

# THE PUBLIC Enemy

DECEMBER

10c

Smashing G-MAN Novel

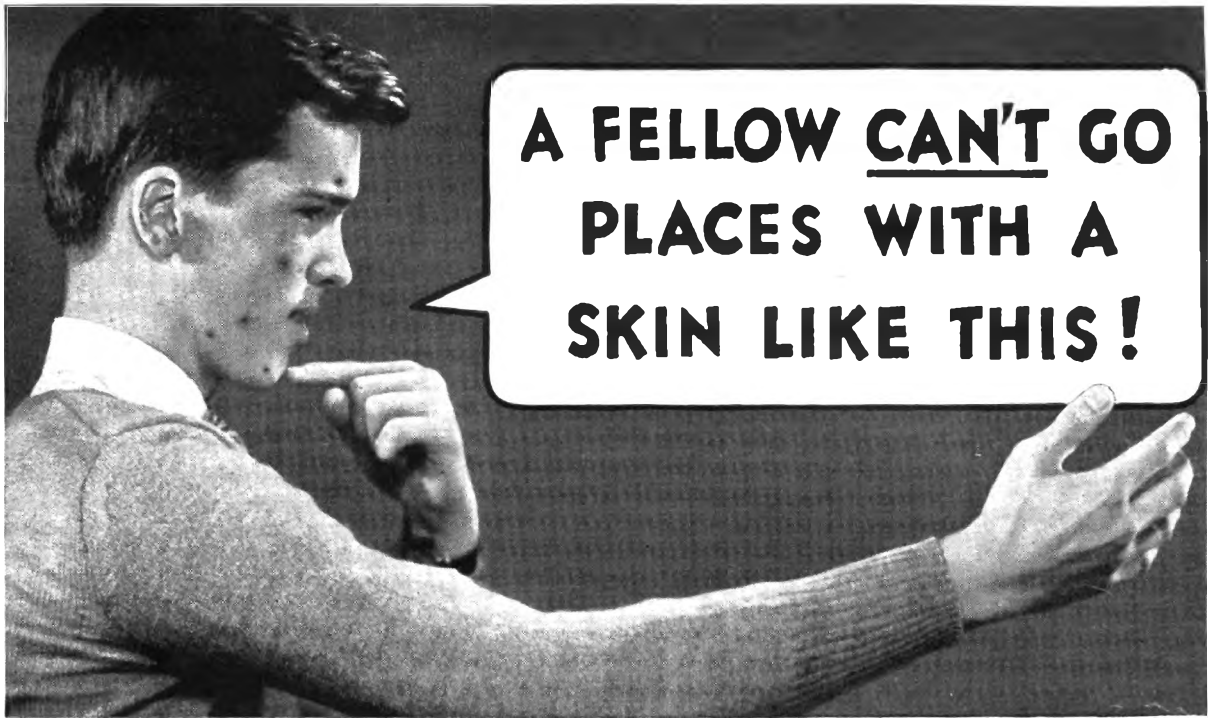
**THE RED RAIDERS**

Complete in this Issue



FEATURING  
U. S. AGENTS  
IN THEIR  
WAR AGAINST  
THE  
UNDERWORLD!

*Saunders*  
G-77'S FIRST  
BIG CASE!



**A FELLOW CAN'T GO PLACES WITH A SKIN LIKE THIS!**

**But Pete is soon pimple-free and "out stepping"**



**Don't let adolescent pimples make a hermit out of YOU!**

Between the ages of 13 and 25, important glands develop. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons get into the blood and irritate the skin, making it break out in pimples.

But you can clear skin irritants out of your blood—with Fleischmann's Yeast. Then the pimples disappear! Eat 3 cakes of Fleischmann's Yeast a day, before meals, until skin clears.



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

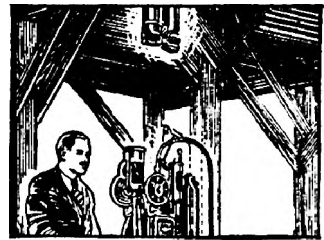
# Learn at Home to Make More Money



Broadcasting Stations employ managers, engineers, operators, installation and maintenance men for jobs paying up to \$5,000 a year.



Get servicing pays many N. R. I. men \$200 to \$1,000 a year for their spare time. Full time men make as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week.



Making, installing and servicing Loud Speaker Apparatus is another growing money-making field for Radio trained men.

## Some Other Jobs N.R.I. Trains Men For

- Broadcast Engineer.
- Operator in Broadcast Station.
- Aircraft Radio Operator.
- Operator of Airway Beacons.
- Radio Operator on Ships.
- Serviceman on Loud Speaker Systems.
- Installation Engineer on Loud Speaker Systems.
- Sales Manager for Retail Stores.
- Service Manager for Retail Stores.
- Auto Radio Installation and Serviceman.
- Television Broadcast Operator.
- Television Engineer.
- Get Servicing Expert.

## I'll train You Quickly for Radio's GOOD spare time and full time Jobs . . .

### Mail Coupon for FREE Information

Why slave your life away in a no-future job? Why skimp, why scrape, trying to pay your bills? I'll train you quickly for a live-wire field with a future — RADIO. \$30, \$50, \$75 a week—that's what many Radio Experts make. \$5, \$10, \$15 a week extra money—that's what many of my students make in their spare time while learning. My free book tells you about Radio's spare time and full time opportunities—about my tested training—about my students and graduates—what they are doing and making. Get this book. Be a Radio Expert. The Radio field is big enough to absorb many more properly trained men.

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

Spare time and full time Radio Service. Installing, Operating, Maintaining, Broadcast, Aviation Radio, Commercial, Ship and Television stations, a Radio service business of your own—I'll train you for these and other opportunities in the manufacture, sale and service of Radio, Loud Speaker and Television apparatus. My FREE book tells you about the many money-making opportunities in Radio. Get a copy. Mail Coupon today.

### Save—Learn at Home in Your Spare Time

You don't have to leave home and spend \$300 to \$1,000 to learn Radio. I'll train you quickly and inexpensively right in your own home and in your spare time. You don't need a high school or college education. Many of my successful graduates didn't even finish grade school. My practical 50-50 method of training—half with lessons, half with Radio equipment—gives you broad practical experience—makes learning at home easy, fascinating, practical and rapid.

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

My book shows how my special training, instruction material, plans, ideas, and my twenty years' experience training men for Radio careers has helped many students make \$200 to \$1,000 a year in their spare time. My Course is famous as "the one that pays for itself."

### Your Money Back if Not Satisfied

I'm so sure you will be satisfied with my training that I agree in writing to refund every penny of your money if you are not entirely satisfied with my Lesson and Instruction Service when you finish.

### Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act today. Mail the coupon. My 64-page book will be sent free to any ambitious fellow over 15 years of age. It tells about Radio's opportunities—explains the eighteen star features of my Course—shows letters of what others are doing and making. There is no obligation. Mail the coupon in an envelope or paste on 1 cent post card.

J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute,  
Department 5NF,  
Washington, D. C.

## Here's Proof

### MADE UP TO \$400 A MONTH



Radio. —E. G. WOLFE, 1202 Eden St., Elkhart, Indiana.

"I was working in a garage with no future in sight. My wife and I decided to put aside enough to pay for your Course. We have not regretted it. I have earned as much as \$400 a month in spare time."

### \$10 to \$25 WEEKLY IN SPARE TIME

"I am making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time, while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I have earned enough to pay for your Course many times over. Only a trained man can service sets nowadays. I owe my success to N. R. I."



—WILLIAM F. RUPP, R.F.D. No. 1, Conshohocken, Penna.

### CHIEF OPERATOR AT BROADCASTING STATION



hesitate to recommend N. R. I. Training to anyone." —MADISON F. HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

"When I had completed the first twenty lessons, I had obtained my license as a Radio Broadcast Operator and immediately joined Station WMPK where I am now Chief Operator. I do not

**MAIL THIS NOW**  
**for FREE 64 page book**

**ACT TODAY**

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

NAME.....  
ADDRESS.....  
CITY.....  
STATE.....

J. E. SMITH, President  
National Radio Institute,  
Department 5NF,  
Washington, D. C.

# **THE PUBLIC Enemy**

Vol. 1

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1935

No. 1

Complete G-MAN Novel

## **THE RED RAIDERS**

**A smashing story of Uncle Sam's crime-fighting forces pitted against the terrifying menace of the underworld . . . . . 8**

**By BRYAN JAMES KELLEY**

"Get Public Enemy No. 1!" In Washington, the Chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation gives this order to Lynn Vickers, sending G-77 on the trail of a bloodthirsty mob of outlaws who seek to subjugate the nation. Again and again the masked monsters strike, matching their daring and scientific equipment against the law. Who is the master mind behind the gang—the real Public Enemy No. 1? Doggedly the grim-jawed Vickers fights his way through to an astounding conclusion.

### **AMAZING TRUE STORY**

**The Clue of the Calling Card . . . . . By Phil Roman 93**

The Secret Service Smashes a Clever Counterfeit Mob

### **SHORT G-MAN THRILLER**

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**War Threat! . . . . . 114**

News About the Next Adventure of G-77

**G-77 In Action (Cover Design) . . . by Norman Saunders**

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**Genuine  
DIAMONDS & WATCHES**

**on Credit!**  
**\$100**  
DOWN  
**IN months**  
TO PAY  
**BALANCE**

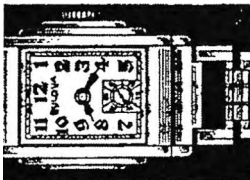


**\$1975**

Only \$1.88 a month

**2. Genuine Diamonds**

Special value in Gentle-  
doone initial ring of 10K  
low Gold set with 2 fiery  
diamonds and 2 solid White  
diamonds on genuine black onyx.  
Initials desired. Only \$1.88



**BULOVA SENATOR—15 Jewels**

Bulova gent's wrist watch at  
lowest price! Handsome, Bulova,  
its case. 15 Jewel B-U-L-O-V-A  
fully guaranteed to give depend-  
-able service. Only \$2.28 a mo.

To Adults!  
See catalog  
hundreds of  
fine specials  
from quality  
diamonds,  
jewelry and  
more on  
liberal  
and for



Our Largest  
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**At our Lowest SPOT CASH PRICES**

Guaranteed, specially selected super values from our vast  
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**\$100 IS ALL YOU NEED NOW! TEN MONTHS TO PAY!**

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C. O. D. to pay on arrival! We ship promptly all charges pre-paid.

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You be the sole judge! If you are not  
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WE PROMPTLY REFUND YOUR DEPOSIT.  
If fully satisfied after trial period pay the cash  
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ROYAL'S 3 million gold bond guar-  
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square dealing. Orders  
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Both  
Now Only  
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Now **\$24.50**

Just \$2.33 a month

MM-6 . . . Square prism  
engagement ring of 14K  
Solid White or Yellow  
Gold; dazzling genuine  
blue-white center dia-  
-mond and a matched  
diamond on each side.  
Only \$2.33 a month.

Both for  
Only \$2.88  
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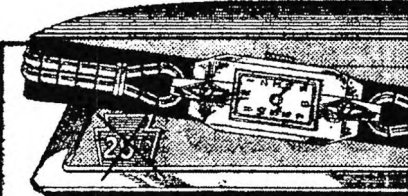
MM-9 . . . "America's Darling" — a most  
beautiful betrothal ensemble in 14K Solid  
White or 14K Solid Yellow Gold! The  
luxuriously hand engraved engagement  
ring is set with a certified specially selected  
dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond of  
maximum value. Wedding ring is es-  
-sentially hand engraved to match. Great  
choice of white or yellow gold. Both com-  
-plete for \$29.75 — only \$2.88 a month.

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MM-2 . . . Equilibrately  
matched engagement and  
wedding ring ensemble of  
14K Solid White Gold. Ex-  
-ceptional ring has a selected  
genuine blue-white center dia-  
-mond and 4 matched dia-  
-monds and 4 genuine diamonds  
in the wedding ring. Both  
complete for only \$42.50  
— \$4.16 a month.

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SEPARATELY**

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alone: \$29.75 — \$2.88 a mo.  
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Only \$1.88 a month

MM-8 . . . Elegantly styled, modern, genuine,  
Baguette wrist watch at an amazing low price.  
The streamlined white fitting case is set with  
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fully guaranteed and dependable movement.  
Smart, link bracelet to match. \$29.75 value  
specially offered at \$19.75. Only \$1.88 a month.



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MM-9 . . . BULOVA's most popular Baguette at  
Bulova's lowest price. Daintily engraved; guaran-  
-teed BULOVA "radio time" movement. Lovely,  
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WALTHAM  
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MM-4 . . . Famous WALTHAM — now  
offered at a specially low price. Handsomely  
engraved, 12 size white lifeline case; factory  
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Jewel WALTHAM movement; complete  
with engraved knife and chain to match. All  
for \$19.75 — Only \$1.88 a month.

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We receive hundreds of letters like this: "I bought a \$4.24 tire 4 years ago and it is on my truck yet and good for another year."—John H. Silverborn, Mich.

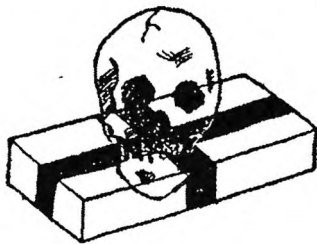
LONG, SATISFACTORY SERVICE. Buy New—at these reduced prices and **SAVE MONEY.**

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28x4-10-21	2.10	28x4-14-1/2	3.30
28x4-14-18	2.70	28x4-14-1/2	3.40
28x4-14-20	2.70	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-21	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-22	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-76	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-80	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-82	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-86	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-91	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
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28x4-14-93	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-94	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-95	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-96	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-97	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-98	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-99	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55
28x4-14-100	2.85	28x4-14-1/2	3.55

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# The Slaying of The Secret Bride



Who sent Naomi Hall the belated Christmas gift? The package, wrapped in red paper and gold string, was brought to her home in Prince Georges County, Md., from a neighbor's house, where it had been left by mistake. Quickly the girl tore off the outside wrappings, lifted the lid of the box inside. . . .

There was a thunderous explosion! A hail of shrapnel spread death and destruction! Pretty Naomi, a secret bride, was blown to bits, and her brother and sister also were killed.

Probing the mystery of the infernal machine, detectives uncovered these clues: (1) Daubs of red clay on her brother-in-law's boots, (2) a marriage certificate which refuted the young husband's statement about the date of the wedding, (3) a doctor's claim that Naomi was going to have a child.

In the current issue of America's most interesting fact-detective magazine, Detective Raymond E. Kennedy, tells how these clues were pieced together.

Other features include "Detroit's Most Horrible Crime," describing the capture of the sex-mad slayer of Lillian Callahan . . . "Murder in the Big Woods," a story of detective work in the Oregon forests . . . "The Mystery of the Highway Killers," a strange love slaying expose . . . "Monsters of Murder," a saga of the U. S. Postal Inspectors . . .

You will be thrilled by every one of the true crime stories in the big December issue

# INSIDE DETECTIVE

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—and how you can take advantage of it

Never before, has there been as great an opportunity as now faces the accounting profession. Depression has taught executives the vital urgency of knowing all the facts about their business. Then our new governmental policy forces the keeping of better and more complete records in every office and plant. It is not a matter of choice—it is necessity. Authorities tell us the demand for competent accountants will probably soon exceed the supply. This spells real opportunity—for those already in accounting, and for capable men who will start training immediately. The man who is wise will investigate promptly—he will write for free booklet and full information.



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The Institution That Has Trained Over 1,200 O. P. A.'s  
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Everyone is asking this question—Why has this talented actress deserted Hollywood just at the peak of her screen career? . . . Was it temperament? . . . Was there a scandal? . . . Was it contract trouble? . . . or a studio quarrel? . . .

You will read the answers to these questions and learn the real reasons behind Helen's sudden return to New York in the December

## RADIO STARS

Other stories and articles of special interest: "My Life is at Stake," by "Believe-It-Or-Not" Ripley . . . "Afraid of Love," a searching and effective story of Nino Martini . . . "Secrets of the Lux Radio Theatre" . . . "The Up and Up on the Lowdown," the new gossip department . . . six pages of news pictures . . . "Air Laughs," the best gags of popular radio comics . . . These and many other features will appear in the December issue of RADIO STARS Magazine. Don't miss it!

## RADIO STARS

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*Earn  
big pay*

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SEND TODAY FOR DETAILS OF MY  
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Prepare now for big opportunities in the world's most fascinating, best paid profession. Get training at Coyne in a practical way so you can be measured to take a real job and cash in quickly. . . I offer you a chance to finance your training. Send now for details of my "Pay-Tuition-After-Graduation" Plan and Big FREE Illustrated Book with all the facts about Coyne training. Mail coupon today for details.

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Prepare for jobs as Designer, Inspector and Tester—as Radio Salesman and in Service and Installation—as Operator or Manager of a Broadcasting Station—as Wireless Operator on a Ship or Airplane—as a Talking Picture or Sound Expert—**HUNDREDS of Opportunities for fascinating, WELL PAID JOBS!**

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Included at **NO EXTRA COST**

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# THE RED

A Full-Length  
G-Man Novel



**Federal Agent Lynn  
His Most Hazardous  
Orders Him To Smash  
And His Monsters In**

## CHAPTER I

### Mobster Vengeance

**T**HE rays of the late afternoon sun cast flickering shadows over Middletown University. Students strolled along the broad, elm shaded driveway that

cut a half-circle through the campus. A youngster with curly brown hair played on one of the lawns in the row of faculty homes. Several of the students paused to talk with the child, for Bobby Brainard, the son of Professor Amos Brainard, psychology instructor and head of the criminal science

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**FROM THE ANNALS OF G-77**



# RAIDERS



## Vickers Undertakes Job When The Chief Public Enemy No. 1 The Crimson Masks!

department at Middletown, was a pet of the college.

Suddenly the quiet of the campus was shattered by the shrill shriek of a siren. A big black sedan rocketed up the drive at a reckless pace. Brakes squealed and rubber whined as the car skidded to a stop

in front of Professor Brainard's house.

The surprise of the onlooking students mounted to startled amazement as the car doors flew open and three men leaped out. Amazement was swiftly followed by blood-freezing dread as the nearby collegians noted the sinister appearance of the three

**BY BRYAN JAMES KELLEY**

men. Cold fingers of desperate fear struck to the hearts of the shocked youths at the sight of the sub-machine guns carelessly cradled in the arms of two of the men.

It was not entirely the menace of the deadly weapons that paralyzed the Middletown students. The wave of dread that rooted them motionless in their tracks was largely inspired by *the crimson masks that hid the upper part of the faces of the three desperadoes*. Those flaming masks of silk were the emblems of the Red Raiders, the most daring band of outlaws that had ever gathered under one head. And the one man who carried no visible armament was Luke Willis, Public Enemy Number 1, credited with engineering the most heinous series of atrocities in underworld history.

Robbery, murder, arson and extortion were but a few of the crimes attributed to Luke Willis and his assassins in a reign of outlawry that had lasted for six months and spread over three states. Like phantoms of death, the Red Raiders dashed about the country, striking a swift, telling blow at the organized forces of law, then fading into oblivion, to reappear days or weeks later in another spectacular foray, hundreds of miles distant from the scene of their last marauding raid. Willis and his mob laughed at the law; they matched bullets, brains and scientific equipment with the best of city and state police forces—and won.

**I**T was the memory of these horrible crimes that seared the brains of the college students. There was no mistaking the long, hatchet jaw and the tight, thin lips of the man who ran across the grass and snatched up the screaming child in his arms. Luke Willis himself was kidnaping Professor Brainard's boy.

Blind rage impelled two of the watchers to quick action. An angry growl gritted from clenched teeth as two lads in sweaters marked with a big "M" made a sudden charge toward the mobster chieftain.

A swift movement on the part of the masked gunners preceded the thunderous clatter of sub-machine guns. One youth pitched forward on his face, rolled and kicked convulsively. The crimson "M" on his white sweater was blotted out by a deeper stain of carmine that spread across his chest. Then the other reckless youth went down as though a gigantic scythe had swept his feet from under him.

Screams of horror mingled with cries of fury as the dormitories vomited forth additional students, maddened by the sight of schoolmates ruthlessly mowed down. The machine guns swerved and shrieks of mortal pain split the quiet of the campus as the cold-eyed, grinning killers directed thundering blasts of death at the milling throng.

From around the corner of Professor Brainard's house lumbered a fat, wheezing figure. Julius, the colored janitor, had seen the attack on his beloved Bobby. Fear had turned his dark skin a grayish brown. In his hand he carried an old single-shot Civil War pistol. The muzzle of the weapon wavered erratically as he tried to squeeze the trigger. His eyes rolled white as they fixed on the murderous bandits. He lumbered bravely ahead into certain death, impelled by a love that was greater than his love of life.

A hoarse, rasping laugh came from the lips of one of the gunmen. His finger tightened on the trigger of the Tommy gun and a short burst crackled forth from its muzzle. Red and yellow flame lanced the dusk. Julius staggered, went down to his knees, with his hands clawing at his stomach. Another short blast and his dilapidated old felt hat flew in the air. Julius stiffened and then slumped down on his face.

Luke Willis plunged into the tonneau of the car, with the boy struggling and screaming in his arms. One gunman leaped in beside him, while the other killer viciously turned the muzzle of his gun

toward a group of lads cringing beside the chapel steps. One final scathing burst sprayed death amongst them, then the door of the car slammed behind the Red Raiders.

The black sedan was pulling away from the curb when a tall, angular figure, with a sharp pointed Van Dyke beard, dashed out of Professor Brainard's house. One of the side windows of the car rolled down, the blue snout of a gun slid out, and the glass splintered and shattered in the windows behind Professor Brainard. Ignoring danger, the stricken father plunged down the stairs and raced along the flower-lined gravel walk toward the kidnap auto.

Gears clashed, the motor roared, and the black car stormed around the curve in the drive. Professor Brainard pursued it down the road, his long arms flailing the air. When the big machine careened out of sight, he stood like a madman, tearing at his hair and beard. Then his hands lifted to heaven and he looked like a tall, bearded prophet invoking the wrath of God upon the merciless killers who had descended upon Middletown. . . .

SEVERAL hundred miles from Middletown, a square-jawed man of medium stature was frantically engaged in answering a battery of telephones on a big desk in a plain, comfortable business office. Flaming anger smoldered in his eyes and a deep frown furrowed his broad forehead as he dropped a phone on the cradle. The Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, had just received the reports on the kidnaping of the Brainard boy, the latest daring feat of the Red Raiders who were now listed as the most notorious bandits in the country.

For weeks the men of the F. B. I.—G-men, as they were known to the public—had been trailing this sinister mob that had blazed a trail of crime across three states. Criticism of the Bureau was al-

ready being voiced. Newspapers were getting caustic in their comments, asking why this nefarious mob of bandits had not been trapped. Confidence in the efficacy of the G-men, that expertly trained collection of super-sleuths, was slipping. And now this villainous crew of murderers had committed another dastardly outrage, right under the noses of the Bureau's agents who had a field headquarters in Middletown.

The Chief crossed the room in nervous strides. For a long moment his keen eyes stared out of the window at the granite wall of the building next to his office. Then the muscles of his jaw tightened with resolution. His finger jabbed at one of the mother-of-pearl buttons on his desk. A clerk appeared in the door. The Chief said:

"Send in G-77."

The clerk ducked his head, closed the door behind him.

A minute later a soft knock sounded at the door, and a tall, blond haired, hazel eyed young man stepped in.

"You wanted to see me, Chief?"

The commander of the greatest man-hunting force in the world eyed the young operative somberly. His eyes went over the wide, slightly sloping shoulders, the lean flanks, the trim athletic figure of Lynn Vickers. Ten years had made little change in the physical set-up of this man who had been a national hero in 1925. Tiger Vickers, the papers called him then, when he was selected as the greatest All-American quarterback of all time. A five letter man—inter-collegiate light heavyweight champion, runner-up in the wrestling finals, football, baseball and track—such had been Lynn Vickers' record at Southern University.

An honor student and Phi Beta Kappa, he left school to begin what promised to be a brilliant career at law. Then, with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, disaster had fallen upon the favored youth. Papers across the country blazed with headlines,

shouting of the suicide of Henry Vickers, millionaire promoter, who had been faced with a long jail sentence for fraudulent operations. The public believed that Lynn Vickers' father had been a criminal swindler who took the easiest way out. Only a few of his most intimate friends knew that in reality he had been the victim of a shrewd political crook who reaped a rich harvest and then ducked out, leaving the senior Vickers holding the bag. Bribery, political influence and chicanery had put the real criminal in an unassailable position. The law could not touch him. Henry Vickers couldn't accept the long years of punishment for a crime of which he was perfectly innocent. He wouldn't give his clever partner the satisfaction of seeing him endure a lingering death behind prison walls. In a farewell letter to his son, Henry Vickers charged the boy with the solemn duty of freeing the world of criminals of the type that had ruined him.

WITH a deep hatred for crooks in his heart, Tiger Vickers had given up defending criminals for the more hazardous job of hunting the evil geniuses that infested the country. He joined the Bureau of Investigation, went through the strict training school, and secured an appointment as special agent.

The same qualities that had won him prominence in scholastic and public life stood him in good stead in his new career. For in the short space of three years, Lynn Vickers had become the key man of the F. B. I. The only memento of his past glory that still endured was his symbol in the army of men without names. G-77 was listed beside his name on the rolls of the G-men; the figures that had once been emblazoned on his football jersey and in the hearts of football fans, were now symbolic of new conquests in the war on crime.

"Yes, Vickers," the Bureau Chief said slowly. "I sent for you. I've got another job for you, probably the most dangerous

that you'll ever encounter in the service. Because of its hazards, I've hesitated to assign you to this case. You are the most valuable man on the force. I hate to sacrifice you unless it is vitally necessary."

The shadow of a smile softened Lynn Vickers' lean, tanned face. There was a hint of a Southern drawl in his voice as he said, "You sure make this new job sound interesting, Chief. When do I start? And where do I go?"

"You start on the trail of Luke Willis, Public Enemy Number 1, just as soon as you can get ready to leave."

G-77's hazel eyes glittered brightly.

"The Red Raiders have struck again, I take it," he said. "I've been studying Willis and his method of operations, Chief, hoping that I'd get a crack at him. What is Luke's latest outrage?"

"Kidnaping," clipped the Chief. "Just got the report from our division office at Middletown. Willis and two of his henchmen drove up to the Middletown campus, machine-gunned a flock of students, and snatched the four-year-old son of Professor Brainard. Made a clean getaway from the campus, shot their way through a police cordon on the state turnpike, crossed the state line at Findlay and then pulled their usual disappearing act—just faded from sight."

Lynn Vickers whistled softly.

"Brainard's the man at the head of the crime detection department at Middletown, isn't he? He's done some pretty smart work along those lines out there; has helped to break up a couple of local gangs, and if I remember rightly he was instrumental in the capture and death of one of Luke Willis' chief lieutenants. Which explains the reason for the kidnaping of a college professor's son. Willis is a supreme egotist, a criminal who takes insane delight in flouting the law. To have Brainard out-think him would be a cruel blow to the pride of Public Enemy Number 1. This kidnaping is a gesture of revenge."



*"I've got another job for you," the Chief told G-77 "—probably the most dangerous that you'll ever encounter in the service."*

"I see you have a good knowledge of Willis. That will be an asset in the job you're tackling."

"I've got a few theories of my own, Chief," Vickers said. "Maybe you'll think I'm screwy, but I can't figure Luke Willis as the same type as Dillinger, Floyd and most of the other notorious criminals we've been up against. Nearly every crime he has committed has been carefully planned

to the last detail. And there has been a sinister motive behind each one. Raiding an armory to equip his men with the most modern machine guns, the burglarizing of the Acme Chemical Company plant to obtain new and deadly chemical formulas—those crimes were executed with a purpose behind them. I think we have just seen the beginning of a nefarious plan of operations headed for a definite goal. What

that goal is, I don't know. But the master mind of the Red Raiders is well on his way to reach it."

The Chief's eyes widened. His right hand doubled into a fist and pounded his left palm.

"You've hit the nail right on the head, Vickers," he said. "All the reports and checking I've had made on the Red Raiders indicate the same thing to me. I'm still in the dark as to where Willis and his murderers are heading. Right now, the gang stands as the greatest menace that faces this country. The work our department has done in instilling fear into the hearts of criminals will be wasted, unless the Red Raiders' organization is destroyed before they can achieve their goal. I'm giving you the job of breaking up that mob. You know your work—I'm not giving you any instructions. Alex Graham is in charge of the field office at Middletown. Call on him or his men for any help you need. You have your pass book entitling you to ride on any railroad or air line in the country. Get going—and good luck to you."

Lynn Vickers' hand flicked to his temple in a semi-military salute, and he wheeled about and hard-heeled from the office. G-77 was on the trail of Public Enemy Number 1!

## CHAPTER II

### G-77 on the Trail

EARLY the following afternoon, Lynn Vickers parked his dilapidated grey car outside of the Middletown Hotel. Inconspicuously dressed, he looked the part of a traveling salesman, and the leather case containing his fingerprinting and photographing materials, magnifying glass, day and night binoculars, handcuffs, beam light and other equipment, might well have been a sample case. A few casual inquiries he made at the desk, as he registered as "F. J. Jones of New York City," further con-

veyed the impression that he was a member of the traveling fraternity.

Vickers' gaze passed over the lobby of the hotel as he followed the bellhop with his bag and case to the elevator bank. The lobby was practically deserted; two men lounging in easy chairs were deeply engrossed in the afternoon papers and three elderly women chattered briskly on one of the big divans. In a sheltered alcove beyond a screen of potted palms, a red haired girl was talking in low tones with a tall, nattily dressed man with a tiny black mustache.

As the G-man's casual glance took them in, their conversation ceased. Vickers had an intuitive feeling that they were watching him closely as he crossed the lobby. Just as the elevator door slid open, he looked again in their direction and found that the girl still had her eyes on him. The dark haired man was strolling toward the desk. Vickers suspected that his signature on the register was going to be examined, and the thought puzzled him. Certainly Middletown was a big enough city so that a new guest at the hotel would not excite any curiosity. Unless, of course, information had leaked out that a new special agent was due to arrive.

He did not believe this was possible. For although Alex Graham, in charge of the local office, had been informed that G-77 was coming to Middletown, Vickers as yet had made no effort to contact him. Whenever possible, G-77 liked to work undercover, calling on the local staff for whatever assistance he needed but keeping in the background as much as possible. He had found that a commonplace exterior was one of his best disguises, and that his youthful appearance and friendly grin were valuable aids in any rôle he wished to play. It would be difficult for the casual observer to believe that the cheerful young fellow who had registered as "F. J. Jones" was G-77, the most feared man-hunter of the Bureau of Investigation.

Vickers decided to look the city over a bit before he got in touch with Graham. As he stepped out of the elevator, the red headed girl and her escort were crossing the lobby toward the main exit. The dark haired man neither wore nor carried a hat. Vickers surmised that he was a guest at the hotel and that he was merely escorting his lovely visitor to the door.

Vickers' long legs carried him swiftly across the lobby. As he went past the couple he was conscious of a quick glance from the girl. Her voice lifted a little in her conversation as she said, "I've got to go down to the bank. . . ." Then Vickers pushed through the revolving door.

He stopped at a newsstand on the corner, glancing at the headlines of the papers. Bold scareheads screamed the story of the kidnaping of the Brainard child and the wanton murder of the seven students who had been blasted down by the Red Raiders. Lynn Vickers' jaw hardened. The headlines were like a direct challenge thrown in his face.

He bought a paper, turned away from the stand, and started down the sidewalk. Ahead of him he saw the trim figure of the red haired girl. A sudden thought struck him, made him glance at his wristwatch. The hands registered two-forty. He knew that most banks closed their doors at three. The girl had said she was going to the bank, yet she was apparently in no haste,

for she stopped to window-shop in front of a millinery display.

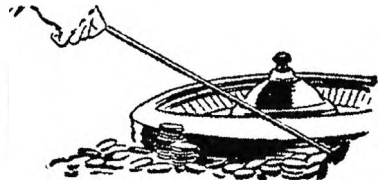
Vickers' pace slowed and he pretended to inspect the contents of the window of a haberdashery. From the corner of his eye he sized up the girl. She was young—about twenty-three, he judged. Tastefully though not expensively dressed in a tailored suit of dark blue, with a tricky blue and white hat that angled a trifle over her left eye. A ghost of a smile tugged at his lips as she opened her bag, deftly touched her slightly turned up nose with a powder puff, and touched her mouth with a lipstick. Then she closed her bag and moved down the street.

The G-man followed. Before long his attention was attracted to a big clock that overhung the sidewalk. Black letters on the frame of the clock read, "Middletown Trust Company." A guard had started to pull grilled bars across the plate glass windows of the bank, preparatory to closing time.

Still the red haired girl showed no signs of hastening. Rather, she slowed her walk to a casual stroll. Her eyes scanned the faces of other pedestrians.

Vickers watched her, a slight frown wrinkling his brow. Some sixth sense seemed to be sending warning flashes to his brain. He had experienced the same sensation before, and seldom had his hunches led him astray.

*You take  
a chance*



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His eyes, too, started scrutinizing the faces of passers-by. He was halfway down the block toward the bank when he saw the red haired girl come to an abrupt halt. She wheeled quickly, facing the curb, and the G-man saw the color drain from her cheeks; her eyes went wide and her hand lifted to her lips, as if to stifle a scream.

His startled glance whipped around, following the girl's frightened stare. Then the blood pounded at his temples. A dark maroon car which had been parked at the curb suddenly stirred into life and glided along to a spot directly in front of the bank.

The doors of the sedan flew open, and four men jumped out, splitting in pairs to form a pathway to the door of the bank. Each held a sub-machine gun in a position of readiness—and the faces of all four were hidden behind crimson masks.

PEDESTRIANS screamed, dashed wildly for safety, as the muzzles of the lethal weapons moved in a slow arc, menacing all who were on the sidewalk. Not a word was uttered. Like grim statues the desperadoes stood, covering the street in both directions, glittering eyes burning through the slits in the masks, tensely waiting for the first sign of resistance or attack.

Vickers was buffeted by a fat, screaming woman who ran in a frenzy of fear. A bareheaded young man hit him from the other side, and ran down the sidewalk, yelling at the top of his lungs, "The Red Raiders! The Red Raiders!"

For a second or two Vickers was puzzled by the maneuver. Then a shot rang out in the bank. On the heels of the report came a terrible scream which was followed by two more shots. The scheme of the Red Raiders flashed through Vickers' brain; part of the gang had drifted into the bank, unmasked, posing as legitimate customers, to wait until the business of the day was practically completed and the vaults were being opened for the storing of the deposits.

Then the pay-off—and the G-man's seething brain could picture the transformation of the bogus customers into hard-faced, cold-eyed killers who whipped guns from beneath their coats and trained them on the startled personnel of the bank.

Vickers dashed forward, his hand flashing to the holster beneath his armpit. Racing madly, he dodged the terrified townspeople who were demoralized with fear at the sight of the red-masked marauders. He glimpsed three figures emerging from the bank. One carried a heavy satchel in his arms. The other two held automatic pistols. Then he saw a policeman running toward the bank from the opposite direction, yanking at the service gun in his holster.

One of the machine gunners lifted the muzzle of his weapon, squeezed the trigger. A shrill, clattering burst mowed the officer down before he could draw the pistol.

