

G-MEN ACTION STORIES

# PUBLIC Enemy

A man in a blue suit and yellow tie is shown in a dynamic, slightly off-balance pose, holding a handgun in his right hand. He has a serious, intense expression. He is looking towards a woman in a yellow dress with white lace trim, who is looking back at him. The background is a solid, vibrant red.

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JUNE

## The KEY to MURDER!

A Complete G-Men Novel

J. EDGAR HOOVER  
MAPS ANTI-CRIME  
CAMPAIGN



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# PUBLIC Enemy

"G-Men Action Stories"

**Vol. 1**

**CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1936**

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Complete \$2 G-Men Novel  
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When a diabolical plot that opens in a temple torture chamber in Tibet crosses the world to a New York museum, leaving a trail of ruthless murder in its wake, Lynn Vickers and his F. B. I. operatives begin a thrilling manhunt for a new Public Enemy. The one clue to this amazing crime series is a sinister jeweled key—and the sinister scheme behind it will baffle you. How will G-77 solve the case? Who are the strange dark men who bring an astounding chain of murder half way around the world to America?

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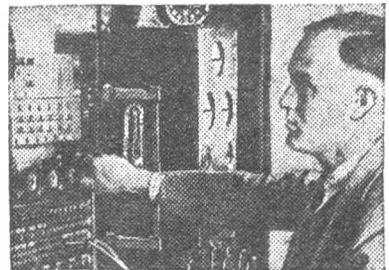
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Lynn Vickers—G-77 of the F. B. I.—and his famous manhunters of the U. S. Department of Justice will continue their thrilling work of smashing secret gangs and rounding up public enemies in the regular \$2 novel-length story in FEDERAL AGENT Magazine.

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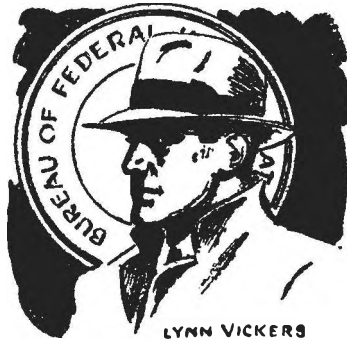
FEDERAL AGENT Magazine will contain many other exciting stories of the men of action of all branches of the Depart-

ment of Justice. Follow them step by step, clue by clue, as they solve the strange cases and battle the underworld demons that challenge them daily.

FEDERAL AGENT Magazine will continue all the PUBLIC ENEMY features and departments. John Alexander brings you more interesting facts about the F. B. I. in his regular feature "With The G-Men." The new "Secret Codes and Ciphers" department will contain further codes, instructions for breaking them, and code puzzles. The G-77 Club goes forward stronger than ever before to gain hundreds of new members through FEDERAL AGENT.

For those steady readers of PUBLIC ENEMY who may be curious as to why we are changing the title, we have a very

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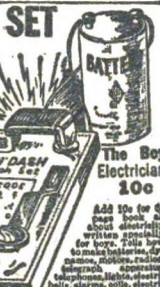
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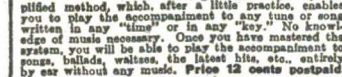
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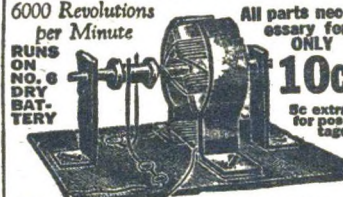
Why envy the easy rhythm and fascinating grace of Step'n Fetchit, Fred Astaire etc. Tap dance in ONLY 2 HOURS by anew, simplified course by Prof. Wilson. No special ability needed. Be smart! Everybody's tapping. The whole town is tapping. Beat out a tune with your feet. Hostesses love it. Besides, tap dancing is not only invigorating and entertaining but is also health-giving exercise for rickety limbs and gives a "springy" feeling of fitness to the whole body. Promotes slimmer figure's way, without pills, drugs or dieting. Readers say: "wonderful benefit." Thank you for making tap dancing to my accomplishments. **PRICE 25 CENTS POSTPAID.**

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# The Key



# To Murder



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**BY**

**BRYAN JAMES KELLEY**

*Creator of G-77 and Author of "Murder in Hollywood," etc.*

**From A Torture Chamber In A Tibetan Temple To A New York City Museum Is A Long Jump—But This Greatest Crime Of The Century Begins Like That. Brutal And Ruthless Murders Leave A Bloody Trail For Lynn Vickers, The Famous G-77 Of The F.B.I., And His Daring G-Men To Follow As They Search For The Key That Is The Solution To These Amazing Crimes. Will The Heroic Government Sleuths Be Able To Defeat The Mysterious Dark Men Who Have Come From The Other Side Of The World To Launch A Reign Of Terror?**

**Begin this Exciting Mystery on the Next Page** ➡

## CHAPTER I

## Death on Top of the World



It was just after sunrise that he came upon the body. It lay by the side of the path, half drifted under by snow, and he might never have noticed it had not his horse shied. At first he thought it might be a mule, and capable of being revived, so he forced his weary Mongolian pony nearer by kicking its shaggy flanks. Then he saw that it was only a man—and a man long since dead. Some unfortunate traveler, perhaps, succumbed to the icy winds and the sub-zero nights of the Roof of the World, his very marrow frozen solid by now.

The man on the horse tugged his sheepskin coat more firmly about his shoulders and muttered a *mantram* through wind-blackened lips. "*Om mani peme hung,*" he said, and the movement of speaking made the icicles tinkle musically in his beard. Then, without dismounting, and without a second glance at the miserable corpse, he urged his flagging pony forward across the bleak and desolate plain. Life is very cheap in India, and in Tibet cheaper still.

Behind him the tremendous ranges of the Himalayas thrust their snowy peaks into the sky. To have crossed those lofty, snow-choked passes in mid-winter was a feat of which no European would have been capable, especially when starting from the sultry jungles of lower Nepal. But this man seemed made of iron, driven to super-human efforts as he was by the pressing importance of the news he carried.

Ahead of him stretched the rocky, treeless tundra of Western Tibet, itself some three miles vertically above sea-level, and broken here and there by mountains and ridges rising higher still. At first glance there was no sign of human habitation to be seen; he might

have been riding across the trackless, frozen surface of the moon. But toward noon he prodded his stumbling pony around an outlying spur, and on its rear slope, thus somewhat protected from the biting gales, came upon a huddled group of buildings.

Those lowest down upon the hillside appeared to be mere hovels of sun-dried brick, but on the crest of the ridge stood the proud bulk of a *dzong*, or castle, that must have been centuries old. Its walls, of rough-hewn rock, were five feet thick, and rose a sheer fifty feet above its foundations. Its flat roof was nearly half an acre in extent, and its flat-arched gate giving into an inner courtyard was surmounted by a grinning *bodhisattva* of hand-carved and painted ebony. Toward this gate the lone rider, leaving his exhausted steed, climbed on foot.

Paying no attention to the curious glances of those he met on the way, he hurried, reeling with fatigue, into the courtyard. To a wide-eyed servant who met him there, he spoke only two words, "From Khatmandu."

The servant vanished promptly through an inner doorway, while the horseman sank wearily onto a bench. But in a very few moments he was up again, following an old *gyepo* up an outer stairway which was a mere series of rungs set in the stones, along a balcony, into a long, inner corridor, and then up another stair built European fashion with treads and risers. At last he was shown into a long, low-ceilinged chamber in which the only dim light seemed to proceed from a brass brazier in which a handful of yak-dung was smouldering.

The outside of the castle, though impressive in form and size, was crudely barbaric; to this the inside now presented a startling contrast. The room in which the courier now stood was excellently furnished in modern style. Oil paintings and rich tapestries covered the walls. Deep, soft Oriental rugs hid the stone-flagged floor, and the



tables, upholstered chairs, and cabinets were of the finest workmanship.

The courier had just stepped toward the brazier to warm himself when he perceived the figure sitting cross-legged on a divan in the corner. He immediately dropped to his knees and spoke in the Urdu dialect of Kashmir.

"A long life and many sons to the dharmaraja Ghatmin! I bring him word that the emperor of the Effendi, George V of England, is dead."

THE dharmaraja rose at once. Now it could be seen that he was a man of middle age; tall, well-formed, and of extraordinary intelligence. His eyes were the dark, liquid orbs of North India, but there was nothing Oriental about the cast of his features. His nose was high-bridged, almost aquiline; his forehead broad, his chin narrow and determined. His face and hands were a light olive in tint, but no more than might be caused by the burning sun of these high altitudes; where his embroidered silk jacket was thrown open, his neck was quite white.

He said merely, "When?"

"On the third day of the last Tibetan month, your highness."

The dharmaraja hesitated only a moment. Then he clapped his hands smartly. The *gyepo*, aged major-domo of the palace, appeared instantly. At a few sharp words from his master he hurried out into the corridor. The courier, upon another command, backed his way out, and sought much-needed food and rest on a floor below. The dharmaraja paced the floor thoughtfully with arms folded.

In less than ten minutes the room was half filled by more than a score of

persons. Most of them were men; some clothed in the long robes of priests, some wearing the elaborate coats and toques of *ponlops*, and some clad in the simple wool and sheepskin. But it was significant that each and every one wore the large turquoise ear-ring in his left ear that denoted a person of rank.

Of the four women in the group, two, who appeared of middle age, were the dharmaraja's favorite wives. The other two were barely out of their teens and from their marked resemblance were sisters. To the critical eye of any nationality they were both lyrically beautiful. Both possessed lustrous raven hair, swimming brown eyes shaded by long lashes, full red lips, and smooth skin to which the faintest of tints gave the look of rich old ivory.

To this group the dharmaraja addressed himself in Urdu.

"The time has come," he said simply. "The emperor of the Effendi died four midnights ago, the emperor whose stubborn caution has made our ambitions useless. Perhaps the gods will now be kind to us, and

allow us an opportunity to recover the symbol of our power, the ancestral heritage of the royal family of Ghatmin. We can but make the attempt, with Nirvana our reward if we fail. All is prepared. Each of you is versed, not only in the lore of the Buddha's wisdom, but in the language and sciences of the *chiling kyi mi* as well. My son Hoban awaits my orders in London. We will start at once."

One of the robed priests coughed in his beard.

"Did you speak, Umzde-gha?"

"I was about to remind the dharmaraja," replied the priest in a respectful growl, "of the ancient Sikkimese



Dharmaraja  
Ghatmin

truth: Blood pays for blood. The favor of the highest gods is not to be bought cheaply."

For just a moment the master hesitated; it was possible that he grew a trifle pale. But when he did speak, his hands behind his back he returned.

"You are right, Umzde-gha. The proper sacrifice will be made, without delay. You yourself shall perform the rites."

Apparently calm, he turned to the two young girls who stood side by side. "My children, the stream of life calls to you. One of you will go with us to play the part you have both trained for. The other will go to the bosom of Buddha. Which—which do you choose?"

Neither of the lovely creatures stirred or spoke, but cast down their eyes in sign of utter resignation to his wishes.

THE dharmaraja paused only long enough to draw a deep breath. Then he crossed the room to the brazier. From the little pile of yak-dung near it he plucked two wisps of straw, and broke them to unequal lengths. With his hands behind his back he returned.

"The longer one goes to the gods," he announced evenly.

He held out a closed fist from which two similar ends protruded. Each maiden seized a straw and held it up quickly. Even then neither of them uttered a sound, nor changed expression. From observing their attitudes it would have been impossible to tell which one had chosen the fateful fragment. The priest breathed heavily.

"Umzde-gha, lead the way to the *chorten!*"

In single file the group wound their way along a twisting corridor, up a flight of stairs, and into a chamber under the roof. This room was one tremendous shrine, its walls, floor and ceiling covered with grotesquely painted images. Each of the four corners was occupied by an exquisitely carved *bod-*

*hisattva*. The center of the north wall was filled by an ornate altar partially hidden behind an intricately worked screen of filigree leather and wood. This altar was strewn with ornaments of gold and precious stones, and was lighted by four butter lamps which had not been allowed to burn out, so the legend said, for more than six centuries. Yet oddly enough, the elevated dais at its very center, covered by cloth of gold, was completely empty.

In silence the members of the group fell to their knees in the middle of the room, facing toward the four corners. All except the bearded priest. He stepped to one end of the altar and picked up a knife. Its blade, of the finest Damascus steel, was more than a foot long, and delicately tapered. Its hilt was studded with diamonds that glittered coldly in the wan light, though no more coldly than its holder's deep-set eyes. His other hand closed on the wrist of one of the young girls; the one who still gripped the longer straw in her hand.

She made not the slightest sign of resistance—or of protest. Whispering softly to herself, "*Lha-gyal-lo!*" she rose from her knees and permitted herself to be led toward the altar. By the side of the muscular *khanno* she disappeared behind the screen.

Everyone in the room must have been literally holding their breath, for there was not a sound, not the faintest draft to waver the yellow flames of the butter lamps. No cry, no gasp of ultimate terror; not even the thud of a body falling to the stone-paved floor.

But after a moment a narrow rivulet of crimson trickled out from beneath the screen and wandered along the cracks between the stones, widening as it flowed. Then the priest was seen to replace the sacrificial dagger on the altar, careful not to wipe its dripping blade, so that the smoking blood soaked into an ugly stain on the fabric. In stentorian tones he pronounced a phrase, or rather one word, itself a



*Drawn toward the altar by the big priest, the girl made no protest at becoming  
a human sacrifice. (Page 12).*



long as an average English sentence. The ceremony was over.

Less than a minute later the whole group was back in the dharmaraja's apartment. He addressed them in the same even voice; if it held a quiver of regret or sorrow, it was imperceptible. And now he spoke, not only in English, but in surprisingly perfect English, with the gently modulated accents of the Oxford cloisters. And even more surprising, each of his listeners understood him perfectly.

"We will leave as soon as we can get ready. You all know your instructions by heart; your preparations should not take long. I will order mounts and send a messenger to the other side of the hill at once. Gather by the main gate as soon as you are ready."

**I**N less than an hour the same group was assembled just within the courtyard. But there was an astonishing change in their outward appearance. Gone were the rough sheepskin coats, the Oriental silks and turbans, the flowing priestly robes. Those who had worn beards had shaved them off. The earrings of the nobles had disappeared. Instead, every man was now dressed in modern European clothes; hats, shoes, overcoats, and tweeds of faultless style, and in the brand-new suitcases and kitbags at their feet they carried ample replacements.

In the girl, however, was the most striking change. In Oriental costume she had been beautiful; now her natural charm was enhanced a hundredfold by western apparel. She wore a trim sports outfit that might have been purchased the previous week in Mayfair, or on Fifth Avenue, and the cocky little blue hat that sat at just the right angle on her softly waved hair was undeniably a product of the Rue de la Paix. Her lithe grace was accentuated, rather than hidden, by the folds of her fur-trimmed cape, and her poise was that of a debutante.

At a word from the dharmaraja the

group moved through the gate. All except the girl, who hesitated, glancing back toward an inner door. A servant, an old, wrinkled crone, hurried out and came toward her to hand her, with a deep salaam, a small shiny object. A flat, silver tube, no thicker than a man's thumb and hardly six inches long. The young girl took it without a word of acknowledgment. Quickly she lifted her dress, exposing a silken calf that would have graced a rotogravure ad. Thrusting the tiny silver case under a pink garter, she straightened.

One of the younger men of the party called from the gateway.

"Come, Lallah, we wait. *Bismillah!* but you are charming!"

"I am ready, Mukla. And if I appear charming, it is because that is my duty, you understand," she added coolly.

"But I may feast my eyes, nevertheless. Some day—"

"Some day, Mukla, you may be Prince of Kashmir," she interrupted pointedly, as they neared the waiting group.

In another minute they were all mounted on small but agile Mongolian horses, and riding down the hillside. None of them gave any notice to the respectful salutes and wondering cries of the villagers, but trotted swiftly out onto the plain, and round the spur of the hill. A half hour's gallop along the western edge of the flat valley brought them to a point where a cluster of tents, the black *yurts* of the nomad *Dro-pas*, huddled against the very base of a rocky cliff.

The riders halted and the leader, dismounting, cried out a command. A number of men in heavy woolen outfits like coveralls appeared from under the yak-skin flaps. Immediately they went to work, pulling up pegs and shifting poles. In a very few moments it was seen that the largest of the tents, placed side by side, were not really tents at all, but formed a huge curtain covering the mouth of a cave in the face of the

cliff. Drawn back to either side, they left an opening almost eighty feet across and more than fifteen feet high. Back in the grotto stood two aeroplanes, one behind the other.

Quickly and deftly, as if familiar with their work, the men rolled the two ships out onto the level plain. They were both high-wing, Ford-Stout monoplanes, with three motors and cabin space for a dozen passengers; a model much in use on commercial airways in the United States five years earlier. Gradually superseded by newer types, they were now quite common in remoter districts, being still very reliable over a long cruising range at moderate speeds.

The mechanics, evidently trained on British post fields at Delhi or Allahabad, seemed to know their stuff. It wasn't long before all the motors were running sweetly against the chocks. The group, having dismounted, unloaded their luggage from the spare ponies and packed it into the planes. They divided between the two passenger cabins; the dharmaraja himself took the pilot's seat in one, and the young noble whom the girl had addressed as Mukla prepared to fly the other. The doors were closed; the dharmaraja made a sign.

"*Lha-gyal-lo!*" intoned the mechanics in unison, stepping back. "Victory to the gods!"

The motors roared. The planes began to move. Fortunately the vast table-

land of the Roof of the World was like a floor for miles toward the west, for at such altitude a loaded plane takes off with great difficulty. But after a long run both ships swept into the air, one after the other. They wasted no time in circling back over the *dzong* on the hill, but flying half a mile apart headed almost due west, straight into the eye of the setting sun.

For the first few hours they flew over barren, desolate, virtually uninhabited country, where there was no eye to note their passage. Then darkness fell, and they droned on and on through the curtain of night. When they finally did land to replenish fuel tanks, the following morning, they were many thousands of miles from their starting point, and no one on the aerodrome at Jaffa had the slightest inkling where they had come from, and even less where they were going.

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## CHAPTER II

### Night Attack

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**L**YNN VICKERS awoke out of a sound and dreamless sleep. Not slowly, as most people drift gradually back to a vague, blurred consciousness of self. But instantly, all at one, with the long-trained habit of the man who lives by constant alertness, whose brain is unfailingly geared to the impact of emergency.

Even before he lifted his lids he was

*The Cards are stacked  
against you*



**WHEN YOU BUY THE *unknown***

• You gamble when you buy unknown razor blades! Probak Jr. —priced at 4 for only 10¢ is produced by the world's largest maker of razor blades. It glides gently over tender faces, shaves tough whiskers without pull or irritation. Buy a package and see!

**PROBAK JUNIOR**

completely aware that he was in his own bed, in the small apartment on G Street in Washington which he called his home. He was instantly aware, also, that he was not alone. He had awakened because he was cold, and without raising his head, he could see that the window just beyond the foot of his bed was wide open. And silhouetted against the faint square of light was the crouched figure of a man, arm upraised. From the uplifted hand came a sudden glitter of light on steel. Vickers rolled to the edge of the bed. And even as he rolled, the whole bed shook and heaved under him with the impact of a solid blow as the uplifted arm of the shadow crashed down upon the spot where the G-man had been.

Vickers came to his feet in the narrow space between the bed and the wall, facing toward the room. He could see nothing except the faint oblong of the far window. It was the darkest hour of the night, an hour or less before dawn. He stood tensely listening for a sound that would tell him where the intruder was.

Then he heard the faint rasp of a footfall on the rug.

"Stand where you are!" he ordered curtly.

There was another rustle on the rug. G-77 dropped into a crouch beside the bed. There was a revolver suspended in a loose holster which was tied to the under part of the frame of the bed. He got the butt of the gun in his hand, and repeated his command impatiently.

There was a soft thump, and the clink of loose coins. The intruder, moving in the darkness, had bumped into the small table where he always dumped the change from his pockets.

The roar of the automatic in Vickers' hand shattered the stillness. That thump had told him definitely where the intruder stood, but he did not aim toward the table. He fired deliberately down into the foot of the bed, where the mattress swallowed the bullet harm-

lessly. His purpose was not to kill, but to frighten.

The instantaneous flash of flame from the muzzle gave him a momentary glimpse of a moving figure. He leaped across the bed. That vague blur flashed rapidly toward the wide open window, went on through it, and disappeared.

"Stop, or I'll shoot!" he cried. His head and the hand that held the gun came through the window simultaneously. But for a moment he could see nothing outside. Then he saw a pale form half way down the fire escape. It lay huddled there, perfectly still.

Cautiously, keeping his gun aimed on the white blur below, G-77 climbed out, moved down the steps. He was close enough to touch the thing that lay there before he realized what it was, and cursed bitterly at his mistake. It was a pillow, his own pillow!

HE re-entered the window and switched on a light. The intruder had fooled him neatly. He had simply snatched the pillow off the bed and thrown it out the window. When Vickers followed, the phantom burglar had simply left by the door that opened into the main hall of the apartment house. By this time he had doubtless run down the three flights and was in the street.

Returning to the bedroom, G-77 picked up the telephone which was now ringing wildly. It was the switchboard operator. Other tenants had been disturbed by the shot and were making inquiries. Briefly Vickers explained what had happened and hung up.

He took a sharp look around the room. Nothing was missing, and the intruder seemed to have left no clues at all. Who the man could be or what he wanted was a mystery. Probably a petty burglar who had been frightened into attacking him and had been forced to leave before committing the robbery.

He slipped the revolver back into the holster beneath the bed. And as he bent over to do so he noticed the slashed



sheets. In the middle of the bottom sheet, where he had been lying when the intruder entered, was a neat slit about an inch long. He bent over to stare. Then he pulled the sheet loose and examined the spot further. The slit went right on down through the mattress; where it appeared on the under surface, it was less than half an inch long.

Vickers could not repress a slight shudder. Now he understood the object of that blow that had shaken the bed. The hand that delivered that blow had held a knife; the blade must have been at least eight inches long. From the clean way the material of the sheet was cut, that blade must have been very sharp. The slit was right under the region occupied by his stomach. Had he not rolled when he did, that blow would have disemboweled him.

A frown creased his brow. He was bothered, not because he had been attacked in the dead of night, but because he could assign no reason for the attack. He was engaged in no important cases at present; in fact, the world of crime had been so quiet for several months that he had become bored. Of course his name had figured prominently in so many new stories of the past exploits of the G-men that he was more or less of a public figure, and had to protect himself by ruses from cranks and notoriety seekers. But he could think of no one who would want to murder him.

Eventually the G-man dropped off to sleep again. But when he awakened later in the morning the attack in the dark was still on his mind.

In a very short time Lynn Vickers had bathed, shaved, dressed in a neat but inconspicuous gray business suit, and was running lightly down the stairs. At the street door of the apartment house the doorman touched his cap respectfully and said, "Good morning, Mr. Vickers!" A passing errand boy turned his head and stared.

G-77 turned on his heel and re-entered the lobby.

"Peter," he said severely, "how many times have I asked you not to call me Mr. Vickers out loud like that? The general public isn't supposed to know where I live, but if you keep on—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Vi—I mean, Mr. Lynn. I'll remember."

The young G-man stepped out to the sidewalk again. A rather far-fetched idea of the chief's, that was, he thought to himself. Made him feel silly and self-conscious. Of course it was true that the successful conclusion of his last few big cases had brought him a tremendous amount of newspaper publicity—more than enough to counteract the unfavorable comments emitted by those same papers while the cases were still unsolved. The result was that his name was a byword, and without some such precautions he would be continually pestered by reporters, thrill-seekers, and inquisitive hero-worshippers who wanted no more than to look at the famous sleuth and shake his hand.

The air was crisp and cool with the tang of the first week in March; the remnants of the last snow still soiled the gutters. He walked briskly several blocks to a large cafeteria where the crowd was big enough for him to lose himself, and breakfasted standing up at a counter elbow to elbow with strangers.

Another short walk brought him to the Department of Justice building. He nodded to several men standing just inside the door and strode straight down a long corridor. But he did not turn in at the main entrance of the department offices. Instead, he continued along the wide corridor, almost to the end, until he came to a small door on which was inscribed the single unexciting word, "Files."

No one would ever think of looking for Lynn Vickers, daring nemesis of crime and criminals, behind the label, "Files," so that was the room he used for his office. There were, as a matter of fact, a number of filing cases along

one wall; besides that, only a desk, two chairs and a coat-tree.

His first move was to pick up the telephone and call the chief.

"Good morning, chief. What's come in?"

"Nothing of any importance. Haven't heard from Tommy Dewart yet; he must be still testifying in that mail trial in New York. How you coming with the classifications?"

"Chief, I've dug through classification records till I'm dizzy."

The chief's laugh came over the wire. "Well, the government has to have some excuse for paying your salary. And if you had nothing at all to do, you'd be dizzier. Shall I send Miss March down with a fresh batch?"

"Yes, send her down. Wait—" Vickers glanced at the pile of papers on his desk. "I've got enough to hold me this morning, I guess. Send her down about twelve o'clock, will you, chief?"

The chief laughed again. "All right, Lynn. I'll see that she gets there in time for lunch. See you later." •

Vickers took off his coat, sat down at the desk. He had not mentioned the mysterious attack on his life to the chief, although it was still uppermost in his mind. Not that he feared for his life—a G-man expects to walk side by side with Death daily—but he couldn't figure out who, at this particular time, would try to kill him. He wasn't working on a case at the moment, and there were no loose ends still hanging from previous cases—no one left to seek vengeance on him. There was a possibility that his attacker had been merely a burglar who had picked his room at random to burgle. But, somehow, G-77 felt there was more to it than that.

Lynn was still at his desk at noon when the door opened softly. Evelyn March slipped in, giving him a smile that lifted him to his feet and warmed his heart. She was dressed for the street in a tailored suit that emphasized the clean-cut lines of her trim

figure, and a dove-gray hat that contrasted pleasantly with the auburn locks that curled beneath it. Her eyes twinkled at him.

"Just to keep you from going to sleep at your desk," she said pertly, and tossed down a whole armful of bound documents.

"Those will probably put me to sleep," he grinned, and began putting on his coat and hat. "Unless you read them aloud to me yourself. Where are we going for lunch?"

"Am I to take that as an invitation, Mr. Vickers? You took me out to lunch only yesterday . . . remember?"

"Hell, I'd like to make it—" he was about to say, every day, but prudently changed it to, "—often. Unless you've got a date?"

At this hour the corridor outside was full of people hurrying back and forth. Consequently neither Lynn Vickers nor Evelyn noticed the slim dark man who detached himself from a lounging position against the wall and followed their casual course to the door and out into the street.

THEY found a table in the grill of one of the smaller hotels, and lingered idly over the meal. Looking at the girl opposite him, Vickers kept asking himself which way he liked her best. When helping on a case, which she had done more than a few times already, the vivacious red-head was as keen as a razor; active and untiring, utterly fearless, and worth her weight in brains alongside any man in the department. But in between active duties, at such times as this, she was completely and bewitchingly feminine. Her manner, her eyes, even her voice seemed to take on softer accents, to become doubly attractive.

He knew that she thought a lot of him; and he was more than ordinarily fond of her. At such times G-77 had to remind himself forcibly of a vow he had taken. Some years earlier his father, to whom honesty and integrity,

had been a religion, had been framed by a crooked lawyer, had gone to an early death in disgrace. It was then that Lynn Vickers had sworn to devote his life to fighting crime and criminals. And that in such a life women could play only a very minor part. Love and murder would not mix.

"Oh, I almost forgot," said Evelyn, suddenly. "The chief said to tell you an assistant secretary of state phoned, and asked him to come to a conference at two o'clock. The chief wants you to go along with him."

Lynn paid the check, and they sauntered out into the street. A slim man in a brown fedora, who had been sitting in the lobby, rose and idled out of the door after them.

The first warmth of spring was in the sunshine, and the sidewalks were full of people. Lynn and Evelyn dawdled along, arm in arm. Almost without knowing it, they passed the right corner, and wandered on, until they found themselves strolling through the park.

The path swung round behind the base of a monument, bordered on the opposite side by tall shrubs which at this season were leafless. In midsummer this would be a secluded spot, completely sheltered from view; even now it was not in direct sight from the neighboring streets. For a few moments they were practically alone.

"Evelyn, I wanted to ask you to—" Lynn began.

Suddenly the words froze in his throat. All in an instant he was paralyzed by a nameless apprehension at the change that came without warning over Evelyn March's upturned face. She had been looking straight up at him; then her glance had flicked past him,

over his shoulder. And immediately her eyes went round and wide with terror.

