanne had as good an opportunity as any one to kill Gerda, mistaking her for the red-headed actress!

Yet Valcory had been wiped out in the stock-market crash. He needed money badly, Gregg recalled. He might be lying. Duganne might still be his partner—or was until she refused to help him any more and threatened to expose him—if he were the writer of the letter they found. He could have killed the double by mistake. And his babblings about the killer being after him could be all a clever ruse to disarm police suspicion—to make Clay believe he was a possible "killee" and not "the killer"!

"We'll lock you up again, Valcory," Clay said, "and give you more police protection than you may expect." He instructed Murtha to put the bootlegger in a cabin after ripping out the telephone wire. Two men were to stand outside his door.

When Valcory was taken away, Clay got up.

"It's getting damn late, Gregg. This ship is due to sail in less than five hours—and we've gotten nowhere on the murder, and we're in deeper on the hijacking matter. But I'll stick to the ship till noon and now"—his eyes lighted up with anger—"for another session with that admirable little actress—Dolores Duganne. I'll get at this hijacking stunt and the meaning of the

letters we found among her effects—if I have to wring her damn neck!"

They went to stateroom No. 150 where a detective was on duty. He leaned against the door, smoking.

"Any sign from her? Has she wanted to come out?" Clay asked.

"Nope! She's as quiet as a mouse. Looked in ten minutes ago and she was snoozing!"

Clay pushed open the door. The bed was empty. The room was deserted. Dolores Duganne had vanished.

And the open window, giving on the promenade deck, explained her disappearance!

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH IN THE DARK.

IT was nearly eight o'clock when the actress was found to have joined the missing band of suspects whom Clay faithfully believed were hidden aboard the *Largentine*. And now, an hour later, with some forty members of the police force, plain-clothes men and the reserves, scouring the ship and turning up neither hide nor hair of them, the inspector elected to have breakfast with the captain and Gregg in the captain's quarters.

Gregg startled them over their *œufs du Papé* by springing to his feet and clapping his hand to his bandaged pate. "By God, I've got it, inspector! What an absent-minded fool I've been not to have thought sooner. If the liquor was hijacked and Lippy had a hand in it, I know where you can find it, I think—and him!"

"What? Where?"

"At Harrigan's road house! You know the dive on the Merrick Road!" The reporter had just recalled from the inner recesses of his memory the words uttered by Lippy in Tony's speak-easy in dismissing the fair-haired youth. He said that they would "meet later at Harrigan's." That meant after the job was pulled off!

And before the inspector could show either pleasure or rage over Gregg's faulty memory, the captain's phone rang. (The police had discovered where the shore connections had been cut on the pier and the line had been temporarily spliced together pending the arrival of the telephone company's repair unit.)

The captain answered the call. He repeated a name which indicated that he had the president of the steamship company on the wire.

"Yes, sir. You've been in touch with Washington? We had feared as much, sir." The captain looked hard at Clay and swallowing a mighty lump in his throat, he ventured boldly: "We expect to have the liquor on board before we sail, sir. The police think they know where it is! . . . Very good, sir! . . . Good-by!"

Clay roared. "Why did you tell him the police knew where your damn liquor was? Gregg may be barking up the wrong tree!"

"The president had word from the secretary of the treasury that his department had not ordered and knew of no raid! Our liquor supply was hijacked."

"But——"

"He instructed me to announce that there will be a reward of five thousand dollars from the company for the return of the liquor or any information that will lead to its recovery," the captain said.

Gregg blinked. Five grand was the reward! He stood to win part of it—if Clay would act on his advice! Five grand! And he was worrying about a fifteen-dollar-a-week raise—expecting to get five dollars at the most! What a difference!

"Inspector," he said, "give the word and have Harrigan's place covered. You can't go wrong—and if the liquor isn't there, you might pick up Lippy, if he got off the ship—or Duganne, since

she's vanished. You've got to cover that angle!"

"I mean to, Gregg."

"And if you get the liquor, we split fifty-fifty on the five grand!"

Clay smiled and shook his head. "If it's there, you get it all, my boy. I know it's funny for an old copper like me to turn down cash, but if I can get the liquor back, I'll at least be saving my face on that score. God knows I must! This murder is getting beyond me!"

The inspector went to the phone and called Spring 3100. He got his chief on the wire and told him the low-down on the hijacking party, giving a good description of the badly wanted fair-haired youth and of Lippy who was already an old police customer.

"That's that," he said when he hung up. "Headquarters will cover Harrigan's road house. We'll have word on that angle in less than an hour." He beamed at Gregg. "If the stuff is there, half my rep is saved. And I'll take you into the bureau, Gregg, if you can improve that memory of yours—make it work faster. Know any more tricks?"

Grinning, the reporter shook his head. He was anxious now for a break on the Galaston killing. The afternoon paper offices were open and the first editions were being prepared for press. He had dead lines to worry about—and the possibility of his grand scoop leaking out from the ship. Haddle was the main fly in his ointment! The hiding *Star* man was up to something—was hiding either his knowledge of the murder for a scoop of his own—or possibly his own participation in the crime.

"We've got a new light on the murder, inspector," Gregg said. "This hijacking is behind it all."

"So I think. But let me hear you out. I'm beginning to have a lot of faith in you, lad!"

They lighted cigarettes and Gregg spoke up. "For the moment, let's believe Valcory's story. He broke with

Lippy and is in need of cash, and he came to the preview because he likes to attend such affairs. He went to see Dolores who once was his tipster and he found Gerda dead in the drawing-room. With a natural enough impulse, he denied seeing her dead to keep himself out of the case and making awkward explanations. Then he was threatened by a whispering voice on the dark deck, so he hid himself under the turbines till your men routed him.

"Next comes Doctor Morelle. He was in love with Duganne and was shocked by the rumor that she meant to marry Lord Karivan. He comes aboard in mufti to have a last talk with her before she sails—to learn why she changed her mind. He has no chance to see her in the salon, so they arrange a meeting in the star's suite. When he gets there he finds Gerda dead and no sign of Duganne—or he had reason to believe Duganne was in the room. For some reason, he wanted to shield her name and he evaded your pointed questions——"

"But that singing you heard! Some one greeted him with 'Sweetheart, Come Back to Me,' when he entered—and he and Valcory swear Gerda was dead at the time. How can a dead woman sing? I think Duganne was in the room."

"That would mean Morelle, realizing Gerda was dead and Dolores had a lot to explain, made her sing the song—if he saw the actress in the room—and then he took the accusation of murder, since we believed the star's double was alive when he entered. That singing means something, but I can't quite make it out.

"On the other hand, Morelle might have an idea who Dolores' enemy is—and realized that Gerda was killed by mistake. He's either hiding on board to get at the killer—or he is the killer. I must confess, I can't place him.

"Then we have Lady Montbanne,

who is in the bootleg racket on her own, according to Valcory. She likewise was anxious to marry Morelle because of his wealth and social position. Mightn't she have killed Gerda by mistake—wanting to silence Duganne because of something the actress had on her—and to eliminate her for good from Morelle's heart? Of course the mysterious proposal by telephone is another angle. Is the Englishwoman telling the truth about that or did some one other than Morelle—some one who's trying to frame him—telephone?

"Next we have Masone, the publisher. He stood to gain a two-hundred-thousand-dollar insurance policy if Duganne died. He was hard up himself. But he knew Dolores very well, and he isn't likely to have killed her double by mistake. His being near the suite at the time of the murder might be purely accidental. Yet why has he disappeared? Was he threatened by the mysterious whisperer as was Valcory—or is he up to something else, or is he dead?"

"Dead?" Clay asked in surprise. "Why dead?"

"I'm convinced all the people in this case are avoiding you, because they know something about the crime, or have something to cover up. Our killer means business. Duganne has been attacked since the murder and there's no reason why the others mightn't have been attacked, killed and dropped into the river.

"Then we have Ruthers, the first officer. At first we thought he was after the jewels. He's been a loser at the races. He might have gone after the jewels and killed Gerda when she found him out—or he might have some part in the hijacking plot, since he knew the full value of the *L Argentine's* liquor supply. He might have been using Dolores on other jobs—if he was bootlegging—and she knew about this and he set out to silence her.

"Whoever conceived the hijacking of this liner in its berth showed a stroke of genius. Any one of the suspects, including Morelle, Lady Montbanne and the maid, might be behind it. The man called Nearlo and the fair-haired youth are nothing but tools, outside accomplices.

"Lippy, of course, is the most likely originator of the hijacking stunt. And if we believe Valcory, Dolores was working for another as tipster—and why not Lippy, the racketeer? If that is true, he had good reason to silence her in death since she was through with him and knew enough to send him to the chair. Lippy has the best reason in the world for hiding from us—and wanting to kill off any one who suspects him.

"Miss Helstrom, the star's maid, has been in trouble before. We only have her word that she was innocent and subsequently exonerated. But we know nothing about her. Either she was playing ball with the actress in bootleg, or as Dolores says, she picked her up just before she left Hollywood. Why she's hiding I can't guess—unless, like Mason, she might be dead. He and she might have seen the killer come out of the star's suite and for that reason must be silenced."

Clay was pleased with this new slant on the affairs of the early morning. Then he chuckled. "How about your beloved rival, Haddle? Where does he fit in?"

"Haddle is a man, who like all other reporters, mixes with the town's riff-raff in pursuit of business. Mightn't he have gotten in with the bootleg mob? And he might have had access to Dolores through Gerda, whom he took about on parties. He could have thought out the hijacking—since us reporters are pretty smart with our imaginations"—they both laughed heartily—"and when Dolores went back on him, he decided to kill her. On the other hand,

being rather unscrupulous in news gathering, he might hold the key to the mystery and is hiding to spring it in his newspaper."

"Good God! I'm ruined if I find the case solved for me by a newspaper—me sitting here, high and dry, not knowing which way to turn!" Clay became dejected.

"And lastly, in our considerations, we have the beautiful Dolores Duganne, the idol of a million fans. We know she is involved in bootleg deals, we know she was invited to participate in a big haul and she turned it down. We know she was in the suite when Gerda was killed and we know her for a liar. Yet she was attacked by some one. If she didn't choke herself and tell us that fairy tale to mislead you, then she's hiding to save her neck—from a strangler!"

"Or she's the baby we want," Clay snapped, "having committed murder because the double had something on her—something that Karivan might like to know. Possibly Gerda was blackmailing her."

Gregg started. "Possibly."

Their theorizing was abruptly halted.

The lights in the captain's quarters flickered and went out. The commander sprang to his feet with an oath. "Something's gone wrong!"

He phoned the engine room and demanded to know the cause of the trouble. What he heard brought more profanity from his lips.

"Hell, inspector, the dynamo that supplies the ship with electricity has been put out of order. The man in charge was smacked on the head with a piece of pipe, but he didn't go under. He's trying to repair the damage! And already passengers are beginning to come aboard."

"The hell they are!" Clay cried, bounding to his feet. He summoned Sergeant Murtha from the darkened passage and instructed him that no one was to be permitted on the *Largentine*

—in any class—unless they had a ticket. And once aboard, they could not go ashore. No visitors were to be allowed on board no matter who they were. By these means, he hoped to control traffic between the ship and the dock.

"All stewards carrying baggage aboard," he added, "must bear police passes. These must be shown every time they leave the ship and board it."

The captain went off with Murtha to attend to the execution of these orders. No effort would be spared to keep the suspects bottled up on the liner—and Clay meant to go to sea with them if necessary—if only he could make sure they were still aboard. Leaving Gregg over a fourth cup of coffee, he went after Murtha to see in person that the letter of his order was carried out.

Presently Gregg went out on deck and found himself on the starboard side—facing the river. None of Clay's patrol was in sight. On A deck and the bright morning sun, portentously a warm day, danced on the spotless white funnels, on the green-and-gold smokestacks, on the canvas-covered lifeboats. The wireless antennæ's copper was turned to silver in the summer light.

"Help!" The cry came vaguely from the dark reception hall.

Gregg ran forward, and from the deck into the hall. Below him on the winding stairs, there were scuffling sounds. Looking down, he could see nothing.

"Help! Help!" The cry was weaker and abruptly shut off.

The strangler was on the stairs below him! Gregg knew that!

Yet on which deck? The grand stairs descended five decks and he was at the very top.

A scream and a thud of a body crashing against the stair's iron balustrade. The rattling bang of wood on wood—on human substance.

Another cry of terror! A louder crash and a groan of pain!

Gregg knew that some one had been hurled into the stair well—had fallen several decks to the bottom of the stairs.

Heedless of his own danger, he ran pell-mell down the winding steps. The lights flashed on as he reached D deck.

There on the floor lay Hugh Masone, his face bloody and cut. Gregg knelt at his side and felt for the heart. There was still life in the man.

Suddenly Gregg's head went up. Some one was in the passage behind him. The police or the killer?

"Inspector Clay!" he shouted. "Murtha! Kildane! Police!"

The invisible one moved away from him, aft. He ran to the mouth of the corridor, but it was empty. Its dim light revealed no one. Had he been hearing things?

Looking over the rail, he saw another body on E deck's floor. It lay partly on the bottom steps where it had fallen from D deck. Two broken and battered chairs were beside it, tokens of the fight that had been waged—between Morelle and Masone and the killer. Yet against such odds, the killer had triumphed.

The reporter ran down to Doctor Morelle. The top of the famous surgeon's head was caved in where the steps had creased it. The man to whom the finger of suspicion so glaringly pointed in Gerda Galaston's death was dead himself!

CHAPTER XV

THE GARNET RING.

CLAY stood over Doctor Morelle's body where it had fallen, trembling with the rage of frustration. He had guessed correctly. The missing persons were still aboard—and he had accounted for three of them—Valcory, Masone and Morelle.

The medical examiner was kneeling by the body, completing his preliminary examinations. He told a detective to

cover the corpse with a tarpaulin, and he got up brushing his dusty knees. "Well, Clay, you've got another one to explain." His cheery grin was frozen from his mouth by the inspector's acid glare. "Morelle was battered with one of those chairs on D deck. There are unmistakable signs of a pretty hot struggle. He's scratched and has skin lacerations about the head and face. Then he was pitched from the upper deck down here and he landed on his neck, snapping the spinal column. I'd say death was instantaneous."

"Thanks. You're no help to me," Clay said and walked away from him. Gregg caught his arm and he saw a mute plea in the reporter's eyes. He understood.

"I've got to phone this in now, inspector," Gregg said emphatically. "We can't tie up this news much longer—two killings on a liner in dock in less than twelve hours, not to mention the hijacking. There's a dead line at noon for the *Examiner*—and I've got to make it!"

"I know. I know. Go ahead, Gregg. You've been a help to me, and I'll help you now—though God knows what it'll bring upon my head—the commissioner and the chief inspector, most likely. I should have made a report long ago—but I was hoping for a break."

"What about Masone? Did he go to a hospital?"

"The hell he did!" Clay growled as they climbed to B deck. "I've got him in a cabin next to Valcory. The ship's doctor is tending to him. He's been badly beaten and his left hand is broken at the wrist."

"Get anything out of him?"

Clay shook his head. "He's still listening to the birdies sing. The doctor can't seem to bring him to."

They went into the cabin appropriated by the inspector and, as Gregg reached for the telephone, Clay stopped him. "I think a lot of your imagina-

tion, Gregg. What do you make of the attack on Masone and the murder of Morelle?"

"I'm up the well-known tree. But I stick to the belief that too many people know things they shouldn't—and some one person is trying to shut their mouths the most effective way." He drew his finger across his throat.

"It seems to me that Morelle's death brings Lady Montbanne to the fore again. Aside from her possible connection with Gerda's death and the hijacking, Morelle might have told her he never phoned that proposal of marriage yesterday afternoon. You know the line about 'There's no fury like a woman scorned!' She had that reason to bump him—and as I remember her, she's pretty hefty—strong enough to belay the two men."

"And Masone came to Morelle's rescue and got beaten up, too?"

Clay nodded. "And left for dead—when you surprised the killer. But don't tell your city editor about our theories—because there's such a thing as libel laws. Go ahead and shoot it in."

The reporter got central and gave the *Examiner's* number. He could hardly wait to hear his city editor's voice. Finally, Martel, the editor, spoke up. "Well, Gregg, what's on your mind?"

"I've got a swell story from the *L Argentine*—"

"Yes? Did you get it out of the *Star*? They've got a swell story, too!" Martel was crisp and angry.

"What? It's impossible!"

"Is that so? Well, Haddle has a signed story in the early editions about the rumor I sent you on. He's confirmed Dolores Duganne's engagement to Lord Karivan, her break with Doctor Morelle to marry a title and his turn about and engagement to Lady Montbanne! Where've you been? Not sober, I dare say!"

Gregg burst into wild, hysterical

laughter. For the moment he thought he'd lost everything. Now he understood what Haddle had done. The *Star* man had written a story in advance of boarding the liner and the *Star* had printed it as gospel truth.

"That's no story!" Gregg shouted at his boss. "Get an earful of this!" And he told Martel about the murder of Gerda Galaston, the mysterious behavior of eight persons prominent in the city's upper and underworlds, the attack on the actress and attempt to strangle her, the death threat whispered to Valcory, the hijacking of the ship's one hundred thousand dollars' worth of liquor and the fight Masone and Morelle put up with the killer in the dark—and Morelle's death.

"H'm," Martel said briefly, "I'll give you a rewrite man. Make it snappy when you give him the dope. We'll put out an extra."

Gregg expected no more thanks. He was happy he had a yarn that would stand New York on its ears and he communicated his enthusiasm by virtually dictating his story to the rewrite man. Twice he heard Martel's voice beside the rewrite man and twice the men were changed so that the typing out of the story and its setting up in the composing room could be handled with utmost speed.

When he was through he was bathed in sweat. Reaction had set in against the tense strain under which he had been working. He was beginning to miss his sleep now that half his job was done. The story was broken and it would rebound to the *Examiner's* credit for being first on the streets with the news. But he still had to fight his weariness to save himself for the solution—for Clay had to solve the two murders or retire from the police department in disgrace.

He asked the last rewrite man to connect him with Martel again. He forgot himself so far as to give his boss orders.

"Please don't ask questions but have a man of ours in a motor boat follow the *Largentinc* down the river and bay when she pulls away from the dock. Let him wave something blue to me, keeping close to the port side of the liner. I'll know him by that sign."

"What for?" Martel demanded.

"I'll throw him the solution in a bottle—if the case isn't cleared up by sailing time," Gregg laughed.

"All right." And Martel hung up.

Clay patted the reporter's shoulder and his hand went to his hip—not for his gun but for a bottle. "You're all in, my lad. Have a nip of this."

Gregg had several and began to wake up again. The inspector left him to supervise the embarking of the passengers. Pandemonium reigned on the dock because visitors, seeing friends off for Europe, were unceremoniously denied permission to climb the gangways and the sight of uniformed policemen all over the ship excited the passengers.

But there was no time to be wasted, Gregg decided. Every minute counted and it was already quarter to eleven. It had taken him nearly three quarters of an hour to put over his story.

He wanted to find out what Masone knew, so he went to the publisher's cabin. The detective on the door admitted him.

The room was dark and the ship's doctor was not in it. The injured publisher had been stripped and was in the berth, tossing and moaning. His face was well bandaged. The reporter tried to get a few words out of him, but the man could not speak.

Gregg turned up the light impulsively and stood staring at the wounded man's clothes heaped on the floor where the doctor had thrown them. He loathed the thought that entered his mind, but he and Clay were sorely in need of information. Masone had behaved oddly enough in hiding from the police. There might be a clew in his pockets.

Without further hesitation, the reporter dropped to his knees and began going through the man's pockets. He found the usual things, a fine gold watch, an address book, odd change and a roll of bills, handkerchiefs, a tortoise-shell cigarette case and a platinum light. Crumpled up in a ball was a slip of paper which Gregg smoothed out and read. He could make neither head nor tail of the following:

H. P.
R. 1— 7m—10m
R. 2—10m
R. 3— 3m— 9m
R. 4—10m
R. 5—11m

This cabalistic memo was neatly typed and Gregg pondered. Was it a code? Or was it something to do with the buying and selling of stocks? Men often made such notes, using a shorthand all their own.

He chanced to look up as he was thinking and his eyes met Masone's in a mirror over the washstand. The man had come to and was staring at him, watching him.

Gregg faced him. "Feeling better, Mr. Masone? Can you tell us what happened on the stairs now? Every minute counts."

A groan of great pain escaped Masone. "God, I'm suffering! My hand—my hand. Did they cut it off? It's numb!"

"You've sprained your wrist. You'll be all right in a little while. Try to think. Who attacked you?"

"It was dark. Morelle cried out for help. He was being beaten. I ran into some one—then I was hurled against the wall. My head hit something—and I don't remember anything else."

"Who was beating Doctor Morelle? A man or a woman?"

Masone hesitated. "A woman, I think. I'm not sure. I can't seem to remember. My head——" His voice trailed off incoherently.

The ship's doctor came in then and the reporter left to seek Clay. Masone had given them a lead. A woman was the killer. But which one? Lady Montbanne? Miss Helstrom? Or Dolores Duganne?

His hand held a crisp ball. He was surprised to find that he had carried off from Masone's cabin the cryptic memo. Knowing that he had no right to it, he started back to replace it. The corridor was deserted and the guards on Valcory's and Masone's door were not in sight.

The door to the actress' drawing-room opened and Dolores Duganne stepped into the corridor, prepared for flight. She had doffed her yellow lace evening gown and wore a trim gray tweed suit and a small straw hat that hid her hair and came well down over her eyes.

A little cry escaped her as she saw Gregg. Her right hand went to her throat in a frightened gesture.

The reporter gaped—not at her—but at a piece of jewelry she wore. On a finger of her right hand the garnet ring he had last seen on Gerda Galaston's finger glowered at him, its facets shining in the corridor light.

"You'd better step back into that room," Gregg said quietly. "I want to talk to you."

She quailed before the light in his eyes and obeyed him.

CHAPTER XVI.

IRON FINGERS.

THE actress and Gregg faced each other across the divan that held the murdered girl's body before it was removed to the morgue. Dolores Duganne had lost her defiance but Gregg feared he saw cunning in her glance. Masone had thought the killer was a woman and the reporter was on his guard.

"Sit down, Miss Galaston," he said.

"You—you know——"

"I've known for some time that you're

Gerda Galaston. The dead woman was Dolores Duganne." His voice was tart with anger. "And though I knew, I had to make sure before I turned you over to the police. The garnet ring betrayed you. It was not on the dead woman's finger. You forgot to remove it when you exchanged clothes with her and went through your clever impersonation."

As though she were a schooner's sail and the wind had suddenly died down, she wilted and collapsed to the chaise longue.

"Am I to believe that you killed Dolores Duganne so that you might assume her character—and her place in the movie world?" he said casually, his eyes never leaving hers. "You said last night that you could never be a star in your own name—until Dolores Duganne was dead."

"I—I didn't kill her. Believe me when I swear it that——"

"Your behavior, I think, speaks for itself, Miss Galaston. You've lied to the police, you've concealed valuable information, you've done your best to mislead the inspector and you fled from the cabin where you were told to stay pending the police investigation."

Mutely, she bowed her head.

Gregg was relentless. "Through a coincidence of circumstances, you've gone undetected—as to your true identity. Clay has no idea who you are. And you've a helluva lot of explaining to do. Will you talk to me honestly—or shall I call the inspector?"

She moistened her lips. "I'll talk to you."

"What were you doing just now in this suite?"

"I came in here on a chance, thinking it the safest place to hide. The police were in and out of these cabins so much, I didn't think they'd look for me in here. I hid under the bed in No. 148."

"Why did you run away?"

"I was afraid. One attempt was made on my life. I knew there'd be another."

"Who are you afraid of?"

"I don't know," the girl said with conviction. "All I know is that Dolores had an enemy and that her life was in danger. When she was killed, I thought it was all over."

"So the killer knew the woman posing as you was really Dolores?"

"I think so. And fearing I'd betrayed my identity, I was to be killed, too."

"Why didn't you tell the police who you were?"

"Could I?" she said, appealing to him. "They would have jumped to the conclusion you did—that I killed her to take her place—for her fame and her name and her wealth. They knew I was in the next room when the murder was committed. With such a motive pointing to me, they would not have believed my story. I was terrified."

"You're Miss Duganne's twin sister, aren't you?" That was Gregg's shot in the dark.

The girl started. "You seem to know—or guess everything. Yes, I am. But we were separated when we were very young. My father left my mother and went to try his luck in Canada, taking me with him. Dotty stayed in Liverpool and, as the years went by, few people ever knew she had a twin. But when she came to America and became famous in Hollywood, she sent for me and I became her double there. No one in this country knows about our relationship. But how did you know who I was?"

"By the way you spoke. You haven't Dolores' Southern drawl mixed with cockney. And for even a poor liar, you weren't well posted on the details of her life. I was convinced when you knew so little about the two letters we found in her effects. You weren't properly surprised, because the letters were strange to you when you read them. And then there was the garnet ring."

He took her hand and looked at it. "Just as I thought. You couldn't get it off if you had to."

She smiled wanly at him and drew him to the divan beside her. A voice murmured to him to be careful.

"You know something of your sister's bootleg deals?"

"Honestly, I don't. I'm amazed at what I've heard."

"Then why did you exchange clothes with Dolores and pose as her?" Gregg demanded.

"She knew I was in New York and she phoned me, telling me that she had reserved a cabin for me next to hers. I was to go to it, put on evening clothes and cover my red hair, concealing my likeness to her. Then I was to meet her in the salon. All that took place, and she brought me up here, told me she was in great danger and suggested that we change clothes so that she, impersonating me, could ascertain the identity of the person she most feared. I did as she suggested, even going to room No. 148 at the time she suggested. She met me there and told me to wait for her while she went into the drawing-room to meet some one who knocked on the corridor door——"

"Her murderer!"

"I think so. I've told the inspector what I heard while I was listening at the door."

"Did First Officer Ruthers know you were her twin sister?"

"Yes," she nodded.

"And who else?"

"No one that I know of. But Mr. Valcory, Mr. Masone, Lady Montbanne. Mr. Haddle and that Lippy Lorers could always tell us apart, if that's what you're getting at. It's quite easy when you know how."

Gregg smashed a fist into his palm. "I knew it! The killer was sure of his victim. He—or she—knew the Gerda Galaston that was strangled was really Dolores!"

"I'm afraid so. That's why I'm frightened still."

"And you've no idea whom your sister feared?"

"None whatever. I swear it."

Yet Dolores knew she was marked for death! Could it be, the reporter wondered, that Dolores was capable of the diabolical plot to send her twin to the death that was intended for her? Hadn't the actress intimated in her letter that she played a fast and furious game, and the other letter writer stated that they were both involved in matters that could "put a rope around her neck"?

He was aghast at the thought that Dolores had enticed her sister to wear her clothes, hoping that the killer would make the perfectly natural mistake and then flee from the ship, leaving her safe and free to sail to greater security abroad. Dolores must have been pretty hard boiled to be mixed up in the bootleg racket—and sending her own sister to her death would not be beyond her capabilities.

Could he believe Gerda now? He was still apprehensive of danger.

"But the singing you heard? What of that?" Gregg asked.

"I can't understand it."

"Sing that theme song for me!" he commanded. "I want to hear it now—in this room where the murder was committed!"

The girl hesitated and sprang from the couch as if she had seen her sister's body upon it. His eyes were insistent, and finally she composed her emotions and sang "Sweetheart, Come Back to Me." The reporter's eyes grew wide with understanding as he listened.

"I've got it!" Gregg cried. "I should have guessed sooner."

The girl was bewildered by his mad behavior. His eyes ran wildly around the room, up and down the walls. He moved pictures and looked behind them. He disarranged the furniture, looking

under chairs and tables. Finally, on all fours, he approached the screen-covered radiator. The screening was on a door which he pulled out easily.

"Of course," he muttered. "It's as simple as A B C." He shut the door again and started to get up.

Gerda gasped and fell heavily against him, throwing him off balance, prone on the floor. Again he started to rise up and, as he did so, ten iron fingers surrounded his throat.

His cry was stilled with the lightning pressure exerted in the fingers that expertly found his windpipe. He was in the killer's grip. He had solved the mystery of the two murders of the *Largentine*, and swift death was upon him.

"Gerda! Clay!" He tried to call out.

The blood in his head threatened to burst out through his face. He squirmed and struggled to face the murderer of Dolores Duganne and Doctor Caspar Morelle. His muscles refused to obey him as a terrible lassitude stole through his veins. His eyes were bulging.

There was a great blast of noise. The *Largentine* was leaving her dock. That was her whistle blasting. He had a story to put through to the *Examiner!* He had to live! He must live! He knew the killer's name at last!

He found himself racing, whirling through space with straining lungs. He wanted air!

Air! Air! Air!

"Gerda! Clay!" No sound escaped his lips!

The iron fingers never relaxed.

CHAPTER XVII.

HADDLE GETS THE STORY.

OH, he'll be all right in a few minutes," a voice was saying. It sounded like the ship doctor's. "We got him just in time."

Gregg's eyes fluttered and found

Clay's face bending over him. He was lying on the chaise longue in Dolores Duganne's drawing-room, alone with the doctor and the inspector. There was a faint vibration, a throbbing that enveloped the whole ship. She was moving, in midstream, headed down the Hudson for the open sea.

"Thank God, Gregg, you're still alive! How do you feel?" Clay asked with infinite relief.

"I—I feel pretty thirsty," the reporter grinned and managed to wink at the same time. The inspector's bottle came forth, and presently the reporter sat up, rubbing his aching throat.

"We've got the killer," Clay said, "thanks to that party's fondness for your neck. If we hadn't heard that damn theme song, we'd never have looked in here. And all the other suspects have been rounded up. We're putting them off on a revenue cutter as we pass Quarantine. And you'll be interested to know you've won five thousand dollars."

"You got the hijacked liquor at Harrigan's road house?"

"And the whole mob to boot! Only we couldn't get the liquor back on the liner before sailing time. I think this'll be a thirsty crossing for a lot of people." Clay grinned.

Gregg's one thought was his story. He had to get it through.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Twelve thirty-five. I know you're worrying about your yarn," the inspector said, "but you'll be ashore by one or one thirty. Now tell me what you know."

And Gregg, mentally counting the minutes, outlined the clues that led him to the killer. Clay whistled softly and soon corroborated the reporter's theory by looking behind the radiator screen. Then Clay reciprocated by telling of a confession he had from Lippy and other developments.

"My hat's off to you, my lad," Clay

said sincerely. "You got the goods while we only got the killer red-handed—at work on you! It'll make grand evidence in court—just like something out of a detective story in a book."

There was a cry in the corridor. More voices shouted and the inspector leaped to the door. Gregg caught sight of Sergeant Murtha's pale face, sputtering and gulping.

"The murderer's got away!"

Pistol shots barked vociferously like hungry dogs on the deck outside the window. The reporter poked his head out, took one look at the detectives running to a point down the deck and then he made for the door.

No more time could be spent chasing the killer on the *Largentine*. The *Examiner* was waiting for the solution to the ship murders—and he meant to deliver the story—right off the ship.

Though groggy and with a fierce headache from his bout with the strangler, Gregg crossed the ship to the port rail. The sky line of lower Manhattan leaped out at him in bold relief, painted gold by the noonday sun. The Woolworth Tower, the Singer Building, the Bank of Manhattan, Wall Street slid by, monoliths of stone and steel—moving upstream like giant soldiers on parade.

And there in the river beside the ship, scurrying close to the tugs that were towing the liner to bold water, was the launch he had ordered from his city editor. A man was at the wheel and Robbins of the *Examiner* was standing in the bow, waving his bright blue necktie tirelessly. Gregg shouted and Robbins saw him. The launch was nosed closer to the side of the liner.

"Throw down your bottles!" Robbins yelled up to him. "We'll stand by!"

The reporter was upon the ship's rail, poised. Fingers clutched at him as he jumped clear, feet first, into the Hudson.

Robbins caught him by the back of the neck, digging his fingers into the

coat collar. The helmsman helped and, though they almost capsized the small craft, they dragged him aboard.

"Where's your story?" Robbins asked breathlessly.

"In my head, you fool," Gregg laughed and turning to the helmsman, "Get me ashore as fast as you can!"

Another shout went up from the steamer, now well downstream, immediately followed by a huge splash in the river.

"Another man overboard!" Robbins cried. "Shall we pick him up?"

The second jumper from the *Largentine* was almost all in when the boat circled around him. His hands went up and he slipped beneath the blue surface of the sunlit river. Gregg went over the side and dove.

"Haddle!" Gregg cried on seeing the second jumper's face. "I'm glad to meet you." He kept the man afloat till the launch came along.

They were helped into the boat and, as it pointed its stem toward the maws of many Manhattan piers, Haddle collapsed on the deck.

"And why did you jump, too?" Gregg inquired sarcastically.

"I want—the story—you got!"

The two men's eyes blazed fire and then the *Examiner* man laughed. "'Ask and thou shalt receive,' eh? Guess again, Haddle!" With that he sat astride the *Star* man's recumbent, helpless, gasping body. "I think I saw some rope near the engine, Robbins. Let me have it."

And when he got it he trussed up Haddle tighter than a chicken on a spit. On reaching a deserted dock, Gregg insisted that the others carry Haddle ashore while he hunted a telephone. He found an office and broke open the door to get to the instrument he saw inside. Haddle was brought in and propped up in a chair while Gregg gave the *Examiner's* number.

"Well, here's the story, Haddle," he

chirped. "Listen carefully. Mr. Martel? I've got the story! Clay got the — Yes, I got the killer!"

He was immediately switched to a rewrite man and Haddle listened in a daze to the solution of the *Argentine* murders—worked out by Gregg, who raced along, dictating, losing his breath, stammering—but putting over his facts.