Lynn Vickers grated out an oath. Without slackening his speed, he whipped up his automatic, tightened his finger around the trigger and felt the recoil of the butt against his palm. The bandit who had shot the cop whirled around as though a giant hand had spun him. The Tommy gun dropped from his grasp. His right shoulder sagged and his arm hung limp. He started to run, but stumbled and fell.

The other desperadoes wheeled sharply, swinging their sub-machine guns toward the man who had dared to pit himself against the murderous skill of the Red Raiders. But the darting figure of G-77 was diving for the sidewalk, rolling toward the curb, as he sought a clear shot at the masked leader of the mob, who was racing for the sedan with the satchel.

Bullets ricocheted around Vickers as he desperately squirmed and twisted toward a heavy galvanized waste receptacle standing by a post at the curb. Chips of granite spurted up in his face while he covered the last few feet to partial safety.

He came up on his knees behind the



heavy can, ducking as a bullet slashed through the metal. Then his gun levelled. But as his eye lined on the hatchet jaw beneath the crimson mask, one of the mobster guards turned and sprinted toward the car. His body blocked the slug that was meant for Luke Willis. The guard groaned, took another step and pitched over. Willis dodged into the car before the G-man could fire again. The last guard piled in, leaving the two wounded men frantically trying to get to their feet.

Police whistles blasted shrilly as the doors of the car slammed shut. Vickers swore as he raced along the curb. Bitter anger inflamed his brain—anger at the daring of the hellish bandits who dared to pull another job in Middletown so soon after the kidnaping. Such insane bravado could only denote one thing—an utter contempt for law.

His jaw was set at a determined angle as he sprinted toward the back of the car. He had a wild hope that he might be able to cling to the tire rack, unnoticed by the killers, and accompany them to their lair. Only desperate means could prevail against outlaws as daring and fiendish as the Red Raiders.

But the motor of the sedan roared and a cloud of nauseating gas poured from the exhaust, partially blinding the G-man and all but stifling him. Vickers staggered back. Through the poisonous fog that enveloped him, clutching at his lungs, tearing at his eyes, he saw the sedan swing away. It was not carbon monoxide that was strangling him, but some new and unknown gas that he had never encountered—something that the bandits had been able to introduce either into the gasoline or the exhaust to facilitate their escape.

Aliming uncertainly through the smoke screen, Vickers emptied his gun at the rear of the car, hoping to puncture the gas tank or a tire. It was wasted effort. The maroon sedan was a bullet-proof job. Even the tires were filled with a puncture-proof-

ing liquid which flowed into bullet holes and congealed so quickly as to prevent the escape of air.

The bandit vehicle rocketed down the street. Cars swerved madly aside to clear a path for the juggernaut of death. A motorcycle policeman raced out of a side street. A gun lifted in his hand, barked twice. Then a side window of the sedan rolled down, and a chopper opened up on the hapless officer. His body was literally blasted out of the saddle of the motor-bike.

VICKERS turned and began to dash back toward the hotel where his car was parked. He saw a big figure in a blue uniform car cutting across the block toward him. A gold shield glittered in the afternoon sunlight; gold bands adorned the officer's coat.

"Halt! Halt, or I'll fire!" yelled the police captain. He had mistaken G-77 for a member of the mob. Vickers kept running as he turned a white, set face toward the officer.

"Get those two birds I dropped, you big cluck," he grated. "I'm going to trail the killers in my car."

The captain paused, uncertain. Vickers rapped another order.

"Get going, feller, before Willis comes back to pick up those men!"

There was something authoritative in the clipped command which made the officer obey.

Vickers wasted no more time. Jerking open the door of his car, he threw a concealed ignition switch beneath the dash. The motor roared and throbbed beneath the battered hood. Vickers slammed the machine into gear and whirled away.

The special racing motor installed in the shabby looking coupé proved its worth as G-77 tooled the grey car furiously down the main thoroughfare. The maroon sedan had a lead of more than two blocks. Traffic scattered in all directions as it roared through red lights. Cars piled in confu-

sion on either side of a lane cleared by the Red Raiders' juggernaut. Vickers cut into that lane, his left arm clamped across the wheel, his forearm leaning hard on the button of the horn.

He gained on the sedan as they flashed through the business district. Twice death stared Vickers in the face when panic-stricken drivers hurtled out of side streets,

almost into the path of the racing cars. Both times he swerved past with scant inches to spare. Out past the Middletown University grounds they flew. The road was clearer now. Both machines showed even greater bursts of speed.

Vickers pressed his accelerator down to the floorboard. His speedometer needle flickered at ninety. But the maroon job

*Lynn Vickers whipped up his automatic and fired. The bandit whirled around as though a giant hand had spun him.*





gradually began to creep away from him. Doggedly he hung on in stubborn pursuit.

G-77's glittering eyes riveted on the sleek back of the sedan as he crouched over the wheel. Bitterness gripped his heart as he continued to lose ground, yard by yard. Now he fully realized the diabolical cleverness of the masked murderers. It was no wonder that they had been able to terrorize three states with their reign of pillage and bloodshed. The Red Raiders obviously

were guided by some criminally scientific brain. Their car was a marvel of impregnability and speed. The contrivance for disseminating poison gas indicated that an ingenious mind was at work for this organization of super-criminals.

Vickers sucked in his breath sharply. Through his mind flashed the memory of a case the Bureau had been working on for weeks—the strange disappearance of an eccentric inventor in Baltimore. The man

who had vanished was an expert on chemistry. Had Luke Willis been responsible for that disappearance?

Jacoby—that was the inventor's name—had been a leading technician with one of the big public utility companies. He had inherited a small fortune, and bought himself a house just outside Baltimore, built a laboratory and had devoted his time to experiments. He lived alone, a crusty, elderly bachelor who was too wrapped up in his work to care for social contacts. A cleaning woman came once a week, and it was she who had discovered the absence of Henry Jacoby. His usually neat and orderly study had been topsy-turvy, as though a struggle had taken place. Neither the local police nor the G-men had been able to find the slightest clue to his whereabouts.

Vickers vowed to go deeper into the disappearance of the scientist. Possibly the Red Raiders were holding him a prisoner, forcing him to work for them.

A GRIM smile split G-77's face as he saw the back window of the bandit sedan roll down. Blue steel glittered momentarily, then Vickers bent lower over the wheel as the staccato barking of a Tommy gun sounded above the roar of the racing motors.

Cobwebs frosted his windshield where the bullets from the death car smacked against the shatter-proof glass. His vision was clouded; the road ahead became a shadowy, wavering ribbon. His hands clamped tighter on the wheel as he guided the grey car by the movement of the sedan ahead.

Then the hair at the back of his neck lifted, and cold beads of perspiration formed on his brow when he glimpsed the outline of a hand raised in the aperture of the window. Something oval and black nestled in the fingers of that hand. The black object arched through the air, followed swiftly by another, and two grenades

curved down onto the road ahead of him.

A succession of deafening explosions crashed against G-77's eardrums. Asphalt rained down on the roof of the coupé. Then the wheel pitched and bucked in his powerful grip as he struck the first hole blasted in the pavement. He saw a steel telegraph pole rushing toward him. Savagely he threw his hundred and eighty pounds against the steering gear, veering the machine sideways on two wheels.

The coupé rocketed and swerved, then crashed into the edge of the second shell hole, almost pitching him against the windshield.

His feet braced against the floorboards. His arms tore at their sockets from the sudden, jarring wrench. Death loomed ahead. The plunging car shot off at a tangent, headed for a high brick wall that flanked the road.

Vickers grimly fought to avoid the crash that seemed almost certain. His right foot was still pressed tight on the accelerator, and it was the speed of the machine that saved him. The wheels hit firm pavement again, spun for a split second, then the car lurched forward on all four wheels, describing a long S on the road, finally straightening.

The maroon sedan had gained hundreds of yards while Vickers was battling with death. Now it was roaring out of sight, around a corner. The craggy-jawed G-man swore fitfully, pointing the nose of the grey coupé at the curve.

Then with a sickening lurch the coupé catapulted toward the side of the road. There were two sharp explosions. Despair gripped Vickers' heart as he heard the tires blow. His foot yanked off the accelerator and his knee cut the ignition. His left foot slammed hard on the brake. Sweat poured across his forehead, partly blinding him. It seemed that now no human power could ever right the careening, swaying heap of steel he was riding. He felt the shock, heard the crunch of twisting metal when

the rear fender smashed past a telegraph pole. The coupé executed a complete turn in the road. He let the wheel spin in his hand for a fraction of a second, then yanked hard to the left. The radiator of the coupé was less than a foot from the threatening wall when his final desperate yank at the emergency brake averted disaster.

Lynn Vickers found his legs suddenly weak when he lurched out of the car and on to the road. Baffled anger glinted in his eyes as he stared at the profusion of shingle nails the bandits had strewn across the highway. Luke Willis and his mobsters were prepared for every emergency. The score had been all in favor of the Red Raiders in G-77's first encounter with the notorious outlaws.

Vickers' jaw squared and his shoulders hunched. It was going to take all of his skill and intelligence to achieve success in this assignment. In Luke Willis he had met a foe who had means of matching the G-men point for point, both in daring and in science.

G-77's eyes took on the hard, green light of battle. It was the same look that marked his eyes when Southern U was on the one-yard line in the shadow of their own goal posts. Only now he had to battle through to win, not for his Alma Mater, but for the nation. The menace of the Red Raiders was steadily increasing. Already death, deprivation and desolation had followed in their wake. More women would be husbandless from bullets of the murderers, more mothers and children would be starving because their wage earners had been ruthlessly shot down, all citizens would doubt the efficacy and power of the law—unless these cruel fiends were wiped out.

Lynn Vickers was faced with a terrific task; the safety and sanity of a nation depended upon that task being accomplished. The Red Raiders must be smashed! The reign of terror must be ended!

## CHAPTER III

### Scientific Sleuthing

IT was nearly fifteen minutes before the first car of the posse that had trailed out of Middletown in the wake of the bandits came to a stop at the holes in the pavement. Then came other machines, filled with men who were armed with every conceivable type of weapon. Threats and curses were growled between clenched teeth; a seething hatred toward the daring outlaws was revealed in the faces of the possemen. Yet Vickers could see that beneath the savage anger there was an undercurrent of fear. The dread reputation of Luke Willis had left its impress upon the minds of these citizens.

Vickers moved toward the cars. As he walked, he thought fast. It was possible that an organization as clever as the Red Raiders would have spies planted everywhere. He decided to keep his identity a secret.

He saw the police captain scramble hastily out of the first car. He was accompanied by another man, tall and thick chested. The big man clipped, "My name is Church—Branford Church. I'm the district attorney at Middletown. Are you a government man?"

"Hell, no, Mr. Church," Vickers said hastily. "I'm Fred Jones, a salesman for the American Metalware Company."

"A salesman, eh?" Church's eyes were sharp. "How come you dared to tie into the Red Raiders like you did? It took a lot of guts to pull a stunt like that."

Lynn Vickers face grew somber. His voice was husky with emotion.

"Those murdering devils shot a pal of mine down in cold blood," he explained. "He was walking past a bank where they pulled a job, and he got a bullet in the heart just for being near the spot. When I saw them raiding that bank I guess I went haywire, thinking about Ned Green, my pal. I didn't come out of the fog until

I nearly crashed the wall. I've been scared to death ever since."

"You handle a gun pretty smooth. You wounded two of the bandits, and they're both prisoners now." Suspicion still tinged the voice of the district attorney. Vickers was sizing him up shrewdly, and the result was none too favorable.

He explained that he'd been born and raised in Texas and had practically grown up with a six-gun in his hand. Before leaving Washington, G-77 had equipped himself with necessary credentials to carry out the rôle of Fred Jones, salesman, even to the gun permit which he now showed to Church.

Captain Miller, the police officer, had been examining Vickers' coupé. Miller was loud in his praise of the pseudo salesman's courage, and in the same breath was curious about the bullet-proof car that Vickers was driving. The G-man said he'd bought the machine from an ex-bootlegger, and hadn't discovered that it was bullet-proof until the bullets of the Red Raiders had been deflected.

It was not until two men from Graham's office in Middletown came over and flatly stated that Vickers was a stranger to them and not a member of the F.B.I. that the district attorney accepted Vickers' story. Vickers managed to signal his fellow G-men before they were questioned.

**P**ART of the posse, including the federal operatives from Middletown, left to follow up the trail of the bandits. Vickers accepted a ride back to town in Captain Miller's car, first arranging to have the grey coupé towed to a garage for repairs, after which it would be delivered at the hotel.

Returning to town, Vickers questioned Church and Miller about the raid on the bank. The district attorney swore vehemently, and pounded his thick knee. Not only had the president and the cashier been murdered, but the desperadoes had taken all the money for the city's relief rolls for

the month. The bandits must have had inside information about the bank, for the money had only been deposited that morning.

"That's tough," said Vickers. "Lots of people are going to suffer from that blow."

He could vision people starving. Want and famine would stalk through the streets of Middletown as a result of that raid. Violence and crime would be rampant. Starving men know no law, save that of self-preservation. They would rob and even kill for money to buy food.

Grimly he wondered if the bank robbery, executed so soon after the kidnaping, was not a coolly calculated coup, intended to break down the morale of all law enforcement agencies—whether it was not another step in a carefully planned campaign which would lead to a staggering new series of diabolic crimes. More evident than ever was the menace of the leader of the Red Raiders; more evident were the vast schemes which were being hatched in the diseased brain of the crime emperor who ruled these outlaws. They had to be stopped—and he was elected to stop them.

Then Vickers heard the harsh voice of Branford Church addressing him. For a few minutes he had slipped out of the rôle of Fred Jones. He wondered if his vengeful thoughts had been betrayed in his face. The district attorney had asked him about the smoke screen of poison gas.

"I never smelled anything like it," Vickers declared. "Of course I wasn't in the war, but I took some chemistry at school, and I couldn't notice anything familiar about the odor."

"That's what I figured," Church stated flatly. "I'm a chemist—just sold my interest in a manufacturing plant a year or so ago—so I know something about gasses. I got a good whiff of that smoke screen, and it was a new mixture to me."

Something tinkled at the back of Vickers' brain, like a tocsin warning him of danger. He looked interested as he asked, "So

you're a chemist as well as a lawyer, Mr. Church?"

"Yep. Had a degree in science before I took up law. Politics appealed to me more than manufacturing, so I gave up the business."

Vickers asked about the Red Raiders who had been captured. He learned that Professor Brainard, almost crazy with apprehension over the fate of his kidnaped son, had gone to the city jail to aid detectives in questioning the prisoners. Church pompously expressed a doubt that anything would be learned. Brainard was all right on the scientific end, with microscopes and test tubes, but when it came to getting information from prisoners, the district attorney had plenty of confidence in his own ability to break them down.

Vickers heard Church promise that he'd take the outlaws to his office and give them a workout without delay. The G-man fumed inwardly. It would be just like the big wind-bag to pave the way for Luke Willis to carry out a threat he had made many times—a boast that he would free any of his men from any jail, inside of twenty-four hours after their arrest.

Vickers made a casual suggestion that it might be better to wait until morning, as Willis might make an attack under the cover of darkness. From the corner of his eye, he saw Church and Captain Miller exchange significant glances as he voiced his suggestion. Then Church heartily agreed to the wisdom of the plan.

AS the police car pulled up to the curb in front of the bank, Lynn Vickers saw the red headed girl walking swiftly toward them. Church got out of the car while Vickers was assuring Captain Miller that he would be around town for several weeks, in case he was needed to testify against the prisoners. When G-77 stepped to the sidewalk, Church beckoned to him.

"Like to have you meet my niece, Evelyn March," he said. "Evelyn, this is

Fred Jones, the young feller who nearly wiped out the Red Raiders single handed."

Vickers smiled politely, but his probing glance was sharp on the girl's face. He thought he saw her violet eyes narrow a little as she gushed, "I'll bet he's a G-man, Uncle Bran."

Branford Church laughed heartily and dug his thumb into Vickers' ribs. Vickers thought the laugh lacked sincerity. The district attorney explained that "Jones" was a salesman, not a government sleuth. Vickers talked for a minute, then said he had to call his home office. He told Evelyn March he hoped he'd see her again.

"You will, Mr. Jones." And she smiled cryptically as he turned away.

The G-man's forehead furrowed in a frown as he strode along toward his hotel. District Attorney Church's beautiful niece was an enigma. He felt that her flapper mannerisms covered a keen, calculating brain. And he had a strong hunch that Evelyn March's crack about his being a G-man was no stupid compliment. Grimly he resolved to learn more about the red headed girl.

From a pay-station in the hotel drug-store he called Alex Graham at the Bureau field office. The special agent in charge of the area had strongly suspected that the blond man who had dropped two of the Red Raiders was G-77, whom he had been expecting. In guarded tones they talked for a minute or two about the case. Vickers learned that Graham's men had followed the bandit car across the state line, but had lost the trail there. Graham believed the car had been switched at some hidden garage, and was having all garages covered and checked. Vickers told Graham he'd come up to the office about eight that night, and asked if Professor Brainard could be there. He felt the university criminologist might have some information about the ruthless mob that had kidnaped his child. Graham promised to get Brainard, if he could.

Vickers found himself quite a hero among the guests of the hotel. He played the rôle of Fred Jones to perfection, even to the point of assuming an affected swagger. He hated the idea of going into the dining room for dinner and being a target for curious eyes, but the rôle called for just such a display of nonchalance.

He was making a great pretense of studying the menu when a suave voice asked if the other chair at the table was reserved. Vickers looked up and saw the dark haired man with the mustache. He shook his head. As the man sat down he congratulated G-77 effusively on his courage and marksmanship. The G-man looked embarrassed, and repeated his story about going "crazy mad" over the murder of his pal.

The dark man looked sceptical. He introduced himself as Paul Adrian, a private detective from New York. Adrian hinted strongly that he believed Vickers was in the same line of work, and tentatively offered to coöperate. But Vickers tried to convince the sleuth that he was a simon-pure salesman. He casually attempted to pump Adrian, but the private dick was close-mouthed about what had brought him to Middletown.

VICKERS was doing some deep thinking as he rode the elevator up to his room. He knew the Ajax Agency, with which Adrian was connected. It was a big agency, but one with none too good a reputation. He wondered what the tie-up was between Paul Adrian and Evelyn March. From what Church had said, his niece was from New York, too, and was in Middletown merely on a visit.

Then Vickers got busy gathering his reports and dossier on the case of the Red Raiders, slipping them into a flat envelope that lay snugly in the inside pocket of his coat, next to the clip holstered gun which he had cleaned and oiled with meticulous care.

The Bureau of Investigation field office was about four blocks from the hotel. Vickers meandered carelessly away from the hostelry, stopping now and then to stare in the shop windows. Before he had gone two blocks he knew that he was being shadowed by Paul Adrian. A grim smile creased his face. He paused for a minute in front of a movie theater, then bought a ticket and walked in.

In the semi-gloom he headed swiftly for the balcony and took a seat at the end of a row, near the exit. His eyes stabbed at the patrons who came up the stairs for seats, but he couldn't discern the tall, dapper figure of the private shamus. A minute or two later a chattering group of high school youngsters came down the stairs and started for the balcony exit. Vickers slipped out of his seat, went through the door with them, and sped swiftly down the iron stairs that led to a wide alley at the side of the theater. Five minutes later he was walking up the stairs to Graham's office.

Three of the F. B. I. men were in the office with Graham. Lynn Vickers shook hands with them. One chap, a wide-mouthed, freckled faced Irishman, Barry Kelley, had worked with Vickers on a case two months before.

Graham handed G-77 a report on the two thugs he had wounded. Both were wanted in several states for previous crimes. The efficient methods of the Bureau of Investigation had located the duplicate fingerprints of the pair in the file of more than four million prints at headquarters in Washington, and Graham had his report in less than an hour after he had wired the classifications of the prisoners.

For the next hour the F. B. I. men were busy comparing notes, scanning maps, checking, and re-checking the lists of various crimes attributed to the Red Raiders. Finally Vickers straightened, said abruptly, "Alex, maybe I'm wrong,



but I've got an idea that we're barking up the wrong tree in chasing Willis."

Graham stared at him thoughtfully. "You mean that Willis isn't the head of this gang? I've had the same idea, Lynn. But I've got nothing more definite than a theory to work on."

"Just run over the list of crimes this mob has committed," Vickers said. "Look how many of them show the diabolic cleverness of a trained mind. Willis is smart, but he isn't brainy enough to plan anything like that poison gas smoke screen or some of the other fiendish schemes they've worked out. A scientific brain—or a legal mind—some trained intellect is behind the activities of the Red Raiders."

Vickers nodded and asked Graham for his up-to-date information on the kidnaping of Henry Jacoby, the eccentric scientist. Each branch of the service always knew the cases that other state or territorial divisions were working on, so Graham was able to produce reports from his files which showed that very little progress had been made in clearing up the mystery of Jacoby's disappearance. Graham's lips pursed in a silent whistle as Vickers finished reading the report.

"That's a possibility I hadn't thought of," he said. "Jacoby may be a prisoner of the Red Raiders, may be supplying the brains they need."

"It's a hot lead for us to follow, at any rate," Vickers told him. "I've got the wildest kind of a hunch on another slant. What do you know about Branford Church, your local district attorney? Did you know that he was a chemist and something of a scientist before he went into politics? Of course, he has inside knowledge of all the steps the law is taking in the pursuit of the Raiders. It would be an ideal spot for the leader of this mob to occupy!"

Graham looked startled, then shook his head.

"Church is a politician at heart. He's

pretty cocky and talks a lot. He's building up, probably for the next election. Wants to be a senator. We've nosed around, naturally. But Miller and Church seem to be trying conscientiously to do everything they can to break up the gang."

HEAVY steps sounded on the stairs. Then a loud sound that was more like a kick than a knock. Barry Kelley opened the door, and the tall, gaunt, bearded Professor Brainard walked in. His deep-set eyes, shadowed with grief and worry, were apologetic. Vickers saw that both of the criminologist's hands were swathed in bandages.

"Sorry I was late," Professor Brainard said. "Had to go to the doctor's. A test tube exploded in my hands while I was analyzing the dust from the hats of the prisoners the police got today. I hoped that I might find a clue as to the hangout where they took my boy."

The professor's voice cracked, and his eyes misted with tears. He went on shakily, "You know that sort of thing has been done. A certain type of dust might indicate a certain part of the state where these thugs spend most of their time. But the tube exploded, so I didn't learn anything. I should have known better than to try anything like that in my present frame of mind. I was thinking more about Bobby—he's all that I've got since his mother died three years ago—than I was about the experiment, I guess."

Graham nodded sympathetically. Then he introduced Vickers. G-77 felt a twinge of pity as he looked at the seamed, harried face of the stricken father. The eyes, above the high cheek bones, were sunken; the cheeks, against the shadow of his Van Dyke beard, looked hollow and gaunt.

"I've heard a good deal about your exploits, Vickers," the professor said. "I hope you are as successful here as you have been on other cases. God knows you

are needed. If we ever want to see my boy alive again . . .”

Brainard's voice shook, and tears filled his eyes. "We've got to strike fast," he quavered. "The Red Raiders hate me because I was instrumental in the capture of one of their lieutenants. I'll do everything I can to help, but . . ." His deep-set, blazing eyes went down to his bandaged hands, "It's hellish to be crippled—at a time like this."

"Have you any idea where they might have taken the boy?" asked Vickers. "Anything that might give some idea of where the headquarters of the gang is located?"

Brainard shook his head. He paced the floor like a caged tiger.

"I took a page out of your book," he muttered, "and analyzed some of the oil that dripped from the Red Raiders' car in the few minutes it was parked in front of my house. The sediment that made up the residue was strongly alkaline. The soil around here is rich and fertile. But in the hills of the next state there are strong alkaline deposits. I'd suggest that every square inch of those hills be combed—that every corner in every building in that area be searched. . . ."

His voice died away. Then he continued:

"I know your men are doing everything possible, Graham. But my life was wrapped up in that child—the only thing left for me to love. They're going to torture him—because I dared to help the police."

"Are you sure it's just a revenge motive?" asked Vickers. "Perhaps the Raiders think they can bleed you for ransom money."

Brainard shook his head, and said:

"You'll find a note in my coat pocket. Please take it out, Vickers. It will settle any doubt you may have on that score."

Vickers took the note out carefully, using a silk handkerchief to avoid leaving any fingerprints. He opened it with a small

pair of pincers. Then his eyes narrowed as he read the typed message:

"WE'RE GOING TO MAKE YOU SWEAT BLOOD, SMART GUY. YOUR KID IS GOING TO SUFFER LIKE HELL BECAUSE YOU NOSED INTO THE AFFAIRS OF THE RED RAIDERS."

"You've got to do something, Vickers," cried Brainard. "Those inhuman fiends will torture him to death just to make me suffer."

"Perhaps it isn't as bad as that," Vickers said grimly. "The leader of the mob knows psychology—he knows the mental agony you are going through, picturing what is happening to your child. It's a diabolical scheme, but I think we have a little more time before anything serious happens to Bobby."

Brainard paced the floor wildly. He found little comfort in G-77's optimism.

"Have you checked this letter for prints?" asked Vickers. The professor nodded his head.

"I went over it carefully, subjected it to every test I know, trying to bring out latent prints. I haven't even touched the letter since it was thrust under my door this morning. It has been handled with gloves or instruments all the time. Perhaps your laboratory experts can bring out something on it, but I couldn't find the trace of a print. Which is another proof of the fiendish cleverness of these devils."

VICKERS inserted the sheet in its envelope and nodded his head.

"We'll go over it," he said. "The new silver nitrate process may bring out something."

Professor Brainard left a few minutes later. After he had gone, Vickers had a sudden thought. He placed the letter under a powerful magnifying glass, went over every square inch of its surface. When he

had finished he turned to Graham and said:

"There's no watermark, but the pattern of the paper is not common. Let's send it to headquarters and see if we can learn where it was made and where the stock was sold. That may give us a clue.

Graham agreed.

G-77 eyed the maps on the table, scrutinizing the shaded area in the hilly section of the next state. A scowl wrinkled his forehead as he stared at the area where the Red Raiders might be holed up.

"Here's a thought, Alex," he muttered.

*A girl was walking at the side of the road, weaving erratically. Vickers recognized her as Evelyn March!*



"Crooks have to eat. None of your men has been able to locate any restaurant where there have been any suspicious characters eating regularly. They must be cooking their own meals in their hideout."

"That's what we figure, Lynn."

"How about trying the old peddler act? Have a couple of the boys circulate through the area, find out from grocers any boarding houses or homes that buy big quantities of food. Then our men can call at those houses peddling fireless cookers at ridiculously low prices. The stuff they sell will be defective, and the purchasers will want their money back. That gives us a chance to get the cookers back and check them for fingerprints, and also for our men to get in these houses and use their eyes to good advantage."

Barry Kelley and the other two agents agreed to start out the next morning on the job of trying to ferret out the hideaway of the gang. Vickers would remain around Middletown attempting to pick up a lead. From the very timeliness of the attack on the bank with the federal funds, he was sure that the Red Raiders had spies planted right in the city. He already mentally listed Paul Adrian and Evelyn March as possible suspects for such a rôle.

**I**T was nearly midnight when he went down the stairs from the Bureau office. He paused for a minute in the lobby of the building; then, assuring himself that there was no one to witness his departure, he slipped quietly out of the door and started for the hotel.

Caution was an instinct with G-77. As he walked, his eyes were probing every shadow, seeking out every dark areaway where a hidden foe might lurk.

Half-way to the hotel, his heart skipped a beat. He thought he caught a faint movement in the shadows of an alley between two tall buildings on the opposite side of the street. But his pace did not slacken. Then his scalp started to tingle.

There it was again—the faint movement of a deeper blob of black that was within the shadows. Vickers' hand moved toward the top button of his suit coat; his muscles tensed as his heels clicked along the sidewalk.

Flickering rays from a street lamp edged the blackness of the alley with grey. Now the movement was definite, and as Vickers reached a point almost in front of the alley, he caught the glint of light on dull metal. It was visible for the merest fraction of a second, but the G-man's keen eye got it, and his brain translated the gleam into a danger signal.

He threw his body forward in a low, plunging dive, as though he were hitting a football line. His charging rush carried him forward for five yards; then he

swerved suddenly to the right. A red and yellow flame lanced the darkness, and G-77 heard the whine of a bullet as it ricocheted off a brick wall where he had stood a second ago. No echoing roar followed the flash. Vickers knew that an assassin was sniping at him with a silenced gun. He was dodging across the street now, making a broken field run. A second bullet from the hidden killer plucked through the cloth of his coat, and the stillness of the night was broken by the noise of shattering glass as the flying lead smashed through a plate glass window.

Vickers glimpsed the blurred outline of a figure in the alley. His own gun snarled viciously as he fired at the flame of the hidden sniper's gun. But he was shooting at a moving target, for the dark shadow ducked swiftly and then faded into the deeper blackness at the other end of the alley.

Running feet clattered on the pavement. Vickers saw a patrolman pounding down the sidewalk, a revolver waving in his fist. He slowed his stride a trifle, believing the officer might mistake him for an enemy. They reached the head of the alley together, and the cop growled an order for Vickers to halt.

"What's the idea of shooting up the town?" he snarled. Then he recognized Vickers as the blond young man who had become famous that afternoon. "So it's you, eh? What is it this time?"

Vickers knew there was no use in trying to follow the gunman now. In the few seconds' delay the assassin was probably blocks away, if he had had a car at the opposite end of the alley. G-77 explained tersely what had happened, and the cop swore vehemently.

Taking a thin flashlight from his pocket, Vickers played the beam along the alley, probing at every nook and corner. But as he had expected, the alley was clear. Then he let the ray flicker along the bricks at his feet. He exclaimed exultantly when he

spotted two discharged revolver shells on the pavement.

"Mind if I keep these, officer?" he asked. "I'm seeing Captain Miller and the D. A. in the morning. I'd like to have them look at these."

The cop nodded his head, scribbled a few notes in his report book about the "accident," and then went on to the hotel with Vickers.

"You'd better be watching your step, young feller," he advised. "It looks to me like the Red Raiders have got you spotted as the man who nearly broke up their parade. It ain't going to be healthy for you around Middletown."

Vickers nodded soberly. The same thought was running through his mind, and the idea was disturbing. Had the Red Raiders tabbed him as G-77, or was the attack simply a vicious effort to avenge the interference of a private citizen?

The night clerk at the hotel was full of excited questions when Vickers came in. Vickers told him briefly what had happened, then went upstairs to his room. As he undressed, the presentiment was strong that someone in Middletown was aware of his true identity. If that was the case, his life was in danger every minute of the day or night. He walked over and examined the lock on his door. It was the ordinary type of lock—one that could be opened in a few seconds with a skeleton key. A few added precautions might not be amiss.

From his leather case the G-man took the beam light he carried, with its photo-cell battery. In fifteen minutes he had rigged it up so that the beam dropped down from above, directly in front of the door. Anyone coming into the room would break that beam of light, and when the beam was broken a buzzer would sound on the night table beside Vickers' bed. G-77 inserted fresh cartridges into the clip of his automatic and thrust the gun under his pillow. Then he climbed into bed and dropped into a deep, dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER IV

### Jail Delivery!

IT seemed that he had barely closed his eyes when the warning buzzer on the table beside him jerked him into wakefulness. His eyes darted to the door, saw it inching slowly open. Vickers' hand whipped beneath the pillow, grasped the automatic. Then he slipped out of the far side of the bed and crouched against the wall.

Blood pounded at his temples and savage exultation raced in his veins as he saw a tall figure clad in a long coat of dark material slipping through the partly opened portal. Like a black phantom, the menacing figure crept across the floor toward the bed. Vickers saw the vague shape of a mask beneath the dark felt hat that was pulled low on the intruder's head. He could dimly glimpse the outline of a strong, predatory jaw tucked deep in the upturned collar of the coat. There was a small shadow above the masked man's mouth. Vickers couldn't make out whether it was a mustache or not. His eyes went to the gloved hands, and the hair lifted at the back of his neck as he saw the barrel of a gun. From the length of the barrel he believed it to be a silenced revolver.

Burning rage flooded to his brain when he glimpsed that gun. His nocturnal visitor was the assassin of the alley, returning to complete the job. Crouching low in the darkness of the room, Vickers lifted his own revolver. His finger tightened on the trigger. Then his heartbeat quickened.

The masked man did not have Luke Willis' lantern jaw! He doubted that the important job of murdering an important foe like himself would be delegated to an ordinary member of the mob. The masked murderer might well be the mysterious chief of the Red Raiders! Such a man would take personal pride in wiping out a dangerous enemy.

Vickers lowered the muzzle of his gun.

G-men were trained to take prisoners alive whenever possible. His jaw hardened and he planted his feet hard on the floor, muscles tensed, his eyes slitted on the menacing figure approaching the bed. G-77 was going to take him alive if possible. He tightened his grip on the butt of his automatic, turning it so that he could barrel-whip the masked marauder.

He saw the man's eyes gleaming as he turned toward the bed and lifted the silenced gun. Then Vickers sprang, his left hand grabbing for the killer's throat, his right hand clubbing down with the automatic. Over the bed he dove in a vicious head tackle. His fingers closed on the intruder's throat, carrying him back against the wall. Vickers' automatic crashed down, and the force of the blow tingled his hand, almost jarring the gun loose from his grasp. For a split second Vickers was dumfounded. His assailant should have wilted under that powerful blow. But instead, his knees merely sagged a bit and then he was a raging, fighting maniac.

**V**ICKERS cursed under his breath. Here was another tribute to the fiendish ingenuity of the Red Raiders. The masked killer was wearing some sort of a protecting guard over his skull. Vickers had seen them—thin skull caps of finely meshed steel on a cushion of rubber. His blow hadn't even stunned the killer.

Savagely and desperately they struggled. Vickers' muscles were like steel bands, but the man he fought was just as powerful. He tried to lift the gun again, but Vickers grabbed his wrist, pulling himself close to his antagonist to prevent a groin blow from the marauder's knee. Vickers jammed his right forearm across the man's throat and tried to force his head back against the wall. His bare toes dug at the carpet, seeking additional leverage.

His antagonist's body arched, and with a tremendous surge he jarred Vickers backward. His right heel crashed down on the

G-man's bare instep. A wave of excruciating pain swept through G-77's brain and for a fraction of a second his grip slackened on the killer's gun hand. He felt the wrist slipping from his grasp, fought to hold it. But the hand jerked free, and the revolver snapped up in a short, vicious blow that smote Vickers' temple like a sledge hammer. His knees buckled and he felt himself slipping to the floor. He moved his head, trying to avoid a second blow. Something exploded against the back of his skull and blackness swept over him. Dimly he heard a voice mutter, "You interfering young fool! You've met a real foe this time."

Blind instinct made Vickers roll as he hit the carpet. A metallic click sounded dimly in his ears, and a bullet ripped into the floor beside his face. Somehow he managed to lift his wrist and the gun which he still gripped barked in his hand. A savage oath came from the lips of the masked assailant. Then the door suddenly slammed shut. Knowing the sound of Vickers' shot would rouse the hotel, the masked assailant had slipped away.

G-77 got to his knees. His head spun like a top and he staggered as he pushed himself to his feet and lurched to the door. Jerking it open, he ran into the arms of a man in the hall. In his daze he saw the face of Paul Adrian. Anger burned like a red flame within Vickers. He jabbed his gun against Adrian's ribs, growling savagely:

"Back up, mugg, or I'll drill you."