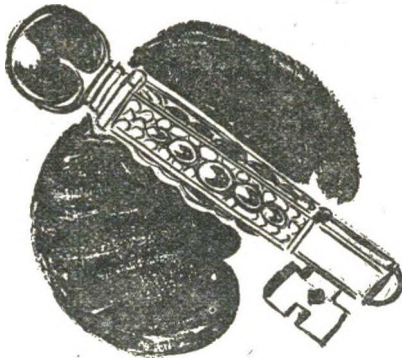
Then, before Lynn had time to ask the reason, before he even had time to turn his head, she did a strange thing. With an instantaneous tightening of every muscle, she hurled herself backward, away from him. At the same time she grabbed him about the neck and jerked him toward her. The immediate result was that she fell clean over backwards, pulling Lynn after her.

Even while he was in midair, already off balance, Lynn heard a faint r-r-rip of cloth, and felt the sharp point of a knife nick the skin below his left shoulder blade.

Evelyn struck the cement walk flat on her back. As she did she emitted a short scream. Not a scream of fear, so much as a cry of warning. Vickers very nearly sprawled on top of her, where he would have been slaughtered helplessly. But just in time his hair-trigger reactions came into play, and his brain awoke to the crisis. He stiffened one arm, bent the other elbow up under him, so that he hit on his left shoulder and rolled to one side as he hit.

And he turned to face his murderous assailant. It was the dark little man who had been following them. He was already raising his arm, driving it downward in a second blow. The blow was aimed straight at the G-man's left breast. The blade of the knife flashed brightly in the sun. Flat on his back on the walk, Vickers was helpless to rise before the blow fell.

In a desperate effort to take the thrust where it would do the least harm, he shoved up his left arm. But Evelyn March, twisting sideways, thrust her own arm across above him just a frac-



*The Key of Vashnu*

tion of a second quicker—just as the malicious dagger descended. The blade struck her just above the elbow. It ripped through her firm flesh like butter.

For an agonizing instant Vickers, still prone, was looking up at the point of the knife, as it pierced Evelyn's arm. The murderous little dark man had dropped forward onto his knees now, and was striving to draw his weapon back for another blow. But it seemed to stick, and the reason it stuck, Vickers realized, was that the girl, with heroic grit, was deliberately pressing her arm as close as possible to her side to make its quick removal difficult so as to give Lynn time to get into action. G-77 struggled wildly to reach his feet.

With a savage tug the little dark man in the brown fedora got the knife free again. But just as he raised it for another blow, Vickers gathered both legs up under him and lashed out furiously. His feet caught the mystery man square in the chest. He came right up off the ground, described a graceful arc through the air, and landed on the back of his neck, ten feet away. With a continuation of the same movement Vickers came to his feet.

The dark killer had rolled completely over and was immediately on his feet, running swiftly. Vickers sprang after him and hurled his long body through the air in a flying tackle that carried fully fifteen feet. His clutching fingers grasped the fleeing killer's ankles and he came down full length on the grass.

G-77 had engaged in rough and tumble encounters before, but he had never met an opponent who could change his tactics so quickly. Flight being now impossible, the dark man now turned on him fiercely. He was small, but seemed to be made of rubber, under which were muscles of stranded steel. He writhed and twisted frantically, still in the same utter silence, and so lightning-like were his contortions that Lynn found it next to impossible to get and keep a grip on him.

With grim determination distorting his features, Vickers clung to what hold he had, and fought to better it. A foot drove into his groin; he gasped, but shifted so that the next kick glanced off his thigh. He worked up inside the man's knee and wrapped a hand about his belt. But this brought him within range of the dagger and its glittering blade lashed out and grazed his cheek.

G-77 drew back, then lunged suddenly. The knife leaped at him, but he managed to capture the wrist that directed it. Using all his weight in one jerk, he forced that wrist back and around, farther and farther, until the elbow was twisted grotesquely. The hand that held the knife moved slowly up between its owner's shoulder blades.

The dark face of his attacker did not change expression. He was stretched out on his side, his right arm coiled in a veritable corkscrew knot behind him. The sweat stood in beads on his saffron-tinted cheeks. And then a faint cry came from his distorted lips. Hardly more than a low moan, but it mirrored the agony that coursed through his tortured sinews. Yet not even then did his fingers relax from that knife hilt, or his face mirror his agony.

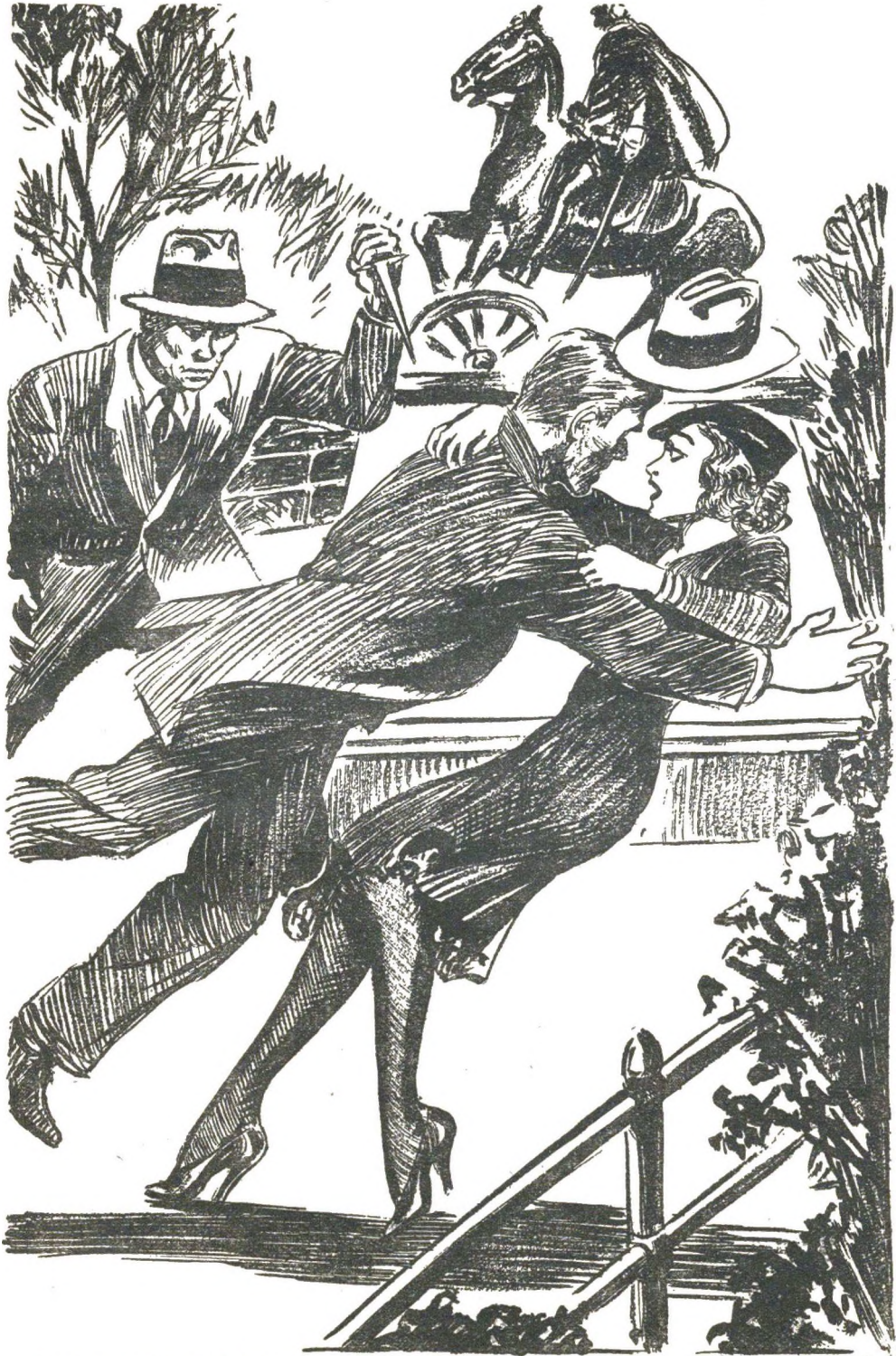
**B**UT with that cowardly attack from the rear still vivid in his mind, Vickers relentlessly applied the pressure. He heard the slight grinding sound that told that the killer's shoulder joint was beginning to give. The man's dark and glaring eyes seemed about to pop out of their sockets; the breath whistled through his teeth.

Then, suddenly, on the very verge of being overpowered, disarmed, and captured, he managed to defeat the fate that awaited him. From straining every muscle in one direction, he abruptly reversed his efforts and strained in the opposite direction. The effect was prompt, but unnerving.

The dark man rolled onto his back, with the hand that held the knife doubled up underneath him, and Vick-



THE KEY TO MURDER



*Evelyn grabbed G-77 and jerked him abruptly toward her. (Page 19).*



ers rolled with him. The G-man heard no sound at all, but suddenly his fingers were wet, and he knew that his own weight had driven his assailant's body down upon the point of the blade. He felt a tremor pass through that tense form; then it relaxed with a short sigh and lay still.

Vickers slid hastily to one side, but it was too late. The knife, gliding between two ribs, had grazed the dark man's heart. With eyes already glazing, his lips parted and in a hoarse whisper he breathed, "*Lha-gyal-lo!*" In the next second he was dead.

Vickers, stunned by the sudden conclusion of the desperate and mysterious assault, reeled to his feet. Undoubtedly this was the same mysterious attacker who had attempted to kill him last night. But G-77 still had no idea who the dead man was—or why he wanted to kill him.

By the time the first cop came running from the distant street, Vickers had fashioned a tourniquet from his handkerchief and fountain pen, although already Evelyn was almost unconscious from loss of blood. The G-man identified himself quickly, and sent the policeman for an ambulance to take the red-head to a hospital before anything else was done. Then he turned to the figure sprawled on the grass.

"Who was he? What was his idea?" asked a police sergeant.

"I only wish he'd lived long enough for me to ask him," frowned Vickers. "I'm afraid that now it may be hard to find out."

This prophecy was quickly proved correct. A brief but thorough search of the dead man's clothes disclosed no clues to his identity, let alone the purpose behind his strange but savage assault. His pockets contained cigarettes, matches, a plain handkerchief, about eighteen dollars in small bills and change, and a wallet that was brand new but utterly empty. None of the small items that usually serve to

give a lead to start on, at least. No letters, no cards, driver's license; no printed or written papers of any kind, in fact. No watch, no pen or pocket knife, and—strangest of all—not a single key.

"Hard to figure how a man lives nowadays in a city without carrying at least one key," mused Vickers. "If not to his home, to his hotel room, or to his boarding house, or maybe to his car."

"Looks like a foreigner, don't he?" suggested the cop.

Vickers shook his head. "You can't tell; plenty of fourth generation Americans have complexions just as dark as that. And yet there's something . . ."

Vickers stared thoughtfully at the man who had tried to take his life. The fellow's skin did seem to have a brownish tinge that went deeper than mere sun tan. His features were regular enough, but his glazed dead eyes were so dark that they appeared to be all pupil, and there was something exotic about the full redness of his lips. Lynn recalled, too, the strange foreign word that came from his dying lips.

Vickers knelt beside the corpse again. There were no labels in his clothes, though the cut of his suit made G-77 think of London, and there was an unfamiliar trademark stamped in his hat.

"Guess we'll have to fall back on the old standby, the laundry mark," he clipped, rising. "But we'll wait till he's in the morgue. Take care of him, will you, sergeant?"

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### CHAPTER III

#### The Key to Vashnu

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VICKERS walked quickly to the F. B. I. headquarters building, feeling the need of a good wash and a change of clothing, and considerably disturbed in mind. It was annoying enough to be set upon in a public park by an enemy bent on murder; but the fact that he could not guess at

any conceivable explanation made it doubly unnerving.

He was inside the corridor before he remembered something. He glanced at his watch. It was quarter past two. He swore softly, turned into the main entrance of the department, and spoke to a man behind a desk.

"Jim, where's the chief?"

"Went out twenty minutes ago. I think he was looking for you."

"I know he was. Listen. Send Bar-long over to the morgue to start a run-down on the stiff they're just bringing in. He tried to knife me in the park." Jim's eyebrows lifted, but he did not interrupt. "Check fingerprints, measurements, teeth, everything. I want to know who he is, and why. And call the Union Hospital every half hour for a report on Miss March's condition." Jim gasped at that, but still held his tongue. "If the chief phones, tell him I'm on my way."

G-77 jumped into a department car, of which there was always at least one at the curb, and added to his directions the one word, "Fast!"

The driver paused to ask no questions, but threaded the car through traffic behind his moaning siren with a trained hand. Within five minutes Vickers was hurrying into the offices of the Secretary of State. He found the impatient chief waiting in the reception room.

"Didn't you get my message, Vickers?"

"Yes, Miss March told me. But we took a walk—"

"If you had an important case on your mind, I could understand it. But people aren't late to an appointment with the Secretary of State. As it happens, he hasn't sent for me yet, so no harm is—say!" he exclaimed, suddenly noticing G-77's scratched cheek and generally disheveled condition. "What have you been doing?"

Briefly Vickers related what had happened. The chief's face expressed grave concern as he listened. When G-77 fin-

ished he fired a series of rapid questions. Before there was time to go into any details, however, an assistant approached them and announced that the Secretary was now ready to hold the interview. They followed him down an inner passage and directly into the private office at its end.

The cabinet officer rose from behind his massive desk as they entered and greeted them pleasantly. He was past middle age, with a mop of pure white hair, and the strong yet shrewd face of a practical statesman who knew how to use tact as an actual weapon. He turned to the man who sat beside his desk.

"My lord," he said gravely, "let me present the chief of our Bureau of Investigation, of whom we have just been speaking—and Mr. Lynn Vickers, his foremost man of action. Gentlemen, this is Lord Ledyard, of Allchester, England."

VICKERS inclined his head, and then looked curiously at the impeccably dressed young man who contented himself with a casual gesture of greeting but did not rise from his deep leather chair. The British baronet had straight blond hair, brushed back from a high forehead, sharp blue eyes on either side of a long, aquiline nose, and a jaw that was quite prominent but unusually narrow, giving him a lean, horse-faced look. The inherent strength of his features was somewhat marred by faint circles of dissipation under his eyes, and by the slackness of his thin lips, through which he murmured his phrases so carelessly as to be sometimes incomprehensible.

"Had I talked with Lord Ledyard earlier," said the Secretary of State, "I might not have sent for you. He seems to feel that the Embassy's fears are exaggerated, and precautions unnecessary."

"Lot of silly rot," muttered the peer.

"But now that you're here, I may as well give you the story. It concerns an exceedingly valuable piece of

antique Oriental jewelry, known as the Key of Vashnu. Perhaps you've heard of it?"

Vickers and the chief looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Perhaps you'd like to give the story, my lord?" the Secretary suggested.

"No. You go right ahead, my dear chap." The Englishman settled down in his chair and assumed a look of utter boredom.

"Well, the British Embassy sent me a written history; I'll quote from that. It seems that this Key of Vashnu was fashioned at some time in the 16th century for Babar the Tiger, the first Great Moghul of India, who was a descendant of Genghis Khan. It is less than a foot long, of gold in a four-sided pattern, set with a number of precious stones. The head, or handle, is one enormous ruby. The exact size of this ruby is not known, since it has never been removed and weighed; if not the largest in existence, it comes very close to it, and is of incalculable value.

"This key has always had a religious significance attached to it in the minds of the Indian natives. The myth states that it will unlock the knowledge of the four winds for its possessor, thus giving him the supreme power of a king. For many years it belonged to the Moghuls, while they were rulers. It lay in a certain temple where one family of priests and their descendants were continuously on guard over it. Not until early in the 19th century did it change hands. Then the invading British armies pushed the natives before them into the foothills of the Himalayas. The contents of the temple, being moved hurriedly, fell into the hands of a raiding party who slaughtered the guards and seized the loot. The leader of that raiding party was a British major named Stephen Ledyard."

The chief glanced questioningly toward the man in the chair.

"Exactly," said the peer.

The Secretary continued: "He became the first Lord Ledyard upon his return

to England, a short time later. He kept very quiet about his treasure, however, and it was not until he died under mysterious circumstances some years later that it became known that the Key of Vashnu was reposing in the vaults of the Bank of England, with the crown jewels. There it has remained ever since, although technically the property of the Ledyard family."

"It has never been taken out?" asked the chief.

"Never—until last month. You see, the King of England, through succeeding generations, has always exacted a promise from the Ledyards not to remove it from the vault. Perhaps through respect for the tradition, which alleges that its possessor is the rightful ruler of the hordes of India. As long as it rested among the British crown jewels, the natives have accepted the English king as their emperor."

"You say it was removed last month?"

"Yes. The present king, Edward VIII, perhaps feeling that the people of India have become modernized, educated beyond such childish superstitions, or that they have forgotten the legend of Vashnu, gave the present Lord Ledyard permission to do what he liked with the key itself, so long as he did not break it up or dispose of it. Naturally, jewel experts, collectors, and students are keenly interested in such a relic; so it has been brought to New York and put on exhibition."

"To New York?" repeated the chief. "Then why should we—"

"The Embassy is worried," continued the Secretary. "Although belonging to Lord Ledyard, it is under the protection of the British Embassy, and is naturally a matter of concern to all England. They feel that if anything should happen to it, trouble might be precipitated. The British ambassador here in Washington sent me a private request to check up on the precautions being taken to guard it. Being an international matter, it would come under the Federal Bureau, of course."

"What do you wish us to do, sir?" asked the chief.

"Well, since I sent for you, Lord Ledyard himself has come in. He assures me that additional precautions are not necessary."

"Bally fuss over nothing," injected the British baronet sleepily. "Embassy a pack of old women. New York police doing the job nicely already. Arranged with them myself. All the latest gadgets; electric eye, everything. Those Indian blighters probably have forgotten all about the stupid key long ago, anyway. Besides, the key is not being shown to the public."

"I've no doubt you're right, my lord," smiled the Secretary. "The New York police should be able to guard a museum exhibit safely. I imagine we can forget it, unless we should get some reason to believe—"

"I beg your pardon," said Vickers, speaking for the first time. "I gather that it would be the Indian priests who would be most eager to recover this key. It just struck me, chief; that man who attacked me, less than an hour ago—his complexion had an Oriental tinge, and—"

"Attacked you?" The young Britisher was suddenly sitting up, alert, his eyes wide open. "What was that?"

VICKERS stated briefly what had occurred. "I can think of no possible reason for such an assault on my life. But if he was an Indian priest in disguise, and something has already happened to the Vashnu ruby . . ."

The Secretary, suddenly white, was reaching for the phone. He asked for a through wire to New York, and then turned to the baronet.

"What was the name of that museum where it's on exhibit?"

"The Churchill galleries, on East 55th Street." The Britisher, too, had paled, and his voice was tense and sharp.

It took only a few minutes to get the call through. But the air in the room



*He pointed to the wires leading to the "electric eye" device that protected the sacred key. They had been cut in two! (Page 33).*

became tense and stifling as they waited, and it was the Englishman who was now the most nervous of all. He lighted a cigarette, crushed it out, paced the floor, and bit his lip in suspense. Vickers watched him curiously.

"Hello! Churchill Galleries? . . . State Department, calling from Washington. That exhibit—the Key of Vashnu; Lord Ledyard's, yes. It's all right? . . . Oh, thank you very much. That's all, yes."

The Secretary hung up with a sigh of relief. "Nothing has happened in New York, gentlemen. The key is perfectly safe."

Everyone relaxed perceptibly. The baronet said something under his breath. The chief shrugged, looked at Vickers.

"Must be some other explanation behind that attack. We'll probably turn it up, eventually." He turned toward the Secretary. "We've got a man in New York now, cleaning up some other matters. I'll send him word to contact the local police, and drop in at the Churchill Galleries just as a precaution, if you'd feel easier, sir."

After receiving the Secretary's thanks for his promise of coöperation, the chief and Vickers left the office with the baronet. At the curb the young British lord bade them a curt farewell, hailed a taxi from the head of the waiting line, and stepped into it quickly.

"This man who tried to knife you," the chief said as he and G-77 stood for a moment on the sidewalk. "I doubt he had any connection with what the Secretary was telling us, but you'd better check up on his identity closely. Probably just a crank. You must remember that you're a pretty well known figure now, Lynn. You've had a lot of publicity, and every criminal in the country has heard of you. There must be plenty of them that would like to see you dead, and would—"

"Wait a minute!" Vickers' tone was sharp; he was staring down the broad avenue, where a couple of taxicabs were

disappearing around a corner. "Did you notice that? A cab pulled away from the opposite curb, and trailed the one Lord Ledyard is in right down the street and around the corner."

"Did you see who was in the second cab?" the chief said sharply.

"No, damn it—except that it was a man, alone. Come on, let's see if we can pick up the trail!"

Together they leaped into the department car that had brought Vickers from the offices of the F. B. I. The corner around which both cabs had whirled was four blocks away, and when they made the turn they were in a busy street choked with traffic. Ignorant of where the Englishman was heading, they soon found themselves following an empty cab. They stopped and Vickers went into a phone booth. He called the office of the Secretary of State and asked for the name of the hotel at which Lord Ledyard was staying.

Then they drove across town and shortly pulled up before the Hotel Willard. In reply to Vickers' inquiries, the doorman told him that Lord Ledyard had driven up in a cab a few minutes before, and had entered the hotel. But he could not remember if another taxi had drawn up to the curb just behind or not.

VICKERS went quickly into the lobby and used the house phone to call the baronet in his room. Ledyard himself answered.

"Are you being tailed around Washington, Lord Ledyard?" Vickers asked abruptly after identifying himself.

"Being tailed? My dear fellow, are you spoofing me?"

"I mean, are you being shadowed; is someone following you? I saw a taxi trail yours away from the state building. I thought, perhaps for your own protection, you had arranged something of the sort."

The Englishman seemed quite upset. He had arranged nothing of the kind; it was news to him. Damned annoying,



he declared. But, as he listened, Vickers thought there was something more than mere annoyance in his voice.

"Keep a close watch, Lord Ledyard," he advised, "and if you find you're being shadowed, let me know at once. Just call National 7117."

The Britisher thanked him and said: "I shan't be in Washington much longer, at any rate. I'm flying to New York in an hour, so I doubt if you will hear from me."

Vickers shrugged, and hung up.

Back in the car, driving toward headquarters, he said to the chief. "The more I think about that fellow in the park, the more it puzzles me. Every case we've handled has been cleaned up clean; we haven't left any loose ends. The Dalvatian affair, Madame Nihil's mob, and Dr. Buehl's gang of panhandlers; there's not one left alive outside of jail. Who the devil could be so interested in getting rid of me?"

The chief gave him an odd look, as if he had just thought of something. "Had it struck you that this might be accounted for by forethought, instead of hindthought?" he asked suddenly.

"Forethought? What do you mean, chief?" Vickers looked puzzled.

"Suppose someone is laying plans for a gigantic crime, or a series of crimes. They know that, once the first act is committed, detectives will be after them. The newspapers have made you well known as the greatest crook hunter in the country. Why shouldn't a wise law-breaker, then, dispose of you first? Sort of kill off the pursuit before the chase has started?"

Vickers' eyes glistened. "By God, chief, it's an idea. And only a mighty clever brain would think of that—to plan so far ahead."

"That's just what worries me," replied the chief solemnly. "But there's nothing we can do until something happens—if anything does."

Vickers dropped his superior at headquarters, and himself went on directly to the morgue. He found the process

of identifying his assailant had turned up nothing. The man had no unique characteristics about him that would serve for a starting point. Although his shirt and other linen had been recently washed, there was no sign of a laundry mark on any piece, nor any manufacturer's label. He had evidently been at some pains to conceal his identity.

His fingerprints had already been taken, and rushed to the files in the central office. A phone call from there shortly established the fact that they were unknown. Whoever the fellow might be, he had no previous record in the United States. The dagger he had used, or tried to use, on Vickers, furnished little help. It was a plain, straight blade, with a simple handle of chased ebony. Unlike a revolver, it bore no number or maker's name. Such a knife might have been picked up in any one of a thousand curio dealers' shops, anywhere.

It was Vickers himself who finally turned up the only clue. He was turning the dead man's coat inside out, looking for a possible dry cleaner's mark when he felt something crinkle under his fingers. The pockets had already been emptied; yet there was no mistaking that rustling sound. Vickers went through the pockets again, with no result. Then suddenly his fingers felt that slight stiffness again. Swiftly his fingers ripped the lining from the coat. A folded slip of paper fell from the left sleeve, near the cuff. An exclamation of satisfaction came from Vickers' lips.

It was a slip about the size of a dollar bill, engraved with an intricate design. The printing was in Spanish. A ticket in the Havana Sweepstakes. The number printed in red, near one end, was proof of that. That number was what G-77 wanted. The list of purchasers of those tickets, in the Sweepstakes central office in Havana, would show a name opposite that number. And that name would probably be the man who lay now on the marble slab in front of him.

Vickers turned to Barlong, handed him the ticket. "Here, take this and hustle back to headquarters. Wire the chief of police of Havana. Ask for the name, and all the details he can furnish about the buyer of that ticket. I'm going to stop by Union Hospital; I'll be along shortly."

#### CHAPTER IV

##### The Museum Mystery

VICKERS found Evelyn March in a small private room. Her arm had just been dressed, and she met him with a tight-lipped little smile, although her face was pale as chalk.

"Well, red-head," he grinned at her, "how's your second joint?"

"Tough," she retorted. "You'll have to use me for fricassee. But seriously, Lynn, I'm disgusted with myself. It was all my fault."

Vickers stared at her. "Your fault? How do you figure that?"

"Why, I led him to you. I remembered, as I was lying here. When I started downstairs, I forgot those classification records. I called back to Jim to bring them off my desk, saying that I had to take them down to Mr. Vickers. The lobby was full of people; that man must have been waiting there, for a chance to spot you. That tipped him off; he simply followed me downstairs, and then trailed both of us until he got the opportunity he was waiting for. I'll never forgive myself."

"Forget it. You made up for that part, by saving my life."

"What have you found out about him?"

"Not much. But we're on the track. I think he's a Cuban."

"A Cuban?" She looked at him doubtfully. "Lynn, I once lived in Havana for nearly a year. He didn't look like a Cuban to me. And besides, that phrase he spoke as he died, wasn't Spanish."

"No? What was it, then?"

"I don't know. But I'm sure it wasn't Spanish."

"Well, you stop worrying about it, anyway. You just think about getting well. The doctor tells me it's only a flesh wound, but a deep one, and that a couple weeks will fix it up O. K."

"I'll be all right. Drop in when you can, won't you, Lynn?"

"Every day," he promised, with a cheerful gesture.

She smiled bravely at him as he ducked out of the door and strode down the corridor. But had either of them known how long it was going to be before he saw her again, they might not have parted quite so gaily.

Vickers jumped out of the car at the curb and ran up the steps of the F. B. I. building. He went at once to the main office, upstairs.

"Where's Barlong?" he asked the girl at the information desk.

"He went to the morgue, Mr. Vickers," she reminded him.

"Didn't he just return from there a few minutes ago?" Vickers asked.

Barlong hadn't been back to the office since he left for the morgue, she assured the G-man.

Vickers hurried down the stairs. Barlong might be waiting in his own private office. He pushed open the door marked "Files." A quick glance showed him the room was empty. Puzzled, he turned to retrace his steps. As he did so he heard a shout from the door that opened onto the street. He heard a hum of voices from outside, and saw someone running. Vickers quickened his own pace, and headed for the street entrance.

Emerging from the outer door, he saw that a taxi stood at the curb. The driver sat on the running board, holding his head between his hands, and a small crowd was gathering around him. Something about that driver was familiar. With a curse Vickers ran down the steps.

The rear door of the cab stood open. Barlong was sprawled, half on the seat and half on the floor. His head was twisted to one side at a grotesque angle,

and his eyes stared glassily at the roof. What kept him from sliding the rest of the way to the floor was the five-inch hilt that protruded from the left side of his chest, and which had caught on the edge of the seat cushion.

A swift glance was enough to assure Vickers that his man was stone dead. Again the phantom killer had struck at the G-man—for G-77 knew that the same man behind the attempts on his own life was behind this murder. He cursed grimly as he searched his dead assistant's pockets. The lottery ticket was gone!

THE driver's story was almost incoherent. He had started across town at a fast clip. Turning into F Street, a car had cut him off, forced him to the curb. Two men had jumped out of the other car. One had opened the door of his cab and jumped in the back with Barlong. The other cracked him over the head like a flash. Before he had time to get a decent look at either of them, he was out like a light. When he came to, he was slumped over his own wheel, still in the same spot. One look at his passenger had given him the horrors, but he managed to remember the address to which he had been directed, and so had finished out the trip with his dead passenger.