"It was Dolores Duganne who was really killed. The murderer knew her and made no mistake. She knew too much about the bootleg racket and was ready to spill a tale that would send both of them to the chair. The killer had an alibi all planted—so that any one passing the star's suite would think she was alive after the deed was done.

"Get this: A small, portable loud speaker was hidden in the radiator in Duganne's drawing-room. It was hooked up with the sound apparatus used in her talking picture, 'Hell's Playmate.' That's how I heard the dead woman sing the theme song. The murderer strangled her and then went out and pulled a switch hidden near the deck door, about ten yards from the room, and the theme song came over the wire just as Doctor Morelle entered the room.

"Yes, it was all neatly timed because the killer meant to have some one hear the woman singing after the killer left the room or was outside the door. That was to be the conclusive alibi but Morelle spoiled it, though he was marked for suspicion.

"The killer was piling facts against him for, being Duganne's sweetheart, he was her logical killer in a crime of passion. Morelle went into the room, the singing stopped and he came right out again. He couldn't have had time to strangle the actress.

"How was the loud speaker discovered? Well, we compared a human voice to the one I heard. Then I knew the difference. The one I heard was a little unreal, a little tinny. But things

happened so fast after the girl was killed, the killer didn't have time to rip out the wiring or the loud speaker in the radiator.

"What? Didn't I give you the murderer's name?" Gregg was fatigued now by the night's ordeals, but forgetfulness in such a moment was unforgivable. He glanced at Haddle, and the *Star* man hung his head. Gregg had beaten him, properly and soundly. "The killer was Hugh Masone, the publisher and movie promoter. And after he tried to silence yours truly with his well-known strangle hold, he broke away from the police. They riddled him with hot lead when he tried to jump from the liner.

"How did Clay solve the crime? Well, he found a paper in Masone's pocket that listed the five reels in 'Hell's Playmate' and the exact number of times, to the minute, that the theme song was rendered. So all he had to do after killing the actress was to stand near his switch and note the time. Remember I saw him looking at his watch as I stepped through the door and bumped into him? He knew what reel was on and timed the appearance of the singing, threw the switch, and I heard the song come out of the drawing-room just as Morelle happened to enter.

"Lippy Lorers, who's up to his neck in the hijacking, confessed to the police that he did the wiring from the salon to the star's suite, not knowing the talkie was to be used to hide a murderer. Masone told him Duganne wanted to listen to the sound effects in her suite, away from the crowd.

"What? Yes, Masone went to the preview determined to kill Duganne because she was through with his racket and knew too much. Besides she was insured for two hundred thousand dollars to which he was the sole beneficiary, and he needed the dough. And he was the man behind the hijacking scheme, according to Lippy, who's turned State's evidence.

"Masone's idea was to involve Morelle as the killer because it would be easy for the police to see him as the jilted lover. The note signed 'Cass' bears a great similarity to Masone's handwriting in Dolores' movie contract. It was intended to incriminate Morelle. He also phoned the fake proposal to Lady Montbanne so that the announcement would give rise to rumors that Morelle wanted to get rid of Dolores so he could marry the Englishwoman. The police think Masone told Morelle to go to Dolores' suite so that he would be found with the body, but Morelle got there too soon.

"Morelle's suspicions were aroused, for both he and Masone knew that the dead girl was the star and not her double as we supposed. So he kept mum, laid low and waited to have it out with the publisher. They came upon each other in the dark on the stairs and had it out. The surgeon gave Masone a sound thrashing with his fists and a chair, and then Masone managed to hurl him to his death. Then we picked up the publisher and thought him also a victim of the killer—until his possession of the theme-song time schedule betrayed him—as well as his attempt to silence me because I saw that schedule.

"What about the other suspects? Well, the fair-haired boy pulled a boner. He let them loose before Masone could stop him. Ruthers and Lady Montbanne saw Masone come out of the drawing-room wiping a speck of blood off his hand. He must have thrown the handkerchief overboard. He saw them and warned them to keep silent. They were terrified, kept mum and when they got free of the police, they stayed out of sight lest Masone silence them. Valcory, Haddle and the maid were frightened and naturally dug in.

"Where did they hide? Ruthers and Haddle were in different parts of the

smokestacks just above A deck. There's a ladder inside each stack that can be reached from A deck by a little door. It's used to clean the things. The women hid in the women's bath on C deck, a place our blushing coppers never thought of looking.

"And Lippy was smuggled off the ship by the hijackers in the first load they swung from the ship's hold to the pier. He was under some light bags of liqueurs. That was before the police took to watching for such a move. They picked him up at Harrigan's road house where all the liquor was found. They radioed his confession to Clay.

"What about Gerda Galaston? Why she's one of the nicest girls you'd want to meet. Play her up big—beautiful Titian blonde and that sort of thing. Masone was going to work on her after he got through choking me, but the police interrupted him. She's going to be a star some day—soon. Let me have Martel again."

The city editor was connected with his soaking, dripping reporter. "Well, what now, Gregg?"

"You've got another swell scoop, Mr. Martel."

"Yes, it's a good story, Gregg."

"How about—how about that raise?"

"You bet."

"Thanks."

Haddle struggled to free himself. "You can't keep me here, Gregg. It's unlawful."

The hell I can't," Gregg laughed. "You're an escaped lunatic and a menace to society. Watch him, Robbins, till you hear the boys shouting the *Examiner's* extra. And Robbins, if you'll change clothes with me, I'll run uptown and do my stuff for Simon Legree Martel.

"By the bye, Haddle, I'm dining with a very pretty girl to-night—name of Gerda Galaston."

What Haddle replied isn't news!

Seven Stone Images and Six Men Wiped Out—But a Living Man Laughs and Smashes On.



The Gate of the Seven Dead

By NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

A CURSE in English was Quentin Parker's introduction to Corinjas. He knew it for a bad town—the stepping-off place into the jungles beyond. But he was not accustomed to his own countrymen cursing—not with such vehemence and wild anger as this.

“—dirty native! Indian, eh? Nothing more than a swine. Tell me why you went to the consul, you damned swine—”

Quent swung from his mule. He'd had to come up on muleback from the last stopping place—there was no horse that could negotiate the mountain passes. And Quent, for all his powerful six feet, was weak from the ravages

of recent fever. He had traveled slowly—he had had to.

Beyond were the lights of the only cantina in town—Romero's. He had heard of it. Here was a deserted, cobblestoned street.

A deserted street, crooked and dirty, with closed and barred doors and windows. There were no lights in these streets. Electricity had not got this far up into the mountain and jungle country. And a white man cursing out his foul mouth upon some one who must be a breed or an Indian.

Quent saw a quick huddle; he heard the swish of a blow; and then, distinctly, the thud of a stick as it fell across un-

protected flesh. Something inside him that was like his old, almost superhuman strength, arose with that sound and the sound that followed.

"Ah, *Dios!* Mercy, master. I but did——"

"You went to the consul! Take that for it. And now, you damned black, take two more before you tell me!"

Thwack! Down went the stick again. Quent saw a form, as powerful as his own, in the half dark. A wide-shouldered figure that bulked out of the gloom, standing half astraddle a huddled shape only partially clothed.

Quent wished for the strength that was his own. That fever—the fever that had left him on the coast while his pal went on up here alone. But there was still some of him left. The last two days on the trail had done some good.

Again the stick was raised. Quent's cold voice cut through the dark.

"Hey, hombre!"

He paused; the stick paused, too, in mid-air. "Where have you been gettin' all of the rough stuff from?"

The stick lowered slowly. The words in English, here in a tiny Guatemalan town, had done it. Quent could see powerful, heaving shoulders that turned toward his approach.

"Who's asking?" demanded the heavy voice above those shoulders. "Somebody lookin' to get in on some of it?"

It was a threat and a challenge at once. Here was a man who fought his way with both fists, and who knew no code of mercy for anything weaker than he. And in the same instant, Quent knew who the man was.

Dane Volney! Cursed in a score of ports and hated in cities from one belt of the tropics to another. Ivory hunter,

slave trader, treasure driver, his bullying strength and unscrupulous methods had made him friends who feared him and a horde of enemies who loathed him. And Quent knew suddenly that Volney must be here for the same reason as he.

"I'll take trouble if it's comin' my way," he said easily, stepping forward. "This is a damned poor place, though, for a white man to be working off his temper on an Indian."

A rectangle of light cut across his face for a moment. It showed up the square forehead and the straight gray eyes, the outthrust jaw and straight mouth. Volney made a noise in his throat.

"So it's you, eh, Parker?"

"Me." Parker confronted him over the crouched, trembling body of the Indian. They looked the same size these two—huge, manhandling men; but both of them knew that Quent's powerful frame had been desiccated by fever.

"Thought you were dead." Volney measured his man, dark eyes

glittering in animal appraisal.

"Not too dead. What are you beating this man for?"

"None of your damned business! He belongs to me. My peon, savvy? And you're keeping your face out of this, Parker, or you'll wish you were where your pal is! Get out of here—or I'll give you what I'm giving Sayko."

Quent tightened. He wasn't used to that sort of language. His bulk and a certain rather well-known reputation with his two fists usually protected him from it. Volney was as big as he, and heavier. And Quent was aware—only too deeply aware—of the strength that the dose of fever on the coast had taken from him.



The Indian cowered, almost motionless, eyes shining in the dark. He made no sound; Quent remembered that he had not made a sound.

Volney gave a short laugh out of the depths of his barrel of a chest, as Quent hesitated. Then Quent dove forward, weakness forgotten.

Straight into the big trader's middle went his two fists. Volney doubled up with a grunt and struck out at the same time. He hit a glancing blow that Quent would not ordinarily have felt, on the side of the face. As it struck, Quent's right fist drove for the other man's jaw.

At another time the fight would have ended there. Few men had taken a short-arm jab from Quent's right fist and cared to continue a discussion. But Volney was a big man, and powerful, and Quent's blows had not their old strength.

With a bellow, Volney shook his head and tore in again. Quent struck out as the trader caught his shoulder a mighty blow. Then suddenly he doubled up, a grunt between his clenched teeth, as his antagonist caught him a powerful punch in the groin.

He slipped. Something other than a fist clubbed down across his temple. As he fell sidewise another blow struck. Quent heard a hard laugh and went down face forward. A heavy boot landed in his ribs; but he was too sick with pain and dizziness to care. His faculties were plunged into an awful blackness.

Quent awakened slowly and agonizingly. A cool, water-soaked hand was stroking his brow and temple, and a gourd of cool water was at his lips. He felt sick, and then he knew that he had been sick—wretchedly. The pit of his stomach was a groaning agony. But he knew, too, that he was not seriously hurt.

He opened his eyes slowly, to take in the dark, aquiline features of the Indian

for whom he had intervened. He was propped up against the wall of one of the low adobe houses, sitting on the cobblestones of the street. Above the moon rode serene over the crooked thoroughfare. Dane Volney was gone.

The Indian smiled reassuringly. Even then, sick as he was, a thought crossed Quent's mind: This Indian did not look, somehow, like an abject and quivering creature who waited for the blows of a bullying master like Volney. But that was all he thought.

"Got me—eh?" He tried to smile.

"*Si*. Sayko is grateful, señor. He is gone. I had to run. I shall not go back to him."

Quent's eyes fluttered open a trifle wider. "You didn't have to stay with him, did you?"

"N-o."

The syllable was drawn out. After a pause, the Indian said, "I shall not, now." Quent thought he saw a strange gleam in the man's eye, but the moonlight might have been playing him tricks.

Anyway, Quent had other thoughts at the moment. The first of them was enough to send the blood pulsing anew through his body and make him forget momentarily his aches and pains. His right hand started to drop to the gun at his side; then quickly it unclasped. His gaze shot downward.

He stared. In his clenched hand was a tiny plaque—of a stone something like soapstone, he thought, and on it there were engraved hieroglyphics which he could not make out. He looked at it for a second, then looked back at the Indian. Sayko seemed not to have seen.

"You say you went away, Sayko?" he demanded.

"*Si*. I only hid until he left. He would have killed me if I had not run."

Quent nodded. "I know." He heaved himself to his feet. His gun was safe, and he had business. The native had washed his face and he was not outwardly badly battered. The memory

of that beating rankled deep, though. Quent had been licked before, but he had never been kicked! The memory of Dane Volney's heavy, saturnine visage would remain in his heart until that stigma was wiped out—and thoroughly.

His burro had ambled aimlessly up the street after him, with his packs. He caught up the reins now. As he started off, the Indian caught his hand.

"Señor, you go to Romero's?"

"Sí."

"Please—no, señor. He is dangerous, this Volney. I know! You are kind—and brave—and Sayko is grateful. How grateful you may know some day. But you are in danger here. All white men who come here are in danger. It is not wise to make it more by fighting Volney."

He was insistent in a quick-breathing, eager earnestness. Quent was attracted idly, there in the moonlight, by an odd slash on the man's cheek bone, a sort of cross, high up.

"It's all right," he said. "You don't understand, Sayko. You've got nothing to do with this fight any longer—you're out of it. See? We don't forget—my people—things like those that just happened!"

Again that strange, fierce light came into the native's eyes for the briefest moment; then the face was a blank again, carved and wooden—somehow serene. That crosslike mark on his face seemed to glow, though it must have been hallucination, and his breath sucked inward in a little hiss.

"Neither do we forget, señor," came in sibilant tones. "'*Stá bueno. Vaya con Dios.*"

And turning, he seemed veritably to be swallowed by the shifting shadows of the crooked street. He was gone. Quent thought no more of the incident.

He had his own considerations. The Indian meant nothing to him, nothing but the principles underlying his own

code. It was another fight between him and Dane Volney now, a more bitter one. And beyond Volney was his pal—lost, somewhere, in the pressing jungle that lay untouched beyond Corinjas, the jumping-off place.

First Volney. Quent touched the gun at his hip as he walked slowly toward the low lights of Romero's cantina.

Quent Parker had come to Guatemala with a purpose. He and Jack Reynolds knew every port in the Caribbean and the Pacific, it seemed. One job after another they had. In this part of the world, though, they were rather well known, and with it they were familiar.

In the ruins of a Maya city—ruins that were the chalky bones of that once-mighty race—there existed, so scientists had found, the seventh of the tablets of the Maya rain-god, the tablet of Huxtán. The other six had been discovered: they formed a mosaic in one of the greatest museums in the States.

But the seventh no man had recovered. Men had sought for it, beyond Corinjas, but no one had returned with it. Few had returned at all. There was no secret about the existence of the bones of the city, little secret about the existence of the tablet. The secret was in what lay beyond Corinjas, the last spot where white men could be found, and the hiding place of the seventh tablet of Huxtán.

Expeditions were useless. This was a lone job, a job for one or two adventurous men willing to stake everything they had. Men willing to face unseen and unknown in a risk that might or might not be worth while. The museum, and its backers, wanted the seventh plaque to make the mosaic complete.

Quent Parker and Jack Reynolds had been offered the job. They had handled such jobs before. In Yucatan, by themselves, they had located lost ruins which had led to one of the greatest of archæological expeditions.

Then, as they were starting, fever got Quent. A recurrence of an old fever. The tropics are jealous of men from other climes, who invade them. Jack Reynolds—small and dapper and careless—fearing nothing seen or unseen, had blithely started off alone.

Jack had disappeared. Quent, hearing of his friend's start, had torn himself from his bed before a complete recovery had come. No word from the kid. Quent threw his ravaged body day after day over the broken trails and across the winding mountainsides—for the jumping-off place.

He was here. And so was Dane Volney. There was something sinister about that fact. Volney had not even seemed surprised at seeing him, and evidently Volney had been here for some time. Why, if he, too, was searching for the seventh plaque, did he remain here?

Quent glanced again at the stone rectangle in his hand. Then he shoved it in his pocket. Some one had placed it in his palm while he lay back there unconscious. Possibly it had been the Indian, Sayko. Quent rather thought not. At any rate, its significance could wait. He had to get out of Corinjas by dawn and get on the trail of his partner. In the meantime, there was Volney.

Romero's—the one excuse for an inn and stopping-off place that the village of Corinjas boasted—was wide open to the street. It was simply a big room filled with tables and chairs, with a small bar at the farther end. A number of people were there when Quent drew up in front of it.

He let a *mozo* take his burro, and slung his pack over his shoulder. He paused only an instant in the doorway to survey the scene. Most of the crowd consisted of native shopkeepers or small landowners.

Across the room, Volney was just rising from a table where he had been talking. He started for the door and

saw Quent. He started to smile; and then, at sight of Quent's eyes, the smile changed. Quent dropped his pack. He was between Volney and the exit.

Volney drew up. His eyes were cruel, gleaming. Quent's face was pale. The others in the place saw them; a strange electric current that ran across the room muffled the chattering voices.

The men were some four paces from one another when Volney halted. Of the same height, his superior bulk was evident. Quent's strength lay in powerful shoulders that grew up out of narrow hips, of lean arms and legs and a clean, supple body.

"Well?" Volney said. He sneered.

Quent said, in a low voice: "You're a louse, Volney. A rat. But I want you. If my hands can't do it right now—well, we're both carrying guns. If you've got any guts in you, dive for yours. I'll wait till you're starting!"

Volney started to smile again when Quent spoke; but at his words the smile faded. The words were in English, but there were a few here who could speak English. Volney moistened his dry lips, hesitated—then laughed contemptuously.

"Guns? Because you're licked, you think I'm going to let myself in for killing you, too? You can find me when you want me."

"That won't be long. You won't shoot it out?"

"Of course not!" Volney had his courage back now; the animal courage of a man who knows only strength. He knew Quent was not the man to shoot unless another drew on him. He took a step forward, swaggering a little.

"Lookin' for your pal, ain't you? Going to follow him, like a nice, brave little boy. You won't be back to see me, Parker, not if you've got the guts to go. Ever hear of the Gate of the Seven Dead?"

"What's that got to do with us? You and me, Volney——"

"It's got lots to do with us. Because you'll hear about the Gate of the Seven Dead before you start. And we'll see then how much guts you've got, amigo! Adios!"

He turned on his heel and went out. Quent watched him. The others, habitués of the place, were watching Quent, too. He frowned, picked up his pack, and walked to the bar. There the grinning Romero assured him of a room—not worthy of the *caballero, seguramente!*—but the best there was. Would the señor look at it now?

No. Quent said he was tired, but he wanted a drink and a bite of food before he rested. He sat down idly at a table and watched the people. No one interested him particularly, and outwardly he seemed to have lost interest for them.

Romero himself brought the food—tortillas, *pan dulce*, and the cold breast of some game bird. When Romero came, Quent was toying with the stone he had found in his hand. The hieroglyphics meant nothing to him, except for the fact that there were seven of them.

Seven—it was the seventh, and last plaque of the rain-god mosaic he and Jack had started after. And Dane Volney had spoken of some Gate of Seven Dead. Now this—

He did not see Romero's start at sight of the plaque. When he looked up, the fat little proprietor, blinking rapidly, had recovered himself and was hastily setting down the dishes.

"Do you suppose I can get a *muchacho* for the trail to-morrow, Romero?" he asked, rather tiredly.

Romero hesitated. His eyes could not avoid Quent's hand. "It is difficult, señor. For which direction?"

"Northwest. I guess."

Romero's eyes opened wide. "*Pero, no, señor!* No one would go there. There—they do not come back. It is the place of the Seven——" He broke

off suddenly, fearfully. "*Perdóneme, señor, my customers. In but a moment.*" He hurried off.

Quent frowned wonderingly and looked down at the thing in his hand. "Now what the devil——"

"Pardon, señor!"

A voice spoke at his elbow, a voice evidently English. He looked up to see a man in his later forties, clad in white drill. He had a pleasant face.

"I'm Ward, the vice consul here, if I may introduce myself."

Quent asked him hastily to sit down. He wanted information and here he might get it. Beside, the vice consul seemed a rather pleasant sort.

They had a drink and over it spoke commonplaces. It was Ward who broached: "You expect to stay here for a while, Mr. Parker?"

Quent smiled that lazy smile he had. "Not a minute longer than it takes me to get out and on my own. I've got an idea, Mr. Ward, that you knew that."

Ward nodded gravely. "I might have guessed it. I knew that Jack Reynolds was your friend."

"*'Was'!*" Quent jerked forward. "Why the tense?"

Ward looked out calmly through the doorway. The moon was just descending.

"They kill at the end of the half moon, so I understand. There's no doubt that they've got your friend, or he'd be back. Maybe I was anticipating. That moon has about two days to do."

"You mean——" Quent gulped. Something hard stuck in the base of his throat.

Ward gave his grave nod. "I thought you had better know, before you followed him. The Indians—the Mayas—aren't all stamped out, you know. And near your destination, we've known for years there was a tribe of them. Guardians of the gate to that city, they seem to be. They give a warning first,

They're not killers by nature. It's religion with them. A little stone marked very much——"

"Like this——" Quent suddenly shot into view the rectangle of stone he had received.

Ward took the piece. Nodded. "That's it. The warning—not to trespass past the Gate of the Seven Dead. And you've got it, too." Ward looked grave.

"What the devil is this Gate of the Seven Dead?" Quent wanted savagely to know.

"The ruins of the gate to the ruins you want to get at, that's all. Seven men sacrificed themselves there, for the rain god. Rain came, they say. It's tradition. These Indians won't let the ruins be defiled by treasure-seekers."

"But I'm not looking for treasure!" Quent expostulated. "That stone tablet means nothing to them by itself. I happen to know. I helped get one of the others that form the mosaic."

Again the vice consul nodded. "Yes, but they don't know that. And some white men are looking for a treasure that is surely there. It's sacred. After seven have died—and I think your pal will be the seventh to face it——" He shrugged. "I don't know. I rather imagine those Indians will be more friendly."

Quent sat back. His face was white. His jaw was tight and drawn.

Seven to die! And Jack would be the seventh. Of a sudden he wondered if he knew why Volney had waited on so long in this town. Waiting—for the seventh to die. The peculiarity of the superstition—the fact that neither he nor Jack was after the supposed treasure in the ruins—these things meant nothing. Seven must die, at the Gate of the Seven Dead.

"An Indian confirmed it to me this morning," the vice consul was saying. "Came to see me. Warned me against letting white men go in there. Asked

me if Volney was going. I wondered why, but you can't get anything out of these beggars if they don't want to talk."

Quent stood up. There was nothing irresolute about him as he stood there. His face was graven and his deep-set, calm eyes were straight. "You can't get me a boy, by any chance—for the morning, can you, Mr. Ward?"

"To go there?"

"In that direction."

"Not a chance. Haven't I told you enough——"

Quent held out his hand. "It's been pleasant to talk with you, sir. I'm starting into the jungle in the morning alone."

But he did not go alone. Dawn came through the thick trees, and then the hot ball of the sun commenced to steam through the impenetrable jungle. Before noon, Quent, with a single burro, was coming out onto one of those open spaces on the mountain trail which leave the jungle suddenly and spread out a vista of eternity—miles of low country, crisscrossed by trails, spread out below.

He brought up. Instinctively his hand went to his holster. Down there, less than half a mile below him, on a piece of trail that opened to the sun momentarily, there toiled a bigger trail than his own—a white man and three natives.

The white man he knew at once. It was Dane Volney, and bound in the same direction as he!

He drew back, and almost snarled. Here in the jungle, apart from everything that he knew of another life, he was almost an animal. He understood. Dane Volney had known. He had waited for the seventh to die. Volney was after the treasure in the ruins, and Jack Reynolds' death would free them.

The seventh to die. The Indians would cling to their superstitions to the last. They might not be friendly, but

they would not condemn an eighth man to death at the Gate of the Seven Dead. Well Volney had known that. He was taking his chances on that—and banking that Quent would fight to save his friend—perish with him. For Volney undoubtedly thought that Quent and Jack were after the supposed treasure in the ruins.

Quent had not been seen. Not that it mattered, for Volney undoubtedly knew he had started out. So there was another trail. And Volney had managed to get men who were not afraid of the journey.

Quent pushed back his helmet, his eyes sullenly dangerous. It was fated that he and Volney meet; a strange smile drew back his lips over glistening white teeth at that. Here in the jungle, where everything was fair. Where it was primitive and they were alone. Good enough! He'd prefer it that way.

Perhaps one of them would come out of that green fastness alive—not both. Quent knew now that Volney knew the meaning of the warning stones, that he had let Jack go to his death so that the prophecy of the seven might be fulfilled.

A sound startled him, behind him. Not a jungle sound; it was too stealthy. There was something human in it, indubitably. Quent whirled against the bole of a breadfruit, his back to the tree and his hand on his gun butt.

A rustle of fern and creeping vine. The sound came nearer. In the jungle there was a gray-green haze that hung like a live thing, suspended in mid-air.

A huge fern parted in its center, a few feet from the trail, and as Quent's gun was half out of its holster, the Indian Sayko stepped into view.

"Don't shoot, señor!"

Sayko was in full view now, tall and bronze and powerful—a different creature, here in his own element. In his eyes was the light of a man who has never known fear; in his near-nakedness was a return to savagery. Quent re-

membered again that he had made no sound as Volney was striking him. The peculiar cross mark on his cheek bone was visible plainly.

"What are you doing here?" Quent demanded.

"I followed you. You needed a *muchacho*. I go with you." The Indian spoke simply, with dignity.

"You'll take the job? And you know where I'm heading for?"

"Si. I asked you not to go. I know the way. Will you take me?"

Quent shot another look downward over the edge of the cliff that led to the lower trail. The last of Volney's cortège was being swallowed once again by the jungle. He frowned.

"You're hired," he said. "Let's go. I'm in a hurry to get there, and you probably know the way better than I. Take the shortest cut. I want to get there before the moon goes down."

"To-morrow night it sets, señor," said the Indian impassively, and he turned to the burro.

"I know," said Quent Parker heavily.

On through the moist, streaming fastnesses of a jungle that had known the footprints of less than a score of white men since the world began. On into an unknown world peopled only with vast silences, and where the very silences were mocking dangers.

All day, and into the darkness, for Sayko knew his way. He never faltered. With his machete—his only weapon—he cut free paths that were long disused and hidden from other eyes. Quent knew that now he was lost if Sayko forsook him.

Yet he trusted the man. He asked himself why the Maya had chosen to follow him, to go with him where no other would go. Gratitude? He doubted it. After all, he might have made it by himself, and Sayko had shown no particular signs of being grateful. There was no suggestion of loyalty between them: they had never

trailed together before. And this was a mad mission.

What the end would be could never be prophesied. Quent did not even know what he intended doing when he reached his destination. Only that Jack was there, and Jack was doomed to die at the Gate of the Seven Dead. If Jack was going to kick off on a job that belonged to both of them—well, then, there would be eight to die at the Gate. Quent wasn't going there intending to die, but he was not afraid of it.

Sayko spoke only in monosyllables on the trail. It was too arduous for speech, anyway. Quent found his muscles responding to the strain of it. His driving will gave his powerful body new strength; and with the rigors of the mad journey the strength turned itself back into the vitality that had always been his.

The moon set like a symbol. They slept, and, before dawn, Sayko had wakened Quent and they were off again.

"Can we make it by to-night?"

Sayko only nodded. "We shall be in time," he said.

Quent looked at him sharply, wondering. But he did not pursue the question further. Did Sayko know?

On they toiled. For hours the pace was maddeningly slow. Vine and creeper caught at their feet and arms, snapped at their faces. Heavy growth barred their passage until Sayko broke it away with his machete. There had been no further sign of Volney.

The sun wore down toward the horizon. As fast as their progress seemed slow, to Quent, once it had started to descend.

Dusk. It seeped, part of the jungle mist, through the thick trees and the matted growth. It was upon them stealthily, like a creeping thing. A creeping thing that Quent hated.

Quent hastened his dragging footsteps to catch up with Sayko, who was some paces ahead of him. Just then,

a low, ululating call echoed through the forest. It was an eerie thing, in that strange stillness. It hung on the air, suspended, died, and then rose again—to fade out slowly.

They both stopped. Sayko was listening intently. On his face was an expression of concentration, quite unlike Quent's. Quent was frowning with wonderment. He didn't like things that he did not understand, and he knew that he was nearing the mouth of danger.

"What was that?" he demanded, as the sound died.

Sayko relaxed. "We are here," he said simply. "You will camp here. It is better I go ahead."

"Where to?"

"To look," the Indian answered impassively. "You wait, señor. I promise you, it is better." He made as if to leave.

Quent suddenly caught his arm, and the big man's face was hard with purpose. "Look here—maybe you're all right, Sayko, and I've been trusting you. Where are the ruins?"

The Indian pointed. He seemed not to feel the fierce grip of the white man on his arm. Quent saw a faint opening that was blotted out by the green jungle mist and the creeping dusk.

"You be back here pronto—*sabe?* I've got to get things done, and before the moon sets to-night. *Entiende?*"

"*Entiendo.* You can trust me, señor."

Quent released the arm. As on that night in the crooked street in Corinjas, Sayko simply faded from sight. No sound, no consciousness of movement. He was just gone.

Quent's pack had been thrown on the ground. Dubiously he unrolled it and prepared a sort of camp. Dark came down, and he ate without making a fire, careless of prowling animals. His express rifle lay alongside him.

There were other things upon his

mind as the jungle night shut in and the moon shone. Through the trees he watched it. It moved only slowly. The minutes passed—two hours. Sayko had not returned. Quent wondered what kept him rooted there.

He was waiting for something. Somehow he had a sense that the Indian Sayko could solve a lot. That if he returned, Quent would know which way to move.

As it was, he visualized his own helplessness for the first time. Here he was at his destination, yet alone and helpless in the jungle. Near him, somewhere, were dangerous savages; nearer were wild animals. Somewhere was Jack Reynolds—and the Gate of the Seven Dead. He realized that, now he had got here, he did not know in which direction to move to save his friend.

And the moon began to descend—slowly.

Quent got to his feet, in an agony of doubt. He had to do something. He'd at least find the lost city and the dread gate.

Halfway to his feet, he froze. Something stirred in the underbrush near his left shoulder. He looked. No animal's eyes peered from the pitch blackness.

"Sayko!"

The answer was a sudden quick movement—a hurtling form that leaped silent through the dark—and Quent went over backward as one long, sinewy hand found his throat. A guttural cry came. It was answered.

Quent caught out wildy for another hand, and a knife blade slithered across his palm. Another being broke through the brush now. He understood—Volney's natives!

He felt the spurt of blood across his wrist. Then suddenly, in the face of this strange, silent danger, his old strength was with him. Quent gave a mighty heave upward, still holding the wrist that wielded the knife.

Down and over the two figures went,

a cry of surprise and pain issuing from the native's lips. Into another figure they hurtled, and the three went down together. But not before the knife had buried itself deep to the glistening hilt in the unprotected stomach of its falling owner.

Quent felt the naked body crumple. He was on one knee. As a gasp of blood came, he understood, and half turned, instinctively. His fists were clenched. He reached up and outward—blindly, in the dark—but the right fist struck.

A grunt, and Quent had closed with his second assailant. He knew his strength now. He gloried in it, its mastery over this slippery, almost naked body. Again the fist crunched home. This time to the jaw.

The head of the native snapped back with a crack. There was only a muffled crash in the underbrush, and that was all. Quiet came again, a quiet that had never been disturbed. Only the man with the knife in his abdomen lay moaning in a low whisper.

Quent dropped down above his second victim. His hands explored rapidly. In a moment he stood up. He had broken the man's jaw—splintered it, and knocked him completely unconscious.

He stood up. His chest was heaving; but his eyes, even there in the darkness, gleamed strangely. The powerful muscles in his shoulders rippled as he moved, under the sweat-soaked shirt. He was ready now. That fever was over!

Quent moved slowly, doggedly forward. He remembered the way Sayko had pointed out to him. Inaction was over. It is doubtful if he even minded the tendrils and the thick growth which impeded him. The light from the lowering moon shone in occasional patches through the thick growth. Often he stumbled; once he fell; but he kept on.

The moon was sinking. Jack was to

die. He fought on, toward the only goal he knew.

And suddenly the jungle broke away. The moon shone down on the chalky bones of a dead city. And directly before Quent there lay the Gate of the Seven Dead.

The city itself, lying beyond, was a dead thing, like something conjured out of the wild madness of some medieval romancer. Almost it was as though it had never been. It lay there serene, a collection of blue bones, dead as the face of the moon itself. Nothing stirred in it; it was hard to believe that those bones arising had once been structures erected by men, that civilization had lived here and died.

The city was more creepy than a graveyard could ever be. It had no name. Its name had died with its glory. But standing aloof and over it was the gate which had once been the entrance. The gate had not crumbled appreciably. Strange symbols marked it; its two giant pillars reared themselves with a naked absolutism into the sky.

The gate seemed to tell of an agelessness that was history. Through it men had passed to glory, to triumph, to death. It lingered on, all that was left of something once great.

Quent walked toward it feeling like a man in a dream. No sign of Jack here; no sign of any life. Beyond, it was forbidden to go. He had received his warning. Beyond lay a treasure, and the lost tablet for which he and Jack were risking their lives. For which Jack was losing his life.

The pillars of the gate loomed above Quent and he stared at the symbols upon it. Some of them he understood; he had come across them before. But he did not stop to try to decipher. He knew of no way to go, now that Sayko had disappeared, except directly through those forbidden pillars and into what lay beyond.

The lost tribe did not live in the

graveyard of the city; that fact was known. But something must live there. Some horror must guard the treasure. He wondered idly if Jack had come just this way—to search first for something that could be classified as the ruins of a temple, which was the place to look for the seventh tablet of the mosaic.

He walked between the portals. It was still a dream. His footfalls echoed strangely in that unreal place. Along what had once been a paved street, flanked by tumbled masonry, ghosts of palaces, perhaps.