"Don't be a fool, Jones," snapped Adrian. "The man you want ducked out the window just as I opened my door."

Vickers followed Adrian's pointing finger and saw an open window at the end of the corridor. He swore beneath his breath, ran crookedly to the window. He stared down two stories to the alley below, listening for the sound of running footsteps, peering for a moving shadow. But the alley was silent and deserted.

Bitterly Vickers turned back. His head throbbled and ached and his foot felt as though it had been smashed with a hammer. Adrian was solicitous, but Vickers didn't want sympathy. He had fallen down on a job. His fingers had encircled the throat of the masked leader of the Red Raiders. He was sure of that. But he had let the nefarious killer get away. He might be the veriest tyro in police work. From the muttered words of the masked killer he knew that his identity was no secret and that from now on it would be a personal battle between himself and the leader of the Red Raiders—if indeed his attacker was the brains behind the mad mob, as he had every reason to believe. Vickers' face was like granite as he applied cold compresses to the bump on the back of his head. Red rage seethed in his heart. He welcomed the struggle that was to come.

ONLY a sore spot on his skull remained as a reminder of his narrow escape from death when Vickers appeared in Graham's quarters the next morning. The district attorney had told the special agent that the prisoners would be brought to his office for questioning at nine o'clock. G-77's eyes were intent as they stared out of the window at the courtyard between the county jail and the municipal building where Church had his offices. Graham's office overlooked the court on the third side of the hollow square.

Vickers' nerves were taut. He uttered a low exclamation when the barred steel door of the jail opened and two armed guards came out. The manacled prisoners followed them, with two more guards flanking them on either side. Another armed pair brought up the rear of the procession that moved slowly across the court. Out on the sidewalk a cordon of police detoured all pedestrians. The law was taking no chances on an attempt at rescue.

Uneasiness stirred Vickers' brain as he waited for Alex Graham to assemble his

fingerprint records and other data. Knowing the caliber of the opposition, it seemed inconceivable to G-77 that the leader of the Red Raiders would let these men be questioned. True, they might be hard and tight-lipped enough to survive the grilling without giving out any information. But when a man is facing the chair and an opportunity to save his own life is offered, the instinct of self-preservation is strong. There was always the chance that one of the prisoners might crack.

Graham spoke to the tense, alert man at the window.

"Guess I've got everything, Lynn," he said. "Let's go."

Vickers turned away from the window, nodding his head. He had taken about three strides when his blood ran cold at the terrifying sound of a machine gun burst. Whirling on the balls of his feet, Vickers raced back to the window he had just left.

Out of the mad welter of writhing figures on the ground of the courtyard, he saw two arise—two shackled figures that broke into a lumbering run toward three masked men who were engineering the jail delivery. Two of the men still depressed the triggers of sub-machine guns, one pouring lead at the police along the sidewalk while the second directed his deadly fire at the guards writhing on the ground. The third man—and Luke Willis' long jaw was plainly visible beneath his crimson mask—scattered death from a pair of blazing automatics, driving back the reinforcements that started out from the jail door.

The prisoners reached their rescuers, and the bandits whirled and started back to the car from which they had sprung. It was the same sedan that had been used in the Brainard kidnaping. Terror-stricken townspeople fled before the menace of the outlaws' guns. A woman screaming hysterically dashed along the sidewalk, where the remaining police were returning the bandits' fire from behind trees and poles. The terrible crossfire blasted her down. For a

second the police were stunned by the tragedy. In that moment Willis and his men turned and raced for the car.

Vickers' eyes were green with fury as he turned and grabbed up a Colt-monitor rifle from the rack in the corner. He pumped a bullet into the magazine, levelled the sights on the broad back of Luke Willis, just crouching to dive into the car. The rifle cracked, and a little puff of dust rose from the upholstered door of the car, an inch from the bandit leader's head. Then Willis faded from sight. The front sight of the rifle lined on the neck of one of the machine gunners. His second shot dropped the desperado in his tracks.

The prisoners were leaping into the car now. Willis had spotted the source of the rifle bullets, and Vickers ducked back as the glass in the window splintered from a pistol bullet. He dropped to his knee, his face as hard as granite. Once more his cold eye sighted down the rifle barrel and his finger tightened on the trigger. The rifle butt recoiled against his shoulder. The second machine gunner staggered in his running stride and would have gone down, had not a long arm snaked out from the car, grabbing the wounded man and jerking him inside.

**V**ICKERS caught a glimpse of a woman bent over the wheel of the sedan as the black juggernaut leaped into life, whisked away from the curb and raced down the street. Clever work on the part of Willis. The police, alert for an attempted rescue, would be more likely to overlook a car driven by a woman. Willis had outsmarted the police again, and had kept his promise to free his men from jail.

As he raced down the stairs with Alex Graham at his heels, G-77 was wondering if the girl at the wheel was the red headed niece of District Attorney Church. There had been a certain familiarity about the set of the girl's chin, though he had been too far away to recognize her features.

Vickers' grey car was parked at the curb in front of the Bureau office. He swung the door open, motioned for Graham to get in back of the wheel. He swung the high-power rifle along the back of the seat, and his automatic was gripped in his right hand as he perched precariously on the running board.

Graham switched on the ignition and the coupé thundered down the street in pursuit of the black sedan. From the open rear window of the getaway car a machine gun snarled viciously. Bullets zoomed past Vickers' ears. He lifted the automatic and emptied a clip at the open window. A grim smile tightened his lips as the Tommy gun was suddenly still and the bullet-proof glass window hastily rolled up and closed.

A light roadster tried to swerve out of the way of the bandits' machine. The bumper of the heavy sedan crashed the smaller car and sent it plunging on to the sidewalk. Shrieks of agony rang in Vickers' ears as they swept on past the scene of the accident. He saw people beneath the wheels of the wrecked roadster, saw bodies writhing within it. Then his eyes were glued on the back of the retreating sedan. Gripping the window with his elbow, he worked another clip into his automatic.

Being unacquainted with the coupé, Graham was unable to get the maximum speed of its motor. The sedan was whirling away from them. Vickers steadied himself and concentrated his fire on the right rear tire of the Red Raiders' vehicle, hoping against hope that he might be able to drive so many bullets into it that the puncture-proof liquid would not be effective. Graham jerked out his own automatic and handed it to Vickers when G-77's gun was empty. Seven more sizzling pellets of lead sped after the racing tires of the sedan.

But the effort seemed wasted. The bandit car gradually crept away from them, until it was lost from sight in the distance. Vickers crawled into the coupé, and for the next hour they stuck doggedly on the trail.



Much ground was lost in stopping to make inquiries and to examine tire tracks at branches in the road. But the G-men kept on, hoping at last to trail the outlaws to their lair.

They were across the state line when they sighted the black sedan piled up in a ditch. Climbing out to examine it, they found that Vickers' expert marksmanship had been partly effective. The right rear tire was almost flat. Graham muttered an exclamation of pleasure. This was a minor victory for the G-men, forcing Willis to abandon his racing, bullet-proof chariot. Vickers got busy examining the road for tire tracks, trying to figure out what had been the next move of the outlaws.

He saw signs where another car had been forced to a skidding stop, then had swerved in the road in a short, reckless turn that denoted extreme haste. The story was before his eyes. The bandits had halted some autoist and commandeered a car to continue their getaway. Once again the trail was ended.

Graham walked back to the nearest house to telephone for men from his office to come out and go over the black sedan for fingerprints, serial numbers and any other items that might be valuable. When he returned Vickers was inspecting the sedan. G-77 pointed out the short wave radio set, growling, "No wonder they've been able to escape traps and posses. As fast as instructions are disseminated, these babies can pick them up, change their route and avoid cordons."

Cars from Middletown soon began to arrive. Miller and Church were purple with rage over the rescue of the prisoners. But their anger was futile, for they had to admit that they were up against a blank wall.

When the G-men from Graham's office arrived on the scene, Vickers and Graham decided to keep on with the hunt. It was possible that they could pick up the trail again by making inquiries. A car contain-

ing four men and a woman, besides the driver, might have been noticed.

Ten miles farther along the highway, Graham touched the arm of Vickers, who was driving, and pointed to the road ahead of them. A bareheaded girl was walking at the side of the road, weaving erratically. As they drew closer, Vickers' eyes kindled with sudden interest. He recognized the young woman who staggered along, holding her hand to her head. It was Evelyn March!

THEY pulled up beside her and Vickers leaped out, firing questions at the injured girl. In a dull, pain-racked tone she told them that she had been driving her car, a maroon sedan, back toward Middletown after a trip to Norwood, the next town, when the bandits had halted her and forced her to turn and drive them back along the road she had come. After traveling a short distance the outlaws forced her out of the car. Willis had wanted to shoot her, but a woman with them had begged him to let her go free. As she stepped out of her sedan under the guns of the killers, one of the men had struck her on the back of her head with either a blackjack or a gun. The blow had knocked her unconscious. When she came to, the car was out of sight. She didn't know which way it had gone.

Vickers' handsome face mirrored suspicion as he looked at the wound on the back of Evelyn March's head. To him it appeared extremely superficial—hardly sufficient to bear out her story about being knocked unconscious. But she stuck to her original account, and finally the G-man had to accept it.

With the injured girl on their hands, it was impossible to continue trailing the bandits. Evelyn had to be taken to a doctor. She asked them to take her back to Middletown to her uncle's family physician, insisting that she would be all right now that the shock was over.

She talked spasmodically with Graham

on the trip back. As far as he could determine, the girl showed no surprise when she learned that Fred Jones was in reality Lynn Vickers, G-77. She smiled wanly and said, "I suspected something like that last night. No salesman would have done what Mr. Vickers did at the bank robbery. My uncle said the same thing. In fact, he's been sort of expecting G-77 down here for the past week. He said that they needed the best men in the F.B.I. if they were ever going to wipe out the Red Raiders—and he rated Mr. Vickers as the best man on the force."

Vickers' jaw tightened. At the back of his mind was the thought that the man who attacked him the night before might also have been expecting G-77 in Middletown. The chemist-district attorney would bear close observation. And why did the wanderings of Church's niece seem to coincide so closely with the activities of the Red Raiders?

## CHAPTER V

### Single Fingerprint

FOR the next two days Graham's men fruitlessly scoured the country in the hill section of the next state where Professor Brainard's laboratory analysis of the motor oil had indicated that the Red Raiders' hideout might be located. In the guise of peddlers the federal men planted fireless cookers in a dozen homes that were under suspicion. Eight of the cookers had been returned and checked for fingerprints. Reports on these prints from Washington were negative. None of them were on file at the identification bureau.

Graham and Vickers were showing the strain of long hours spent running down false leads and trailing mistaken clues. Each hour they expected the phones to ring and wires to flash with news of another outrage by the Red Raiders. Newspapers were hounding them, lashing them in virulent editorials, inquiring sardonically

about the vaunted efficiency of the G-men. Temporary relief had been obtained for the unemployed in Middletown, but the feeling of unrest and terror was constantly growing. When the key men of the government were defeated so decisively, what protection could there be? And though the Bureau of Investigation prided itself on being absolutely non-political, the opposition party papers were most scathing in their denunciation of the expensive department which apparently was proving so useless. Vickers' blood boiled anew at each bit of calumny and injustice. If only the fools knew how the agents were working day and night, trying to pick up the slightest clue that might lead to the rescue of Brainard's son and to the ultimate smashing of the daring band of outlaws!

On the afternoon of the second day Professor Brainard came into Graham's office. His eyes gleamed brightly, even his pointed beard seemed to radiate excitement.

"I've got an idea," he said shakily. "My hands have been of no use in trying to save my boy, so I've been working my brain instead. I think this plan may work. I'll run a personal ad in the columns of the *Middletown Times* and say that Bobby has to have a certain drug because he has a bad heart. And I'll promise that the police and the government men will make no attempt to trace any sales of such a drug, if they get it for him. But that promise won't prevent me from checking—and since it can only be obtained from a wholesaler, the field will be narrowed. I believe that it will work—if—if those inhuman fiends have the slightest spark of humanity in their breasts. They may want to torture me, but I don't believe now that they will let my child die."

Graham and Vickers nodded their heads. It was a thin chance, but anything was better than the dreary succession of failures they had met in their efforts to locate the kidnaped boy. When the professor had gone Vickers said wearily:

"I haven't much faith in Brainard's plan. But at least it will keep him from going to pieces over the loss of his son. And he's headed that way right now. If that kid isn't found soon, we're going to have an insane man on our hands."

**A**N hour later Barry Kelley called in and excitedly asked for Vickers. He demanded that G-77 come out to a spot forty miles from Middletown, explaining he believed he'd found something important. Vickers clicked the receiver and burned the roads up getting there. Finally he turned off on the lonely highway Kelley had designated. He drove for miles without seeing a house. Then, at a bend in the road, he suddenly came upon Barry Kelley's car. But the young, freckle-faced agent was nowhere around. Vickers leaned on his horn and heard a shout from the woods. A minute later Kelley appeared, running down an abandoned lane that was little more than two tracks through the grass.

"Come up here, Vickers," Kelley said excitedly. Vickers followed him, and a hundred yards from the road he saw a maroon sedan upended in a gully. As he drew closer he observed a crumpled, white haired figure huddled in the tilted body of the sedan.

"That's the March girl's car," Vickers clipped. "Who is the white haired gent?"

"A doctor named Erwing who comes from Lisbon, a town about fifteen miles from here," Kelley answered. "I identified him from a letter in his pocket. What do you make of it?"

"The man I wounded needed attention," Vickers said in a dry, hard voice. "The bandits picked up this poor old doctor, forced him to accompany them, and after his work was done they shot him to silence a possible witness against them. Let's get him out of there."

Together they performed the grisly job of lifting out the body. Both men were white faced and grim as they stared down

at the features of the victim. Barry Kelley swore and blew his nose hard. "What a lousy trick," he rasped.

"We'll go over the sedan for prints," Vickers said. Kelley nodded and they went to work. But the usual proficiency of the mobsters was evident. The car had been wiped with an oiled rag. Not a print could be picked up, not even on the wheel or emergency brake. Vickers started to run up the windows and found that one of them stuck. As he twisted at the handle, the glass creaked and then slowly started to rise. Vickers' eyes narrowed. At the top of the glass was a single print—the impression of a man's thumb.

Carefully dusting it, Vickers photographed it with his special camera. Then they closed the car. Vickers complimented the young agent on being able to trail the car this far. Kelley grinned. **Praise from the best man in the Bureau was a rare compliment.**

"Do you see what this means, Barry?" Vickers asked abruptly.

Kelley shook his head and said, "Unless that print turns out to be someone not connected with the mob I can't see that it means much."

"It means that we've been looking in the wrong direction for the hideout. See here on the map—the crooks have been running on two legs of a triangle, doubling back on their trail. Instead of the headquarters being a hundred miles from here, in the hills, as we've suspected, Willis and his outlaws are probably located in this state, almost in the shadow of Middletown. Their trail was leading back when this happened. And they must have been within walking distance of someplace where they could get transportation at the time that they ditched this car. We can narrow our field a lot now."

Vickers left Barry Kelley with the doctor's body while he went back to notify the authorities of the latest murder attributed to the Red Raiders. He sent the

classification of the print he had found to headquarters. At the division office, Graham handed him a report on the paper bearing the bandits' message to Professor Brainard. No prints had been found, but the peculiar stock had been identified as an odd lot that had been shipped to a local distributor in Middletown. Graham had followed it up and obtained a list of the six customers to whom the paper had been

The real Public Enemy Number 1 is Mr. X, the phantom leader. And I firmly believe that we'll finally locate him right here in Middletown."

Soon the report on the single fingerprint was flashed from Washington— and the print could *not* be identified! Vickers rubbed his jaw, called up the district attorney's house, and tried to get in touch with Evelyn March. The girl was out. He

*Leading actors in this G-man drama — Luke Willis, Public Enemy; Professor Brainard, father of kidnap victim; Evelyn March, the mystery girl, and Lynn Vickers, foe of the underworld.*



sold. Now the job of running down each individual customer still remained. Vickers looked thoughtful as he went over the report. He looked up and said:

"All the evidence is pointing stronger and stronger to one fact, Alex. We believe that Willis isn't the real leader of this mob.

left word to have her call him either at the office or at his hotel.

On his return to the hotel, he found her sitting in the lobby, deep in conversation with Paul Adrian. At the sight of the G-man, she left the private detective and walked over to meet Vickers.

"They tell me you're looking for me," she said blithely. "I hope I'm not slated for Leavenworth or Alcatraz."

VICKERS watched Paul Adrian go past, and his eyes slitted a little at the smile the private detective gave him. It was a sardonic smile, almost a gloating grin. Vickers turned to the girl and said, "Let's sit down, Miss March. I want to ask you some questions."

polished, and the windows washed, the morning she started for Norwood. No one had been in her car but herself up to the moment the bandits had taken it. The print must belong to the doctor or else to the garage mechanic who had washed the windows.



The young woman folded her hands demurely in her lap and turned her big, violet eyes on his stern face.

"Shoot, Big Boy," she said. "The witness is ready."

Tersely, Vickers told her about the print they had found in her car. Her face went white when she heard about the murder of the doctor. Then, her lips tight against her teeth, she grated, "The dirty rats!"

That was all she said

In response to G-77's questions, she declared she couldn't account for the single print. Her car had been cleaned and

Vickers shook his head. They had samples of the doctor's prints, and they didn't match the print on the window. He asked for the mechanic's name so he could be fingerprinted. As he watched her, Lynn Vickers became more certain that the violet-eyed girl was fencing with him.

"Why don't you come out in the open, Miss March?" he asked suddenly.

"What do you mean?" she retorted.

Vickers gave her a level stare. His face was expressionless.

"Which side of the fence are you on?" he demanded. "Are you helping your uncle in prosecuting crime—or are you hooked up with the Red Raiders?"

For a moment he was startled by the

expression in her eyes. Terror showed in their purple depths, and then as quickly as it had come, the fear was gone. Lynn Vickers' blood tingled. His shot in the dark had found a target. He reached out to grasp the two white hands tightly clenched in the girl's lap. His voice was soft and persuasive—the dulcet tones he had used in swaying juries now stood him in good stead.

"I can't believe that you're connected with a gang of murderers and kidnapers," he said slowly. "Yet you've never tried to help us in gathering in the most dangerous criminal in the country."

"You rate Luke Willis that high?" Her voice was full of sarcasm.

"I rate the man who is in back of the Red Raiders higher than that," he said harshly. "Willis is dangerous enough alone—but his boss, the master mind of the mob, is the greatest menace to the peace of this country that exists today."

Once again the girl's eyes widened and the color drained from her cheeks. Then her expression changed, and shadows seemed to overcast the deep pools of purple.

"And you dare to tackle such a dangerous genius of crime?" she asked slowly. "You are young, Lynn Vickers, to sacrifice your life for duty."

"The Red Raiders must be wiped out," he responded coldly. "If I fail, someone will take my place. But I'm not going to fail."

And as the girl looked at the firm jaw of the man beside her, and saw the determination that glinted in his eyes, she felt that the manhunter had spoken a solemn truth, in his quiet words. She began to see some of the qualities that had earned G-77 his reputation as the country's super-sleuth. For a second her lower lip trembled and a haunted look showed in her eyes. Then she stood up.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Vickers, but I'm not a mystery lady from a detective novel," she said. "I'm just a simple

little city girl, learning things from her country cousins. I hope that you break up the Red Raiders without losing your life. But remember those who dance must pay the fiddler. . . . *Especially those who dance.*"

Vickers watched her as she clicked across the lobby on high heels. His brain was busy, cataloguing impressions that he had gained from her expressions and from her words and gestures. Remembering her parting words, his brows drew together in a frown. He tried to find the hidden meaning which he felt was there. Suddenly his eyebrows arched. He bounced out of the lobby and raced over to Graham's office.

## CHAPTER VI

### "Those Who Dance"

"LET me look at your maps, Alex," Vickers clipped. "The ones that cover the territory around Lisbon and the spot where we located that car."

Graham brought out the maps, and Vickers studied them. Villages, public buildings, auto-camps, taverns and hotels were indicated on them. Vickers pored over these symbols. Then his face brightened.

"That's the spot, Alex," he exclaimed. "I'll lay my bottom dollar that I'll find something there." He pointed to a roadhouse about five miles from the spot where Barry Kelley had located the car. "What can you tell me about that place?" he asked.

Graham frowned and gave a quick recital of the roadhouse's history. Formerly owned by a bootlegger, it had been a popular resort in pre-prohibition days. With repeal, business had fallen off and it had been closed for several months. It had opened up under new management about a year before. The G-men had unofficially inspected it a couple of times, but found it apparently on the level. A cheap floor show and a small orchestra attracted the

mill hands and their girls from the neighboring towns on Saturday nights.

"We failed to find where the mob was eating," Vickers clipped. "But to them, women and amusement are just as important as food. That type has to have excitement. . . . Especially those who dance."

Unconsciously he repeated the girl's words—the veiled hint which he believed had sent him on the right track. Then he told Graham of his interview with Evelyn March. Graham shook his head.

"If she was the dame who drove that car, Lynn," he pointed out, "she's probably trying to set a trap for you. She's being subtle about it, for she knows you wouldn't fall for any dumb play. And even if she isn't trying to frame you, your life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel, if any of the Red Raiders do hang out at Bleitz' Tavern. It's suicide for you to attempt to crash in there."

"We've got to hook into their hideout somehow, Alex," G-77 said stubbornly. "It's part of our job to take risks. I've got a plan worked out which I believe will be successful."

"Let me send Barry or one of the other boys out there," Graham said. "We can't afford to take a chance on losing you."

But a look at Lynn Vickers' face told Graham that his protest was useless.

"Here's the plan," Vickers told him. He talked for five minutes, and when he had finished Graham's worried look was partly erased.

"It's a honey, if it works," he said. "But if it fails. . . ."

"That's my headache," grinned Vickers. He left the office and hot-footed it back to the hotel. He went directly to his room. Thirty minutes later he came out, a different person. A mild hair dye had changed his hair from blond to flaming red. Skin tint had darkened his complexion a couple of shades, while plumpers inside his cheeks gave his face a round, cherubic expression

which was at variance with the long scar that circled from his right nostril around his lip to his chin. Collodion and flesh paint in his skilful hands had puckered the corners of his eyes, giving them a slightly Oriental cast.

He pulled his hat low and hooked his topcoat collar up around his neck as he strode through the lobby. He saw Paul Adrian give him a casual glance; then the private detective straightened in his chair and craned his neck for another look. G-77 hastened across the lobby and out of range of Adrian's vision.

Vickers met Graham with his car at a dark corner. As the special agent got a look at G-77, he grinned broadly.

"Good Lord, Vickers," he said, "if I weren't expecting you I'd certainly pick you up as Chink Flaherty, the Chinatown bandit. The makeup is perfect."

VICKERS smiled as he climbed into the car. Chink Flaherty was one of the leading criminals in New York. Vickers was playing a wild hunch, hoping that some member of the Red Raiders had been East and would recognize him as a kindred spirit. He hoped to accomplish the dangerous task of allying himself with the Red Raiders; working from the inside, he might be able to do the job that so far the G-men and local authorities had been unable to accomplish from the outside. It was a hazardous bit of work where a single slip would mean his finish. Vickers had no false illusions as to what would happen to him if the ruthless leader of the wolf pack discovered a G-man—especially G-77, the underworld's most hated enemy—masquerading in his gang. His scarred jaw hardened a trifle, but he gave no other indication of his feelings.

"Did you arrange for Barry to plant the car?" he asked.

"Yes. It's a new Buick 8, license number 88-V1373. Here's a master key for the door."

Graham drove him to Lisbon, dropped him on a corner of the main street, and returned to Middletown. Vickers strolled around the little city for a half hour, then flagged a private taxi and asked the fare to Bleitz's Tavern. The driver asked two-fifty for a one way trip. Vickers argued him down to two dollars with tip included, then got in. Thirty minutes later he was dropped at the roadhouse. As he handed the driver two one-dollar bills, his eyes went over the parking lot. It looked as if business was good; at least a dozen cars were parked, and it was only ten-thirty p.m.

**T**HE shrill cacophony of a second rate orchestra drifted out to the veranda while loud laughter and profane talk echoed from the bar at his left. Vickers patted his armpit, made sure that his shoulder holster was easily accessible. Pulling down the corners of his mouth in a sullen, furtive sneer that was a characteristic expression of Chink Flaherty, the G-man swaggered into the tavern, checked his hat, and walked into the bar.

Curious stares were fastened on him as he walked past tables surrounded by hard faced men and painted, mascara-eyed girls. Vickers' blood was pounding in his veins. There was every chance that the mysterious leader of the Red Raiders had set a trap for him and that Evelyn March had cleverly baited that trap. But he met those appraising looks with a sneering glance as he walked to a table in a corner. A waiter shuffled over to take his order. Vickers demanded whisky straight, and when it was placed in front of him he tossed it down in a single gulp.

His eyes went around the long room, searching for a familiar face. It was a mixed crowd. Half of the patrons seemed to be local citizens; the other half had the steely eyes and other unmistakable earmarks of gangsters.

A blond girl in a tight red dress came

over and sat at Vickers' table. She had spotted him for a newcomer and tried to question him about where he had come from. Vickers bought her a drink, answered her questions evasively. They had been talking for ten or fifteen minutes, when a hard-looking thug, with the twisted nose and cauliflower ears of an ex-fighter, turned away from the bar and looked around the floor with sullen, hostile eyes. His glance found the girl in the red dress at Vickers' table and a vicious snarl twisted his thick, battered lips. He rolled a little on the balls of his feet as he crossed the floor. Vickers tabbed him as being slightly punch drunk.

The ex-pug glared down at Vickers, then scowled at the girl.

"Two-timing, are you, sister? Come on—drag out of here."

The girl flamed with resentment.

"You ain't got no strings on me, Butch Kiley. I like this gentleman, and I'm sticking right here."

The thug's cold eyes gleamed with rage.

"Oh yeah?" he snarled. "Maybe that's what you and him think. Beat it, frail, before I start to work on you and your red headed mug. I don't want no argument."

Quick thoughts shuttled through Vickers' brain. Was this a build-up to draw him into an argument so that he could be wiped out by the gang? His jaw hardened as the thug started to grab for the girl's shoulder. She shot him an imploring glance, and Vickers knew there was just one move left for him. He had to play the rôle of Chink Flaherty all the way through. If it was a trap—well, that was just too bad.

He came out of his chair in a flash. His left hand gripped Butch Kiley's shoulder, swinging the heavyweight half way around. The thug got a quick glimpse of hazel-green eyes blazing into his face. Then a pair of hard knuckles crashed under his ear. Kiley's knees buckled; he staggered



back and tried to get his hands up. But Vickers followed through with his left, a beautifully timed one-two punch. Kiley's heels went up and his head crashed on the floor. He was out as cold as a mackerel.

From the corner of his eye Vickers saw two gorillas leap to their feet from a nearby table. One of them was clawing for a gun as Vickers wheeled to meet him.

"Get your hand away from that rod," he grated. Then a cold chill went down his spine as he noted the dilated pupils and twitching lips of the gunman. Kiley's pal was a dope fiend, flying high. Vickers saw death in the man's eyes, glimpsed the gleam of light on a blue-barreled gun that was whipping up to line on his heart. And as his own hand darted toward his shoulder holster, bitterness gripped his heart. The trap was being sprung. His lips flattened against his teeth as his holstered gun flashed out and down. There was a double roar of automatics. The sound reverberated from the beamed ceiling of the tavern. Screams and curses echoed on the heels of the shots. Patrons at nearby tables dove and scrambled for safety.

In the midst of the confusion, a slim-waisted, wide-shouldered young man crouched tense and alert. In front of him a wild-eyed gunman weaved slowly to his feet, then went flat on his face, drilled through the heart in the fastest gun play that the hard-boiled patrons of the mobster resort had ever witnessed.

A tense silence settled on the room following the shot—a silence which was finally broken by the harsh, strident challenge of the red-haired man.

"Any more of you punks feel like picking on me?" he grated. "Come on, mugs, I'm just getting hot."

From across the room, near the bar, came a sibilant whisper.

"My God! It's Chink Flaherty. Dopey and Butch tried to gang Chink Flaherty."

▲ bald, fat, perspiring man pushed his

way through to Vickers' table. He waved his chubby hands in the air, yelling:

"Kerist, boys! Nix on the gun play! You'll have the state cops in here."

Vickers seared him with a hostile stare.

"Do you run this joint?" he clipped. The fat man nodded his head, gulping. "Yeah, Red. I'm Adam Bleitz."

"Drag this snowbird out of here and clean up," rapped Vickers. "Souise the plug-ugly with a pitcher of water and fan his tail out of here, too. I don't think there'll be any more trouble."

His eyes went around the room in a murderous challenge. He waited for the next move, but none came. Men and women turned back to the bar, or sat quietly at the tables, regarding the red-headed killer with furtive glances that mirrored admiration. Vickers spoke to the girl who cowered in her chair:

"Finish your drink, gorgeous. These yokels won't get in your hair no more."

Her eyes were still wide with fright. Vickers saw that she was anxious to get away from the new customer who dealt out death so swiftly. He grinned a little as she made excuses to leave.

COLD, sardonic eyes watched as the dope fiend's body was taken away and fresh sawdust was spilled over the crimson stain on the floor. Butch Kiley sat up and rubbed his jaw. His porcine eyes slitted on the slim-looking youth who had knocked him out. But friends grabbed his arms, whispered the news of Dopey's fate in his puffed ears. Kiley's features were lined with sudden fright, and he shambled off, out of the bar.

Vickers' eyes were busy, from beneath lowering brows, scanning faces, looking for someone he could tab as a member of Willis' gang. There must have been at least twelve men in the room whom he spotted as criminals, but none of them was familiar. After nearly an hour of waiting, Vickers decided that his plan was a washout.

He called for his check, tossed the waiter a bill and started for the check room.

He was just slipping the girl a tip, when a voice at his elbow murmured:

"Got a couple of minutes, Chink?"

The young punk who had spread the news that he was Chink Flaherty was standing beside him. With him was another man, and Vickers' heart skipped a beat. The second man was one of the mobster guards who had assisted Willis in the rescue of the prisoners from the jail.

"You got me wrong, buddy," he said flatly. "My name's Smith."

A wise grin twisted the young punk's lips. He nodded and said, "That's okay with me, Chink—er—I mean, Smith. Have you been out to see the Chief?"

**A** WARNING tingle ran down Vickers' spine. The young gangster spoke as though Chink Flaherty was expected. Cold caution crept into his brain.

"I ain't seen no one, he responded shortly. "Just dropped in here for a drink, and some wise guys tried to give me the works. Who is this Chief you're talking about?"

The second man jerked his head toward the door.

"Let's get outside," he said tersely. Vickers went out to the veranda with them. The second man made an explanation:

"It's okay, Flaherty. I'm Riccio, one of Luke Willis' head men. You know Luke is rounding up all the big shots in the country and getting them out here. I ain't heard him say you'd been accepted, but I know you didn't come out here for your health. Does that clear your mind any?"

Vickers eyed Riccio narrowly. Better not commit himself too strongly.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Riccio," he said, "but I'll trail along and see what Willis has got to offer a good man."

"Swell," said the young punk. "Boy,

what a mob we'll have. The big guns from all over the country are coming in."

Lynn Vickers felt cold fingers of dread wrapping around his heart. What diabolical scheme could be afoot that would cause the leading gangsters from all parts of the nation to enlist under the banner of the Red Raiders? The sinister power of the Red Raiders would be increased tremendously by the addition of these new recruits, each of whom was a menace in himself. What did it portend? What evil machinations were being planned to scourge the country with untold crimes? His hands doubled into hard fists in his pockets. All thought of personal danger was gone now. He had to find out what monstrous plot was brewing in the lair of the Red Raiders.

"What kind of transportation have you got?" Vickers demanded of Riccio. "I came out here in a taxi."

"Right over there," the hoodlum pointed. "It ain't much of a bus, but it gets us where we want to go." He started toward a small sedan parked in the parking space. Vickers looked at the bent fenders and the faded paint. Then he sneered:

"Nix on that old jolly wagon. Let's get us a good bus."

His eyes went over the line of cars and settled on the new Buick that Barry Kelley had planted there.

"That looks like the best one," he said. "Just keep an eye peeled, and if the mug that owns it comes out, rap him on the skull."

He walked over to the Buick, fooled with the lock a minute, and then the door opened in his grasp. He grinned at Riccio. Taking a little coil of wire from his pocket, he short-circuited the ignition and tapped a connection with the battery. A few deft movements inside the car, and then the motor hummed as he pressed the starter. He backed it out, turned it and picked up Willis' two henchmen.

"I hope you boys know a 'right' hard-

ware dealer who can get me a duplicate set of keys from the serial number of this engine," he said.

The young punk was loud in his admiration, and asked G-77 to show him how the trick was done.

Vickers let the Red Raiders do most of the talking on the way to the mobster hideout. He was listening, trying to plan his next move. He was going to come face to face with Willis, and possibly even with the mysterious genius of crime that headed the bandits' organization. Once or twice he tried to pump Riccio about the big plans that were under way, but the lieutenant either didn't know anything or wouldn't talk. Vickers was satisfied to let things take their course. Exultation thrilled him. After weeks of vain effort on the part of the G-men, the location of the Red Raiders' hideaway was at last being discovered.

## CHAPTER VII

### The G-Men Attack!

**L**YNN VICKERS' nerves were taut as the steel strings of a banjo as he faced Luke Willis in the living room of a big three-story house, set back from the road, where Riccio and the young thug had brought him. Willis' glance was sharp and piercing, his long jaw was thrust forward aggressively as he spoke.

"I can't tell you what the set-up is, Flaherty."

"I said the name was Smith," the red-head said flatly. "Until the heat goes off back in New York, Smith is the name, Willis."

"Okay, then, Smith," growled Willis. "I don't know why the Chief hasn't contacted you. You were on his list. Guess he hadn't gotten around to it. Things have been hot since the G-men moved in, especially since they sent that blond killer, G-77, down here."

"Is he a blond?" Vickers asked. "I

spotted a bird at the hotel last night—a smooth, dark mug with a trick mustache. He seemed to be kind of interested in me. I figured he might be either a local dick or a G-man."

There was a queer expression in Willis' eyes for a second. Then he laughed harshly.

"Sounds like Adrian to me," he said. "You don't have to worry about him. He's no G-man."

"When do you expect this Chief that you're talking about to get out here? Who is he—one of the big boys from Chicago or New York?"

Willis slitted his eyes in suspicion. Vickers was afraid he had overstepped. But the lantern-jawed crook said:

"Hell, this boss of ours can give those big town crooks a few lessons. Nobody but me knows who he is, and I ain't talking any. He's busy as hell right now, shaping things up for the biggest program that's ever been pulled. We won't see him until just before the next job. A certain bank is going to be knocked off. Not much of a job, but it's just a try-out on some new stuff we've got to work with. There'll be a whole string of them after that—if the new bullets and the new . . ."

Willis suddenly caught himself. He muttered, "I'm talking too much. You'll see the stuff work at Carson, over in the next state, in a couple of days. So will the rest of these boys who have just joined up."