No, he couldn't describe either of those men; vaguely he recalled that the one that hit him had been dark, swarthy in complexion. He hadn't noticed the license number of the car. It had not been a taxi, but might have been a Driv-yourself car. The crack on the skull had left him dazed, so that he could scarcely remember clearly what it was he had seen.

"They must have been posted in front of the morgue," Vickers told the chief, a little later. "Waiting for an opportunity to get in and recover that ticket before it was found. When I handed it over to Barlong right on the sidewalk, I signed his death warrant for

him, poor devil. What a fool I was, not to make a note of that ticket number. All I can remember about it now is that it started with the letter N, and contained six digits. A lot of help that is!"

"We're up against something big here, Lynn," said the chief seriously. "Whoever that fellow's pals are, they're mighty anxious to prevent him from being identified. But when they killed a G-man to preserve his secret, they went a little bit too far."

"That's just why I'm not going to rest until they're behind bars," declared Vickers grimly.

The chief pushed a paper across the desk. "By the way, here's a copy of a telegram I sent to New York."

Vickers picked it up and read:

THOMAS DEWART, MADISON HOTEL,  
NEW YORK CITY. JEWEL CALLED KEY  
OF VASHNU PROPERTY OF LORD LED-  
YARD NOW ON EXHIBITION CHURCH-  
ILL GALLERIES 55TH STREET UNDER  
GUARD NEW YORK POLICE STOP WHEN  
FREE CONTACT POLICE CHECK ON PRE-  
CAUTIONS AGAINST THEFT INCREASE  
SAFEGUARDS IF YOU BELIEVE NECES-  
SARY STOP ACKNOWLEDGE.

THIS telegram was filed in Washington at 4:06 P.M. It was received in New York at 4:19, and delivered to the Madison from the nearest office at 4:32. At a quarter of five Tommy Dewart swung with his brisk stride across the lobby and over to the desk. The clerk handed him the sealed yellow envelope apologetically.

"We phoned the courtroom, but you had already left, Mr. Dewart."

"For the last time, thank heaven!" exclaimed Tommy with relief. "I'm glad the case is finished. I'd a lot rather be collecting testimony than giving it on the stand."

He ripped open the envelope as he talked. As he read the wire a faint frown of puzzlement appeared on his brow. What kind of an order was this?



*It was the night watchman of the museum who lay there, sprawled on his back. (Page 35).*

It certainly didn't sound like a job for the F. B. I. but the chief must have his reasons, though Tommy couldn't see the sense to this assignment. Dewart went from the hotel directly to police headquarters on Centre Street. After some inquiries and explanations, he was admitted to Inspector Harrison's office.

"From Washington, eh?" grumbled the inspector. "What the devil have you people got to do with watching this antique?"

He hadn't the slightest idea, Tommy explained; all he knew was what was in the chief's telegram, which he exhibited.

"Don't you fellows think we're capable of guarding a showcase without your help?" growled the police officer, shrugging into his overcoat. "I've assigned two second-grade detectives to that job, in shifts; that's plenty. The Britisher wouldn't stand for the expense of any more. The Churchill Galleries have their own watchmen, day and night, and the place is wired to a burglar alarm. What's more, that little jeweled tid-bit is set up in the same apparatus that was used for that big diamond exhibit last summer. There's an electric eye, actuated by a photo-cell, that automatically closes an armor-steel case as soon as any object approaches within a foot of it. Houdini himself couldn't lay a finger on it."

"Sounds interesting," commented Tommy. "Mind if I go up and look it over?"

"Go ahead," was the gruff reply. "Tell Wilkins I sent you. It's my opinion that fewer precautions are needed, rather than more. That ruby is it's own best guardian, after all."

"What do you mean?"

"A man would be a fool to steal it. There isn't a jewel market in the world where it could be offered for sale within his lifetime. A stone of that size and quality has no duplicates; it would be recognized immediately. That's probably the meaning of the curse on it."



"The curse on it?" Tommy encouraged him.

"There's a legend, so I'm told, that whoever possesses it unrightfully will die a violent death if he tries to dispose of it. Probably a lot of boloney; there's always some such story attached to those Oriental jewels. Invented to scare off robbers, I suppose."

**T**OMMY parted from the inspector on the sidewalk. He rode up to 59th on the subway, walked down Lexington, and turned west on 55th, hurrying a little because he had guessed correctly that the museum closed at six. He found a door by whose side a plain brass plaque said, "Churchill Galleries," and entering, asked a uniformed attendant immediately for Wilkins, the police detective.

The museum he found to be small, more an exclusive private gallery of objects of art than a public museum. It had been formed by joining and remodeling three private houses. Two of them faced 55th Street side by side, and the other extended through in the rear to face 56th. The interior, therefore, was roughly L-shaped, but was very irregular in arrangement. Some partitions had been knocked out entirely, some pierced by doors, and the floor levels didn't always jibe, so that one was continually forced to go up or down a few steps, or to descend to a lower floor in order to reach the neighboring studio. Only artificial light was used; the windows facing the street were painted opaque, though a few rear windows in the corridors looked down into a small rear court.

From a large central foyer Tommy ascended a wide staircase to the second floor. Above this level the old stairs were still in use, a narrow flight on either side of a central partition; as directed, Tommy took the one on the right.

There were very few people moving about; the place had an air of dignified

mustiness, enhanced by the carpeted floors and old woodwork.

He found Wilkins in the third floor corridor; Tommy knew the detective instantly because he looked less like a detective than anyone else in the place. He was short and rather stout. He had a folded newspaper under his arm, and looked bored to death.

After introducing himself, Tommy asked, "Where's the crowd? I should think an exhibit like this would draw plenty."

"No one knows about it," was the reply. "It got no publicity in the papers; announcements were sent out only to an inside circle. Jewel experts, collectors, college professors, and such like."

"Let's take a look at it, shall we?" Tommy said.

Wilkins led him into a large square room at the rear. The walls were lined with tall glass-front cases, and several low tables were scattered in the middle of the floor. In one corner stood a steel pedestal, bolted to the floor. On this pedestal was an open steel box in which lay a flat tray lined with silk. The object that lay there, hardly more than ten inches long, looked less like a key than a stubby wand. Its golden shaft was almost hidden by the stones that encrusted it; the curved claws that formed the head held in their grasp a single, enormous ruby. Under the glare of an overhead light, the lesser stones flashed and glittered like ice. Against the white silk the ruby was like an ominous blotch of warm, living blood.

For several moments Tommy stared, spellbound. That stone was almost as big as his fist; its value must be fabulous. No wonder a legend of violence and murder had followed it down through the ages.

Then he became conscious of a group of four or five men who moved up and stood beside the case. All elderly and of scholarly appearance, they were not at the moment looking at the Key of Vishnu, but it was evident that they were discussing it.

"But why are you sure, Professor Gartman, that it dates no earlier than the Moghul era?" asked one gray-bearded individual.

"Because of the prongs," was the reply. "The artisans of Samarkand never learned, before the time of Bahar, to set a stone free of its supporting base, as you see this one set."

TOMMY glanced at the speaker. He saw a tall man with regular, aquiline features browned by the sun, and deep-set, compelling eyes that shifted continually from one of his listeners to another.

"That's the electric eye," murmured Wilkins in Tommy's ear, indicating two upright standards surmounted by bakelite cabinets large enough to contain photo-electric cells and a few coils. "I don't understand the principle, but if you put your hand anywhere within a foot of that pedestal, a steel lid jumps across the top and an alarm rings."

Tommy was properly curious. "Have you seen it work?"

"Sure, we test it every morning. Want to try it yourself?"

Tommy nodded. The police detective glanced around. "We ought to notify the curator and the watchman, first. Save them a shock. But what the hell, maybe it'll do 'em good. Here, you watch now—"

Wilkins had extended his arm and was moving his hand slowly toward the open top of the coffin-like box where lay the Key of Vashnu, his fingers spread as if his intention were to seize the jewel from its tray, when it happened. As his fingers were within inches of the key a piercing scream rang through the room.

The detective drew back, startled. "What's that?" he exclaimed.

Tommy whirled on his heel. There was no one in the room but the group of professors; they were all gaping in surprise.

"Out in the hall," cried Tommy, dashing toward the door.

He sprang into the corridor with Wilkins at his heels. As he did so a choking cry echoed through the dim room. At first he could not find its source; then he saw a crumpled form at the head of the stairs, where the balustrade ended in a carved newel post. A few quick strides brought Tommy to the stairs. The crouched figure was a girl. Her head was buried in her arms.

Tommy dropped to one knee. He lifted her head, and demanded anxiously, "What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

She made no reply. Her eyes were closed, and her breath came in agitated gasps through her parted lips. Feeling for her pulse with one hand, Tommy saw that her lips were full and red, and voluptuously curved, and that her lashes were long and dark against her ivory cheek.

A moment later her eyes opened, and she gazed straight up at Tommy. For a moment he was speechless and fascinated by the most beautiful eyes he had ever seen. She sighed, closed her eyes and relaxed against him confidently.

"What—what happened?" Tommy stammered finally.

"A man," she murmured in a low whisper. "I didn't see him—"

"What about him? Did he hurt you?" cried Tommy.

"He tried to snatch my pocketbook," she said.

Tommy glanced at her hand, at the bag she held there. "But he didn't get it?"

"No. I held on—and screamed. Then he ran away."

Wilkins was already leaping down the stairs, shouting to the watchman below. The group who had been standing inside began to hurry excitedly along the corridors, and into other rooms.

"What did he look like?" demanded Tommy.

"I hardly saw him; I don't know. He wore an overcoat, I think it was gray. And a hat. That's all I can tell you."

Five minutes of search produced no

results. The girl's description was extremely vague, and they could find no one who had seen a man wearing an overcoat and a hat. If he had leaped down the steps he must have gotten out the front door without being seen.

The girl recovered her poise quickly. She stood up, straightened her blue felt hat, and adjusted her fur scarf to the right angle. She thanked Tommy sweetly for his attentions, but firmly declined to give her name, making light of the incident. She was quite all right now; had not even lost her bag. Wouldn't he please forget it?

A FEW minutes later he and Wilkins were back in the room with the exhibit, accompanied only by Dr. Eggleston, curator of the museum. The closing hour had arrived, and all visitors had left.

"Damned funny place for a purse-snatcher," muttered Wilkins.

"We never had such a thing happen before," said the curator nervously. "It's very upsetting. As if it weren't nerve-racking enough, having *this* on my mind."

His gesture indicated the Key of Vashnu on its satin couch.

"By the way," said Wilkins, "I was going to demonstrate the electric protection for Dewart, here. All right to do it now?"

The curator agreed, and Wilkins stepped out into the corridor to call down to the watchman to pay no attention to the alarm. Returning, he moved over to the hollow steel pedestal holding the jewel.

"The magnetic field, or whatever they call it, is invisible, of course. But it's there. Now watch . . ." He thrust out his arm, lowering his hand toward the steel casket. "As soon as my hand gets too close . . ." His fingers hovered a foot or so above the gleaming ruby. "You'll see the lid snap closed, and . . ."

His hand dropped lower still; it was almost level with the top of the casket. The next instant his fingers touched the

key itself, remained there for a moment, and then jerked back in consternation. The lid did not close!

"What the hell!" cried the detective in amazement.

The curator stared, and Tommy frowned in puzzlement.

"It don't work!" exclaimed the police detective. "Well, I'll be damned! It worked this morning—something must have happened to it since then."

Dr. Eggleston hurried to the hall and called down to the watchman, telling him to send at once for the electrician. The electrician arrived within a very few minutes. The standards supporting the apparatus on either side of the central pedestal were tripods of hollow pipe, through which the wires ran up from a conduit below the floor. One of these legs rested askew on a fold of the slitted carpet, leaving a quarter-inch gap. Just at that point, inside the pipe, the two important wires had broken cleanly.

"Maybe somebody leaned against the frame too hard, in the crush," suggested the electrician, splicing in a fresh connection and taping it firmly. "That might have snapped them."

"But there has been no crush," retorted the curator.

Tommy Dewart waited until the workman finished his job. They tested the circuits. Now everything worked perfectly. At the near approach of any object from any direction, a steel plate like a jaw clamped shut over the open top of the casket that formed the upper portion of the pedestal. It was utterly impossible now for any thieving fingers to get close enough to the Key of Vashnu to touch it.

"You on here all night?" asked Tommy as he and the police detective descended the stairs together.

"Only till midnight," replied Wilkins. "Then I get a relief, thank heaven! This night watchman is a lulu. He don't play pinochle, and he brings just enough sandwiches and coffee for himself. This place gets on my nerves at

night; it's as dull as your great-aunt's funeral."

Tommy grinned. "Well, I hope it stays dull," he said as he left Wilkins at the door and walked blithely away from what was to be, within a very short while, the scene of a crime that was to start the F. B. I. off on one of the longest and most exciting chases of its career.

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## CHAPTER V

### Death in the Dark

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**T**OMMY had returned to the hotel, and had actually entered the elevator on the way up to his room, when something struck a chord of warning in his brain. He cursed himself for a stupid fool when it occurred to him. That was an ancient trick, yes; but human nature being what it was, the ruse still worked. It had worked in the past, and would work many times in the future. And it might have been pulled this very afternoon, under his eyes.

That purse-snatching, and the girl who had fainted; there had been something a little queer about the whole incident. No trace of the culprit had been found, and the girl had recovered with astonishing quickness. A decoy? There to steal the Key of Vashnu? The G-man cursed himself for a fool.

The broken circuit had been discovered, purely by accident, just *after* the episode in the corridor. The electrician had said that those wires had been broken by a strain on the tripod. But might they not have been cut? There had been room for the blade of a heavy knife to slip between the carpet and the pipe. Tommy remembered that, though it had not occurred to him at the time. And when everyone had rushed out into the corridor to answer that scream someone would have ample time to do the job.

The elevator boy was holding the door open, saying, "Sixth floor."

"Take me down again," said Tommy sharply.

If that act had been staged for the purpose of cutting those wires, thus putting the electric eye out of operation, there could be but one motive. Someone was planning an attempt to seize that jewel, an attempt that must be made before the circuit was tested again—in other words, this very night.

The G-man leaped from the elevator and crossed the lobby on the run. He sprang into a taxi at the curb. "Fifty-fifth Street, just west of Lexington—and step on it!" he snapped.

It still lacked half an hour of midnight when the cab swooped round the corner, and stopped before the art gallery. The block was quiet, almost deserted; a few parked cars stood silent at the curb, and less than a half dozen pedestrians were in sight in either direction. The front of the Churchill Galleries was dark and still.

Tommy ran up the steps and pressed his thumb to the bell set in one end of the brass name-plate. He could hear no answering ring through the heavy panels of the door. He waited. There was no response. He rang again, long and hard. The taxi in which he had come purred around the far corner, and a man's heels rapped coldly on the pavement from the opposite direction. Otherwise, no sounds.

Impatient and faintly apprehensive, Tommy seized the doorknob with the intention of shaking it violently. To his astonishment it turned in his hand, and the door swung on its hinges. Unlocked! Without stopping to consider a possible reason, he stepped inside, and habit more than anything else made him close the door behind him.

He moved a few steps into the main foyer of the street floor. The place was in absolute darkness; a solid, impenetrable wall of deepest night. There was something wrong about that. In such an establishment, at least one night light would always be left burning on each floor. And surely the watchman, who



had a chair here near the door, would not sit all night in pitch darkness. Tommy's nerves tensed and he was immediately on guard. He stood still in the darkness.

"Wilkins!" he called softly. "Wilkins!"

There was no reply. The police detective, Tommy knew, was posted on the third floor, where the Key of Vashnu lay. But why did not one of those two men he knew were supposed to be on the ground floor answer his call immediately?

**T**OMMY cursed his foolishness in coming without either flashlight or revolver, and advanced a few more steps. His eyes squinted, trying futilely to penetrate the Stygian gloom. The blackness wrapped him like a mantle; he could no longer be sure of finding the door by which he had entered. The silence was oppressive, ominous. Then he became conscious of a distant throbbing; a regular, muffled beat, barely perceptible, unrecognizable.

His outstretched fingers found a wall, and eagerly he felt along it for light switches. He found none, but suddenly remembered seeing push buttons in a row on the landing of the second floor. He'd better get to those, and turn on some light.

He turned away from the wall, found that he had passed the foot of the stairs, and was back toward the rear of the building. Turning to move toward the front, his foot struck something—something soft.

Nerves tensed, the G-man dropped to his knees and groped for the thing his foot had touched. Instantly he knew what it was. There was no mistaking the yielding resistance of an inert body. His fingers traveled along an arm in the blackness, came to a shoulder, then a chin. The skin was warm.

Hastily he felt in his pocket for matches. It took him three attempts to strike one. Then he went rigid. It was the night watchman of the Churchill Galleries who lay there, sprawled on his back. His eyes were closed, his face white as a sheet, but he was not dead. A spasm passed through his limbs as Tommy stared, and a faint rumble came from his throat, as if he was trying to groan.

The match burned Tommy's fingers and he dropped it. He started to scratch another, but then changed his mind. Call it caution, call it instinct; call it mere blind chance. But by that instantaneous decision, made without thought, Tommy undoubtedly saved his life.

He seized the unconscious man's shoulders and shook him gently.

"Where is Wilkins?" he whispered. "What happened?"

He got no reply. The watchman was still too dead to the world to hear him, although he was evidently on the point of coming to. Then suddenly Tommy heard a distinct sound of movement from above him. It came from somewhere on one of the upper floors. He moved quickly to the foot of the stairs, straining his eyes upward.



For a long moment he stood listening. But there was only silence now—a silence fraught with an unseen menace. Yet he was sure he had just heard someone moving up there. Perhaps Wilkins, too, lay on the floor above, unable to speak.

The G-man went up the first broad flight as fast as he dared. He stumbled over the top step, cursed at the noise he made, and turned right along the corridor. Where it divided in two, he kept right, as he had that afternoon, and swept his hand along the surface of the wall. In a moment he found the panel of light switches, and began pushing them with both thumbs in rapid succession.

*Click-click-click-click.* Not a single bulb glowed, anywhere!

Immediately he realized the significance of this. None of the lights worked; the supply of electricity must have been cut off. But there were other things besides lights that depended on the supply of electrical power. The apparatus that guarded the Key of Vashnu would not work without electricity either!

He groped his way to the foot of the next flight. From the second to the third floor there were two stairways, one in either building, separated by the original house walls. He kept to the one on the western side of the partition, the same one he had used before.

The door to the room in which lay the Key of Vashnu was a vague blot of gray against the black. He swerved through it, tripped over something soft and spongy, and fell flat on his face.

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## CHAPTER VI

### Tommy Meets Death Again

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**F**OR a second time the skin crawled along Tommy Dewart's scalp. He knew before he got out the match and struck it that this would be Wilkins. The guttering flame showed him the police detective, curled on his side, with a heavy service revolver clutched in one

hand. On the floor, near him, lay his flashlight.

Tommy dropped the match and seized the flash. It worked immediately. By its strong glare he could see Wilkins' distorted face frozen in a grimace of agony. His wide eyes were staring glassily at nothing. He could also see the blunt, gruesome thing that protruded from the detective's back, just below the left shoulder blade. The blade of the knife was wholly out of sight. Wilkins must have died instantly. Tommy knelt beside him, touched his face. It was still warm.

That drove Tommy to his feet. It couldn't have happened more than a few minutes ago!

Hé turned the ray of the flashlight on the pedestal in the corner. It looked precisely as it had looked that afternoon, except that the silk-lined casket on top was empty. The Key of Vashnu was gone!

Stopping only to lift the revolver from the dead fingers of Wilkins, he hurried out into the corridor. And as he reached the stairs the sound of a shot crashed against the silence.

He dashed down the steps in four jumps. Another explosion, which seemed to come from outside the building, followed closely onto the first. Simultaneously he heard another sound; the vague, distant throbbing that he had been aware of ever since entering the museum had grown abruptly to a steady roar. He recognized it now for the motor of an automobile, idling up until this moment, but now opened up wide.

The G-man leaped for the front door and threw it open. The steps and the street were empty. There was not even a passing pedestrian to be seen, and no car was moving in the block. The growl of that motor was less distinct here than inside the foyer.

Puzzled, he ran back toward the rear. His flash sought the body of the watchman. It no longer lay where he had seen it! It had disappeared completely!

A current of cold air swirled about his ankles, though he had closed the front door behind him. Tommy switched off the flash and warily approached the door under the staircase, which stood open now. It had been closed, he was sure, when he had found the watchman's body. He stopped at the top of a flight of rough wooden steps leading down to a lower floor, evidently the cellar, and listened. And then he noticed a small window just inside the doorway. A light seeped through it. Tommy moved closer and peered out into the rear court which was lighted by the street light at the end of the alley leading in from 56th Street. A car was just starting away along the alley; a small, light delivery truck with a closed body. The G-man got just a glimpse of the large white lettering on its side. He read, "Star King Laundry." As the truck moved from his sight a crimson flash vomited from its interior, followed instantly by the crashing report of a gun.

Tommy plunged down the steps. The truck was vanishing toward the far end of the alley when he reached the courtyard. Behind it ran the blurred shadow that was a running figure.

The G-man raised the police revolver and bounded past a high heap of empty crates. He heard no voice, nor even the slightest sound in warning of what was coming. From behind the pile of crates an upraised arm shot out and descended savagely. Whatever struck him was both heavy and hard; a blinding flash of light seared his brain, and all consciousness ended in blind blackness.

**T**OMMY had no idea how long he was out, but it must have been quite a while. When he began to come to he was upstairs, lying on a settee against the wall of the main foyer of the museum. There was a lot of commotion near him; voices, hurrying footsteps, slamming doors. The hubbub gradually penetrated his numb brain,



*Tommy saw the girl double up and catch instinctively at the rail as she plunged downward. (Page 49).*

making him aware that his head was pounding like a trip-hammer. As soon as he opened his eyes he shut them again quickly, against the glare of an overhead light. Then he opened them once more, a crack, and rolled his head. Someone said:

"Don't hold it against me, G-man. I had just been sapped in the dark, a while before, and I wasn't taking no chances."

It was the watchman. Tommy stared at him resentfully. "Were you the one that conked me, in the cellar?"

"Yeah. I came to on the floor just as somebody went by me and down the stairs. After a minute I pulled myself together and followed. I was behind those packing cases when I heard you coming down after me. I didn't know who it was, but I could get just enough of a look to be sure it wasn't Wilkins. So I walloped you with the gat first, and looked afterward . . . Yeah, he's comin' round, inspector."

Inspector Harrison came over as Tommy sat up.

"For God's sake, give me a straight story on this, will you?" asked the harried officer. "How did you come to be here?"

**T**OMMY began with the events of the afternoon, and told how they had finally aroused his suspicions. When he got to the point of arriving at the museum, the watchman burst out angrily.

"Unlocked! You must be crazy; that door was twice bolted!"

"I walked right in, I'm telling you. And you were out like a light, on the floor right over there," Tommy said.

"And did you hit anybody, firing from the upstairs window?"

Tommy gaped. "I never fired from any window, nor from anywhere else. It was Wilkins' gun I had—where is it?"

It was found near by. The chamber was full. The inspector looked sternly at the watchman. "Where were you shooting from?"

"I never fired a shot!" protested the man hotly. "Here's my gun. Look at it yourself. The shooting was going on while I was running down the cellar stairs. It ended before I got to the door."

The inspector sat down abruptly. He said, "Then who the hell pulled all the gunplay? You each heard three or four shots, and there's a corpse out there in the courtyard with two bullet-holes through his chest. Somebody did some shooting. It couldn't have been Wilkins; he was dead by that time. And besides, he only had one rod—this." He held up the gun.

"Maybe it was the cop on the beat," suggested Tommy.

"He says he knew nothing about it until he came on the run from 54th Street in answer to the watchman's whistle. He heard those shots, but took them for backfires. And who the devil unlocked the front door, if the watchman didn't? He says he was upstairs talking to Wilkins, when all the lights went out. He got down to this floor just in time to get knocked on the head—from behind, mind you. There must have been somebody planted in here. And I'd like to know who and where."

At that moment a detective came up from the cellar.

"We found this down by the main switch, near a big empty case that was turned on its side."

He held out to the inspector a small square of white cambric; plain, but of the finest linen. The inspector held it up. "This wouldn't be yours, would it?" he said to the watchman.

"Hell, no. That's a woman's handkerchief, ain't it?"

The inspector turned to the G-man.

"A woman?" said Tommy. He took the tiny bit of fabric from the inspector, looked at it closely. It bore no initials, but there was a trace of perfume, very faint, but nevertheless distinctly recognizable. It was the same scent worn by the mystery girl whose bag had been snatched!



EIGHT hours later Tommy sat talking to Lynn Vickers, who had arrived in a specially chartered plane from Washington at daybreak. Tommy had reported the museum incident to Vickers. They were going over the facts now, trying to sift out the loose end of a clue.

"The cellar door opening on the court was jimmied by an expert," said Tommy. "Yet why jimmy the cellar door if there was someone planted in the building who could unbolt the front door?"

"You think that Indian woman stayed in the building and hid down there?" asked Vickers.

"I don't even know if she was an Indian," Tommy insisted. "I *thought* she walked out the front door, but I didn't go down with her to see. She could have doubled back to the cellar stairs right then. All I can swear to is that the scent of that handkerchief is the same perfume she wore."

"The perfume expert says it's very rare aroma," Vickers said. "He's never run across it before."

"I wish I'd taken her name, in the afternoon," moaned Tommy. "Although if she was really in on this robbery, I don't suppose she would have given me the right one. Here's another point. If they intended to short-circuit the feeder in the cellar, thus cutting off all the lights as well as the juice to the photo-electric eye, why did they go through with that horse-play in the afternoon to cut those two wires?"

Vickers shook his head. "Assuming that those wires were cut, who cut them? You say there was only that group of professors in the room when the girl screamed, besides you and Wilkins?"

Tommy nodded, passed one hand over his eyes, and shivered slightly.

"You know, it just struck me. When I went up those stairs in the dark, I had a queer idea that I could hear my steps echoing, it was so quiet. But what I heard must have been other footsteps, going down the other stair, on the other

side of the partition. That could have been the man who had just killed Wilkins, and who even then had the Key of Vashnu in his hand. If I had chosen the left, instead of the right turn . . ."

Vickers laughed. "Forget it, Tommy. If your number had been up last night, you'd have gotten a knife in the back while you were bending over the watchman with a lighted match in your hand. What puzzles me is the shooting in the court. Who did it? I've heard of crooks quarreling over the spoils, but not before they've even gotten away from the scene of the crime. That corpse hasn't been identified yet, but he looks to me as if he had Oriental blood in him."

"The name on that truck may give us a lead," Tommy suggested.

But the running down of that clue occupied three detectives all day, and brought negligible results. They located the owner, or rather the former owner, of the Star King Laundry, in Brooklyn. His business had gone bankrupt six months before, and he had sold his truck to a used car dealer in Jamaica. The dealer, when questioned, remembered it, because it had been standing in his yard a long time. Only a week before he had sold it, for fifty dollars cash, to a man who gave his name as Carl Jaines, and who brought his own license plates with him. The dealer had not noted the number of those plates, but he had a record of the motor number of the truck itself.

Digging into the files of the license bureau, they came up against a dead end. A truck with that motor number had been licensed the previous year, to the Star King Laundry, but no plates had ever been taken out for this year. And no person named Carl Jaines had ever taken out a car license in the history of the motor bureau.

WORK on that lead ended when the truck itself was found abandoned, twenty-four hours after the crime, in an isolated lane in the Bronx. The puzzle

of the license explained itself when the plates were found to be two years old. The custom in New York State of alternating colors from year to year, black numbers on a yellow background in 1934, and vice versa in 1935, meant that plates from the year before last matched the current year's tags in color scheme, and no one would ever think to notice the small 34 where there should be a 36. And every year, during the last week in January, thousands of motorists threw their old plates in the gutter, or in trash barrels, where any foresighted crook could pick them up. These particular plates had belonged to a taxi driver named Lifkowa, who could not even remember where he had discarded them, fourteen months earlier.

The only clue in the interior of the truck was the body which had been brutally crammed under the seat. The man had been killed with a knife, but not by one clean stab to the heart, like Wilkins, or like Barlong in Washington. A savage, upward sweep of the blade had practically disemboweled him; his death must have been an intolerable agony. He was undressed down to his underclothes, evidently after being wounded. A shirt, probably his own, had been wrapped tightly about his head, no doubt to stifle his cries, and the pangs of suffocation must have added horror to his final agonies.