A larger structure than the rest loomed just before him. The temple, perhaps. Part of the walls were intact, jagged in unwilling decay. Sight of even a hostile native would have cheered him; at least it would have told him in which direction to search. The search now was for Jack Reynolds, and the time was drawing near. It began to seem more and more unreal.

And then, suddenly, the unreality abruptly vanished. He was back in a world of greed and cruelty and ruthlessness, as he crawled over fallen masonry and stood within what had been the temple walls.

Before him, a pick in his hands and just rising from a dump of débris, stood Dane Volney—not ten yards away.

Volney was alone. Quent remembered, with a flash that took away all the dreaminess of this strange place, the two natives he had left behind at his camping spot. He remembered a kick—and he saw Volney's smile. The smile was rather terrible in that weird light. Somehow he knew that this man stood between him and his pal.

He walked forward, steadily and not too rapidly, his eyes never leaving the face of the man he hated. And Volney stood there with his feet spread a little apart, watching—a cruel, confident smile on his face. On Quent's face there was no expression; it was deadly, intent.

Still it all seemed like a dream, a silent dream—a dream-drama staged in the dust of forgotten centuries.

Suddenly he was upon Volney, with a surge of strength that flooded through him. No guns—he had forgotten that Volney carried one, and he ignored his own.

A mighty jerk upward—his attack had been so swift and deadly that Volney was caught off guard—Volney's bulk went heaving over his shoulder, and the two crashed down together. Quent was on top. Wildly he drove forward his right fist in a short, sharp blow. The fist buried itself in his enemy's midriff. Volney grunted.

The roar of a shotgun clove through the stillness of that dead place. At first it was only something that blended with the pounding madness in Quent's brain. Then he remembered that Volney had a third man.

Volney cried out. For a moment he broke free, staggered to one knee as Quent tried in sudden blinding to follow him.

Again the gun roared out. On the heels of it, Volney had charged back again and caught at Quent's throat. And Quent knew that a good part of the flesh of his left shoulder had been torn apart by that last discharge. He heard Volney's low, triumphant laugh in his ear.

It maddened him. He took a blow that caught him just under the jaw, but was fortunately deflected. As he went backward, he saw the grinning face of his second attacker.

Volney had placed his man in ambush, lying almost flat on the chalky surface of a section of the temple wall. The gun gleamed in the waning moonlight.

Quent's passion gave him a sudden access of strength. With his left arm, he caught Volney to him in a mighty grip, caught him and held him until they were cheek to cheek and until Volney's shortened, maddened blows could only

pound ineffectually against his body. And he loosed his automatic.

The native did not see in time. The two men were a blurred mass on the ground, among the loose stones and scattered débris. And he was more interested in getting a new shot at Quent. The shotgun followed their progress eagerly.

And then suddenly the half-breed saw. A look of wild terror went over his features as he realized—too late.

Crack! He heard the hum of the first bullet—but the second, which came as he started to scramble wildly to safety, he was never to hear. He dropped, just as Quent fell backward with the force of a mighty blow in his chest which broke his hold.

Volney was not laughing now. His eyes were madman's eyes, and he was cursing. Vile, horrible curses, that were a red contrast with the killer's silence in Quent.

Quent's gun went spinning from his hand as Volney dropped away from him for a new attack. The treasure hunter dove for his own gun, but Quent was upon him. Together they went down again, and Volney's automatic fell into the rocks.

That the stones and heaped débris cut and tore at them neither seemed to realize. Here in the silence of ages, two men fought for more than life—they fought for a hatred that was real and tangible. Ten minutes, and their clothes were in ribbons, more from the frequent contacts with the disused floor of the temple than from each other's pounding blows.

All attempts at science, or even the rules that apply to civilized men in battle, were forgotten, after those first few minutes. The very fury of Quent's attack took a good deal of his strength, as it had called for the same toll from his enemy. They only knew that there was an ancient score between them and that here that score would be settled.

It is doubtful if either knew weakness. Quent knew of the burning pain in his left shoulder; he knew that he was dripping with blood: he could see the stains of it all over his enemy each time they closed. He could not hit well with his left hand, but his right kept driving remorselessly on.

As remorselessly as his body. They had even forgotten pain, these two. They were animals in an animal world.

Blood was running into Quent's eyes. He could realize that the moon was very low. He could hardly see his antagonist. Volney was a mad blur. They kept on.

Quent went to his knees. As Volney stepped in to drive down at him, he twisted over, caught out, and dragged the other down with him. He tried to rise. Volney's hands clawed at him; Volney's fists struck. One eye was closed.

On the ground the two fought on—clawing, striking, digging for each other's throat. And then Quent saw something which dashed the blood from his eyes and made reason return. He blinked. A punch glanced off his cheek bone, yet he scarcely felt it. Volney had not seen.

But around the edge of the tumbled temple wall there was strung the heads of more than a score of Indians! Watching in silence—waiting for the outcome of this herculean battle between two men of a different race.

And after it—after it was over—there was the gate and the sacrifice it demanded.

For a moment, Quent felt a strange weakness. For the same moment, his fears and his pains returned. He knew of each separate blow and every wound. It didn't matter. It was over, anyhow. Only—

Suddenly, with consciousness of it all, something new was aroused within him. There was Volney first; Volney who had let Jack Reynolds go to his death, and who had tried to send him. Volney,

with whom the last score on earth must be settled.

And with reason, he had a new strength. He knew it could last but a moment. He knew that every muscle in his body had responded to its utmost. Blood smeared and battered, he was done. Done, except for the last!

Half rising, he drew back his right arm as far as it would go. He accepted a blow that might otherwise have rocked him as Volney struck out with the remains of his strength. He hardly felt that blow. He only knew that his own must tell.

The arm came forward and over. Four knuckles crashed across Volney's already battered face—they were spread between nose and jaw. Teeth stuck to Quent's hand. Blood spurted. Volney's head went back with a snap as Quent, with a wild laugh, darted to his feet.

His hands were in what remained of Volney's collar. Volney tried to open his eyes: his head sagged back. He was done.

A mad surge of strength gave Quent the ability to jerk his enemy to his feet. Volney sagged there, inert. One hand went up. It was then that Quent remembered that kick. Once more his right fist snapped outward.

This time, the remains of his strength could not hold the unconscious figure. Volney dropped like a sack.

Quent swayed above him. His distorted features tried to manage a smile—a smile of victory. This much, at least, was wiped out forever. The score might never be wholly paid, but he had paid all that human flesh could muster in payment.

Jack! Through his dulled brain the thought flashed. There was Jack now. He must—

He saw the row of watching faces, like figures in the mad dream he had entered at the edge of the jungle. He tried to turn, to face them. Then he

reeled and pitched head foremost to the ground. Quent thought it still a part of the dream when he awakened. A familiar voice was in his ear. Familiar hands were placing cool, water-soaked leaves across his battered face, and he knew that water had just trickled down his throat.

Those Indians, and yet—this was Jack Reynolds' voice! He struggled to open his eyes, in spite of the agonizing pain that clove down through his skull.

"Jack! What the——"

Through the misty haze that was half his own semiconsciousness and partly the dusky spot in which he lay, he had seen the face of his friend. And beyond—Sayko!

He heard his friend's disjointed phrases, tried to piece them together. But mostly he was aware of a strange gladness, for the moon must have long since sunk, and Jack was alive.

"It's all right, kid. There were seven to die, all right, but they didn't particularly want me for the seventh. They'd been saving that honor for Mister Volney for some years. He killed two of their boys that they'd rented out to him for one of his trips, after he'd made friends with them. Then he sent other men in here for the treasure—there is a treasure, you know—though we don't want it. We've got our tablet—sleep easy on that."

Quent tried to stir, to ask questions. But Jack Reynolds' hand pressed him gently but firmly down. He sighed as he relaxed again.

"Take it easy," went on the careless voice. "You're a hero around here, and we're safe—free to go. I was just a decoy. The tradition's there—that

seven must be sacrificed. They wanted Volney to come when it looked as though the seventh had gone. Savvy?"

"Unnh."

"Know who Sayko is?"

"Unnh. No."

"Minor chief. I hear you saved him from some abuse by Volney. Ever figure why one of these proud devils would take abuse like that from a white man up in this country?"

"Unnh."

"That was it. Sayko wanted to bring Volney here. But he couldn't take enough of it. You butted in. That mark on Sayko's face"—Jack lighted a cigarette contentedly—"you never did notice things, so you probably didn't notice that, you big hulk. But it's a traditional sign of chieftainship in the Mayas. And the only reason Sayko came with you was to keep you out of trouble. He didn't want any mistake about who Volney was."

Quent tried to open his eyes and found it difficult. It must be nearing morning, he thought.

"And him—Volney—what about him?" he mumbled.

Jack inhaled slowly, thoughtfully. Beyond, through the slow-creeping mists of dawn, loomed the two portals of the Gate of the Seven Dead. They loomed like the gates of doom in that strange light, with the odd, dead city beyond them.

"Him! After you got through with him?" Quent could not see him friend's face, nor the gate, nor the thing there. But he could feel a strange shudder that may have been the dawn chill, as Jack spoke. Jack's voice strove to be casual.

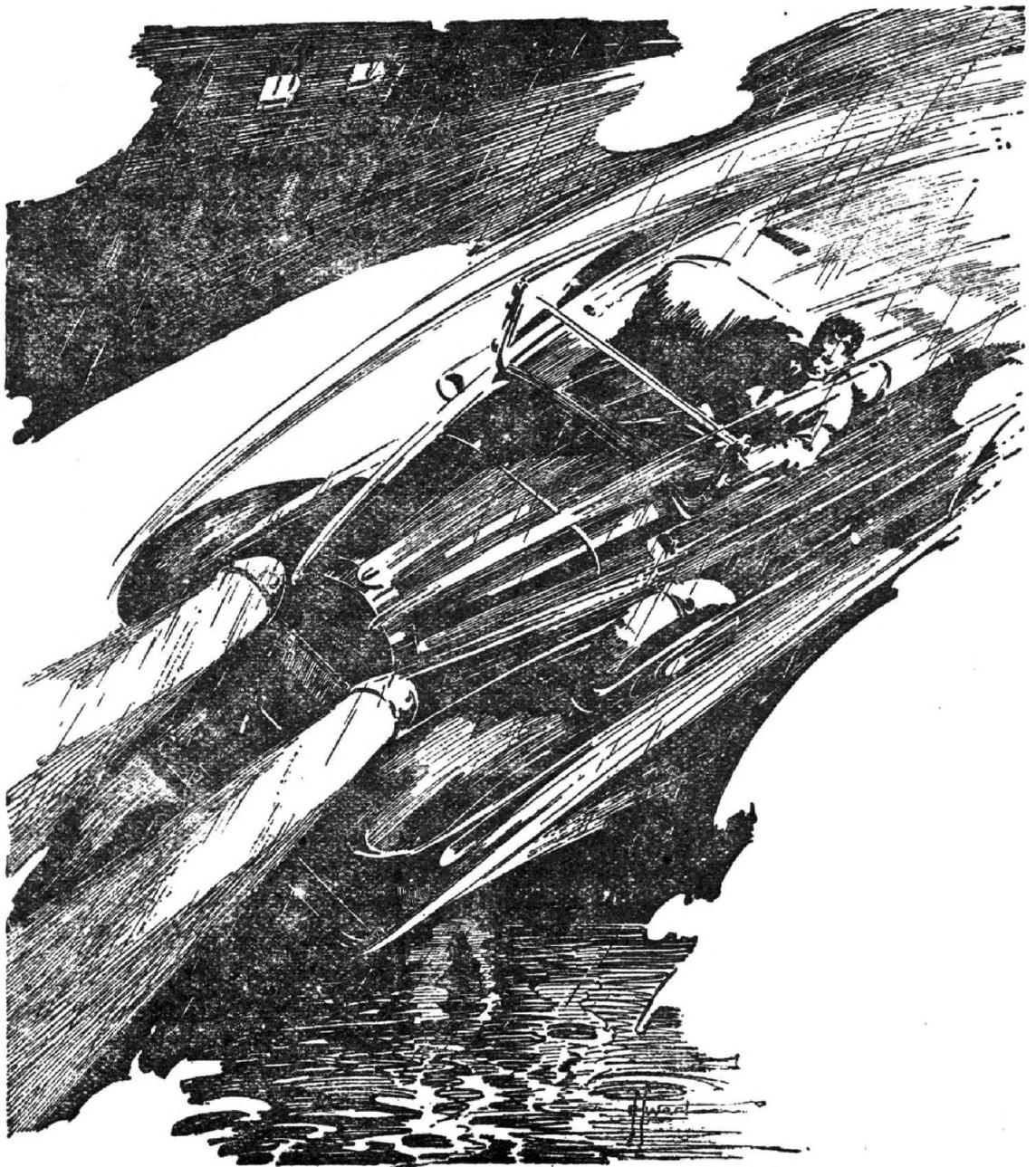
"Oh, the prophecy has been fulfilled," he said.

Another gripping story by Nels Leroy Jorgensen will appear soon.



The
WEREWOLF'S HELMET

By EDGAR L. COOPER



In the Drenching Hot Night of a Texas Rainstorm the Ghost of an Austrian Soldier Rises to Create a Smashing World-wide Intrigue.

In Six Parts—Part I.

CHAPTER I.

TWELVE YEARS LATER.

DONALD KINCAID leaned back in his chair, tapped a cigarette upon his thumb nail a moment very thoughtfully, then snapped a black-and-silver lighter into flame. His eyes, staring across the tiny glow of the *briquet*, were fixed upon the blue slip of a cablegram lying on the smooth surface of the table before him. Gray-green eyes they were, slightly narrowed, reflecting an absent, speculative glint in their shadowed depths. For a long minute he smoked in silence, not moving, his stare unwavering.

Then a one-sided, twisted smile flicked across his face—a lean, sun-bronzed face, thin of lips and hard of jaw, with something patently saturnine and sardonic and cynical in its make-up. He batted his strange eyes twice, rapidly, ran a sinewy hand through his close-cropped, tawny hair, reached forward and picked up the cablegram and read its message again, his features screwed crookedly against the curling smoke of his fag.

Tossing the blue slip to one side of the desk, he opened a right-hand drawer flanking his leg and drew out a long envelope addressed to him and bearing a European stamp and postmark. From this he took several sheets of letter paper, each covered with lines of fine, exact writing of typical Continental pen-

manship. Leaning back in his chair once more, rocking ever so little, he re-read the pages that smelled very faintly and subtly of *patchouli*. Pages that bore a coat of arms in gold at their tops, and were tinted a pale lavender.

February 18, 1930

MR. DONALD F. KINCAID,
Monte del Sol,
Harristown, Texas.

DON, CARO MIO: Doubtless you will be amazed and bewildered by this letter, coming from me after all these years of silence save for our mutual greeting at the time of Noel and the New Year. More so will you be puzzled at my reticence to explain some queer requests, or enlighten you upon the object of the favor I ask. The reason, and the sole reason, that I do not go into detail and take you into my complete confidence in this letter is because such would be terribly unwise, stupid—and dangerous. The thing I shall ask of you will be risky enough, without blunders. For you, Don.

The only reason I dare ask this thing at all is because of old memories that lie between us—memories of those days of war when you served with the American troops in my country. I was able, in those days, to be of some slight service, to you—in several ways. It was, I needn't assure you, because I liked you very much, not because I ever expected to ask from you any favor in return. But, now, that fickle jade called Fate has thrown an odd combination from her dice box, and you, in far-away America, have been drawn into her web. You, and I, and others. Frankly, Don, you are the focal point.

You will recall the time on the Val Canonica settore, a day in late October, 1918, during the last offensive that resulted in Austria's collapse, when you carried a badly wounded Austrian officer, a *kapitan*, in your

ambulance to the field hospital at Erbanno? The *kapitan* who gave you his steel helmet as a *momento*, a souvenir, of the occasion? The same helmet you showed to me some time afterward—the camouflaged “coal-scuttle” with the two red swastikas painted on it, and the words, *Karl Stendahl*, printed in indelible ink on the inside? The self-same helmet, Don, that you said you were going to keep always as a souvenir.

The great, burning and terribly vital question is now—have you still that helmet of *Kapitan* Karl Stendahl's? Or, if not, do you know who has or where it might be found? I cannot explain further, but suffice it to say that to find that helmet is of the gravest, most vital importance, to myself. If you yet have it in your possession, Don, please guard it as if you would “a pot of gold and diamonds,” and notify me immediately. Place it on a spot where it cannot be stolen, make your steamer reservations and take the quickest available boat to Genoa, *keeping your hand on the helmet every foot of the way*. I know this all seems mad to you, Don—wild and impossible and nightmarish—yet once with you I can explain everything to your satisfaction. I dare not, in writing, tell you who *Kapitan* Stendahl was, or the significance of the swastika helmet.

Please trust me, Kincaid! If in the past it has been my good fortune to add anything to yours, may I now invoke in you the memory of our very frank and delightful friendship? It is much to ask of you, I realize. It will cause you inconvenience, trouble, expense; even jeopardize you, probably, and endanger your life. But once I can speak to you, face to face, I will a tale unfold that will make the stories of Scheherazade pale in comparison. The need for secrecy and caution in even mentioning this much to you must be evident to your discernment, for I traveled to Cannes, France, to write and post this letter. Mailing it from Italy is too unsafe.

Now, then. If you feel that you do not care to do this for me, or for any reason are unable to do it, cable just the one word, *Nitchevo*.

If you are embarrassed financially, cable the single word, *Reargenter*, and matters shall be arranged immediately through a New York bank.

If you will secure the helmet, bring it to Genoa to me, and do me the greatest favor a man can help a woman with. Cable the one word, *Avvenimento*. I shall be waiting.

In any case, let no one see or tamper with that helmet, Don. And be careful—*careful*. I fear, and greatly, that plans are already

afoot to steal or secure it, and for it to fall into wrong hands will be a black tragedy for

Your sincere friend,

GIANNINA STROZZI,

Marchesa della Serravalle.

Villa Grimaldi, Bergamò, Lombardia, Italia.

Donald Kincaid carefully folded the sheets of scented crested paper and thrust them into the envelope. He reached for the cablegram and very slowly reread it a third time, his lips pursed in a low, under-the-breath whistling of the first four bars of “La Paloma,” his narrowed eyes glowing with a strange reddish gleam. Two days past, on March 12th, the letter had arrived; that afternoon the cablegram came. And it stated:

Please secure and look up at once the camouflaged *pickle-haube* helmet with two red swastikas on it given you in Italy in 1918 by Austrian officer *Kapitan* Karl Stendahl. Lose no time in doing this, I implore you, as attempt to steal it is afoot. Beware of anybody resembling a European. Have written, but beg you not to wait for letter before putting the helmet in a secure place. Act quickly, Don.

GIANNINA STROZZI.

Kincaid thrust the blue slip in its jacket, laid it on top of the letter and placed a paper weight—a heavy fragment of gold quartz—upon both. He snapped the flame of his *briquet* to another cigarette, got to his feet and walked across the room to a curiously carved buffet set against the wall; a six-foot, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted man who moved with the steely, careless grace of a panther.

The dim firelight from the open hearth and the soft glow of clustered incandescents threw his shadow, grotesque and distorted, upon the curiostudded wall of the den as he opened a door of the buffet and took out a black bottle of Bacardi and a wineglass. Filling the glass, he replaced the bottle in the cabinet and held the liquor in his hand, untasted, a short minute, his gaze fixed absently upon the great spread of a Kadiak bearskin rug at his feet.

Queer, this—damned queer. The Marchesa Serravalle—Karl Stendahl—a camouflaged, swastikaed Austrian tin hat. Italy—'18—America—'30. Almost twelve years. Don Kincaid's thoughts were shuttling rapidly as they roved beyond that strange, jumbled-up letter in its neat, precise script, beyond the terse cablegram, back to days separated from the present by years and leagues.

The Austrian he remembered well—a badly wounded officer of dragoons that he, Kincaid, *ambulancier*, had gone out of his way a bit to load and rush back to a field hospital. The fellow, though seriously hit on the head, had been conscious enough to insist that the *Amerikaner* accept his helmet as a souvenir; in fact, had urged it, and oddly—stressing the point that Kincaid must always keep it. Kincaid, thinking the man's mind unsettled by his wounds, had agreed. That was the last he saw of *Kapitan Stendahl*. Several days later a hospital orderly told him upon inquiry, that the Austrian had died.

He kept the swastika helmet. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it; it was like thousands of others, save for the daubs and streaks of camouflage and its two red talismans of luck. It had been battered about from pillar to post, mislaid several times, thrust into a barracks bag, journeyed across the ocean to at last come to rest in a Texas town. And now the Marchesa Serravalle wanted it. Wanted it badly. Why?

"Gina Strozzi," he had called her in those days. Young and beautiful and fiery, her veins blue with the bluest blood of Italy, she was a woman reincarnated by fate with something of the strange magic of Phyrne, Thais, or Ninon. Active in war work, flitting here, there, everywhere, she had turned over her two villas, the castle, even their town house in Verona, as convalescent hospitals and officer's leave club.

She had been nineteen then. She would be thirty now. And Donald Kincaid wondered how the years had dealt with her. He shrugged irritably, scowling at the Kadiak rug.

What the devil was the connection between Gina Strozzi and Karl Stendahl's helmet? Why all the sudden furor about an ordinary Boche coal scuttle? Why should anybody want to steal it? Something damned queer was right. This thing would bear looking into. It didn't make sense.

Donald Kincaid raised the glass of rum to his mouth and drank it slowly, wiped his lips with a handkerchief and replaced the wineglass. He opened the door leading into the hallway, stepped outside and called out, "Bob." Walking back into his den, leaving the door open, he went to the dark-wooded table with the steer-horn legs, opened a side drawer, and drew out a squat black automatic of foreign make. A swift examination showed it to be clipped and loaded, and he dropped it into the right-hand pocket of his Norfolk herringbone jacket as a copper-colored Indian-Negro entered the room from the hall.

"Bring the roadster out, Bob," said Kincaid. "See that she's got plenty of oil and gas. And I won't need you any more to-night."

"Yes, sir." Bob Gaines, Kincaid's Indian-Negro servant and general factotum, straight as an arrow and muscled like a puma, smiled about-faced and departed. Kincaid lit another cigarette, got a plaid striped cap and put it on, filled his *briquet* with benzine, picked up a pocket torch and switched off the lights in the den. The pur of the roadster came from the flagstoned portecochère as Kincaid left the house whistling lightly.

"I'm running out to the shack," he told Bob Gaines. "Be back for breakfast."

The Indian-Negro glanced at the sky, where but few stars showed. A far

drum of thunder beat upon the western horizon, and dark clouds were piling up in its wake, fitfully illumined by winks of heat lightning. The night was not hot, yet the air was humid, oppressive.

"It's gonna rain, Mister Don," said Bob Gaines. "Reckon you hadn't better take the coupé?"

"I won't be gone long. If you're here, and anybody calls, tell 'em you don't know where I went."

"Yes, sir." Bob Gaines went back into the house after another look at the sky.

Donald Kincaid settled himself behind the wheel, let out the clutch and rolled the sleek tan roadster along the red, graveled driveway between flanking cacti and palms and barberries onto the paved street beyond. The lights of Harristown smudged the sky south and southeast. Bright gleams from prosperous residences flanked the smooth roadway as he traveled northwest. He glanced at his radiolite watch and flipped away his cigarette. The hour was twenty-two minutes of nine o'clock.

CHAPTER II.

MYSTIFIED.

KINCAID'S thoughts were musingly jumbled as he bowled along into the open country, leaving the sky glow of Harristown far behind. He was bound for a cabin of his eleven miles up in the hills, built in the midst of virgin woods and squatting on the banks of a spring-fed, natural lake. It was a beautiful location, with splendid fishing and hunting, and Don Kincaid spent a great deal of his time out there. "Out of Bounds," he called it.

Many people called him "queer." Others called him a rake and idler and knave. And certain there was bad blood in him; wild blood and bad. His father and grandfather had been notorious before him, two ruthless, devil-may-care men who had broken women's hearts

and lives, who had gambled with gold and love and all the stuff of life. Before them his ancestors had sinned and died in many ways—at a rapier's point, by derringer bullet, and two or three had even danced their last waltz from a gibbet for defying the crown. But seldom had one of the Clan Kincaid died peacefully in bed amid lace and candles.

And Donald Fitzalan Kincaid was no different. He was modern, hard, cynical and illusionless, with few scruples and fewer morals, and had a banshee in his soul from the Irishwomen who had helped grow his family tree. God had given him guts and good looks and a stout body that advancing years and careless living had not noticeably marred, and he had come out of two years of war steeped in all the ruthless callousness it bred. Nor had the caravan of succeeding days and months changed him.

He had grown a bit heavier, but it was all brawn and muscle. He did not have to use tonics for the hair or tonics for the liver, despite his reckless, care-free life. He played a fair, if indifferent, game of golf, and was on the board of directors of the San Gabriel Country Club. He donated to civic and charity organizations, danced extremely well, and could be interestingly entertaining when he chose. Bridge he would not play at all, nor would he speak in public. Though popular after a fashion with his townspeople, Don Kincaid's totem was undeniably the wolf.

He was absent from Harristown a great deal of the time. Off hunting, fishing, roaming; prowling forests and mountains. There were few better shots in America either with rifle or revolver than Don Kincaid—few disciples of Izaak Walton more expert with rod and reel.

The walls of his den at *Monte del Sol* and the walls of his cabin on Wild Plum Lake were covered with trophies of rod and chase that attested to his

prowess. "Muskie" and tarpon rubbed noses with bull moose and Yukon white sheep, jaguar and mountain lion.

Yet this threatening March night he was driving along a macadam country pike for a woman, engaged in what he gruntingly told himself was a "wild-goose chase, or a poor joke."

But he was puzzled. Life had been dragging somewhat slow for him of late, and things seemed flat, at a loose end. He needed a good live adventure, some touch-and-go escapade, to sweep away the winter cobwebs and set his blood to spinning. He hadn't gotten much of a kick out of Gina Strozzi's amazing letter, but her urgent cablegram had pricked him into action.

The swastika helmet of *Kapitan* Karl Stendahl's was hanging on a wall at "Out of Bounds" cabin, or had been the last time Don visited the lodge several months past. It had hung there dusty and unmolested, for six or seven years. And now a mystery was centering around it.

Kincaid stepped a little harder on the accelerator as he swept a glance at the heavens. They were overcast now, with not a star visible, and the mutter of thunder had increased to ominous, if yet distant, crashes. Now and then vivid serpents of lightning slashed across the fast rising clouds, and the close-massed woods on either side of the road were still, with the blanket silence of an approaching storm. But two more miles would see him at his destination, and with luck he could still beat the storm back to town.

But luck was not riding his shoulder that night. Just before he turned off the pike into the dark of the woody road that twisted among the dense growth of oak and cedar, plum and laurel, to his cabin a mile beyond, a jagged streak of lightning, holding curiously long, lit up the forest, etching the treetops like witches' brooms against a smut black sky.

And hard on the heels of the crashing thunderclap came a gust of wind, cool and moany, bringing the smell of rain. "Damn!" muttered Don, twisting the wheel and sending his roadster over the stock-gap gateway into the pitchy blackness of the woodland. The road was of dirt, and rough; with rain, it would become slick as glass and gum-mily muddy.

Might as well go ahead now, he thought—he was in for a wetting anyhow. Nobody could dope out Texas weather in March, or any other month for that matter. Why the devil hadn't he listened to Bob Gaines and come in the coupé! Big wet drops were already slanting brightly across the gleam blazed out by his headlights.

Donald Kincaid suddenly jammed on the brakes as his body tautened behind the wheel; with the same motion he retarded the throttle and clicked over the light switch to dim. A tingle of anticipation and excitement prickled along his spine as he stared with swiftly narrowed eyes straight ahead.

For beyond those twin funnels of radiance from his car lamps, beyond the black mass of intervening wind-tossed forest between the roadster and Plum Tree Lake, the slow sweep of another car's lights was dimly reflected above the thrashing treetops, as if some one were turning it around or backing up.

And above the almost inaudible pur of his own motor Don could hear the grind of another engine, dim and faint. Somebody was down there at "Out of Bounds"—some one who assuredly didn't have any business being there. Kincaid's jaw hardened, the left corner of his mouth twitched, and the reddish gleam began to creep into his gray-green eyes again.

Noiselessly he snailed his car forward, feeling his way along the bumpy trail until he came to a little glade in the woods a scant quarter of a mile from the cabin. Turning off into this, he

jockeyed the roadster around nose to the road, switched off the lights, and idled its engine to a bare pur.

The wind was rising and the rain increasing as he set off at a dog trot down the trail, flash light in one pocket, automatic in the other. Big drops stung his face and pelted his back; the vivid flash of lightning and rolling crash of thunder was incessant. He cursed under his breath as he pounded on.

Arrived at the edge of the woods fringing the half moon clearing, he halted a moment, getting his wind and looking over the situation. The log cabin was a bit to his right, some fifty yards from the shore of the lake, and a rocky, fern-banked hollow whose heart held a boiling spring lay just behind it. The spring branch poured its rippling skein into the lake, hard beyond the lodge. And as Kincaid looked, a light came on inside the cabin, a dim, yellowish light shining through the clustering tree boles.

He crept forward warily and obliquely, every muscle tense. And in the constant flashes of lightning he saw two things almost simultaneously. One was a parked car of closed pattern some seventy yards from the hut. The other was the figure of a man walking from the cabin toward that car. A man stumblingly feeling his way and casting the white beam of a pocket torch boldly ahead of him.

Donald Kincaid's feet struck no sound from the sodden forest loam as he sped toward that wavering pencil of light. The ground had been cleared and was fairly smooth, save for here and there shallow gullies and chaparral and thorn bushes. As he was behind, and half flanking, the man with the flash light, it was no trick to slip right up on him from an angle before the fellow was aware of his presence. The storm with its lightning, thunder and sheets of rain made hearing and seeing difficult.

"Stick 'em up, hombre. Grab sky."

At the loud clipped words, sounding out of the night, right behind his back, the fellow froze into immobility. Kincaid's gun was covering him as he came to life and whirled around with a sharp intake of breath. In the blinding flash of lightning, his every feature was sharply etched—hawkish, swarthy face, beady eyes, thin mouth, the livid scar across his chin. Cap pulled low over his forehead, the glistening raincoat close buttoned about his throat.

"Sacramento!"

His oath was drowned by the terrific peal of thunder, and in the ensuing blackness the man's torch snipped off, and he moved with the stealthy speed of a bobcat. His hand flashed to his waist, came up with a sheen of steel in it, and he sidled forward. The white lance of Don Kincaid's flash light caught him full in its focus. He had been carrying it in his left hand.

"Figlio della——"

The snarling imprecation got no farther as he lunged and struck out wildly at the blinding ray with a razor-edged, needle-tipped knife. Kincaid, holding the torch at arm's length and horizontal to his own body, neatly sidestepped, and as the fellow lost footing from his savage slash, brought the barrel of his heavy Luger in a vicious arc solidly against the intruder's head just above the left ear. The man went down on his face without a word, kicked and thrashed a second, then sprawled limp on the spongy earth.

Don bent over him a moment, made sure that he was cold turkey, then ran lightly toward the cabin. The love of combat was in him now; he even forgot that he was soaked to the skin and spattered with mud.

Beware of anybody resembling a European, Gina Strozzi had warned him. Well, that lad back there in the mud was certainly a European, and a scummy one at that. Sicilian or south Italian from appearances. The marchesa must

not have been joking when she posted that amazing letter. And there was another marauder in the cabin, too. It looked like the "other parties" mentioned were wasting no time in going after the tin hat.

Kincaid grinned as he wiped the water from his face. "First blood," he muttered. "Now for number two."

He crept upon the narrow porch and cautiously tried the door. It was locked, of course. They had gotten in by smashing a window, apparently. A minute later this surmise proved to be correct, for as he peered through the jimmied window, into the dim lamplight he made out a shadowy figure on the opposite side of the trophy room. Running to the back of the cabin he inserted a key in the rear door by the kitchen shack, opened it and slid inside. A narrow hall ran between two flanking bedrooms to the main lounge room up front, ending at a closed door. Guided by his flash light, Don was quickly at this door, which he knew to be unlocked. He waited only until another crashing peal of thunder shook the walls to jerk it open and step into the trophy room, torch in left hand, pistol in right.

"Well! Where have *you* been all my life?"

At his ironic question, the intent, rain-coated figure by the table whirled like a dervish, one hand leaping to her mouth and stifling a scream, the fingers of the other gripping a keen-bladed knife until their knuckles gleamed like knobs of ice. A lighted lamp stood on the table, and beside it, lay the swastikaed helmet that once belonged to Karl Stendahl. The woman, for such she was, had been doing something to the helmet with her stiletto.

For as long as it takes a clock to tick five there was silence, deathly and absolute, in the low room with the ax-hewn beams on its ceiling. The lamplight threw the shadows of the man and woman in grotesque silhouette against

the screen of the walls; she, standing motionless as a statue, her face white as chalk, her breast rising and falling spasmodically, her eyes great black, dilated pools. He, looking at her with hard, deliberate eyes, his lean face sardonic, his back against the closed door. The rain drummed on the roof and ticked against the streaming windows; thunder crashed like a field battery in action.

Then with a gasp the woman came to life. In one swift, catlike movement she bent her head and blew out the lamp, leaving the room in instant darkness save for the lurid gleams of lightning that flashed across the windows. The next watch tick Kincaid's torch threw its white beam straight toward her, catching her in its funnel—as quick as it snicked on it snicked off, and Don ducked sidewise, twisting as he crouched and diving forward. He had caught the dull glint of a pistol in her stiffly extended hand. The stab of its flame cut the blackness as a bullet thudded into the wall behind him and the deafening crash shattered through the room.