Vickers followed Willis' nod to a door that had swung open. His heart seemed to stop beating, and the blood rushed madly to his brain. At a table in the next room were four of the deadliest gang leaders in the country. G-men rated big, red-faced Al Kruze of Chicago as Public Enemy Number 2, with the slim, dark Frenchy LeDuc of New Orleans, czar of the underworld in the South as Number 3 on their list of undesirable characters. Gene Holden, the fat, round-faced, cold-eyed leader of the Red Ribbon Gang of

Detroit, and Mock Werthmeir, the hook-nosed bandit king of Pittsburgh, were close behind Kruze and LeDuc in deadly notoriety.

What plan was afoot that these specialists in murder had gathered to discuss? An idea glimmered in Vickers' mind which was almost too fantastic for belief. But the thought made his blood run cold.

His voice was steady as he said, "Some talent, eh, boss? Guess I'll be traveling in good company."

HE heard the door open behind him and slewed around, his hand flicking toward his gun. Then a sheepish grin crossed his face as a good looking girl with platinum blond hair crossed the room. Her eyes went over Vickers in a quick, searching glance, and he was struck by a strange feeling of familiarity. He probed his memory, tried to remember where he had seen the girl or her picture. Probably in the rogues' gallery in some police department he had visited.

Then the girl's probing glance moved to Willis' harsh, granite face.

The bandit leader rasped, "What do you want, Verna?"

"How about getting in contact with Brainard and getting rid of that brat?" she asked. "I'm getting worried—"

Vickers was startled by the sudden change in Willis' expression. His eyes flashed and his lips curled back, showing his yellow, uneven teeth in a fiendish snarl. His thick, gnarled fingers knotted into a heavy fist as he struck out at the girl.

"You damned fool!" he roared. "Can't you keep your trap shut?"

Vickers saw the fist driving at the girl, and for a split second he forgot his rôle. Hot, Southern blood leaped in his veins. His hand shot out to encircle Willis' wrist, deflecting the blow. The Oklahoma killer's murderous glance turned on Vickers. His eyes, inflamed with rage at the interference of the red-headed man, burned into

the hard hazel-green glitter of Vickers' orbs. For a long minute the hatred in the souls of both men blazed. Then in a flash Vickers realized he had made a fool play. Gangsters had no respect for women. But it was too late to back water, so he had to brazen it out.

"What's the big idea?" Willis snarled.

Vickers dropped the mob leader's wrist, hoping that Willis couldn't see the beads of cold sweat that had gathered on his brow. He made his voice contemptuous as he said levelly:

"Beating up molls won't get you anywhere, Willis. Dillinger used to try it and look what the dame in red did for him."

Willis glared at him balefully, then turned on the girl and said, "Get back upstairs on the job, Verna. Leave the job of running the mob to me."

The platinum blonde was defiant. Her dark eyes rested on Vickers' face.

"I don't like that crack about dames being double-crossers," she said. "If this red-headed punk is hinting that I'd put the finger on you, he's crazy. After all that I've done—"

Willis' brows clouded with anger. His thumb jerked toward the door.

"Get up on your job, Verna," he clipped.

She turned and started sullenly for the door. Vickers watched with sardonic eyes. He believed he knew where young Bobby Brainard was now. But he still had to figure a way to get out of the hideout to use that information.

Almost in answer to his thoughts, Luke Willis said, "You can put up here if you want to, Flaherty."

Vickers decided to take a chance on a bluff.

"My bag is at the hotel in Middletown. I got a special Luger in it that I'd like to get before starting on this Carson job you're talking about. The rod I pack is all right—but I'm superstitious about starting a big job without the old Luger."

Willis rubbed his long jaw. He regarded

Vickers suspiciously. Then he said, "Better watch your step, Chink. This Vickers guy is poison to big time crooks. If he happens to spot you, it won't be healthy."

"I'd like to meet him," Vickers said flatly. "If he's as good as they say he is, he ought to be rubbed out. Don't worry about me getting picked up. You've got contacts in Middletown, in case there's any change in your plans, haven't you?"

"Yeah. See Limpy, the feller that runs the fruit stand at the railroad station. If there's any change, he'll know about it."

Vickers did some quick thinking. In the event that anything went wrong, he didn't want to be suspected of being a traitor. Here was a chance to plant an alibi.

"Is he a fat guy who has a bum left leg?" he asked quickly.

"Yeah. That's Limpy. What about him?"

"Nothing, except that I happened to see him chinning real serious with a copper in Middletown just before I started out for Bleitz' place tonight. He may be on the up-and-up, but it looked funny to me."

Willis looked startled, then he laughed.

"Hell, Limpy's all right," he said. "He wouldn't dare to double-cross the mob. He knows I'd carve his heart out."

"You know him better than I do," Vickers said dubiously, "but I wouldn't trust him too far. Well, I'll be shoving off. If I don't get out here in the morning, I'll see you in Carson tomorrow night. Where can I contact you near there?"

"The Chief is going to meet us in Malden. That's a little burg just outside Carson. We'll have what he calls a staff meeting of the head men. The boys will start drifting out that way tomorrow morning. They'll get together at a place that's been set. So you come to the Plymouth Hotel in Malden to meet the Chief."

Vickers nodded and ten minutes later he was driving the Buick he had "stolen" back to Middletown. Satisfaction gleamed in his eyes as he raced the car over the

thirty miles. Now to organize a posse of G-men and local police to wipe out the Red Raiders. A surprise attack at dawn would smash the ring and at the same time would round up the greatest array of criminals ever captured in one raid. Tomorrow, Bobby Brainard would be in the arms of his father again, and the Red Raiders would have gone the way of all desperadoes who believed they were greater than the law.

**B**ACK in Middletown, he lost no time in removing his makeup and getting to Graham's office. They routed out Captain Miller and the head of the state constabulary. Telephone and telegraph wires buzzed. Within a few hours armed forces were concentrating on the bandits' tuckaway from four points of the compass.

Vickers asked about Professor Brainard, and learned that the personal ad concerning the drug for Bobby, which had appeared in the late editions of the paper the night before, had brought the professor a telegram from a druggist in Danvers, a city to the west of Middletown near the state line. Brainard believed that the wire, which was non-committal and guarded, was a hot lead on the kidnaping. Graham had offered to send a man to investigate, but the professor insisted on keeping to his promise not to put the police or G-men on the trail. He had taken the night train to Danvers.

Lynn Vickers' face was wan and tired as he rode with Graham and Barry Kelley toward the scene of battle several hours later. He had been busy all night, formulating plans, directing operations for the attack. The exultation over the discovery of the hideout had passed; now it was replaced by the grim reality ahead. He knew how much depended on this attack, and the thought sobered him. Though the recovery of Bobby Brainard was important, a bigger job overshadowed that. A great menace had to be destroyed—a menace

that threatened the entire nation. Unless the Red Raiders were wiped out this morning, the evil genius at their head would proceed with the horrible campaign at which Willis had hinted. The rural hide-out was a nest of poisonous reptiles that must be stamped out. There could be no slip-up.

He tried to shake off the foreboding of evil which had settled on him. He was tired; fatigue was making him jittery. He listened to the chatter of Barry Kelley. The freckle-faced young Irishman might have been starting on a picnic, instead of a grim, dangerous job.

"Too damned bad Professor Brainard isn't with us, Alex," he remarked. "The old boy would have enjoyed cleaning up on some of this mob. He'll be burned up plenty when he learns that he was on a wild-goose chase, while we were knocking off the Red Raiders and rescuing his kid."

Graham nodded and replied, "You're right, Barry. He would be of more use to us than our famous district attorney. I don't fathom yet why Church insisted on coming along. Probably hoped he'd get his name in the papers. Instead, he'll probably get knocked off, and we'll catch hell from headquarters for letting him come along on such a dangerous mission."

Vickers straightened up in his seat. He asked abruptly, "Is Church in on this attack? I didn't know that."

"He got wind of it and insisted on joining Captain Miller and the local police," Graham said. "I guess you were over at the hotel when he showed up."

Vickers was silent, but the foreboding was more pronounced now. His jaw set grimly. He couldn't fail. Too much was at stake. . .

**V**ICKERS glanced at his watch. The hands indicated five twenty-nine A.M. In just sixty seconds he would step out from his place of concealment on the hillside, fire a single shot, and the attack would

be opened on the big house down in the valley below him. Scattered along the hillside at regularly spaced intervals were Graham and his men, armed with Colt-monitor rifles and Thompson sub-machine guns. Captain Miller had a squad of police and deputies in the woods on the left flank. Over across the road to the right and circling to the rear of the big house were state troopers, waiting for the signal to open fire.

The house below looked empty and deserted, but Vickers knew that the mobsters were not likely to be stirring at this hour in the morning. Just as he stepped into the open he saw a figure move at the back of the house, headed toward the garage. G-77's hand lifted and a single shot cracked the stillness of the dawn. The figure in the yard paused uncertainly, then dashed into the garage and was gone from sight.

Vickers started down the hill at a run, and he saw the human fan spread and converge as the crouching officers in the skirmish line moved swiftly toward the house. His eyes narrowed on the big frame building, still looming quiet and apparently lifeless. Foreboding gripped his heart again. Had news of the raid reached the hang-out? Had the birds of prey already departed? Or was there some more deadly reason behind the silence in the house?

His question was answered as they struck the road that lay between them and the house. The windows in the hideaway were suddenly filled with hard, grinning faces. Machine guns burst into a staccato cacophony of death. Vickers yelled a quick command, then threw himself to the road. Bullets plucked at the cloth of his coat as he crawled forward on his stomach.

Now the attackers opened up, and the rattle of guns smashed at his ear drums as a hail of bullets smashed into the bandits' fortress from three sides. An answering volley came from the house. Vickers saw men in uniform reeling and falling. His face was tense and white. He had

led these officers into a trap—the Red Raiders were prepared for them!

His head lifted. For a full minute no shots had come from the house. Windows which a moment before had been blasting forth a barrage of death, were now empty and vacant. Surprise gripped Vickers as he sought the reason for the sudden cessation of the outlaws' fire.

"We've got them on the run," shouted Barry Kelley. He pointed to the rear of the house, where four cars were being taken from the garage. Rising to his feet, the freckle-faced agent started across the road at a run. Vickers shouted a warning, but Kelley was mad with the excitement of the battle. A machine gun in his hands sprayed the driveway where the cars were roaring out of the garage.

Five yards, then another five yards, the reckless kid charged. Abruptly the door of the house was jerked open. Vickers caught a glimpse of Al Kruze, the Chicago machine-gunner, advancing out on the porch. Public Enemy Number 2 cradled one of his favorite weapons in the crook of his arm. His face was lighted with maniacal hatred as he lifted the gun and squeezed the trigger. A short burst belched from the muzzle, and for a second Barry Kelley wavered in his tracks. Then a horrible spectacle took place.

The young agent staggered, dropped his gun, and *exploded* before the startled eyes of his fellow officers. Vickers swore feverishly, his eyes wide and staring. There was no other word for it. Barry Kelley had literally been blown to pieces by the bullets from the ugly weapon of the mad machine-gunner.

Sickening realization clutched at Vickers' heart. This, then, was the new experiment that Willis had spoken about. The Red Raiders had a new type of destruction—high explosive bullets that blew their victims to fragments!

Red rage gripped Lynn Vickers. Kelley had been his pal, had helped him and

worked with him. He was going to avenge the young operative's death. His flaming eyes whipped to the veranda of the house. Big Kruze was grinning now as he shifted his clattering gun to drive back the attack of Captain Miller's men. Stark terror had gripped the attackers in that quarter. They had seen the ghastly miracle of Kelley's death. Flat on the ground they huddled, showered by huge clumps of dirt as Kruze's explosive bullets ploughed around them.

VICKERS got to his knees, crouched like a sprinter at the tape, then went forward. His charge was low and swift. Yard after yard he flew, headed for Barry Kelley's shattered body. His red flecked eyes saw Kruze whirl on the veranda, saw the muzzle of his Tommy gun slowly circling.

Then he left his feet in a diving tackle, hitting the ground on his shoulder. As he rolled over he grabbed the machine gun Kelley had dropped. Bullets ploughed the dirt, exploding like miniature shells. Vickers was grateful for the screen of dust and dirt that Kruze was throwing around him.

He completed his fast somersault and came up on one knee. The machine gun was clattering in his hands as he rose. Savage exultation split his face in a flat-lipped smile when he saw the big gangster drop his weapon, stagger back against the door, and pitch in backwards.

Vickers wasted no time. Another mobster might come out to take the place of Kruze. Charging to his feet, he drove forward at the house, the sub-machine gun hugged against his hip, spraying a steady stream of death at the door. A loud cheer rang from the lips of the other attackers. A thin wave of men followed Vickers in his reckless charge.

Coming close to the house, G-77 saw the bandits piling into the cars near the garage. This was the reason for Kruze's mad attack; he had been covering the retreat of

the other killers. Vickers' gun swerved, and hot lead cut a wide swath in the ranks of the fleeing mobsters. Then the weapon clicked futilely in his hands. The drum was empty.

Still running at a furious pace, Vickers leaped up on to the veranda. At each stride he expected to feel the impact of a bullet or to hear the crescendo rattle of a machine gun from inside the house. Two more leaps, and he snatched up the gun Kruze had dropped. Without slackening his pace Vickers turned and headed for the end of the porch. He plunged over the rail and dashed along the side of the house. A bitter oath escaped his lips as he swerved toward the rear of the hideaway and glimpsed the tall, gaunt figure of Luke Willis headed for the last of the bullet-proof cars lined in front of the garage.

Vickers threw up the gun, his finger squeezed the trigger. But no burst came from the blue-steel muzzle. Fate was against him. Another empty drum.

Frenzy drove Vickers to furious effort. His long legs raced over the lawn. An automatic was gripped in his hand. Willis was just leaping into the car as Vickers lifted the gun. But before he could squeeze the trigger, a heavy figure crashed into him, spilling him like a ten-pin.

Over and over he rolled, struggling, fighting and twisting. His left hand locked on the throat of his attacker, and he clubbed at the man's head with his gun-barrel. He heard the roar of motors and knew that Willis was following the other cars roaring out of the yard, blasting death from behind shatter-proof windows.

He caught his first glimpse of his assailant's face and at the same second Paul Adrian recognized him. The big private detective's mouth dropped open and his eyes bulged.

"You, Jones?" he gasped. "I thought I had one of the Raiders who was late in making his getaway."

Vickers eyed him furiously. His voice had a knife-like edge as he said:

"If I could prove what I'm thinking right now, Adrian, I'd blast your soul to hell."

Slowly he climbed to his feet, his bitter eyes following the cloud of dust that marked the escaping outlaws. Since they had bullet-proof cars equipped with racing motors, it was futile to pursue the pack. Slowly G-77 turned to see District Attorney Church and Captain Miller coming out of the house with a curly-haired boy in their arms.

"Found him tied in a bed upstairs," Miller yelled gleefully. "Doesn't seem to be harmed a bit, outside of a couple of bruises."

Vickers laughed sardonically. Even the glory of rescuing the boy had been taken from the G-men.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Trapped!

"YOU'RE a fool if you try it," Alex Graham growled. "It's sticking your head in the lion's mouth. What if the mob feels that someone tipped the G-men off about the hideout? Whom are they going to suspect? Chink Flaherty left them and went back to Middletown—and the next morning they were raided. Figure it out for yourself."

Lynn Vickers' lips were clamped in a thin, tight line. His eyes were pools of anger. To the enmity which he had already borne for the Red Raiders and all their ilk, there had now been added glowing coals of hatred over the death of Barry Kelley. The kid had been a good agent, clean-cut, intelligent and courageous. The light of murder shone in Vickers' eyes as he thought of the ghastly death of the young G-man. True, that death had been partly avenged. Half a dozen mobsters had gone down before the fire of the law forces. But the majority of the Raiders—including the three big shots, Holden,



LeDuc and Werthmeir—had escaped with Luke Willis.

Another scarlet thread had been woven into the warp of the plot. In a shallow grave in the cellar of the hideout the G-men had discovered the partly decomposed body of Henry Jacoby, the inventor. Marks on the corpse were mute evidence of the torture to which he had been subjected. Grimly Vickers speculated whether Jacoby, under the pressure of intense agony, had been responsible for the horrible death missiles the Raiders used. And he wondered what other dangerous secrets might have been wrung out of the eccentric old recluse. . . . Or did the battered condition of Jacoby's cadaver mean that he had held out even under the threat of the death that finally ended his suffering?

Silently Vickers paced the floor of Graham's office. The newspapers, sparing enough in their compliments over the rescue of Bobby Brainard, had been more than critical in pointing out that the big shots, the leaders of the mob, had slipped through the fingers of the G-men. And though the criticism rankled, Vickers was weighed down by more serious troubles. The Red Raiders would go on to more and more atrocious crimes. The Grim Reaper would walk in their wake, his scythe cutting down all men, women and children who happened to cross the path of the murderous wretches in the crimson masks. A shudder shook the wide shoulders of G-77.

"I've got to go, Alex," he grated. "It's our only chance. I put the fear of God in Limpy Greer, their contact man, and chased him out of town on a train that won't stop this side of Chicago. On top of the suspicion I planted in Willis' mind, Limpy's disappearance may make them believe that the cripple sold them out."

"They won't take a chance on raiding the Carson bank now. They'll be afraid of a trap."

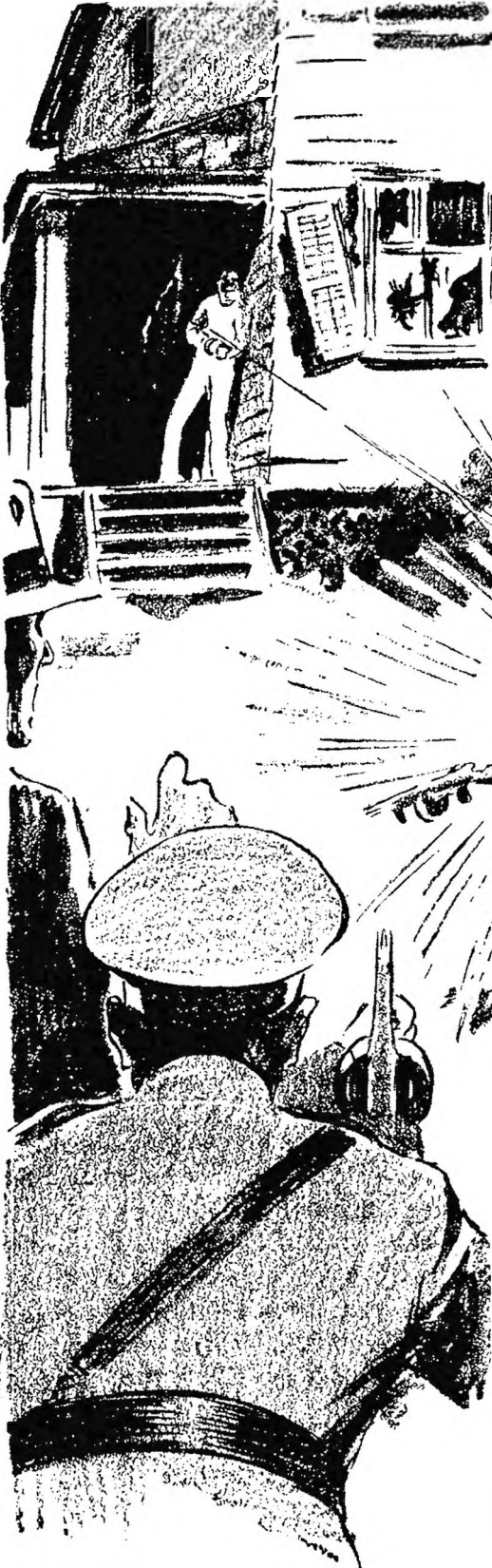
"Traps mean nothing to the leader of the Red Raiders," Vickers retorted. "The Carson job might possibly be delayed, but it is to be just the first of many that will follow. With those new high explosive bullets they will be able to demoralize any sort of resistance in ten minutes. I can still see Kelley's body exploding into shreds of flesh. With horrible weapons like that at his disposal, the master mind is on his way to becoming the emperor of crime in this country. I've got to go to Carson. The actual leader—the man who is the real Public Enemy Number 1—will be there. If I can put a bullet in his heart I will have wiped out the greatest menace the nation has ever known. It's worth the risk, Alex."

**N**O amount of persuasion could turn him from his decision. He tried to get in touch with Professor Brainard, but at the university instructor's home it was reported that he had not yet returned. Presumably, he was hurrying back from Danvers, where there had been some delay before he could be located and informed of the safe return of his son.

"When he does get back, I want him to test the high explosive cartridge shells we picked up after the battle," Vickers told Graham. "His analysis might determine what formula is used in the manufacture of the new ammunition."

G-77 then attempted to get in touch with Evelyn March on the telephone, but Church informed him that his niece was visiting an aunt. The district attorney said he thought that the girl would be better off away from the scene of so much trouble and strife. Vickers mentally agreed with him, but from an entirely different viewpoint.

With characteristic thoroughness, Graham and G-77 worked out the plan of defense for the bank of Carson. This time the civil authorities would not be brought



in. The G-men took no chances of a leak. Telephones and radio were avoided. Graham dispatched men by planes and fast cars to gather forces from surrounding divisions to concentrate on Carson.

At three in the afternoon, Lynn Vickers, once more in the guise of Chink Flaherty, was speeding in the new Buick toward Malden, the town where the Red Raiders were to concentrate. His jaw was set and

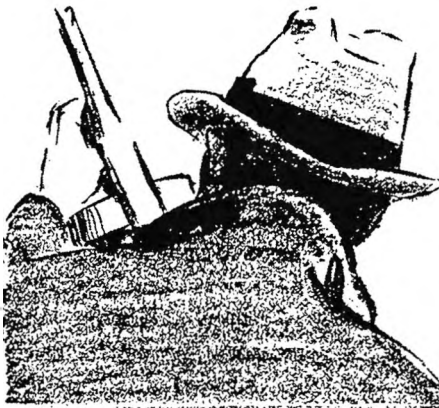
hard and his eyes were like chips of polished jade. G-77 knew what a tremendous responsibility rested on his shoulders.

Shortly after six he parked the car at the curb a block away from the hotel where he was to meet Willis. As he entered, his practiced eyes went over the lobby of the hotel, narrowing on the dark, pock-marked face of Frenchy LeDuc, who was sitting

in a chair in one corner, reading a magazine. The pock-marked man looked up and saw Vickers. His white teeth flashed in a welcoming smile. For a second Vickers was stumped. He didn't know whether the real Chink Flaherty and LeDuc were acquainted or not. Mechanically and a trifle insolently as became a New York gang leader, G-77 returned the smile, waiting for LeDuc to speak.



*The young agent staggered, dropped his gun, and literally exploded before the startled eyes of his fellow officers!*



"*Sacre Nom!*" the Frenchman said. "You were lucky to have gone last night, Chink. The damned G-men raised hell with the mob this morning."

"Yeah. I heard about it in Middletown. Poor old Kruze went out, I hear. He always was machine gun crazy."

LeDuc nodded somberly. "He had guts, Chink. If he had not held off the damned



law, we couldn't have made our getaway."

"Where's Willis, Frenchy?"

LeDuc glanced at the clock on the wall.

"He should be back now," he said. "A message came from the big boss and Luke went out. He said he would meet us at six."

Vickers heard high heels clicking on the stairs. His eyes lifted to meet the stare of Evelyn March. For a moment he almost forgot himself in the wave of rage that swept through his brain. But then he gave the red-head a familiar smirk. She froze him with a disdainful glare, tripped down the stairs, and went out of the lobby.

"Who's the doll, Frenchy?" Vickers asked quickly. "She looks like the real McCoy."

"Forget it," cautioned LeDuc. "I don't know who she is—but she rates plenty high. I think she's the moll of the big boss."

"He's a good picker," complimented the pseudo Flaherty.

**T**HE door of the hotel swung open and Luke Willis strode in. The lantern-jawed killer's face was like a thunder-cloud.

"Come on, Flaherty," he snapped. "You and LeDuc pile into the car out there. We've got to meet the Chief out at the farm."

"He turned and started out of the hotel, with LeDuc and Vickers trailing.

On the sidewalk, Vickers said, "I'll follow in my bus, Willis. It's parked right up the street."

"No time for that. Pile in here with us."

Rebellion flamed in the G-man's brain. But he appeared calm as he met the stony glare of two mobsters who sat in the car. Wertheim and Holden were giving him the fishy eye. The hair started to lift at the back of Vickers' neck, but it was too late to back out, so he entered the machine. Willis climbed under the wheel of the big

sedan, with LeDuc sitting beside him. Vickers was in back with the other two.

No word was said as the Oklahoma killer deftly swung the big car around the block and hurtled out of town on a straight stretch of road. They left the city outskirts behind in ten minutes, and for miles passed only woods and uncultivated fields. Finally Willis nosed the car into the driveway of a tumbledown farm, and as they wound through the screen of elderberry bushes that fringed the grass covered driveway, Vickers saw a big barn. A dozen or more cars were parked in the open space in front of the old carriage shed.

A presentiment of evil clutched at Vickers' heart as he got out of the sedan and followed the tall, angular figure of Willis toward the barn. His foreboding increased when he saw Holden and the hooked-nosed Wertheim fall into step behind him. It was like the march of a prisoner headed for a firing squad.

Inside the barn, he blinked through a haze of tobacco smoke, then made out fifteen or twenty men leaning against the walls in the big room. Vicious, sullen looking men they were, each marked with the imprint of the underworld. But Vickers had no eyes for the minions of Luke Willis. His slitted gaze went to the forbidding figure that stood alone against the far wall of the barn. For a second Vickers stared, and his heart began to palpitate. It was the same dark figure that had come into his room at the hotel. There was no mistaking that predatory jaw, nor the chin, chiseled lips that showed beneath the crimson mask. Nor could he forget the terrible flame that burned in the jet eyes glittering through the slits in the crimson silk. The real Public Enemy Number 1—not Willis, but the mysterious master mind of the Red Raiders—was present in person!

Vickers' fingers itched to grab for the gun beneath his left coat lapel. A slow fire of wrath kindled in his brain as he stared at the grim spectre in the long,

black coat and the black felt hat pulled low. A single shot placed between those glittering eyes, and the world would be rid of a dangerous menace, a foul genius that must have been spawned in the nethermost pits of hell. The red fog in his brain cleared as the masked leader's strident voice cut through the low hum of conversation like a knife.

"Bring him here, Willis," clipped the voice. Vickers knew the speaker was disguising his natural tones.

Then Luke Willis grated in his ear, "Come on up and meet the Chief, Flaherty. He wants to look you over."

Vickers fell into step with Willis. Almost in a military stride they marched up to the masked leader and halted.

"This is Chink Flaherty, Chief," Willis said. "He's the New York gun I told you about."

"Flaherty, eh?" rasped the voice behind the mask. The burning eyes, deep-set and piercing, burned into Vickers' face, seeming to probe beneath his disguise. Vickers tried to meet that inspection with the insolent bravado that would be expected of Chink Flaherty. Despite his effort, the malignancy that flamed in those dark orbs kindled the fires of hatred in his own brain. He felt his fingers curling and stiffening, and had to use every bit of his conscious will power to fight down the mad impulse to go for his gun. For insanity gleamed in the eyes that sought to stare him down—the murderous insanity of a megalomaniac completely crazed with the lust for power.

"Flaherty, eh?" repeated the masked leader. Suddenly his voice lifted to a hoarse scream of rage. A black-gloved finger pointed at Vickers, like a grim finger of death. "You fool, Willis, you brainless, blundering idiot—Chink Flaherty is in jail in New York on a murder rap. This man you have brought here is our most dangerous enemy—G-77!"

For a split second a sibilant hiss of sur-

prise swept through the mob. Then came a low, angry growl, like the death cry of a pack of ravenous wolves. G-77—the hated foe of the underworld, the super-sleuth of the G-men—was in their very midst!

Lynn Vickers' face went white beneath the make-up of Chink Flaherty. His hand moved with the same amazing speed that had so often spelled disaster to his enemies. The game was up—there was no escaping from this ring of killers. G-77 had followed his last trail. But before he went out, the world was going to be rid of a desperate fiend. He would take Public Enemy Number 1 with him.

**B**UT fast as he was, the masked man was faster. A sudden snap of the outstretched hand whipped a tiny derringer from his sleeve. A puff of smoke came from the little pistol, and searing hot liquid smote Vickers between the eyes, blinding him. Vile, choking gas was driven into his nostrils and mouth, nauseating and strangling him. Aiming by instinct, Vickers squeezed the trigger of his automatic, vainly hoping that a bullet would smash into the heart of the diabolical leader.

Then heavy bodies hit him, and he went down beneath a welter of legs and arms. He fought viciously, even as he coughed and strangled. Something crashed against the side of his head. His last conscious thought was that he had failed. The Red Raiders would go on—slaughtering, pillaging and laying waste the entire country. Blackness blanketed him.

When he came to he was tied hand and foot, a prisoner in a small room which had only one window. He slitted his eyes against the light, and through half closed lids he saw a guard who held a machine gun in his lap, seated across the room. The man's eyes were cold, unblinking and murderous.

Vickers' head ached almost unbearably, and his throat and nostrils burned from the gas. Vainly he racked his pounding

brain, tried to find some loophole of escape. Cautiously, so as not to attract the attention of the guard, he tried the fetters at his wrist. The bite of the rough cord against his flesh told him there was no chance of slipping his bonds. He lay still, waiting for the throbbing at his temples to cease.

Faintly, as if from a distance, he heard the buzz of conversation. Then he located the sound directly beneath him. Through the cracks in the rough boards of the floor came the rumble of voices. Bitterness engulfed him. The brains of the Red Raiders were congregated in that room below his prison, plotting more fiendish deviltry. And he was helpless as a babe in arms, only a few scant feet away from them. Burning wrath steeled his muscles, and he strained at the cords that lashed his wrists. The effort sent the blood pounding to his head. A faint groan escaped his clenched jaw.

"So you're coming out of it," a coarse voice grated. Vickers saw the guard rising from his chair. "That's swell. The Chief wants to talk with you."

The butt of the Tommy gun pounded on the floor, three slow thumps. Vickers gritted his teeth and sweat poured from his brow as he worked savagely at his bonds. He could feel the warm trickle of blood from the lacerated flesh around the rope. Then heavy feet rang on the stairs.

**L**UKE WILLIS came into the room, followed by two husky thugs. Venomous eyes glared down at Vickers as the Oklahoma killer walked over and brutally booted him in the ribs.

"Come on down and hear your death sentence," Willis snarled. He turned to the henchmen and growled, "Lug him down. If he acts tough, I'll sentence him myself."

A gun flashed out from Willis' belt and its muzzle lined on Vickers' trussed body,

while the thugs grabbed him by his heels and head and started down the stairs.

He was carried into a room on the floor below and brutally dropped to the floor. His head rapped on the boards, and a wave of nausea started his stomach pitching. When the haze cleared from his eyes he was staring at the masked face of the leader. Four men flanked the tall figure in black. Willis and the two guards stood between him and the door.

"So, puny fool, you sought to trap the Red Raiders," rasped the masked chieftain. "You thought you could annihilate my men at Carson. Your simple-brained agents are still gathered there, waiting for the wolves to walk into their trap. And while they wait, the wolves will strike another place—a place where their fangs will be felt more painfully."

Icy fingers wrapped themselves around Vickers' heart. What big coup was about to be executed?

The harsh voice had now risen in a frenzy of rage. Flaming eyes stabbed at Vickers through the slits in the crimson mask.

"Before you die, G-77, I want you to know what kind of an organization you pitted your feeble strength against. The jobs that the Red Raiders have committed up to now are mere child's play. In the next sixty days this country will learn what real organized crime can do. You have seen a few of the little surprises we have in store for your friends in the service—the explosive bullets and the poison gas smoke screen are but two of the mildest ones. I have organized the greatest criminal and scientific brains in the country under my banner. From now on there will be only one Public Enemy in this country—the Red Raiders.

"It is too bad that you must die. I would like you to live to see the greatest coup that has ever been perpetrated in the history of crime—one that will strike fear into the very heart of this nation. It is

your misfortune that your brains and courage have been given to the side of so-called justice. You have been a sore thorn in the flesh of the underworld, and like a thorn, you will be removed."

Vickers' blood congealed in his veins as the rasping voice droned on, boasting of a campaign of horror and slaughter. Disaster was threatening the country through the evil machinations of this maniac. And the one man who could stop him—G-77—was a helpless prisoner in the hands of the enemy, slated for some horrible death.

The crime dictator turned to Willis.

"You brought this spy in our midst, Willis," he grated. "It will be your job to see that he is destroyed. Make sure that there is no slip-up. He has escaped from the hands of enemies before. Such an escape now might mean the ruination of our plans. I will take care of the other two men in Middletown who menace us. I shall communicate with you in the usual manner when it is time to take the next step in our campaign."

Once again those terrible eyes burned into Vickers' white face. Then Public Enemy Number 1 laughed hatefully and disdainfully, whirled around, and strode swiftly from the room.

Willis, left in command of the mob, echoed the laugh, his malignant eyes promising untold torture for the helpless G-man. He turned to his lieutenants and growled:

"Shooting is too good for this rat. He's sent a lot of our pals to hell. I want to fix him so that those boys will know we squared their debt when they meet him down there. We ought to be able to figure out something between us."

Then he addressed the guards: "Cart him back upstairs. You stay up there with him. Sam, while we dope out a nice lingering death for the lousy G-rat."

Vickers was picked up and taken back upstairs. Flashes of pain knifed his brain again as he was brutally thrown into a corner. The guard took up his post on

the single chair in the room. He toyed with a .45 automatic pistol as he leered at the prisoner.

G-77 struggled feverishly with his bonds, though he knew the effort was futile. Had he been conscious when he was tied up, he could perhaps have wriggled out, for he was trained in rope escapes by one of the greatest experts of the stage. But he had been unable to expand his muscles, and now he couldn't hook a thumb under his bonds.

He could hear the rumble of voices in the room below, interspersed with bestial laughter, as some evil brain suggested another method of torture. Then his ear caught a different sound, the click of heels on the floor outside his door.

CONTEMPT blazed in his eyes as Evelyn March walked into the room. The guard started to protest when she walked toward the prisoner. But her gesture quieted him. This moll rated too high—he couldn't afford to get in bad with her.

"Well, if it isn't our old playmate, G-77, in person," she jeered. "The big shot of the G-men doesn't look so tough now."

Vickers' lips went white as he drew them tightly against his teeth. Suddenly her pointed toe smashed against his ribs which were already sore and bruised from the beating he had received.

"Would you like to know what's going to happen to you?" she demanded venomously. "I want to hear you scream for mercy when Wilis comes up here to put his brand on you. They're going to give you a crimson mask, just like the ones they wear. Only yours will be permanent—burned on with acid. You won't be able to see it, because you won't have any eyes then. And after you're blind, the boys are going to turn you loose to run around the room, while they pop you off with their new explosive bullets. Some fun, eh, Big Boy?"

The girl talked fast and furiously, her

voice seemingly charged with hatred. Again the tip of her shoe dug into his ribs. This time the kick was accompanied by a sharp thrust of pain.

Vickers turned his loathing eyes to the girl's white face, then he sucked in his breath. Evelyn March was doing more than taunting him; she was attempting to convey a message to him. Her terrified eyes, her strained expression, were trying to tell him something.

Once more she kicked, and the knife-like pain went through his side.