The clothes carried no marks of identification whatsoever, but his fingerprints, sent to Washington by plane, did the trick. The central bureau of the F. B. I. reported within fifteen minutes of their arrival that he was Bo McLund and had served time in three State's prisons. He had escaped from Joliet in a jail break the previous November.

Immediately a small army of men, Federal and local officers, began inquiries in a dozen states for traces of Bo McLund. Had he been seen in the last four months? Where? When? And most important of all—*with whom?*

In the meantime Vickers and Tommy

Dewart were trying to get a line on all the East Indians in the city. New York, the most cosmopolitan metropolis in the world, seemed to have no clearly defined Hindoo quarter. The few natives of that far country who were rounded up and brought in for questioning were as uncommunicative as a blank wall. They knew nothing of the Key of Vashnu; they had seen no strangers of their own race in the city lately; they could not identify the corpse found in the courtyard.

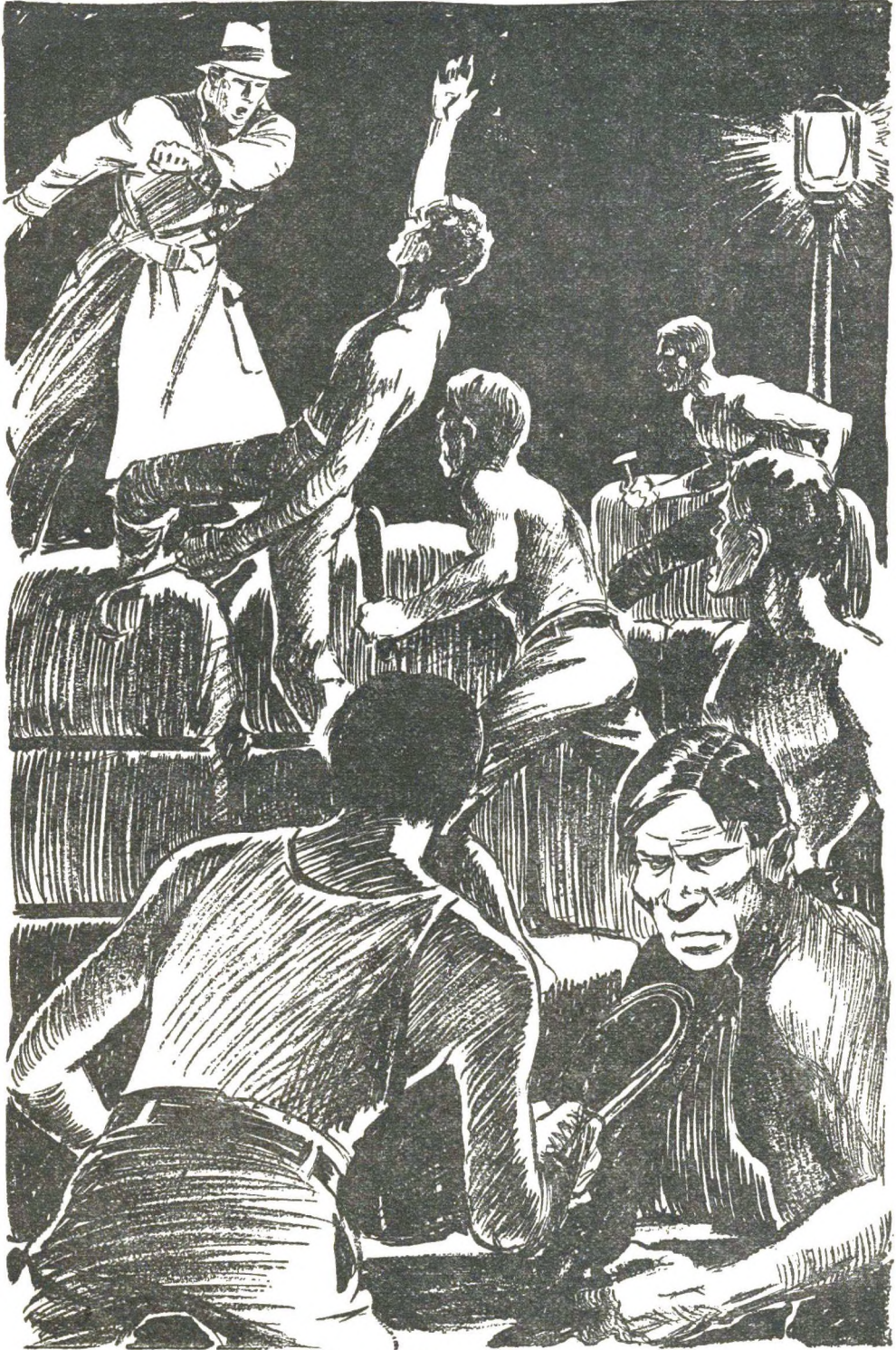
Yet the very sameness of their replies, coupled with a certain bold truculence in their attitudes, confirmed Vickers' suspicions.

"They know, or suspect, more than they tell," he told Tommy. "There's an Indian plot behind this, sure as daylight. But these Orientals are trained to be close-mouthed; and furthermore, I suppose they have a natural patriotic interest in seeing that jewel restored to its mother country. They're ready to hinder us more than to help us."

"I'll say so," said Tommy. "Did you see the late papers?"

Vickers nodded, frowning. The news dispatches were disquieting. On the first day the disappearance of the Key of Vashnu had, of course, made all the front pages of the New York papers. But the sensation created in the United States by the robbery was mild compared to that aroused in England. The government offices in London were thrown into an uproar. The British prime minister, after being closeted for an hour with the king, hurried to the Foreign Office for a conference behind closed doors. At the close of this conference a statement was issued to the press, brief but ominous.

The loss of the valuable relic was regrettable to the extreme, the prime minister had said. What effect the event might have on the natives of India was impossible to foretell. However, it seemed inevitable that a diplomatic situation of the greatest gravity would be precipitated. If the Indians still took



G-77's fist stopped one of the stevedores cold, but two more leaped at him.  
(Page 59).



seriously the legend of Vashnu, British prestige in India would suffer heavily, and trouble would foment. The British government hoped that the American police would be able quickly to apprehend the thieves and recover the symbolic key of power, for the loss of which England felt justified in *holding the United States responsible!*

IT was that last phrase that stirred up the storm. The American papers protested vehemently. The State Department at Washington was thrown into a fever of apprehension. If the recovery of the Key of Vashnu by the Indian tribal chiefs should precipitate a revolution in Bengal, for which England held this country responsible, the results might be exceedingly serious. Shattered relations, bad feeling between the peoples; even a war was not unthinkable. The international complications far overshadowed the mere mercenary value of the jewel. To preserve world peace, the Key of Vashnu had to be recovered.

"What I don't understand," continued Vickers, "is where this petty safe-breaker, McLund, comes into the picture, if it's all an Indian scheme. Do you suppose they would hire him to do the actual theft, and then knife him to close his mouth as soon as he has handed over the loot?"

"Perhaps he got the car for them," suggested Tommy.

"Why use a car at all? That's not a Hindoo's method of making a getaway. Sounds more like a modern gangster's idea. Besides—"

The telephone at his elbow interrupted him. G-77 answered it.

"Hello! Yes, Inspector, this is Vickers. What is it?"

"We've got a line on Bo McLund," Inspector Harrison's gruff voice came over the wire. "Spent three hours questioning an ex-con who runs a dive on the West Side. He finally admitted that Bo had been in his place last Thursday, with Levi Shauer . . . Never heard

of him? Well, we've known for years that he was a fence, but he's been so cagey we've never been able to catch him with stolen goods on him. I've been itching for a chance to give him a working over; now I've got an excuse. We're going over to Shauer's joint right now. Want to come along?"

"By all means! Pick us up here, will you?" Vickers replied.

Within ten minutes the two G-men stepped into a police car at the curb, and were hurled uptown behind a wailing siren. In addition to the inspector, there were two detectives in plain clothes, and the driver.

In the forties the car ground to a stop in front of a tiny bandbox of a store which occupied the ground floor of an old brownstone residence. The single dusty show window was filled with watches and miscellaneous trinkets in disordered array; on it faded gilt letters said, *Jewelry Repaired*.

"You'd never think," muttered the inspector aside to Tommy, "that he had a rep for staking the biggest crooks in the business."

Vickers, Tommy, and the three police emerged from the car and filed past the door of the shop, where a tinkling bell announced their arrival. An anemic, half-bald clerk hurried up from the rear.

"Where's Levi?" demanded the inspector. "I want to see him."

"He's busy just now," answered the clerk apologetically, glancing nervously toward a door half hidden in the shadows at the rear. "There's someone in his office with him. But he won't be much longer, I'm sure; he's been there twenty minutes already."

The inspector paused, turned to make sure that his men blocked the only exit. "Tell him to hurry," he growled.

The clerk hurried again to the rear. The police watched him as he stopped before the shadowed door in the rear and rapped timidly on it. There was a sudden sound of hurried movement behind the closed door.



"Mr. Shauer!" he called. "The police are here to see you!"

"Damn you!" grated the inspector, striding after him. "I didn't tell you to tip him off it was the police!"

The sounds behind the door had ceased abruptly. The inspector pushed the clerk aside and seized the knob. The door was locked.

"Come on, boys," he ordered. "Give me a shoulder."

In a few seconds the flimsy door gave way before them. They burst into the tiny back room, stopped abruptly and stood staring at what they saw there.

The dingy office was crowded with cabinets, filing cases, shelves, and an old-fashioned roll-top desk with a swivel chair before it. In that chair lolled the figure of Levi Shauer, his hands gripping the arms as if he had been on the point of rising when death overtook him. His head was thrown back, and one glance was enough to see that it had been very nearly severed from his body by one furious, accurately directed sweep of a keen-bladed knife. Blood still bubbled from his jugular vein.

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## CHAPTER VII

### A Clue to Murder

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THE inspector began barking orders. One of his men dove swiftly through the single window at the rear, which stood open. The other doubled back to the street and approached the rear areaway through the cellar of the adjoining house. Tommy dashed out, and down an alley, while Vickers ran around the block.

Ten minutes later they were all back again, unsuccessful. There was no sign of the murderer of Levi Shauer.

"He must have been just ahead of us," said the inspector with an angry oath. "It looks as if he murdered old Levi the minute he walked in, and then spent the rest of the time ransacking the place." Half the filing cases were

open. The desk drawers had been pulled out, and their contents littered the floor.

"Maybe he didn't find what he was looking for," suggested Vickers.

The inspector turned to the G-man. "While I see what that clerk knows about Levi's visitor, you can use my men to help you look through this mess if you like."

It was Vickers himself who turned up the only item of interest. The old man's pockets had been turned inside out, their meagre contents scattered on the floor. Vickers went through them again, just on a chance, and in an inner pocket of the vest he found a key. Not a masterpiece of gold and precious stones, but a plain brass key; heavy and old-fashioned in style, obviously designed merely to unlock a door, and evidently overlooked by the murderer in his hurried search. Vickers pocketed it as the inspector entered from the other room.

"That clerk is scared stiff," said the inspector, mopping his brow. "His description of the man who came in might fit anybody. Average height, dark, plain clothes, soft hat—bah! Says he gave his name as Gartman, from St. Louis."

"Gartman!" Vickers gave a start, and turned to Tommy. "Didn't you say there was a Professor Gartman in the Churchill Galleries, yesterday afternoon?" he said sharply. Tommy Dewart nodded.

"Yes. He was the only one in that group that Dr. Eggleston couldn't identify. He'd told Dr. Eggleston he was from St. Louis, but none of the museums or universities near St. Louis ever heard of Gartman."

G-77 nodded as he nervously paced the floor. "And he has a dark complexion, like an Oriental—ten to one it's the same man! He's also the one who cut those wires, while the girl pulled you out into the hall with her phoney bag-snatching gag. And now he's butchered Levi Shauer, who was seen with Bo McLund. I don't know how it all

fits in, but I'm positive we're on the right track, Tommy!"

He paused to draw the key from his pocket.

"This seems to be the only clue he overlooked here. I want you to take this, Tommy, and find the door it fits. No matter how long it takes you, find it! It's either a hotel room key or the key to a stateroom on a ship. That's obvious. See, the tag says simply, 421. Go to all the hotels in New York large enough to have four hundred rooms, and try that key in the door of Number 421. When you find the one it fits, you'll find a retreat of Levi Shauer's, and a clue to this mystery."

WITH the aid of a classified directory, Tommy Dewart covered Manhattan that afternoon. The smaller hotels he eliminated by a telephone call; few of them had as many as four hundred rooms. But even at that he actually visited thirty, before he crossed to Brooklyn and began making the rounds there. There weren't so many here, but they were widely scattered from the Bridge to Coney Island. After several fruitless hours he entered a subway and returned to New York.

It was night now but Tommy decided to start working on the stateroom possibility. Stopping only to grab a bite to eat, he set out. Beginning at the tip of Manhattan Island, he worked up the North River, pier by pier, wherever he saw a passenger ship in dock. His method was simple and direct.

"That ship got a stateroom numbered 421 on her?" he would ask.

If the answer was no, he turned away. If it was yes, he went on board, displayed his credentials to the purser, and tried the key in the door of the stateroom. It never fitted.

It was close to midnight when he got up as far as the Munson Line, at the foot of West 11th Street. That pier was brilliantly lighted, peopled by hurrying porters, and showed all the bustle and excitement of a midnight sailing. The

name across the stern of the good-sized liner that lay alongside the dock was the *Munalbo*.

Tommy stepped up to a window in the pier office, and asked his usual question. The clerk regarded him with disgust.

"You drunk, brother? If you don't know now, it's too late. She's sailing in five minutes; don't bother me with riddles."

He started to slam down the window. But with a quick thrust Tommy got his elbow in the way, preventing it closing entirely, and barked through the crack.

"Lift that glass, big boy, or I'll come right through it! This is government business—take a look at that!"

The card that Tommy pushed through the slit changed the clerk's mind in a hurry, and the window flew up.

"Say, I didn't know. What was it—" the clerk said hurriedly.

"Is there a stateroom numbered 421 on the *Munalbo*?" Tommy snapped.

The clerk ran a nervous finger over a framed deck plan on the wall.

"No, there isn't. That's funny; there's eleven cabins on E deck, and they're numbered from 410 to 420. But there's no 421. Why? What's the trouble?"

Tommy turned away without answering. He emerged into West Street and stood watching the last preparations for departure of the vessel headed for South America. A crowd of half a hundred or more milled near the edge of the pier, waving and shouting to the passengers lined against the rails of the lower promenade deck. The canopied gangway was still in position, just opposite Tommy, but a uniformed officer stood at its foot, glancing at his watch.

Then the officer lifted his head, made a gesture with his hand, and ran up the gangplank. Pulleys creaked, as dockhands began tugging at the ropes which raised the ship's end of the gangway and swung it inshore. The ship's whistle blasted raucously; the cries of the crowd redoubled in volume.

And in that instant Tommy froze in every joint, and stood gaping with his mouth half open. His eyes, running idly along the passengers leaning over the rail, had halted. They rested on a girl who stood there, perhaps twenty feet away from him and half as many feet above his head. She was young and attractive, and wore a neat little blue felt hat and a fur-edged coat that framed her oval face. But it was her eyes that caught him. He had not forgotten those eyes; she was the girl he had seen in the museum! At the same moment she saw Tommy. There was an instant of indecision, then she flashed him a brief but tantalizing smile of recognition!

THE G-man hesitated only a second. Then he sprang forward. His elbows jammed a passage through the crowd, and brought him to the foot of the long gangway that was now poised in midair, a dozen feet from the ship's side. The removable section of rail had already been replaced in position. A dock policeman grabbed for his arm, but Tommy jerked away.

He ploughed up the steep slant at his best speed, followed by a chorus of angry yells. Arrived at the upper end, he faced a gap that was widening every second as the vessel swung off from the pier. Below him, thirty feet or more, swirled the dark waters of the river. The gangway swayed unsteadily, supported only by its ropes, but he took what footing he could get, tensed his muscles and leaped. . . .

Splash! The last hawser holding the ship to the dock trailed in the water as it was cast off. But Tommy was flat against the side of the hull, clinging by his fingertips to the rim of a hawse-hole.

After an anxious moment he got a precarious footing on the protruding half-inch rim of a porthole, and inched himself up until one hand could catch a fresh grip on an iron cleat. Then arms stretched down over the rail to seize and help him. A few moments

later he stood on the loading deck, panting heavily.

"You blasted fool!" a minor officer yelled, glaring at the G-man. "Why didn't you show your ticket; they'd have lowered the gangway again."

"I haven't got any ticket," grinned Tommy.

"Then what the hell is the idea--" began the other.

"If you'll take me straight to your captain," Tommy interrupted, "he'll find out, and will probably tell you to keep your mouth shut."

Captain Creston was decidedly annoyed when asked to leave his bridge at the moment of warping his 20,000 ton vessel away from the dock, but sixty seconds in his private office sufficed to establish Tommy's identity and the nature of his business on board.

"Don't delay your sailing," Tommy told him. "I may have to hunt around a little before I locate the person I want to see. If I've finished before you pass Ambrose Lightship, I can drop off there with the pilot. Otherwise, I'll just stay on board. I'll have to let you know later."

Tommy went first to the point on the promenade deck where he had seen the girl standing. Passengers still lined the rail, waving and shouting to friends on the fast receding pier. But the girl was not there. He walked toward the stern, mounted a companion and glanced forward along the upper deck. The girl with the blue hat had disappeared.

He went below, made his way to the purser's office, and asked to see a copy of the passenger list.

"It's not quite complete," that officer told him. "A few last minute bookings haven't been entered on that copy, yet."

Tommy let his eye run down the list of forty or fifty names. He hadn't the vaguest idea of what name he was looking for, but hoped that one of those on the list might offer a suggestive ring to his nimble wits. He found nothing, however, that meant a thing to him. Some had a South American flavor, such as

Cantavos and Velose; others were plain United States, like Haines and Connelly and Waldron and Smith. Some were in groups, indicating a family traveling together. He could find no feminine name, alone by itself.

"Those late bookings, purser?"

The officer collected three or four typewritten slips and handed them to him. Tommy thumbed them through listlessly, but at the last one he suddenly came bolt upright with shocked surprise. He stared twice at the name there before he could believe his eyes. It said, "Miss Lallah Dewart, Boston, Mass."

The devil! Was that the girl in the blue hat, and was her name actually Dewart? What an astounding coincidence! And according to this entry, she came from Boston, his own home town. The name, while not as common as Smith or Jones, was not utterly unique. There were doubtless many Dewart in the United States, even in the Boston neighborhood, of whom Tommy had never heard.

But if this was the girl of the Churchill Galleries, and she was using an alias, how had she happened to choose his own name? Pure chance? Or was there a deeper, more subtle reason behind the choice? If she were really involved in this crime, and had deliberately picked Dewart as a name under which to masquerade, that very act hinted at the deep-laid and diabolic cleverness of a mastermind. Tommy decided that he was going to have to be very careful.

"This passenger, purser; what do you know about her?" Tommy pointed to the typewritten sheet.

The purser glanced at the slip. "Only that she booked in a hurry, late this evening. Wanted better quarters, but 420 was all we had left, so she took it. Very little baggage."

"420 on E deck, isn't it?" asked the G-man.

The purser nodded. "Forward end of the port corridor."

## CHAPTER VIII

### Mystery Attack

**E** DECK was well down in the bowels of the ship, and was filled in the stern by the main dining salon. Amidships were the kitchens and serving pantries, between the two corridors. Farther forward were stewards' quarters in the center. Along the outer wall of the narrow passages were the doors of a few staterooms, odd numbers on the starboard side and even numbers on the port. No. 420 was the last door on his left before the port passage ended in a bulkhead.

Tommy lifted his hand and rapped softly. There was no answer. He knocked again, quite hard. Then he pressed his ear to the crack. He could hear a blurred confusion of distant sounds; the throb of the engines, the clatter of cutlery, the creak of a winch. But he could hear nothing on the other side of that door, and it did not open.

Uncertain about his next step, Tommy crossed back again to the port corridor and once again halted before Cabin 420. Should he go to the purser's office and get a passkey? Or should he take the risk of breaking down that door, here and now?

He was debating these two possibilities when he heard a distant footstep from the direction of the companion. He gave a start. Perhaps it would be unwise to let the girl catch him hanging about her door before he discovered more about her. But how could he avoid meeting her now, in the corridor?

He jumped quickly to the door at the very end, which he knew opened onto the ledge in the hatchway. He jerked it open, slid through, and pulled it shut behind him. And as he did so a pair of muscular hands closed about his throat, from behind.

It had not before occurred to Tommy that someone else might be watching the girl also. Perhaps he had disturbed a previous visitor, also posted in that



corridor to watch Cabin 420. Whatever the reason, there was a man on the narrow railed ledge, and he was distinctly annoyed at being discovered there.

The light was dim, the grip on his throat prevented him from turning his head, and the G-man found himself fighting for his life. He used both hands to tear frantically at one wrist that was using his shoulder as a lever. But that wrist, the size of an ordinary man's calf, was immovable. He twisted and squirmed, to no avail. The grip only tightened.

He put all the power of his lungs into emitting a cry for help. Only a feeble croak emerged through his flattened wind-pipe. His eyes were bulging in their sockets. His chest was bursting. He could feel the blood pounding in his veins, and knew that in another few moments he was going to lose consciousness completely. That vise-like clamp on his throat never relaxed the least bit.

Yet even under these harrowing circumstances Tommy Dewart's mind, trained by long practice to reason and deduce, was working unbidden toward a conclusion. Unprovoked attacks like this were not every-day occurrences on board ship. It was not the usual thing to find someone lurking behind a door that would ordinarily be used only in emergency. The *Munalbo*, therefore, had some very unusual passengers on board. This attack convinced Tommy that he was on the right track.

With his unseen antagonist behind him, Tommy was able to do practically nothing with his hands. But by a violent wrench he now managed to get one leg hooked around behind the other's knee. At the same moment, exerting every ounce of his fast fading strength, he bent sharply sideways from the waist as far as he could go. A wrist, not his, cracked smartly against the iron railing.

A muffled bellow of pain and rage exploded close to his ear. The grip of one of those hands on his throat slacked away. Tommy twisted fiercely in the opposite direction. But the one hand

still grasped his neck, and its owner must have been incredibly strong.

Tommy felt the floor drop away from under his feet. He was being lifted bodily into the air. With no base to give him a purchase, he could only writhe helplessly, like a bird strung up by the wing-tips. Inexorably that hand lifted him higher and higher, as one might hoist a pup by the collar. Then it swung him out over the railing. In the next instant, before Tommy could grasp the fate in store for him, the grip relaxed and let him go completely. He felt himself falling into space.

The shaft led from the hatch on B deck straight down into the bowels of the ship, ending in a floor built just over the ship's bottom. From the level of E deck, where Tommy's fall started, it was perhaps thirty feet down to that floor of rough planks. Just far enough for his body to turn one complete somersault in midair and strike with a muffled thud, one leg crumpled beneath him. He uttered no cry, but merely folded up into a silent, senseless heap.

IT was four days later when the doctor told Tommy he might leave the ship's hospital and take a short stroll on deck.

"Go easy on that ankle, though," cautioned the physician. "It was nearly a bad sprain. You ought to favor it for a time."

Tommy grinned and stretched himself slowly, like a cat.

"By the way," said the doctor, "here's your hat."

Tommy looked at the dark blue fedora that was handed to him and said, "My hat? No, that isn't my hat."

"It was found underneath you when they picked you up."

"But I was wearing a plaid cap. I don't see—"

The G-man stopped abruptly. The explanation had struck him, but he didn't care to pass it on to the physician. It wasn't his hat; therefore it belonged to his assailant. It must have



*When the man raised the sputtering candle a few inches, a horrible scream broke from Jake's livid lips. (Page 70).*

fallen off while they were struggling on the ledge. He had the fedora; doubtless the other man had picked up his plaid cap.

He wandered out on deck, keeping his eyes open. The *Munalbo* was far past Hatteras by now, shoving her nose into the long swells of the Gulf Stream. Tommy wanted very much to meet a man wearing a plaid cap. But he wanted even more to meet the mysterious girl who called herself Lallah Dewart. A sure sixth sense told the G-man that she was the key that would unlock the mystery.

He met Lallah Dewart at the door of the dining salon that evening. And, to his amazement, she mentioned the museum incident almost immediately.

"Oh, I hoped I'd see you again!" she smiled. "I didn't thank you properly for your kindness during that dreadful incident. I was quite upset, you know. Do you think it could have had any connection with the robbery there that very night?" Her eyes met his squarely and were without guile.

Before Tommy could conquer his astonishment, she went on to say that she had of course read all about it in the newspapers. She had also seen the Key of Vashnu—"that key thing," she called it—that very afternoon and recalled wishing enviously that it belonged to her. "I'd sell the big ruby," she smiled

demurely, "and have a glorious time for the rest of my life."

Tommy felt as if the ground had been swept from beneath his feet. He had never encountered a suspect who acted like this. The usual effort of a guilty conspirator was to avoid the subject at all cost. Such outspoken candor as this was either the mark of utter innocence, or else the cleverest kind of duplicity. If she was acting a part, she was certainly a consummate actress.

They sat together at a small table, and before dinner was over, Tommy was completely captivated by this girl he was sure was mixed up in the most sensational crime committed in years. He found himself hoping she was no more than an unsuspecting tool of the mastermind behind the crime—and determined to help her as much as he could. And the next morning she came near to being murdered right under his eyes.

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## CHAPTER IX

### The Man in the Plaid Cap

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IT was raining; the soft, warm, gray rain of the Gulf Stream, and the streaming decks were deserted at eleven o'clock. Tommy stood in a corner of the rail at the end of the upper promenade, which was enclosed. Here he and Lallah had planned to meet about this time in the morning. As he waited, the G-man gazed abstractedly down at the clutter of the stern cargo deck, some twelve feet below him.

He looked at his watch impatiently; she was late. What was keeping her?

Suddenly he started, and leaned forward. From a door somewhere below his feet two figures had just emerged onto the cargo deck. He was looking down almost squarely on top of their heads, but one of them he recognized instantly. It was Lallah. With her was a man he had not seen before. The man held her arm closely; she appeared to be straining against that grip.

All Tommy could see of the man was a plaid cap and the folds of a tan raincoat, though he did notice that the fellow was broad-shouldered and thick through the chest. Holding the girl close to his side, he was leaning toward her, as if speaking in a very confidential manner. Tommy could not hear his words, and could not see his face, hidden under the peak of the cap.

Side by side they walked slowly to the rail, and paused. Now Tommy could see Lallah's profile, as she stared out across the misty waves. Her chin was high and her face pale. Her eyes set in a rigid stare, as if she was frightened, or angry, or both. And then suddenly Tommy saw something which was visible from no other point except the one where he chanced to be standing, peering downward.

The man's right hand was under Lallah's left elbow; his left hand, held close in against his abdomen, gripped a small but wicked looking automatic of blued steel. The muzzle was trained on Lallah's heart.

Tommy's mouth opened, but he uttered no sound. A cry might cause a nervous finger to contract on the trigger. Surely the fellow in the cap didn't mean to shoot her down in cold blood, there on the open deck? The risk of discovery was terrific, even if there was no one in sight at the moment. The crack of the shot would bring many on the run.

Tommy saw the man's head turn from side to side, as he made sure no one was watching. But he did not raise his glance to the corner of the promenade where Tommy peered from behind the stanchion. Then his right hand shifted quickly from under Lallah's elbow; it was a big, powerful hand, like a huge claw. Abruptly it seized her around the hips, and with one powerful heave hoisted her slight form up over the rail and gave it a violent push.

Tommy saw the girl double up and clutch instinctively at the rail, in spite of the fact that the revolver was still

pressed to her side. At that same moment Tommy let out a yell, and leaped for the cross passage, where a narrow stair, more like a ladder, led down to the cargo deck. For a moment the upper rail, and the deck itself, cut off his view of the scene below. Then, as he slid rather than ran down the steep flight of steel steps, he could see the lower deck again. The man in the cap was whirling away from the rail; Lallah was nowhere in sight.

As Tommy hit the deck and bounded, the man wheeled away from him. He started for the door from which he had emerged, on the port side. Then he saw Tommy, changed his mind, and made for the starboard companion. Tommy sprang for him. The big hand that still held the gun swept out in a vicious arc. It met Tommy on the fleshy part of his shoulder, hurling him aside. Then the man dashed through the door and disappeared into an inner passage.