The next second he had her in his grasp, his own automatic pocketed. It was a struggle in pitch darkness, violent but brief. The woman fought like a wild cat, writhing, twisting, clawing, her breath coming chokily and hot upon his face. She managed to fire again as he caught her right arm in a viselike grip, and the flash almost blinded him. The stiletto in her left hand dug down and slit the side of his coat, cut through his shirt, raked a long scratch across his ribs before with a savage twist of her wrist he sent it clattering to the floor. Holding her left arm firmly and straight down against her side, he felt along her right arm until his fingers touched the desperately clutched pistol.

Her back was against the wall now literally—she could squirm away no farther. His hand slowly crushed the slim fingers wrapped around the pistol

butt, crushed them mercilessly. Her breath came in panting, agonized sobs as she fought desperately to retain her grip on the weapon, beaten but game. Her teeth almost fastened in his cheek—he jerked his head backward just in time. The next second they did fasten fiercely in the flesh just below his left collar bone, biting through his sodden shirt and almost meeting in a fiery ellipse beneath his skin. The stab of swift pain infuriated him, touched off the explosive in him that was difficult to reach.

He exerted his whipcord muscles brutally, and with a sharp scream she let go her tooth hold on his chest and slumped weakly against the wall, the pistol dropping from her paralyzed fingers.

"Now, you murderous little devil! Stand still, damn you!"

Breathing heavily, Kincaid released his grip, fumbled about on the floor and found his torch, and threw its full radiance straight into her face. Panting, disheveled and spent, she leaned weakly against the rough log wall, deathly white and her lips chalky. The fingers of her left hand were mechanically rubbing the numbed wrist and tendons of her right, and her eyes were half closed as if she were about to faint.

Watching her like a lynx, Don re-lighted the lamp and turned up the wick, casting the shadowy room into brighter glow. The helmet still lay on the table, and he picked it up, closely examining it. One of its three sweat pads had been slit, but apparently nothing taken from it, as it felt as bulky as the others. So that was it, eh? He put it down, and looked himself over.

His right side stung and burned from armpit to thigh, and his slashed shirt was red and sticky, but the wound was no worse than a deep scratch. The angry red ellipse on his left chest had tiny drops of blood oozing from its teeth marks. He calmly rebuttoned his

shirt, kicked the woman's pistol and knife far across the room, and faced her.

Her eyes, wide open, now, were regarding him defiantly. Deep, dark blue they were, heavily lashed, below thin, arched eyebrows. And her face, though strained and bloodless, was strangely and hauntingly beautiful, with its perfect features, and full curving lips. Her smart cloche hat had been pushed away in the struggle, disclosing a mass of shingled, red-gold hair, and even the prosaic raincoat could not conceal the graceful, pliantly slender figure, all symmetry and curves. Her small feet were incased in tan fabric zippers.

Don Kincaid, his legs slightly apart, stood before the honeycomb rock fireplace and looked at her with steel-chip eyes that studied and judged her without pretense that they were not studying or judging. They did not miss a single feature or detail of her—it was a deliberate ticketing. She flushed slightly under the brutal frankness of his scrutiny, but returned it fearlessly, her eyes hardening, mouth straightening.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" he demanded shortly.

Her glance darted swiftly about the room, came back to him. "Is this your house?" she retorted in a low, breathless voice. Perfect English, with just a bare trace of accent.

"It damned sure is, sister. And you and your boy friend outside burgled in. What's the big idea?"

She started. "My boy friend—outside—Where—where is he?"

Kincaid laughed harshly. "Gone by-by. You needn't count on him. He may be drowned now for all I know. Or give a curse."

She placed both hands over her breast as if to quiet its rapid breathing, torturing her lower lip between white teeth. Her eyes flashed out like daggers at the mocking, sardonic eyes of the man taunting her. The whisper of rain upon the

roof quickened, swelled into a roar as another fierce shower swept through the woods.

"You have killed him?" she asked at last, a little throaty catch in her voice.

"Possibly. But you haven't answered my questions, sister. What did you break in here for, and what were you doing with that helmet?"

The voice, as hard and cold as his eyes, roused her. She straightened, gave him a long, narrow look, calculating and inscrutable. "I think you know why I came, also what I was doing with the helmet."

Her voice was low, but calm now. A low contralto. She quit massaging her right wrist, but still worked the fingers of that hand painfully.

Kincaid laughed again, a short bark. "Then you think wrong. What's your name? You're not an American."

The girl's shoulder rose and fell. She didn't reply. Only her eyes took him in slowly, speculatively, inch by inch, from the crown of his tawny wet hair to the soles of his mud-caked shoes. Kincaid shook a cigarette from a packet, snapped his lighter into flame and touched it to the cylinder of tobacco.

"All right, sister," he said, exhaling smoke from mouth and nose. "Suit yourself. Maybe you'd rather tell it to the police at the city hall. Alla same to me. Let's go."

She caught her breath as she might have if a rapier point had pricked her near the heart.

"Police!" she gasped. "*Herr Gott!*" Her dilated eyes fastened upon his merciless ones. "Don't—don't give me to the police, *please!* I'm—I'm not a thief."

"No? Then what the devil do you call yourself?"

The girl looked at Karl Stendahl's helmet. "You know," she said in a low voice. Her eyes were harebell blue prayers in her white face.

Donald Kincaid, who had no intention

of turning either her or the man outside over to the authorities, blew out a long, pale cloud of tobacco smoke toward the lamp. He stepped over and picked up the helmet, looped its chin strap in the crook of his right arm. It wouldn't do to linger too long—that rat-faced Latin might come to life at any time now and dry-gulch him. So he grinned crookedly and said:

"I'll just take you along with me, dear lady. Let's be moving while this shower has eased up a bit."

"I—I don't care to go with you," she said uncertainly, her lips tight. She made no motion to move away from the wall.

"Dammit, do you want me to carry you?" he asked savagely. "If you don't come peaceably, by God, I'll do it! You hear?"

She turned a slow red, stared furious eyes at the set of his shoulders, at the angle of his jaw and the neck, at the reddish lights in his eyes, then let her arms fall at her sides in a weary, helpless gesture.

"You need not trouble," she said with that little throaty catch of her breath. "I'll come."

"Sense talks there," said Kincaid tersely. "And no tricks, sister. I don't trust you as far as I can spit. If I have to manhandle you—well, I will. Better remember that before you try to start anything."

He felt over her quickly for a weapon, caught her right wrist in his left hand, took the pocket torch in his right, glanced at the jimmied window a second, then blew out the lamp. Holding the beams of his flash ahead, they left the room, passed down the hall and stepped out into the clearing, Kincaid closing and locking the door behind them.

For a moment he listened, but heard no sound from the direction of the parked coupé or from the fellow he had knocked out. He chuckled shortly, but

knew that his blow hadn't put the Italian to sleep for long, not in this rainstorm it hadn't.

The girl said nothing as they traversed the wet-matted weeds through the rough clearing, nor did she hang back. The rain had slacked considerably but a cold drizzle still beat down on the keening wind, which was steadily rising. Miniature showers pelted down from the tree branches as they brushed them in slogging through the clingy mud, and Don Kincaid was getting cold, soaked to the bone as he was.

The woman, closely wrapped in her slicker, kept dry, but exclaimed in annoyed whispers now and then as her foot struck a stump or squished into a mud puddle. They arrived at the little glade without mishap, where the car's engine was still purring smoothly.

"In you go, milady," said Kincaid, opening the door. "The seat's wet, but you have a raincoat. Anyhow, it won't be long now."

She hesitated, foot on the running board. "Where are you taking me?" she asked in a low, tense voice. "Can't you play fairly and not give me to the police?"

"Get in," said Don again, giving her a little push. "I haven't time to argue. You break into my house, try to murder me, refuse to talk, and then ask me not to turn you in. Outside of that, sister"—he placed the helmet securely against the driver's seat, on the far side of the girl, and climbed aboard—"outside of that, you're all right."

The gears rasped and the powerful, long-hooded roadster sprang out into the rivulet-scored road, skating and skidding and spinning. Kincaid swore—the girl sat still and said nothing. No word was spoken until the dark gut of muddy wood road was negotiated and they swung at right angles into the hard surfaced turnpike leading to Harris-town. Don laughed as his foot bore down on the accelerator.

"Still going to be contrary and not talk?" he asked pleasantly. "Anything you say can be used against you, y'know."

The girl, huddled into her raincoat, was silent a moment, then: "What do you wish to know?" Her words and voice were cool, indifferent.

"Your name, for one thing?"

"Does it matter? Still, to escape the police, I am called Stephanie."

"Pretty name—what there is of it. And that bravo I knocked in the head back yonder? Who's he? Your husband or boy friend or rich uncle?"

"Oh!" Don heard her catch her breath. "You are detestable, abominable!" She flung the words at him furiously. "I will tell you nothing more, devil that you are!"

"No?" Don was unperturbed, albeit a bit surprised at the outburst. "Then you'll do a hell of a lot of telling to the honorable chief of gendarmes *tout-de-suite*, dear lady. What's 'Scar-Chin's' cognomen in the family Bible?"

"*Verdamnt Boche!*" said the girl between her teeth. "You will be killed for this, fool! I trust that you will be! The one you have hit in the head, as you say, is known as Baroffio. And he will not forget."

"I dare say he won't," grinned Don. "It wasn't exactly a love tap that I handed him. No matter about that. What about that helmet?"

She did not answer for some moments, but set very still, staring straight ahead into the twin tunnels of the headlights. To the right of the road the blazing windows of the San Gabriel Country Club shone through the screen of brush and shrubbery beyond the golf links—Don remembered somebody was giving a dance there that night. To the left, tree-blanketed hills and hollows crowded the pike closely, black and sinister looking in the drizzle. The girl shivered slightly, clasped her hands in her lap.

"Why do you ask me about the helmet?" she said in a low, almost inaudible voice. "*You know.* For the Marchesa della Serravalle has told you."

"What the hell!"

Donald Kincaid was taken off guard, and so startled by her words that he almost forgot to slow down for a tricky curve. He held the speeding roadster in hand with difficulty, and its slithering antics on the slick, glassy road drew a muffled scream from his companion. What the hell, indeed! What did this good-looking girl know of Gina Strozzi, or of her recent communications with him? There was something damned funny going on in Denmark, and he didn't know the half of it.

The girl glanced obliquely at his profile, a sarcastic comment on her lips in regard to his driving. But the steely set of his jaw and slit of his eyes locked it behind her teeth, and she stirred uneasily and looked away.

"We are going some place and talk, you and I, sister," said Donald Fitzalan Kincaid very grimly. "And by talk—*I mean talk!*"

He swung his car abruptly eastward and raced onto that broad paved street that led up to the exclusive residential *mesa* above Harristown called Ridgefield Heights, nor did he offer to speak again en route.

CHAPTER III.

STEEL MEETS STEEL.

THE roadster braked up on the radial driveway beneath the loggia portecochère of Monte del Sol, and Kincaid cut the ignition key. Water dripped from tiles and vines; a loud speaker blared in a house a block away. Don tucked the helmet beneath his arm and slid to the flagstones, walking around the hood to open the door for his companion. But she had already stepped to the ground and stood waiting, eying him obliquely beneath curling lashes.

"This way."

He opened the side door, which was unlocked, stepped back and bowed her in mockingly. Without a glance at him she entered, drawing the raincoat tightly about her body. Down the hallway to the den they walked in silence, the girl looking straight ahead and treading with light, sinuous steps.

Bob Gaines, his copper-colored face inscrutable, came from the rear of the house and halted in the doorway of the den. Kincaid punched on the light switch, flooding the warm room in soft radiance, and poked at the fire with a wet, muddy shoe. A big rough-barked oak log on the hearth broke into snapping flame.

"Glasses, Bob."

Don spoke without turning, taking off his sodden coat meanwhile and hanging it on the back of a chair. He replaced the pistol in the desk. The girl stood motionless by the fireplace, her hands held out slightly to the blaze, hooded blue eyes watching the man with a furtive intentness. She had not spoken a word for ten minutes.

The Indian-Negro returned noiselessly with two glasses and a carafe of water, placed them on the carved buffet, put a crackly cedar stick upon the fire, and stepped to the door, standing straight as an arrow.

"Anything else, sir?"

"No."

Bob Gaines vanished as noiselessly as he came. Don Kincaid picked up the helmet from the table, walked over to a huge, age-blackened Spanish chest against the wall, opened it and placed the "coal scuttle" inside. He turned the key in the lock and put the key in his pocket, glancing at the girl with a thin, malicious smile. She flushed slightly, and insolently turned her back upon him.

"Take off your coat," he said amiably, "and dry out. Also have a drink. A shot of this ought to put you right."

He walked to the buffet, drew out the long black bottle of Bacardi and filled both glasses. The girl made no motion to take off her raincoat, or to move away from the fireplace. As he looked at her she shook her head slightly.

"Still the damned stubborn Lady Dick Turpin, eh?" he sighed. "Do I have to *make* you mind?" Don stepped up close to her, with only the spread of a Bengal tiger rug between them, and her eyelids fluttered nervously at the expression on his face, although her gaze did not fall. She stood straight and slim and defiant.

"Take that wet rag off, lady," he ordered tersely. "I'm not kidding."

For a moment she gave him look for look, then: "*Gott!* How I *hate* you!" she burst out passionately. "You—you *teufel!* *Ach!*"

With a deft motion she ripped off the glistening, smoking raincoat and cast it on a chair, jerked off her sodden cloche and hurled it after the slicker. Kincaid, watching with a crooked smile on one side of his face, nodded abruptly. With an ironic bow he tendered her a glass of Bacardi, his gray-green eyes drilling into hers.

"To our better acquaintance, dear lady," he said, a note of derisive badinage edging his voice. Straight and still she stood, her red-gold head held high, twin flames burning in her eyes. She looked more like a picture painted by an artist than a flesh-and-blood woman, motionless there, outlined by the fireglow, her form a model of slender grace and intriguing curves. Don Kincaid studied her with slow deliberateness, from face to boots and back again.

He tilted his glass to her, drank. Drank slowly until the wineglass was empty. The girl who called herself Stephanie barely tasted the rum, walked over and placed her glass on the table. Don, following suit, switched on a desk

light that had once been a mosque lamp in Samarkand, picked up a beaten brass humidor of cigarettes and offered her one. Again she refused with a shake of her head, no. He exhaled heavily through his nose, looked at her over the flame of the *briquet* that he touched to his cigarette, and said:

"We'd best get the unpleasantness over with, sister. You refuse to talk, you're acting up, and I'm not sure but what you're holding out on me. Suppose you tell me what you took out of that helmet?"

Malice glittered in her eyes, and color heightened in her cheeks, but she said nothing.

"What are you?"

No answer. Instead she tossed her head and walked back to the fire, turned, and faced him. Defiance and cold, angry contempt were stamped on her every feature. Donald Kincaid, his own face suddenly set and hard, his eyes like a half scabbarded blade, crushed out his cigarette in a Mexican sombrero clay ash tray. A forked vein began to swell in his forehead.

"All right," he said, with barely controlled passion. "You asked for it. Now, by God, you're going to get it! I'm not playing the sap for you."

In three long steps he was across the tiger rug, had grasped her by the wrist. Her suddenly dilated eyes were coal black in the stricken color of her cheeks, and her features seemed frozen. She tried to fight, to retreat, to break away, but he held her in a merciless grip. Pulled her out of the den, down the hall, into his bedroom. Panting, breathless, panicky and infuriated, she gazed about wildly. A scream tore from her lips.

"Don't——" she choked, battling desperately against him. Please——"

"Where is the thing you took out of that helmet?" he demanded furiously.

"I—I took nothing!" she stammered, her eyes murderous fires.

The left corner of his mouth twitched.

"Don't lie to me, you damned little thief. There's the bathroom"—with a sidewise jerk of his head toward its half-open door. "And you're going in there and take off every stitch of your clothes, then toss 'em out to me. We'll see who's left holding the sack in this night's work."

The last faint vestige of color drained from her lips—her eyes stared into his, incredulous. "I—I won't," she gasped.

"Very well. Then I'll do it for you. And have no more compunction in doing it than I'd have in shucking an ear of corn."

The trapped girl suddenly surrendered. She knew this tawny headed American would do exactly as he threatened—he had not the slightest respect for her or her person. She put her free hand to the throat of her coat suit blouse that his fingers had unfastened, and the devil himself looked from her lash-veiled eyes.

"Wait!" she panted. "Don't! I'll give you my clothes. But—but I took nothing! Can't you believe me? Do I look like a *thief*?"

Kincaid laughed harshly. "That's one for the book. Did you ever know a high-class crook that looked the part?"

"Oh! You fool, devil, beast——"

The exclamation ended in a half-smothered sob as Kincaid pushed her into the tiled bathroom with its lavish furnishings—green tub and lavatory, shiny whites and silvers, soft lights. He opened the medicine cabinet, took out a bottle of antiseptic, picked up a towel and soaked it under the hot-water faucet, threw a second dry towel across his arm. At the door he turned to the white-faced girl.

"No need trying to lock yourself in," he said dryly. "I have a key."

Donald Kincaid went into the bedroom, calmly stripped off his sodden, bloodstained clothing and rubbed himself down briskly with the rough Turk-

ish towel. He carefully bathed the wound on his ribs and painted it with the "monkey blood"; it was just a deep scratch, but hot and soggy nevertheless.

The angry red ellipse on his chest, where her teeth had punctured it, was down-veined with tiny drops of blood. This also he daubed with antiseptic, then pulled on pants, socks and shoes over armless and legless underwear, and donned a heavy wool sweater coat over his undershirt. He lighted another cigarette, and walked over to the pile of clothes lying just outside the bathroom door.

He picked up each piece and examined it with fingers as well as his eyes. There was no sign of papers, or anything else. When he had finished, he stood up, holding a tan-and-black plaid bath robe in his hand, and his knuckles beat a soft tattoo upon the door.

"O. K., sister. Now poke your head around the corner."

A little movement inside, and the red-gold hair and stormy eyes appeared at the edge of the jamb. Don tendered the bath robe. "Put this on toot-sweet and open the door. Hurry."

His voice was impersonal, calm. The girl called Stephanie reached out a white arm, took the robe, drew a deep, quivering breath, and a moment later opened the door and stood swathed in its folds, her face tense and pale. Don stepped up to her, ran his fingers deftly through the masses of her glinting red-gold hair, felt in the pockets of the robe, knelt and examined her small, shapely feet.

He got to his feet, faced her. "Now open your mouth, please. So." His fingers touched her lips as he bent closer and turned her face to the light. "And don't bite," he added. "I carry one little souvenir of your so perfect molars already, and that's plenty."

After a moment he stepped back. "O. K. yet. You can dress in a minute."

He looked in the bathroom—medicine

chest, tub, shower, everywhere. Poked and probed into every nook and cranny that might be a possible hiding place for a scrap of paper or small object. And all the while the girl watched him with a scornful, slightly amused expression, hands resting lightly on her shapely, slender hips.

Finished, he grinned wryly at her, nodded, picked up her clothes and handed them to her. "Sorry," he said shortly. "But I had to know."

She closed the door with an inscrutable, malicious look at him. Don sat on the foot of his bed, a cigarette burning away between his fingers, his gray-green eyes staring unseeingly at a bronze figurine table lamp near by. There was nothing in her belongings giving a clew about her. And so he sat until the bathroom door opened and the girl came out, powdered and rouged and lipsticked, her red lips curled in a mocking quirk.

Quite surprisingly she said, "If you don't mind, I'll finish my glass of rum and accept that cigarette now, Signor Americano. Then, if you are quite satisfied, I shall take my departure."

"Don't be in such a hurry," he amended coolly. "There are several things we must speak of yet. I'm going to find out the honest-to-God on all this."

She laughed shortly, shrugged, picked up her glass of Bacardi. Waited until Don had filled his own, then drank, her eyes mocking his above the crystal rim. She seemed a different person from the chalky-faced girl of a half hour ago; different from the savage wild cat who had tried to murder him at the cabin. She was perfectly in command of herself now, and regarded him with a cool, measuring irony.

Don held a match to the tip of her cigarette, then abruptly led the way into the kitchen and switched on the lights. He filled the percolator with water and coffee, plugged in the current, went to the electric refrigerator. "Dishes are

over there," he told the girl, with a wave of his hand toward a built-in cabin.

She looked at him a moment, then began setting plates and cups, knives and forks and spoons on the kitchen table. Don was whistling between his teeth as he placed a loaf of crusty French bread well sprinkled with poppy seed, a link of liverwurst, a triangle of Switzerland cheese, and a plate of dill pickles on the table; the girl, in turn, was humming lightly under her breath as she arranged sugar and cream, salt, pepper and mustard. Parroting him in nonchalant indifference. The tangy aroma of rich coffee began to scent the room. Their eyes, meeting, held; then instinctively both smiled.

"You are rather a breath-taking person," she said calmly. "Even if you are a very great fool."

"So?" Don surveyed her a bit warily. He was puzzled by this change of front, but he was far from believing that any good was meant toward him by it. "We're all fools at times, sister," he finished. "You were a damned big one when you shot at me to-night. Suppose I'd been as big a one and cut down on you in the *mêlée*?"

She was silent a second, toying with a button on her coat, looking at him curiously. "You were armed?"

"Of course. With a nine-shot automatic. And you'd better thank whatever gods you don't pray to that I didn't pull trigger. You would be deadlier than Moses right now, my blood-thirsty young friend."

The girl shrugged, laughed lightly—a tinkly laugh as fearless of danger or its consequences as the light in her eyes was brave and daring. She came up close to Don, who stood near the range, and looked him straight in the eyes, said quietly:

"I might as well tell you right now that what you've been stupid enough to do to-night is going to cost you your life. Listen! I know nothing about

you, Mister Kincaid, save your name, and that you are a wealthy person. All of which is beside the point."

Don Kincaid's thoughts were gyrating swiftly, but he kept his astoundment and surprise well hidden behind the poker mask of his face. Who, in the name of seven devils, was this who knew so much, anyhow? Why the complete reversal of form after he had subdued and humiliated her? Why this cool, ironical, half-mocking and half-sincere humor? Some canny intuition warned him to hold his tongue and be on guard, so he only stared sardonically at her and remarked:

"So you know my name and *dossier*? Maybe you've found out then that I was weaned on *cholla cactus*."

The girl made an impatient gesture; frowned. "Listen again," she said in the same pleasant, even voice. "I am speaking in all frankness now, Mr. Kincaid. You make a terrible mistake to involve yourself in the affair of that Austrian helmet. It is a dangerous and stupid thing that you have done to-night—a thing that will certainly cost you your life unless you wash your hands of it. You do not know, realize or understand its significance, evidently; certainly you are not interested in it from a personal point of view. You couldn't be."

Don Kincaid grinned, showing an eye-tooth and eyed her askance. This girl was rank poison—as clever as a cobra and as devilishly dangerous. His voice was blunt as he answered:

"I wasn't interested in the damned tin hat until to-night. But friends of mine were."

The girl's lips curved in a sneer as her eyes watched his face with a flaming intentness. "La Marchesa della Seravalle. I know. Much could I tell of her, and others. A woman capable of any sort of intrigue and trickery; caring not for the rights, property or lives of others. Of course she asked you to get

the helmet for her; to keep it until she got her grasping hands upon it. I guessed, but was not certain. Now I know."

She drew a long breath, came closer and placed a light hand on the bewildered Don's arm. "Why should you involve yourself, you, an American, in a matter that is no concern of yours?" she went on earnestly. "I am more serious than I ever was in my life, Mr. Kincaid. Do not let yourself be drawn further into this affair. Listen. I have no personal feeling of anger for you—not now. You offered me violence; you behaved brutally, savagely, most indecently. And I hated you for it. But I want you to understand that no petty personal grudge prompts what I say. The wrong you have done me is nothing—the wrong you threaten to do certain persons by carrying out the request of the marchesa is very great and grave and unjust. Vicious and damnable and ruinous, even. I ask you to believe that I speak the truth. Won't you give me the helmet, let me go, and forget this night?"

Donald Kincaid laughed harshly.

"What a long tail our cat has!" he jeered, just a trifle hoarsely. He imprisoned the hand on his sweater sleeve with hot fingers. "Tell me"—and his voice was steady now, even a bit amused—"how did you know the helmet Karl Stendahl gave me was out at Plum Tree Lake?"

The girl drew her hand away, looked at him levelly. "Your sense of humor seems a trifle perverted," she replied coldly. "I shall say no more. Yet, I don't mind telling you that I knew the helmet of Karl Stendahl's was likely out there at your cabin because it was not here."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Don. "Y'mean to tell me you looked through this house?"

"Of a certainty," she said coolly. "Not I, but some one else."

"Who? When?"

She laughed at him, shrugged, walked away a few steps, her eyes upon the floor. Don stared at her narrowly, a cold, fixed stare. The coffee and sandwiches were forgotten, now. So they had gone through *Monte del Sol*, eh? And somehow got the low-down on himself. Knew all about Gina Strozzi, and Stendahl's helmet. What, in the name of God, was it all about? He didn't like this idea of going it blind, not for the marchesa or anybody else—didn't like it a damned bit.

"What's in that helmet that you and the Serravalle want?" he grated out suddenly, stepping in front of her and tilting up her face with a none-too-gentle hand under its chin. The girl drew back quickly.

"Keep your hands off of me!" she said angrily, flinging his arm aside. Resentment and bitterness made twin glints in her hot eyes. "Ask your friend, the marchesa, to tell you—if she dares—you are in her employ and confidence, apparently. *Lieber Gott!* But you are a fool, American! Utterly the fool to meddle in this mad thing. Your life is worth less than a copper *centesimo* every second you have that helmet in your keeping!"

Donald Kincaid's mouth snapped shut behind an oath. Anger knouted him suddenly with a stinging cat-o'-nine. "Understand this, once and for all," he said savagely between his teeth. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this affair, despite hell and high water. I'm not taking your word, or the marchesa's, or anybody's; not believing any fairy tales or hokum; not cashing a single check for strangers. That tin hat is mine—*mine*—you compray? What the hell business have you and your mob trying to swipe it, burglarizing one house and snooping through another? Damn it, I ought to turn the whole kit and posse of you over to the police——"

The girl, who had been half turned

from him during the tirade, suddenly stiffened as if an electric current had entered her body. One hand flew to her face, she caught her breath, her eyes dilated as their stare froze on the window beyond Don's left shoulder. His own gaze whipped there like a glancing snake's, and as swiftly as sparks leap when a flint strikes steel, he slithered sidewise, ducked and pressed the light switch, instantly flooding the kitchen in darkness as black as the inside of the devil's boot.

Almost simultaneous with the act a red tongue of flame lanced the blackness outside the window, and the loud, dry crack of a pistol ripped through the silence. Glass tinkled from the broken panes, and a bullet zipped across the room and thudded into the wall, chipping and mushrooming bits of plaster. A bare second earlier, and Don Kincaid would have stopped it.

With a furious curse he lunged for the kitchen door. He wrenched the knob, flung open the door, and a second bullet splintered the woodwork a bare foot from his face. Though roweled with anger, Don was not a fool. He had left his pistol in the den, and it would be rank suicide to tackle the bushwhacker unarmed. He slammed the door shut, and ran toward the den.

He had had an instant's vision of Bob Gaines coming down the steps of his quarters over the garage out rear on the run just before he closed the door—as he wrenched open the desk drawer and jerked out his Luger he heard another barking pistol crack—the crack of the Indian-Negro's Colt automatic.

Don ran down the hall, out the front door, into the rain-wet yard. The roar of a starting motor a block down the street came to his ears; gears snarled and the engine raced. It tore off like a streak, turned a corner and disappeared. Don stealthily circled the house, pistol in hand, found nothing, and began searching the grounds. Bob

Gaines came back, walking from the direction where the car had started, his pistol also in hand.

"Missed him, Mr. Don," he said ruefully. "You hurt none?"

"Uh-huh. He fanned my ears a couple of times, though. See him plain?"

"No, sir. Seen him shoot the last time, then he run. He was duckin' and dodgin' so through the yard I couldn't get no bead on him. But his hip pocket was dippin' up sand when he turned the corner, he was runnin' so fast."

"Well, I saw him," said Don grimly. "If you run across a ferret-faced dago with Gila monster eyes and a scar across his chin, weighing about a hundred and fifty, tie onto him. He's the gorilla."

"Sho' will," said Bob Gaines. "What's this here all about, Mr. Don? Somethin' I oughta know, or not?"

"Well, if you can make heads or tails of it, it's more than I can. Let's give the grounds another once-over."

While they made a careful search, Don rapidly acquainted his major-domo with the night's escapades, Bob Gaines replying with grunts and low ejaculations. Don would trust the coppery Indian-Negro with his life or property or confidences any time, and had for years. But their ferreting about the grounds of Monte del Sol was fruitless. They returned to the house, locking the door behind them.

All was silence inside. Kincaid called out to the girl, but there was no answer. He went back to the kitchen, switched on the lights, looked about. The coffee still bubbled in the percolator, the lunch stood untouched on the table. The shattered windowpane let in a breath of rain-washed wind, and a hole with a spider-web crack around it was on the wall, fragments of plaster scattered on the floor beneath it. There was no sign of the girl.

With a crooked smile on one side of his face, Don Kincaid along with Bob

Gaines searched the house from den to cellar, missing not a closet or cubbyhole. But the girl who called herself Stephanie was not to be found—she had apparently vanished into thin air.

"Well, that's that."

Kincaid exhaled his breath noisily, and liberally laced his cup of steaming black Java with brandy. Of course the girl could have slipped out during the mêlée, or while he was in the grounds, but why hadn't he seen her? Her hat and raincoat were gone, too. Upon noting that, Don had hastily looked inside the Spanish chest, but found the helmet untouched. She had made a keen, clever get-away, all right. Smart.

Well, he would know that scar-chinned wop if he ever saw him again. That ugly face in the light of the window, with a leveled gat in front of it, its business end trained on himself, and a pair of beady eyes behind it that glittered with venom, would long remain stamped on his memory. Kincaid was obligated to the girl, after a fashion, for warning him; if she hadn't cried out just when she did, he would have furnished a flush bull's-eye, for the guinea wasn't half bad with a rod. That bullet in the door had fairly fanned his face.

"You watch, Bob," Don said shortly. "I don't want any more visitors bothering me for a while."

As the Indian-Negro slid out the back door Don walked to the den, poured out a glassful of Bacardi and drank it slowly. He poked up the fire, drew all the curtains and shades to the windows, locked the hall door. He turned off all the lights save the one on his desk that had once been a mosque lamp in Samarkand. Then he unlocked the Spanish chest, took out the helmet, placed it on the table and sat down in the chair before it.

For a long moment he looked at it narrowly, not touching it. Just a commonplace Boche officer's tin hat, weath-

ered to a light chocolate color, its bizarre patterns of ring-streaked-and-striped camouflaged faded and smudged. The two red swastikas stood out in plain relief, one on the front and one on the right side, and there was a round, smooth screw on its top in place of the customary parade spike. Low on the front was a sharp dent, as if a piece of shrapnel had glanced off of it.

Don reached out and turned it over, looking inside. A light iron band circled it, bradded to the helmet front and back and dotted with evenly spaced holes. To this was attached two brackets holding an adjustable canvas chin strap, which was almost black with sweat and dirt.

Also to this iron hoop were attached three shock pads—one in front of the chin strap, and two behind, the trio in the shape of a rough triangle, and adjustable by a stout string running through holes in the tops of each.

Don felt these pads, examined their exteriors closely. They were a sort of "U" shaped contraption of leatherette, dark chocolate in color. Sewed onto them, so the head could rest against it, were three stiff pads of cotton cloth, white in color, with thin black and blue horizontal stripes, stuffed with some hard material and their flaps sewed down.

One of these had been slit by the girl in the cabin, and Don pried into the cut. The pad was stuffed with horsehair, and bore the number 57 stamped upon it in blue ink. The cloth drawstring used to tighten the pad was untied.

Don reached in a desk drawer and drew out a thin, razor-keen pocketknife. Very carefully he slit the pad along its seam, opened the lips and poked an investigating finger into the close-packed horsehair.

When he had a good purchase upon the fadded mass with thumb and finger he drew it out and placed it carefully on the table. A bit at a time he separated

it, raveling it between his fingers. There was nothing in it but horsehair. Nor was there anything in the empty cloth jacket of the head pad.

"A water haul, there."

He grinned wryly, scratched the back of his neck with a forefinger, lit another cigarette. Certain the girl hadn't taken anything from it, because the hair hadn't been unpacked. That was the left-side pad. There were two more. Don Kincaid started on the front one.

Again the stamped serial number 57 under the flap. A careful operation, a minute's poking, and again the wad of hair came out tight-packed.

But this time, rolled up in a neat cylinder and bound with strands of stout hair, a piece of darkened paper appeared, bedded deep in its hirsute casket. Donald Kincaid worked it free, placed it on the table and drew a deep, long breath, his heart picking up in tempo.

The third and last pad, on the right side, brought to light a second cube of paper almost identical to the first except that it was larger. Carefully remolding and replacing the horsehair in their cotton coverings, Kincaid shoved the helmet to one side, picked up the first cylinder and with a light touch of his knife severed the hair bindings. Slowly and carefully he unrolled the scroll.

He was looking at a piece of paper that resembled parchment, so crinkly and dark stained it was, and some three by four and one half inches in size. It was closely covered by German lettering and written in the same language, neat, tiny and precise, with several pot hooks and hangers appearing among the words. One almost needed a magnifying glass to make out the faint, tiny lettering.

Kincaid swore under his breath. He could neither read nor speak German; the writing was that much Greek to him. It must be something damned important, however, he reflected grimly—important enough for people to attempt murder to get hold of.

Luckily for him, and unluckily for the girl Stephanie, she had cut into the empty pad first, out at the cabin. Certainly nothing had been taken from it, and he had likely interrupted her before she had a chance to feel in the horsehair.