"Do you get that, you rat?" she cried shrilly. Vickers got it, and following the desperate flicker of her eyes, he saw a slim blade of steel, inserted in the welt of her shoe, projecting about an inch. It looked like a nail file that had been ground down to razor sharpness.

Vickers snarled a curse at the girl, rolling his body as if to avoid another kick. Then he rolled back, and the flesh of his fingers stung as they closed on the blade. He clung to the bit of steel, yanking it free from the shoe. The girl spat at him, reviled him in gutter language. Then she clicked out of the room on her high heels. The guard chuckled sardonically as she went.

## CHAPTER IX

### Mistaken Identity

**F**EVERISH thoughts ran through Vickers' brain as his numbed fingers juggled the thin blade of steel into a position to saw his wrist bonds. Had it been a sudden softening of her heart that had prompted the girl to aid him? Or was there some deeper purpose behind her strange behavior? Had he judged her wrong entirely?

Whatever her motive was, she had kindled new hope in his breast. There was still a chance to smash the monarch of crime and to explode the dastardly plot he was hatching!

Sweat beaded his brow as he worked. The strain on the cramped muscles of his wrists and fingers almost brought a scream to his lips. He choked it back unuttered as he twisted and sawed with the steel. Would the strands never part? Frantically he listened for the sound of voices below to cease. He heard the clink of glasses, and the breath came back to his lungs. The mad beasts were drinking a toast to the destruction of their hated enemy. Soon they would come up to get him. One strand parted!

Slowly and carefully he started on the second strand. He had to be cautious, not to attract the guard's attention. The loop worked loose, and then the third and last strand dropped away. His hands were free.

The next task seemed impossible. His ankles were still bound. He couldn't draw them up to slice the rope, for the movement would surely be noticed by the guard. But the fertile brain of G-77 was hitting on all cylinders now. What did it matter if there was an armed guard across the room and a dozen murderers down in the room below? He was G-77, the invincible. A wry smile twisted his lips. He must be going balmy. Then a sudden thought flashed over him. It was a reckless plan, and one that would probably earn him a slug in the heart. But even that was better than the torture the Red Raiders had devised.

Inch by inch his right hand slid along the floor beneath his body until his fingers were in his pocket. Thank God they hadn't pilfered the change in there. He grasped a quarter with his thumb and forefinger, twisted his body a trifle, then knuckled the silver piece toward the far corner of the room, behind the guard. The coin clanged on the floor, and the guard's head jerked around to locate the sound.

At that moment Vickers' legs lifted, and in a "snap-up" that he had practiced on gymnasium mats, his heels came down and



his body rocketed upward. It was perfectly timed and executed.

The guard heard the crack of his shoes on the floor, whirled around just in time to see a big figure hurtling through the air at him. He tried to jerk the automatic up, but the hands that could heave a sixty-yard forward pass gripped his throat. One hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle crashed into him, carrying him back out of the chair. The guard's head crashed the floor; the hands around his throat tightened their grip, and he went suddenly still and limp.

Vickers grabbed up the gun, slammed the barrel over the guard's skull, then took a long hop back to the knife blade he had dropped on the floor. He heard feet running on the stairs as he slashed his ankles free. There was no time to seek an avenue of escape through the interior of the building. His eyes darted toward the window. He didn't know what was below—but he did know that ten or twelve murdering wolves were just outside the door. Too many for him to blast his way through.

He took two short steps, turned and drove three bullets through the door in quick succession. His lips tightened in a savage grin as screams and curses told him that the slugs had found human targets.

He angled away from the line of the door, then raced across the room. A silent prayer went through his mind as he sprang off the floor and went feet first through the window. Fervently he hoped for something softer than asphalt or rock to land on. His left arm shielded his face from the flying glass and wood; his right hand still gripped the gun. He heard the rattling blast of a machine gun, smashing through the door as his body arched out into the darkness. His muscles went slack to break the force of his fall.

Down he plummeted, his breath fairly stopped in his lungs. Then his feet and legs whipped through branches. Twigs slashed at his face, but the stings were

unnoticed. He plunged through a heavy shrub and tumbled onto the grass below.

Up above he heard voices cursing. He saw faces grouped in the window he had cleared. Hot anger seared his brain, and in a last gesture of defiance he turned and emptied the magazine of the automatic in the direction of the window.

**T**HE mobsters drew back momentarily. Before they could fire, G-77 had dashed off into the darkness. He had no idea where he was; his only thought was to put as much distance as possible between himself and the hangout of the Red Raiders. Ahead of him he saw heavy shadows that looked like woods. He doubled his speed and raced toward the shelter, reaching it with not a minute to spare. For as he plunged into the trees and brush the terrain in back of him was lanced by the powerful white beams of searchlights. He turned and paused for a moment, following the slow circle of the beams with his eyes. He saw one of the shafts of light reflect on a dark ribbon. That would be a road. He circled through the trees like a fleeting shadow, his ears alert for the sound of pursuit. Faintly he heard the voices of the pack, raised in the cry of the hunt.

Then he cut toward the highway, but as he neared it he heard the roar of a motor. He threw himself into a ditch and lay there panting like a hunted beast while a car swerved past less than twenty-five feet away. Wrath burned in his brain as he saw the vicious face of Luke Willis bent over the wheel. The Oklahoma killer had figured that he would make for the road and was hunting him down in a death car. Vickers waited until the tail light blinked out of sight before he climbed out of his trench. Making sure that no other autos were coming from the hideaway immediately, he started in a lope up the road in the direction Willis had taken.

Twice he took to shelter as he heard cars behind him on the twisting road.

Then, when he saw the head lamps of a machine coming from the opposite direction, he cut off the road and hit the tall grass in a long dive. The great danger would come from that quarter, when Willis and his henchmen gave up the chase and returned to the hangout. Hugging the ground, he parted the grass with his fingers. His breath was drawn in sharply. A searchlight began to swing slowly back and forth on the front of the car. The mobsmen were scouring the roadside on their return trip.

For a minute desperation gripped his heart. Was he to lose the freedom he had so perilously won? The temptation was strong to leap to his feet and make a wild dash through the open fields.

But he saw the searchlight beam was swinging away from him as the car drew nearer. He flattened his face in the dirt, hoping that his clothing would be indistinguishable against the weeds in which he lay. The big machine rolled past, and the searchlight beam swung back, not a dozen feet beyond his body. A few minutes later, the car went out of sight around a curve in the road. Vickers leaped to his feet and started up the road in a rapid, tireless stride.

A thrill of exultation swept through him as his lungs pumped in the clean country air. He was free—miraculously free to carry on the battle against the nefarious enemy, the real Public Enemy Number 1. Grimly he vowed that the masked maniac would not carry out the campaign of terror he had planned. The horrible menace that overshadowed the country would be met and wiped out. G-77 swore that to himself.

He had covered nearly four miles when he saw the scattered lights of a city gleaming faintly ahead of him. His watch told him that it was nearly two a.m. Only eight hours had passed since he had driven into Malden, thrilling with the excitement of getting within the ranks of the infam-

ous Red Raiders. Those eight hours seemed centuries long.

He raced down a long hill. Approaching the edge of the town, he slowed his pace to a walk. He recognized a few of the buildings. This was the road he had driven over the previous afternoon. He was back in Malden again.

Vickers headed for the first lighted building. A restaurant sign swung over a door. Pushing in, he asked the startled counter-man where police headquarters was. The man's face turned as white as his coat, and he pointed a quivering finger down the street.

"One block down and two to the left, mister," he stuttered. Two callow youths who were seated at the counter turned a pasty grey. Vickers got a glimpse of himself in the long mirror near the door, and a grim smile twisted his lips. No wonder they looked scared.

Mingled with the stain of his Chink Flaherty makeup was blood from the scratches he had received hurtling through the tree branches and brush in his reckless jump for freedom. Dirt from the roadside had smeared into the blood. His hands were covered with red which had streamed from his chafed wrists and cut fingers. He looked like a bandit just escaped from a police mêlée.

"Okay, buddy," he grinned. "I'm not as tough as I look."

HE ran down the street, turned, and was headed for the green lights of the police station when a curt voice halted him:

"Hands up there! Get them up quick or I'll fire."

Vickers jerked his hands aloft and whirled around to face the cop who was running toward him.

"It's all right, officer," he snapped. "I'm not a crook. I'm a G-man, and I'm headed for the police station."

"You're damned right you are," the cop

responded. "And no funny business or I'll drive a bullet in your heart. The G-men were here looking for you Red Raiders tonight, and you must be one that they missed."

Vickers clenched his jaws. There was no use arguing with the bull-headed patrolman. The fellow was ready to shoot at the slightest provocation. Each minute was valuable, for Vickers believed that if he could rout out an armed posse in fast cars there might be a chance to capture Willis and his vicious henchmen before they made a getaway.

With the cop's gun boring into his spine he walked into headquarters. Two plainclothes detectives were there with a police lieutenant. When the detectives saw Vickers they rapped out savage oaths.

"So you got one of the rats, Clancy!" growled one of the dicks. "Let's go to work on the murdering beast."

A heavy hand fell on Vickers' shoulder. He shook it off impatiently.

"Lay off, you big tramp," he grated. "I'm no crook. I'm a G-man, and I've just escaped from the Red Raiders' hangout. I came here to get help to go back and capture them."

The detective he had brushed aside snarled viciously. His hand started back to his pocket. Vickers knew that unless he acted fast a bullet would lodge in his heart. Fear and hatred of the Red Raiders was so great that the law officers were primed to shoot first and ask questions afterward.

His face whitened beneath the dirt and grime. Then his eyes glinted evilly. He moved swiftly across the floor, and his right fist lashed up in a wicked uppercut. The detective's heels shot toward the ceiling before he could pull the gun he had started for.

Vickers raced past him. Turning abruptly, he planted his wide shoulders against the wall. The gun he had taken from the guard seemed to leap out of his

pocket. The magazine clip was empty, but they didn't know that. The weapon swung in a low, menacing circle, covering the other men in front of him. Bitter anger was in his voice as Vickers growled:

"I don't blame you birds for the attitude you're taking. But I don't intend to get knocked off, just because you've made a mistake. My name is Vickers—G-77 of the Bureau of Investigation. I've been working in disguise, so I haven't any credentials with me. But if you'll call up the field office at Middletown, Alex Graham will identify me."

"Yeah?" growled the lieutenant. "And who's going to pay the charges?"

"Reverse the charges," Vickers argued desperately. "Or else call Hodges, the agent in charge of the office at Carson. Tell him to ask you any questions he wants to about the service and give you the answers over the phone. Then I'll match those answers for you."

The second detective saw the angry glint that was shining in Vickers' eyes at the stubbornness of the cops. He misread it for hate, and he growled savagely, "Look out, lieutenant. He's getting ready to shoot."

Vickers felt his skin crawling as the second detective's hand flashed to his hip. Desperately he played his last card:

"Okay, you mugs," he rasped. "I'm dropping my gun. My hands are going up. But unless you want to answer personally to the Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, you'll make that call to Carson."

THE lieutenant frowned in deep thought. He wasn't looking to get jacked up on the carpet over shooting a G-man. He reached for the phone and called Carson. Three minutes later he nodded his head.

"It's okay, boys. They said one of their men was working with the mob and that his name was Vickers."

The breath went out of Vickers' lungs in an expression of relief. Then in brief,

terse words he related what had happened, describing the hangout as best he could.

"That's the old Franklin place," the lieutenant said. "It was sold about two weeks ago. I didn't know anyone had moved in, though."

He reached for the phone and got busy routing out reserves. In fifteen minutes a score of heavily armed men were racing squad cars to the headquarters of the Red Raiders.

But their quest was fruitless. Luke Willis and his pack of killers had flown. They went over the house seeking evidence that might indicate where the mob had gone, but it was no dice. They found plenty of evidence of the bandits' occupancy—including a machine gun with a drum of bullets which Vickers believed to be the new type high explosive cartridges that had killed Barry Kelley. He grew grim at the sight, and remembered his vow to revenge the freckle-faced kid. Vickers asked to have a guard placed on the house, to make sure no souvenir hunters or thrill seekers came in the morning. He wanted to have the G-men from Carson go over the house from top to bottom, in hopes that they could pick up some prints other than those of the known members of the mob.

Daylight was creeping over the hills when Vickers and the police went back to town. He was weary and dispirited. Once again he was up against a blank wall. The crazed crime czar was still free to ferment his murderous brews of death and destruction. Willis and his wolf pack were travelling to new territories, ready to pillage and plunder and kill. The trail would have to be ferreted out anew.

Then Vickers' eyes brightened. He had been mentally reviewing the frenzied outburst of the masked leader at the time he pronounced his death sentence upon G-77. There were two men still in Middletown who had to be removed, he said. That meant that the evil genius of crime would return to wreak his insane vengeance on

his foes. He might possibly be there now. Vickers was wasting time in Malden, while the fiend he sought was free to carry out his dastardly plans in Middletown, miles away.

Vickers questioned the police lieutenant, asking if he had picked up the car he had driven, and learned that the Buick was in the police garage. It had been towed in when no owner could be located. Tracing the plates, the police found that it was listed as a government car, assigned to the Middletown Bureau of Investigation office. Thirty minutes later, after a hasty breakfast, washed down with several cups of black coffee, Vickers was on his way back to Middletown in the Buick. As the road flowed under the swiftly rolling tires, his brain was busy trying to piece together the scraps of evidence that he had gathered.

Who were the two enemies that the masked leader feared in Middletown? Professor Brainard certainly was one. But who was the other? Was it Graham—or Adrian—or District Attorney Church? It was hard to guess. But sooner or later the phantom enemy would strike once more, and then the trail would be blazed again.

## CHAPTER X

### Midnight Peril

ALEX GRAHAM'S dark face brightened with relief when Vickers strode wearily into the Bureau field office in Middletown. He had almost given up hope of ever seeing the blond sleuth again. After he had heard Vickers' concise recital of the events of the night, the special agent's face wore a black look.

"God, Lynn!" he ejaculated. "The man is crazy. Those threats were the raving of an insane brain."

"Crazed with lust for power, perhaps," Vickers said bitterly. "But the man is the greatest criminal genius that ever lived. He is a wizard of organization. Willis, LeDuc, Werthmeir, Holden—any one of

them is an underworld czar in his own right. Yet they take orders from this man without question. Public Enemy Number 1 has perfected banditry and murder to the ultimate degree. Science has contributed a lot to the mob.

"We'll probably never know how much or how little they got out of Jacoby, but their scientific methods are so effective that they have the nation losing faith in the G-men. And the next step will be the complete terrorization of local police forces. Unless we find some way to stop him, the fiendish chief of the Red Raiders will have established a government of fear throughout the country, with himself as the supreme ruler."

Graham nodded his head, then said:

"We've run down that paper used in the kidnap communication about as far as we can trace it. The local distributor gave us a list of all his customers. The county bought some for office supplies. More of it went over to Middletown University, and the rest was peddled in small lots to local stationery stores for miles around. I suppose the crooks bought it at some small shop out in the sticks."

"Perhaps," said Vickers thoughtfully. "Have you done any checking on typewriters? I'd be particularly interested in examining those in the building where Church has his office."

"Still nursing a grouch against our district attorney, Lynn?" Graham asked sardonically. "I think you flatter Church in thinking he has brains enough to head an organization like that."

"Can't always tell, Alex. You remember the Trulane case. Jed Trulane looked and acted like a loud-mouthed ward-heeler, but he was directing the smartest bunch of yeggs and bank robbers in the state of Ohio. Maybe it's because Church sounds almost as bombastic as Trulane that I'm suspicious of him. But I've got the feeling that he knows more about the Red Raiders than any of us. Well, I'll be pass-

ing out on my feet if I don't get some shut-eye. I'm going over to the hotel and sleep for a couple of hours."

IT seemed that Vickers had scarcely closed his eyes when the telephone in his room awakened him with its shrill alarm. His eyes flicked to the beam light over the door. At first he thought that he was receiving another visit from the masked leader of the Red Raiders. Then his foggy brain cleared as the telephone bell whirred again.

He picked up the receiver and heard Graham's quick, jerky voice.

"Professor Brainard has been threatened by Public Enemy Number 1," Graham told him. "He got a telephone call about ten minutes ago. The leader of the Red Raiders told the professor he was to die at midnight, tonight. Brainard had the call traced. It came from a pay-station in Millville, forty miles from here. I'll get men over there right away to see if they can pick up the person who called, but I don't expect any luck. Brainard is still crippled. He wants you to go out to his house."

Vickers was silent a minute, frowning at the phone. Then he said:

"I'll be out before midnight. Better throw a guard around the house, Alex. The leader of the Red Raiders is too smart to warn Brainard just in a spirit of bravado. It may be another job by the gang—or it may be an ingenious lone wolf proposition. We can't take a chance either way."

He was still frowning as he walked into the bathroom and let the cold shower run over his sore, bruised body. Some of the aches disappeared, though the marks of the mobsters' boots were still plain on his ribs.

When he had finished dressing he picked up the phone again and called for the chief operator. He talked with the girl for five minutes, and a tight, grim smile twisted his lips as he had finished. A call had gone out from Middletown to Millville

*"Chink Flaherty, eh?" screamed the masked leader. "You fool Willis—Flaherty is in jail in New York. This man you have brought in here is our most dangerous enemy—G-77!"*



about an hour before the professor had received his threat. And that call had originated in the home of Branford Church!

Vickers called Church at his home and was told that the district attorney was out of town. Another inquiry brought the information that Evelyn March was no longer staying in Middletown. The servant who answered the phone could not tell him whether or not the niece of the district attorney had returned to New York.

It was shortly after eleven when Vickers stepped out of his grey coupé and walked

up the driveway to Brainard's front porch. His eyes scanned the shadows on either side, and his finger was curled around the trigger of the automatic in his pocket. But he saw no danger lurking in the shadows. The campus of Middletown University was as still as a graveyard. Even the dormitories across the green were shrouded in darkness, since the regulations called for lights out at eleven, except over weekends.



His ring at the doorbell was answered by a sweet-faced, grey-haired woman, whom he took to be the housekeeper. She escorted the G-man into the big living room, with its walls lined by shelves of books. The tall, bearded professor was reading intently.

Brainard put down his book and rose to greet him, ruefully holding out his bandaged hands, saying, "Excuse me for not shaking hands, Vickers. They're healing

pretty well. I'll be able to tie my own tie in another week, which will please Mrs. Nolan here greatly."

The housekeeper murmured a protest, then Brainard told her she could go to bed. He himself would let Vickers out when their conference was over. After Mrs. Nolan had gone upstairs they talked casually for a few minutes. Brainard said he had sent his son East to live with relatives until the Red Raiders had been finally wiped out.

Vickers asked Brainard if he had prepared any means of defense. The professor shook his head, and his deep-set eyes were hostile as he smoothed his Van Dyke with one bandaged hand.

"This damned accident has put me out

of the running, Vickers," he said. "If I had two good hands to work with, I wouldn't have called you here. But I can't handle a gun, nor was I able to rig any trap that might catch our murderous friends. The house has been equipped with the most efficient burglar alarm system I could have installed, since Bobby was kidnaped. I don't see how anyone can get past it, but the fiend who telephoned me has proved that he is a genius of crime. So I don't know what to expect."

Vickers saw that Brainard was trying to keep the fear out of his voice but wasn't making a very good job of it. Minutes slipped past as they talked of the nefarious band of criminals, and tried to figure out what form the gigantic scheme of the Red Raiders would take. But there was no conceiving of the heights of daring to which Public Enemy Number 1 would aspire.

G-77 was conscious of a presentiment of evil as the hands of the banjo clock on the wall slowly crept around toward the hour of midnight. He could not attribute his uneasiness to any real cause. His keen ears detected no sound that was alarming. But it was as though some ghostly presence had slipped unseen into the room, and as though an aura of danger was emanating from that presence.

**I**N another room a tall grandfather's clock started to bong the hour of twelve. Brainard bit his lips. His eyes turned to Vickers' face at the last note of the timepiece. A note of relief lightened his voice as he remarked, "I guess I brought you here on a wild-geese chase, Vickers. It seems that our friend Public Enemy Number 1 . . ."

"Is right here to keep his word!" a hoarse voice grated.

Both men whirled in their chairs, glimpsed a dark figure standing by the alcove beneath the stairs. Vickers had a glimpse of a crimson mask, with jet eyes

glinting through—and then the phantom was blotted out by darkness as every light in the house went out.

Like a bullet from a rifle, Vickers came out of his chair. He plunged through the darkness toward the spot where the menacing figure had stood. But as he drove forward in a low tackle, he felt something brush past him. A low, hoarse laugh rang in his ears, turning his blood cold. He had heard that same laugh as Public Enemy Number 1 had walked out of the room where he had been sentenced to death at the Franklin place.

Vickers' dive carried him on to the wall, beneath the stairs. He turned his head and shoulder, crashed into the wall, and spun around. A choked cry came from the gloom of the living room, a faint, gasping plea for help. Straining his eyes against the blackness, Vickers thought he could see two figures struggling there in deadly combat. He caught the rasp of labored breathing. Brainard was struggling with the masked intruder.

G-77's heart beat faster. If the professor could only hold out a second longer, he thought as he threw himself at the dark blob that marked the struggling men. His arms went around a powerful torso, and he heard a deep grunt as his shoulder crashed home. The body he hit turned slowly in his grasp. Vickers dug his face into a smooth serge coat, tried to tighten the grip. He felt Brainard jerking free on the other side, heard him utter a savage curse of pain.

Then a million needles pricked and tingled in Vickers' nostrils. His throat constricted as if a giant hand had encircled it. For a split second a burning memory scorched his brain—the memory of the acid gas turned against him in the Red Raiders' hideaway. He tried to fight off the blackness that was creeping into his brain, tried to gulp air into his paralyzed lungs. And he was obsessed by a single thought—that his hated enemy had trapped him again.



Then unconsciousness swept over him. He was falling into a deep black well. He heard a sharp, cracking sound, and that was all.

Vickers thought he was in a cavern in the Inferno, and that little red devils were jabbing at his throat with pitchforks, making him do calisthenics. When he didn't wave his arms fast enough they chilled his body with spray from an ice cold hose. He opened his lips to rasp a curse, and a stream of fiery liquid poured down his throat, choking and strangling him. He spluttered and sat up.

For a second he blinked his eyes at the white, anxious face of Alex Graham, who held a flask of brandy in front of him. He shook his head to dispel the fog that clouded his brain. But it was to no avail. His brain wouldn't function. He closed his eyes—he was tired and wanted to sleep.

His eyes popped open again, and he heard Graham growl:

"Get him on his feet, Mac. You and Ned do the same thing with Brainard, Olsen."

He was jerked to his feet, and his numb, almost lifeless legs were dragged back and forth across the room. It was fifteen minutes before he had thrown off enough of the effect of the poisonous gas so that Graham would let him sit down. Glancing across the room, he saw Brainard slumped in another chair.

"What happened, Alex?" Vickers asked. His throat burned with the effort of talking.

"We were outside, parked just beyond the shrubbery, waiting for the Red Raiders to turn up. All of a sudden the lights went out in the house and we heard an ungodly laugh. That was enough for us. We tried to crash the door, but couldn't. So we smashed in a window just in time to get a faint glimpse of a figure bent over someone on the floor. The man ran as I came through the window. I winged a shot at him, but I guess I missed, and he slipped out a back window that was open.

"We got a whiff of some vile gas. We didn't dare to pursue the would-be assassin, because we were afraid you two were dying. Our flashlights showed both of you keeled over on the floor. We hung you out the windows and gave you the Schäfer treatment, while Olsen hunted for the fuse box beneath the stairs. I guess you know the rest. It was a close squeeze. Another thirty seconds and both of you probably would have been gone. Your faces were blue when we propped you out the windows."

**B**RAINARD was still shaking with fright.

"It's a new gas," he said. "I've never encountered anything like it before. I heard a faint, hissing sound, and then everything went black."

His frightened eyes widened on Graham's face.

"How did he get in?" he asked. "He couldn't have gotten past the burglar alarm."

"Any efficient burglar can locate and short-circuit a burglar alarm," Graham snorted. "There was a pane of glass cut out of a cellar window. I suppose it was worked from there. He landed on the grass, outside the window, and there isn't a ghost of a footprint. Public Enemy Number 1 has outsmarted us again."

"I don't know whether he has or not," Vickers said cryptically. "I've got an idea that he did both Brainard and me a big favor by his little visit tonight."

Graham looked interested, but G-77 showed no signs of amplifying his statement.

Brainard appeared frankly puzzled, then he said:

"I guess I should thank you and your men, Graham, for saving my life. I was too badly shaken up before to do it. I—I—"

His lips trembled, and a quiver of fear went through his angular body.

"I guess you fellows think I'm yellow," he went on. "But I can't stand any more of this. It was bad enough when Bobby was gone—but now—to be living in fear of this horrible creature—it's getting too much for me."

The shaken man's eyes gleamed wildly, then he started to laugh, as if his jangled nerves had cracked. Graham looked at Vickers. The blond agent shook his head, warning Graham not to speak. The spasm lasted for a minute, then Brainard looked up, and his sallow cheeks were flushed with shame.

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "It must have been the reaction from that poison gas."

"I feel kind of jittery myself," confessed Vickers. "I've met some pretty clever crooks, but this bird tops them all. Maybe you'd better turn in, Brainard. We'll leave a couple of the boys here to make sure that you don't have a return visit."

While Graham and Vickers were riding back to the office, the former demanded:

"What did you find, Lynn? What was the idea you had?"

Vickers grinned mirthlessly.

"Glad you reminded me of it, Alex," he said. He halted the car, turned on the dashlight, and examined the sleeve of his coat. A single dark hair was caught on the button of his cuff. In the light of the dash part of it seemed tinged with grey.

"It sounds like story book fiction," Vickers went on, "but you and I know what our laboratory can do with something like this. Under the Gompert tables, our experts in Washington can classify this single hair and come close to giving us a description of the man whose head it came from—the man with whom I was struggling. I'm sending it on to Washington for tests right away."

Graham nodded his head.

"Some of the boys back there know a damned sight more than Edmund Locard, the head of the French Police Technique

Laboratory. This is the first speck of evidence we've been able to find which might identify the leader of the Red Raiders. It isn't much—but other cases have been cleared up by the analysis of scrapings taken from beneath a murder victim's fingernails. Let's hope your idea works. God knows we've gotten enough bad breaks to deserve at least one good one.

## CHAPTER XI

### Reign of Terror

IN the course of the next few days Lynn Vickers had no time to remember the infinitesimal clue he had sent to the laboratories at Washington. For an unprecedented wave of crime had spread throughout the Middle West—a series of crimes that were so baffling and atrocious that every government operative in the area was driven to distraction.

Bandits walked into a bank in Kansas City at high noon, each carrying a pistol no larger than a fountain pen. Beneath their crimson masks the Red Raiders wore gauze bandages. Their pistols sprayed forth streams of liquid gas, and in thirty seconds coughing, strangling depositors and clerks were in a panic of fear and hysteria, unable to resist the mob. Some started to dash for the door, only to fall on the floor writhing in fits of agony. Screams and hoarse shouts became gurgling croaks.

Coolly and efficiently as a fire brigade on exhibition drill, the masked bandits formed human ladders, shooting companions over the tops of the cages. Cash drawers and vaults were emptied with quick precision. Then the raiders hurried into double line formation and retreated.

Outside the building, six men from a second car had jumped out and taken up positions on the sidewalk. A mounted policeman spurred his horse toward the scene. A machine gun rapped out its death rattle, and hysteria spread in the street at the horrible spectacle of man and horse exploding in a welter of bloody flesh.

A shrieking woman, crazed by the sight, ran blindly toward the masked killers. Another machine gun cracked, and the sidewalk in front of the bank became a shambles of blood and torn human flesh. The robbers ran out of the bank, the two cars sputtered into motion, and with a final hail of explosive bullets they rocketed through the city, to disappear in the country beyond.

Pittsburgh was the scene of a similar carnival of slaughter four days afterward, even while the desperate G-men were combing the Ozarks in pursuit of a false lead. And two days later, with the agents concentrated on Pittsburgh, the phantom murderers swung into Cleveland. . . .

**L**YNN VICKERS looked like a gaunt shadow as he stepped out of a plane at the Washington airport. He had been summoned back by his Chief.

Black despair gripped his heart. The carnival of crime that had been promised was being launched, and the forces of the government seemed powerless to stop it. The Red Raiders appeared to be invincible. Vickers had only once been close to the shifting battlefield, and that was when he had landed in Cleveland two hours after the mobsters had swept through the largest bank in the city. Here, Luke Willis had been positively identified as the leader of the crimson murderers. And driving the car in which the lantern-jawed bandit and his pals made their getaway, terror-stricken citizens had glimpsed a lovely girl.

As he rode the clouds from Cleveland to Washington, Vickers' fatigue-seared brain had puzzled over that fact. For some reason, out of the record of ghastly details that he had picked up in the last seven days of will-o'-the-wisp pursuit, that one thing seemed to stick in his mind. Repeatedly he found himself dreadingly wondering whether it was Verna, the moll of Willis, or Evelyn March, Church's red-headed niece, who had driven the death car. The

question was still bothering him as he dragged his weary legs up the steps of the building which housed the crime-fighting machinery of the Department of Justice.

Never since the days of its infancy had the Bureau of Investigation been so harassed. Mob rule seemed to be established throughout the country. The Red Raiders struck whenever and wherever they pleased; the Bureau's efforts to check their murderous activities were in vain.

Between whispers of fear and terror the public was clamoring for defense from the kill-crazy beasts in the crimson masks. Newspaper headlines denounced the F. B. I. for failure to apprehend the mob.

The executive heads of the government were in session; martial law was threatened.

Vickers felt that he was largely responsible for the Bureau's downfall. Yet there seemed no way to stop the barbaric march of the Red Raiders. Public Enemy Number 1 was still a dark ghost, baffling and defying the cleverest criminologists in the land. G-77's shoulders sagged with the bitterness of defeat.

He had almost reached the door of the Chief's office when a dazzling possibility occurred to him. In the frenzied chase of the Red Raiders he had overlooked an important link in the chain. The red-headed girl might be able to furnish the lead the harassed G-men needed. Locate Evelyn March and the trail to Public Enemy Number 1 probably would be plain.

The weariness fell from him like a cloak. Descriptions of the girl could be broadcast over the country. There were thousands of beautiful red-heads, but he relied upon supplying a detailed description of Evelyn March which could be supplemented by photographs obtained from her home in New York. At all cost, she had to be located.

The Chief's secretary gave Vickers a grin of sympathy as she told him that the head of the Bureau was waiting to see him.

Vickers' face was grim as he knocked and walked into the big office. A single glance at the square-jawed, stocky man behind the big desk told him that his Chief's confidence in G-77 had not diminished. They shook hands silently, and the extra pressure that the Chief put into his grip told Vickers more than a thousand words could have related.

"Hello, Lynn," said the Chief quietly. "I hated to call you in, but you know more about this business than any man in the country with the exception of the leader of the Red Raiders himself. I wanted to go over some important questions and get your opinion on several points."

"Thank you, sir," the hazel-eyed agent said simply. "I'm glad you don't think I've fallen down too badly."

"No one has fallen down," his superior replied shortly. "We have come up against the most brilliant mind that has ever been devoted to criminal activities—a mind that is reducing the whole country to a state of terror bordering on panic. Even our skilled manhunters—yourself included—have been unable to track down these super-criminals by the usual methods. Some other means must be devised. This department has never had a failure. We aren't going to admit defeat now. But our tactics must be changed. What are your ideas on the matter?"

Vickers talked, swiftly and surely, for nearly a half hour. He told the Chief the idea that had been forming in his mind during the past week. The mysterious leader of the Red Raiders had schooled a group of able lieutenants—Willis, Holden, LeDuc and Wertheim—and had imparted to them all of the craft and guile that his fiendish mind had devised. Then he had launched them out in separate sectors, each to start a campaign of terror which would tend to demoralize not only the civilian population of the country, but the forces of the law as well. That was the first big step in the campaign.

"What is it leading to?" the Chief demanded. "I believe as you do that these attacks are separate operations by branches of the main organization. Surely Public Enemy Number 1 doesn't believe that this can be kept up indefinitely. Even now we have reached the point where we are segregating the divisions of attack. We will close in on those sectors, narrowing down the field of activity, until sooner or later we can corner these murderers and wipe them out. What is the real objective of the master mind?"

VICKERS' clean-cut jaw hardened. He shook his head, and a baffled look showed in his eyes.

"That's where I'm stopped, Chief, right at the minute," he said. "As I told you in my report, when this fiend thought I was going to die he promised me that he would accomplish the greatest coup that has ever been brought off in criminal history. The scattered fanfare and slaughter is preliminary to that coup. What it is, I don't know—but I hope to find out."

Briefly he told the Chief about Evelyn March, and asked that machinery be put into operation to locate the girl. The Chief pressed a buzzer and dictated a message to the operative who came in, telling the young man to burn the wires. The door closed behind the stenographer, and the hunt for Evelyn March was on.

"Do you still believe District Attorney Church is implicated in the plot?" asked the Chief. "We've had the treasury men and the income tax boys working on him, but can't dig up anything suspicious. But of course he would have his share of the loot cached away under false names."

"I don't know what to make of Church," Vickers answered frankly. "Nor of Paul Adrian, the private dick who was hanging around Middletown. What was the report on the Ajax Agency?"

"They claim to have been employed by an insurance company that lost a lot of

jewelry in robberies when the Red Raiders were first operating. The insurance company officials substantiated the story. But the insurance company itself is none too sound in its policies, and the Ajax outfit has a tough reputation, particularly as applies to Adrian. He's an ex-racketeer turned private shamus, and is suspected of being the brains behind several important jewel robberies, acting as a front man to step in and collect rewards. But I can't picture him as being the head man in the Red Raiders, even if he is the criminal type."

"It's really only a hunch," Vickers said slowly. "But I still have a feeling that both those birds are hooked up some way with the Red Raiders. I think that unless we hit a hot trail in the next twenty-four hours I'd better go back to Middletown and try to pick up something there."

The Chief nodded. They spent the better part of an hour over plans and maps, and then Vickers was dismissed to catch a few hours of rest at the apartment he maintained in Washington.

His wide shoulders were squared again and his fighting jaw had an aggressive thrust as he stepped out of the entrance to the Bureau headquarters. As his long legs carried him down Pennsylvania Avenue his brain was clicking fast. He was so deeply engrossed in his thoughts that he had gone past a dark-haired girl wearing tinted glasses before a familiar chord jangled in his brain. They were going in opposite directions; she was headed up the avenue.

Five, ten, fifteen paces he strode, with his brain working at the elusive memory. Then he had it. It was the cut of the girl's mouth and chin that was familiar, Verna! Luke Willis' moll—with her hair dyed a darker shade and wearing colored spectacles. Verna in Washington! That could only mean one of two things. Either the hatchet-jawed killer was in the city, or else he was expected

Vickers swung on his heel and retraced his steps through the sightseers and office workers who swarmed the sidewalk. Verna was walking rapidly. She glanced at her wristwatch, and her pace increased. Vickers' heart started to beat fast—the girl was rushing to keep an appointment. His hand slipped up to his armpit and his fingers touched the butt of the automatic nestling there. Fervently he hoped that her appointment was with her horse-faced lover. Vickers promised himself that Luke Willis wouldn't escape this time.