**T**OMMY could have pursued, and kept his quarry in sight, had not he thought of the girl. He turned to look anxiously toward the rail over which Lallah had disappeared. And as he looked he saw the flutter of a scarf, a bright blue scarf that he knew well, and it came from *outside the rail!*

Quickly the G-man ran across the deck. One look overside told him what had happened. Starting that terrible plunge to the sea, fully fifty feet below, the girl's desperate fingers had found nothing to seize. But by some providential fate, her wrist had gotten itself entangled, though none too firmly, in a loop of rope that trailed from a lifeboat stanchion at that point. She had dropped more than ten feet; then the line had tautened and held. There she dangled, swaying and thumping against the steel plates of the hull, too low to reach any handhold even if the strength remained, and with the rope about to slip at any moment.

Very quickly, but with great care, Tommy grasped the rope, held it away

from the side, and pulled it up hand over hand. In a moment he could reach her wrist, then her shoulders. Dropping the rope entirely, he lifted her bodily over the rail. The loop of hemp, as soon as the tension was released, fell away from her arm. Tommy uttered a little curse of relief that he had been in time.

She was half unconscious; either the shock of the fall or a blow against the side of the hull, Tommy thought. Sagging in his arms, she murmured through livid lips a phrase that he did not catch. Then she opened her eyes and saw who held her.

"Tommy!" she whispered. "Do not tell anyone!"

"Don't tell anyone!" he cried in astonishment. "Why, he tried to throw you overboard—to kill you!"

"No," she said firmly. "It was an accident."

Before he could protest further, a petty officer and two members of the crew came up through the after companion.

"What's wrong here, sir? Did I hear you call?"

"It is nothing," replied Lallah at once. "I slipped on the wet deck, and fell against the rail. Only a bump." She smiled at him reassuringly. "Help me to my cabin, Tommy, please?"

Tommy had learned that there are moments when silence is the part of discretion; obviously this was one. While they moved inside, and down the companion to E deck, he kept his thoughts to himself. Only when they had reached the door to her stateroom did he speak.

"Lallah, what is it? There's something queer—"

"Don't worry, Tommy. I will explain it to you later—tonight, maybe. Now I am tired." For just a moment she swayed close to him. "You have saved my life. And I am grateful."

The next instant she vanished behind the closed door.

A little later Tommy found himself



paced the promenade deck. Where the enclosed deck ended he came to a halt, gazing down at the spot where the brief drama had taken place a short time before.

"That was no accident. And it wasn't play-acting for somebody's benefit, either. That devil meant to get rid of her. The rope catching on her wrist was the only accidental part, I'd swear. But why should she want to keep it quiet? Why doesn't she tell me, if no one else? Is she protecting *him*? Who the devil is he, then? What has he to do with the Key of Vashnu?"

Tommy racked his brain in vain. He had gotten only a brief glance at the face under the cap, but it was fixed now in his memory. He meant to find out all he could about the man immediately. Things were happening fast now, and the G-man debated asking the captain for help. He decided, however, to wait until he had had one more talk with the girl. Maybe this last incident would frighten her into telling him something. Whatever the girl had to do with the Key of Vashnu, the man in the plaid cap was certainly not her ally.

Lallah did not appear for lunch; Tommy ate alone, mulling over the mystery. Only when he rose to leave the dining salon did a chord click in his memory. That small table in the corner—that was where he had seen the man who wore the plaid cap!

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## CHAPTER X

### The Mystery of Cabin 40

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THE table had seats for four. At the present moment it was empty. The G-man crossed the room to the desk of the chief steward.

"Let me see your seating plan a minute, will you?" he asked.

He found the corner table quickly on the plan, and made mental note of the four names written next it. Fleming—Stern—Copellard—Brickell. Not one of them meant anything to him. But when he went next to the purser's office, he

learned a little more. All four were men, apparently traveling together on a business trip. They were traveling together and were booked for Buenos Aires. They occupied a suite on B deck. "The forty suite," the purser called it; two staterooms containing twin beds, and a sitting-room connecting with them. It was isolated, just aft of the captain's quarters, with no other cabins near it. The rooms were numbered forty, forty-one, and forty-two.

Tommy did not yet know the name of the man in the cap, but he felt sure it was one of those four. He mounted to B deck and strode resolutely forward. He found that Cabin 40, the sitting-room, opened into a cross passage of which the other wall was the forward partition of the smoking room. The two staterooms also had separate entrances, one on the port corridor and one on the starboard.

Obviously the main entrance to the suite was by way of the sitting-room, and Tommy was just hesitating before the door numbered 40 when a waiter with a loaded tray entered the passage. Tommy walked on slowly down the passage. The waiter stopped before number 40 and knocked. As the door opened, Tommy caught a brief glimpse of a short man in a green bathrobe, half bald and frowning. Then the waiter went in and the door closed.

For several minutes Tommy loitered in the passage; when the waiter emerged, the G-man spoke to him with studious carelessness.

"People seasick, in there?"

"Oh, no, sir. But they generally have their meals sent up. A couple of them never have left the room since New York, I guess. The other two go down to the dining room once in a while."

Tommy nodded casually, and sauntered around into the port corridor. The waiter had disappeared; there was no one in sight. He stood gazing blankly at the closed door of Cabin 42 while he pondered that last bit of information. Two men who were not seasick, yet

never left their stateroom during more than four days on a calm sea. There must be some significance to that. And one man who went out only seldom, but who on the last occasion had tried to murder a fellow-passenger by pushing her overboard in the middle of the morning. The daylight feature of that bold assault puzzled Tommy.

With these thoughts tangling in his head, the G-man glued his eye to the keyhole of Cabin 42. Abruptly he was seized by an impulse. The key that Lynn Vickers had told him to find a door for! The very thing that had brought him aboard this ship—why not try it on this door?

Already Tommy had tried that key in more than three score locks. He had no reason to believe it would fit this one, any more than it had fitted any of those others. But it would not hurt to try. He drew the key from an inner pocket and inserted it in the lock. It turned easily under his fingers, and the door swung open!

His next move was inspired by the sound of not far distant footfalls. The room in front of him was pitch dark, and silent; he stepped in, and closed the door behind him. For several moments he stood perfectly still.

There wasn't a sound within the cabin. From his right he could hear the faint murmur of voices from the next cabin where the occupants of the forty suite were evidently eating their lunch. He hoped they had large appetites, for he was going to need time—and he didn't want to be interrupted until he had finished his search. It seemed to him extraordinarily dark in this stateroom. There must be a porthole somewhere; yet he couldn't detect the faintest glimmer of gray to mark its position.

He didn't want to stumble over furniture, and he knew that the light switch in every cabin was just to the right of the door. He found it without trouble, and gave it a twist. Nothing happened.

That was queer, he thought. Was it an accident that these lights didn't

work? Or did that, too, have an ulterior significance? Cautiously he drew a box of matches from his pocket and struck one. The first thing he saw was a small square table by his elbow, to the top of which was screwed a brass lamp with a paper shade. There was one like that in every stateroom; the wire led down to a floor socket, independent of the switch on the wall.

Tommy fumbled for the lamp switch, found it, and pressed it. The bulb lighted instantly, shedding a warm, yellow glow. He raised his head, and the match singed his fingertips unnoticed.

**T**HIS had once been a comfortably furnished stateroom with twin beds. There was a single port facing forward. Now it scarcely resembled a stateroom at all. The glass of the port had been pasted over with heavy black paper, shutting out all daylight, as well as all inquisitive eyes. The chairs and one of the twin beds had all been shoved back against the walls. The other bed had been taken apart and stacked on the floor under its mate.

In the center of the room a long table, or work-bench, had been built. It was made of light boards, in short lengths pieced together, and included a rack in which were ranged a great many fine steel tools; files, knives, bits, pincers, and so forth. At one end was a machine, resembling a power-driven lathe; small, but beautifully made. At the other was a four-foot section of light shafting supporting a number of wheels and pulleys; this looked like a small scale reproduction of the apparatus used in modern shoe repair shops for buffing and polishing.

Over the work bench hung two drop-lights holding large bulbs. These were not connected with the central light fixture, but were supplied by a heavy cord that led to a different floor plug. A separate insulated cable led to the two compact electric motors, under the bench, which were there to drive the machinery.

Tommy's glance continued around the room. Lying helter-skelter on the bed and the floor were half a dozen trunks, some empty, some still containing tools, sections of lumber, coils of wire. The G-man peered into one. It was neatly packed with many bottles and jars that looked as if they might hold chemicals. The other trunks were empty. Apparently all of this equipment had come on board in those trunks, and had been set up since the voyage started. The process of setting up was evidently not yet finished.

Tommy stared in growing amazement. What could be the possible motive for transforming a ship's cabin into such a workshop? Then suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, it struck him.

This was no ordinary machinist's work-bench—this was a lapidary's shop, complete to the last item! Those delicate tools, those tiny tongs, those graduated buffing wheels; those were what the lapidaries used to cut, grind, and polish precious stones! Their presence here could mean but one thing—the Key of Vashnu was aboard the *Munalbo*!

What was it Inspector Harrison had said? "That ruby is its own best guardian . . . A stone of that size and quality has no duplicates; it would be recognized immediately, in any jewel market."

That was it! They were going to cut it up, transform the Key of Vashnu into a number of smaller stones! Its unique value as one of the largest rubies in the world would be destroyed. But the cash value of the resulting jewels, themselves far from small, would be tremendous. And they could then be easily and safely disposed of; to trace them back to the original Key of Vashnu would be utterly impossible.

Tommy tingled with excitement at the impact of his discovery. The missing relic, then, must be on board the *Munalbo*; was perhaps hidden in this very room. But even in his excitement the G-man realized that it would

be foolish for him to start hunting it alone. There were at least four men in the plot, and they were all in the next cabin. If they discovered him before he found it, he would never leave that room alive. No, the best plan was to get out now and return in force. He was quite certain that the cutting had not yet commenced because obviously the workshop was not completely set up. And there was no way in which the jewel, or its illegal possessors, could leave the ship in mid-ocean. Therefore, he would have plenty of time.

He turned and reached for the table lamp. His fingers flicked the switch and the light went out. He straightened up, and as he turned the thing he had wanted to avoid, happened. His hand, leaving the lamp, caught in a loop of the wire. With a loud crash the lamp and table overturned on the floor.

THE G-man sprang for the door. The room was pitch dark again now. In his excitement Tommy became momentarily confused, and the ship, rolling in the smooth swells of the Gulf Stream, pitched him off balance. When he got to his feet again he could not find the door. His fingers slid along smooth wall, came into contact with a piece of furniture. It must be the other way. His pressing haste made him doubly awkward; his hands scrambled desperately for the wainscoting. He found a vertical edge, followed it downward. Just as his fingers closed on the knob, a voice behind him said sharply, "Hold it!"

Tommy's head jerked round. A shaft of light coming through another door on his left—the door that joined this cabin with the sitting-room — fell squarely on him. In that doorway, advancing slowly, was a man. He was partially bald and seemed to be wearing a green dressing gown. In his hand he held an automatic.

Tommy remembered suddenly that the ship's partitions were made of steel plate.

He jerked the doorknob. The door opened and he sprang out into the corridor. No revolver barked behind him; perhaps the man in the bathrobe remembered that steel plate, too. Tommy whirled left and dashed along the corridor. And just before he reached the cross passage by the smoking room he ran head-on into someone who came abruptly around the corner.

The G-man looked up, and the blood froze in his veins. The face that glared mockingly at him was that of the man of the plaid cap! He must have leaped out through the door of Cabin 40, and hastened around this way to cut off Tommy's escape.

Tommy tried to duck around him. The big man's arm shot out and his hairy fist crashed against Tommy's jaw. It was a crushing blow. It cut off Tommy's cry for help, forming in his throat, and sent him reeling ten feet back down the corridor. But it did not knock him out.

Shaking his head to clear it, Tommy steadied himself against the wall. He could give it as well as take it. That bird was a big bruiser, but that meant that he would probably be clumsy. Tommy had more than once knocked down men bigger than the one who now came toward him threateningly. So the G-man crouched low, clenching his fists, awaiting the attack. So intent was he upon the fight before him, that he did not hear the door open behind him, nor the footsteps of the man who came up behind him. The hand that held the automatic rose and fell in one swift, decisive motion. Without a sound Tommy slumped against the wall and pitched to the floor.

"Pull him inside quickly, Jake," ordered the bald-headed man in the green bathrobe who had knocked the G-man out.

One muscular hand accomplished that quickly.

"Is anybody in the corridor?"

The man called Jake glanced in both directions. "No," he said.

"O. K. Shut that door, then, and lock it."

## CHAPTER XI

### G-77 Follows An Air Trail

**I**N F. B. I. headquarters in New York Lynn Vickers fidgeted uneasily in a swivel chair. The droplight over the desk where he sat was the only one lighted in the big room. Its slanting cone of illumination threw his rugged features into bold relief. He looked worried; and in truth he had cause. It was nearly four o'clock in the morning, more than fifteen hours since he had started Tommy Dewart off on the trail of the key numbered 421. Yet in all that time Tommy had turned in no report. Not a word, either of success or failure.

Vickers picked up the phone and asked for a number.

"Police headquarters? Inspector Harrison there?" he said finally.

"I was just going home, Vickers," said the inspector wearily. "We couldn't turn up a single lead in Shauer's office, and I'm convinced that clerk is as stupid as he acts."

"Have you heard anything from Dewart?" Vickers asked.

"No. He wouldn't call in here, would he?"

"I don't know. But he hasn't reported here, either. I've got to get some sleep myself. But listen: leave word with your switchboard that if Tommy Dewart phones in to transfer the call to me at the Madison, will you?"

No call woke him that night, however, and no word came from Tommy all the next day. It was six in the evening when a radiogram was handed to Vickers, which he tore open casually.

NO LUCK WITH KEY 421. SPOTTED MUSEUM GIRL ON MUNALBO, SO TOOK PASSAGE MYSELF ON A HUNCH. BOUND FOR RIO, SANTOS, MONTEVIDEO, BUENOS AIRES. WILL ADVISE DEVELOPMENTS. TOMMY.

He was relieved, and at the same time astonished, though his astonishment was short-lived. In this kind of work a man had to be prepared to take instantaneous action without warning, and see others do the same. Apparently Tommy had thought fast.

Vickers sat down and wrote out a reply, instructing Tommy Dewart to keep his eyes open, use code for any important messages, and to radio the main office in Washington if he found it advisable to have police meet the ship at Rio de Janeiro. He signed the message simply, Lynn Vickers.

He had no sooner handed it to a boy than his phone rang.

"Vickers?" said Inspector Harrison's voice. "Look here, we've been checking roughly on terminals and airports, you know. Well, this afternoon a couple of planes pulled out of Glenn Curtis airport, at North Beach. Our man there saw nothing suspicious about them at the time, and let them go. Big Ford monoplanes, they were, with all seats filled. They had been there about ten days, and the same crowd left in them that came in them. A group of British coffee-planters from Brazil, they said they were, up here on a goodwill and business trip. They had English accents, all right, but just on a devil's guess I phoned the president of the coffee exchange, down on Pearl Street. He tells me this is the busy season down in the coffee country, and that he doesn't know of a single Brazilian planter in the United States at this time, let alone a delegation of a couple of dozen."

"Where's the connection with our job?" asked Vickers sharply.

"I don't know. I can't see any connection—yet. Probably there is none. But I'm overlooking no bets. I'm sending out a short-wave broadcast to all airports as far south as Miami to detain those two planes, if and when they land. There's something phoney about that explanation, and we'd better find out what it is."



*At the very moment Vickers launched himself into space, the boat surged away from the side of the ship. (Page 77).*



"Right," said Vickers. "Let me know if they're reported."

He hung up the receiver and considered this last clue. Two planes, more than a score of men . . . a bodyguard for the Key of Vashnu? No, that notion seemed fantastic to him. If that was the gang who had stolen the treasure, why hadn't they departed immediately after, instead of waiting several days for the hue and cry to reach full blast? Furthermore, he had never heard of jewel thieves traveling in such large mobs. Their own safety made such numbers unwise, and well they knew it.

Yet the more he pondered, the better the clue seemed. Every other clue seemed to point south. The lottery ticket came from Cuba. G-77 was convinced by now that the attack in the park had been a preliminary move to the major crime. Tommy Dewart had found a suspected accomplice on a ship headed for South America. And now two planes full of Brazilian coffee merchants. It struck him that a native of India might easily pass for a Brazilian, and the planes had last been seen headed south over New Jersey.

He sprang to his feet. It was really instinct more than reason. But in detective work a man develops a subtle sixth sense that is often more reliable than a mass of misleading facts. He felt that New York was dead. Every single lead had been run into the ground; nothing new was going to develop here. He did not know where the Key of Vashnu was, but he was certain it was no longer in New York. He must move.

G-77 made four hurried telephone calls; one to the Munson Line, one to Inspector Harrison, one to Evelyn March in Union Hospital and one to Washington. Then he taxied to Newark airport to hop a late plane flying south. When he arrived at the field the chief met him in person.

"Those two Ford-Stouts have just been reported from Carabon, Georgia. A small emergency landing field there,

with only one attendant on duty. He tried to hold them, but they tied him up, filled their own tanks, and flew away. He kicked himself loose and phoned in here, not fifteen minutes ago. Said they headed southeast."

After that there was no question of using the regular air lines. Vickers chartered a special plane, got hold of Bert Pyne, the ex-army pilot who had flown him several times before, and set off. The plane was a fast two-scater, and Pyne knew the country like the palm of his hand. It was several hours after daybreak before they dropped their wheels at Carabon, Georgia.

The night attendant had been relieved, and it took an hour to reach him at his home and listen to his story first hand. The details checked; the men had spoken only English in his presence, but they had a foreign look, and acted grimly business-like. The big planes had both been equipped with radio; thus the occupants had doubtless listened to the police short-wave broadcast, and were on their guard. Else why had they chosen a lonely little drome like Carabon for refueling?

**VICKERS** and Pyne hastily took off and flew south. The G-man did not expect to find that the Ford-Stout planes had landed at Miami, but he did hope for news of them. At first, however, he was disappointed. No Ford-Stout monoplanes had been reported anywhere in Florida for weeks.

But after considerable anxious telephoning, he got a clue from Fort Pierce, a hundred miles north. Early that morning two planes, flying too high to be recognized, had been seen some distance off shore. They had appeared to be heading roughly south-southeast.

"The devil," muttered G-77. "That wouldn't take them to Havana. But wait—maybe they're just keeping over the water to avoid being spotted, and plan on swinging around the keys." He turned to his pilot. "Think we can make Havana before dark?"

"If we can't," grinned Pyne, "they say the water in these parts is nice and warm. The Gulf Stream, you know."

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## CHAPTER XII

### The Disappearing Men

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THE lights of Havana were just going on as the two-seater glided overhead and settled to a landing on the city airport. But here Vickers met another disappointment. The trail seemed to end completely. No two planes such as he described had landed there, and a quick check by telephone of the few fields on the island turned up no trace of them. He seemed to be up against a blank wall.

Two days passed, and three, and four. Days of nerve-racking inactivity for Vickers. The chief of the Havana police, as he had expected, told him that without the number the clue of the lottery ticket was worthless. There were literally tens of thousands of buyers, of whom only the winners would eventually become known. The drawing was not to take place for another ten days.

Vickers kept in daily touch with the chief in Washington, who in turn had spread a net over the entire Caribbean and the northern half of South America. This net caught nothing, however; those two planes, after leaving Carabon and passing Fort Pierce, seemed to have dropped out of sight. Furthermore, to Vickers' puzzlement, no more word had been received from Tommy Dewart on board the *Munalbo*.

It was noon of the twentieth when the first lead turned up. It was the supply clerk at the airport who furnished it.

"We had a telegram from the Santiago airport this morning," he told Vickers, "ordering six gas filters, part number C-6802 for a Whirlwright motor, series of 1929. Now that's the type of motor used in the Ford-Stout. You'll find it in some other ships, too, of course, but not many three-motored jobs. And it seems unlikely that six

single-motored ships, if there are that many in Cuba, would need to replace their gas filters at the same time. I wondered if—"

"Did you say Santiago?" snapped Vickers.

"Yes. They asked us to send them air express."

"Wrap them up and give them to me," commanded G-77, waving to Bert Pyne. "I'll be the expressman."

It was nearly five hundred miles to Santiago, which was almost at the eastern end of the island, and it was after three o'clock before G-77 was questioning the manager there.

No, they had seen no Ford three-motored planes. The customer who wanted the gas filters had simply walked into the hangar the day before, having apparently come out from the city by trolley. He had paid the full list price, cash in advance, and had directed that they be held until he returned for them. He had given his name as Santana.

"What other airports are there, near here?" G-77 asked.

"Very few. The U. S. Navy field at Guantanamo Bay. A small drome at Manzanillo, a hundred miles west. No other commercial airports this side of Camaguey. But the back country is full of sugar plantations; there's plenty of open fields where a ship could land."

Leaving the package of parts, with orders that anyone who called for them was to be seized and held, Vickers and Pyne again took the air in the two-seater.

Swinging in wide circles, each time a little deeper inland, they were hardly twenty miles from Santiago when Vickers rapped the pilot's shoulder.

"Look there! In that field back of the hill!" he yelled.

The two tapered-wing planes were easily seen, but would have been noticed only by someone definitely looking for them. They stood side by side, close up against the heavily wooded hillside.

"Get your revolver handy, Bert!" warned G-77.

The pilot nodded, and executed a swift gliding turn. The two-seater dipped, touched the earth, and rolled to a stop with idling motor. Very tense, the two leaped out, guns in hand.

But ten minutes later their tension had evaporated, and they were staring at each other in amazement. Not a living soul could they find. The two ships stood there, apparently in good order. Nearby was a long shed, used for storage of sugar cane in season. Here were signs of recent occupancy; dead campfires, brush piled for bedding, and many cases of canned foods. But not a human being in sight.

"They've been here," exclaimed Vickers. "This is the hideaway for the planes. But they've gone. Where? Santiago, of course. I wonder why? Well, they won't leave as easily as they came, anyway."

He went from one motor to another, removing each distributor head, handing them to Bert Pyne.

"We'll send back a squad to guard this spot," he told Pyne. "In the meantime, fly low and stick close to the road on the way into Santiago."

THEY retraced that twenty miles, however, without seeing any sign of a car on the road below that looked interesting. G-77's first move on reaching the city was to inquire at all public garages. Within half an hour he found a garage that had rented three large open cars to strangers the day before. Fifteen minutes later the police had the numbers of those cars, with orders to stop them on sight.

Vickers sat in police headquarters, waiting restlessly for the trap to spring. But it was after dark before the report came in. A corporal telephoned from a sentry-box; he had come across all three automobiles, parked behind a warehouse down near the waterfront. At once Vickers was on his way in the chief's personal roadster.

Staring into the unlighted cul-de-sac at the three empty, silent cars, Vickers

had a strange sense of frustration. Again he was too late, just as he had been too late at the field that afternoon. Here was the trail, but where was the quarry? Would they return? When? It was impossible to guess. But he arranged a little force of armed police in hiding, and again sat down to wait in the mouth of an alley.

An hour passed, two hours, four hours. The ambushed guards were growing restless; talking, lighting cigarettes. He cautioned them sharply, though hardly able to contain his own impatience.

It was after midnight. The city, especially this section of it, was going to sleep. Street noises were dying out, lights were being extinguished. The only activity seemed to be on the big roofed quai, a hundred yards farther up the shore.

More to stretch his tense muscles than anything else, Vickers rose and strolled that way, ready to hasten back at a sound. A steam lighter lay alongside the pier, loading freight; on the dock itself a number of men were busy amid a clutter of crates and bales. At the gate a guard stopped him, but answered his questions willingly.

A steamer was expected about day-break, to pick up freight only; no passengers. The lighter would meet her out in the harbor. There was quite a large shipment of agricultural machinery going to South America; these men were finishing crating it before loading. It had been booked at the last minute. The name of the steamer? Why, yes—the *Munalbo*.

An electric shock ran along Vickers' nerves at that name. Tommy Dewart was on the *Munalbo*! And so was the mystery girl! Without betraying too much eagerness, he crossed the watchman's palm with a ten peso note and moved out onto the pier. Keeping out of sight behind the heaps of boxes, G-77 drew near the cleared space under the lights where the workmen were busy, and paused to watch them.

There were many pieces of what looked like second-hand equipment; pumps, tractors, threshers, and miscellaneous mill machinery. They were all partially crated, having been left exposed on one side, perhaps for last minute inspection. The men were now nailing them up.

It was the men who interested him most. They were all tanned, but not as dark as the average Cuban native, and their features were not at all negroid in cast. Although they worked in undershirts and pants, their clothes seemed of good quality, better than a stevedore's. They talked very little to each other, and then in some foreign language which G-77 was certain was not Spanish. And then as he watched, Vickers became conscious of a change in their numbers.

There did not seem to be as many dark men on the dock as there had been a short time before! And yet he had not seen any of them leave! He looked again. Surely there had been twenty when he first came on the pier. Now he could only count eleven. Yet he was positive that none of them had passed him, going toward the gate. What had happened to the ones he missed?

Suddenly he saw, and amazement froze him. All the men were grouped about one large packing-case, ten feet square. The last few planks were being made ready. But while there still remained an eighteen-inch opening, he saw one man toss into it a bundle. Then the man himself stepped inside, his companions slammed the last two boards in place, and spiked them fast!

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### CHAPTER XIII

#### A Fight in the Dark

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**H**OW they discovered they were being watched G-77 could not guess. But a few moments later they moved away, scattering toward both sides of the pier, their faces impassive, betraying nothing. Before he

realized it, they were behind him, between him and the gate, and were closing in from both sides, still in complete silence. A footstep sounded, not ten feet in back of where he crouched. He moved quickly around a bale, and met two of them face to face.

"*Al rangpo Vickers!*" the one nearest the G-man yelled.

The others rushed in then, armed with hammers, crowbars, or wicked bale-hooks. The nearest lunged at him savagely.

Vickers had no time to reach for the gun in his pocket, and it would have done him little good against ten men. He ducked the first attack, and flung himself sideways. His shoulder crashed into the chest of one man, diverting a vicious swipe with a hook that would have disemboweled him. As he rebounded, a descending hammer grazed his arm. His fist stopped one assailant cold, but two more leaped at him, in a terrible, grim silence.

With every avenue of escape blocked, the G-man seemed lost. Then he whirled, crouched, and sprang straight up. Scrambling with fingers and toes, he hauled himself to the top of the pile of bales, fifteen feet off the floor. Like a jackrabbit he began leaping from one pile to the next, while his attackers followed below.

Unfortunately he was forced to go toward the outer end of the pier, and there was no turning back. A short distance farther and the stacks of merchandise in the middle came to an end. Beyond lay only level flooring, and then the open sea. A low growl came from his pursuers.

Vickers doubled back sharply, toward one side. Then he leaped down, smashed the first man out of his way, and darted past a heap of big bales. In another moment he was out on the stringpiece, running along the very edge of the dock. It was quite dark here; a wall of crates cut off the light, and cut off his return to the center of the pier as well. On his other hand lay the

water, ten feet below, heaving against the piling with a dismal sucking sound.

He could hear the footsteps of those behind him. Ahead of him, where the next aisle opened, appeared others. He was trapped. The only escape seemed to be a leap into the sea, where just then the triangular fin of a man-eating shark flashed a trail in the dark.

Some heavy object blocked his way. It seemed to be a broken pulley from an old winch, of cast iron, nearly three feet in diameter. Just behind it was a mere crevice in the wall of crates. Quickly G-77 put his shoulder to the discarded wheel. It toppled slowly to one side, and then fell into the water with a loud splash. At the same moment he himself slipped into the narrow crack between the stacks of boxes.

His pursuers came running from both directions. They stood in a group there, staring down at the swirling waters where something had just sunk below the surface. One said something about sharks, and laughed grimly.

But Vickers was not listening to their remarks. He was worming his way through that twisting crevice, back toward the open space in the middle of the pier. When he reached it, he glanced cautiously about under the feeble glow of the lights. No one was in sight; they had all followed the trail of his pursuit. He darted out, and ran for the spot where the others had shortly before been working. He chose a big case, nearly ten feet square, which was not yet closed.

Gliding in through the opening, he found that it held some sort of threshing machine. There was a big hopper which suited his purpose precisely. He drew himself up, and dropped down inside, where he lay still.

A few minutes later Vickers heard the gang of pseudo-stevedores return to their jobs. Talking in undertones, they nailed up the case next to his. Then they moved nearer—to the side of the case he was in. Peering through a half-inch bolt hole, Vickers saw one of the

men toss his coat, shirt, and hat into the case he was in. Then the man stepped inside, crowding himself into a small space under the overhang of the hopper. The remaining planks were thrust into place, the spikes driven home.