The larger cylinder disclosed an incomprehensible map drawn on the same sort of paper. A strange map with little squares on all four corners and figures drawn in them—on the upper left a black double-eagle; upper right a coat of arms; lower left the figure of a running black wolf; lower right a fuzzy white flower that appeared to be an edelweiss, growing in an urn-shaped cup.

Don Kincaid stared at it bewilderedly, unable to make heads or tails of the thing. He stared at it for a long five minutes, not moving, finger and thumb pinching his lower lip, his eyes narrowed intently.

Bergamo and Brescia and Lombardy—he understood that. Also the Val Camonica, where that savage fighting in the late October of '18 had taken place. That was where he made the acquaintance of Karl Stendahl, and the dying Austrian had forced the helmet upon him, asking that he always keep it.

But the remainder of the map was a puzzle. The two subdrawings marked A and B; the figures of the eagle, the chamois and the snake; the crude masses of mountains, the spots and places marked in smudged red ink. And the four drawings in the corner squares—what of them?

Don plowed his hair with restless fingers. The key, the legend to the map lay in the other paper, of course. He glanced at his watch, got up and went to the telephone sitting on a dark taboret with horn legs, picked up the directory and searched for a number. The hour lacked eight minutes of twelve o'clock, midnight.

He took the receiver from its prong. "Haskell 851530, please."

For a full minute he waited, pulling on his cigarette and blowing smoke down the front of his sweater coat. "Hello—I want to speak to Professor Bohmer, please. Yes, Professor Bohmer; it is important—very—thanks."

"Hello, Doctor Bohmer? This is Donald Kincaid speaking. No—*Kincaid*. Right. I've something very urgent and very important I wish to consult you about. I'm sending my car around for you in fifteen minutes. Will you dress and be ready?"

"Certainly I can't wait until tomorrow, or I wouldn't have called. Hold on a minute—don't start to grouching. I know it's midnight, and all that—but as I remember, the university is starting a drive for a new library right away—isn't that correct? Thought so. Well, I'll make it well worth *your* while, also the university's, if you are all set to take a ride in fifteen minutes. Thanks a lot. Cheerio."

Don stepped out on the porch, and whistled a curious two-note trill between his teeth. A moment later Bob Gaines appeared noiselessly around the house.

"Put up the La Salle, Bob, and get the coupé," he said shortly. "Go to No. 1008 University Avenue, and pick up Professor Ludwig Bohmer. And bring him here without plucking any daisies along the way."

"Yes, sir." Bob Gaines snaked behind the wheel of the La Salle, stepped on the starter, grated the gears and slid garageward.

Kincaid went back into the house, relocked the front door, and returned to his den. He put the helmet back in the Spanish chest, thrust the map into a drawer of the desk, weighted the segment of close-written paper down with the edge of the lamp, and glanced along the surface of the table. He started, opened three drawers rapidly, peering inside, and slowly closed them. Then leaned back in his chair with a gritted curse on his lips.

The letter and the cablegram from Gina Strozzi, which he had left on the desk weighted down with the chunk of gold quartz, were gone.

The girl, of course. She had seen them earlier in the evening, and when she got her raincoat and cloche before her get-away in the racket, had pocketed them. Kincaid swore viciously at himself for being dumb enough to leave them in plain sight—but the milk was spilled, now. No use crying over it. She and Scar Chin knew plenty, right now, and were in a position to cause him plenty of trouble. He heard the coupé driven by Bob Gaines go scudding through the grounds, and a thin, sneering smile twisted his lips.

"You're bright, you are, buddy!" he gritted, calling himself a number of names no other man would dare to. "You're the original John D. Sap himself."

He tilted back in his chair, fingers locked behind his head, feet resting on the table, and stared at the ceiling with half-closed eyes. And he was still in the same position when a car hummed

up the driveway and braked to a stop beneath the loggia some twenty-five minutes later.

"Well, God bless my soul!"

Professor Ludwig Bohmer, instructor of Germanic language at the university, took off his glasses and turned myopic, owlish eyes upon Don Kincaid, who sat in a chair at his elbow. The doctor, tall, thin, knifelike, and subject to tuberculosis, wiped his brow with a handkerchief, coughed hackingly, and again picked up the slip of parchmentlike paper.

"May I ask where you got hold of this, Mr. Kincaid?"

Don nodded through the haze of tobacco smoke. "Found it in some papers I was going through. An Austrian officer over in the Italian campaign in '18 had it, and I got possession, somehow or other. I was curious to know what it was before I burned it."

Professor Bohmer again swabbed his face with the handkerchief and chewed on the stem of his black pipe.

"This is most extraordinary!" he exclaimed at last.

TO BE CONTINUED.



CONCERNING SENATORIAL HEALTH

AMONG the dignified and sapient senators of the United States the death rate is high, chiefly because most of them, being past middle age, work hard and take little or no precaution to preserve their strength and health. An exception to this rule is William E. Borah, of Idaho, the statesman with massive shoulders, barrellike chest, and stentorian voice.

Washingtonians know that he makes it a rule to get out early every morning for a horseback ride in Rock Creek Park or along the bridle paths beside the Potomac River, but few are aware that the ride is preceded by an elaborate system of what the army calls "setting-up exercises." Moreover, Mr. Borah does not use tobacco in any form, abstains from coffee and tea, and does not know what alcoholic stimulants taste like.

Neither golf nor bridge tempts him. He goes in for no competitive sport. But he tops off his long hard-working day in the Senate with hours of study in the evening. Whenever he takes the floor for a speech, his colleagues know in advance that he has a thorough grasp of his subject.



General Rafael de Nogales

*Who Has Lived to Tell the Tale
Oftener Than Any Other Man,
Recalls Here One Hair-raising*

JUNGLE NIGHT

A PLATOON of Venezuelan mounted infantry was following on my heels. I had given them the slip by setting the savannas on fire, leaving behind me a giant barrier of writhing, roaring flames which forced my pursuers to run for their lives, and duck into a shallow lagoon or one of the many sloughs or tributaries of the Ily River.

As soon as I had finished my incendiary job I had taken to the woods or, rather, I had hastened toward a wide fringe of Gramalote grass which skirted the left bank of the Arauca River like a broad, emerald-hued ribbon.

This strip was a paradise for snakes; but it was also inhabited by myriads of alligators of various shades and all sizes, as well as by the big spotted panpas jaguars which were the terror of the surrounding cattle ranches. In the "Tigre" ranch, for instance, over eighty jaguars were reported killed during the first two years after the ranch had been started.

The jaguars usually remained in the grassy marshlands until nightfall, when hunger finally drove them forth, roaring and growling, in search of a "kill," or until a band of marauding Goajibo Indians set the tall grass on fire, or made them lie sprawling and clawing in the sand with their beautiful spotted pelts pierced by dozens of poisoned arrows.

I had been traveling fast that day

and the day before. Frequently I had to cut a way through the man-high grass thickets with the aid of my machete. Only when the sun had descended beneath the western horizon did I decide to take a few hours' rest, for both my horse and I were all in. We had traveled during the past two days at a rather stiff gait. I had hardly had a bite to eat during all that time for the simple reason that I did not dare shoot a cow or deer for fear of attracting the attention of my pursuers who were trailing me like a pack of bloodhounds. I was at that time the leader of a group of "patriotas," or revolutionists, who had crossed the Colombian border line in order to fight the Venezuelan government; and after our successful raid we were "beating" it back to Colombian territory with prices on our heads.

To facilitate our retreat we had separated and were following different directions with the intention of meeting again a few days later at our usual rendezvous, the Esmeralda Ranch near Laguna de Termino.

After taking my bearings by the evening star, which was dimly sparkling on the eastern horizon, I rode into a near-by patch of jungle growth, unsaddled, hung up my hammock and my mosquito net, and turned my horse loose.

Unfortunately I could not light a fire on account of my pursuers. I had to run the risk of receiving an im-

promptu visit from the prowlers of the night while I lay fast asleep in my hammock, with no more roof over my head than my mosquito net. I intended to remain there until about eleven when the moon would rise sufficiently to allow me to continue my trip to the Esmeralda Ranch. I was sure to get there something to eat, for its owner, Torribio Tejera, was a partisan of ours, and a friend of mine.

Suddenly I awoke with the startled realization that I had overslept. The moon had almost reached its zenith in the dark-blue sky, and hours of precious time had been given to my pursuers, who could not now be very far off.

While I was sitting astride in my hammock, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I suddenly drew my six-shooter and stared into the surrounding darkness with all my senses alert. The moon rays were piercing the thick jungle foliage like tiny silver arrows, while a school of bullfrogs was tuning up softly for their nightly concert in a near-by swamp.

Every nerve in my body was tight as a bowstring, for I had scented the dreaded "sheiro," as the Brazilians call it, or "the smell of tiger," as the panperos say. It had drifted to me on the night breeze: that peculiar smell, characteristic of all wild carnivorous jungle creatures, especially of the feline family.

While I remained seated astride in the hammock, with my six-shooter and long, whetted machete in my hands, ready for action, I kept staring through my mosquito net into the surrounding darkness until I finally perceived two shadowy figures which kept slinking around me in a circle. They stopped now and then to glare in my direction in a fiendish way, with their phosphorescent eyes riveted on me like two pairs of glowing emeralds.

At first I felt scared at the sight of those eyes. But soon I realized that, being scared, would not help me any.

So I smoothed down my slightly ruffled feathers, rubbed the goose skin off my shaking limbs and sat upright, motionless in my hammock, following the shadowy, slowly moving forms, turning my eyes gradually from right to left until the jaguars temporarily disappeared from sight while they circled around my back.

I caught sight of them again with my head twisted over my right shoulder. Again and again I followed them so, afraid to move my body, eyes straining, my head moving with monotonous, rhythmic regularity. How long I kept it up I am not sure.

Suddenly I awoke again with the rising sun shining straight into my face. My horse was nosing at my mosquito net, begging to be saddled. Its round belly proved that it had had a square meal and a good night's rest. I envied it, for my stomach was as hollow as an empty barrel. Then, of a sudden, I remembered my nightmare: those two pairs of phosphorescent jaguar eyes. At the thought of them my hair stood on end first, but then I had to laugh in spite of the vicinity of my pursuers. I stopped laughing when I happened to see my six-shooter lying, cocked, on the grass beneath my hammock. Why was it cocked?

Instinctively I jumped out of the hammock and, clambering out of my mosquito net, walked away a few steps, only to stop short with a shock: there were the tracks of two full-grown jaguars. They had circled about me until dawn, leaving a regular trail, a perfect circle of deep-trodden tracks around my camping place.

If my mosquito net had been gray, or brown, instead of white, my fate would have been sealed that night. What had saved my life had been the gently swaying white net which had scared the two cats and caused them to let out those occasional low growls, as if consulting with each other whether it would be

advisable to take a chance, that is to take a jump at the hated man-beast beneath that white bag which kept bulging and swaying mysteriously in the night breeze.

It seems that after moving my head in a half circle from my right to my left shoulder several dozen times, while following with my eyes the two shadowy moving forms, my optic nerves had finally relaxed owing to the strain, and my eyes had closed gradually, as during a hypnotic spell, leaving me fast asleep.

After thanking my lucky star for that narrow escape, I saddled my horse and rode all day and all night until the following morning, when I finally dismounted at the Esmeralda Ranch and devoured two pounds of half-raw meat almost in record time. I found most of my men there already waiting for me.

We decided that we would withdraw temporarily to Colombia by crossing the wild Indian territory of the upper Ily River into which the Venezuelan troops would not have dared follow us. But before we departed we had the pleasure of meeting the platoon of mounted infantry which had been tracking me during the past three days.

When those poor beggars ran into the death trap which we had laid for them they looked almost as scared as I must have looked when that couple of pussycats paid me their impromptu visit the night before. It was either their lives or ours. Not one of them escaped. The memory of that skirmish, which was more like a slaughter, is with me still; one of those evil ghosts which haunts the trail of every soldier.

Our trip across the Indian territory turned out to be more dangerous than we had anticipated, because we repeatedly had to fight numerous bands of marauding Indians who were excellent

scrappers. They shot with poisoned arrows three or four feet long. They killed half a dozen of our men before we managed to shake them off by setting the surrounding prairies on fire.

During our first night's rest we camped in the open pampas. We were so tired that even our sentries finally fell asleep. Shortly after sunrise one of our officers showed me the broad tracks of a monster jaguar that had paid us a visit during the night. These tracks crisscrossed our camp in almost every direction. They showed plainly how the jaguar had stopped repeatedly to smell at some of our sleeping soldiers, but without hurting them.

The curious thing about it all was, however, how that mysterious cat had managed to enter our camp without scaring our horses, which were tied around us to the neighboring bushes. Why didn't those cayuses stampede, or raise at least the infernal racket which they used to raise whenever they scented the proximity of a jaguar?

The tracks were fresh; besides, most of our men were experienced *pamperos* who could read a track like a book. Why, then, had that phantom jaguar succeeded in making himself at home among us without our horses ever noticing it? That's another of the many jungle mysteries which have always puzzled me.

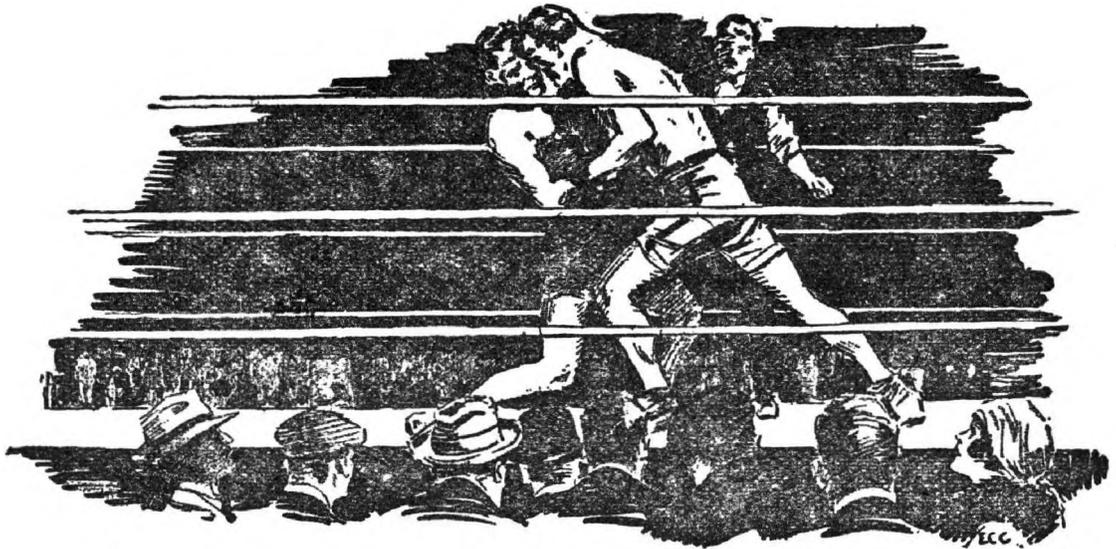
During that risky retreat of ours across the Ily Indian territory we met bands of Goajibos, who peppered us generously with their long poisoned arrows.

At last, after three or four weeks of feeding on alligator steaks and roast monkey meat without salt, we finally struck the foothills of the Cordillera and hurried to the nearest *rancheria* to get a square meal and a cowhide to sleep on, for we were all in, tired to death.

**Another Article by General Rafael de Nogales Will Be Published
in the Next Issue.**

A NEW CHAMPION

By WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY



The Sport of Sports—Is it on the Skids? No!

DEMPSEY, Carnera, Schmeling, Sharkey, and Stribling—what a power of fighting men! One of them is likely to be, in the near future, champion of the world. In all its history the ring has never mustered such an array of fast, hard hitters, all intent upon capturing that crown. That is why we are all trying so hard to guess the winner in this group of stars blazing in the sky of pugilism.

But the brilliant picture has a black background: the good name of the ring was never so befouled, never so dragged in the mud, as it is this minute. Think of it—more than two million dollars of fight fans' money thrown away in the last twelve months on contests that ended in fouls! Either that dirt will be driven out of the business, or boxing will be put down by law, as it was only a few years ago. Yet we need not despair; for the game has recovered from conditions worse than this.

The State athletic commissions who rule the sport could end the whole dirty business by compelling the principals in a foul contest to fight the battle over again without pay and the promoters of the contest to let the spectators who paid to see the first fight come in free to the second. That would cure the trouble at once; for the managers, promoters, et cetera, who have no more regard for their good name than so many buzzards, become touchy as sensitive plants the moment their pockets are tapped. And as all the big men in the industry are keen to get all the dollars possible out of it, we may rest assured that we shall soon be rid of the epidemic of fouls that has sickened us of late.

The rather dry prospect of guessing how the new Sharkey-Schmeling fight will come out dropped out of sight when the fans read a little while ago that Jack Dempsey on his thirty-fifth birthday admitted that the battle fever has got into

his veins again. That possibility had been published in these pages, but the actual news was a happy surprise. "I'm going to do a little easy training for a while," said Jack, "and if I'm right we'll see about a match with Carnera."

No need to worry about that. Jack is right. That question was settled recently when the famous Doctors Mayo examined him from head to toe with all their skill and many scientific instruments. They found him perfect except for a trivial defect that was set right with the scalpel.

But the biggest surprise of the year is the comeback of "Young" Stribling, who knocked out Otto von Porat—the man everybody ducked—in less than one round at Chicago! That brought a fifth contender into the field. And, by way of good measure, a hero of the second rank, Vittorio Campolo, the Tall Tower of the Argentine, knocked out husky Salvatore Ruggirello of Italy in the third. No need to name more of the pretty good ones who are crowding to the front. There are plenty of them, and at any moment one of the lot may grow into the first class.

What can Dempsey do with Carnera? is the question we all want to answer. How good can Jack be when he climbs into the ring again? No one knows how fine an edge he can put on his speed and condition, but there is every reason to believe that he will be almost as good as ever, especially against a big, heavy man.

They seem to be made for him—as you remember what he did to Carl Morris, Jess Willard and all the other behemoths that rolled in against him. Lighter men, fast on their feet, from Bill Brennan to Gene Tunney, have managed to skip out of Jack's destroying reach.

Carnera is six feet seven inches tall and weighs two hundred and sixty-eight pounds. It is hard to think of such a giant as anything but a slow-moving tar-

get for Jack's short, ripping punches. And yet the big fellow is not altogether ignorant of the game. For a man of his tremendous length he handles himself well, and the best thing about him is that he has shown constant improvement in the months he has spent in this country.

His managers have been a little too anxious, a little too careful, in picking opponents for him—large, fierce-looking men who seemed formidable but caved in like cream puffs when a solid blow got home. Also the many charges of "fixing" which have resounded from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast have hurt the giant's reputation and made many ring followers believe that he needs constant protection.

That California bout, in which his opponent's second tossed in the towel in token of surrender when said opponent seemed far ahead in the scoring, caused the greatest scandal. The offending second was said to have been "fixed."

The California authorities after investigation punished the men they found guilty, which was a bad reflection on Carnera, innocent as he undoubtedly was; for Chairman James Woods of the commission has been a fine boxer since he was a boy—and that was several years ago—and he saw the fight and knows the game down to the last detail. He is a big hotel man of national reputation, absolutely fair—as I know from many years' experience—and his judgments carry weight. Yet it is possible that whatever skullduggery there was about the towel tossing was entirely outside of Carnera's knowledge.

Thus far there has been no charge of crooked work in his recent bout at Philadelphia with George Godfrey, the gigantic Black Menace. George quit cold on the fifth round by hitting Carnera below the belt with all his might. Referee Tom Reilly officially proclaimed that Godfrey lost "on a deliberate foul," and the black man received only five

thousand dollars of his ten-thousand-dollar purse.

He was suspended for a year. It seemed as if Godfrey knew he was beaten, and looked for the easiest way out of his troubles. After that melancholy exhibition, it will be hard to think of him as a fighting man; yet the contest as far as it went gave a good line on Carnera's abilities.

Godfrey stands six feet two, and, although he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds, he was carrying too much flesh. This did not bother him at first, and for two rounds he showed his superior skill by hooking his left deeply into Carnera's ribs and occasionally getting home his right to the jaw.

James J. Corbett, world champion of the distant past, and Gene Tunney, the recent Aladdin who coined millions while the championship was good, sat at the ringside and praised Carnera's gameness as the black man hammered him above and below. They praised Primo still more when he rallied in the third and fourth rounds and began to drive a straight left on Godfrey's jaw, followed by a right to the heart.

The Italian was so far in the lead in these two rounds that Godfrey lost all traces of his early skill, stood close and tried half-heartedly to mix it up with the big fellow. Finding that this was not getting him anywhere, George shot in a left hook well below the belt line. Carnera made no protest, so he tried it again.

This time the referee stepped between the men and warned Godfrey; but Carnera shook his head, said he did not claim a foul, and smiled on Godfrey and offered to shake hands with him. The Black Menace backed away in sullen silence.

The bell sent them to their corners, with the Italian smiling confidently while Godfrey's swollen mouth was bleeding freely and his right eye was almost closed, to say nothing of the sore ribs

that Carnera had battered. He, by the way, had not hit one low blow.

Godfrey plodded wearily out for the fifth round, while Carnera, in spite of his towering legs, moved in with easy speed, and renewed his straight lefts to Godfrey's mouth with an occasional right to the body; when suddenly the black man crouched and swung a left hook as hard as he could.

The blow was well down on the groin, even lower than the first two fouls he struck. Carnera's jaw dropped, his eyes rolled in agony, and he clasped his hands over his groin and fell to his knees. Then he pitched face down on the floor, writhed about trying to rise, but soon rolled over on his back, unconscious.

Referee Reilly saw the foul blow, and Doctor Vaughan declared it had knocked Carnera out completely, so Reilly awarded the victory to the Italian. Thirty-six thousand fans, who had paid one hundred and eighty thousand dollars to see a real fight, walked out, too dazed to grumble. You remember the kind lady who pitied the eels that were being skinned alive.

"Lord bless ye, mum," said the fisherman, "they're so used to it they like it."

Two foul fiascos within two weeks was a little bit thick for the fans—but they're so used to it they like it; at least they always come back for more skinning.

Mr. Corbett and Mr. Tunney are polite gentlemen, just about the most polished that ever upheld the standard of world champion. Each of them said after the battle that he thought Carnera was a great prospect for the championship. Now, was that opinion the result of cool judgment, or was it the effect of natural kindness and courtesy on these pleasant men? Certainly they ought to know a good fighter when they see one, and I am inclined to agree with them that Primo de Carnera has fair possibilities.

How far he can go against Dempsey is something else again. Next to his unquestionable courage and his enormous reach is his lively footwork. He gets in and out of distance with the speed of a middleweight, and this is simply phenomenal in view not only of his length of leg but of his length of foot. His fighting shoes look like submarine chasers, but they skip like grasshoppers.

There is at the moment some talk of matching Primo with Vittorio Campolo, the lofty Gaucho (cowboy) of the Argentine, who knocked out the powerful Salvatore Ruggirello so handily in Boston. Campolo has done fairly well since he arrived here, less than a year ago, and he has learned much more of the art than his predecessor, Luis Angel Firpo, whose main and simple idea was to raise his right fist high in air, bring it down like an ax on the enemy's jaw—and watch him dive. (Remember Firpo *vs.* Dempsey.)

Campolo's higher artistic development may not be backed by such a devastating punch as Firpo's, but it was good enough to knock out rugged Ruggirello in less than three rounds; so the tall Argentinian would make an excellent trial horse for Carnera while Dempsey is fitting himself for the fray.

William Muldoon thinks Campolo may be a comer, and Mr. Muldoon is a good judge. Whichever one wins, he would make a picturesque antagonist for our Jack the Giant Killer.

On form up to date, neither would be so dangerous as, say, Sharkey, whom Dempsey outed before his second Tunney match. Yet Jack *vs.* the Giant would pack the house from ringside boxes to the farthest corner of the bleachers.

Just how fit Dempsey can be the next time he steps into the ring is a question that need not worry his admirers. He is not much older than he was when he knocked Jack Sharkey into a mess,

and he was good enough then to fight for any man's money. It is not too much to expect that Dempsey to-day can train into better condition than he was when he lost his championship to Tunney. For one thing, he has not the deadly weight of the title to drag him down.

If you will look back over his record, you will observe that he has always done better when he was not handicapped with the responsibility of defending the championship. Even the placid Tunney fought best in winning the title. Compare the terrific smashes Jack landed on the bewildered Jess Willard with the wabby, uncertain fight he made with old Bill Brennan. Note how much more effective he was against Tunney in the Chicago battle, in which he was trying to regain his crown than he was in Philadelphia, when he was defending it. See how much better still he was against Sharkey, who is as fast as Tunney, even if he may not boast as much intellect as the Shakespearean puncher.

Undoubtedly Dempsey lost some of his speed while he lived the soft life at Hollywood and elsewhere, and he will never perhaps be as fast on his feet as he was; but his punch is as quick and as heavy as ever, and up against a Carnera or a Campolo he would seem fast as ever.

And would the crowd pack the last inch of space in the stadium to see Jack fight? He says the gate money would gross two million dollars.

He is too modest. There was nearly three million dollars in the gate the night he fought Tunney in Chicago, and with Dempsey going up against a giant, even without the title at stake, the crowd ought to be bigger than ever. Jack is honest and he is always trying to wipe his opponent off the face of the earth. The crowd is for him to the last man.

Some may think that time has robbed Dempsey of stamina, so that he cannot make much of a fight against the ambi-

tious youngsters struggling for the crown. Yet no one thinks time has robbed Jack Sharkey, who is not so many years younger than the former champion! After all, it is not the number of years a man has lived that counts, so much as the way he has lived them.

Dempsey has been a good boy, so far as the gay life is concerned, and he has nothing to reproach himself for except the softening that naturally follows living on Easy Street. He still has pride, ambition, and a real need of money.

He knows how to bring himself into the best possible condition. He is as free from the lawsuits, injunctions, writs, et cetera, that pestered him when he was getting ready for Tunney as he is free from the weight of the champion's crown.

He will climb in there, primed to the minute, with a deadly punch in either hand and a hundred thousand fans roaring their praise of him at the ringside. Good luck to you, Jack! You certainly deserve it.

And now Young Stribling has hurled himself into the limelight—a genuine championship possibility. Who would have dreamed it a year ago, after the sour set-to he made with Sharkey at Miami? The temperamental sailor seemed half his usual self, for his lively imagination was full of Ku-Klux Klanners, Black Avengers, Knights of the Golden Circle and a few other odds and ends of frightful goblins of the South, while Willie Stribling had so much respect for the gob's two-handed punching power that he resorted to a program of tap-and-clinch that was disgusting to see.

"One's afraid an' tother dassent," a keen old Yankee friend of mine sized up that alleged battle. He was right.

But Stribling was the sorrier spectacle of the two, and the general opinion was that he had gone so far back that he could never get another good match.

Which shows just how wrong the wise men can be; for in his battle at Chicago a week after the Sharkey-Schmeling horror, Young Stribling danced out in the presence of twenty-one thousand citizens and shot up the giant Otto von Porat with a volley of left jabs, jolts and hooks, plus straight rights to heart and jaw, that made the poor man look as if the machine-gun men had been at him.

It was a different Stribling from any ever seen before in the ring. He did not tap once, neither did he clinch once. His hitting was free and fast and plenty—so swift that Von Porat was bewildered after the first left lit on his lean jaw with a smack like the ping of a bullet.

Now, Von Porat is no soft match for anybody. A great many of the big boys who want to keep on collecting fat purses have side-stepped him with the usual string of pretty excuses, taking the risk of being laughed at rather than K. O.'d.

Even Stribling was conscious that he was fooling with dynamite, and he had the battle postponed for several days because he had hurt his left hand on a sparring partner's head. The Illinois State Athletic Commission had their doctors look over and through the hand with X-rays, et cetera, and ordered Willie boy to go on in and fight. He still seemed rather unwilling, a pale young martyr going to his doom.

Could he have been spoofing Von Porat? Perish the thought—yet the last echo of the starting gong had not sounded when that same delicate left banged Von Porat's strong countenance and drove his head well back on his shoulder blades.

Then the Georgia lad, who used to either waltz or run away after hitting a little blow, laughed heartily at the big fellow's look of pained surprise, stepped after him, and shattered him with one clean smash after another, high, low and

middling. Not one of the volley was too low, at that. As he hit he smiled, and as he smiled he hit.

The crowd was paralyzed by the spectacle of a Stribling they had never dreamed of, much less seen, before this magic change. He was actually throwing himself right in with every punch. Von Porat tried a right swing. He might as well have tried a last year's snowball.

It was too good to last. Von Porat melted under the torrent of blows as a snow man melts under a torrent of rain, and after two minutes and fifty seconds he dropped to the floor, dead to the world, as the result of a Stribling left hook that banged poor Otto's head to the floor.

The Georgia boy had not only knocked out one of the toughest big men in the ring, but he had proved himself a dangerous two-handed hitter, fit to meet the best of them, full of self-confidence and that fine control of the nerves which is the mark of a real champion.

Whether he can hold this fine form will be proved in his bout in London with Phil Scott.

Possibly this will be fought before these lines are published, but I will risk the statement that, if Willie goes at Scott as fiercely and intelligently as he went at Von Porat, he ought to win in jig time. Then home again with a clear title for a shot at the biggest prize of all—the championship of the world.

Although Max Schmeling is a credit to his country and to the game that has only lately taken root there, it is hard to think of his next match with Sharkey without a feeling of anxiety. So much depends upon the temperamental sailor.

No man in the business shows better form or a more workmanlike style than Jack—when he is away out in front, hitting his victim as he pleases and listening to the encouraging clamor of the crowd.

But let him strike a snag in the smooth path to victory, let some unexpected obstacle shoot up in his way, and he loses control of his nerves and makes a mistake as serious as shooting the low blow that knocked out Schmeling and gave him the championship on a foul—the first time such a thing happened in the history of the ring.

You can't help feeling sorry for the poor sailor—he is one of the richest sailors in the world, by the way—when you think of the awful mess he made of his battle for the title, and of his honest, manly efforts since that night to make up for his stupid tactics.

He really is the Poor Little Rich Boy of the ring, has piled up a comfortable fortune, has a delightful family and a charming home he built for them—but he has suffered agony for more than two years in his efforts to capture the championship of the world. Something goes wrong every time he is all set to grab the title. One of the most puzzling problems in the world is to try to guess what will go wrong next time.

A few hours before the mess at the Yankee Stadium I asked a friend of many years' experience who he thought should win.

"Oh, Sharkey in a walk," he answered.

"Yes," I agreed, "if things break just right for him to put up his best fight. Of course, he knows more than Max, and has had a lot more experience; but if the least thing goes wrong, he'll do some foolish stunt that no novice would be guilty of—and away goes his chance."

And what happened? Sharkey took command from the first gong, made the pace, made Schmeling fight his way, did most of the leading; yet for all that Max caught him with a stiff right counter on the jaw. The round was nearly even, with Sharkey a little in the lead, though Max surprised everybody by getting home his left several times.

The second was Sharkey's round.

The third was like it, with the sailor finding his mark oftener, and one of his rights to the jaw staggered the German for a moment, yet he fought right on without trying to cover up or stall.

At the end Sharkey drove home a terrific left to the body that bent Schmeling half over. So far it looked like a nice, easy fight for the sailor, who not only hit oftener and harder than Max, but tossed him about in the clinches and seemed almost to have him at his mercy.

After all that punishment, the young German should have shown signs of wear and tear when he came out for the fourth round, but instead of that he came out prancing at the bell.

A moment before, after a protest by Buckley, the sailor's manager, the referee picked up a big, soft towel and wiped off Max's face the vaseline one of his seconds had smeared on it in the hope of making blows glance off.

Sharkey resented the foolish bit of trickery, and he seemed, for the first time, to be fighting with savage resentment. There was a glare in his blue eyes and a snap in his punches.

Another thing annoyed him: the German was absorbing his blows and still going strong. Just as he had taken all Johnny Risko and Paolino Uzcudun had to offer and then came on to beat them, so he had weathered Sharkey's attacks and was still full of fight.

He used his long left lead to good advantage. Sharkey plunged in with a hot return, and Max met him with a hard right cross to the chin. The sailor's knees did not bend, but that punch shook him just the same.

His mental upset at finding Max able to keep on after he had hit him hard and often was made still worse now by that stiff smash on the jaw. The crisis had come.

Poor Sharkey lost his balance. His sense of timing and distance seemed to blow up and disappear. He clinched and hung on hard as the ring seemed

to whirl round him. At the break, he let go a vicious uppercut that missed Max's head by at least two feet, and dashed in with a shower of lefts and rights that all went wild.

No doubt about it, Jack had taken the balloon, self-control blasted out of him by surprise and disappointment.

He steadied himself somewhat and continued to attack, reaching Schmeling's head with a right drive. No use: Max came in with a powerful left drive. Sharkey hooked left for the head, and Max ducked. Then as the German still plunged forward, Sharkey met him with a low left swing for the body that landed far below the belt and ended the bout with a wretched foul.

When Sharkey saw the referee raise Schmeling's limp arm in token of victory, his knees bent, and he nearly fell in his corner. His mouth drew down in what nearly became a fit of weeping. He had not intended to foul—he had simply struck the low blow in a fit of rage and impatience, as a child might smash a toy he found himself unable to manage. But a championship contender must not give way to such blind rage.

The moment he saw the consequence of his act he was the sorriest man in the world. His behavior since that night shows more clearly than a whole book full of words how sincerely he regrets his folly. He has made the new match with Schmeling in an honest effort to prove that he can and will fight fairly. He has agreed to accept twelve and a half per cent of the purse, not much more than enough to pay his training expenses. He wants to beat Max fairly.