After the chase had covered four blocks, Vickers halted abruptly. Another girl had come out of a hotel entrance to meet Verna. His breath caught in his lungs, then went out with a sudden explosive sigh, as he saw the curly red hair beneath the brim of the swanky little felt the second girl wore. Verna was meeting Evelyn March!

FURIOUS thoughts shuttled through Vickers' brain. Verna had seen him only in the makeup of Chink Flaherty. But Evelyn March knew him as Lynn Vickers, the key man of the F. B. I. He stepped into a doorway, cupped his hands over a match, and ducked his head to light a cigarette.

Should he step out and arrest both the girls, taking a chance that they could be broken down under cross-examination until they revealed the newest headquarters of the Red Raiders? Instinct told Vickers that this wouldn't work. Either of these girls would suffer tortures before they would squeal. He carefully noted the name of the hotel where Evelyn had emerged. Was that the hiding place of the mysterious mobster leader? Would a swift, efficient raid on that building unearth the greatest criminal in the world?

While G-77 remained concealed, the girls separated. Verna continued on her way north, while Evelyn March cut across the street on a green light and went west. Again Vickers found himself in a quandary—which one to trail? The light at the

corner turned red, and the heavy stream of automobile traffic swung against him. He swore under his breath, feeling that the red-head was the all-important factor. Yet he would be more certain of success in trailing Verna, who did not know him.

Across town, in a zig-zag route, the girl in the glasses led him a merry chase. She was heading toward the poorer section of the city now. Six more blocks and they would be in the Negro quarter. Just as Vickers began to believe that she had discovered he was trailing her, Verna turned in at the entrance of a second rate hotel.

Vickers lit another cigarette and lounged in a doorway, watching to see if she came out. When five minutes elapsed and she had not reappeared, he walked into the lobby, which was practically deserted.

AS he approached the desk a pimply faced clerk shoved the register at him. Vickers reached in his pocket, pushed a leather identification card case under the clerk's nose. The young fellow glanced at the insignia and his face whitened. He gulped a couple of times, then said, "Yes, sir. What can I do for you, sir?"

"Who is with the girl in the dark glasses that just came in?" Vickers clipped. "What room has she got?"

"She and her husband have 203, sir. They registered as Mr. and Mrs. Lukins. Is there anything wrong?"

"Is her husband in now?"

"Yes, sir. He came in a half hour ago with two other men. They went upstairs. I sent a bottle of liquor and three set-ups up to them just a few minutes ago."

Vickers' eyes roved over the lobby and settled on a man in a porter's jacket and cap who was pushing a broom near the back corridor. He jerked his head in the direction of the porter and said harshly:

"I want that man's cap and blouse. I'm going upstairs—and if anything should happen to let the people in 203 know I'm going up, you may find yourself serving a

long stretch in Leavenworth for harboring criminals."

The clerk started to protest his innocence, but Vickers turned a deaf ear as he slipped out of his coat and slid into the porter's blouse and jacket. The whispered order of the clerk had reduced the porter to a state of nervous collapse. Vickers ordered him to go out and get himself a cigar or something. Then he grabbed up the broom and long-handled dust pan.

"Let me have your skeleton key or master key, whatever your maids use," he said. "And if anyone else asks about Room 203, you bring them up yourself. Cough three times to let me know you're coming."

Excitement stirred his pulse as he walked up the shabbily carpeted stairs. He paid a mental tribute to the daring of Luke Willis in coming to Washington, the seat of the Bureau of Investigation's operations, while the forces of the law were searching the whole nation for him. Something tremendous must be brewing to justify a risk like that.

He reached the corridor on the upper floor. He swept a few cigarette stubs into the dust pan as his eyes raked the doors. Room 203 was at the end of the grimy hall. His feet scuffed along the velvet carpet, past 207 and 205. Then he darted a quick look in both directions and dropped to one knee outside the door of 203.

For nearly five minutes he knelt there, his ear pressed against the panel, intent to catch every word spoken inside. Willis did most of the talking, and as Vickers listened his blood ran cold. He heard Willis and his two companions calmly discussing the most dastardly plot that had ever been conceived by a twisted intellect. Fires of wrath inflamed him as he rose to his feet. His right hand whipped to the butt of his automatic and his left hand reached for the door knob. One turn of the knob, a swift command, and the first lieutenant of the Red Raiders would either be a prisoner or a corpse on the floor of Room 203.

Then saner judgment prevailed. Vickers realized that although he might blast Willis' black soul to hell, there was a chance that one of the other conspirators might get him. And the plans of the Red Raiders would go through just the same. Besides, the removal of Willis would not mean the end of the outlaw organization.

Sick at heart because he couldn't take the revenge that was right at hand, Vickers started back down the hall. The door opened behind him. Vickers' hand plunged into the pocket of the blouse, and he sneezed violently, as a rasping voice called, "Hey, there! You with the broom."

Holding a handkerchief up to his face, Vickers turned slowly and said in a muffled voice, "What you want?"

For a long moment his eyes, peering beneath the peak of the porter's cap, met the steely glance of Luke Willis, in a dull, disinterested manner. He sneezed again and repeated, "You want something?"

Willis grinned a trifle, then said, "Never mind. Skip it. I'll get it myself."

"Hokay, boss," the pseudo porter muttered. He turned and went down the stairs.

Two minutes later he was on the sidewalk hastily thumbing a cab to the curb. He gave the address of the F. B. I. and settled back against the cushions, his brain whirling with the shock of the conversation he had overheard. He had already known that the masked leader of the Red Raiders had evil designs of startling proportions. But the magnitude of the heinous plot now devised in the fertile brain of Public Enemy Number 1 was almost beyond belief.

HE found the Chief still busy at his desk. Piercing eyes fixed on the good-looking face of G-77 as the Chief remarked, "You look as if you'd found something, Lynn."

"I have, Chief. I've had a stroke of luck after all the misfortune that's camped

on our trail. The Red Raiders are assembling here in Washington right now."

"Assembling here? What the devil! What does that mean?" The Chief's voice was sharp and curt.

"It means that they are planning the greatest blow at American law and order that has ever been conceived," Vickers solemnly declared. "They are going to attack this building—to kill or capture you!"

For a moment the Chief stared in blank incredulity.

"Do you believe Public Enemy Number 1 would dare to attempt such a thing?" he asked. "The man must be crazy."

"He is crazy," Vickers said somberly. "He is afflicted with an insane lust for power. He has declared war on the United States—a war of the underworld against the law. You are the commanding general of the forces of the law, the only man who stands between him and the empire of crime that he wishes to set up.

"He believes that his Red Raiders have the local and state police forces terrorized and helpless, and that our own organization of G-men, supposedly the most efficient detective unit in the world, is breaking up. Newspapers are lashing us in print, public confidence in the Bureau is weakening and we are being criticized and condemned on every side for failing to smash this nefarious band of outlaws. The President has been asked to call out the army and national guard to fight this vicious enemy—to put the country under martial law.

"Public Enemy Number 1 believes that this one decisive blow will not only establish his final supremacy over the law, but will give him a weapon to fight the government. By holding you as a hostage he can temporarily prevent a declaration of martial law, while he goes ahead with his Machiavellian plans. While he has the government's hands tied through bargaining for your release, his army of murderers will carry out their big coup—simultane-

ously attacking all of the government mints. Once they have control there—”

Vickers' hands spread helplessly.

THE Chief's cheeks went gray. The terrible significance of the ghastly plan chilled the marrow of his bones. The President valued him not only as the capable and efficient head of the greatest law force in the country, but even more as a close personal friend. And the Chief Executive would hesitate to condemn an intimate friend to death if there was a possible chance to save him. And while negotiations were being carried on, the sinister blow would be struck. Once Public Enemy Number 1 was in control of the nation's gold, his empire of crime would be established. An entire nation would be at his mercy.

The Chief's fist smashed down on the desk.

“You're right, Vickers,” he said sternly. “There can be no failure this time. We'll surround that hotel with a cordon that no crook could break through. Without leaders, they can never carry out their dastardly plan.”

“We can get Willis and the sub-lieutenants,” Vickers pointed out. “But Public Enemy Number 1 isn't there. He'd still be free to organize and train new henchmen. Why not let them go ahead with the attack? We can be prepared for them. And since he will need his entire force for such a monstrous undertaking, we'll have a chance to wipe out the whole organization at one time.”

The Chief paced the floor for several minutes, his hands rammed deep in his coat pockets. He walked to the window, stared with unseeing eyes at the tall, slender spire of Washington monument. When he turned to Vickers again, his face was white and set.

“Such a plan would entail the loss of lives,” he said. “But they would be the lives of fighters who knew the risk they

took when they enrolled in the service. If we don't make the sacrifice, God knows how many innocent souls will be snuffed out by this murderous gang. Better that a few should suffer than many. We'll prepare for their attack—and may God have mercy on our souls if the mob isn't smashed once and for all.”

From the plans Vickers had overheard, they expected that the attack would be made within the next twenty-four hours, probably the following night, since it was well known that the Chief of the Bureau was usually at his desk until midnight.

Far into the night, Vickers and his superior worked, perfecting their scheme to deal the Red Raiders the single, smashing blow that would wipe out the scarlet scourge forever.

Men were sent to the hotel under the guise of porters to watch the goings and comings of the bandit leaders. At the office of the capital telephone company a man was constantly on duty at the master board to listen in on any calls that might come to the hotel. Telegraph lines were manned by Bureau agents to intercept and inspect any communications that might pass between Public Enemy Number 1 and his vicious lieutenants. Code messages of any sort, by wire or radio, were promptly passed on to the experts of the Bureau for translation. Every road leading into the city was covered by men who could instantly spot a habitual criminal. Every movement that the outlaw organization made was under the surveillance of the G-men.

The laboratories of the entire Department of Justice were a beehive of industry all through the night and the following day. Samples of the high explosive bullets and the poison gas had been obtained in some of the attacks that had shocked the country. Chemists and ammunition technicians toiled trying to find a neutralizer for the new gas and to devise a means of protection against the bullets.



In this they were not entirely successful; and the gas masks that were requisitioned from the War Department and treated with the new reagent were but partially effective. Bullet-proof vests of finely forged links of steel were the only means of protection against the high explosive bullets that could be devised in the limited time at the disposal of the experts.

But at least these safeguards offered a hundred times more protection than had ever been available in the past to the victims of the Red Raiders.

## CHAPTER XII

### War in Washington

AS darkness settled on the streets of Washington, groups of men in assorted uniforms started to congregate at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Citizens saw the straggling groups wearing overseas caps and ragged olive drab uniforms and believed another bonus army was forming in the national capital. But on closer inspection they would have seen not starving veterans, but well fed, husky men whose eyes were cold and merciless and whose mien radiated viciousness and cruelty. This was the army of the underworld!

Police officers eyed the aggregation warily. But they were under orders not to interfere in any such gatherings, except in case of riots or mob violence on the part of the participants.

At ten o'clock a lantern-jawed man wearing a campaign hat pulled low on his forehead, and with sergeant's chevrons decorating the sleeve of his coat, blew a whistle and shouted a terse command to "Fall In." That man's photograph rested in the files of the Bureau of Investigation, only a few blocks away. Beneath his picture and his fingerprints was the name "Luke Willis." The criminal record covered two columns on that card.

The Oklahoma killer was assembling his legions of death.

Fifteen minutes later the ragged ranks were marching down Pennsylvania Avenue; grim, silent and menacing. Police wondered at the lack of wise-cracking or jeers amongst the members of the new bonus army. There was something sinister in their silence.

Straight for the building that housed the F. B. I. marched the army of crime. As they neared their objective, two big sight-seeing buses swung into the curb and parked.

The leader of the parade blew a whistle once. His army halted—and consternation spread among the police as the "veterans," with swift, sure movements, reached up under their hats and jerked down crimson masks that covered the upper halves of their faces. White cotton pads, impregnated with a reagent for the poison gas, were attached to the bottom of the masks. Deft fingers fastened them across mouths and nostrils with adhesive tape.

Two blasts of the whistle scattered the men in skirmish formation. They spread fan-wise across the front of the building. At a wave from their masked leader they whipped guns from beneath their coats—not the pistols that had been carried in their bank raids, but large caliber guns, almost like the Very pistols that were used for flares overseas.

The doors of the buses flew open and another dozen men, who had crouched along the floor, sprang out, bearing Thompson sub-machine guns with drums of high explosive bullets. LeDue and Werthmeir led the machine gun squad, while Holden rounded up the stragglers.

A small black coupé unobtrusively slipped up to the curb. Out stepped a tall figure, dressed completely in black, even to the gloves he wore. Like a field general, he swung in behind the line of skirmishers. A single harsh command, "Charge!" grated

from his lips. Hoarse yells sounded from the mob as they broke into a run.

Then with a suddenness that almost took their breaths away, the surging criminals were bathed in brilliant light. Searchlights mounted around the roof of the building flashed on, turning night into day. And from the doors and windows there came a withering volley of machine gun bullets. For a split second the outlaws wavered; then, like trained veterans, the Red Raiders hit the ground, and the machine gun

platoon took up fire on the windows of the besieged building.

Glass shattered in its frames, and the interior of the structure rocked and echoed with the detonation of high explosive bullets. As the machine gunners cleared the windows, the gas squad swept forward. Their gas guns poured vile and nauseating streams of liquid death in on the defenders. Eyes smarted behind the glass in the antiquated gas masks that the G-men wore. Lungs were impregnated with the caustic,



*The line of Red Raiders on the left flank crumpled beneath the fire from the G-men's guns.*



biting fumes, despite the partial neutralizer with which the mask cans had been loaded.

Pacing back and forth in the big rotunda, the Chief of the Bureau guided the operations of his defending force. Lynn Vickers was his Chief of Staff, and his steel helmet appeared now with the defenders at the windows, and again with the machine gun crews driving their deadly fire down from the mezzanine gallery.

The first floor rooms were a welter of blood, where ricocheting bullets had taken their toll. The deadly fumes of the gas were weakening the defenders. Vickers grated a curse and grabbed up a Thompson sub-machine gun from a dying G-man. For a second he yanked the mouthpiece of his mask from his face.

"We've got to drive those gas guns back or they'll wipe us out. I want a dozen volunteers."

**F**ORTY men crowded toward him. He selected a dozen armed with sub-machine guns. Waving his hand in a command, he raced toward a side entrance in the building. There he divided his force, half to swing around the east wing of the building, the other half to make a drive from the west corner. The attacking force split, and Vickers led his grim little army of defenders out into the face of almost certain death. He knew that the minute the flanking attack was discovered, the fire of the raiders would be concentrated on them. But he believed that in the few minutes that would be granted them, he and his men could wipe out the majority of the gas gunners who were so mercilessly weakening the defense inside the building.

Outside, he threw a swift glance at his companions, then his hand sliced the air in a signal to spread them as skirmishers. Following his lead, they dashed for the front of the building, hitting the ground as soon as they were on a line with the enemy.

Vickers' gun roared into action. Ahead of him he saw the crooked nosed Werthmeir, commanding a group of four gunners. They had risen and were charging forward when the G-man's gun stuttered its rolling message of death. Werthmeir half turned, his eyes bulged in his head, then he went over on his face. Grim exultation gripped G-77 as his gun whipped along the line to the spot where Frenchy LeDuc, flashing back and forth like a little black weasel, was directing the fire of a group of machine-gunners against the main door of the building. Two at a time, the gunners charged forward for a few yards, then threw themselves prone and opened fire on the door while another pair raced up behind them. As fast as a G-man's gun thinned the ranks, another replacement was shot forward by LeDuc.

Vickers' eyes widened as he caught the significance of the move. They were literally shooting the door off its hinges. A few minutes more of concentrated fire and the portal would fall in. Then the Red Raiders would charge the building, and by sheer force of numbers would drive their way inside.

The other detachment of G-men had rounded the building now and were taking up their deadly fire. Four of the gas gunners staggered and dropped.

Vickers swung the muzzle of his gun on LeDuc's squad and mowed down the first two that charged. LeDuc flung himself to the ground as the G-man's gun spewed a stream of death over his head. Now the Red Raiders had spotted the counter-attack, and the ranks of Vickers' men were thinned by flying lead. High explosive bullets smashed into the ground, throwing up clouds of grass and dirt before them. An agent beside Vickers screamed in mortal pain, and G-77 went sick as he felt the splash of warm blood and flesh against his hand. A bullet had entered the man's body, and exploded.

Insane rage sent a red mist to his brain.

He flattened himself on the ground, nestled his cheek along the barrel of the sub-machine gun. They would get him, but he'd take as large a toll as possible. The gun roared and snarled in unison with the two remaining guns of his little section. The front line of the Red Raiders wavered under the direct fire. Men started crawling back, and as the rain of bullets still followed them, some of them rose screaming and plunged in wild retreat.

Vickers' eyes were trying to single out the black, menacing figure of Public Enemy Number 1. Suddenly a curse slipped from behind his clenched teeth. The masked leader was racing like a madman back of the rear lines. Keeping in comparative safety, constantly surrounded by a body-guard of machine-gunners, the evil genius rallied his men, threw them back into the attack.

Vickers groaned as the door of the building burst open. He saw Big Joe Halloran, from the Baltimore division, rush out carrying a Hotchkiss machine gun and set it up on a tripod. Two other agents followed at his heels. Then G-77's eyes became hot and humid as the heroic operative went down before the fire of the Raiders. But his followers dove for safety, and in three seconds their gun was blasting a swath of death in the ranks of the mobsters.

Swiftly in the wake of Joe Halloran's gun crew came another trio of G-men with a second Hotchkiss. Two of the courageous fighters went down, but the third stumbled over their bodies, tugged and jerked the gun erect on its tripod, and added its staccato rattle to the din of the battle. The line of mobster machine-gunners on the left flank crumpled beneath the deadly fire.

Vickers' jaw tightened. The advent of the two machine guns from the building had drawn the fire of the Raiders away from him for a few seconds. Suddenly a huge shadow seemed to darken the ground.

His head jerked around and his eyes narrowed to blazing slits as he saw the masked leader frantically directing the fire of his gun crew on the searchlights on the roof of the building. Four of the reflectors shattered under the concentrated fire.

Madly Vickers swept his Tommy gun toward the sharpshooters. Two men wheeled, threw up their hands and went down. Another blast took down the third man. Snarling a curse, the G-man whipped his gun in a quick arc, blasting at the spot where the black-clothed figure of the nefarious leader lurked in the background. But the evil genius of crime bore a charmed life. Big Holden went down before Vickers' bullets, but his overlord plunged into a seething, roiling mob of blood-maddened gangsters and was hidden from view.

G-77's gaze shifted and he saw Luke Willis, with a machine gun clamped against his hip, racing madly for the opposite corner of the building. A grim smile twisted Vickers' lips. Willis would run into the other detachment of G-men over there. But as the agent's eyes followed the tall figure in the crimson mask, his blood turned cold. There was no detachment there to stop him. The bullets of the Red Raiders had wiped them out.

FOR a split second the maneuver puzzled Vickers. Then he caught its significance. The Raiders were trying to blast out the remaining searchlights so that they wouldn't offer such good targets to the G-men inside the building. The lights in front were gone, but the three big lamps toward the rear of the building still bathed them in brilliance.

Public Enemy Number 1 was pulling his men back now, aligning them for a new attack. One of the G-men's Hotchkiss machine guns had been silenced and the crew at the other gun was reduced to a single man. As Vickers leaped to his feet, that man's body exploded into shreds before the fire of the Raiders.

Under cover of semi-darkness, the Raiders would be able to charge right into the building. Willis must not be allowed to wreck the remaining lights, or the tide of the battle would be completely turned.

Vickers whipped around and raced along the building, trying desperately to beat Willis back. His long legs covered the ground at a furious pace. Breath pumped jerkily into his lungs through the mouth-piece of his gas mask. Bullets threw up the dirt around his heels as the Raiders spotted him and tried to mow him down.

He grated a curse between clenched teeth as he heard a burst of machine gun fire and saw one of the searchlights smashed out. Then he rounded the corner, and the blue and yellow flames from the muzzle of his gun lanced the semi-gloom at the moment that Willis whipped his chopper around to line it on the one remaining searchlight.

The masked bandit staggered from the impact of the bullets. Then he braced his feet, and his gun dipped toward Vickers. Grim exultation surged in Vickers' veins as his finger tightened on the trigger. One short burst and the world would be rid of a heinous killer. He tightened his finger on the trigger—then his blood congealed as he heard a soft *p-phutt*, followed by a metallic clash. His Tommy gun had jammed.

With the lithe swiftness of a tiger he cast his body sideways and downward. He heard the whine of Willis' bullets as they went past his diving body. A bullet plucked the flying cloth of his coat. Then he hit the grass and rolled.

As he turned, his hand flashed toward the pistol he carried in his shoulder holster. He came up to his knees in a barrel roll, his automatic kicking in his hand. Earth exploded in his face as Willis followed him with his clattering machine gun. Then the killer's bullets fell short, and the gun wavered in his nearly nerveless fingers. Willis tried vainly to lift the gun once

more as a choked, moaning sound like the cry of an animal in pain came from his lips. The weapon slithered from his grasp. He clawed at his breast. Vickers was on his feet now, running toward the outlaw, his automatic ready to spit out another leaden messenger of death.

He saw Willis' eyes gleaming with hate through the slits in his mask, saw the thin lips flatten against the yellow teeth. Willis' hands lifted slowly, not in surrender, but rather in a gesture of bitterness and defeat. Abruptly his legs collapsed and he went down in sections, like an accordion folding up. Knees and haunches sank to the ground, then he pitched forward on his face.

The Oklahoma killer—Public Enemy Number 2—was dead.

**N**OW, the firing out front was spasmodic: Vickers raced back to the main battlefield. Rounding the corner, he saw the black car of Public Enemy Number 1 pulling away from the curb. For a fleet second a masked face pressed against the window. Vickers lifted the gun he had snatched from Luke Willis, but the car whipped past one of the big buses, and was out of sight. His hated foe had escaped!

One of the buses roared into action. Vickers saw that a handful of mobsters were making their getaway. A detachment of mounted police swept along the avenue, opening fire on the bus with their pistols. A window rolled down, the muzzle of a machine gun was thrust through, and in the wink of an eye the police group became a screaming, plunging chaos of man and beast. Explosive bullets burst amongst them. Maddened horses plunged and squealed. Arms, legs and hooves, flashing in the air, made Vickers' stomach turn as he gritted his teeth and sprayed a lethal stream of lead at the retreating bus.

But once again the criminal genius of Public Enemy Number 1 manifested itself. The bus was a bullet-proof job, resisting

even the high explosive bullets. Seeing the formidable juggernaut whizz down the avenue, he knew that it had been built for just such a job as this. The racing motor roared and a cloud of poisonous, white smoke poured from the exhaust. In advance of the vile smoke screen, the remnant of the army of death rocketed out of sight.

G-77 turned swiftly and walked back into the building. His face was somber as he greeted the Chief.

"That's the end of the Red Raiders," the Chief cried. "We've dealt them a death blow from which they never can recover. Organized outlawry has reached an end in this country."

A bitter smile twisted Vickers' lips. He shook his head.

"Not unless we move fast as hell, Chief," he said. "Public Enemy Number 1 made his escape. So did some of his men. Not many, but enough to form the nucleus of a new organization. We've got to cover all roads out of the city; we can't let him get away. He'll be more dangerous than ever after such a drastic defeat. There's no telling what means he'll take to avenge this crushing blow."

The Chief's face paled. His jaw was like a piece of granite as he grabbed up a phone. In three minutes the word had been spread to watch all roads for the black coupé of the evil genius of crime and for the bullet-proof bus of his henchmen. Orders were issued to stop both vehicles at any cost and to take the occupants dead or alive.

"We'll get them," the Chief rasped. "Public Enemy Number 1 can't get through that dragnet. We'll pen him in the city, then hunt him down like the mad dog that he is. Every possible hideout will be investigated."

Vickers shook his head. For the first time in his career as a sleuth he was ready to admit defeat. The master mind seemed to live under some evil protection that kept him from harm.

"I'm afraid it's useless, Chief," he muttered. "He probably had a getaway all planned in advance. He'll have another car planted for a quick change, and will slip right through the cordon. We don't know what he looks like. All we've ever seen of his face is his mouth and jaw. And there are thousands of smooth-shaven, hard-jawed crooks in the country. I guess we'll have to wait until he strikes again. For he certainly will reorganize his mob. And you and I will be first on his list for vengeance."

The phone on the desk rang. The Chief answered, then handed the phone to Vickers. As G-77 listened, his hazel eyes took on a hard, green glitter, and the muscles along his jaw stood out like cords.

Turning his head a trifle, he moved his lips in a soundless message, "Trace this call!" The Chief ran to another phone, clipped a terse order.

VICKERS' face was a mask of cold rage as he listened to the venomous message that came over the wire.

"Checkmate, Mr. G-77," rasped the voice of Public Enemy Number 1. "For once you have tasted of victory. But the taste will turn bitter in your mouth. You will pay for that victory with your life. I swear it!"

Vickers tried to taunt the evil genius into further conversation, to enable the call to be traced. But he heard the sharp click as his foe pronged the receiver. The concentrated hate in the voice he had heard burned in G-77's brain. It would be a battle to death now. Public Enemy Number 1 would never rest until he had carried out his vicious threat.

Vickers dropped the receiver in its cradle.

"That was our little playmate," he explained, "calling to tell me that he's got my slab in the morgue all picked out. Any luck in tracing the call?"

"It came from a pay station in the North-West Exchange," the Chief growled.

"Impossible to trace because it's a dial phone. All we know is that this madman is still in Washington. I'll launch the greatest manhunt of all time. Every nook and corner of the city will be searched. We've got to get him—not only for your sake, Vickers, but for the safety of the country—before he has a chance to organize another mob of murderers under the banner of the Red Raiders."

Vickers rapped on the desk.

"We've been asleep on our feet, Chief," he said excitedly. "Verna and Evelyn March are probably still in the city. Cover the hotel where Verna is staying. There's a chance that she is remaining under cover, waiting for a chance to slip out. If we can pick up her trail she may lead us to Public Enemy Number 1."

## CHAPTER XIII

### Evelyn March's Secret

**L**YNN VICKERS' hunch proved itself within a very few hours. One of the G-men reported that Verna was still in the hotel. At nine the next morning it was reported that Evelyn March had joined her. Shadows camped on the girls' trail as they left the hotel and proceeded to a public garage, where Verna picked up a big, black sedan. From the description, Vickers believed it was one of Willis' bullet-proof jobs which had already figured in the exploits of the Red Raiders.

Five minutes later G-77 was on the Central Highway, the main artery of traffic leading west, on the trail of the black sedan.

Anger flamed in his brain as he gave his battered gray coupé the throttle. A fervent hope lived in his breast, a hope that Public Enemy Number 1 would delay attempting to reorganize his shattered army until after he had settled his scores of personal vengeance. The grim-jawed G-man prayed for the chance to meet the

nefarious criminal before he could launch another campaign of terror.

He realized that his present pursuit might be playing right into the hands of his enemy. Public Enemy Number 1 might be using the girls as decoys to lead him into a trap. But he was willing to chance that, if it brought him an opportunity to come to grips with the man whom Vickers rated as the most sinister criminal he had ever encountered.

Verna was burning up the roads in the sedan. An hour or two passed before G-77 drew close enough to see the two girls in the front seat. Traffic was heavy and he managed to keep two or three cars always between himself and the mobster juggernaut.

Late in the afternoon Vickers knew his early hunch was right. Evelyn March and her girl friend were heading for Middletown. Traffic thinned now, and twice he saw the red-headed girl turn to scan the cars behind the sedan. Vickers feared that she had spotted his gray coupé and remembered it from his activities in Middletown. His fears were strengthened when in the open country road Verna gave the big car the throttle and pulled away from him at a reckless speed. Vickers decided to let them outdistance him, rather than frighten them away from their ultimate destination.

At the next city he called Graham by phone, asking the district agent to post men on all roads leading into Middletown in an attempt to pick up the trail of the sedan. Then he stopped for a hasty meal before taking a more roundabout road to Middletown.

Dusk had fallen when Vickers reached the city. He went directly to the Bureau office, only to learn that the black car had not been seen. Plenty of time had elapsed for the black sedan to have reached the city.

Vickers swore softly to himself. His plan to trail Public Enemy Number 1 to his lair had failed. There was no telling



how long it would take now to ferret out the malevolent genius of crime. Nor was it possible to guess what new depths of satanic devilry his diabolical enemy might launch in the meantime. G-77 knew his own life was in danger every minute that the sinister crime genius was at liberty. And so were the lives of any others who had participated in the destruction of the empire that Public Enemy Number 1 had visioned. Suddenly Vickers sat erect in his chair. There was one man in Middletown who was in particular peril.

"Can you get hold of Brainard?" he asked quickly. "Does he know that Public Enemy Number 1 escaped from the battle at Washington?"

"There's no way of telling," Graham answered. "Brainard got a leave of absence from the college the morning after he nearly lost his life. He said he was going to find a safe refuge and remain in hiding until the leader of the Red Raiders was wiped out. He hasn't been back to Middletown since."

"I don't blame him much for that," Vickers said grimly. "I've had a little taste of that fiend's ideas of vengeance myself. How about District Attorney Church?"

"He's been in and out of town, campaigning for the next election. He wants the senatorial nomination. I don't know whether he's home or not. Let's give him a ring."

"In a minute," Vickers said. "What's the story on Adrian? Has he located the stolen jewels he's supposed to be hunting for?"

"Not that I know of. Haven't checked up on him lately. The reign of the Red Raiders kept us all pretty much on the go. . . . By the way, Lynn, the report you asked for on the hair your button pulled from Public Enemy Number 1's head, up at Brainard's house, has come back. I wonder if it will suggest the same thing to you that it does to me."

Vickers read the typed report, and his hazel eyes became hard as glittering green jade.

"I think it does, Alex," he said. "It confirms a belief I've had for some weeks, but had no way of proving. We've got to get this megalomaniac, Graham, and we've got to get him damned fast. He's in a position to do untold damage right now—traveling about totally unsuspected, as he is. What's Church's telephone number?"

Graham told him, and Vickers dialed the number. He swore impatiently as he got a busy signal. He tried at intervals for five minutes, and each time he got the same signal. Then he slammed the instrument down on the cradle.

"Let's go down to his house," G-77 snapped. "We'll talk to him in person, instead of having him come up here."

THEY climbed into Vickers' car and rode out to the residential section where Church's big colonial home was situated. As they drove up the gravel drive, they saw a blue car with the gold letters "M. P. D." parked in the driveway. Vickers scowled as he said:

"The district attorney and his pal, Police Captain Miller, must be having a conference. We may have to change our method of approach."

But as they went up the red brick steps to the portico, the door jerked open. The white face of the police captain peered out at them. His chin was quivering and his skin was pasty.

"God, I'm glad you came out here, Graham!" he explained. "This is a G-man job if there ever was one." He saw the blond agent with Graham and reached out and grabbed Vickers' hand, pumping it rapidly. "I didn't know you were in town, Vickers," he said. "We certainly need you bad."

"What's happened, Miller?" Vickers asked. "What's given you the jitters?"

"Didn't you know? I told them to call

Graham's office. *Branford Church has been kidnaped by the Red Raiders!*"

"You're insane, man!" snapped Vickers. "The Red Raiders were practically wiped out in Washington. Only Public Enemy Number 1 and a few others escaped."

"Then he's recruited new members or he's working almost single-handed," Miller said stubbornly. "Here's the story Mrs. Church told me over the phone, and she repeated it word for word just now. About six o'clock the doorbell rang. Church answered it. Mrs. Church saw two men on the steps. Church talked for a minute, then they came in with him while he got his hat. And she saw that both of them were wearing crimson masks. One, who seemed to be the leader, told her not to make an outcry or he'd kill Church on the spot.

"As they started out the door the masked kidnaper warned her again, saying that if the police tried to trail them, Church would be bopped off. She waited until the snatch car was out of sight, then called me. I've sent a description of the car to all the cities around here over the short-wave radio. But we haven't picked up a trace of it yet, and it was twenty minutes ago that I broadcast the alarm."

"Probably the machine has a short wave receiving set," grated Vickers. "What kind of a car was it?"

"An Auburn eight—battleship gray. License number 7Y-3463. I left word at headquarters for them to call me here if any word came in on it."

The phone jangled. Miller answered it. His eyes gleamed brightly as he said, "Car was spotted going through Urban ten minutes ago, lamming like a bat out of hell. That gives us a lead."

Vickers turned on his heel. Over his shoulder he barked:

"They're heading for the state line again. Sorry, Miller, but that puts it out of your hands. Graham and I will have to do the trailing."

At the door he halted. His eyes were soft as he turned to the red-eyed, gray haired woman who stood there, nervously twisting her hands.

"Don't worry too much, Mrs. Church," he told her. "We'll get him back safely."

The heartbroken wife broke into tears. Anguish quavered in her voice.

"He has been expecting something like this for weeks. Oh, why did he ever have to get mixed up in such a terrible affair?"

Graham and Vickers exchanged swift glances as they muttered goodnight, and raced down the stairs to the gray coupé. G-77 spun the motor, slammed in the gears. Gravel flew beneath the spinning wheels as he turned the coupé and levelled out on the road for Urban, forty miles south of Middletown.

At Urban they picked up the trail, still heading south. Stopping at filling stations wherever there was a crossroad, checking on the tire tracks of the Auburn—which they had already identified—when they had no other guide, the two G-men relentlessly dogged the trail of the kidnap car.

AN hour passed, then another, and Vickers knew they were losing ground. Impatience was jangling his nerves. They had driven up to a filling station, and Graham was asking the monotonous questions, when Vickers suddenly released the brake, shot the car into gear and raced away. Graham was slammed back in his seat. He smiled crookedly, and asked:

"Why all the sudden rush, Lynn?"

"A black sedan just tooled past," snapped Vickers. "A girl and a man in the front seat. I just caught a flash of their faces under the light out there—but I'll swear it was Evelyn March in the car they drove from Washington. And the man with her was Paul Adrian. They didn't see us, I'm sure. The red-headed moll wasn't hitting that speed on a pleasure trip."

At the top of the next hill they picked

up the tail light of a racing car ahead. Vickers leaned hard on the accelerator, gradually closed the gap between them. But he kept far enough behind to avoid recognition.

The chase grew hot. Up hill and down, through somnolent towns and villages, the two cars churned. For more than an hour Vickers hung on the tail of the sedan. They flashed past a signboard which said that Newton, the capital of the next state, was twenty miles ahead.

Vickers suddenly slammed on his brakes, and his gray coupé whipped into a country road at the right, on two wheels.

"They are slowing up, for some reason," he clipped. "I'd like to get ahead of them, before we get into Newton. I'm afraid they've spotted this car."

Graham knew this country like a book. He had searched nearly every mile of it with his men, trying to locate the first headquarters of the Red Raiders.

"We can parallel the state highway," he said. "There isn't another crossroad for fifteen miles, so they can't turn off. Hit for the parallel highway, give this bus everything she'll take and we'll come out ahead of them on the state highway, fifteen miles from here. Then when they come into Newton they will have to be in back of us. I hate like the devil to take the gamble, though."

"Evelyn March won't lead us to Public Enemy Number 1 if she can help it," Vickers growled. "The road near Newton is patrolled by state troopers, isn't it? We ought to be able to pick up the trail if there is any slip-up."