AN hour later he heard the hiss of steam, shouts in Spanish, and the creak of a heavy derrick. The freight was being transferred to the lighter. The box in which he lay hidden, being one of the largest, was among the first to be hoisted aboard.

Another hour, and the lighter was moving away from the dock. The G-man could hear the muffled throb of its engines, and a little later felt the surge of the swells as it steamed out into the open harbor. The swells became larger, and the lighter began to roll. Cramped in the hopper, Vickers lost balance, and reached up with one hand to steady himself. Grasping for the edge, his hand came down squarely on top of another hand, there for the same purpose.

He snatched his fingers away, but the damage was done. For a long moment there was not a sound in that dense blackness. Then a voice said something in a strange language. Vickers uttered no sound. The voice spoke again, in English.

"Who are you?" it said tensely.

"You might as well take it easy," warned Vickers. "You thought I fell off the dock, but I didn't. We're both in here, and we can't get out. I've got a gun, so there's no use in—"

He was rudely interrupted by a splintering smack, near his head. He recoiled abruptly, but his hand shot out toward the sound. He touched a wrist, seized it. It was trying to draw back, at first unsuccessfully, because the knife it held was buried in the wooden side of the hopper. By the time the knife jerked free, G-77 had a firm grip.

For several minutes the two invisible fighters heaved and strained. Neither could gain an advantage. Vickers would have been willing to call a truce until



such time as the case was opened. But the savage desperation of his opponent, his panted curses in a foreign tongue, left no doubt of his intentions.

The lighter rolled heavily to a sea, and Vickers threw all his weight forward. He forced the wrist that held the knife back across the hopper, and by exerting all his strength pushed it farther and farther away from him. He could see nothing, but could hear the throaty gasps of his unseen foe, struggling in opposition. Vickers lifted himself as far as the top and side of the crate would let him go, and thrust furiously against that tense wrist.

It gave ground beneath his merciless pressure. Then came a strangled, choking sob; a horrible, retching cry of despair. The forearm relaxed suddenly and completely in his grasp. He felt a spurt of something warm and wet on the back of his own hand.

For a long time Vickers crouched motionless. The wrist, to which he still clung, was slack and lifeless. Though he strained his ears to listen, he could hear no sound of breathing.

Some time later Vickers felt the crate hoisted bodily into the air, and knew that it was being loaded, with the others, into the hold of a steamer lying in the harbor.

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#### CHAPTER XIV

##### Strange Rescue

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THE first thing returning consciousness brought to Tommy Dewart was thought of the man in the green bathrobe. Opening his eyes, he saw at once that same green robe. The bald-headed man was seated at a desk writing, and his face, in repose, was a harsh, cruel mask.

Tommy glanced about him. He was seated in a chair, his elbows and ankles firmly shackled to the rungs. This was evidently the sitting-room of the suite. It was tastefully furnished with upholstered chairs, a couch, floor lamps, and

a dark rug. Pictures hung on the walls, and at one end a false mantel gave a homey touch. On the mantel stood an unglazed china vase with a broad base and a narrow throat, in which drooped a handful of artificial flowers. They struck the G-man as incongruous.

Besides the man at the desk, there were three others in the room. One was the big bruiser, Jake. The other two he had never seen before. Both were slight; one with a broad, placid face and sandy hair, the other with sharp features and beady black eyes that kept darting to Tommy's face and then shifting toward the desk uneasily.

The man at the desk finished what he was writing, and rose.

"There, that will do," he said in a voice as soft as butter. He turned to Tommy with a sheet of paper in his hand. "We wouldn't want the captain to miss you when you leave. So you're going to write him a little note, copying these words exactly. We'll see that it is found in your stateroom, tomorrow."

"I don't feel like writing," said Tommy stubbornly.

The man in the bathrobe shrugged. "Put the silencer on my rod, Jake," he ordered coolly.

Tommy thought fast. "Let's see that note," he asked thickly.

It read: *Sudden developments call me ashore at Santiago. Going in on the lighter. Will probably not return. Thanks for your help.*

"Santiago?" said Tommy. "We're nowhere near Santiago, are we?"

"What a smart detective," taunted the other. "Didn't know the *Munalbo* is touching at Santiago, eh? It wasn't advertised in the schedules, because no passengers are dropped or taken on there. Only freight. But of course a passenger like yourself," he continued with an icy smile, "could be expected to do the unexpected. I don't imagine the captain will be greatly surprised at anything a G-man might do. Well?"

Tommy had little choice, but he decided to stall for time.

"Give me the pen," he said.

They pulled a table up close, so that he could write without freeing his elbow. The bald man watched every word over his shoulder.

"Fair enough," he said when Tommy had finished. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He moved the table away. He lighted a cigar. Then without the least display of emotion he turned to the other three and began a discussion of how they should kill their captive.

Tommy listened, trying frantically to think of some way out. Those fiends had intended all the while to kill him. They had never had any intention of putting him ashore at Santiago. The note was only a blind to help cover their crime.

"Okay, Fleming," said Jake, finally, flexing the muscles of his huge hands. "Shall I polish him off now?"

"Not yet," snapped the leader. "I'll tell you when I'm ready. We'll wait till we've left Santiago behind; then his body won't be found floating in the harbor, to arouse curiosity, see?"

Through rigid lips Tommy spoke. "You can't get away with it," he said. "I've friends aboard. They'll miss me."

"If you're thinking about your lady friend," said Fleming with a nasty leer, "you're dumber than I thought. She's the last woman within a thousand miles to help a G-man."

Tommy didn't know what he meant by that, but he didn't ask. He was depressed enough already. He had faced death before, and threats of death. But there was something about the calm, unemotional manner in which these men discussed his murder that made it seem a foregone conclusion. They actually looked at him as if he were already a corpse, cluttering up their room. He could sense no ray of hope. If Lallah had no intention of helping him, certainly no one else would. No one else on the *Munalbo* would even notice his absence until after the note in his own

handwriting had explained it. His body would never be found.

And then, when all seemed lost, the G-man received proof that someone was aware of his position—someone from the outside knew he was a prisoner in that cabin!

Jake carried him, chair and all, into the bedroom, Cabin 41, and set the door ajar, warning him not to utter a sound. Then they called to a steward and ordered dinner sent up. Half an hour later a waiter arrived with a loaded tray. He cleared a table, and began setting places. Tommy was suddenly on the alert. Fleming had spoken, and his words struck a chord of warning in the G-man's agile mind.

"What the hell is this?" the voice from the other room snapped. "Why dinner for five?"

"Didn't you order for five, sir?" asked the waiter in surprise.

"Hell, no! You know damned well there are only four of us. You've been bringing food for four every day, haven't you?"

"I understood that you had a guest for dinner, sir. My mistake, sir."

An abrupt silence fell on the room, which lasted until the waiter had finished and gone. Then the four occupants cursed each other, and fate, in savage undertones, while Tommy's heart leaped. He saw the significance of that little incident as well as they. Whoever gave the waiter that instruction about five dinners knew he was here, and wanted that knowledge conveyed to him as well as to his captors. To him it was encouragement, to them it was a veiled threat. "Kill him," it warned, in effect, "and your crime will be exposed."

"It's that blasted woman," grated Fleming through clenched teeth. "I should think she'd want him out of the way; she must be crazy. But it couldn't be anyone else. She's got to be rubbed out, I tell you."

For some time they conferred in low tones. Then they ate the dinner, with-

out bringing any in to Tommy. As soon as the waiter had taken away the tray, three of them prepared to leave the suite.

"Don't come back until she's dead," Fleming told them harshly. "I won't open this door to anyone but you. Knock like this . . ." Raising his hand, he knocked on the inside of the door, twice, once, and once.

Then three of the men left the cabin. Fleming turned the bolt behind them.

The minutes dragged. Tommy slumped in his chair, waiting tensely for what would happen next. Fleming paced the floor nervously.

Suddenly there came two raps on the outer door. They were followed by one, then a pause, then one more. Fleming let out an exclamation of satisfaction, jumped to the door, and threw it open.

And in walked Lallah with an automatic in her hand!

"Back up!" she ordered curtly, shutting the door behind her. "And keep your hands high . . . Where is he?"

Fleming leaned back against the mantel, his eyes glittering.

"How did you know that knock?" he snapped.

"I heard you demonstrate it a few minutes ago quite plainly, from that smoking room window across the passage." She was laughing at him. Tommy called to her then.

Fleming glared at her as she moved across the cabin towards the G-man. But the automatic never wavered. Without taking her eyes from his face, she leaned over and lifted the hem of her skirt. The next moment a small blade flashed in her hand. It was the work of a few seconds to slash Tommy's bonds.

"We're leaving before your friends re-

*(Continued on page 103)*

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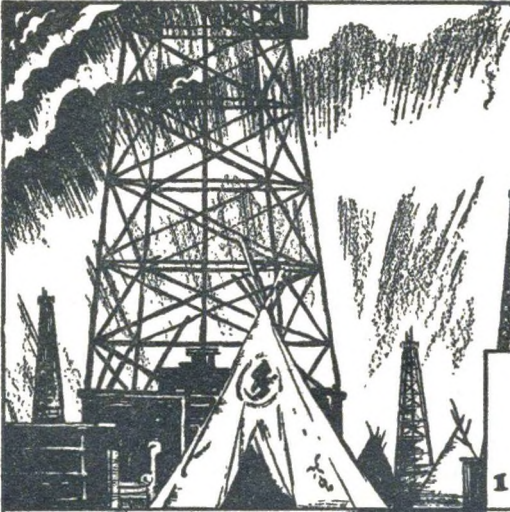
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# INDIAN MASSACRE

A TRUE G-MAN FEATURE



1 The Osage Indians are among the richest people in the world since oil was discovered on their barren reservation. After living for centuries in squalor and poverty, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by tall gushing derricks.



2 But with the great wealth it brought, the gushing oil also introduced violent death and terror to the Osages. The Indians took to whisky, carousing and reckless spending of their new-found wealth. The quiet reservation became a scene of mad orgies, with long-haired, blanket-clad Indians careening about in \$10,000 automobiles.



3 It was during this period that a murder syndicate began the series of twenty-four murders that was to bring the G-men to the reservation. The first of the rich Indians to die was Henry Roan, a six foot, full-blooded Osage whose only vice was whisky—and whose dead body was found in a car at the bottom of a canyon.



4 There followed other deaths among the wealthiest of the Indians. One of these victims was Anna Brown, plump and very wealthy Indian girl. She went riding with two of her admirers one night and one of them held her while the other shot her in the back of the head.



5 Other deaths followed through the succeeding years. But it was not until someone put a five gallon keg of nitroglycerine under the house of William E. "Bill" Smith, an Osage chief, and blew him and his family to bits, that the federal agents took a hand. Three G-men, disguised as a medicine man, an insurance salesman and a cowpuncher, arrived on the reservation and quietly began an investigation.





6 The agents soon became interested in the activities of William K. Hale, former Texan, and a white man who had for years been a power among the Osages. They also became interested in the movements of Ernest Burkhart, Hale's nephew. They soon learned that Hale employed notorious bad men of the West to work for him, and that he was teaching the younger Indians to drink.



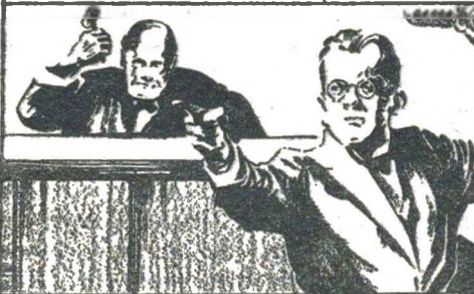
7 The G-men did not approach Hale, however, until three Indian girls and their immensely wealthy mother were murdered. Hale defied them when they questioned him concerning his business relations with the Osages.



8 But when they questioned Hale's nephew, Burkhart, they soon broke him down. He said finally, "Naw, I didn't do nothin' much. Just helped kill a few worthless Injuns." Hale had taken out insurance policies upon the Indians before killing them.



9 A bootlegger, John Ramsey, was hired by Hale to assist Burkhart in most of the killings. Usually, Burkhart said, they would get their victim drunk. Then they would call in a doctor who would pronounce the Indian intoxicated and inject a small dose of morphine to quiet him. After the doctor left the two killers would inject enough morphine into the unconscious Indian's armpit to kill him.



10 Four times Hale was tried for his life before he was finally convicted of the murder of Henry Roan and committed to life imprisonment in Leavenworth. Ramsey and Burkhart also got life for their part in the twenty-four murders.

11 After this murder syndicate had been rounded up by the G-men, the native Indian councilmen of the tribe met and gave thanks to the Great White Father in Washington who had rid them of the terror of violent death that had hung over them for so many years.







J. EDGAR HOOVER

# J. EDGAR HOOVER MAPS ANTI-CRIME CAMPAIGN

**The Director Of The F. B. I. Of The U. S. Department  
Of Justice Appeals To You As A Person Of Influence  
In Your Community To Help The G-Men—And In  
This Article He Tells You How You Can Do It**

**C**RIME has reached a pinnacle of appalling heights. It lives next door to us. It rubs elbows with us. Its blood-caked hands touch ours. A lackadaisical attitude now has resulted in a crisis.

No American home is free of this shadow. Aggravated robbery, theft, arson, rape, felonious assault or murder annually is visited upon one of every sixteen homes in America. Last year there was a minimum of 12,000 murders and an estimated total of 1,445,581 major crimes. Thus, one of every eighty-four persons in the United States was subjected to injury or death through the workings of this tremendous crime aggregate.

Beyond this there is a constant toll of the rackets. Here no home is exempt. The criminal toll is taken upon food and services, and actual physical violence includes the loss of life itself. The American home and every person in it is today in a state of siege.

Yet the insidiousness of crime is such that even though a greater danger exists we find that the average citizen reads his newspaper, sees the black headlines screaming the details of conditions which are as symptomatic in their way as the ravages of the most deadly disease that ever has swept this country, and practically nothing is done about it.

So I am telling you now that condi-

tions have reached a place where you can take your choice! You can rise up and fight. You can use some of the fortitude which is supposed to have been granted the American people through the courage which made this country the greatest independent nation of the world. You can gird yourself for a long and difficult fight upon armed forces of crime which number more than 3,000,000 active members, and by so doing you can set yourself free from the dominance of this underworld army. If you do not care to do this, then you can make up your mind to submit to what really amounts to an actual armed invasion of America.

Flooding to me every day in the disillusioning business of watching the criminal flood stream by, I see the reports of local officer after local officer; I hear the stories of probation supervisors, of persons engaged in the thankless job of trying to reconstruct the wreckage of American youth.

**I** FIND courts jammed with youthful defendants and equally crowded with parents and friends of those parents, determined only upon one course—that of getting their boy or girl, as they call it, “out of trouble.”

I find that they go to any length of political pressure, the pressure of friendship, to restore that boy or girl to the place where he or she really gained the criminal instincts, which was in the indulgence of the home . . . in the negligence of older persons who should have led them into upright paths . . . who, through mental laziness, allowed discipline to relax and their children to go into the world and reap the harvest which they, the parents, really sowed.

Until the criminally minded person, the extraordinarily selfish person, the highly egotistical person, the ultra-greedy person who wants what he wants and cares not how he gets it, can be taught the inexorable lesson that he cannot get away with violating the laws of

society without adequate punishment—until that day arrives, just so long will you have a constant menace of serious crime. Crime begins in America today in the cradle, and the greatest influence toward eradicating that sad condition is the hand which rocks the cradle.

However, while the citizen may look upon his crime only locally, the criminal views it from the standpoint of the entire United States. He knows where he can rob a bank and pay the slightest penalty. He knows where he can commit a murder and be eligible for clemency within a comparatively few years. He knows where courts are lax. He knows where prisons have, as criminals call it, “low walls that are easy to climb over.” He knows where local legislators, seemingly intent upon the protection of the innocent, have written technicality after technicality into the state statutes, until it is almost impossible to convict an enemy of society. The criminal knows where there are “fixers” who will guarantee freedom for the payment of a certain amount of money. He knows where there are politicians so eager for a criminal vote that they will gladly trade the safety of their community for it.

The criminal realizes all these highly important conditions because he is in the business of crime, and the only thing which can put him out of that business is for the American people to make it their business to combat crime and all of the filthy, stultifying influences which foster crime. Of those stultifying influences, may I say with utmost emphasis that the most important of all is rotten politics.

Here I ask you again as molders of public opinion, as persons of influence in your community, to dedicate yourselves to a never-ending campaign toward the divorcement of politics and law enforcement. There is no sane reason why a warden of a prison, a district attorney, a judge, a sheriff, a constable, a policeman or any other man who chases criminals should live in dan-

ger of the bull whip of political retaliation.

As long as immunity from punishment exists in this country, then just that long will you continue to pay your individual crime bill of \$120 a year. In these times when there is so much talk of taxes, why, I ask you, do you sit supine; why do you remain resistless against this draining force which not only takes your money away from you, but endangers your happiness, your homes and your lives?

I wish to express my gratitude to the fine and loyal law-enforcement officers of America who have given us their co-operation in Federal cases, and again it might be wise to ask in your home town why local officers can work so well when they are protected by the proximity of Federal officers and why so many strange influences seem to hamper their steps when the case is purely a local one.

Do not construe this as criticism upon your officers. They would be most happy to have this mystery solved and these strange forces lifted from them—forces, I might add, which are weighing them down, slowing their steps when they begin the pursuit of protected racketeers and protected crime. Crime in the aggregate cannot exist without either malfeasance or non-feasance in office. The fault is not that of the man on the job, but the fault of the man who owns that job, the man who can appoint a person to fill the job and likewise take that job away from him.

And is it not your duty to campaign relentlessly for better conditions in our juries, for more courage on the part of our citizens in testifying in criminal cases, and for greater insistence that the laws of our country are not only made more uniform but are made laws for the protection of America instead of laws for the protection of the criminals?

The home, the church and the school must be united upon a common pur-

pose. There is only one way to fight, and that is to get out on the battle line and do something. We must insist upon law-enforcement agencies which are unshackled, which can arrest a criminal and make that arrest stick, which are composed of men properly trained for the jobs they occupy. The time has definitely come when law-enforcement, in all its branches, must be built into a career. The time also has arrived when to select the right person for the right job, a sum of money commensurate with the brains needed shall be paid for that job.

**N**OW I come to the most important matter in our tangle of criminality—that of sentimentalism and clemency. You who sit on the sidelines often applaud when some hardened criminal, perhaps up for his fourth or fifth conviction, is severely lectured in court and given, we'll say, a fifteen-year sentence. You sit back, secure in your ignorance, believing that you will be safe for fifteen years from this menace to society.

But that sentence has been a legal falsehood. Through the utterly amazing workings of our convict-loving parole lawyers it is possible for that man to return to his life of crime in as short a time as twelve months! There have been actual cases where local judges have made political capital of the fact that they were sentencing men to long terms in prison, when in truth agreements had been made with defense attorneys whereby the sentencing jurist would sign a parole petition after a servitude of only one or two years. I state this so that you may make it your business to learn just what happens to the criminals who go through the courts in your communities and ascertain for yourself how much time they actually serve.

I hasten to add, however, that I am an active advocate of the principle of parole. I said the principle, not the present practices which exist in the administration of parole in many of our

states. Certainly every possible endeavor should be made to rehabilitate the person who has offended for the first time against our laws. Crime cannot be cured by inhumanity. A casualty of crime cannot be remolded into a worthy member of society by a punishment which leaves him embittered. The first offender should be charged as a first offender, with a commensurate sentence, with commensurate efforts to restore him to the place he lost in society.

But who is the first offender? It happens that in the perplexity of our laws, in the mass of technical barricades thrown up by lawyer legislators either directly concerned with the defense of criminals or associated with those who make their living by defense of criminals, it is almost an impossibility

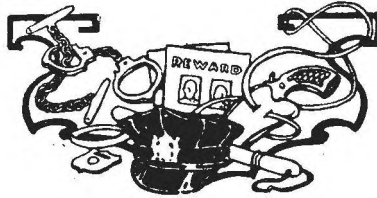
to define the first offender from the old and hardened criminal.

As for the rotten practices of the fine theory of parole, I have said before, and I say again, that it is a national disgrace. Hardened criminals are being turned forth in many of our states under a multiplicity of laws which is utterly astounding.

Until recently, the matter of parole has been the domain of the sentimentalist and the sob sister. It is easy to weep over the fact that a man has been placed behind bars. It is not so easy to remember the mangled, shapeless, horribly sprawled form of a murdered victim upon the floor, beaten to death by the muscular hands of this very same criminal.

Until this attitude is changed, America remains in grave danger.

*This message from America's No. 1 G-man, is from a sensational speech which he made recently in New York City.*



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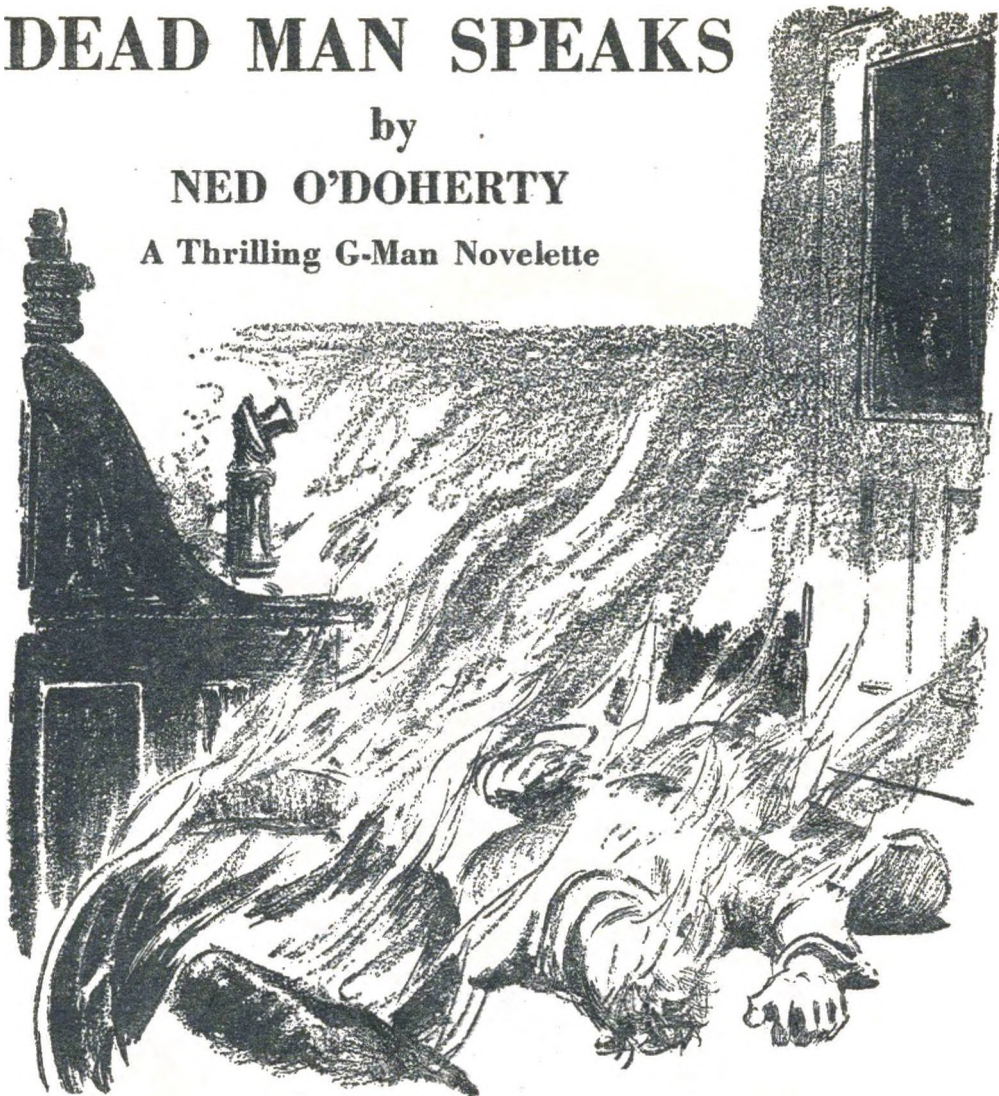


# DEAD MAN SPEAKS

by

NED O'DOHERTY

A Thrilling G-Man Novelette



**A Pretty Girl's Photograph, Lying On A Horribly Blackened Corpse, Gave Customs Inspectors Lamont And Sullivan A False Lead To Murder—But In The End The Macabre Clue Smashed A Rats' Nest Of Kill-Crazy Dealers In Dope!**

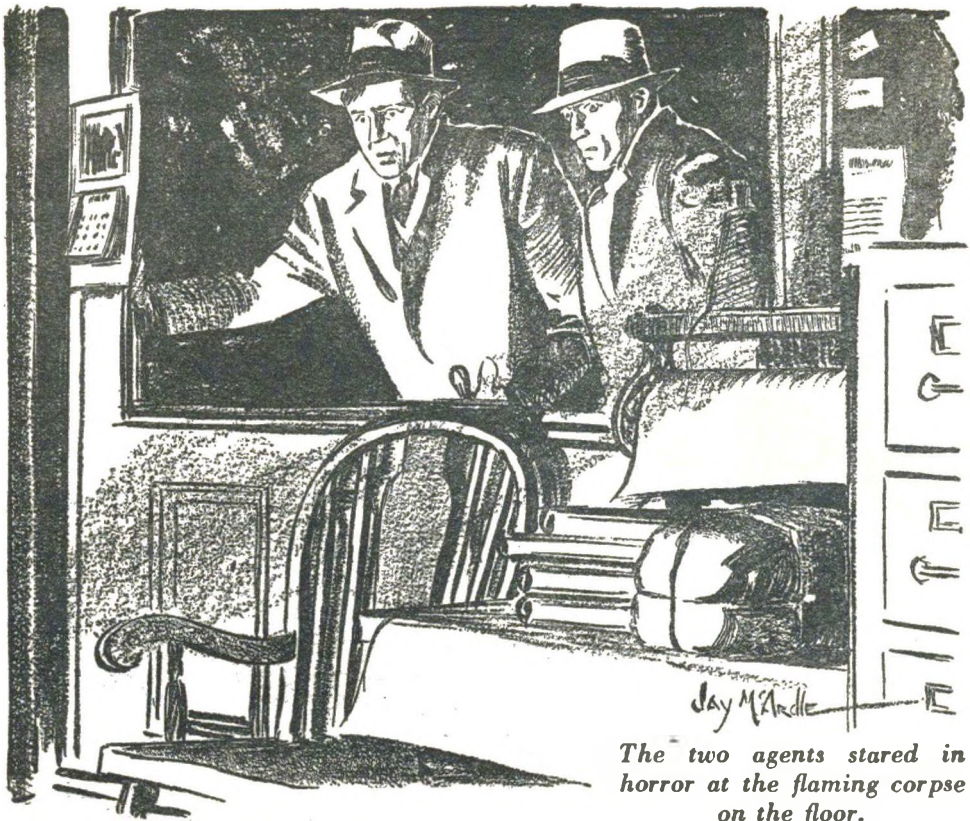
**J**ACK LAMONT, special agent in the U. S. Customs Service, jammed his foot against the accelerator, and the car did a good forty through the narrow street. Half way to the next corner, he shifted his foot quickly, hitting the brake hard. The tires screamed angrily as they fought to grip the pavement, and the car jerked to a sudden stop.

Pete Sullivan shot forward in his seat, banging his head against the windshield.

"What the hell!" he exploded, then, as the car reversed fast, had all he could do to save himself from another head bashing.

The car went in close to the curb and stopped. Sullivan, with hat flattened on his head, had himself braced for the next jolt. Lamont grinned, nodded





*The two agents stared in horror at the flaming corpse on the floor.*

sidewise at a low, brick building, said: "See that, Pete? I knew damn well there was something wrong."

Sullivan glanced at the dismal structure, then back at his companion. One heavy eyebrow went up skeptically.

"You been hitting the bottle?" he demanded. "Or are you just gassed from those filthy bales of rags we've been probing?"

Lamont swung open the door without answering and stepped out upon the walk. He rested one foot upon the running-board and studied the building.

He was a tall, thin man in his early thirties, dressed in a neat blue suit, with a slouch hat turned down over his eyes. His face was boyish, dark, and stamped with alert intelligence. He had seen something now, but seemed in no hurry to do anything about it.

Sullivan grumbled incoherently, eased his two hundred and ten pounds of body out of the car and came round to stand beside Lamont.