But can he? On the showing of the first three rounds of the Yankee stadium fight, the answer is yes. But on the showing of the fourth round, the answer is a loud no. Schmeling, going along in his steady, methodical German style, stood up under the sailor's hammering and kept boring in and attacking.

Sharkey cracked under the strain. If Schmeling has improved through the added experience of the late battle, he ought to do better in this one. Sharkey was at his best that night.

What will he do when he goes up against an improved Schmeling? Time alone can tell; but it will be a rash betting man who will offer eight to five on his chances of winning. He is kind to his family and a fine citizen, but in the stress of battle he is still out to blow a gasket.

Win or lose, Max Schmeling has shown himself a real sportsman. Regularly proclaimed champion by the ruling powers as well as by the decision of the referee, he might easily have told the repentant Sharkey to go roll his hoop and beg for a fight years from now; but once he was sure that Jack was eager for the chance to clear his good name, he gave up the opportunity to make thousands of dollars by exhibiting himself on the stage in order to prepare himself for the coming contest.

His mother was in ill health; so he gave up his show business and hurried to Germany to see her. The hitches in negotiations since then probably will be straightened out.

Max has improved steadily since he came to this country. He used to depend on the power of his right-hand smash to stop his opponents, but careful study and practice have made him skillful and swift with his left.

He has beaten many inferior men on his way up the hill toward fame, and his victories over Risko and Uzcudun mark him as one who can take it and still plunge on to victory. Much as Sharkey outclassed him in the first three rounds, Max is not extravagant in claiming that he felt able to wear him down and put him away.

It is much pleasanter to turn aside from worrying over possible fouls and

take a look at the fine fight program now opening before us. In these days of quantity production we are turning out champions and near-champions faster than ever before.

Sullivan, Corbett, Jeffries, Johnson, all had to wait so long for a challenger worth fighting that they got out of condition and, worse yet, out of the battle practice that sharpens the eye and the timing; so that the long lack of good men to struggle with helped to defeat them when a real contender came along.

Big Jeff beat Fitzsimmons, Sharkey and Corbett twice over, then, because there was no one else to fight, rusted four years in idleness, only to be dragged into the ring and butchered to make an American holiday. Corbett was an idle fighter and a busy play actor for three years before Fitz took him. Poor Jack Johnson ate, drank and danced himself out of the picture.

To-day we have in prospect a feast of high-class battling, which will at last decide who is the best man in the world. If Schmeling should beat Sharkey, Carnera beat Campolo, Dempsey beat Carnera, that ought logically to lead to a final fight, to which the fans and their dollars would roll in their millions, between Dempsey and Schmeling for the title. I'd like to have enough of the gift of prophecy to be sure that the new Stribling will knock out Phil Scott—as he ought. In that case, the new champion will be faced immediately by one of the toughest challengers that ever tossed his beaver into the ring.

Out of the whole business it is not impossible that there should emerge a re-crowned king for whom the cheers would ring around the world—Jack Dempsey! This is dreaming, I know, almost too fantastic to put in print—yet it is entirely possible, and to see the dream come true I guess most of us fans would be willing to pay double.

Watch for Hemmingway's next fight article.

VIA VLADIVOSTOK

By Jack Allman

In Two Parts—Part II.

Two Hundred and Fifty
Chinamen Battered Down
in Hatches, Headed East—
They Always Vanished at
the Border!

THE STORY SO FAR:

PHIL STENNER, young officer of the Seattle immigration service, is commissioned by his chief, Captain Barnes, to solve the mystery of the flood of Chinamen being smuggled across the border. Washington has threatened drastic measures unless the influx is stopped. Stenner learns of a mysterious connection between Lynton, master of the steamer *Bering*, and Kiang Toy, who is a notorious Chinese labor contractor, and finds by rifling Toy's house a note in Chinese which reads: "Two fifty Seattle, two fifty Vladivostok." Stenner is certain this contains the solution. He learns further that Lynton transports Chinese away from the States to labor in the Alaska canneries. He asks Barnes' permission to visit Alaska and probe the secret. The chief refuses, and becomes incensed when Stenner insists that he will take a vacation and go anyway. Stenner does so, and gets himself further in bad with the chief because the trip means postponement of his wedding with Barnes' daughter, Helen.

Back Numbers Are Easily Procured

THE only man to get off at the little cannery port of Killisnoo stood at the end of the dock among piles of box shooks, bars of solder and blocks of sheet tin. The *Conquest*, of the Alaska Transport Com-



pany slid out of sight around a point in Chatham Strait.

Phil felt very much alone. This was to have been his wedding day. He shook his head, as if to clear it of the disappointing thought.

"Pretty country you have up here. Have a cigar?" It might have been just another tourist making the acquaintance of the young man lounging on the dock.

"Thanks." The man in the overalls and stag jacket lit the cigar and rolled it contentedly from one corner of his mouth to the other before replying.

"Yes, sir, stranger, this is the beautifullest country on earth. I've been around the world three times, as a sailor, and I ain't never seen anything to equal it." He seated himself on a pile of shooks. The stranger followed suit.

"I suppose a lot of canneries around here use Killisnoo as their headquarters, don't they?" Phil asked the question casually.

"Yeah, there's quite a bunch right here on Admiralty, and then there's a lot of little independent outfits scattered from hell to breakfast among the thousands of smaller islands that clutter these waters. Do you know, stranger, that it's from this Alexander Archipelago with all its straits, bays, sounds, narrows and fiords that Alaska takes most of her fifty-million-dollar salmon pack every year?" The young man dropped a brown squirt through a knot hole ten feet distant.

"Know where Kagoff Island is?" asked Phil absently.

"Kagoff? Sure. Lays right over there 'long the coast of Chichagof." The sailor indicated a small, green mound rising symmetrically out of the darker green of the sound. A long line of white breakers separated the two shades.

"What's the chances of getting a boat over there, to-night?"

"Hard to tell. Lynton usually drops over here 'bout every five or six days. If he comes in to-day yuh could go back with him."

"Who's Lynton?" Phil choked the eagerness out of his voice.

"Manager of the Kayaka Bay Cannery. He comes in here with four or five discharged chinks every few days. Seems to have a lot of labor trouble. Fires 'em right and left. That's funnier than it sounds 'cause they all get paid piecework."

"Tough guy, huh?" Phil was avidly devouring these choice morsels of gossip.

"Crabby old duck. Don't want any one to visit the island." He suddenly turned a hard eye on Phil.

"Say! If you don't know Lynton, how come you're so anxious to get over there? He's the only white man on Kagoff."

Phil ignored the question.

"No other way of getting over there, huh?" he asked.

"As soon as the mail from the *Conquest* is distributed my partners will be back from the company store. You can go over to Chichagof with us. You can row from there. It's only 'bout a mile across to Kagoff."

"Thanks, old-timer, guess I'll take you up on that. I'm going to do some prospecting over there. I'm anxious to get started." Phil smiled to himself at the thought of posing as a prospector. He couldn't tell a piece of quartz from a chunk of alum without tasting it. Oh, well—the sailor probably couldn't either.

"That so? Prospector, huh?" The man sized Phil up appraisingly. "We're prospectin' on the east side of Chichagof. You're sure going to find tough pickin's on Kagoff. It's nothin' but a knob, mister."

Phil knew at once that he had made a mistake in assuming the rôle of a prospector. This young fellow was too shrewd to swallow the story he had cooked up to explain his presence.

The arrival of the other three partners gave Phil a grateful opportunity to change the trend of the conversation. Introductions were made all round and in a few minutes they were aboard the launch and on their way to the camp.

From the conversation Phil learned that every year now for four seasons these boys had come north for a bit of fishing and prospecting. Each winter would find them signed up on some ship, making a grubstake for the next year. They were a happy, carefree quartet, and Phil liked them from the start. He

sized them up to be just what they said they were, and decided to make a clean breast of the reason for his visit.

They received the information with great interest.

Dick, the youngest of the group, and the one who had first met Phil on the dock, looked inquiringly at his comrades.

"Well, how about it, you seagoing prospectors? Looks to me like we might stir up a little excitement by helpin' this here government man out of a tough hole. Personally, I never did like that pink-whiskered Lynton, anyway."

Oscar, the big oval-faced Swede, inserted a huge wad of Copenhagen *shoos* under his upper lip and sucked on it reflectively.

"Dat bane all yake wid me," he said. The other two men nodded assent.

For some reason Phil felt strangely elated and encouraged by the friendly, though taciturn, attitude of these four hard-fisted adventurers.

Arriving at the island, Phil established a camp down the hill, a short distance from that of the boys.

From the promontory in front of his tent he could look across the narrow strip of water right down into the clustered buildings of the Kayaka Bay plant. With his powerful glasses he could even recognize Lynton.

Every time the cannery tender left the little wharf Phil counted the Chinamen going aboard. "Pink Whiskers" would have been surprised had he known that Phil had an accurate log of all his trips to Killisnoo, Hoonah and Sitka. In a little brown book was a record of his outgoing passengers.

At the end of three weeks' waiting and counting Phil received a letter. The "Old Man" said that politics were entering into the situation. Things looked bad. Would Phil cancel the rest of his vacation?

The note from Helen seemed a little cold. Funny thing about women. When they once made up their mind it was sure hard to change it. On Dick's next trip to Killisnoo he took back Phil's refusal to give up his investigations.

The following day Phil decided to take a trip over to the cannery and look things over. He told the boys of his plan.

"You better let me go over with you, Phil. That Pink Whiskers is a bad hombre. I wouldn't go alone if I was you." Dick was all for taking part in the investigation.

"Nothing doing, boys. I'm going to row over as soon as it gets dark. I want to check up on some figures I've been keeping." Phil was positive in his statement that he would go alone.

"Well, we'll keep a lookout for you in case of trouble." Dick was bound he would in some way take part.

"Thanks, boys. I don't expect any trouble." He pulled his automatic out and gave it the once-over, nevertheless.

That night he rowed across the narrow strait in the darkness. Tying the boat some distance above the little wharf, he made his way up the rocky path to the main buildings of the cannery.

Feeling his way alongside of one of the big packing sheds he stopped and watched the night shift working at the machines. Not over forty or forty-five men, he figured. He made his way cautiously to the long, low bunk house. There was no moon and in the darkness he felt his way slowly along the rocky trail. The bunk house and cook shack stood off some distance from the plant.

He made his way to the small square of light that winked like a huge rectangular eye in the side of the black building. He might be able to count the number that would be at this hour sitting around their quarters playing fan-tan.

He came silently up to the window. It was open, hooked back to the outside of the building. Phil stuck his head up to the opening. A big Chinaman standing by the foot of the tiered bunks threw a cigarette butt out of the window just as Phil's face came into the light. The butt caromed back into the room from his cheek. A flat yellow face appeared in the window.

It was not over a foot from Phil's surprised eyes to the big ugly mouth that opened in a wild screech of jumbled Chinese exclamations. Phil ducked back in a quick, catlike twist. As the face appeared again through the shoulder-high square, a hard fist met it full on the screaming mouth. It was the face of the man he had spoken to on the sidewalk in front of the contract-labor office. No doubt the man had recognized him. Evans' words popped into his head. "Every Chinaman in the country will be trying to collect the reward for the capture of the man who shot Toy's son."

Stumbling and falling he made his way toward the boat. There was a long streak of yellow light cutting the blackness ahead of him. The light came through the open door. He could not pass through that. Wild screeching from many excited throats smote his ears. He'd have to make the boat.

He turned down through the brush toward the shore. Black shapes were swarming over the whole slope. There they were on the beach. Some were even beside the boat. No chance now. In daylight they would beat him out of the brush. It wouldn't take a hundred and fifty men over two hours to cover every inch of the little island.

Got myself into a fine spot, thought Phil. He needed a couple of minutes to think of a plan, and he made his way hurriedly down under the small wharf. Into his bandanna handkerchief he tied his shield, his papers and his gun.

He tied the loose ends of the big cloth

around his neck and removed his other clothing, made them into a bundle, and with the trouser legs for shoulder straps, threw them up on his back. The tide was in, and he hit the water fifty feet back from the old tender riding easily at her moorings.

Heavy feet made drumming sounds on the planking over his head as he struck out with an easy overhand stroke around the stern of the boat. The water was icy. Phil remembered the glaciers he had seen dumping their huge bergs into the sea. Two hundred yards from shore he felt a kind of a nervous catch in his legs.

"Cramps! Lord, if I get a muscle cramp now I'm done for, sure." The desperate swimmer spit out the salt water and the thought in a jumbled moan. With long, powerful strokes, he attempted to increase his speed.

The choppy waves in front of him caught little glints of light as they came up to their sharp ridges. He cast a quick look back over his shoulder. The pack obstructed his view. A slight roll and he saw what he had feared when he caught the first glimmer on the waves. The tender was ablaze with light. It moved off from the pier. With renewed strength he pulled for the black hill so far ahead of him.

A brighter light bounced along on the waves. Phil took another look. They didn't know where he was. The long, white finger of the tender's searchlight scratched at the shores of the little island. Phil could see the small parties of searchers along the beach as the luminous beam swung back and forth.

Swish, swish, swish—long arms and legs moved in perfect rhythm as Stenner plugged steadily ahead. A gasp slipped through his clenched teeth as he shut his eyes to the bright light that swept over him. It seemed to sear his back.

"Perhaps they didn't see me," he prayed. The long oval danced vagrantly

on the waters ahead of him. He was out of the glare.

His hope for such a break was soon shattered. The blinding silver gleam sought him out and held him in its shining ellipse. The series of short toots from the tender's whistle spurred the swimmer to greater effort. The shore was still a long ways away.

His heart pounded violently against his ribs. His legs were like water-soaked logs. Every kick was an effort requiring all his strength. The light became brighter. The heavy gun pulled down on his neck like an unseen hand. He thought of throwing it away. No! He'd have use for that gun before that dirty bunch got their hands on him, he gritted through chattering teeth.

Put—put—put. Phil's head came up with a jerk. They were coming for him in a launch. Well, they wouldn't capture him without a fight. He tore nervously at the bundle hanging from his neck. He'd get a couple, anyway. He dove and came up out of the long patch of light. The freezing water was turning the very blood in his veins to ice. He tried his trigger finger. Thank God, it worked.

The searchlight swung in big circles, hunting him out in that forest of icy waves. The *puts* of the launch punctuated the labored exhaust of the tender's big Diesels.

Phil raised his head high out of the water and swung it to and fro in bewilderment. The tender was coming from one direction, the launch from another—from Chichagof. The boys! The boys! Phil started desperately toward the noise of the gas motor. His legs dragged back like sea anchors. His arms had no power. His head wouldn't come up often enough to give him the air he needed. He could barely answer the foghorn hail that Oscar's bull-like throat sent out over the waves. Madly he waved a hand aloft till he felt Dick's strong arms grip him.

The tender was not over two hundred yards away. Pin points of flame flashed from her bridge. A lead slug ricocheted from the little foredeck of the launch. With a whining cry it went off into the night. Another plunked into the cedar planking just above the water line. More bullets flew around their heads. Phil answered with his wet automatic. The powder burning the salt water out of the barrel was like a tonic in his nostrils. The launch was soon out of effective range.

"Well, you boys sure got me out of a nice mess, that time." There was real gratitude in Phil's voice.

"Yust so soon as ve saw der searcher light, ve figgered dat der wass in Denmark soomt'ings rotten." The big Swede held the wheel with his knee while he folded a fingerful of *snoose* into his lip.

"What did you find out about the Chino angle, Phil?" asked Dick eagerly.

"Well, there's only about a hundred and fifty men left over there. The pop-off will come now within a few weeks. Things are shaping up nicely." Phil wrapped himself in the canvas engine cover.

Soon they ran into the little slip, and in a few minutes Phil had a good fire going and the chill left his bones.

Three more weeks passed, and according to the little brown book the last of the Chinamen were getting aboard the tender. Six Chinos, the last of the two hundred and fifty. Lynton took this load to Killisnoo.

"Run over and get the mail, Dick, and get me some information, too, will you?" The cannery tender was hardly out of sight before Phil asked this of the young prospector.

"Sure will. What's the dope you want?" Dick had just been dying for something to happen.

"Find out for me where these six Chinos are going. Get all the dope you can, and don't forget the newspapers."

Phil gave Dick a friendly slap on the back. "I'd go over myself, but if Lynton ever found out that I was still around here it might queer the big chance," he added.

That evening Dick came back brimming with news.

"They're goin' to Seattle. I was in the ticket office when they bought their tickets. Lynton had already left for Kagoff."

"You say they bought tickets, Dick?"

"Yeah! I guess Pink Whiskers must have given them some money beside the checks."

"Checks, huh?"

"Sure! The clerk at the ticket office wouldn't sell them a ticket till they produced a check showing that they were discharged contract workers that had been in the States before. Funny, though, that they didn't have round-trip tickets when they came up here on contract, isn't it?"

"That's just it, Dick. They did come up here on round-trip tickets. The fun is going to be in finding out who's going to use the other half of those two hundred and fifty fares. Did you bring the papers?" asked Phil thoughtfully.

"Yeah! Here they are. And, I almost forgot, here's a wireless. It'd been there a couple of days." Dick produced the government wireless envelope.

Phil tore open the message with a foreboding of bad news. The blood drained from his tanned cheeks as he read the words:

PHILIP STENNER,
Killisnoo, Alaska.

Your vacation was up two days ago stop You have thrown me down stop Mail your shield and credentials, you are fired stop If you changed your mind about marrying Helen, why sneak off on a pretext stop She is returning your ring.

THOMAS J. BARNES,
Chief Special Agent.

So that was it? They thought he was trumping up an excuse to wiggle out

POP—8B

of his engagement with Helen. Why in hell didn't that boat come? That would clear up everything. Phil felt that another week of waiting would drive him crazy. He tore the message into shreds.

Having cooled himself down, Phil picked up the two-week-old Seattle papers. His teeth came together with a click as a headline caught his eye. There it was, right on page 1:

IMMIGRATION SHAKE-UP IMMINENT.

Seattle, Washington.—The *Clarion* learns from a reliable source that Thomas J. Barnes, veteran head of the Northwest District of the Immigration Service, has been given one month in which to stop illegal Chinese entries. At the expiration of this time his resignation will be requested unless he has unearthed their system of getting into the country.

For a long time it has been known that hordes of Chinese have been pouring through Puget Sound ports. Every effort to check the flow has met with failure. Airplane and submarine theories have been advanced, investigated and discarded.

It is very probable that a large and powerful organization is operating in some new and novel manner, and what that is, will be Mr. Barnes' big problem for the next thirty days.

Mr. Barnes, by the way, quite agrees with Bret Harte, who once wrote:

"That for ways that are dark,
And for tricks that are vain,
The heathen Chinese is peculiar."

So the papers had started in on the Old Man, huh? Maybe that's what gave him that bilious attack. He sure must have had a sour stomach when he sent that wire. But Helen, that's another thing.

"Feel like a trip back over to Killisnoo, Dick?"

"Sure! What's up?"

"I want to burn up a few wireless waves 'tween here and Seattle. Let's go." Phil had a dozen messages written—in his mind—by the time they swung around the point and headed for the cannery port across Chatham Strait.

As Dick swung the launch around the point Phil bounced to his feet. A big black hulk was hugging the shore of the island. She carried no lights.

"Swing in close, we'll take a look at that baby. No time to send messages to unreasonable bosses and high-strung girls right now, Dick. Sure enough, it's the *Bering*. Now I *know* I'm right. Pull in to the slip, Dick, we'll tell the boys."

"Now, that's the layout, boys. I'm going to need help. If you feel like getting in on this we'll give Lynton a run for his money." Phil faced his four prospector friends. He had left out none of the details. They knew that there would be a certain risk. He waited their answer.

"Sure, ay feel for damn gude fight wid Peenk Viskers," said Oscar, tightening up his belt a hole. The other boys signified their willingness to "tear into these chinks just on general principles, because they've wrecked the labor market."

"W'at's the orders, chief?" Dick reached out a big foot and tipped Oscar headfirst into his duffel bag, where the big Swede was fishing around for his gun.

"I think we'd better take the launch and pull out, just like we were going over to Killisnoo for a big night. After we get around the point we can run up on the beach and wait till the *Bering* ties up to the dock. We may have to wait a while for the tide."

Phil looked his own gat over and filled a pocket with loose shells. One of the boys had no small gun. He took the .30-40 carbine.

"I could damn near sink her with the two-hundred-and-twenty-grain slug this old baby throws," he said seriously, "and she'd make a pretty good bludgeon for close work, too." He swung it viciously by the muzzle.

With the engine shut down there was nothing but the dull *thump, thump* of

the oars in the thole pins to break the stillness of the night as the launch crept along the shore.

"We'll get up to that sand stretch just below the wharf. We can find a place to tie her up there." Phil's voice was little above a whisper. It was steady, and charged with purpose. *Thump, thump, thump*—four strong backs bent to the oars. The sharp nose of the gas boat slid up on the sandy beach. A long painter just reached to a pile of half-buried drift.

Five minutes later five phantom shapes stole noiselessly across the dock, in and out among the piles of gear, and up the narrow gangplank. Each man knew his job, and each was more than willing to do it.

A Russian curse was strangled at birth, only to be reborn as a Swedish oath, when two strong hands closed around the neck of a sailor who unfortunately stuck his head out of a companionway just as Oscar was going by.

"Now wait here till I make sure," Phil cautioned his men in low whispers. He slipped up to the deserted bridge. Raucous laughter from an adjoining cabin attracted him. He made his way quietly to the dim yellow circle that marked the port. A hurried glance was all that he needed.

"It's O. K.," he whispered as he rejoined his friends. "I've seen one heathen. That's all I need to make this seizure legal. I'm sure there are more, but that's enough. Now, let's go, and don't take any unnecessary chances, boys."

He laughed to himself as he thought of the legality of his act. He had been fired that day. Well, he'd see about that later. He made his way back to the port. The strident laughter had not abated during his brief absence. Phil noticed this with satisfaction. Probably drunk, he mused.

Through the port he could see almost the whole interior of the cabin. In

the center, beneath a smoky lantern, stood a heavy table, covered with a dirty red-and-white-checked cloth. Lynton sat at one end, across from him a man with a cross on his forehead laughed coarsely. A half-empty bottle of vodka stood on the table between them.

Cringing in the corner by the cabin's one berth was a young Chinese girl. Her fear-filled, slitted eyes were glued in horror on the red stubbled face of the cannery boss. Her clothes were almost torn from her slim, yellow body. Ugly finger-nail scratches marred the silken smoothness of her bare shoulders.

A black gorilla hand, and one covered with red hair, raised aloft two tin cups. The girl crouched further into her corner in renewed fear as raucous laughter filled the room in response to a toast proposed by the man with the torn shirt and the disheveled hair. Everything decent in Phil Stenner revolted at the scene before his eyes.

A shot rang out some place back in the waist of the ship. Others followed. The hollow reports sent echoes bouncing out over the quiet waters of the strait. It sounded like a battle skirmish. More than four guns in that fray, thought Phil. The crew must be armed. The two men in the cabin jumped to their feet as the door burst open to admit a flying bundle of long arms and legs.

Novegoy was nearest the door. The first downward swish of Phil's automatic caught him behind the ear. He slumped to the floor, but from the feel of the impact Phil knew that it hadn't been hard enough.

With a curse the other lurched at him. A crushing blow fell across Phil's raised forearm. The muscles became dead. Faintly, as if from a distance, he heard the heavy .45 clatter to the floor. The fingers that loosened on the butt were dead from the savage blow on his arm. A huge red fist caught him full in the

face. Cobwebs clouded his brain. Blackness flirted with his passing consciousness. Phil shook his head madly. In a fog he could see Lynton reaching for the gun on the floor; it was almost in his hand.

Frantically he stooped and threw his arms around the bull neck. With all his strength he heaved upward. The edge of the table was at the cannery man's back. With his head in the other's face Phil bent the man back over the table. His head cleared slowly. He studied his present small advantage.

With a catlike movement he placed one foot against the wall below the port. The paralysis was slowly leaving his right arm. The hand slipped to the corded red neck. The leg against the wall straightened.

Back—back—he slowly bent the shaggy head till it rested on the greasy cloth. One huge outflung arm was useless to the man on the table. Wildly he felt around for a hold with the big, hairy paw.

The arm fell back with the elbow resting on the edge of the table. Phil shifted his position a little. His free hand sought a hold on the heavy wrist. He held the palm upward and eased some pressure onto the end of the extended arm.

Gasping breaths told him that he could borrow on some of the weight he had been throwing forward. He shifted it to the arm. The cruel mouth opened in a groaning curse. Bloodless lips curled back from a row of uneven, saffron-tinted fangs. Baleful eyes stared into Phil's face unblinkingly. It was the kind of a look that says: "Go ahead and break it."

The younger man threw another ounce onto the arm. He watched the great beads of pain sweat being squeezed out of Lynton's brow. They ran in small streams down into his staring eyes. Some of them were pinkish, like diluted wine, where they mixed with

the blood that dripped from Phil's cut lips. Another ounce—he can't stand much more.

A movement on the floor brought Stenner to an added effort to put the man on the table out of the fight. Novegoy raised groggily to his knees. Phil watched a heavy, lumpy hand slide across the floor in the direction of the gun. He called again on his aching muscles. Would Lynton never give? He saw the stubby fingers of Novegoy close on the broad flat butt. He heaved convulsively. Shut his eyes. Braced himself for the shot. The man under him went limp. Done! Phil fell to the table as the arm sagged. A deafening roar and something hot ripped the flesh from his shoulder blade. Lynton's timely collapse had saved him from Novegoy's shot.

Hurling the table, his fist landed full in the flat face of the captain. Again the deafening roar as a .45 slug went harmlessly out through the ceiling. The big man sagged to the floor for the second time.

There was a tinkle of broken glass. The heavy vodka bottle broke over Lynton's head. The Chinese girl, with absolute lack of emotion, poised the jagged edges of the neck over the ugly face. Phil saw her intent and with a quick spring grabbed her by the wrist. Covering her face with her hands she sank down on the berth, weeping bitterly. Phil retrieved the gun. He stood for a moment, inactive. His brain reeled. "Funny," he mused dully, "I've never thought of a Chinese girl being able to weep."

"Hey, Phil! Where are you? Oh! Gee!" Dick barked into the cabin. His eyes opened in wonder. "We've got them all locked up in the fo'c's'le, all but three, I mean. They're layin' out there on the deck." He spoke breathlessly.

"Fine, Dick! Here, get something to tie these two up with. Seems like I've

had to lick them both two or three times already." Phil wiped his sore face with a bloody handkerchief. "Where are the other boys?"

"They're holding a cargo of about three or four hundred heathens in the hold. Oscar got a bad knife wound in the arm. We better find the medicine chest." With a piece of small line he secured the two recumbent forms as he talked.

Leaving the two men trussed up in the cabin, they locked the girl in an adjoining room and made their way aft.

"I think you'll find that there are just two hundred and fifty Chinamen down below," said Phil. "We better find a way of locking them in.

"Now, how in hell am I going to get this outfit into Seattle? Looks like my troubles have just started." He made a masterful job of fixing up Oscar's cut.

"Well, look here. We would be leaving in a few weeks anyhow, how about us helping you get to Seattle? We could kind of work our way." He laughed at the idea. "You see we've got a whole crew among us. Oscar knows every foot of these waterways. He's a good navigator, too. I'm better than a raw hand around engines, and the other two boys have been going to sea for years."

"It's a go." Phil spoke enthusiastically in spite of the pain. "We'll put your launch up on the skidway, load about a hundred cases of salmon, so that we won't have to let that bunch of Chinos out to eat, lock up the cannery and head south. I have an idea that the Old Man will be willing to sign some good healthy expense vouchers for you boys when we get there. Let's go." He smiled through a pair of "shiners."

The *Sentinel* cruised leisurely back and forth across the entrance to Puget Sound. A gray-haired man in the uniform of the immigration service nerv-

ously paced the tiny bridge of the coast-guard cutter.

"I'll tell you, captain, this thing is pulling me down." The gray-haired man spoke to the uniformed man standing in the door of the chart room. "I'll be glad when day after to-morrow comes. My resignation is written. Ready to be sent to Washington. I'm going to stay out here a few days till my nerves quit jumping. I'll be glad when it's over." His twitching hands opened and shut convulsively.

"Oh, I wouldn't feel that way about it if I were you, Mr. Barnes. These government politics, together with these slippery Chinese have got you on the verge of a nervous breakdown."

The captain of the *Sentinel* trained a pair of binoculars on a black ship swinging around the lower end of one of the San Juan Islands.

"Politics! Chinese! Hell! Last night I dreamed of a Chinaman sitting in the president's chair. He was surrounded by a Chinese cabinet. The secretary of labor was a big, tall Chinaman. A great big fellow with white spots on his face. With a sardonic laugh he pointed a derisive finger at me—a bony yellow finger with a long, curved nail. Ugh! It was awful." The immigration man shook with the horror of his dream.

"Now, what the hell?" The captain handed over the glasses. "Here, Mr. Barnes. Take a look. There's a Russian ship coming down inside the San Juans, instead of through the straits. How do you figure that?"

"You're right, captain. It's Russian—it's—it's the *Bering!* Head her off, captain. We'll board her."

It was with a pitiful attempt at self-control that the elderly man tried to keep the glasses from shaking. The captain knew just how much a capture at this minute would mean to this man handling the toughest of ports—with an unsympathetic political régime swinging a sword of Damocles over his gray head.

The *Sentinel* put herself across the path of the tramp, and pretty nearly got herself cut in two for her trouble.

"Avast there! Whatin'ell you tryin' to do?" The irate captain shook his fist at the man on the bridge.

"Awh, go tak' a beeg yump in der lake." The big oval face in the pilot-house window opened to eject a huge cud of *snoose*.

"Sorry, cap, but we're kind of short-handed." Phil grabbed the line from the cutter and made fast. "There's only five of us running this old wagon," he added.

As the two boats bumped he jumped to the government craft, landing nimbly right in front of the Old Man, just as he stepped to the deck. "Well, I'll be —" Phil was plainly surprised to see his boss up here away from the office.

"What is it? What you doing on this ship? What has happened?" In sharp, gasping sentences, he plied the young man with questions.

"Just like I figured, chief. This Novegoy and Lynton—they're in chains here—been working with Kiang Toy. Lynton, that's the cannery boss, would take a crew of two hundred and fifty legally entered Chinos to the Alaska cannery——"

"Yeah, I know. Then what?"

"Well, he'd send them back—four, five or six at a time. He'd give them a discharge check. That would pass them through the port here as returning contract laborers that had left Seattle for the job."

"But I don't see——"

"Don't you get it? By the time he was rid of the entire crew Novegoy would come in with a load of two fifty illegal Chinos, leave them at the cannery, and then they'd come in on one of the Alaska Transport boats. Everything would be in order. Each man would have the original *identie*, that is, the contract slips that were issued to

the men in the first crew, and all he would have to do would be to answer to the name of some Chino who was already back in the States. I've got all the original *identiés* up in the cabin and the two hundred and fifty Chinamen down in the hold. See their angle?" Phil drove home his point with an authoritative finger.

"You mean to say, son, that you've got two hundred and fifty illegal entries under those hatch covers?" The old man's finger was steady now as he pointed to the black tramp alongside.

"Yep! I confiscated the boat, too. Took it with my four friends here."

He indicated the boys gathered at the rail. "Took her while she was tied up to a dock on U. S. territory. That makes it a legal seizure, doesn't it?" Phil smiled at the Old Man through eyes that still retained light-green rings of discolored flesh.

"It sure does, son. I can't—I don't— Hell! I guess I'm just a damned old fool." He turned to the master of the cutter.

"Captain! Send me your wireless operator." The old whip was back in his voice.

"And Phil, my boy! You better make out those expense vouchers on the way in. Don't forget to take care of the boys here. Better get at it right away 'cause your vacation starts to-morrow. Helen, I have an idea, is set on a trip to California."

"But she sent my ring back."

"I said I was an old fool, didn't I? I was mad clean through the day I sent

that message. Helen didn't know anything about it." He threw an affectionate arm over Phil's shoulder and turned to the young sailor at his elbow.

"Take this message for my daughter, Sparks."

"Dear Helen tear up resignation on my desk stop Reserve table at Olympic Grill for——"

He stopped to count the men at the rail of the tramp.

"—for seven covers stop Be at Municipal Dock 8 p. m.

"Hold it a minute, Sparks." Then he said to the captain: "Are you authorized as a master to marry people?"

"Well, I don't know Mr. Barnes. You could hardly call these waters the high seas. I'd like to oblige but——"

"Never mind," barked the old immigration chief.

"Tell her to bring along a preacher, Sparks. Sign my name to it and get it off right away." Hooking his arm through that of the tall young agent, the Old Man led him to the bow of the cutter.

"Son, I'm sorry." The older man hesitated.

For a moment Phil did not reply. His gaze wandered down over the green waters of Puget Sound toward Seattle—and Helen.

"That's all right—dad," he said. His hard fist met the hand of his chief.

"I'm glad you're going to honor those expense vouchers," he added with a grin. "Helen and I will probably need that money, now."

THE END.

Watch for Another Story by Jack Allman.



THERE'S A PUNCH IN POETRY

IT is worth noting that the middle name of the inventor of the world's best air-cooled aviation motor is Lanier, that of the famous Southern poet. It takes as much vision, imagination, and play of fancy to invent an engine or design a skyscraper as it does to write a great poem.

The FOURTH WITNESS

By WALTER McLEOD

A Square Guy Declares War on the Unwritten Law of Gangland.



DESPITE the late hour, business in the Golden Pheasant Restaurant was brisk. At the bar Mike Murtaugh, with a veteran's skill, slid drinks across the mahogany under a rapid-fire barrage of orders from the ever-thirsty crowd of after-theater uptowners.