Graham nodded his head; then his fingers gripped the edge of the seat as Vickers drove the gray car through the night at thunderbolt speed. They careened dizzily along the parallel highway, hit the crossroad, and then shot out on to the state highway again. With the accelerator still down as hard as it would go, Vickers raced on toward Newton.

Fortunately there was little traffic, and it wasn't until they were almost on the outskirts of town that Graham spotted the uniform of a state highway policeman. The cop saw them coming, and swerved his motorcycle in a short turn to tear after them as they passed. Vickers applied the brakes and skidded to a stop at the side of the road. A flash at their credentials satisfied the state policeman. He asked if he could be of assistance. In short, clipped sentences, G-77 told him to wait for the black sedan, and to halt it for speeding. He wanted Evelyn March delayed for about fifteen minutes, then told to go ahead. The cop grinned and nodded his head.

Vickers and Graham lost no time in getting to the field headquarters of the G-men in Newton. A few minutes later they had swapped the gray car for a dark blue sedan, and were back at an intersection on the state highway, almost at the edge of the city.

THEY parked the car and switched off the lights, though the motor was still running. If the red-headed girl and Adrian came into Newton, they would have to pass that spot. Five long minutes dragged by. Then they saw the sleek outlines of the black sedan limned in the radiance of a street lamp. Vickers grinned tightly, and his worried frown disappeared.

He swung in behind the mobster machine, trailing it through the city to the south end of Newton. Brownstone houses and landscaped lawns had given way to a neighborhood of dilapidated frame buildings, with tumbledown fences and garbage-lined sidewalks. Suddenly Vickers slammed on his brakes. The chase had ended. Two blocks ahead the black sedan had parked in front of a three story building. Adrian and the girl got out, walked swiftly up the steps and went in.

G-77 and Graham strode along the sidewalk. Then Vickers' hard eyes flicked

over the sign, "Rooms for Rent." He jerked his chin at Graham, and started up the steps. The vestibule door was locked. He thumbed the bell viciously. His heart was skipping as he waited for some response.

**W**AS this the end of the trail? Was he finally going to come face to face with the hated Public Enemy Number 1 on even terms? Blood pounded at Vickers' brain at the memory of those vicious glittering eyes that had shone so cruelly through the crimson mask. A few minutes more, he hoped, and he'd tear off that scarlet badge of slaughter, exposing the greatest criminal genius he had ever trailed.

Heavy footsteps pounded along the hall, and the door inched open. A fat, slatternly woman with frowsy hair squinted at them suspiciously.

"What do you want?" she asked sharply. "If you're peddlers, I don't want to buy anything."

Vickers started to push past, but she leaned her huge weight against the door, starting to slam it in his face. Desperation blazed in the G-man's eyes. His shoulder slammed against the door, and the fat woman bounded back. A flip of Graham's wrist flashed the identification card of the Bureau of Investigation in front of her startled eyes. She started to wheeze an apology.

But her words were cut short by the loud roar of a gun that echoed from above. A woman's shrill scream rang out. On the heels of the first report came a double blast, and a second later another explosion reverberated down the stairs.

Vickers and Graham plunged up the poorly lighted, smelly staircase. As they reached the second floor they heard a lighter detonation. Evidently the gun battle was taking place on the top floor.

Vickers' breath was pumping into his lungs as his long legs went up the second flight of stairs. He could hear sobbing

that was wild and hysterical as he raced down the hall. Graham pounded along behind him.

The cries came from a door half-way down the corridor. A scared, bloated face showed in a doorway across the hall. A woman in a dirty nightgown pointed a shaking finger at the room which was the scene of battle. Vickers' shoulder hit the portal as his fingers twisted the knob. His automatic was swinging upward when he catapulted into the chamber of death.

Inside, his feet skidded to a stop, and for a second he felt his stomach churning with nausea. His quick glance took in the terror-stricken face of Evelyn March, who was crouching in a corner of the room. Her wide, staring eyes were fixed in a look of horror on an open window beyond the bed, which was angled out from the wall. Vickers interpreted that look, and as Graham plunged into the room, he clipped:

"Someone went out that window, Alex. See if you can spot him."

Graham's face whitened, then he leaped past the bed, where a dark-haired girl, clad only in negligee, lay sprawled on the grimy spread. The negligee was ripped and torn at the neck. A slowly spreading crimson stain marked the whiteness of the shoulder and breast, extending over her pink garment and onto the spread. The girl was Verna, the moll of Luke Willis.

Across the foot of the bed, face downward, was another figure. Advancing toward it, Vickers saw the bloody mess that had once been the face of Paul Adrian. A bullet had driven squarely between the eyes of the private detective.

Vickers' head slewed and his gaze centered on a huddled figure which was slumped against the wall just beyond the bed. A crimson mask still adorned the upper half of the face. Quickly Vickers read the story. The crimson-masked thug and Adrian had battled to death at point-blank range. But the masked man was not Public Enemy Number 1. Vickers recognized

him at once as one of the mob chieftain's lieutenants who had escaped from Washington.

Then Vickers sucked in his breath sharply. His attention was shifted to another corner of the room as he heard a choked, bubbling groan. Propped up against an armchair was the ghastly form of District Attorney Church. The prosecutor's hands were clutching his breast. Blood welled between his fingers. His lips were moving slowly. An agonized stare gleamed from his pain-ridden eyes.

The G-man dashed over to him, dropped to his knees. A single glance told him that nothing could be done for Branford Church. The assassin's bullet had punctured his lung, and probably had sliced through his heart as well.

He bent his head, tried to catch the faint murmur that was coming from the stricken man's lips.

"I tried—to save—my niece. She—was in his power—they brought me—here—the fiend wanted—to torture me—He's—he is—"

THE blood flecked eyes strained in their sockets as the chemist-politician tried to gasp the name of the murderer. But the terrific strain was too much. His mouth dropped open, his hands moved convulsively, and he was dead.

Graham's stocky figure turned away from the window, where he had been stabbing at the ground with the ray of his flashlight.

"There's a waterspout just outside the window," he grated. "He made his escape that way. Not a sign of him in the alley below. Public Enemy Number 1 has slipped through our fingers again."

"But not for long," Vickers growled.

He turned and faced the terror stricken girl in the corner.

"Well," he grated harshly. "Do you feel like talking now—or would you rather talk through the bars of a cell?"

Evelyn March's eyes went from the bloody corpse of her uncle to the figure in negligee on the bed. Suddenly she stiffened and her glance was hot with hatred.

"Do you think a threat of jail frightens me?" she lashed. "I've just seen my uncle and my sister shot down by the most inhuman fiend that ever lived. And I know I'll be the next to go. What have I to fear in jail?"

Vickers' breath went out in a sharp whistling sound.

"Your sister?" he growled. "Verna—your sister? I thought it was you that Church was trying to save."

Suddenly he realized why he thought he recognized Verna when he had first seen her in the gangsters' hideout. There was a strong resemblance between the two girls, and not even the stark fear that twisted the face of the slain gun moll had erased it.

"Yes, my sister," echoed Evelyn. "Verna, the gun moll, was Veronica March—my sister."

Vickers leaned toward her, his hazel eyes probing, fixed on her white face. "Tell us who shot your sister, Evelyn," he said tonelessly. "You know who the man is that we call Public Enemy Number 1. Tell us and save your own life, as well as the lives of countless others who may be victims of his murderous schemes."

For a long minute her dark, violet eyes stared back at him. Then her chin set aggressively.

"I don't know," she said. "I've never seen him without a mask. But I have an idea—and I'm going to hunt him down myself. I've risked my life in attempting to save my sister. I'll risk it again—to avenge her."

Furious anger blazed in Vickers' eyes. Then he shrugged, "We're wasting time here," he told Graham. "I believe I know where we'll find Public Enemy Number 1."

The girl stared up at him and gasped:

"You know—you know who the leader of the Red Raiders was?"

"Yes," clipped Vickers. "We're going after him immediately. There's no time to lose. If you want to see your enemy taken by the law, come along."

Feet were pounding up the stairs now. Graham met the policeman at the door. He flashed his identification card and explained:

"We arrived here just too late. The killer got away."

"Who—who are all these stiff?" the cop gulped. Then his eyes caught the still figure of the girl on the bed. "Holy Jeez! A dame croaked too!"

For a second Vickers' eyes met the challenging stare of Evelyn March. There was a plea in those eyes, despite the girl's effort to keep it out. He remembered the good turn she had done him at the Franklin place, when he had been sentenced to death.

"The man by the chair there is District Attorney Church of Middletown," Vickers said. "He was kidnaped by the fiend who who was the leader of the Red Raiders. This girl—Evelyn March—is his niece. She trailed the kidnapers here with Paul Adrian, a private dick. That's Adrian, across the foot of the bed. Adrian tried to rescue the D. A., but was gunned out. The thug over there was one that Public Enemy Number 1 recruited for this job. And the girl on the bed—well—"

Vickers' gaze rested on Evelyn's face again. Then he said slowly, "We don't know who she is. She's a moll that hung around with the mob. Her name was Verna. That's all we know."

Evelyn March's lips were compressed; her eyes were flat and expressionless.

"Let's get going, Mr. Vickers," she said. "The murderer is getting farther and farther away all the time."

Vickers issued some brief instructions to the officer and told him the local Bureau men would arrive to take charge of the bodies, aiding the city police. Then he and Graham went down the stairs, with Evelyn

March walking silently in front of them.

Graham ran the blue car back to the field headquarters of the G-men. Vickers and Evelyn trailed him in the black sedan which had been the property of Luke Willis. G-77 gave a terse report to the agent in charge, and told him that operatives from Newton would come for the blue sedan. He knew that on the dash back to Middletown they could make best time in the bullet-proof machine which had figured in so many of the Red Raiders' depredations.

## CHAPTER XIV

### Unmasked

IT was nearly two in the morning when Vickers toiled the big car down the main street of Middletown. He had made the hundred and fifty miles from Newton in an hour and one half. Grim faced and silent, he had huddled over the wheel, a single thought racing through his brain—the end of the chase—the end of the chase. . . .

Now, as he drove out through town, savage exultation drove the fatigue from his brain. The world's master criminal would soon be unmasked. The Machiavellian despot of crime, who had sought to reduce an entire nation to his insane will, had at last reached the end of his rope. Megalomania had swayed that criminal genius to dizzy heights—and the same disease would prove to be his downfall.

Straight for the Middletown campus rocketed the sedan. It slewed up to the curb, the braked tires gripping the asphalt. Two men leaped out—a tall, wide-shouldered youth whose face was like a granite block, and his stocky, hard jawed companion. At their heels trailed a red-headed girl. They went around the house to the garage, remained there for a moment, then returned to the front and mounted the steps.

Lynn Vickers' eyes brightened as he saw a light shining through the window of Pro-

fessor Brainard's living room. Seated in a comfortable chair was the tall, angular figure of the criminologist. The cone of light from a reading lamp diffused over his slightly bowed head, throwing the deep-set eyes above the high cheek bones into deeper shadows. The bandages were gone from his hands now, and as he read the heavy volume before him he smoothed his neat Van Dyke beard with long, sensitive fingers.

Professor Brainard looked up with a startled glance as Vickers leaned against the bell. Through the window they could see his right hand dart down and lift an auto-

matic which had been jammed between the cushion and side of the chair. He thrust the gun into the pocket of his dressing gown as he arose. Vickers waved for Graham and the girl to slide over out of the range of vision from within.

Slippered feet scuffed on the rug in the hall, then a chain rattled against the door. Brainard inched the door open, and his piercing eyes stabbed at Vickers' face.

Then the door was jerked open wide, and the hand that had been deep in the pocket of his dressing gown came out, extended in greeting.



*G-77's shot drilled straight through the brain of Public Enemy No. 11*

"Vickers!" the professor exclaimed. "You're the last person on earth I expected to see."

Vickers walked in, followed by Graham and the girl. The professor's eyes widened for a second when he saw Evelyn March; then they showed only pleasure at the visit of the G-men.

"Were you expecting some one else?" Vickers asked. "I had hardly hoped to find you awake at this hour."

A shadow clouded Brainard's face. He motioned them through the foyer, offered to take their hats. The G-men shook their heads, dropped their hats on a table in the hall, and stepped into the big living room.

Evelyn March slid into a chair near the door. Her eyes had not moved from the bearded face of the professor since she entered the house. Vickers and Graham took chairs facing the big easy chair where Brainard had been sitting. When his guests were comfortable, the professor answered G-77's question.

"I haven't been sleeping much lately," he admitted. "Not since I read that our nefarious enemy escaped the fate of most of his minions at Washington. I've been expecting another visit from him—and I want to be awake when he comes. So I usually read most of the night and get a little sleep during the day. Living in terror isn't the pleasantest thing in the world, gentlemen. . . . But why bother you with my worries. You have plenty of your own. I presume that's why you came here. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Lynn Vickers' hand was toying with the top button of his suit coat. His voice was low, but beneath its softness was a tone of tension and hard determination, like steel under a velvet glove.

"Yes, Professor Brainard," he said. "The first thing you can do is to take that gun from your dressing gown and put it on the table."

**B**RAINARD gazed at Vickers blankly, as if he had misunderstood.

"What?" he asked in a puzzled tone. "What did you say, Vickers?"

G-77 repeated his request, and there was a trace of harshness in his voice now. Brainard still looked puzzled—but under the level stares of the G-men he obeyed

the order, dropping the gun on an end table near Vickers' left hand.

"Would you mind explaining the reason for your peculiar request, Vickers?" he asked quietly. "Just what is the meaning of your visit tonight?"

"I mean that the game is up! Your disguise has finally been penetrated. *You are Public Enemy Number 1—the master mind of the Red Raiders!*"

A sardonic smile momentarily lifted the corners of Brainard's mouth. He placed his hands tent-wise before him, fingertips touching, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair.

"I am arresting you," Vickers went on, "as the murderer of Veronica March and District Attorney Branford Church—and I am also charging you with being either an accessory or an actual participant in every crime committed by the band of desperadoes you organized and directed."

Brainard's tall, angular body seemed to burrow deeper into the chair. His glittering eyes were fixed on G-77's face. He made no reply to the wholesale accusations, but merely asked:

"Church murdered? When—where?"

"At Newton, less than three hours ago," rasped Vickers. "Not that it's any news to you."

Again the ghost of a smile twisted Brainard's lips.

"But I've been sitting here in this chair, reading, for the past four hours, Vickers," he responded smoothly.

Vickers laughed harshly.

"Sorry to spoil your alibi, Professor, but we just stopped in your garage, and the radiator of your camouflaged racing car is still red hot. You were a fool to drive straight home, but I suppose you had so much faith in yourself, such a strong megalomaniacal belief that you could fool us completely, that you took the chance in order to get here in time to arrange this peaceful stage setting."

Brainard blinked his eyes, but said noth-



ing. Vickers turned to Graham and ordered:

"Start casing the house, Alex. See if you can locate the outfit he wore as the masked leader of the Red Raiders. He probably hasn't had time to ditch it. The stuff must be around here some place."

Brainard's lips drew back in a snarl. His voice was husky with rage as he saw Graham leave the room to begin the search.

"I hope you have a search warrant, Mr. Vickers," he warned. "Because if you haven't, I certainly will file charges against you for infringing upon my rights as a citizen—as well as entering a defamation suit for slander, when you have learned that you can't prove a single one of these ridiculous charges."

"I don't have to prove them," Vickers growled. "You've proved them all yourself. Your own cleverness has trapped you."

"You make it sound very interesting," Brainard said, in a dry, rasping voice. "Suppose you tell me how you expect to substantiate these wild accusations in court."

Vickers leaned forward in his chair. His voice had an edge of steel, as he said:

"Turn your hands over, Brainard."

Brainard's eyes widened for a minute, then narrowed on the G-man's face. Slowly he turned his hands palm up in his lap.

"Didn't have time to put the bandages on again, did you?" Vickers snapped. "And your hands and fingers don't show any fresh scars from the burns you were supposed to have sustained. The bandages offered a nice safeguard against leaving any prints around, while you pretended to be working with the G-men on the case."

"But I was suspicious. I didn't believe that any man whose son had just been kidnaped could ever go into a laboratory to work. Either you hadn't burned your hands, as you said—or you weren't nearly as distracted about the loss of your son as you tried to make us believe. As it hap-

pened, both theories were right. You didn't burn your hands—and you weren't distracted, because you had arranged the kidnaping of your own son deliberately to throw us off the track."

THE color drained from Brainard's cheeks, leaving his face like a death mask, drawn and sallow and incredibly evil. He laughed, and the sound was like the rasp of a coarse file on steel.

"Your imagination is working overtime, Vickers," he said. "But go ahead with your fantastic story."

"The scientific brain that had won you such a reputation as a criminologist here at the university was equally prolific in devising ways and means of defeating the law," Vickers continued tonelessly.

"But you feared that because of the scientific ingenuity of the Red Raiders, suspicion might eventually point to you. Consequently, even before your son was snatched, you arranged the kidnaping of a harmless old inventor. When you were finished with him, you murdered the poor devil. But Jacoby's body is going to forge one more link in the chain of evidence that will send you to the chair. Murder has been a handy tool for you, and men who have been in your way have died with startling suddenness. I was in your way, and you tried to get rid of me by your own efforts, as well as through the efforts of your mob."

Brainard's lips were still twisted in a savage sneer. Still he remained mute. His eyes burned with deep, undying malevolence.

"It was your second attempt," Vickers continued, "that proved to be your undoing. You set the stage to trap me right here in this room. We were both to be gassed by the man you had elected to play the rôle of Public Enemy Number 1. Only yours was to be a mild dose, while mine was to be fatal. You wanted to have a hand in my death, wanted to help your

murderous assistant. You leaped on me. I could still fight back. In the struggle a hair from your beard got twisted around a button of my coat. I sent that hair to our laboratory for examination. We found that the end of the hair was imbedded in gum arabic. *The beard from which it had come was false!*

"With that report the mystery was almost solved. Public Enemy Number 1 had reversed the customary procedure in disguise. As Professor Brainard of Middletown University he wore a false beard that was a work of art—one that was carefully put on, almost hair by hair, so as to defy the closest inspection. And as the leader of the Red Raiders he was clean shaven, with the predatory jaw that was visible under his mask."

For a long minute Brainard stared at him. Then he laughed softly.

"You aren't very logical, Vickers," he said. "A few minutes ago you accused me of rushing madly back here after accomplishing several murders in Newton in my alleged guise as the clean shaven leader of the Red Raiders. Supposedly I had only a brief respite before you came barging in after me. And the beard you speak of would take at least an hour to assume. How do you account for the discrepancy?"

A frown wrinkled Vickers' brow as he studied the evil face of his suspect. Then his eyes narrowed. Like a flash he came out of the chair, and his hand whipped toward Brainard's chin. The professor saw the movement, tried vainly to duck. But Vickers' fingers wrapped around the beard. A quick jerk, and Brainard's chin was as free from hair as a billiard ball.

A scream parted the lips of Evelyn March.

"That's the man," she cried hysterically. "That's the face I saw in the room at Newton!"

Vickers' head whipped around. At that moment the man he had unmasked made his last desperate bid for freedom. His

long, slender hand flashed downward—not toward the gun on the table, but inside of the belt of his trousers. In the glow of the floor lamp, Evelyn March saw the glint of light on a blue-steel barrel. Another scream tore from her lips:

"Look out, Vickers. For God's sake, look out!"

LYNN VICKERS whirled. As his body twisted, his hand darted to the holster beneath his left armpit. For an instant he saw the eyes of the doomed man gleaming at him with insane, murderous rage. They were like the eyes of a tortured soul in hell.

The room echoed with the double roar of guns. Vickers felt the pluck of a bullet as it ripped through the cloth of the shoulder of his coat. Then he saw a round, black hole showing between Professor Brainard's malevolent eyes, the eyes that had glittered so ferociously through the mask of Public Enemy Number 1. But those feral orbs would gleam no more. G-77's shot had driven straight through the warped, twisted brain.

Alex Graham came pounding down the stairs at the sound of the shots. As he entered the living room he saw Vickers pick up a brown patch of hair from the floor.

"We'll need this as supporting evidence," Vickers rasped. "He didn't miss a trick. Had this beard specially made just for occasions like this, when he wouldn't have time to build on the one he wore in the classroom."

The G-man walked across the room, stared down at the figure of his vicious foe. His eyes narrowed on the hidden gun that Brainard still clutched in his claw-like hand. A hard grin split G-77's bleak countenance.

"I guess that gun will pretty well wind up our case, Alex," he said. "The one on the table is a .45, and it's my opinion that those murders at Newton were committed

with a .32 caliber gun—just like the one he has in his hand. I hated to take the chance by turning my back, but I felt that if I gave him a break he might produce the murder weapon and prove his guilt by opening fire. When we match the bullets from this gun with the bullets that killed Verna and District Attorney Church, the case will be closed. And if we need any additional evidence to hook him up with the Red Raiders, we'll have it when he's been fingerprinted and his prints are matched with that single print we found in Evelyn March's car after Doctor Erwing was murdered."

"Yes," said Alex slowly. "And here's something else."

He held out a black coat and hat he had found upstairs in a laundry bag. In his other hand were a crimson mask and a pair of black gloves.

"The final proof against Public Enemy Number 1," muttered Vickers.

A low, choked sob from Evelyn March swung him around. The girl was staring wildly at the huddled figure of Brainard.

"It had to be that way," Vickers muttered. "God knows I wanted to take him alive. I wanted to see him being dragged to the chair, a broken, cringing wreck of the man who had aspired to rule the country through his terrorism."

She nodded her head slowly.

"He deserved it," she said. "He was a born criminal. I learned that he had been in prison many years ago for forging a check on a fellow professor at another university. You'll probably be able to trace his record, and learn how he got some incriminating evidence on a banker who used to buy 'hot' paper from thieves. When Brainard got out of prison, that banker was here in Middletown—the president of the Middletown Trust Company, a respected citizen and a trustee of Middletown University. That's how Brainard got his appointment here, through threatening that banker. I just learned all that

from my sister—on the ride from Washington."

"That accounts for the raid on the bank so soon after the kidnaping," Vickers declared. "Brainard was afraid the banker might try to tip us off as to the real identity of Public Enemy Number 1, so he ordered his henchmen to kill him during the holdup."

After he had called the Chief in Washington to inform him of the last incident in the case of the Red Raiders, Vickers said:

"This young lady has had about all she can stand for one day, Alex. I'm going to take her home to her aunt."

WHILE they drove to the Branford Church residence, the G-man questioned her about how she had come to be tangled up in the vicious net of the Red Raiders.

Her voice was low-pitched and shaken with sorrow as she told how her sister had attended Middletown University and had become interested in the criminology course of Professor Brainard. Veronica had been shallow and flighty, and the smooth wiles of the instructor had something to do with her interest. Brainard exerted an almost hypnotic influence over her. He was clever enough to know that he couldn't afford to get hooked up with any women, but he did succeed in influencing Veronica to join the gang, where she met Luke Willis. After that, Veronica became a full-fledged moll.

Evelyn heard from her sister at intervals, and whenever they met or corresponded she tried to persuade her to turn back from the path of crime. Being unsuccessful, she determined on the desperate measure of trying to join the gang herself, hoping that she could find some way of trapping the Machiavellian leader and at the same time keep her sister from being disgraced.

The mob had accepted her on her sister's recommendation, and she was detailed as

a contact link in Middletown. Her uncle knew her purpose and did all he could to help her. His political future would have been blasted if it were known that his niece was the sweetheart of Luke Willis, second in command of the Red Raiders. While working with the gang, she tried to do everything in her power to trap them, which explained her attempt to tip off Vickers about the attack on the Middletown bank. A secret agent was expected—and Vickers looked like that agent.

Vickers gruffly told her that she had been insane, and in the same breath he complimented her on her marvelous courage. He asked her about Paul Adrian and learned that the private detective, suspecting that she was in the mob, wanted her to work with him on the recovery of the jewels so that they could split the reward. She played him along, never knowing when she would need a man to help her. In the final showdown, when she offered him the chance to get the leader of the Red Raiders, Adrian died in the attempt.

Vickers waited until she had unlocked the door of the Church mansion. She

paused on the threshold, gazing at him with a warm radiance in her eyes. Then she raised her fingertips to her lips and waved in a gesture of farewell.

The lines of the G-man's face softened as the door closed behind her. But only for a moment. As he got into the car and drove back toward Professor Brainard's home, where he had to clean up the loose ends of the long investigation, he was caustically reproaching himself.

He must be getting bawny, thinking about girls. He was G-77, the key man of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. His job was hunting men—there could be no girls, no romantic alliances, in his life.

Hours later, when his weary head finally hit the pillow in his room in the Middletown Hotel, the vision of Evelyn March had been banished from his mind. The case of the Red Raiders was closed. But other underworld organizations would take form, other criminal brains would devise horrible means of wresting wealth and power from a defenseless citizenry.

His task was endless. G-77 had to go on—alone.

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# The Clue of the Calling Card

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## A TRUE STORY OF THE SECRET SERVICE

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**T**HE Treasury Department was openly alarmed. "It's the cleverest counterfeit I ever saw," said the Secretary. "It is so well done it even gets by the banks." Turning to the Chief of the Secret Service, he said:

"We've got to stop it. Nearly two million dollars' worth of this counterfeit currency has been put into circulation. We can't allow it to continue."

"We'll stop it, Mr. Secretary," the Secret Service chief replied, "but it can't be done in a day. Learning the identity of the counterfeiters isn't the big job. The important thing is to find the plates from which this counterfeit ten-dollar bill is being printed, and destroy them."

"You are right, of course," the Secretary rejoined, "and there isn't a doubt but what you will succeed. In the meantime, however, it would seem advisable to give widespread warning to the American people to be on the watch for this bogus currency. I have had such a warning prepared. Here it is:

A \$10 Federal Reserve Bank of New York note, series 1928-B: check letter G: face place number 48 or 148: serial number B-27723-486A: bearing a portrait of Hamilton

This note is printed on good paper, though the seal and serial numbers appear in a darker green than the genuine

It is the most dangerous of all the counterfeits now in circulation, and can best be detected by the serial number

"This notice," the Secretary pointed out, "is not going to stop the counterfeiters from printing more bills, but it will serve to protect such cautious citizens as heed

it from being victimized. In the meanwhile, we are counting on the Secret Service to end the menace. We have no misgivings as to the final result. You will succeed."

The flood of B-27723486A ten-dollar notes had already reached wide proportions, especially in the New York metropolitan area, when the Secret Service turned its full strength into the hunt. The uncanny skill of the engraving and the perfection of the printing and the paper were such as to reduce the chance of detection to a minimum. Shortly after publication of the Treasury warning, the counterfeiters were even able to get rid of the one flaw which the warning had pointed out—the "darker green" of the seal and serial numbers.

Alan G. Straight, chief Secret Service operative in the New York area, took active charge of the case. The best brains of the service, not only in New York but from Washington and the Middle West as well, were enlisted.

It was easy enough for the agents, as they began their hunt for the master counterfeiters, to lay their hands upon "passers" of the money—the petty crooks who were actually putting the money into circulation. But the "passers" had no more knowledge of the source of the queer money than did the agents.

More and more operatives were thrown into the hunt—and more and more bogus bills B-27723486A appeared in circulation. Complaints from banks and individuals increased. The bills appeared among

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**By PHIL ROMAN**

the currency of income tax collectors, showing that even government officials were being fooled.

The agents learned that the underworld was circulating the bills at their face value, regarding the counterfeits as being so clever that they could be accepted definitely as a part of the American monetary supply! Murray Kleindler, an assistant district attorney who was looking after the legal side of the investigation, was quite frank in calling the bills "the most dangerous ever issued in the history of the United States."

George Z. Medalie, the federal district attorney in New York, announced that federal courts had agreed to impose maximum penalties upon all persons convicted of passing the bad bills. This action was taken in the hope that it would frighten passers of the bills sufficiently to hold down circulation of the counterfeits until the Secret Service was able to break up the gang.

The announcement had its effect for a time, and the flow of bills was temporarily checked—but only temporarily.

Secret Service agents were now scattered throughout the city, mingling with all classes and digging for the clue that would lead them to the heart of the case. Wherever spenders gathered, there, too, were government sleuths.

ONE night in a "hot spot" where liquor flowed and tongues were loose, a federal operative met Harry Mills. Mills, expensively dressed and having a wonderful time, was alone but not lonely. He liked to talk with chance acquaintances, and to drink with them. Mills liked the agent, and they had a few drinks together. When it came time to separate, Mills handed the agent a small piece of pasteboard.

"Here's my card, old fellow," he said cordially. "I'm mighty glad to have met you, and hope I'll see you again soon."

Mills, swinging his cane jauntily, went

out, and the agent tucked the card into his pocket. It was another night wasted, he thought reproachfully. The next morning he reported at Secret Service headquarters and tossed the calling card on the desk of his superior.

"No luck," he sighed. "I met a fellow who was a big spender, but the money he used was perfectly good. Here's his card."

It was plain, neatly engraved, bearing no address. It said simply:

**Harry Mills**  
- **New York City**

Surely this was no lead. But the Secret Service is thorough. The card was sent to the laboratory for careful study—and with astounding results. The laboratory reported that the hand that engraved Harry Mills' calling card and the hand that engraved the bogus B-27723486A were one and the same!

Chief Operative Straight was exultant. Here was the break in the case. Here was the clue to the identity of the engraver of the plates. But where was Mills now, who were the master minds, and where were the plates?

Within a day, Straight had the following information from his agents:

Harry Mills was an engraver. His skill had been acquired in engraving plants of the United States government. He worked on steel in preference to copper, believing that larger printings could be made from steel.

Several months earlier, Mills had been without work and broke. He had no criminal record, but was a fellow who drank a great deal. The agents learned that he had frequented a certain Brooklyn saloon, but suddenly had disappeared.

On the last night Mills had been there, the bartender recalled under sharp questioning. He had been babbling of his skill as an engraver. "I am the best engraver in the United States," he had boasted.

Among those who heard the remark was Sam Di Sandi, a racketeer and booze seller of the prohibition era. Engraving was not Di Sandi's line, but easy money was his middle name, and he was not the fellow to overlook any bets. Maybe this drunk at the bar was only a windbag, but he was worth investigating. Di Sandi slipped into a telephone booth and called a number. The man he talked to was Ar-mateo Santaniello.

Santaniello was not nicknamed "The Killer" for nothing. He had done time at Sing Sing for murder. He was now out on parole—and he needed money.

"Bring him over," the Killer said.

Di Sandi drew Mills aside. The two talked for several minutes and then departed. As they drove away in Di Sandi's car it was observed that Mills' eyes had been covered by a blindfold. Di Sandi was making sure that Mills would have no knowledge of where he was being taken.

**W**ITH this information, the Secret Service sleuths felt they had learned the identity of the top men in the case of bill B-27723486A—Santaniello, Di Sandi and Mills.

However, the information had come very late. Two million dollars' worth of the bad bills had been put into circulation. Killer Santaniello and Di Sandi had disappeared—had gone to Europe, the agents learned. That accounted for the appearance of some of the bogus money on that continent, which had previously been reported.

The agents picked up the trail of Mills, believing that he eventually could lead them to the place where the bills were being printed. They soon found that they were up against a very clever gang.

It developed that the Killer and Di Sandi had plotted to murder Mills as soon as he had completed engraving the two plates necessary for printing the bills,

but had been obliged to abandon that plan because of the necessity for constant re-touching of the plates. This was a job only Mills could do.

They had kept the engraver a virtual prisoner in his workroom. In order to prevent the possibility of Mills' babbling, they blindfolded him each time they took him out. The arrangement was to turn him loose once a week at Times Square, giving him a night to himself, and then pick him up later at a designated time, blindfold him again and return him to his workshop. Should Mills by any chance be arrested, he would be of little value to the officers, because he could not tell them where the counterfeiting was being done.

After learning from the Mills calling card that he was their man, the agents had little trouble in tracing him to the place; but even then the problem was complicated because they dared not make a raid until they were positive they were going to get the plates.

This was the stumbling block for several weeks. Twelve times the agents were ready to make the raid, but each time they were obliged to hold back through their uncertainty concerning the plates.

The counterfeiters were smart. The two plates were never left longer than necessary at the place of printing, nor were they ever in the possession of one man. After they had been used they were given to different members of the band, one taking the front plate and another taking the back. It was next to impossible to know in advance just when the plates would be at the printing plant or who would have them afterward.

A most elaborate guard had been set up by the gang, forcing the agents to work with the greatest secrecy lest they disclose their hand and frighten the counterfeiters away. The mob went so far as to check the license numbers of all automobiles passing the quiet rooming house where their printing press was located, so that they

might learn if anyone was watching the place from a cruising car. Lookouts were kept posted at all times.

For two months the agents had to bide their time, yet never for a moment were members of the gang free from surveillance. The government men learned the identity of all of them. They found out that the actual printing of the bills was being done by one John Teal, who, like Mills, was not a criminal by profession but merely an unemployed craftsman.

There was big money, indeed, for both Mills and Teal. Each received \$500 in genuine currency to every \$1,000 paid them in "queer" money. They were able to spend the good money without the risk of passing any of the "queer."

Mills had required three months to engrave the plates. Then the printing began, with more than two million dollars' worth being run off before any effort was made to put it in circulation. Consequently, the gang had a running start before the Secret Service knew of the plot.

Killer Santaniello and Sam Di Sandi were smart enough to know that once the bills began making their appearance, New York would be hot for them, so they cleared out of the country long before the agents had any inkling of their connection with the case. Mills and Teal, however, were in it up to their necks; each was a virtual prisoner, not daring to flee for fear of gang vengeance.

The day came when Alan Straight decided he could wait no longer. His men swooped down on the rooming house so swiftly that the lookouts had no time to give a warning to those inside. The sound of the agents pounding down the door was the first intimation that the counterfeiters had of the raid.

Mills and Teal had been at work. Several freshly printed bills were in sight. The all-important plates were found in a dark corner of the room where they had been thrown hurriedly upon the approach of the agents.

Besides Mills and Teal, the operatives nabbed Mrs. Mary Woods, proprietor of the rooming house, Lubreo Santaniello and Carmine Bruno, a relative of Mrs. Woods who was serving as printer's apprentice.

The leaders of the gang—Killer Santaniello and Sam Di Sandi—together with Dominic Avella and Salvatore Gesolde, escaped arrest. The federal men left them to be handled later, knowing that by seizure of the plates and the arrest of the engraver and printer they had smashed the ring and stopped the flow of B-27723486A—"the most dangerous of all the counterfeits."

Government agents have called this the most amazing attack upon American currency in history—and it was smashed because Harry Mills, engraver par excellence, couldn't resist handing his calling card to a Secret Service sleuth!