The building before which they stood was of the small warehouse type, similar to the many others that lined this dirty, waterfront street. A rickety platform ran the length of the place with a space cut out for some steps which led up to a narrow door. To the left of this was a large double door, heavily padlocked. With nightfall business activity had ceased for the day and the street was deserted. A street light swinging nearby cast furtive shadows upon the pavement.

Sullivan, who had appeared completely disinterested, suddenly straightened and pointed to a crack beneath the narrow door.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Isn't that smoke coming out of there?"

"It's the same smoke that has been coming out of there for the past five minutes," Lamont cracked, and ran up the stairs. He tried the knob, felt it turn in his hand and pushed hard against the door. It flew in with a bang.

A CLOUD of black smoke burst out, blinding the agents, driving them back. After that it cleared somewhat and they pushed forward. A flashlight in Sullivan's hand showed huge bales piled four high, utilizing all available space. A narrow lane between the bales led to the rear of the building. At the end of this passage, bright flames were rising high in the air, licking hungrily at the ceiling.

Lamont led the way down the passage, stopping just before he reached a glass-partitioned office. Sullivan took a quick glance, saw that the interior of the office was a raging inferno and started back. The other grabbed his arm, swinging him round. For a moment, he held the man thus, then, as a large pane of glass cracked and crashed to the floor at their feet, he pointed through the opening.

"On the floor!" he shouted above the roar of the flames. "On the floor, Pete! Look!"

Shielding his eyes with his hands, Sullivan followed the other's pointed finger. As he looked, his eyes grew larger in his head, and his mouth fell open. "My God!" he groaned. "It's a man!"

Stretched on his back in the center of the office floor lay the burning remains of what was once a man. The clothing had been completely consumed, and the head was a blazing torch. The flames shot higher and a full outline of the body was discernible. Then the fire lowered, became more compact, and the body disappeared from view.

The nauseating odor of burning flesh became strong in the air. Sullivan could stand it no longer. He turned and rushed down the passageway. Lamont hesitated, decided Sullivan's idea was a good one and dashed after him.

They came out upon the platform, eyes blinded, lungs bursting and crashed into the policeman who had just reached the top step. The cop staggered back, grabbed hold of the rail and, the next moment, had his service revolver in his hand.

"Up with the paws!" he growled, and sounded like he meant it. "Firebugs are my special meat."

Lamont wasn't taking any chances. His hands were up before he spoke.

"A poor guess, officer. We're U. S. Customs Agents."

The cop said, "Sounds swell. But still looks lousy to me."

"You'll find our tins in the lower, right pockets of our vests." Lamont's tone was impatient.

The cop moved forward, keeping his gun leveled. He reached into Lamont's pocket, glanced at the gold badge, and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Okay, boys. I'd rather have help than trouble any time." He started down the steps. "I'll be back in a jiffy. Soon as I turn in an alarm."

"Better get the morgue wagon while you're at it," Lamont advised. "There may be a few ashes left of the man we saw in there."

The cop stopped short and stared unbelievably. "No kidding?"

Lamont growled, "Kidding be damned! Get going. Tell your fingerprint man to go to work on any articles found near the body. The whole thing looks phoney to me."

"Yes, sir," the cop stuttered, then turned and bolted down the street.

THE agent stepped towards the car. "Let's go, Pete. We have yet to interview Mr. Richard Carroll."

Sullivan groaned as he slid into the seat, then almost had his head torn off as the car jumped away from the curb. He swore loudly, raining sharp profanity upon the future lives of those who issued driving licenses to maniacs.

Lamont, studying his partner from the corner of his eye, didn't blame him for grumbling. All that day they had been engaged in the unsavory job of probing ten bales of imported rags suspected of containing narcotics. The work had been futile. They had found nothing.

The agents had been notified that the

bales were being unloaded from a ship at Pier 30, Brooklyn. Their orders were to examine the bales, and also interview the importer himself. The man's name was given, also his business and home address. A vague description of the importer went with this and that was all.

The agents had worked late on the pier. They had phoned Carroll's office afterwards, only to receive no answer. It was then that they had decided to visit the man at his home. While hurrying away from the pier, Lamont had noticed the smoke coming from the warehouse and stopped to investigate.

Lamont glanced at his wrist, saw that it was almost nine o'clock and put pressure on the accelerator. Chief Agent Rogers would be looking for that interview report in the morning. There would be hell to pay if he didn't get it.

The car went over the Gowanus Canal Bridge with a swish and swung left into Fourteenth Street. At Eighth Avenue, a left turn to Ninth Street, then right to the park, 123 Prospect Park West was just around the corner. The agent pulled a little ahead of the canopied entrance and stopped. A moment later, they strode into the lobby of a quite pretentious apartment house.

The switchboard operator swung around in his chair. He was young, just about twenty-two or three. Dark polished hair and a thin, black mustache set off a coldly handsome face to sheikish effect. He smiled, showing exceptionally white teeth.

"Don't tell me, gentlemen," he gushed. "I know it's Miss Daisy Belaire you want." He started to insert a phone plug, and Lamont slapped his hand hard. The plug jumped back into place.

"Don't think that Charlie Chaplin mustache makes you a comedian." Lamont disliked the fellow instantly, and he showed it. "Now hop into that elevator and take us up to Richard Carroll's apartment before I go to town on your dental work."

The smile disappeared from the young fellow's face and he stood up scowling. "Okay," he said shortly, and strode towards the car.

The customs agents got off at the fifth, turned left and walked to the end of a long corridor. They stopped before a door marked 504. A small card immediately above the push button read: Richard Carroll.

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### Death in the Dark

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LAMONT hesitated a moment, then pressed the button. The sound of a bell ringing inside could be heard plainly. A moment's wait and he touched the button again, allowing his hand to drop to the knob. A slight twist and the door swung open. The agents stepped into a small foyer, heard no sound and stood where they were. For the fraction of a second Lamont had a vague sense that there was something wrong. He half turned to speak to his companion, then changed his mind and moved forward along the short corridor which led to a lighted room at the end. He was the first to step into the large expensively furnished living room. Sullivan followed close at his heels.

A slight click, the familiar sound of a revolver being cocked and both agents were flat on the floor. Almost at the same instant, the roar of an exploding bullet echoed through the quietness of the room and lead tore into the wall, where a moment before Lamont's head had been. Another click and the room was in darkness.

Lamont drew his automatic from his shoulder holster as he went down, and in quick succession pumped three shots in the direction from which the flash of the gun had come. After that there was silence for a short minute, then the creaking of a floor board. Simultaneously both agents fired in that direction.

Two leaden pellets came banging back and it was lucky for the government men that they had changed their posi-

tion. A vase crashed to the floor somewhere at the other end of the room and the agents rose to their knees. Then the sound of breaking glass in the next room, and they were going fast towards the small door which led to it.

They met head on at the entrance and Sullivan went crashing to the floor with Lamont doing a flip over him and managing to curse as he did it. For a while the two men were a tangled mass of arms and legs. Lamont finally escaped the clutch of his companion and struggled to his feet. Moonlight coming through the window showed him a small kitchen. Then he saw the curtain blowing in and rushed to the window. The glass had been completely knocked out and he made his way to the fire-escape without troubling to lift the frame.

Sullivan was at his side in time to see a dark figure drop from the ground floor fire-escape and start across a small court toward a low iron fence which entered upon the street. The big man straightened his arm, taking deliberate aim. Lamont grabbed his arm before he could press the trigger.

"Lay off, tackler!" he exploded. "Haven't we made enough noise for one night?"

Back in the apartment, Lamont found the light switch, touched it and looked about the room. Heavy velvet drapes covering both windows of the room showed where the would-be murderer had concealed himself.

Sullivan mumbled, "If only we hadn't tripped we'd have got that guy sure."

Lamont sighed and sat down, not trusting himself to answer.

A LOUD banging upon the door brought the agent to his feet in a hurry. Out in the foyer, he opened the door with a jerk, then stepped out into the hall. The switchboard operator fell back against a group of excited neighbors. Lamont gave them a flash of his badge.

"You can go back to your radios,

folks," he smiled. "No one has been hurt, and everything is under control."

The group moved reluctantly along the corridor mumbling among themselves. As the switchboard operator started to follow, Lamont reached out, grabbed hold of his collar and swung him around. The man jerked himself free, began an angry exclamation, checked himself quickly and stood glaring.

The agent said, "Listen, Charlie, go quiet those people. Then go back to your switchboard and play nice. Don't call any cops. Don't talk out of turn. Just act dumb—which should be easy. Those are my orders. Disobey them, and I'll slap your wrists."

For a moment cold hate shone in the boys' eyes. Then he swung on his heel and strode towards the elevator. Lamont gazed after him thoughtfully.

Sullivan started to say something, but hesitated as he saw his partner's eyes on the whisky cabinet. He took the hint and went into the kitchen, making a lot of noise in his search for ice and glasses.

Lamont was just beginning to enjoy Sullivan's idea of a Scotch and soda when the bell gave one short ring. The agent headed towards the door. When he opened it, a girl stepped back quickly and said:

"Oh! I beg your pardon."

She was tall, race-horsy, dark and beautiful. Lamont got all that at the first glance. Then he stared into deep pools of blue and, after awhile, succeeded in tearing his eyes away long enough to notice the full lips, the nice even teeth behind them. He said:

"It's a pleasure," reached out, took her firmly by the arm and drew her in. He closed the door and pointed towards the living room. "That's where we receive guests, Beautiful."

The girl hesitated for a second, then moved ahead without speaking.

Sullivan rose as they entered. Lamont smiled. "Sully, meet Miss . . ." He swung to the girl. "I'm awfully

sorry. I've forgotten the name already. What did you say it was?"

The girl's eyes flashed. She took a quick look at the glass which he still held, then back into his face.

"Listen, you," she spat out, "if you two rummies are playful, don't think I'm a rattle. Do I see Carroll or do I go home for some much needed rest?"

Lamont grinned, then reached out and hit her shoulder with the palm of his hand. The girl sat down hard in the chair which was directly behind her. Her expression was a mixture of surprise and anger. She said, "I'll bet you can lick any woman your weight."

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### Dead Man's Warning

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LAMONT was glad to let that one pass. He got down to business. "We represent the Government—G-men to you. Now tell us who you are and what you are here for."

"I'm Kitty Graham, employed as a secretary with R. Carroll and Company." She decided to go sarcastic. "I used to take a few notes for Harmond, too, but tonight finished that. You may be interested in the fact that I'm twenty-two, white, in so far as I know and . . ."

"Who was this Harmond guy?" Lamont's tone was sharp.

The girl said, "He was a sort of silent partner, but they took his burnt remains out of one of our warehouses tonight, and . . ."

Both agents straightened so suddenly that the girl stopped speaking. Lamont was the first to recover. He turned to Sullivan.

"Did the Chief mention anything about a silent partner?" he asked.

Sullivan shook his head. "No. Only that there might be one. His real interest was in Carroll, the man doing the actual importing."

The girl spread her hands, palms up. "And what's so lousy about the importing business?"

Lamont answered the question with

another. "How long have you been stealing a salary from Carroll?"

The girl's mouth tightened. "Three years, wise guy. And if you think thirty hucks per is stealing . . ."

"How long has the silent partner been connected with the firm?"

"Oh, he came in about a year ago. Carroll was about to throw in the towel when this big butter-and-egg man came along and bought a half interest for about twice what the business was worth."

"There's something putrid about this," Lamont mumbled. "And the longer it lays the louder it smells."

The girl couldn't resist the retort that popped into her head. She said, "They claim that a certain soap is great stuff for . . ."

Lamont couldn't take it. "If you'd stop reading the Broadway columns," he flared, "your cracks wouldn't be so damn antiquated. Let's have some more dumb answers: What did the partners look like?"

She mimicked a thoughtful pose. "Let me see. They were of the same height and build, but that was as far as the similarity went. Carroll was strictly sober, while Harmond appeared to be a man who would buy nice presents for a lady." She grinned. "How's that?"

"I've heard some lousy descriptions," Sullivan put in, "but that's tops!"

"Go smart on us," Lamont begged her, "and tell us why Carroll should want to peg shots at two nice guys like ourselves?"

"Shots!" Her tone was suddenly serious. "Not Carroll! Where did it happen?"

"When we came in here tonight, someone got sore as hell and threw lead from behind one of those drapes." The agent grimaced. "Of course, you wouldn't know anything about that?"

"Know anything?" She straightened in her chair. "I don't understand."

Lamont said, "How did you know Harmond was dead?"

"Carroll called me on the phone and



told me that Harmond had been found burned to death in one of our warehouses. Said he had been identified by a watch and a key-ring check. I told him I was about to take a bath, but he insisted that I come right over to take some important letters. So here I am."

LAMONT picked up the phone, dialed a number and spoke for a few short minutes. When he came back, his expression was thoughtful.

"I checked your story with Police Headquarters," he said. "It's okay. They have a watch with Harmond's name engraved on it, and a key-ring check bearing the name and address of the firm. That's how they got Carroll's phone number. He said he'd be right over to identify the things, but, as yet, he hasn't appeared."

"I could identify the watch," the girl said. "Hammond showed it to me once. It had a closed face, was years out of date. He explained its oldness by saying it belonged to his father and was, therefore, of great sentimental value. The check was Carroll's idea. Harmond carried keys to our different warehouses."

Sullivan said, "I suppose when that young sheik brought you up in the elevator, he didn't say a word about the shooting that had occurred up here?"

"And I was just beginning to think you were on my side," the girl lamented. "Well, let me tell you, big boy, there were no sheiks lying around, so I used the stairs. Carroll was in a hurry. He had told me that he might step out for a minute and would leave the door unlocked. If he didn't answer my ring, I was to come in and make myself at home. You can imagine the fright I got when I saw the homely face of your friend here."

Lamont came over, placed his hands on the girl's shoulders and looked straight into her eyes. "You know," he said, "when a guy looks real close, you're cute. Wonder why they should want to stretch you out."

Kitty Graham jumped to her feet, knocking his hands from her shoulders. "If you intend to get fresh with me . . .!" she began.

"You little sap!" Lamont shouted. "Can't you see that those bullets were meant for that senseless little body of yours?"

The girl fell back into the chair, her face gone a ghastly white. "You mean . . .?"

"Yeah, I mean just that!" He turned to Sullivan. "Let's go, Pete. We had better see her home before the bad mans go making up her face with gun powder."

Lamont took the girl's arm as they left the apartment. "Don't be too angry with me," he relented. "I'm just an uncouth guy who doesn't mean half the tough things he says."

Kitty said, "Forget it. I'm no bargain myself."

In the street the agent gave Sullivan the keys, asked him to drive the car. They crowded into the front seat, the girl sitting in the center. Lamont, glancing sidewise at her, saw the worried expression on her face.

"Maybe I was wrong about them trying to knock you off," he consoled. "It was only a guess and I guess wrong plenty."

She turned to face him, smiling wanly. "Thanks," she said. "That's sweet of you, even if it isn't true."

"That's right," Sullivan growled. "Be nice to the guy. He isn't fat enough between the ears as it is."

Kitty laughed. "I live in Winthrop Street between Bedford and Flatbush, Mr. Sullivan. Will you oblige?"

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### Disappearing Evidence

---

THEY took a long route through Prospect Park, came out the Lincoln Road exit, then went straight ahead to Bedford. Lamont said:

"I suppose the kids will be sitting around waiting for their mother?"

The girl hesitated, got his meaning

and smiled broadly. "That's no compliment. The fact is, I'm not married, there are no children awaiting their mother's return, and there are no other relatives of any importance. There's just a two room apartment and kitchenette, and you boys are most welcome to some real coffee if you'd care for it."

Sullivan's face brightened. "That'll be great. And maybe you can even manage a small sandwich or . . ."

"Sorry, Kitty," Lamont interrupted, "but we can't accept tonight. We've got to find Carroll before we can face our boss in the morning."

The car swung in to the curb and stopped before a quiet appearing apartment house. Lamont jumped out and held the door for the girl. When Sullivan tried to follow, he pushed him back and banged the door hard. He took hold of the girl's arm and started towards the entrance. Sullivan's shout from the car was his first knowledge of impending danger.

A long, dark sedan, which they had not noticed when they rounded the corner, had pulled away from the curb and was roaring towards them with all lights extinguished. In a flash, Lamont gauged the distance to the apartment door, saw that they couldn't make it and jerked his automatic from its holster.

The sedan slowed as it came abreast and dark muzzles of machine-guns were pushed through the windows. The agent let his left go, caught the girl on the point of the chin, saw her drop to the walk, and fell across her body. At the same instant, a sheet of blinding flame burst from the sedan, followed immediately by the roar of exploding bullets.

Lamont rested his elbow upon the pavement and pressed the trigger of his gun. He heard glass crash and knew that he had made a hit. Lead was whizzing all about him and banging into the granite base of the building directly behind. A piece of splintered stone struck him in the back of the head and he felt his senses reel. He had a fleet-

ing glimpse of Sullivan's gun spitting fire from the interior of the car, then something like a streak of lightning flashed across his eyes and thunder crashed in his ears. His head flew back as the bullet struck, then he fell forward on his face and lay quiet.

When Lamont opened his eyes, he saw a white-clad ambulance doctor putting instruments into a small leather bag. The doctor closed the bag with a snap and smiled down at him.

"You're a hell of a lucky guy. That bullet just about parted your hair." He spun on his heel and was gone.

Sullivan moved forward out of the haze. "How you doing, son?"

"Okay. This is a nice place the girl has here."

"Sure is," Sullivan grinned. "But they had to shoot you to get you in."

A uniformed policeman standing near the door, finished writing some notes, waved his hand and left. Lamont raised himself on his elbow and grimaced when he felt the bandage around his head. He caught sight of Kitty then.

"Tell me, Kitty," he said. "Why are they so in earnest about closing that pretty mouth of yours?"

The girl shook her head slowly. "I wish I knew," she whispered.

LAMONT reported at the Custom House next morning, leaving Sullivan to keep a protecting eye on the girl. He took a brow-beating from Chief Agent Rogers and started for Police Headquarters in an ill humor. It didn't improve any when he was informed that the fingerprint expert had not yet turned in a report on the articles found near the cremated body of Harmond. He was on his way to a late breakfast when he decided to call Sullivan.

He rang for five minutes, received no answer and forgot about his breakfast. He passed red lights in bunches on his way to Brooklyn and wondered vaguely if the cops were on strike.

Finding the apartment door locked, Lamont didn't waste time looking for

the superintendent. He went on up to the roof, came down the fire-escape and in through the living room window.

He thought the place was deserted until he went out into the small foyer. Sullivan was stretched out on his back and seemed to be knocking off a peaceful sleep. Closer examination showed a nasty gash across the big agent's forehead. Kitty was gone.

The agent went to work with cold towels and in a few moments Sullivan's eyelids blinked and opened. He started to speak but didn't get anywhere. He tried again and did better.

"Sorry as hell, Jack. They got the little dame."

Lamont pressed his teeth together until the muscles in both cheeks seemed about to break through the skin. He helped the other to a chair in the living room, sat on the arm, and studied the design on the wall opposite.

"How did it happen, Pete?" he said finally, and Sullivan looked up quickly. He had never before heard the man's voice shake so.

"Hell, that makes it worse. I didn't know you had really gone for her."

Lamont said, "I'm still waiting, Pete."

Sullivan swallowed hard. "I guess it was the easiest job ever pulled by those mugs. A half hour after you left this morning, someone rang the bell. I opened the door a crack, saw a young fellow in a Western Union uniform, and opened all the way. I thought it might be a message from Carroll. Well, the lad delivered a message, and I received it right between the eyes. I saw a couple of vague shadows shoot by with a rush, as I passed out. I figured they were after the girl but couldn't do much about it."

"You didn't recognize any of them?"

Sullivan looked thoughtful. "No. That young messenger fellow did look sort of familiar, but his hand moved so fast that . . ."

The loud ringing of the phone interrupted Sullivan and Lamont picked up the receiver. As the agent listened his

lips formed into a straight line. He mumbled something in the affirmative, then dropped the receiver back onto its hook. Sullivan said:

"It must be something desperate, judging from your facial expression."

Lamont walked to a chair and fell heavily into it. "It's worse than that. That was Chief Agent Rogers—I told him he could reach us here—he says that those bales we probed on the pier yesterday were the wrong ones. The bales containing the dope are gone. It seems the gang that wanted them used the simple method of changing numbers, thereby fooling two supposedly smart agents."

Sullivan jumped to his feet. "Well, what are we going to do about it? They can't get away with that!"

"We have the very exciting job of searching every suspicious looking building in the Bush Dock section. An alarm sent out for the truck brought in the meager information that it was last seen in that vicinity."

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#### Document of Death

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THE two agents had been cruising aimlessly through the Bush Dock section for some time when suddenly Lamont grabbed his companion's arm.

"Pete! Look! Isn't that the switchboard operator from Carroll's apartment?"

Sullivan jerked his head round to stare at the man who was walking towards them. "Yeah. It sure does look like him. But where is that funny mustache?"

"It's been shaved," Lamont informed, and kept his head low as they swept past.

The agents watched the man through the windshield mirror. He stopped in the center of the block, glanced quickly up and down the street, then disappeared between two buildings.

The government men swung the car round the corner, parked it and started

back. Both sides of the street were lined with factory buildings, and the terrific roar of machinery in operation made conversation almost impossible. In the center of the block a low garage nestled between two tall buildings, separated by a narrow alley that ran along one side. The garage was apparently unused. A For Rent sign hung sidewise on the heavy, double doors, held there by a single nail. Lamont led the way down the alley.

Directly behind the garage was a large plot of land almost completely occupied by the dilapidated frame house which stood in its center. Heavy wooden shutters covered every window, hiding from view any glimpse of the interior. The agents avoided the front door, made their way to the side of the house and listened at one of the shuttered windows. The sound of low voices was just barely audible. The G-Men moved cautiously to the rear, found a rotting cellar door, and opened it easily.

The cellar was damp, musty and intensely dark. Sullivan's flashlight clicked on, throwing a beam of light upon a flight of stairs which led to the floor above. They picked their way up the stairs, keeping close to the wall in an effort to avoid squeaking center boards.

At the landing the agents hesitated, automatics clutched tightly in their hands. Lamont moved back, nudged his companion, and the next moment the full weight of their bodies went crashing against the door. It flew in, banging against the inside wall.

"Reach!" Lamont's tone meant business.

There were two men in the room. The man at the table was out of his chair toppling it over backwards as he jerked up. His hand, sliding back over the gun on the table, pressed the trigger in that position. The bullet smacked into the door edge, picked out a huge splinter and flung it into Sullivan's face. Blood ran down the agent's cheek and he fell hack against the wall.

The other man, the apartment switchboard operator, had cleared his gun when Lamont swung round and fired point-blank at him. His knees buckled and he slid to the floor in slow motion. The other thug stepped in front of the table, and Lamont hit him with a hard right flush on the chin. He crashed hack into the table and collapsed with it on the floor. He dropped his gun as he went down, then dived to regain it. Lamont kicked the man's wrist hard, grabbed him by the shirt front, and jerked him to a half standing position.

"The girl? Where is she? Quick! Before I knock out your brains!"

"Go to hell!" the gangster spat out, and tried to butt the agent with his head.

LAMONT bounced his automatic off the side of the hood's head and let him drop to the floor. He swung quickly then, at the sound of an exploding bullet. He was in time to see Sullivan's bullet shatter the switchboard operator's wrist. The gun which had been leveled at the agent's back went flying across the room. Lamont felt cold sweat on his forehead. He said:

"Thanks, Pete. I owe you plenty."

Sullivan glanced down, saw the man whom Lamont had kayoed crawling towards his gun. The big agent's foot caught him square in the face and the man rolled over groaning.

"Goal for the tackler," Lamont cracked, and strode towards a door at the far end of the room. He kicked it in and stood staring.

Stretched on the bed before him was Kitty Graham. The girl's face was pretty well banged up, and there was enough rope around her to tow a steamer. She made a grand effort to smile as the agent struggled with the ropes. He said between clinched teeth:

"I'll kill some punk for this!"

Sullivan brought a basin of cold water and they did the best they could with her bruised face.

Sullivan returned to the other room

and began raising a racket. Lamont looked out to see what it was all about. Sullivan was holding up the switchboard operator against the wall and punching his face into various shapes and forms. Lamont said:

"If you insist upon murdering the guy, why not use a gun and save your knuckles?"

Sullivan continued with the business in hand. "I just remembered," he said between punches, "that this is the mug who played messenger boy and bounced a safe off my forehead."

"My error," Lamont said, and went back into the other room.

Kitty tried to sit up and Lamont slipped his arm around her shoulder.

"You've taken an awful shellacking, baby. Thanks to the lady killers outside, I suppose?"

Kitty grinned. "And how! The guy with the dog face shoots his right from any angle."

Lamont pushed some damp curls back from her forehead. "You poor kid. What was it all about?"

"You got me there. The dopes kept asking for some document which Carroll was supposed to have given me. I tried to convince them that I never heard of any crazy document, and, each time, caught a fist with my face for my trouble."

Lamont looked thoughtful. "Funny about that Carroll guy. He seems to have completely evaporated. Wonder where he fits in?"

The girl said, "I can't imagine Carroll mixed up in anything like this. He was the perfect gentleman in so far as I know."

Lamont excused himself and stepped into the next room, closing the door behind him. The hood Sullivan had kicked was rolling around on the floor holding his head with his hands. The agent went over and jerked him to a sitting position.

"Here's where you get a real pasting," he threatened. "I want the name

of the guy behind all this, but if you don't wish to tell . . ."

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### G-Man's Payoff

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THE man had lost all his toughness. He clasped his hands together pleadingly. "For God's sake, mister, lay off! I'll tell! I'll tell anything! It's Joe Gaffney. He wanted some paper from the dame and . . ."

Lamont dropped the thug back onto the floor and swung to face Sullivan who was standing with one foot on the pulverized switchboard operator. "Did you hear that, Pete?"

"Yeah. But I thought that bum had gone legitimate. He's supposed to be attending strictly to cabaret business."

A cold voice said, "Thanks for the compliment," and both agents swung round fast.

Joe Gaffney had silently opened the door leading from the cellar and was leaning carelessly against the frame. Two of his men stood on the landing directly behind him. They all held ugly looking revolvers. Gaffney said:

"Get the ironware, Mike," and one of the men came over and relieved the agents of their automatics.

The switchboard operator groaned and pushed himself to a sitting position against the wall. He stared hard at the man who had been kicked in the face, and spoke from between swollen, bloody lips:

"You might be interested, boss, to know that Sam there was shooting his mouth off a mile a minute."

Gaffney walked over and stood looking down at the battered Sam. His gun arm had dropped and the revolver was pointing downward.

Sam looked up, saw something in the gang leader's face, and threw his arms around the man's legs. "No, boss!" he burst out hysterically. "Don't do it! I didn't rat! I swear to God! They half murdered me and . . ."

The gun in Gaffney's hand exploded and a bullet crashed into the top of the



erining thug's head. He groaned once, let go his hold on the other's legs and rolled over upon his back.

Gaffney spun on his heel and faced the agents. Insane anger shone in his eyes. "Okay," he shouted, "You two next. Then that smart dame in the next room!"

Thoughts jumped frantically about in Lamont's brain and remained incoherent. One desperate thought after another came and was quickly dismissed. Life for the three of them seemed hanging by a very slim thread. He studied the three ruthless killers who stood there, guns ready to spit death. There was no use trying to jump them. They would be cut down like weeds. Sullivan was talking, desperation ringing in his voice.

"You'll never get away with this, Gaffney. It'll mean the hot seat for you. Uncle Sam will trail you to the ends of the earth."

Gaffney grinned nastily. "Sounds like one of our brave G-Men is beginning to crawl," he taunted.

Sullivan's teeth clicked together. "Go ahead, you dirty . . ." he spat out. "Pull that trigger, if you ain't too yellow!"

A glint of anger shot into the gangster's eyes and his fingers tightened on the gun.

The switchboard operator came suddenly to life, his eyes popping open. "Wait, boss! I forgot to tell you. I think they untied that smart dame in there."

Gaffney's finger eased on the trigger and he looked thoughtful. He strode quickly to the door, dropped his hand to the knob and hesitated. His thin lips spread into what might be termed a smile.

"Okay, Kitty. Come on out. This is an old pal speaking. I want you to take a new kind of dictation."

**A**S the last word left the gangster's mouth, a terrific roar was heard in the next room, and a line of little

holes appeared in the door. Gaffney went flying back across the room, clutching madly at his chest. He struck a chair and crashed with it to the floor.

Lamont lowered his head and went forward fast. He caught the gunman who stood before him in the groin. The man staggered back, doubled over and went to the floor with a sickening groan.