They were bootleggers off duty, hard-

faced gangsters and the rest of the floating population of the ornate speakeasy at four a. m. From time to time Mike looked at the clock and blew silently through his pursed lips.

From the cashier's desk near the door, Steve Martin also watched the clock with eyes much more tired than the big bartender's. Back in the cheap apartment on

Twelfth Street, Steve's wife waited for him. She was very sick, was Ruby Martin, and the previous day Steve had missed his usual six-a.-m.-to-one-p.-m. sleep on that account. He watched the crowd at the bar with impatience and not a little disgust. He yawned.

"Hey, Mike!" A florid, stout man at the bar addressed the bartender querulously. "You sure that guy ain't been in?"

"Naw," said Mike without stopping in his dash for the Scotch bottle. "He ain't been in yet."

"He said three thirty distinctly when he phoned. It's four now."

The buzz of liquor-stimulated conversation drowned the peevish voice of the fat man. The rose-colored lamp shades bathed the faces of the drinkers in a red glow so that through the thick haze of tobacco smoke they gave a weird

impression, as of people who stood on the brink of some gently blazing inferno. Their drink-excited expressions added to the illusion.

One thin, emaciated man sat aloof from the crowd standing at the bar. In the corner at a small round table he drank ginger ale and regarded the backs of the company with contempt. His unusually bright, black eyes gazed straight out at them with a look of cold, hard power which belied his thin frame and pale face.

Steve knew him as the "Thin Guy" and knew his reputation as a deadly killer who was chiefly remarkable as a gang leader who never employed another to carry out his murders for him. Steve watched him idly through tired eyes, and wished that he had a job which brought him in contact with less sinister characters than many patrons of the Golden Pheasant.

Suddenly above the confused talk and shrill laughter, men's voices rose in altercation and profane abuse. The chorus of small talk faded into a tense silence, to give way to the harsh snarls of the disputants. For a space of five seconds there was no sound save the sharp bark of abuse and accusation flung to and fro.

Crack-crack! Somewhere in the dim light an automatic spat. There was a sharp "Ah!" of pain. The mirror behind the bar splintered across and sheet glass crashed noisily on the tumblers ranged below. The women shrieked hysterically. Oaths came from the men and the crowd at the bar fell back in panic from the body of the fat man huddled on the floor, one arm over the footrail of the bar, blood on his waistcoat.

As Steve came out from the cash desk, fleeing customers wedged themselves frantically in the door which led to the passageway to the street door. Steve pulled the key from his pocket. Without it, no one could reach the street

outside. It was impossible to force a way through the maddened, shouting mob. Above the clamor a torrent of Italian imprecations flowed from the lips of Di Rosso, the plump manager.

From the street outside came a shrill whistle. The milling crowd in the narrow passageway was forced back as those in front tried to return. There was a loud, authoritative banging on the street door, a sound of splintering wood and the escaping patrons came back pell-mell into the barroom. A stentorian voice rang out in the passage. The blue-black muzzle of a police revolver waved at them from the door.

"Get back against the wall, quick." The scared crowd backed up to the wall and ranged themselves along it. Two plain-clothes men came from behind the patrolman and entered the room. One went straight to the body of the prostrate man and bent down over it.

"Dead," he said. "It's Carl Hoffman, the bootlegger." He rose and glanced around the room.

"Go through 'em all an' frisk 'em." He looked at the patrolman. As the policeman turned to obey, the detective saw, for the first time, the unconcerned figure of the Thin Guy still seated at the table. Detective Sergeant McCafferty walked over toward the gangster. There was a gleam in his eye.

"So you're in on this party?" he said, and added quickly: "Keep those hands on the table or I'll plug you." He ran his hands over the thin man's clothing and felt under the armpit.

"Where's your rod?" he demanded. "And get up and stand over there."

The other rose with leisurely insolence.

"I don't carry a gun. It's against the law, isn't it?"

"No wise cracks from you, Thin Guy. You bumped this bird Hoffman off. This time you burn, big boy."

"Not this time, McCafferty. Maybe some other time. Why'd I want to

bump Hoffman off?" He joined the line against the wall. The policeman turned to McCafferty.

"Not a gat on any of 'em, sergeant," he said.

"Hell, here's a guy shot. There's a gun somewhere. Search the joint. Look over the floor. Now then, let's hear what you've got to say." He walked toward the herded and sober customers of the Golden Pheasant.

The manager had seen nothing. He had been in the dining room. Mike the bartender had ducked behind the bar at the first shot. He could only say that Hoffman had been called by phone to meet some one who had failed to show up.

"Put on the spot," said McCafferty, glancing at the Thin Guy. "So you were behind the bar all the time and you saw nothing, huh?" He glared at Mike. "Scared to talk. O. K., we'll see about that. Stand over there."

He waved Mike to the other side of the room with his revolver. Mike, pale and shaking, crossed the room.

"And you're the cashier?" The sergeant beckoned Steve out from the line. "Your desk is there, isn't it? You could have seen everything. Spill it! What happened?"

"I didn't see anything," Steve protested. "There was quite a crowd. The light is bad. I only heard the shot."

"A hell of a tale. All right—stand over there with Mike."

Rapidly he went along the line, questioning, bullying and writing in his notebook. Two men who had been in conversation with the murdered man were identified by some of the guests. Steve recognized Jack Sokolski, another bootlegger and former gang chief, a vicious and dangerous rat, as he was waved over beside Mike and himself. Pete Buffolini, junk peddler, joined them.

"O. K.," McCafferty addressed the company. "Thin Guy, you come over

here with the gang. The rest of you can go soon as I have all your names and addresses."

The patrolman came in from the dining room.

"There it is, sergeant," he said, handing an automatic to McCafferty. "Found it on the floor in there under a seat."

The sergeant examined it. He was careful not to touch the butt more than was necessary to examine the magazine.

"That's the one," he said, and his eye ranged over the five men who stood before him. He walked into the dining room and tried to trace the direction in which the gun had been thrown along the floor by the murderer. He bent over the dead man again. Meanwhile, under the eyes of the other two policemen, the crestfallen but much relieved revelers filed out into the street.

When the crowd had finally disappeared into the chill morning outside, the three policemen shepherded the five men out through the passage to a waiting patrol wagon. The sergeant led the way. Outside the door, several curious onlookers, attracted by the wagon, stood on the sidewalk. Two reporters pressed forward eagerly. Dawn was just breaking over the shabby tenements.

Suddenly McCafferty stumbled and fell. The four witnesses and the patrolmen were hurled back against each other. A revolver cracked. A string of oaths flew from the sergeant as he leaped to his feet. The small crowd plunged into confusion and scattered. Around the corner an automobile roared until, with a click, the clutch was slipped in and they heard the pur of a machine fade rapidly into the distance. The Thin Guy had gone.

Quickly the four men were bundled into the wagon. The door was locked. Orders were rapped out. The patrol wagon swept down the dingy street.

At two o'clock that afternoon Steve Martin climbed the stairs which led to

his modest apartment. He was tired. He unlocked the door and entered. A voice came from the bedroom.

"Are you all right, Steve?"

"Yes, honey." He went into the room and crossed to the bed. Ruby Martin, propped up on the pillows, smiled at him but there was anxiety behind the pleasure on her pale, pinched face. At twenty-one when Steve had married her, only three years before, she had been pretty. She would be pretty now could she have been taken away into the country somewhere, to Arizona or one of the other places the doctor recommended, where the climate would bring back the color into her hollow cheeks, and enable her to recover from that awful illness. Steve kissed her.

"It's terrible," she said, "I wish you could get away from that place." She handed him a newspaper with a glaring headline, "Racketeer Murdered in Downtown Speakeasy."

"Who gave you that?"

"Mrs. Hermann. She was all excited."

"She had no business to give it to you. You don't want to be worried now."

"It says that you and three other men were taken to the police station as witnesses and that the police suspect a man they call the Thin Guy and that he escaped. What did they do to you?"

"They fired questions at us all morning separately. I couldn't tell 'em anything. I didn't see it. It was all too quick. They don't believe me."

"Steve, dear, I'm sort of worried." She hesitated. "Isn't it always dangerous to be a witness in a case like this? Oughtn't you to try and leave town or something?"

"Honey, how can I? I had a hard enough time getting this job, bad as it is."

"I know, dear." She threw her arms around him and put her dark head against his chest. "I'm just a drag on

you. I'm useless. I wish I were dead." She wept, and Steve tried to comfort her. He patted her gently.

"Don't worry, honey," he said. "Everything will be all right. I'll make some money soon, and we'll take you to Arizona and you'll get all well and strong again. Won't that be fine?"

"Steve, you're an angel. I'd give anything to be healthy again. I could have worked and helped out and done so many things, instead of running up doctor's bills for you."

Steve kissed her again.

There was a subdued air in the Golden Pheasant when the restaurant opened in the evening. A few morbidly curious came in to look at a spot on the carpeted floor where a dead man had lain fourteen hours before. Steve Martin, utterly weary, stood at his desk and fumed with anger at his impotence in the face of a cold, hard world. He was much more worried about the events of the previous night than he had seemed to be when he called a cheery good-by to Ruby.

Methodically he took the little cash which came into the coffers of the Golden Pheasant. Once his usual politeness forsook him when a prosperous-looking gentleman argued over his change. He was on the point of stepping out from his desk and driving a short-arm jab into the fat paunch. He collected himself in time. His job was too important.

Mike the bartender was worried, too. He wiped the clean bar top unnecessarily every few minutes. He helped himself to a stiff shot, which was unusual for Mike in business hours. From time to time he left his bar and walked over to the cash desk.

"I don't like it, Steve. It's no good." He repeated. "I wisht I was out of it."

At eleven thirty a customer walked in with the first edition of a morning paper. He ordered a drink and stood at

the bar. Mike watched him impatiently as he read the paper. When the man finally put it down Mike picked it up.

"D'you mind if I look at it?" he asked.

"Go ahead," the man replied. "There's some more news about your party last night."

From the cash desk Steve watched Mike sort out the disordered sheets of the newspaper. Mike wiped his glasses and put them on. He read for a few minutes.

"Hear this, Steve." He looked up from the paper. "Five thousand dollars reward for the murderer of Hoffman. That is, any information leading to the arrest. It says that the police suspect Jim Hickman, known as the Thin Guy, and are looking for him."

He read on. The paper dropped from his pudgy hands. He looked across at Steve. Leaving the bar he walked toward the cash desk. On his round face was a look of terror. He spoke in a whisper.

"Gee," he said, "I knew it."

"What in hell's the matter?" Steve asked.

"They've got Pete Buffolini—bumped off in a car over in New Jersey this afternoon."

"Well, maybe it's got nothing to do with last night."

"The hell it hasn't. Whatever happened last night that guy saw it. He was right next Hoffman. An' now they've got him." He looked at Steve. "They'll get us, too." He shook slightly.

"Why? We didn't see anything."

"They won't believe that. They don't know what we told the bulls this morning. They don't know whether we saw anything or not. Where we both was we ought to have seen what happened. That Thin Guy'd kill a feller just on suspicion. He wouldn't take a chance."

The long night dragged on tediously. Mike went about his work with a pre-occupied air. Steve fought to keep

himself awake. Business was bad. The Golden Pheasant had achieved an unprofitable notoriety. At four o'clock Steve locked up the cash with Di Rosso after they had checked it. Mike cleaned his bar and polished the glasses. Steve was ready to leave before Mike had finished. He put on his overcoat.

"Wait for me, Steve, there's a good guy," Mike said in a voice shaky with anxiety.

Steve laughed wearily. "Sure," he said. He felt none too comfortable himself.

"O. K.," called Mike, putting the last glass back in its place and reaching for his coat. "All set."

Steve led the way down the narrow passage. He opened the outside door with his own key. As he tried to withdraw the stiff key he held the door open. Mike went out onto the sidewalk. Steve could see his huge hulk, black against the gray morning.

Suddenly the ear-splitting *crack-crack* of an automatic echoed in the dark street and the body of Mike slumped down on the sidewalk in a grotesque heap. Steve's heart stopped beating. He pressed back against the wall of the passageway. There was no sound except a faint, querulous moan from the crumpled body outside.

Then from way down the street came the sound of an automobile starting up. In a moment it was silent again. Steve bent down over Mike, but Mike's bartending was finished. As Steve rose a policeman came running. For the second morning in succession Steve visited the police station.

It was nine o'clock before he got away. The police were much concerned with the Hoffman case. There had been a shake-up in the department and a show of activity which had produced the five-thousand-dollar reward. Steve walked slowly down the street. He was glad it was daylight. His thoughts tortured him. For himself, he would

not have worried so much. If he were killed he wondered what would become of Ruby. He did not hurry. He was more anxious to work out some scheme to handle the situation than to meet Ruby perhaps for the last time. He swore to himself.

He knew that the Thin Guy was in with the crooked political crowd, that he could probably extricate himself from any jam by the use of his influence. For all he knew, certain political tools in the department would be relieved if the Thin Guy did dispose of the witnesses in the Hoffman case. There was only one person who could do anything to help him, the Thin Guy himself.

It sounded preposterous, but he had to do something to relieve the unbearable suspense. If they bumped him off, it might as well be done that way as any other. He knew where the gangster's hang-out was. He supposed the police knew, too, in spite of the reward. He sighed with the air of a man about to thrust himself into a den of lions, and turned back.

In the cheap Italian spaghetti joint where he knew the Thin Guy made his headquarters, he looked around until he recognized one of the men he had seen accompany the gangster. He walked slowly over to the table where the man sat.

"Hello, Toni!" he said.

"Hello! Have ya beat it with the cash?"

"No, I want to see the big fellow. It's important."

"You're a bright boy, you are. Don't ya know the bulls is after him? What ya trying to pull?"

"Nothing at all. You know I'm all right. I just want to see him, that's all." Steve watched the man closely for any sign of hostility, but Toni's manner was exactly as it had always been toward him.

"What is it?" Toni persisted.

"I can't tell you, Toni."

The gangster looked at him with a keen, piercing glance.

"Wait a minute," he said and left the room by a door at the back.

Steve sat at the table and tapped nervously on the floor with his foot. He lit a cigarette. His heart beat faster than was comfortable. In a few minutes Toni returned.

"Come on," he said. Steve rose and followed the other out. In an upstairs room he found himself face to face with the Thin Guy.

"Well, what the hell d'you want?" the gang leader demanded.

"I wanted to talk to you about the Hoffman shooting," Steve began nervously.

"What about it?"

"Pete Buffolini and Mike were both shot last night."

"Yeah, I know."

"Well, Jack Spkolski and I are the other two witnesses."

"What about it?"

"Well, hell," Steve cried impatiently, "doesn't it look as if we would be bumped off next?"

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

Steve looked despairingly at the other whose yellow face showed only impatient contempt.

"Look here," he burst out impulsively, "the police think you did it. Whether you did or not I don't know. I saw nothing, absolutely nothing. As a witness I'm useless. That's the honest truth. I can't stand this strain any more. My wife is sick and I don't want to get killed right now. Don't you understand what I'm getting at?"

"Yeah, but you're all balled up. I didn't shoot Hoffman."

"Who did, then?"

"Ask the police. How the hell should I know? And you beat it right away. I'm busy. If you hang round here an' any one sees you, maybe I'll have to bump you off at that. Now beat it!"

Out in the street Steve trudged dis-

consolately homeward. He had no idea whether the Thin Guy had spoken the truth or not. At least they hadn't shot him then and there. That was something. He dreaded the night and wondered whether he would see the little apartment in the morning. It would have been so simple if he had had any money. He could have beat it right away from New York and the Golden Pheasant with its hard-faced customers.

Business in the speakeasy was livelier that night. A new orchestra blared away in the dining room and filled the dimly lit bar with the strains of the latest jazz. The noise of shuffling feet came through the heavy, crimson hangings which separated the bigger room from the small bar. Steve stood at his desk and beat time to the music with his foot. How Ruby had loved to dance a year ago!

A man and a girl came in and stood against the bar, their feet on the brass rail. They laughed together as they ordered Martinis. They seemed happy and carefree; they were good looking and well groomed. Steve thought of himself and Ruby. True, he, too, wore a tuxedo, but in the daylight it was a bottle-green and the cuffs had been carefully hemmed by Ruby a dozen times so that it didn't look too frayed. It was his uniform. He wondered how Ruby would look in an evening frock of silver like the girl's. Steve sighed. He felt bitter with a growing resentment against the world.

A short, slight figure darkened the doorway which led from the passage-way to the street. The newcomer stood for a moment and swept the barroom with bright, black eyes. His gaze came to rest on Steve at the cash desk. Steve started and his heart commenced to beat a little faster as the yellow face of the Thin Guy turned toward him. The gunman nodded curtly.

"Still 'round," he said with a sneering smile.

Steve nodded. "Yes," he answered.

The Thin Guy turned and walked to the table where he had sat the night that Hoffman had been murdered. Steve watched him curiously and not without a tautening of his muscles. With the entrance of the Thin Guy an atmosphere of tension had come into the little bar-room. The music flared up again in the dining room. Through the doorway came the opening bars of the "Vagabond King."

The man and the girl at the bar turned away. "Let's go, honey," the girl said and they passed by the cash desk to the door. At the desk the girl's laughing eyes caught Steve's for an instant, and she was gone. Steve thought of the pinched, white face of his wife on the pillow at home and a pain stabbed at his heart.

He heard the man at the door unlock it to let them into the street. The door opened. There was the sound of another visitor who spoke in a low voice with the doorman. There were footsteps down the passage and Sokolski walked through the door. He nodded to the Thin Guy and glanced quickly at Steve. He crossed to the bar and ordered a drink.

Instantly the air of the room was charged with electricity. From his desk Steve glanced from one gangster to the other. Except for the four men the bar was empty. Suddenly it occurred to Steve that the two men occupied the exact positions in which they had stood when Hoffman had been shot. He remembered the finding of the gun in the dining room.

As he looked out from his desk, tense and alert, an idea flashed through his mind. From the Thin Guy's seat it would be practically impossible to throw a gun so that it slid all the way back to the end of the dining room where the patrolman had found it. The angle would be too small. The gun would have gone into the opposite corner be-

hind the door. Steve looked at Sokolski's back as he stood at the bar.

The newspapers, too, had referred to new clues which it was said the police were working on. One thing was clear to Steve. Here in one room together were two men, and one of them was out to get him. And yet they sat or stood apparently unconcerned, listening to the jazz which throbbed from the violin in the next room.

The music died down. Voices came from the crowd who dined and danced. The waiter came in with a tray of empty glasses. Steve looked at the Thin Guy and then over to the stocky figure of the hunky at the bar. Sokolski was a mean guy. At one time he had been a big shot in the beer racket, but dope had impaired his efficiency. He was no longer regarded highly in gang circles.

A wave of disgust swept over Steve Martin; that he, a hard-working cashier with a sick wife should live in dread of his life while two gun-toting crooks apparently moved around with perfect freedom. It wasn't fair. Why should an honest man creep around guiltily in hourly fear of a finger crooked around the handle of an automatic, and a spatter of lead accurately through the heart?

The orchestra broke into a fox trot. A strange excitement filled Steve's breast as he listened to the violin and the saxophone. He began to hum the tune. It was the one Ruby liked so much:

"You and I have everything to make our dreams come true,
You're in love with me, dear; I'm in love with you."

Steve knew the words, all of them, because Ruby always joined in with her weak little voice when the tenor crooned on the radio back in the apartment. He kept his eyes fixed on the two gangsters. So one of these two tough babies was going to take him from Ruby with a bul-

let or two from one of the automatics under their armpits.

"We'll be so happy, we'll always sing,
If we remember one little thing."

Would they hell! A strange, wild exultation came over Steve as he looked at the two men. The Thin Guy tapped with his forefinger on the table. A girl in the next room began to sing the words of the next verse of the lilting little song.

Steve felt his stature increase. The two sinister-looking men in the bar seemed to shrink to their true size. Two crooked bums, too lazy to do an honest man's work. He looked from one to the other with contempt in his glance. The girl sang shrilly in the next room:

"Who cares if hard luck may be ahead,
An empty cupboard, a crust of bread."

Hard luck was right. He and Ruby had had little else. The cupboard was empty all right. Five thousand bucks, five thousand for one of these two ugly-looking stiffs. Which? Probably Sokolski. But they bumped off guys who squealed to the police. What the hell, they were going to do it anyway. Even if they did Ruby would get the money and it would take her to Arizona. Steve fidgeted, stamping his foot on the floor:

"A little kiss each morning,
A little kiss each night."

The saxophone blared out. More dancers joined in the chorus. Steve's heart danced to the air. He was excited and no longer afraid. He was like a soldier after the first volleys have brought his comrades down around him; his only feeling was one of rage and loathing.

Steve stepped from behind the desk. With a glance at the Thin Guy, he walked straight over to Sokolski and tapped him on the shoulder. The ex-bootlegger turned quickly. He looked

surprised. He raised his thick eyebrows.

"Want to speak to you." said Steve curtly.

Sokolski looked at him inquiringly. He did not speak.

"D'you hear me?" There was a note of command in Steve's voice. "Come outside here, you skulking rat, I want to see you."

The Thin Guy turned and looked curiously at them. He smiled.

"What d'ya want?" Sokolski demanded suspiciously.

"Never mind. It's important. Come out to the cloak room."

Sokolski shrugged his shoulders and moved from the bar. Steve walked beside him to the door and let the gangster go out ahead of him. They came into the cloak room. Across one side was a counter behind which hung the rows of coats and hats. A blond girl with frizzy hair looked up inquiringly at them. Steve closed the door behind him without letting his gaze away from Sokolski for a second. The gangster turned.

"Well? What's the dope?" he asked.

Steve came up close to him. His eyes were narrow and his mouth tight-lipped. "I've got an idea you intend to bump me off. I believe you killed Hoffman."

Sokolski hesitated for a second. He looked into Steve's eye and his right hand slid across his chest. Sokolski was usually quick with his gat. He had to be, but this time he faced a man who trembled with a boiling rage, whose breath he could feel on his own face, and a man who waited for just that movement.

Before Sokolski's fingers were half an inch under his coat, a hard fist crashed into his stained teeth; his head jerked back; he put out his right hand instinctively and a pistonlike left whipped him cruelly on the jaw. The girl behind the counter screamed. Steve turned on her. "Shut up," he cried.

Sokolski reeled back, his knees sagging. Outwardly calm but mad with pent-up rage, Steve walked into him. He had no time to think of the gun under his armpit, for Sokolski's head swam and there was a mist in front of his eyes as he vainly strove to shield himself from the rain of stinging rights and lefts that were beating his face to a pulp. He leaned back against the wall as though he would slither to the floor and Steve pounded his head back so that it thumped on the plaster of the wall. Suddenly Sokolski's head fell sidewise limply and he crumpled and lay on the floor.

Steve stood back panting. He looked at the terrified girl at the counter. She was white and her eyes were round. He was still in the throcs of blind rage. He had no definite plans as to what he would do now. Sokolski breathed noisily. His face was a mass of blood. He lay like a grotesque sack.

The door opened and the music from the dining room came blazing out. The same tune. They were singing drunkenly out there.

In the doorway stood the Thin Guy, a smile of contempt on his emaciated face. He looked from Steve to Sokolski and came in. Steve watched him, his heart pounding, a gleam in his eyes.

"Say, you," Steve snapped, "which of you guys is it?"

The Thin Guy saw the look in Steve's eyes. Exactly what he intended to do Steve didn't know, but the gunman's right hand moved rapidly in the direction of his armpit.

"You bum," said Steve. He stepped forward, and drove his cut and bleeding right fist straight into the eye of the gunman. The Thin Guy's head shot back. Steve moved on him like a tiger. He swung his left and then his right again. The Thin Guy staggered, his arms before his face. Steve paused a second, drew back and knocked the small man clean across the floor of the cloak

room with a right which left his fist stiff with pain.

The Thin Guy rolled over and lay still two yards away from Sokolski. Steve stepped over and took a gun from each of them. He put them in his pockets. There was a noise outside. The portly form of Di Rosso blocked the door.

"*Perdio!*" he wailed, wringing his hands. "What is this?" He came in. People crowded behind him. Steve walked to the door. He pushed Di Rosso on into the room and hustled the others out. Then he carefully locked the door.

"Di Rosso," he said, "go to the telephone and call up the station. Tell Sergeant McCafferty to come around at once."

The manager shook like jelly.

"No, no," he cried with tears in his voice. "Not the police again."

Steve looked at him sternly. "Yes," he said, "the police, and if you don't go straight over there to the phone I'm going to beat you up, too." With his left hand he pointed to the phones in the corner while he waved his closed right fist in front of the astonished manager's face.

Di Rosso, pale-faced and muttering broken-heartedly to himself, walked over. A few moments later he was connected with the station. Steve watched the prostrate gangsters. They were out cold. For the first time in several days Steve felt serenely happy.

The Thin Guy began to stir restlessly. He sat up with his back against the wall. He looked at Steve as if collecting his scattered senses.

"What in hell didya do that for?" he asked. He rubbed the side of his jaw. A dark ring was beginning to form around his right eye.

"I did it because I don't stand for any more of this stuff," said Steve beligerently. "One of you guys was going to bump me off. I don't know which

and I don't give a damn, what's more." He glared defiantly at the gunman.

The Thin Guy shifted into a more comfortable position against the wall. He made no attempt to rise. With his right thumb he indicated the recumbent figure of Sokolski, breathing noisily through his blood-clotted nose. "That's the guy," he said.

"Maybe." Steve looked from one to the other. "I don't care. You birds are good and tough when you've got a gun on you and some more tough babies along with you."

"Say, kid, you kinda feel good tonight, don'tya?" The Thin Guy's cut mouth broke into a narrow-lipped smile.

"You said it," Steve told him. "The way I feel now, if I knew which of you guys it was I'd stand him up against the wall and prop him up and paste so much hell out of him, the cops wouldn't know him when they come."

"The cops?"

"Yeah, the cops." Steve spat the words out. "There's five thousand bucks for one of you two guys and I want it. What's more, your friends can come after me, too." He stepped forward threateningly. "The dirty rats."

The Thin Guy shrugged his shoulders lazily.

"I don't figure this bird has any friends who'll worry you if you turn him in."

"I don't give a hoot." Steve said and he meant it. Just then he would have liked some excuse to beat up the Thin Guy some more, not that the Thin Guy had started the trouble, but simply because he was conscious, while Sokolski was in a state where it wouldn't have made any difference. The Thin Guy sensed the situation. He stayed where he was, his back against the wall.

There was loud knocking on the door. Di Rosso opened it to admit Detective Sergeant McCafferty, followed by three policemen.

"What the hell's wrong here again?"

he demanded. Then he saw Sokolski and the Thin Guy. He walked over to the unconscious bootlegger.

"Holy smoke, here's the guy we're looking for." He turned to Steve. "What's happened?"

"One of these guys killed Hoffman. I don't know which it is. If you know take your choice."

Steve waved his hand to the prostrate men.

McCafferty stared at Steve for a moment, then he laughed. "You weren't taking any chances, kid." He walked over to Sokolski and bent down. "This is the bird," he said.

"Sergeant," Steve spoke in an aggressive tone, "do I or don't I get that five thousand bucks?" He eyed the detective suspiciously.

"Yeah, you'll get it," and he added, "That is, if you ain't scared to take it."

"Scared?" Steve laughed out loudly. "Scared?" Through the open door came the opening bars of a fox trot again. They were trying to keep the patrons calm. They played the tune they had played before.

Steve threw his shoulders back and pushed up his chin. "For the short time I'm staying in this town, guys like this had better keep away from me."

A look of grudging admiration flashed across the yellow features of the Thin Guy.

"Gee, kid," he said, "when you've blown in that five grand you come 'round an' see me. I could use a guy like you."

"Not me," said Steve Martin.

Watch for more stories by **Walter McLeod.**



MRS. HOOVER AND THE LAW

SOON after the Hoovers moved into the White House, the wife of the President of the United States went to the traffic bureau of the District of Columbia police department to get a permit to drive an automobile. If she had thought that all she had to do was to pay the fee for a driver's card, the first lady of the land must have been surprised when a policeman ushered her to another uniformed cop who, in the rôle of schoolmaster, asked her what she knew about the traffic laws of the national capital.

At the end of the questioning, the "teacher" respectfully informed her that she had failed on her examination.

"Here, madam," he said, "is a little blue book containing all our rules and regulations. If you'll study it a day or two and then come back here, I know you'll have no trouble answering the questions."

The president's wife thanked the policeman, tucked the blue book into her hand bag and departed. Three days later she returned and, passing the examination with flying colors, got her driver's permit.

Two days after that, the examining policeman, who had not understood who Mrs. Hoover was, got the shock and the thrill of his life when he received a note written on White House stationery, signed by the president's wife, and congratulating him and the entire police department for showing her no discrimination and for thus proving that they put the performance of their duty above all other considerations.

TWENTY-TWO

By Wolcott LeClear Beard

DON'T ye s'pose he's started it?" asked "Lengthy" Smith wistfully as he dropped his pick.

"You know he hasn't," snapped "Sprint" Marden.

Lengthy sighed.

"Well, even so, we've got to stand for him, so we may as well do it cheerfully," said poor old Lengthy, with a most uncheerful shake of his gray head.

Sprint laughed bitterly. Together he and Lengthy climbed out of the shaft they were sinking, and made their way toward the big shack of arrow-weed thatch that they would have called home had they ever made use of that word.

They were hot and tired—very, very tired. "It" was the noonday meal, of which they stood sadly in need. Surely it did seem unfair that they, who worked so hard, should have to prepare all meals not only for themselves, but for "Twenty-two" as well. Each time Lengthy hoped against hope that Twenty-two might be moved to do this one little thing for the good of the partnership; Sprint, younger, but more pessimistic, knew better. Three times a day, therefore, with minor variations, the above conversation was repeated.

Twenty-two was squatting in the shade of the shack. His age was twenty-two. His rifle, which also was his constant companion and the only weapon with which he would have anything to do, was of twenty-two caliber. Of like caliber, according to Sprint Marden, was his brain. Sprint was mistaken there; but, nevertheless, the youngest

of the three partners was known as Twenty-two; known thus not only to Sprint and Lengthy, but to the inhabitants of the small though lively mining camp of Doodle Bug, in southwestern Arizona.

Twenty-two was small and freckled and impudent. In his hand he held a magnifying glass, through which he studied the ground between his feet.

When at last the bacon was fried and the coffee made, Sprint seated himself at once and began to eat.

"If he doesn't know enough to come when the food's ready, let him go without," he said, with a wag of his head in the direction of Twenty-two.

Lengthy sighed and assented, but nevertheless banged an iron spoon against a pan and set aside a generous third of the bacon before helping himself. Twenty-two appeared.

"Greetings!" he cried with sophomoric affability. "Has the accumulated wealth of the planet received a notable addition this bee-youtiful morning?"

"Only a color," replied Lengthy wearily. "We didn't expect nothin' more. You knowed that, Twenty-two."

"He doesn't know anything," here interpolated Sprint. "At all events, he didn't this morning, and I doubt if he's learned much since."

"That, my esteemed friend with the gelatinous cerebellum, is where you fall into your customary error," replied Twenty-two. "I was studying bugs. One can learn much from bugs."

"Well," said Lengthy, anxious to end

the bickering and also to air the trouble which just then was most prominent in his mind, "I wish they'd learn yuh how to git some more meat. The salt pork's gone, there's mighty near no bacon left, an' no way to rustle any more, so fur's I c'n see."

"What's the matter with venison?" asked Twenty-two flippantly.

"Going after that venison?" sneered Sprint.

"Later," answered Twenty-two. "I thought I'd stroll over and have another talk with Katie first."

An angry flush rose under the tanned skin of Sprint's face. He straightened as he sat, and the mouthful of bacon on his fork was held suspended in the air. With an effort he partly controlled his temper, and took refuge in sarcasm in order to vent what remained uncontrolled. But Sprint's mind was solid and thorough rather than quick. He was not good at sarcasm.

"If 'Big Jim' Brayle should find you talking to Miss Meeker, and start to break you into little pieces, don't try to shoot him with that thing you have in your hand," he advised. "Because if you did shoot him, and he should find it out, he'd have you into court and make you prove it."

Twenty-two sighed and pityingly shook his head.

"Sprint," he said, "that wheeze is an old, old friend of our family. My dad used to get it off, and he said that when he was a very little boy, his granddaddy used to spring it on him. Probably it was considered funny in those days. But never mind, Sprint. You don't know any better, and I'll forgive you—so cheer up!"

But Sprint did not cheer up. Instead, he sat gazing with deepest and most gloomy disgust at Twenty-two's retreating form.

"And to think a thing like that had to be wished on us!" he exclaimed.

Sprint was unjust there; at least by

implication. If Twenty-two had in fact been "wished" upon him and Lengthy, it was they themselves who had done the wishing. The facts were these:

Lengthy and Sprint, prospecting together, had struck a lead which the former declared to be richer than anything he had seen before in his half century of experience. But before they could be sure of convincing any one else of this richness, considerable development would be necessary. Even though they did this development work themselves, they would require something to eat while doing it. That is where Twenty-two came into the scheme of things.

The passion which governed Twenty-two's life was natural history—entomology in particular, but in general all animals. He was quite alone in the world. With the very modest remnant of a modest patrimony and a record of quick and decisive failure at college, he had come West. In Tucson he had encountered Sprint Marden. Marden had been graduated from college before Twenty-two entered, but his fame, both in athletics and scholarship, had lived after his departure. These traditions of his prowess had made him Twenty-two's hero; he was everything that the latter would like to be but could not.