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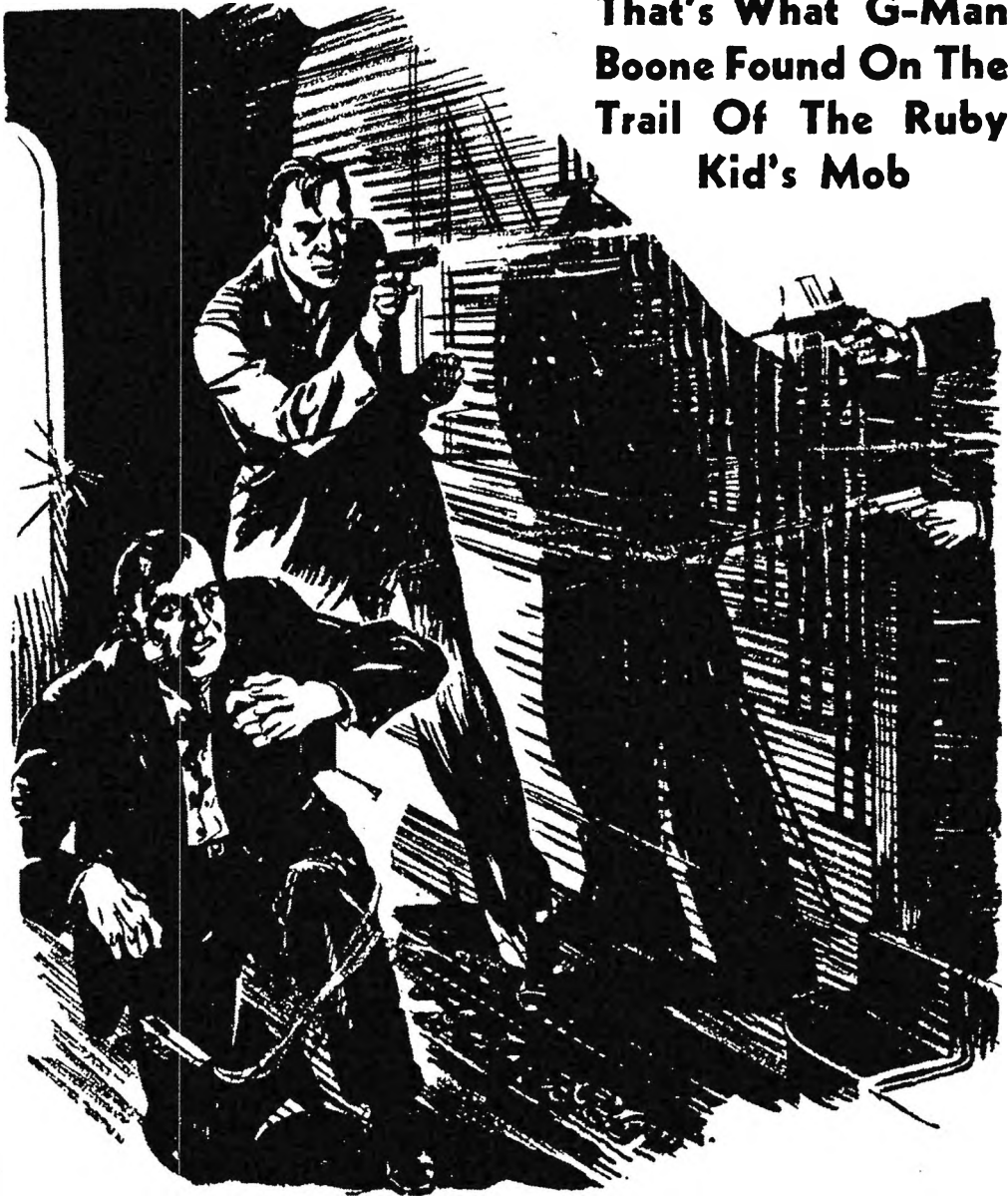
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# MURDER—on ICE!

That's What G-Man  
Boone Found On The  
Trail Of The Ruby  
Kid's Mob



**T**HIN rain misted across Rodney Street, past the broad entrance of the smart-looking apartment house, leaving an oblong patch of dry pavement, like an island, under the tan and gold canvas marquee. The big touring car went past the house at a snail's pace. There

were cars, a few of them, parked before the house. None was occupied. The touring car turned at the corner, came back under the shadow of the trees.

Hal Boone, seated behind the driver, scowled into the drizzle, watched the apartment building. Without turning his head

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By **JAMES DUNCAN**

to the man seated next to him, he asked, "This the house, Hammond?"

Joel Hammond, president of the Jewelers' Association, nodded vigorously. "This is it, all right."

As he leaned forward, his face showed a little more plainly under the snapped-down brim of his soft hat. It was an aggressive face, rigidly expressionless, as if held in check by an inner control. The eyes, however, told their own tale. They were restless, clouded, registering anxiety and even fear.

Hub Peggett, freckle-faced and eager-eyed, twisted about in the driver's seat. This was his first case as a special agent of the Bureau of Investigation. He had been assigned to work with tall, lanky, raw-boned Hal Boone as a matter of gaining experience in the field. His break had come with the startling information Joel Hammond not an hour before had brought to Eastern headquarters. One of the jewel magnate's buyers had contacted Nick Atlas, head of a fences' syndicate, wanted for months by G-men as a receiver of stolen gems and for interstate transportation of stolen property. According to Hammond, Atlas was living under the alias of Albert Hill.

"Gosh," said Peggett impulsively, "if we knock over Nick Atlas, we'll put a real crimp in the hot ice business. And maybe we'll get a line on the Ruby Kid, too, through the Greek!"

**H**AL BOONE hid a fleeting smile. Peggett was rushing to conclusions before the case was really under way. It was true that the Ruby Kid was the source of Nick Atlas' supply of negotiable ice. He stole the gems and Atlas disposed of the loot. So much the G-men had pieced together after months of painstaking investigation. But they had never been near capturing the Ruby Kid. He was no common thief; he was the head of an organized

gang. His depredations were country-wide, incredibly clever, thoroughly planned in advance. On every job he pulled he seemed to have amazingly accurate inside information.

Boone climbed out of the car and said, "Stay back out of sight, Hub. You an' Mr. Hammond will keep eyes glued to the front door. Savvy?"

"Savvy. But gosh, Hal, ain't I gcin' up with you?"

"Sorry—this job needs but one man. Someone must watch the door and check on who comes in and out. If I'm not down in half an hour, I'll signal. And if you don't get a signal—well, you'll know what to do."

Boone walked boldly across the street, his tall form outlined in the feeble rays of the street lamp. The apartment lobby he entered was quiet, dimly lit. A brass panel in the wall to the left of the door bore black bell-pushers, occupants' cards level with each one.

One of them said "Albert Hill." The apartment number was 4E. Boone stepped into the automatic elevator, pushed the button for the top floor. When he got out, he reached under his coat, loosened the army issue .45 in the holster, climbed a flight of stairs to the roof.

Wind tugged at the skirts of his ulster as he cat-footed across the pebbled surface to the fire-escape stanchion, started down the steep ladder. It was very quiet on the top story. From somewhere came the faint tones of a radio, turned quite low. He went down another flight and another, then stopped before a window through the portières of which seeped a thin bar of light.

He stood listening a moment. There was someone moving about, but he couldn't be certain whether the sound came from the Nick Atlas apartment or somewhere else. So he waited another moment. Then

*(Turn to page 100)*

# Why waste time on old fashioned methods

-when you can learn to play  
at home without a teacher

**D**ON'T let the thought of long years of tire-  
some practice scare you away from learning  
to play! Don't let the thought of an expensive  
private teacher keep you from letting your dreams  
come true! For you—*anyone*—can easily *teach*  
*yourself* to play—right in your own home, in your  
spare time, and at only a fraction of what old,  
slow methods cost!

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The note in the first space is *always* f. The note  
in the second space is *always* a. The way to know  
the notes that come in these four spaces is simply  
to remember that they spell *face*.

Now, isn't that simple? You don't have to know one  
note from another in order to begin. For the U. S.  
School way explains everything as you *go along*—both  
in print and picture—so that, almost before you know it,  
you are playing *real tunes and melodies* right from the  
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to do, then the picture *shows* you how to do it—then  
you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could  
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to pick up any piece of music, read it, and understand  
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cal facts.* You get the real meaning of musical notation,  
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lessons come to you by mail. They consist of complete  
printed instructions, diagrams, all the music you need.

There are no dry-as-dust  
exercises to struggle  
through. Instead, it's just  
like playing a game—you  
learn so fast!

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idea that you need "talent."  
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ments in the panel and de-  
cide which one you want  
to play. Remember—no  
matter which instrument  
you choose, the cost in  
each case will average just  
the same—only a few cents  
a day.

You'll never regret hav-  
ing learned to play. For  
those who can entertain  
with music at parties—  
who can snap up things  
with peppy numbers—are  
always sought after, always  
sure of a good time! Start  
now and surprise your  
friends!

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|---|--------------|
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| Organ                                   | Piccolo      |
| Violin                                  | 'Cello       |
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| and Traps                               | Hawaiian     |
| Guitar                                  | Steel Guitar |
| Mandolin                                | Clarinet     |
| Harp                                    | Flute        |
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(Continued from page 98)

he slipped out the .45, gripping the butt lightly, crouched down.

He looked at the window. It had no give when his arm muscles flexed in trying to lift it up. He got out a flat case from an inside pocket, selected a curved steel bar, wedged the chisel-like edge under the sill and pushed down.

The sash made a funny squeak under the strain, then snapped upward with a slight noise. He got the steel bar back into the case quickly and stood back from the window. His face was watchful and he held the gun at his hip. But nothing happened. There was no sound from within. He pushed the drapes aside with his left hand, put a leg over the sill, dropped lightly into the room. His lips tightened.

A man was lying on the floor beside an overturned chair. He was lying on his face, head limply pillowed on an outflung arm. Boone stood in the center of the room, let his eyes flick from him to the furniture. Two more chairs were overturned, a sofa had been slashed with a knife.

Boone knelt down, saw a hole in the back of the man's head. Blood had seeped from the wound, clotted on the hair. He touched the face. It was stone cold, rigid. He looked at the face. Things had been done to it—a face-lifting job, probably—but he could not fail to recognize it. Nick Atlas, alias Albert Hill. He stood up, approached a dark doorway beyond the body.

He hesitated a moment, uncertain whether he was really hearing sounds or not. Then, distinctly, he heard a door close very, very softly. He lunged in, gun thrust before him. In the darkness, his foot tangled with a chair and he nearly stumbled. His left hand, flailing through the air, came into contact with a light chain. He pulled it, saw he was in a small kitchen. Dishes with left-over scraps littered the sink. There was a quart bottle of bourbon, three-quarters full, uncorked,

sitting on a table. Beyond the table was a door. He stepped quickly to the door, opened it, peered out into the corridor. He listened intently, but not a sound reached him. With a grunt, he swung it shut. He figured he had been mistaken about hearing a door close.

Then he found himself sniffing the odor of freshly-dried paint. The walls and ceiling of the kitchen had been recently painted. He noted the narrow door to a tall cupboard in a corner that stood open a scant inch. He strode over to it, pushed it open. His thumb stuck at little on the inside. The paint had not thoroughly dried. After a second's thought, he stuck his head inside the cupboard, whistling under his breath. When he looked at the spot where his thumb had stuck he saw a little fuzz of woolly hair just below it. His ulster was of a hard-woven material. Those hairs had not come off his garments.

He stared at them with close-knit brows, then took an envelope from his pocket, put the hairs inside, licked the flap, sealed it.

STILL whistling, he cruised back into the room where the dead man lay. He went through the clothing carefully, gleaning a watch, a wallet choked with bills, a fountain pen, a cigar case, a silver lighter, a knife and a book of tooled leather no more than two inches square. He laid the objects on the table, retaining only the little book. He thumbed through it, smiled grimly when he saw telephone numbers penciled on the thin pages. There were no names—just numbers. Yet he knew what an important find this might be. Perhaps young Hub Peggett had been right after all. Nick Atlas, though dead, might yet give the Bureau a lead on the Ruby Kid's whereabouts. He slipped the book into his pocket.

Then he thought of Peggett. Why not let the kid come up and have a look around? Do him good to see a real murder situation. He went to the window,



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pulled the drape aside, raised it and leaned out. Below he could see the touring car, parked on the other side of the street. He waved to attract Peggett's attention, but neither the youngster nor Joel Hammond was looking up. After five minutes of this, Boone went to the door. He hadn't wanted to shout through the window. That might attract attention. The best thing would be to go down and bring Peggett up with him.

He pressed a tiny button that would keep the spring lock from working when he closed the door, stepped into the corridor, took the elevator down. He saw Peggett seated before the wheel, Joel Hammond in the tonneau, as he crossed the street. He started to say, "I've got a big surprise for . . ." when a voice, low-pitched and vibrant, spat out:

"Reach, brother, and reach high!"

"What . . ."

"Shut up! No arguments! Put your hands up!"

A SHADY form appeared from behind the car, stepping close to Boone. "Up, mugg!" the man supplemented. A black automatic showed briefly in his hand.

Boone's arms went up, then descended swiftly for the man's head. At the same time, he threw his body sidewise. The man lurched back, but did not fire. Boone dived in under the gun as the man swung it up and down swiftly, aiming for his skull. It jarred against the agent's collar bone, threw him off balance. His groping hands were closing about the man's throat when he heard a vicious laugh behind him. He loosened his hold, whirled to meet the barrel of a .45 that crashed solidly against the side of his head. He caught the glimpse of a dark, brutal face, topped by bushy red hair. Then his eyes closed.

Darkness rushed to meet him when Hal Boone's eyes opened again. His cheek was pressed against rough cloth that

(Turn to next page)

(Continued from page 101)

was irritating his skin. He sat up abruptly, stared stupidly ahead of him, senses whirling, pain boiling over in his head.

And then he remembered. The government car, the two men with guns, the stunning blow against his head. His muscles bunched and at the same instant he felt a gun prod him in the ribs.

"Take it easy, G-man," a low voice murmured. "My finger is nervous on the trigger."

He turned his head. There was enough light to reveal the baleful green eyes and red hair of the man seated next to him. The red hair recalled something; Boone's mind clicked. The Ruby Kid! That's who this fellow was!

**B**UT they were moving. Boone looked out of the window, saw dark trees rush by. Somewhere in the country. He wondered how long he had been out, what direction the car had taken. It was a closed car, a powerful sedan. The man behind the wheel looked back, grinned.

"Has the G-scout woken from his nap?"

The Ruby Kid growled. "Keep your eyes on the road, Timmy. Pass up the cracks."

Then Boone saw Joel Hammond, white-faced, trembling, seated on the other side of the Ruby Kid. A wholesale snatch! Without moving his hand, his upper arm pressed against the shoulder holster. It was empty, of course. They had taken his gun. His feet eased forward, touched something soft, recoiled.

"Yeah," said the cold voice of the Ruby Kid in his ear, "that there bundle of flesh is your sidekick. Timmy hit him too hard and now the dumb lug's dead as a had-dock."

Fire raged in Boone's brain. Peggett, poor youngster sent out on his first case, dead! His rage showed itself in the twitching of his muscles.

"Sit quiet," the Ruby Kid said a trifle nervously. "You can't help yourself or him."

"Hey, Kid," called the driver, "we gotta dump the stiff. Where will it be?"

"What's wrong with right here?"

"Well, won't that show what direction we went?"

"No. This road leads to the concrete highway and that goes to a hundred different places. Stop 'er here!"

Timmy shoved on the brake suddenly, sending them all pitching forward. "You damn' ox!" cried the Kid. "You wanta give this boy a chance to get at me?"

But Boone made no attempt to grapple with the Kid, even though the latter's gun had been pulled away from his body. Instead his left hand dropped into his pocket, closed about the little tooled leather book he had taken from Nick Atlas.

"You keep 'em covered," muttered the Ruby Kid to Timmy. He opened the door of the car, stepped out. Peggett's legs were nearest him. He grabbed them and yanked hard. A loose arm caught against Boone's leg. He leaned down.

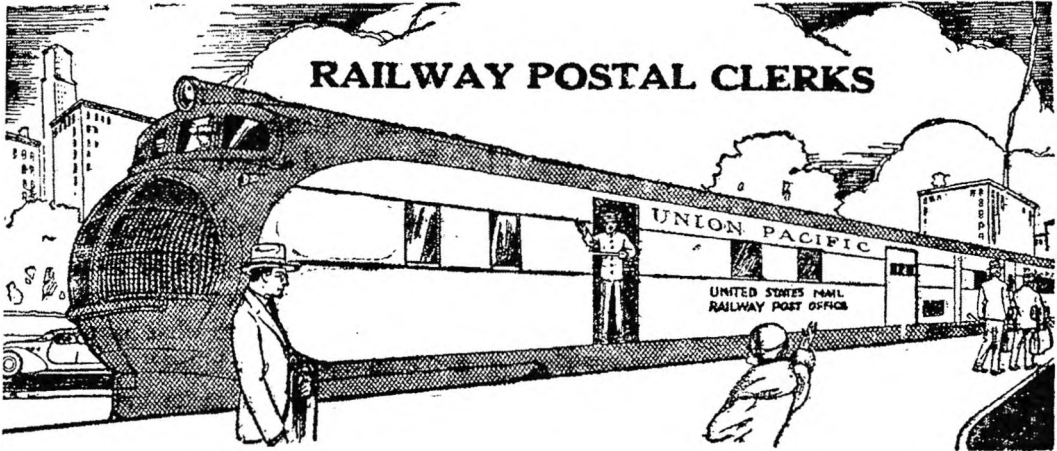
"I'll give you a hand."

His left hand slid down to Peggett's breast pocket and deposited the leather book there as he shoved. The body bumped against the running board, slid to the road. A few seconds later, the Ruby Kid was back in the car. The door banged shut and the machine leaped away. Some ten miles farther the road cut into the concrete highway.

A passing truck's lights bisected the glare of their own headlights and brightly illuminated the inside of the car for a second. The glow showed Hal Boone's jaw set at a pugnacious angle. A bitter, mocking smile flitted across his lips. His frosty blue eyes shone like gleaming ice.

The sedan turned left on the highway, hit a speed of sixty miles an hour. Boone kept his eyes glued to the side of the road

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until he saw a road sign: "Conn. U.S. 1." Now he had a pretty fair notion of their direction. When the car went through Greenwich, it slowed down a bit. Past Cos Cob, it made a right turn into a narrow macadam road. From that point on, it twisted first right, then left, then right again. When it finally came to a stop, Boone knew they were near the Sound.

**T**HE house before which they stopped stood well off the road, surrounded by trees. It looked empty until Timmy gave two short blasts on the horn. Then four men came out the front door, their guns gleaming in the light of the headlamps.

The Ruby Kid gave quick orders and both Hammond and Boone were surrounded on all sides on their march to the house.

The Ruby Kid held up a hand for silence. "Timmy and me was callin' on the Greek," he explained at length. "When

we got up there he was stretched out with a slug in his head. Somebody slid in through the fire escape an' me an' Timmy hot-footed it through the kitchen."

Boone's eyes gleamed. He remembered that noise he had heard in the kitchen. So it had been these two men.

"Well," went on the Kid, "we got down fast. This mugg"—he pointed to Boone—"was the one came in through the window. He had a pal waitin' below in a car. And who was with him? Nobody but El' and ~~Joe~~ **Joel Hammond** himself! Tie that! Well, Timmy socked the boy in the car and I handled Hammond. Timmy broke the boy's skull. We dumped him. This one an' Hammond we brought along."

Curious eyes fastened on Boone. A thin-faced man asked, "Is he cops?"

The Ruby Kid put his head back and guffawed. "No—worse. He's a G-man. So was his pal."


*(Turn to next page)*

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(Continued from page 103)

If the Kid had expected his satellites to laugh with him, he was disappointed. An ominous silence hung over the room. "What's wrong with you dopes?" the Kid growled. "Gettin' scared maybe?"

No one said a word until again the thin-faced man spoke. "We ain't scared none, Kid," he said huskily. "But a G-man! Jeez, the heat's turned on us enough without havin' to kill one G-man an' snatch another. Hell, y'know what happens when a special agent gets killed."

"Aw, you muggs make me sick!" the Kid spat out scornfully. "We're covered. Timmy an' me didn't make a slip. They'll never get on to who did it. An' furthermore, Nick Atlas was killed. See? That's gonna mean trouble."

"So you drag a G-man to the hideout so's . . ."

"Aw, use your bean!" interrupted the Kid. "This guy's goin' be a swell help to us." He winked. "When and if we get in a jam. Listen!" He drew them to a corner, spoke in a low voice.

BOONE could not hear what he said. His eyes were trained on Joel Hammond. Hammond was breathing hard, gasping like a fish out of water. His tongue circled his dry lips. His eye caught Boone's stare and he flushed deeply. But Boone turned away then, an enigmatic expression about his eyes.

There was an open doorway to the right of him that led into a workroom. He saw benches, tables, jeweler's lathes, tools. He knew what it was—a cutting room where stolen jewelry was worked over so that when it was returned to the market it would not be recognized. For months the Bureau had been searching for this plant and here he was actually inside it!

Much good that did him, though. His chances of getting out of the place were about a hundred to one. Of course, he



could go down fighting by simply rushing for the door and attempting a getaway. The results to himself would be inevitable—bullet holes in the back. He promised himself that if they tried to use him against the Bureau in some way, he'd force them to kill him.

Suddenly the Ruby Kid turned on him. 'Come on, mugg,' he growled. 'We're goin' to show you some real hospitality: You'll get a room to yourself and a private bath. How's that?'

"Great!" muttered Boone. "Only your hospitality nauseates me."

"Ha-ha! You'll get over that!" He prodded Boone with his gun. "Get goin' up them stairs."

"Boone!"

IT was an anguished cry, choked out of Joel Hammond. He stood there in the middle of the room, veins prominent on his forehead, the muscles of his face sagging, his head wobbling as though it were loose on his shoulders. "God, Boone, help me! These monsters will murder me!"

There was a brittle silence. The Ruby Kid broke it. He took a step toward Hammond, snarled softly, "Murder ain't all, you lousy heel! You'll face plenty before we're through with you!" And as he spoke, his gun raked Hammond's face, leaving a blue-red welt from his temple to his chin. "An' that's only a sample!" he breathed hoarsely.

Boone, forgotten for the moment, stood with fists knotted at his sides. His face was white and there was a stony look in his eyes. He shot a quick look about the room. Every eye was focused on Hammond. He moved with the grace and speed of a panther. There was no sense making a break for the door. It was locked. But the Kid was near him. His right fist shot up from the hip, cracked against the side of the Kid's jaw. Down went the Kid with a thump that shook the room.

(Turn to next page)

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(Continued from page 105)

But before Boone could get in another blow, a half-dozen hands pulled at him, his arms were caught and held. He struggled for a second, then his muscles relaxed and a bleak grin overspread his features.

"Anyway," he muttered, "I've had my inning!"

On the floor, the Ruby Kid moved suddenly, his right hand snaking up with the gun. Timmy yelled, grabbed at the hand. The gun exploded at the contact, but the bullet whistled over Boone's head.

"Kid!" Timmy snapped. "That's enough blasting. Remember what you said about the gee. We gotta keep him alive."

The murderous fire died slowly in the Ruby Kid's close-set eyes. His mouth warped sullenly. But his gun arm relaxed. "All right," he grated. "Take the lug upstairs. Tie him hand and foot to the bed and gag him. Them dukes o' his won't be so free the next time."

WITH a shrug, Boone accepted the inevitable. He offered no resistance when he was led up the stairs, but behind him he could feel the Ruby Kid's slitted eyes boring into his back.

The room to which they took him was furnished ordinarily enough with a bed, a dresser, a table and a couple of chairs. Under the eyes of Timmy he was stretched out on the bed and held securely while two other men went about the task of tying him up and gagging him. Then they turned out the light and left him.

For an hour and more afterwards he could hear the murmur of voices, the sound of footsteps below. Then, with his own grim thoughts for companionship, he stared up into the darkness until he fell asleep.

It was daylight when he awoke. A murky grayness showed outside the windowpanes, coming close to matching the grayness of his haggard features. The tight bonds had almost completely stopped the circulation

in his arms and legs. Tiny needles, millions of them, were jabbing at his hands and feet.

The hours dragged slowly. Noon came and passed. No one came into the room. He heard voices again, and footsteps, but that was all. Apparently they did not believe in feeding their prisoners. Murky twilight lengthened the shadows in the room. The dim light showed the strain on his face. His eyes were sunken, red-rimmed; his cheeks were white, sweat-stained, bloodless; underneath the choking gag his mouth was hot and dry.

Better be dead than tortured like this. He wondered what they intended to do with him. There was some purpose behind their keeping him alive; he was certain of that.

Hours passed even slower with the darkness and he found he had to keep a tight grip on his mind to dispel cold panic. Suddenly his ears pricked up and he listened intently. The door to the room was being opened. Not boldly, but stealthily. He waited, heard it close just as softly, heard the slight creak of a floor board. Endless seconds lengthened to a minute and then a voice, barely audible, reached him. "Boone!" He recognized the voice.

HE twisted his head in the direction of the sound, but could not answer. The bed springs made a slight metallic crunching. Cautious footsteps came closer. A hand came toward him, felt his body, came to rest on the gag. A second later the gag was removed and he drew in a sharp, whistling breath.

"Hammond!" he said flatly, tonelessly. "How'd you get loose?"

"Sh-h! Not so loud. Listen!" The voice dropped to even a lower key. "I—I've got a proposition."

Boone grinned into the darkness. "Shoot!" he said between tight lips.

(Turn to next page)



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**POPULAR MECHANICS**

(Continued from page 107)

"I'll help you—uh—get away if . . ."

"If what?"

"You know. I saw last night by your face that you knew."

**B**OONE said quietly, "You killed Nick Atlas. You shot him in the back of the head. You came to the Chief, asked him to raid Atlas' hideout. The Chief could only spare Peggett and me. That's what spoiled your plans. You got in touch with the Ruby Kid. You had it timed so we'd arrive at Atlas' place right after the Kid got there. If there'd been a big detail of special agents, the Ruby Kid would've been killed by our guns. Atlas' murder would've been pinned on him. You'd be in the clear. As it happened, it didn't work out that way. Because of you, young Peggett was murdered." He paused a moment, repeated, "Because of you!"

"Boone, I—it'll be . . ."

"All right? Hell, no! You'll fry for Peggett's murder, for the Atlas kill." He chuckled. "That is, if the Kid doesn't get you first."

"You can't prove I killed Atlas!"

"Can't I? When you shot Atlas, you got a scare. Maybe you thought someone had heard the shot. I don't know. Anyway, you slid into a broom cupboard in the kitchen to hide. As it happened, the paint there wasn't quite all dry. You're wearing a Harris tweed suit. A few of the hairs stuck to the paint. You didn't notice, but there's a fleck of paint on the lapel of your coat. Chemical analysis will connect up conclusively the hairs on the cupboard door with your suit, the paint on your suit with the cupboard."

There was an ominous silence. "I had to kill Atlas!" Hammond blurted suddenly. "He was pressing me hard. He and the Ruby Kid were conspiring to drop business with me and use blackmail. They'd

have milked me dry. They had me cold—me, president of the Jewelers' Association!"

"You were in business with them?" Boone asked quickly.

"Yes! Atlas bought the stuff the Kid stole and turned it over to me. I disposed of it through the regular business channels."

"And you gave the Kid's gang tips on jobs. You cased the jobs for them from the inside, and then you sold stolen goods to your customers!"

"That's right. You've got the whole story now. Will you make a deal?"

"To help you escape? No, thanks! I'd rather stay here."

"But . . ." Hammond's voice raised a trifle. "I'll kill you if you don't help me!"

**B**OONE'S face tightened. Little muscles stood in ridges along the side of his jaw. "I guess you mean it, at that. Listen! If we get out of here alive I'll give you a full day's start before going after you. That's the best I can do. Take it or leave it!"

"I—I'll take it!"

"All right. Now how'd you get loose in the first place and what's your plan?"

"Kip Morgan—he's one of the gang—" Hammond said quickly, "he cut my ropes. Kip's always worked for me. He was the one who tipped me off to what the Kid and Atlas were cooking up against me. I promised him twenty grand if I get away from here clear. He couldn't help me directly, but he gave me two guns and a knife."

"That's direct enough." Then, curiously, "But why do you need my help? Couldn't you make it alone?"

"No. All day today I kept thinking it over. You see, these windows, can't be opened. They're all nailed down. We've got to get by through the back door.

(Turn to next page)



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(Continued from page 109)

There's a garage in the back of the house with three cars. If we can get one out, we're safe. And besides, I can't drive. That's the real reason why I need you."

"H'm. Well, cut these ropes and let's get going."

A FEW moments later, Boone sat up stiffly, his arms and legs in an agony of pain. Precious minutes dragged by before he was able to get up on his feet. Even then he felt wobbly. His fingers closed about the butt of a .38 Hammond handed to him, and the cool feel of the gun infused him with new life.

They tiptoed to the door. Boone opened it and peered out. The landing was in darkness, only a little light coming up from below. He listened until he could make out the drone of voices and then stepped out into the hallway. Hammond followed. Slowly they made their way to the stairs and started down. Everything would depend on their getting to that back door unseen. After that, the rest would be comparatively easy. But to get to the door meant passing the living room—and that might mean being seen.

Boone was obliged to think fast. He signaled to Hammond to halt while he straddled the bannister, putting first one leg over, then the other. The step had a curved lip on which his heels rested. The floor was some fifteen feet below. When he grasped the bannister supports with one hand and hung down at arm's length, there was a drop of only about eight feet. He swung his body out and dropped.

He hit the floor with his toes, rebounded lightly, thankful for the carpeting that deadened the sound of his fall. Hammond, round-eyed, seemed too paralyzed by fear to move. Boone signalled frantically and then the jeweler, too, stepped over the bannister. He hung for a moment as if undecided which way to jump. Suddenly

a hoarse cry broke from his lips. His hand had slipped. He hit the floor with a dull thud that shook the house.

Before Boone could set him on his feet, three men were in the doorway.

For the space of a pulse-beat, Boone stood motionless before reflex action jerked his trigger finger. His gun belched flame and lead. The foremost man fell back, pulled by invisible hands. His right hand fumbled under his coat, came out with an automatic. Boone's gun spat again. The man thudded to the floor.

Three guns from the doorway fired instantly. A hail of slugs bit chips of plaster from the wall. Boone jerked aside to hug the protection of the staircase wall. Bullets chipped pieces of wood from the staircase, tugged at the sleeves of his coat.

**H**AMMOND, his face white and distorted, was on his knees, firing wildly. He was shouting incoherently, crazed by fear. A bullet hit him in the throat and another in the chest, but still he remained on his knees. Blood darkened his shirt front, came out of his throat in jerky spurts. Suddenly a slug caught him between the eyes. He swayed. He was dead before he hit the floor, face downward.

Step by step, Boone was retreating toward the back door. Two men were on the steps above him now, firing down at him. He didn't waste any more bullets. He hadn't counted his shots, but he was certain there could not be more than two or three slugs left in his .38. He needed every one of them. He saw Timmy break from the group of men in the doorway and rush recklessly at him with a blazing gun.

Boone's .38 jerked up. His face was cold and bitterly intent. When he fired it was with deliberation, with careful aim. Timmy halted, balancing himself desperately, his left hand brushing a film from before his eyes. He looked at Boone as

(Turn to next page)

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*(Continued from page 111)*

though he had something very urgent to say. His mouth opened and blood gushed from it. He slumped to the floor. He was four feet from Boone when he raised his gun, fired twice, coughed and died.

TWO white-hot slugs slammed into Boone's side; neither of Timmy's last two shots had missed. He bent over double with sudden agony, fell to his knees. Those shots had done something to him, shocked his nervous system into temporary paralysis. He sat on his knees, conscious of the murderous face of the Ruby Kid advancing on him from the doorway, but helpless to do anything about it. He saw the gun in the man's hand, saw it swivel until it was on a line with his head, saw the trigger finger whitening under pressure. He muttered something, dropped suddenly as the Kid's finger twitched. A bullet thudded into the door behind him.

Then from outside sounded the sharp, clattering roar of Tommy guns. The front door flew open. Boone saw men, at least a dozen of them, piling in. He saw their faces, fresh, young, determined. He gave vent to an exultant yell, but his voice was drowned out. He did not hear the gunfire cease a few moments later, did not see the man who rushed forward out of the swirling gun smoke to kneel down beside him, did not know that the Ruby Kid's gang, to the last man, had raised their hands in abject surrender. For he had fainted.

He came to the next day in a hospital bed. Standing beside him was a youngish-looking, clean-limbed man—Hardie, Chief of the Eastern division, Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice. Hardie was grinning.

"Doc says your wounds could be worse. He promises to have you out of here in a month." Abruptly the smile left his face. "I've already sent a preliminary report to Washington. I was waiting to hear from you before I sent home the real dope. The

Ruby Kid gave us a yarn purporting to connect Joel Hammond with the stolen gems racket. What's the truth?"

Boone looked up. "It's true," he said. In terse sentences he gave Hardie the gist of what had happened. "Hammond confessed to killing Atlas. He confessed to being linked with the Kid and Atlas in jewel robberies and selling stolen goods. He's dead and that's the only merciful thing that could've happened to him." Boone was quiet suddenly. "You didn't get to the hideout a minute too soon," he murmured at last. "The Kid had his gun trained on me. He missed once, but the second shot would've got me. How'd you get there? The little book?"

Hardie nodded soberly. "A farmer picked up Peggett's body. The local law got in touch with us. The little book puzzled us for a time until we started tracing each number in it. Then we caught on. There were fences, thieves, hideouts behind every number. Only by elimination did we get to the Ruby Kid's place. His number was one of the last in the book. The telephone was in the name of some woman, probably a fake. I sent a man down and in an hour he'd phoned back that the place looked like a hideout. Then we came on in force. Did you get the book from Atlas?"

"Yeah. I figured it might contain the information you'd need. That's why I planted it on Peggett. Poor kid, I . . ." He stopped.

Hardie looked away. "Yeah, he was a swell youngster. Maybe rounding up the Ruby Kid gang makes up for his murder. I mean in a . . ."

Hardie's voice trailed off into silence. Hal Boone did not look up. His eyes were fixed on the bar of sunlight that fell aslant his bed. A line of bitterness twisted his lips, to be instantly erased. He squared his shoulders. Peggett had died in the line of duty. No man could ask for more.

"Sure," he said. "Sure it does!"



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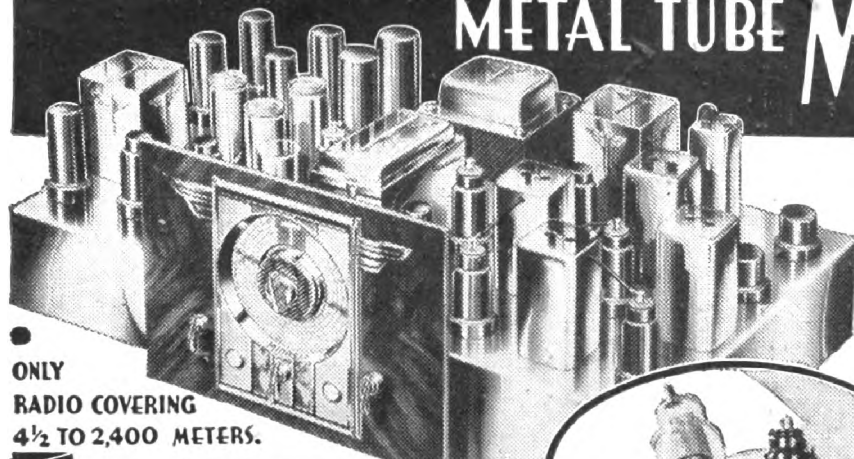
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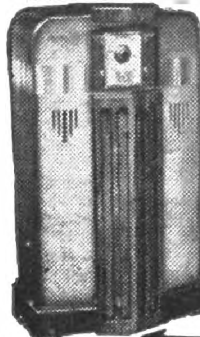
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