Unhesitatingly, then, had Twenty-two turned over his little worldly possessions to the "triple alliance," as they had called their partnership. Overjoyed and relieved, the two senior partners, of their own accord, had made it a condition that Twenty-two should be left free to follow this bent of his—that his money should be accepted in lieu of work. At first Twenty-two had laughed at this condition, and with might and main attempted to help in the work, of which he knew nothing. Now he tried no longer, but held to the condition rigidly, for it and his gaminlike flippancy were the only means of resentment at his command—his only consolations.

He needed consolation. Secretly he admired and revered those two partners of his above all other men, so that nothing else in the world could rankle as did their scorn.

Once more Twenty-two squatted on the spot from which he had been called, and, fishing the magnifying glass from his pocket, again began to study the ground. He was looking down into a little depression in the dry and sandy soil; a tiny crater about four inches deep, an inverted cone, slightly truncated. Most people would not have noticed its existence.

A bug came strolling along; a fat bug, apparently with nothing on its mind. It reached the edge of the pit, hesitated, and then took one more tentative step. Instantly the treacherous sand gave way beneath its feet, and, accompanied by a Lilliputian avalanche of sand, it started to slide down the steep slope.

Once before, Twenty-two had seen the same thing happen, but on that occasion, for an infinitesimal portion of time, he had allowed his eyes to stray while seeking a less uncomfortable position. The bug, on that occasion, which might have been, and very likely was, a brother of this one, could not fly. There had been time neither for it to burrow into the sand nor make its escape over the pit's edge, yet in that tiny fraction of a second during which he was not looking, it had vanished utterly. How it happened, Twenty-two could not understand, and did not intend that it should happen again.

The former bug had slid quite to the bottom of the pit, but this one seemed to be of stronger and more resourceful mind. With a vigor not promised by its portly and prosperous figure, it began to "back pedal," as Twenty-two mentally phrased it, and with such good purpose that the avalanche slid from under its feet, leaving it insecurely clinging to the shifting sand of the pit's side.

For a moment it rested; then slowly, and with infinite caution, moving one foot at a time while the other five remained braced, it began to make its way back toward the brink over which it had fallen. Twenty-two watched with breathless interest; the little brute showed such pluck—pluck guided by brains. Though making it a rule not to interfere with the personal affairs of the lower animals—which interference seldom serves any good end—he resolved, if need be, to break this rule in the present instance. Just then the disaster came.

Despite all care, another avalanche descended, microscopic in size, to be sure, but, even so, stronger than the first one had been. Fairly caught upon its surface, the trapped bug was borne downward. Its efforts were frantic now, but though they served to retard its descent, they could not prevent it. Nearer and nearer it drew to the little level space that formed the pit's bottom. Then a strange thing happened.

That little level space looked exactly like the undisturbed ground by which the pit was surrounded, yet a portion flew open like a little circular lid, which it was. Almost too quickly to be seen, a spider darted forth. It collared the struggling bug exactly as a policeman might collar a drunken and resisting tramp; then darted back again with its prey. The lid snapped down. The little tragedy was finished, and the mystery solved.

Twenty-two had heard and been inclined to disbelieve stories of a variety of trapdoor spiders which thus set pitfalls for their prey. Now, however, there could be no more doubt on this score. He had seen for himself, but was sorry that he had seen, for the sight obtruded an unwelcome thought upon his mind.

His partners had been unreasonable—unkind. That was true. Yet they had not been without excuse; to be fair,

one had to admit that, and Twenty-two wished to be fair. Until it should be properly financed and so protected, they had been trying desperately to keep their rich find a secret; otherwise, against a rich and utterly unscrupulous corporation that was absorbing all the paying mines in that part of the country, they would stand no chance whatever to enjoy the benefits of their good fortune, as well they knew.

In their efforts to maintain secrecy, they had gone so far as to build their sleeping shack over the entrance to the real mine, and on this they worked at night—nearly all night. By day they sunk the decoy shaft, the one in which they found and expected to find only a color. But rumors had leaked out. The springing up, almost overnight, of the camp which, for want of a better name, had called itself Doodle Bug, after the mine, was proof of that.

The combined strains on mind and body were more than any men could endure for long. Small wonder that their tempers were short, and if they had been hard on Twenty-two, so had he been on them, so that account was squared. But famine was another thing; and now that the money brought by Twenty-two had gone, famine was almost upon them. So he must prevent it, as far as he could; there was no other way.

Out of view from the shack, but not far away from it, was a gulch that really was quite a respectable canyon in size. Halfway down one of its sides there was a broad, rocky shelf, where a little spring bubbled into a natural basin. To this spring the mule deer would come each day to drink. And each day Twenty-two would bring a pocketful of salt, and, having spread it on a flat stone, would hide where he could watch the beautiful creatures as they gathered around his offering, for he loved them as he loved all animals. He had been trying to gain their confidence, in

a measure had succeeded, and now—well, he hated himself for what he was about to do.

From the edge of the shelf the rock dropped steeply into the dry gulch that lay between the shack and Doodle Bug, the camp. A little bridge crossed this gulch. This bridge was made of three planks, laid tandemwise from the sides over two trestle piers of logs. It was what lay between these piers that had brought into Twenty-two's mind the unwelcome thought. There was a pit there, deep, conical, and with sides of sand that had drifted in from the arid plains above. Save for the fact that there was no artfully concealed trap-door at the bottom, and no place for any, it was almost a duplicate, on a much larger scale, of that other pit, in which had taken place the small but grisly tragedy which he had watched with such enthralled interest a little time before.

Twenty-two emptied his pocket of salt on one of the bridge planks—the middle one of the three—which he then pushed backward so that its end no longer rested on the nearer pier, but remained almost as delicately balanced as the little scales in which Lengthy weighed gold dust in the old days when he had any. It would depress instantly if stepped upon, and then, after throwing the animal which had so stepped into the pit, would settle back into its former deceptive appearance of security. With a feeling of self-contempt too deep for words, Twenty-two sprinkled a trail of salt along the plank to the shelf of rock, and the trap was complete.

Taking a couple of quick steps, Twenty-two sprang lightly over the balanced portion of the plank, then crossed a little ridge, and walked quickly along the path that led him to the camp of Doodle Bug. Beyond its one short and straggling street, lined with flimsy structures of frame and canvas, stood a more substantial edifice, the Meeker

ranch house. This was the place for which Twenty-two was bound.

Katie Meeker was sitting on the veranda, shelling peas. There were vines on that veranda, and behind it a background of green things that were growing in the only garden for many miles around. To the homesick view of Twenty-two, it was a wonderful picture made by her and her surroundings—wonderful and beautiful as well; but to him its central figure was infinitely the most beautiful part.

Now, as a matter of fact, Katie Meeker, wholesome and sweet and good though she was, would not be called beautiful when judged by any ordinary standards. Twenty-two's standards were not ordinary where she was concerned. They were held by others than he, however. Sprint, for example, and Big Jim Brayle.

Katie nodded without speaking as Twenty-two approached. Her face bent low over her work, so that it was not until he had seated himself on the doorstep that he saw she was crying.

"I wouldn't do that, Katie. It isn't worth while," he said gravely.

"What do you know about whether it's worth while or not?" she cried. "What do you know about me—or about anything?"

"Not much," admitted Twenty-two humbly.

"Not anything!" she went on hotly. "You don't even know Sprint—and you don't want to! You don't stop to remember that he's working himself to death. You don't care whether he is or not. I think you'd rather he would, just because he's sometimes cross with you. So you hate him—hate him and envy him, too!"

"I don't hate Sprint. I'm very far from hating him, and I think you know it," he said gently. "But you're right in one way, Katie. I do envy him—now."

"Now?" she repeated.

"Yes, now. Now that I'm sure I have cause. I wasn't so sure before. There was Big Jim Brayle, you see."

"Don't!" she begged. "I can't bear him! I know I was nice to him. I had to be, for Sprint's sake. Don't you understand? I wanted to find out—and I have. He knows that you three have something worth while—he knows you must have. And he's going to find out what that something is, and get hold of it. He all but told me so this very morning. I don't dare let Sprint know, and I don't dare not to. I don't know what to do. If anything should——"

"Hush!" interrupted Twenty-two, and she did hush, for the man of whom she was speaking closed the garden gate behind him and came walking up the path.

Big Jim Brayle was handsome in what Twenty-two called a swashbuckling sort of way, and the word described him well. He, like Sprint, was a mining engineer and a good one. Yet he was also a bravo, to all intents and purposes, hired as such by the corporate mining interests of which Lengthy and Sprint stood in such well-founded dread. He had proven himself efficient.

With a smile that showed his white and even teeth, Brayle swept off his sombrero in an elaborate bow. Once more Katie nodded, and her head bent lower than before. Twenty-two threw his rifle into the hollow of his left arm, while his right hand raised his cap in conventional acknowledgment of the salute.

Brayle looked at him, his smile becoming one of patronizing contempt.

Twenty-two stared back with an impish, three-cornered grin. He was not afraid. Sprint and Katie were the only things that mattered. If they were free to find happiness in each other, he didn't much care what became of him. A mind in this state is a poor culture for fear.

Besides, Twenty-two's rifle, resting in the hollow of his arm, bore upon a

spot directly over Brayle's heart. It was at full cock, and Twenty-two's right forefinger caressed the trigger. Even its tiny bullet, at that distance, would be effective. Brayle must have known this. But he had been made ridiculous in his own eyes, and worse, in those of a woman. Therefore he would have taken long chances, and was about to make a movement toward his holster, which in all probability would have been his last on earth, when Katie interfered and stopped him.

"Jim, sit down and don't be a goose!" she commanded. "Are you going now, Twenty-two? Very well, then, if you must leave us. Good-by."

Twenty-two had not intended to go just yet, but thus dismissed, he took his departure. It was getting well on toward evening now, and Doodle Bug was showing signs of life. Lounging in front of saloons were loafers, some of whom hailed him with remarks intended to be of a humorous nature. Usually he would have replied in kind, but now he was in no mood for that.

Besides, he was drawing nearer with every step to the pitfall that he had made, and the steps grew slower because of his dread of seeing what he expected to find there.

He had climbed the ridge and nearly reached the bottom on the other side when a command rang out, clear and sharp as a pistol shot:

"Halt!"

The voice was Brayle's, and Twenty-two had obeyed before he could summon presence of mind sufficient to refuse. Then came another command:

"Hands up!"

For an instant Twenty-two hesitated. Brayle had him covered, of course, and would shoot—but what did that matter? What good was he to himself or any one else?

"Quick!" warned Brayle.

With his rifle at his hip, Twenty-two whirled. There was a sharp crack. He

felt a burning pain, as though a hot iron had been drawn across his arm, and also a jarring tingle, like that from a shock of electricity. Both were caused by a bullet from Brayle's pistol, which, after grazing his forearm, had struck the barrel of his rifle, but Twenty-two did not realize that, even though he heard the bullet go singing away through space, as a glanced bullet will. What he did realize was that the rifle flew out of his grasp, that quite without any intent on his part, he sprang backward, and that Brayle, stooping in a leisurely manner, possessed himself of the only weapon that the three partners had between them. For they had pawned all the others for food. Nobody around Doodle Bug would lend anything on that despised toy of Twenty-two's.

With a contemptuous smile, the big man pumped the magazine until the last snapping cartridge that it contained was spent. Then he tossed the rifle back.

"You can carry it if you want to; I don't mind," he said. "I'm going up to interview those partners of yours. Now—march!"

Twenty-two made no effort either to reload or to shout. He marched as he had been told to do, ignominiously ahead, carrying his despised and empty rifle. All the while his captor kept up a running fire of monologue, seeming to take a sinister pleasure in recounting the details of his plan for holding up the senior partners, using Twenty-two as a decoy, and so obtaining from them by force the secret of their mine.

Yet all the while Twenty-two's spirits were soaring heavenward. At last they were no longer to be retained, but manifested themselves in song. It was an old drinking song that Twenty-two sang: "Down Among the Dead Men." So extraordinary was this choice that Brayle fell into a puzzled silence that lasted until they reached the bridge.

There Twenty-two's dread was realized. A doe stood in the bottom of the

pit, her legs bunched together, and buried for half their length. As Twenty-two approached, she looked at him, and in her beautiful eyes he saw, or thought he saw, a look of frightened reproach.

It was not a time just then, however, to yield to feelings of this sort. The eyes of that doe had put an end to the rather lugubrious ditty that Twenty-two was singing. Now he began to whistle a popular melody instead. As his feet struck the bridge, he executed a few extemporaneous dance steps. With evident wonderment as to what he intended, Brayle watched him. Then Twenty-two, as though continuing his dance, leaped the balanced plank without touching it—and Brayle thought he had fathomed his captive's design.

Instantly his pistol spoke. Once more Twenty-two felt that burning sting, this time passing along the top of his head. Twenty-two staggered forward. Almost he lost his balance, and his rifle, but managed to hold on to both until he sank weakly down upon the rocky shelf, the landscape whirling about him as he tried to wipe away from his eyes the blood that flowed into them from the graze on his scalp. Through the roaring in his ears again he heard the voice of Brayle, but as though it came from very far away:

"So you thought you'd break and run, eh? Well, don't try that again, or the next ball will go an inch lower. Now get up and——"

The sentence was finished by a yell—the awful yell of a man in mortal terror—and the heart-rending groan of a deer followed. Then, for a time, both were deadened by the whispering rush of falling sand.

With an excited laugh, Twenty-two bound a handkerchief around his forehead to keep back the blood; then proceeded to refill the magazine of his rifle. There were stains of red, iridescent in the late sunlight, on both the weapon and its little cartridges. These stains

came from his forearm, but he had no time to attend to that. He tried to stand, but the rock pitched and rolled like the deck of a laboring ship, and his knees bent under him. So, on hands and knees, he crawled to the edge and looked over.

Brayle was fighting for his life, and doing it in grim silence now, for he had no breath to spare. Already his shirt was in tatters, and the white flesh that showed through the rents was gashed with crimson by the sharp hoofs of the deer, mad with fright. Frantically both would dash up the side of the pit, each time to slide back to meet at the bottom in a wild play of striking hoofs and bare arms that vainly tried to guard the body behind them from the knifelike strokes.

And over all fell the sand, gentle, unexcited, slow. It rippled downward in heavy, smothering streams. It clogged each move by closing in on the limbs that made those moves; yet forced more moves, that the limbs might not be held motionless in its soft, deadly embrace. No muscles ever born on earth could long resist it. Both man and deer were weakening fast. A fresh slide of sand buried the man to his thighs.

In desperation he threw his arms around the doe's body. She screamed, as it seemed to Twenty-two, like a child, as with a despairing effort her slender legs tore at the shifting mass, mounting higher and higher, that surrounded her. Twenty-two could stand the sight of her agony no longer. His rifle gave its whiplike snap, sending its tiny bullet between and a little above those beautiful eyes. With a sigh, the doe's head dropped. Her muscles quivered and relaxed. Her troubles all had passed—but with the man it was different.

Her body, as he tried to push it away, brought down more gently rushing, dust-dry torrents; others torrents came as he tried to draw back from the warm,

limp carcass. They covered it, coming from all sides. They climbed to Brayle's shoulders, then, as he tried to clear them, pinned down his arms. His face distorted with terror, he turned his dulled eyes to Twenty-two.

"For God's sake, shoot me, too!" he begged.

Twenty-two paled. Gladly he would have killed this man a few minutes before. Now, when he begged for death—for a quick death, to spare him one that was lingering and horrible—he could not nerve himself to the deed. In despair he looked about him for some possible means of escape for this man who so had wronged him, and was endeavoring, when he fell into his present plight, to compass still further wrong.

Then, pushing himself back from the pit's edge, Twenty-two began to laugh weakly—hysterically. For the rocks of the gulch now stood out clean and polished above the sand that had drifted between them. The conical pit was filled. No more sand would descend, for the struggles of man and deer had brought it as low as it would fall, and there was no more to come. It lay in a shallow, saucerlike depression, from

which emerged the head of Brayle, as though it had been planted there, and had sprouted. The sight was grotesque—absurd. And when a man who would be terrible becomes absurd, he is lost forevermore.

Twenty-two's eyes were closed, and the lids were so heavy that it seemed impossible to lift them, but he heard the sound of shouting, and the padding of horses' hoofs. Attracted by the shots, people had come from Doodle Bug. Above a Homeric roar of laughter, he also heard old Lengthy's voice, raised in a roar of wondering admiration.

"An' he done it all himself! Well, the—dern—little—cuss!"

"He's lost a lot of blood. Pick up his hoofs and help pack him back to the shack," said Sprint.

So Twenty-two felt himself lifted and carried, and his heart was content. No longer was he lonely, for he knew that these two were his friends. And besides, he had at last taken his place as a man among men—even among the men of Doodle Bug, for they cheered him with right good will as his partners carried him home.



ONE WAY TO CURE SPEEDING

SHE was the young wife of a man high in an executive branch of the government in Washington, and she had just learned how to drive an automobile. Turning into upper Sixteenth Street, where there are many legations and embassies, she stepped on the gas and was splitting the wind until the law, mounted on a motor cycle, overhauled her, and waved her to the curb.

"Oh, officer!" she gurgled, hitting him with all the batteries of her smiles, eyes, and golden curls. "I just wanted to see how fast my car would go if I let it out."

"All right, miss," the law made surprising answer. "Suppose you cut loose and get it all out of your system and be done with it. I'll follow you."

Somewhere out in the rural reaches of Maryland that cop caught up with her, not because he outran her, but because she slowed down.

"Now, miss," he grinned as he rode a circle around her and waved his hand in good-by, "I hope you feel better, and I also hope you'll never do it again."

NEW PLACES *and* NEW FRIENDS



By JAMES WORTH

I AM sympathetically interested in your problems. I am here to help those who wish to uproot themselves and strike out for new places and new ways of making a living—invalids who would like to learn about healthier climes; vacationists, tourists, and travelers who are perplexed about routes, rates and time; campers, hunters, trappers, and hardy souls who want to seek adventure.

Your letters of inquiry will be welcomed and answered at once. When possible, I shall also be glad to put you in touch with other readers who can supply added information. I will help you, too, through correspondence, to make friends with readers of the same sex. Your letters will be forwarded direct when you so desire; otherwise they will be answered here.

To obtain information about new places, or to make new friends, write James Worth, care of the POPULAR MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will bring a prompt reply.

FAMILY TOURING BY TRAILER A Comfortable and Inexpensive Way to Travel

DEAR MR. WORTH: I'm a long-distance touring fan. Sometimes I take my family; sometimes I go with my partner and one or two other friends. We stop at auto camps or farmhouses, but this is not always satisfactory. We frequently find the food bad and again there will not be hosteleries where we most desire them. All of us are out-of-door enthusiasts and fond of a vagabonding life.

I am not a mechanical genius and cannot make myself a trailer. Furthermore, the homemade contraptions which I have seen do not attract me. Do you know of anything produced commercially and can you tell me something about its equipment and conveniences?

I should be particularly pleased to hear from other sportsmen who have tried this sort of thing. I am a good cook, of course, as every lover of the woods and streams is.

FRANK R.

Salt Lake City, Utah.

When any one confesses that he is not of a mechanical bent, we feel sympathetic with him at once. We are glad, therefore, to inform Frank R. that

there is a trailer, such as he wants, on the market. It is no less than a real home for four people. It is a high-ceilinged room, eleven by twelve feet, when expanded, and when closed for trailing, just six feet wide, the width of a usual automobile. Any car, from the smallest up, can trail it.

The room is a combined bedroom, with berths for four, dining room, bathroom with toilet facilities, and kitchenette. All of the equipment can be used when it is closed for trailing, as well as when it is parked near some cool, crystal lake in the woods while the occupants hunt or fish. Or four members of the crew can sleep while the trailer is carried along at high speed. It does not even have to be expanded unless a great amount of room is needed.

This home instead of being rooted to land which must be bought, can be hooked behind any car and *home* is where you stop your motor. It can move from trout stream to trout stream, or it can be parked on the side of a lake for a month or a year. We never find a hotel at just the exact spot where we wish to stop. Or else we can't afford it if we do find it. Modern inventiveness has eliminated that inconvenience. The appeal of this device to the man of moderate means is very strong.

There is an unbelievable amount of space, and husband or wife or children need not look disheveled and worn, simply because they are traveling inexpensively. The trailer has nine windows and a door for abundance of light and air, and the soft comfortable mattresses of the beds will accommodate a man six feet four, even with his hair standing on end! Drawers galore, a two-burner oil stove, washbowls, closets for the hanging of clothes increase the comfort.

In rainy weather the capacity of the room is such that you may invite in other hunting, fishing or touring friends

to a chummy game of cards. The cost of all this is well within the limits of the lowest-priced cars, and the trailer does not change model with the years.

If any of the readers of this department wish the name of the manufacturer of this trailer we shall be glad to send it to them.



ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Thrilling Service for the Venturesome

DEAR MR. WORTH: I am an Englishman, born and bred. Perhaps I should not say bred; for I have wandered so much that I have probably just grown. I have roamed all over the world. I have been in South Africa, saw service in India, hit the pampas in South America, and have been for three years in the United States. That's too long for me. It's time that I was moving on. I eat danger and hardship and never whine. I am not looking for ease and the quiet life. I am a good constabulary man: know how to obey orders and to go straight. So I am wondering about service with the Mounted Police of Canada. Can you give me any information?

BEN M.

Chicago, Illinois.

The exact title of the force about which Ben M. inquires is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is a military constabulary formed back in 1873, when the western prairies were acquired by the newly-formed Dominion. These men were then employed to keep the Indians under control. After the defeat of General Custer by the Sioux Indians, they rendered brilliant service against the Sioux who entered the Northwest Territories. The Mounted has a long and glorious tradition, divisions of them having served in south Africa in the Boer War and in Siberia and France in the Great War. Ben M. would find many among them who could swap experiences with him.

The duties of the Mounted are evident from some of the spheres in which they have been used. The sudden open-

ing of the Yukon brought many adventuresome miners into that region, some of whom were inclined to cause trouble. There was an enormous area in which travel was difficult and the conditions of life rigorous. Over all these rough men and in this wide territory the R. C. M. preserved perfect order.

However, all is not adventure in the life of the R. C. M. My correspondent will probably be surprised when he sees some of the legislation which the police help to enforce: Shipping Act, Animal Contagious Diseases Act, Canadian Temperance Act (sounds very much like being on the dry enforcement squad in the States, doesn't it?), Chinese Immigration Act, Customs Act, Food and Drugs Act, Patent Medicines Act, Migratory Birds Act, et cetera.

Nevertheless, the Mounted are pushing farther and farther into the wilder parts of the Dominion, and are found on Herschel Island in the Arctic Ocean, along the Mackenzie River, Tree River, Coronation Gulf, Victoria Island, and the coasts of Hudson Bay. The Eskimos are being brought under control and guidance, a duty involving long and arduous journeys through the blizzards of an arctic winter. I imagine if Ben M. can make the Mounted he will be able to get service with the branch which best suits his danger-loving spirit.

The requirements for joining, the pay, promotion, terms of service make too long a story for me to print them here. I am sending them to Ben by letter. If any other reader is desirous of having a copy of them I shall be glad to furnish it.



BUDE RANCHES

In the Cody Country of Wyoming.

DEAR MR. WORTH: This year I want to spend my vacation on a real Western cattle ranch, and have been told that I'll find plenty of them out in the Cody country of Wyoming. Can you tell me anything about

these outfits, where they are located, and how to reach them?

CARL P.

Cleveland, Ohio.

We think Carl P. has chosen a fine section of the West for his vacation, and prophesy a thrilling time for him. The Cody country of Wyoming, so called in honor of "Buffalo Bill," is a delightful region, with its bright sunshine, dry mountain air, and beautiful surroundings. It is literally dotted with ranches, most of which are located along the south and north forks of the Shoshone River.

These ranches are real Western cattle outfits, and amusements consist of mountain climbing, horseback riding, camp-fire dinners, and short one and two-day camping trips into the mountains. Fishing is a favorite pastime, and well it may be, for mountain trout are plentiful and easily taken. One is not required to go far beyond the front door of the ranch to enjoy the sport.

To reach the Cody country, we would suggest that Carl P. take the Burlington Route. He can go via the line which skirts the picturesque Black Hills of South Dakota; through Sheridan, the center of the ranch-resort region in the Big Horn Mountains; historic Custer Battlefield; the Crow Indian Reservation, and Billings.

An attractive return route would be via the fertile Big Horn Basin; through Thermopolis—home of the Big Horn Spring—the mightiest hot spring on this continent; the magnificent Wind River Canyon; Casper, of oil fame; Cheyenne, Wyoming's historic capital city; and northern Colorado—making a side trip to Rocky Mountain National Park—and on to Denver.

There are so many ranches in the Cody country that we are sending Carl P. a list, so that he can make his own choice. We'll be glad to forward this same list to any other readers who are interested.

A Chat With You

THERE'S a pleasant tang in the air these days. Crisp, blue skies look down on brown harvest fields. Wood smoke smells good, hot coffee has a specially grateful taste on these snappy mornings, and nothing looks so inviting at night as a crackling fireplace. The "corn is in stacks on the slope of the hill," and "the sky is red with the harvest moon."

It's autumn now. The wanderlust that cried, "Come on!" to us last spring has gone back to its lair. It cannot torment us now, for at this time of year our own hearths look remarkably good to us. We are content to light our pipes, put our toes near the stove or radiator or fireplace, and grin as the winds shriek outside our snug retreat.

It is more fun to read about the adventures of others than to go looking for them ourselves. At least, that's about how we all feel just now. Next spring we'll get restless, undoubtedly, but for the moment, bring on the good stories and another log for the fire!

* * * *

THE present number has in it a group of unusually good stories, don't you think? O'Larkin is a master of the mystery tale, and Cooper is a born storyteller. This serial, "The Werewolf's Helmet," is more than a story—it's an *event* in fiction. Probably nothing quite like it has ever been written before. And the secret lies in the way it's told. There's a fiery tip to Cooper's pen.

Nels Leroy Jorgensen's tense, grim style will greet you again in the next issue, in his new novel, "Guns Through Gutzalan." It will be on the stands October 8th. In it Steve Norton, a

hard-boiled American who likes to gamble, rips into a gigantic gamble involving an entire South American republic. Jorgensen puts all he's got into the story.

* * * *

WHEN Captain Leighton H. Blood wrote "Marche Militaire" for us some time ago, we asked him to get his memory working on more yarns of the Foreign Legion. So he wrote "The Cheka." Captain Blood was in the Legion, actively, and he writes about it as authentically as the rest of us might discuss our daily lives. But Blood does more than that; he senses the color and drama of that strange army of men who jest with death. You will see what we mean when you read "The Cheka," in the First November Issue.

* * * *

A NEW series, hot from William Hemmingway's typewriter, will start in that number. He tells, in vivid succession, how he boxed personally with the giants of the ring—Sharkey, Fitz, Corbett, and Sullivan. These articles, beginning with "Up Against Tom Sharkey," will be a real treat for you.

General Rafael de Nogales will relate another of his narrow escapes in "The Old Payne Mine"—perhaps the most bloodcurdling experience any man has had in a mine, next to being buried alive.

The author of "Via Vladivostok," Jack Allman, has written a corking Alaskan story for the coming issue. Allman knows his Alaska. He once mushed seventy-two miles in eleven hours and fifteen minutes, rushing a chap with a

broken leg to the nearest doctor. And when you look at the corded muscles of Allman's calves, you don't wonder at it. "Snow-blind," his new short story, is one of his best.

* * * *

YOU have probably noticed already that there is no Secret Unit Operative story in this issue. We'll let John Wilstach step forward and explain.

I'm a little late with the last, for the present, Clark Jones tale, "Uptown—Downtown." I think it is the best—surely it's the most astounding. Heat, the wiring of my little bungalow, and visitors are some of the

things to blame. I don't want to seem slow or temperamental, so I blame it on other things. These are very peculiar tales to write. The ordinary detective type is easy, because obvious. I have read other crook yarns, and I can say, without vanity, that I think the seven of this series, so far, are unhackneyed and different. Clark Jones, the Secret Unit Operative, will take a vacation after "Uptown—Downtown." He has worked hard enough to deserve it.

Watch for "Uptown—Downtown" in the First November Number. And watch, also, for a new, rollicking humorous feature by Raymond Leslie Goldman! Doesn't *that* round out an all-star issue, though?

Two Weeks From Now

In the First November Number—Out October 8th

Guns Through Guetzalan

A Complete Novel

NELS LEROY JORGENSEN

The Cheka

CAPTAIN LEIGHTON H. BLOOD

Up Against Tom Sharkey

WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY

The Werewolf's Helmet

A Six-part Novel—Part II

EDGAR L. COOPER

Bread on the Water

RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

The Old Payne Mine

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

Uptown—Downtown

JOHN WILSTACH

Snowblind

JACK ALLMAN

New Places And New Friends

JAMES WORTH

A Chat With You

THE EDITOR

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Contains complete, rapid-action stories of the West in its wildest aspect. Galloping hoofbeats and roar of six-guns fill every page with fire and action.

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STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC.

79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Grocer's "Slip of the Tongue" Reveals Secret

*That Gets Friend \$3500
CASH in Six Months*

A success story more romantic than fiction because it is true. Now the secret is told here so that readers may use it to help end their money worries too. And a million dollar company offers to pay a cash penalty to any man or woman who does not make \$15 the first day they try this plan.

As related by

HOWARD L. ADAMS



"MY NAME is Adams—Howard L. Adams. Like thousands of other men I've been ambitious—wanted to make money. But 'luck' has been against me. At least I blamed 'bad luck' for my failures. Then suddenly—a few months ago—a peculiar thing happened that changed the whole course of my life.

"My corner grocer made a 'slip of the tongue.' He let slip a secret that I recognized at once as being priceless. I jumped at his suggestion. "Ten weeks later I had made over \$1,123.00—CASH! Now, six months since I talked to my grocer I have made \$3,520.18. Figure it out for yourself: that's way over \$500 a month every month for six months. At that same rate I would make over \$7,000 a year. Not bad for a 'failure'!

"But that isn't all. I have also received bonuses for my work—free gifts that didn't cost me an extra cent. I've received two Chrysler automobiles, two kitchen cabinets, a sweater, a fine blanket, a beautiful fountain pen, a set of glassware, hosiery, neckties, a peach of a watch and three sets of dishes.

"You might think that I'd be excused if I were a little proud. But I'm not proud. In fact, I haven't done anything that anyone else can't do. The secret I learned and the fact that I was willing to carry out a few simple instructions should get the credit. But this I do say: Any man who will follow this plan, use this secret, and carry out the simple instructions—and any woman, too—can make good money.

No reason why they shouldn't make as much as I have made. Here's the secret. I had been struggling all my life with blind alley jobs at small pay. I had tried everything. I was complaining to my grocer about my luck. Right out of a clear sky he said, 'Listen, Howard—if you want to make real money get into supplying something that everyone has got to have.' It came like a jolt. I had been struggling with poverty while my grocer had been getting rich because he was supplying some-

thing that he didn't have to sell. Instead people had to have his goods—they came to him for them—they brought their money to his pocket.

"That was it. I would handle something people had to buy. But what? What was more natural than to think of food, household necessities, things people have to USE UP—and things that they have to buy again and again, day after day.

"Just by chance I heard of that 'Miracle Man of Cincinnati'—Curtis W. Van De Mark. The stories told about him were so crazy as to be almost unbelievable. For example, people told me that he manufactured a complete line of over three hundred everyday household necessities—just what I had been looking for. But they said he would send me \$18.00 worth of his products (at retail) without any risk on my part. He would do this so I could try his plan of selling. By his plan all I had to do was give away ten bottles of perfume—say what he called 'Twenty Magic Words' to ten housewives in my neighborhood—follow his simple instructions.

"Then—and this is the part I couldn't believe,—IF I DIDN'T MAKE \$15 PROFIT THE VERY FIRST DAY, he would send me a company check and pay me cash for my time. And I could return the outfit and owe nothing. Think of it: A man willing to pay me cash if I didn't sell a single thing—if I didn't take a single order. And on top of that he was willing to give me a Chrysler car as an extra bonus if I sold my quota.

"Well, there must be a catch in it. I was sure of that. But I couldn't lose anything by trying, so I wrote for his outfit. It came. I went out and used it according to his instructions. And you already know the result. I can honestly advise any man or woman who wants to make money to try 'Van's' plan. You can't lose and I've proved to my own satisfaction that even a 'Failure' can make a wonderful, big income."

The same offer that Mr. Van De Mark made to Mr. Adams is now open to you. Don't send any money at all. Just send your name and address. "Van" will send you a letter and a booklet explaining all about his plan. It doesn't cost you a cent! Then if you want to test his "Twenty Magic Words," here is what he'll do for you: He'll send you his big outfit worth \$18.00 at retail. He'll send you ten bottles of perfume. This is in addition to the 30 full size packages of his products that come in the outfit. He'll send you his "Twenty Magic Words" and his secret instructions for their use. He'll send you a written agreement, legal and binding upon him, and if you don't make \$15.00 the very first day in what you'll say is the easiest way you ever heard of, just send back the case of products and "Van" will mail you a company check to reimburse you for the time it took to give away the perfume.

If you are really looking for a chance to make real money—get steady, permanent work—remember the grocer's slip of the tongue and start now to cash in by selling something that everyone MUST HAVE. You can't lose, and six months from now there is no reason that you can think of that you can't have \$3,500 profits—just as Adams did. Remember, you send no money. And "Van" does not ship you a C. O. D. package of any kind when you send your name. Just send the blank below and you'll get "Van's" cash penalty offer by return mail. Address your envelope to Curtis W. Van De Mark, President, Dept. 1094-ZZ, Ninth & Sycamore Streets, (Cincinnati, Ohio).

CURTIS W. VAN DE MARK, President,
Dept. 1094-ZZ, Ninth & Sycamore Streets,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

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