Sullivan was not so lucky. He jumped forward, saw the man's finger tighten on the trigger, and ducked. The bullet missed him by the fraction of an inch and the next instant the barrel of the gangster's gun crashed against his head. He went slowly to his knees, stunned. Lamont picked up a chair and heaved it across the room. It banged against the would-be killer's head and he went out like a light.

The door from the next room had flung open and three uniformed cops burst into the room. The leading cop held a smoking tommy-gun in his hands; the others held service revolvers. Lamont flashed his badge and pointed at Sullivan who was struggling to his feet.

"Also an agent," he barked, and dashed into the other room. Kitty Graham was just coming in through the window. The girl said:

"I should have brought the marines, but I hadn't much time."

"You're a great number," Lamont said, and flopped down on the side of the bed. "Tell me about it, quick."

"When your company arrived and someone said something about compliments, I got a jolt: It made me sit up and take notice."

"How come?"

The girl grinned. "You'd be jolted too, if you heard a dead man speak."

"I don't get it. Be coherent, Kitty, please."

"That voice was Harmond's. The partner who was supposed to have burned in our warehouse!"

Lamont stiffened. "But that was Joe Gaffney, one of the biggest gangsters in the city!"

Kitty Graham shrugged her shoulders. "I wouldn't know anything about that. As soon as I heard that voice, I knew it was Harmond's. When I peeked through a crack in the door and saw him and the other men pointing ugly guns at my two heroes, I figured it was time to do something about it. I took the window as the quickest way out and was doing the distance to the corner phone booth in nothing flat, when I saw the cops pushing their radio car along at about eight miles an hour. They came into sudden life when I told them what was going on in here."

Lamont spoke thoughtfully. "I think I'm beginning to get it. Gaffney, alias Harmond, bought an interest in Carroll's business as a means of bringing in narcotics. Whether or not Carroll was in on the deal is a question. However, it became necessary for Gaffney to get rid of Carroll. It would be a simple matter to lure the man to the warehouse, bump him, change clothes, making sure to leave the watch with the phony Harmond name on it. A couple of gallons of gasoline would do the rest and Carroll would be out of the way. If there was any suspicion of foul play, the cops would be looking for Carroll, a man who was already dead!"

"Not bad," the girl said. "In fact, almost perfect."

LAMONT stood up. "Let's step outside, Kitty. I want you to see what happens to a killer when his ideas are just *almost* perfect."

Lamont and the girl entered the room and stopped. Gaffney was propped up against the wall. Sullivan and the policemen stood near him. Blood was coming from between the gangster's lips, and his face was distorted with pain. Large beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. Gaffney's voice was a hoarse whisper.

"I knew Carroll had a swell reputation at the Custom House, so I bought into his business. From then on his lousy bales of rags came in with plenty

of dope in their bellies." Gaffney hesitated, glancing sidewise at Lamont. "You might as well know," he said. "There's plenty of them bales in that garage up front." Lamont nodded his head, and the gangster continued:

"I learned that these punk G-Men were poking around and figured Carroll must have got wise and talked. That settled his hash."

Gaffney stopped and his whole frame shook with a fit of coughing. With a painful effort, he continued speaking:

"I got Carroll down to the warehouse and gave him the works, telling him he was being bumped for ratting to the Feds. He told me then that he had given an affidavit to the Graham girl. She was to turn it over to the cops if anything happened to him. He said it would send me to jail for life, but promised to get it back if I let him live. I finished the choking job then, changed clothes and left my watch and keys for good measure. After that I doused him with gasoline and started the fire. Then I went looking for the Graham dame."

Gaffney turned blood-shot eyes upon Kitty Graham, and said:

"It was I who called you up and pretended to be Carroll. You were supposed to get it then, but your two boy friends walked in instead. Bill the Dude there, who I went to the trouble to install in Carroll's place as the switchboard operator, didn't help much either."

One of the officers said, "I haven't had a chance to tell you, Mr. Lamont, that we had orders to pick up Gaffney on sight. You see, his prints were found on the crystal of that closed face watch."

"If you had told us about that paper," Lamont said to the girl, "it would have made things a hell of a lot easier."

The girl turned large, luminous eyes upon the agent. "I'm sorry, Jack, but there wasn't any paper. That must have been Carroll's frantic effort to save his life. I don't believe he knew a thing about what was going on."

# Secret Codes and Ciphers



by Capt Lowell M. Limpus

(Reserve Intelligence Corps,  
U. S. Army)

Captain Limpus is an expert on Codes and Ciphers. As an officer detailed to Military Intelligence, he mastered this particular branch of the Army's Secret Service work. Since then he has made frequent use of his knowledge of the subject in his work as a star reporter on a New York newspaper. The principles explained and applied in this department are precisely the same as those used in the Army Intelligence Service and by the G-Men of the F.B.I.

## A New Department That Is To Be A Regular PUBLIC ENEMY Feature

**I**T is easy to read secret writing (codes and ciphers) if you can discover the key. If you can't it is impossible. Therefore, this department will specialize in a study of these keys, and how to use them, rather than the ordinary word game puzzles, which frequently masquerade as Cryptography.

There is a world of difference between the ordinary word game and genuine secret code writing. Word games are simple little pastimes, played for fun, but real codes are a different proposition. Men's lives frequently depend upon them. They are used by crooks, criminals and spies, as well as by G-men, diplomatic agents and officers of the Military and Naval Intelligence. Yet all of them are based upon the same principles and even the simplest can be exceedingly tough at times. Let me tell you of an instance.

A little over a year ago, I sat in the County Sheriff's Office at Tulsa, Okla., examining a cipher message. At first

glance it seemed utterly meaningless—just a string of letters that ran as follows:

( F C Q Y H F H R H Q G Q Q R D V )

The slip of paper upon which these letters were written had been smuggled out of the jail by a killer who was there awaiting trial. They were written by the famous Phil Kennamer, Tulsa's blue-blooded boy killer. He had bribed an attendant to deliver the note to one of his friends. The attendant turned it over to the authorities instead.

Oklahoma authorities had wrestled with that particular message in vain, when Sheriff Charles Price turned it over to me. (I had gone to Tulsa from New York to "cover the story" of the slaying of John Gorrell, the crime for which Kennamer was then under arrest. The Oklahoma authorities had appealed to me on learning that I was a Reserve Officer in the Military Intelligence Division of the U. S. Army,

and that I had studied cryptography.)

Here was a real cipher problem—not a magazine word game. There weren't any asterisks in *that* message to show which were capitals, or where each word ended and another began. Students of word game ciphers would undoubtedly decide that Q stood for the letter E—and that would be wrong. Real secret writing is not that easy. (Can you solve it? Could you have read the message that the slayer smuggled out of his cell? Well, we are going to try to teach you how it is done.)

The solution was really simple. The message was read within five minutes, with the assistance of one single item of additional information. The item was very important, however. It was the simple statement that Kennamer counted on his fingers as he wrote the note.

Counting on his fingers was extremely significant in this case. It indicated that the prisoner must be substituting one letter for another according to a numerical key. Such ciphers are usually very simple—once you determine the key. Let me explain the principle involved, and then see if you can translate this message, which the prosecutor used to help convict Kennamer of the killing of Gorrell.

(1) Simple substitution. This is one of the easiest and most common systems used in cryptography. It doesn't require any bulky code book, key card, or elaborate diagram. Best of all, it can be carried in the head—as was the case with Kennamer. In handling it, you simply write down all the letters of the alphabet, and then exchange one for another, in accordance with the key number which you have in mind.

Take any number—say 45, for instance. Now if you want to write the word "not" in secret code, according to this key, you consider it, one letter at a time. For the first letter in the word—letter n—you will substitute the letter of the alphabet which is four letters to

the left of n, as you have written it down. In this case, that letter is j. Therefore J stands for N in this code. The second letter in the word is O. We will change it by applying the second figure of our key number—in this case the 5 of 45. And this time we count to the *right*. By so doing we find that the fifth letter to the right of O is T. Therefore, T stands for O in this code. Now for the third letter of the word "not", we go back to the first figure of our key number—the 4 in 45—and again count four letters to the left. Thus we get the letter P, which in our code stands for T. Now the word "not" is written in code.

Remember the first letter of the key *always* counts to the left, and the second figure to the right.

Now you can begin to see how this code can be changed by simply changing the numbers. Of course, it is possible to use a key number of more than two figures—but the principle is always the same. Sometimes the first figure may count to the left and the second figure to the right—or both figures may count in the same direction. You can only discover what key is in use, by trying one figure after another. If the substitution begins to form words, you know you are on the right track.

The quickest way to check such a message is to start with the first letter and apply one numerical key after another. Try 1. Count one space to the left and then one to the right. If the answer doesn't form words, go on and try 2—two spaces left and two spaces right. Still no answer? Then try 3 and 4 and 5—and so on up to 10. If this fails, begin with the 2-figure numerals and try them in order—11, 12, 13, 14, and so on. Somewhere along the line you will find your key. I usually begin with alternate two-figure numerals, as 11, 12, 21, 22, 23, 32, 24, 42, 25, 52, etc.

Now with this information, see if you can translate Kennamer's message. (Incidentally, you will find that he made

one mistake when counting on his fingers. He accidentally got the letter O, when what he wanted was the letter N. That mistake occurs in the third word.)

#### Basic Principles of Cryptography

(1) Cryptography is the study of secret writing by codes and ciphers; (2) A code is a form of secret writing in which one word is substituted for another; (3) A cipher is a form of secret writing in which one letter is substituted for another; (4) The key to any code or cipher tells which word or letter has been substituted for another.

One of the simplest keys of all is the "Rail Fence" cipher key. It can be read without difficulty when it is recognized. You will understand it more easily if you will study the form in which the cipher is composed. Let us take the sentence "The Rail Fence (cipher) is easy," and write in two letters at a time, with one pair of letters under another. It now becomes

TH  
ER  
AI  
LF  
EN  
CE  
IS  
EA  
SY

Now, by taking the first column, and writing it five letters at a time, we obtain the following words:

First—Teale  
Second—Ciesh  
Third—Rifne  
Fourth—Saynu

The message:  
TEALE CIESH  
RIFNE SAYNU

You will note that we have added two letters to fill out the last group of five. Such letters are called "Nulls" and are just tossed in to make it harder.

To translate the Rail Fence cipher, you simply write the message in parallel columns, and read it off.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following problems are written either in Rail Fence cipher, or the numerical transposition of the Kennamer message. See if by examination you can determine which is which, and translate the message:

P B I E E  
Y I H R A  
E A O E U  
L C N M C  
P E S R E  
S O E N U

C D S R C  
A G S N O  
D N T E T  
R O E A E  
H N E I W  
R S O L T  
E S N U L

S J H U J  
G X K R V  
V G K Y D

V E K P  
M Q C  
L Q  
H Y V W

(Answers to the above problems will be published in the August FEDERAL AGENT Magazine.)

Watch for

## THE POLITICAL CONVENTION MURDERS

By BRYAN JAMES KELLEY

A Book-Length G-Men Action Story

In the August FEDERAL AGENT Magazine—On Sale June 19th



# PUBLIC ENEMY NO.6



Jack McGurn

*As he turned to face the door, Jack McGurn's "friends" shot him in the back.*



By  
**LIEUT. WALTER HEALY**  
of the Chicago Police Department  
as told to  
**HARRY READ**

**Over The Murdered Body Of His Father Jack McGurn Swore A Terrible Oath Of Vengeance—And He Had To Become Chicago's No. 1 Gunman To Keep It. But His Violent Death Again Proved That Crime Can Never Pay!**

**W**AIT a minute," I said. He paused with his hand on the doorknob, stood there with the motionless graceful poise of the athlete in condition. He looked at me easily.

"I just have a few more things to tell you, McGurn," I went on. "You're smart enough to know what's ahead. It's the same for you as for the others like you.

"First, there's the G-men. They

trailed you until they got you indicted on the Mann Act. Maybe you'll beat that rap. Second, there's us coppers. You beat us on the St. Valentine Day Massacre. Third, there's your own friends. So far they've let you go along. But you won't win every time against those three propositions. I'll tell you why.

"When a man is in your racket, he is allowed only one mistake. The G-men, the coppers, and the people you

call your friends can make a thousand mistakes, and they keep on going. But when you finally make one little mistake, you're through—for good, McGurn!

"Three hurdles you must keep jumping constantly, and you're bound to trip on one of them!"

HE still stood there with his hand on the doorknob, but now he was smiling that shy smile which everyone liked—rather infectious it was, and his eyes flicked just a trifle as they strayed to the five-pointed star on my vest. Flicked almost too rapidly for me to see although I was looking straight at him.

"Aw, gee, Lieutenant, I—" he began.

"I know what you're going to say, McGurn!" I interrupted. "You're going to say it's nothing but a lot of gossip. You're going to say that your name on the Crime Commission list as Public Enemy No. 6 is persecution; that you're not with the Capone mob; that the newspapers print lies about you. Well, I notice you haven't sued the newspapers or the Crime Commission for what they said and still say about you every day."

He was looking at me soberly now, but he did not speak.

"I'll give you credit for one thing, Jack McGurn, you never say the police are picking on you, and that's very unusual."

"No, I got some good friends with the coppers, and even with the G-men," he said, smiling again.

It was hard to talk to him seriously facing that disarming smile, so I quit. He couldn't realize that I really was sorry for him. But there was nothing more to say, except the usual police windup.

"Okay, McGurn, get going," I remarked. "We've nothing on you this time, and a judge would only turn you loose. But just remember that Sergeants Drury and Howe will pick you up every time they meet you on the street. That's just in case!"

"I get you, Lieutenant," he said, opening the door. "I'll try to stay out of their way."

He was gone, walking out into the street. My eyes dropped to his history sheet addressed to me as supervisor of squads at the Chicago Detective Bureau by Identification Inspector Emmett Evans.

"Jack McGurn, alias Machine Gun Jack, alias Vincent Gebardi, alias Vincent Demore," I read. "Arrested—indicted — acquitted — discharged — murder—assault with intent to kill—carrying concealed weapons—possession of machine gun—"

The long list of entries ran into a tangle of words through which Public Enemy No. 6 had picked his way carefully thus far to the life and freedom he still enjoyed. How long would it last? I wondered.

It was in March, 1931, that I sat studying his record and reminiscing, and my mind cast back to the winter night of Jan. 8, 1923, when I was working out of the Detective Bureau on a squad.

I was in the big Cadillac car when we flashed over Harrison Street with the siren going full blast at about eleven o'clock. At Halsted Street we wheeled southwest in Blue Island Avenue for a short half block, then west once more on Vernon Park Place.

The crowd milling around on the sidewalk just west of Sangamon Street was a signal to our driver to stop the car. And the squad car was a signal to the crowd to stop talking.

It was old familiar stuff—Italian and Sicilian neighborhood, alky cookers, extortion, revenge of fantastic European origin, a hundred things, all equally as mysterious and impenetrable as the silence of that huddled Thing lying face downward on the sidewalk.

With the beams of our flashlights to guide us, the squad leader and I leaned over to look. The two pistols lying close by, the wet, sticky crimson pool that was spreading wider and wider on the sidewalk; the absolute inertness of

the Thing itself told the story. The man was dead.

"Anyone know him?" The squad leader addressed the front rank of the impassive crowd. Inscrutable stares, head shakes and shrugs were his only answer.

A uniformed patrolman from the Maxwell Street District Station pushed his way through. He nodded to us, bent over the body, and then straightened up.

"Angelo Demore," he said.

The onlookers stirred uneasily but remained silent. They knew; but it made them nervous to have anyone say anything. However, that patrolman knew his business. He looked at a boy in the crowd and said:

"Hello, Tony."

The urchin greeted him slyly.

"Come on, Tony, show me where Angelo lived," said the patrolman.

The boy nodded and led the way, and as the policeman passed our sergeant he muttered:

"Stick here! I'll be right back!"

And back he was within four minutes. At his suggestion we pushed the crowd back some thirty feet. Then he and the sergeant whispered together. Finally the uniformed man began calling men in the crowd forward. When a half dozen had joined our group near the body, the squad leader spoke up:

"We want you men to go into the station. Want to talk to you."

There were no comments, no objections. We herded them into the squad car, leaving only the driver on guard. The patrol-wagon from Maxwell Street clanged up. The fat old wagon men got out and waddled over with the stretcher. There was a youth about nineteen years old with them, a good-looking, well-built, graceful lad, and I never will forget how the silence deepened in that still crowd when he appeared. If one had breathed we would have heard it.

The boy stopped when he got four

feet from the body; stopped and stood there looking down.

"Padre!" he breathed.

He still stood staring with his tensely clenched hands on his chest. Then he drew a deep breath and stepped forward, unmindful either of the crowd or of us. I had been a policeman then for five years, but I shuddered at his next move. He leaned over, dipped his right forefinger into the oozing blood of the murdered man and drew the finger between his lips. Then raising the same hand, he muttered something under his breath.

I had witnessed for the first time the most dreadful oath of vengeance known to modern experts in folklore—the Oath of Blood—illimitable in time, indissoluble against any interest, uttered with lips and tongue but just now stained with the life stream of the one to be avenged.

"Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand!" Titus Andronicus had written this grim oath in the ancient language of these people.

The boy turned on his heel and started away, the crowd parting to let him pass. A ripple of comment ran through the throng—and if I sensed it aright, it carried approbation of his act. However, we had our work to do. The wagon men bundled the body of murdered Angelo Demore into the patrol. The uniformed man strolled away to resume his beat. We piled into the squad car and took our silent witnesses to the Maxwell Street Station. And only that stain on the pavement remained to stare at the sullen winter sky.

THE investigation was brief and futile. Reluctantly, the half dozen Sicilians we had brought in after the uniformed policeman had wheedled their names out of the urchin, admitted they had seen the murder. Their stories were about the same. Angelo had been plodding his weary homeward way toward Sangamon Street. He was about to turn the corner and enter the tene-

ment where he lived, when two men stepped from a dark doorway. There followed the roar and blaze of ten shots; the clatter of guns thrown beside the bleeding, dying victim, and two figures fading into the blackness of the alley. The who and why of the event stood unanswered.

“. . . murder at the hands of persons unknown,” was the coroner’s verdict.

**H**OWEVER, through random channels we learned several other things. The dead man had been an alcohol cooker allied with the notorious Gennas, Sicilian rulers of West Side Little Italy, the Ghetto, and the dread Valley. One of hundreds like himself, he had operated a small still that produced a hundred gallons of illicit alcohol of doubtful quality every week. This product had been cleared through the Gennas to the Johnny Torrio syndicate which distributed it through the far-flung brothels and speakeasies of Chicago’s South and West Sides. Alcohol had had nothing to do with his murder, however.

But there was a skulking, slight figure that coursed the streets and alleys at night who knew the reason of that murder. Always accompanied by a quartet of bodyguards at a distance, traveling with noiseless footfall like a wraith, he flitted through the somber shadows of Little Italy, the Ghetto and the Valley, holding converse openly with no man. Where he lived, loved or lingered, not even his bodyguards could say. The women shuddered and looked away when he appeared. The men fell silent and shrank into doorways. The children ceased their play and stood with frightened faces staring at him. And when he had passed, they would point their tiny fingers and whisper:

“The Scourge!”

For such he was beyond all doubt. His right name, known to few, was Orazio Tropea, but none called him by it. Many of those who quailed when he appeared had grave reason for dread,

because time and again they had met his insatiable demands for money tribute.

For The Scourge headed a ring of extortionists. It was his business to ferret out the incomes of his fellow countrymen and then force them to pay him a percentage of that income. That was what had happened in the case of Angelo Demore. Had he not had a weekly income of a hundred dollars from his alcohol still for a year without interruption from the federal government or the police? Was then a trifling ten per cent, or five hundred dollars, an unreasonable amount for him to hand over to The Scourge so that he might go on living?

But Angelo Demore was made of sterner stuff than most of his countrymen. He met the demands of The Scourge—always delivered through a “friendly” go-between—with scorn. He would appeal to the Gennas, powerful rulers of the Unione Siciliana of which he was a member. They would help him defy The Scourge.

Unfortunately, he did not know that The Scourge was closer to the Gennas than was he!

I talked it over with a desk sergeant at Maxwell Street a few weeks after the murder.

“It’s just one of those things,” said the desk sergeant. “There’s that kid, Vincent Gebardi, the one you saw dip his fingers in the dead man’s blood that night. He is a stepson of Angelo. He’s a nice boy. He used to hang out around the station here. He was friendly with every copper in the place. Well, it looked as if he might do something about his stepfather’s murder, and I guess he did take it up with the Gennas, but evidently his squawk got him nowhere. He must be going to forget it. Maybe he’s too much Americanized for the Sicilian feud idea.”

That was my last conversation with anyone concerning the murder of inconspicuous Angelo Demore, the alky cooker; and the affair faded from my

mind as newer and more important cases claimed my attention.

There followed a hectic political season, with the Prohibition Amendment turning American civilization upside down. New administrators had appeared in public office; the beer gangs were organizing for the war that was to make American law enforcement a joke abroad; Johnny Torrio had been driven from our city to new headquarters in the Village of Cicero, just west of the Chicago city limits.

The Torrio jurisdiction of Cicero was running full blast a year after the killing of Angelo Demore, when on a day early in May, 1924, I was riding south on a State Street trolley. At Forty-third Street I glimpsed two gaudily dressed youths seated in the rear of a flashy seven-passenger touring car. Obeying that sixth sense which policemen are supposed to possess, I got off the street car at Forty-fourth Street and sauntered back. As I neared the touring car I studied the pair. I recognized one of them in a flash as Jules Portuguese, jewel thief, hotel room prowler and stickup man. The face of the other was familiar, but I could not place him. Neither of them noticed my approach until I stepped to the side of the car. Portuguese looked at me and smiled.

"Hello, Healy," he said affably.

I had my pistol ready at hand, because I knew the sort of rat he was.

"Outside on the sidewalk, both of you," I ordered, opening the door of the car.

Portuguese, to whom the experience was old, obeyed instantly. His companion dawdled a bit, however, and so I helped him with a yank of the arm. The muscle under the expensive suit cloth was like steel.

"Turn around!" I ordered.

They turned their backs and I fanned them carefully for concealed weapons. They were unarmed. I ordered them to turn again.

"What's your name?" I asked the one I did not recognize.

Portuguese's companion smiled in a rather shy manner and his eyes twinkled.

"Jack McGurn," he answered.

I was racking my brain as to where and when I had seen him, but I could not remember.

"No, it isn't," I bluffed. "That wasn't your name the last time I saw you."

The smile faded from his face.

"You know me," he said soberly. "Remember the night my stepfather, Angelo Demore, was killed? I'm Vincent Gebardi."

Standing before me, then, was the boy I had heard utter that fearful oath of vengeance. I recalled what the sergeant at Maxwell Street had said about him.

"Changed your name, eh?" I said. "Do you know this man you're with? Do you know he's a criminal with a record; that he's a thief and holdup man?"

"Aw, listen, Healy, I'm out of that racket," said Portuguese.

"Shut up, or I'll give you a clout alongside the head, you scum! No one's talking to you."

He held his tongue.

"I'm not in any racket with him," said Jack McGurn.

"Then why the phony name?"

"Well, you see, I'm in the ring now, boxing, and that's the name I fight under."

"Oh," I said. "You're the McGurn I've been reading about. Well, let me tell you something: You'd better stay away from people like this sneak thief here, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble."

**T**HERE was nothing more to be said or done, and I resumed my interrupted journey. Yet somehow, the incident stayed in my consciousness, and I made a few inquiries concerning young Gebardi.

His story had been true. He had won a few ring fights under the name of Jack McGurn, and he had been backed in his ring career, first by the Gennas for whom his murdered step-



father had cooked alcohol, and later by Johnny Torrio, the vice overlord of Cicero. Having made some money through his connections with the big shots, the boy had married his childhood sweetheart, Helen Canazarro. He had also become friendly with Torrio's chief lieutenants, Al Capone and Dean O'Banion.

Three months after my chance meeting with him, Capone and O'Banion got into the row that split the Torrio mob for all time into two gangs. O'Banion established headquarters on Chicago's North Side with his sympathizers, chief of whom were Hymie Weiss, Vincent "Schemer" Drucci, George "Bugs" Moran, the Guesenberg brothers, Louis "Diamond Jack" Alterie and Irving "Sonny" Schlig, each of whom had a long criminal record. Young Jack McGurn also followed O'Banion's fortunes. He had his motive, however.

**T**HE warfare between the two gangs had raged bitterly for eighteen months and Dean O'Banion's murder had brought the North Siders under the leadership of Hymie Weiss, when, on the bitterly cold night of February 13, 1926, a figure muffled to the eyes stood in a window embrasure of the Auditorium Hotel on Congress Street near Michigan Avenue. The wind moaned through the canyon formed by the huge gray hostelry and the Congress Hotel across the street, and only an occasional cruising cabman noticed the solitary watcher in his wind-sheltered nook.

The watching figure did not move until a heavily overcoated man left the side door of the Congress Hotel. The watcher stared steadily as the unsuspecting pedestrian wended his way westward across Wabash Avenue. Then he left his hiding place and followed. At Wabash Avenue, however, he ran a half block to the north and entered the rear of a big limousine. From beneath a fur robe a husky voice snarled:

"Another bum steer tonight, or what?"

"Nope," replied the watcher briskly, uncovering the lower part of his face and turning down his coat collar to disclose the features of Jack McGurn.

"Got him this time, Hymie!" he exclaimed.

Hymie Weiss, ex-convict boss of the North Side gang, sat up.

"Where is he? Let's get it over with!"

"Okay," said McGurn, leaning forward and addressing the driver, Jim Cook, another gangster who was at the wheel.

"South to State Street, Jim, and take it easy. He grabs a Taylor Street trolley car at Harrison Street going west."

"And follow the street car he's on until he gets off. Then I'll tell you what to do," supplemented Weiss.

The big car raced around Van Buren Street to State Street and then south until the figure of the man who had left the Congress Hotel came in sight near Harrison Street. Then the automobile slowed to a crawl, and the three occupants sat silent when the man they were trailing boarded a trolley at the intersection.

When the street car started west, the limousine loafed along some eighty feet behind. It stopped a few feet from the rear platform at Halsted Street, and McGurn gripped Weiss' arm when the man alighted.

"There he is!" he said.

"Pull ahead and cut him off from the sidewalk," ordered Weiss, lowering the window on his side.

Jim Cook eased the car forward, turning the front wheels just a bit and nearly pinning the street car passenger against the car step. With a muttered curse, the man crowded back. Then, seeing the open window of the limousine just before him he thrust in his head and turned his face on the two men in the rear seat.

The face was that of The Scourge!

The ready Sicilian threat he was about to utter died on his lips as his ferocious eyes met the equally terrible eyes of Angelo Demore's stepson.

"Give it to him," said Hymie Weiss casually.

Jack McGurn raised the sawed-off shotgun he had been carrying between his knees and squeezed the trigger! The face of The Scourge vanished in a blast of flame from the open car window as though whisked away by a magic hand. The limousine roared forward, turned the corner and was gone.

**P**OLICE investigation of The Scourge's murder brought to light more than a hundred motives, and one guess was as good as another. I had my account of it some years later from the lips of Jack McGurn himself. Of course, he related his own part in the third person, as if the killer had been someone else, but he knew that I knew what he meant. And he also knew that the date of his "rise" to infamy was the same on which his stepfather's murderer fell to the street with the top of his head blown off. Throughout the various Italian neighborhoods of Chicago, young McGurn was hailed as a hero.

No sooner had the murder of The Scourge been accomplished than McGurn's motive for joining the North Side crowd became apparent. He had used the O'Banion-Weiss group merely to carry out his Oath of Blood. Once The Scourge was dead, he promptly deserted Weiss' ranks and resumed his alliance with the Gennas. There was no compunction about the matter on either side. McGurn had killed The Scourge without involving the Gennas, and they, on their part, were probably much relieved when the notorious extortionist was carried to his grave. The only person dissatisfied was Hymie Weiss. He felt he had been tricked by the 22-year-old stripling, and he smarted under the loss of face with his own mob.

On the night of March 30, 1926, a scant six weeks after the murder of The Scourge, McGurn sauntered casually toward his home at 630 South Morgan Street, taking a short cut up the alley

from Harrison Street. A sudden premonition made him look back, and he read ominous warning in the sudden presence of four men at the mouth of the alley. The light of a street lamp glinted on a shiny object that swung in the arms of the first man.

Jack McGurn, unarmed at the moment, ran, zigzagging like a Digger Indian. His perfect physical condition enabled him to travel almost at full speed while bent double, although he was weaving from one side of the alley to the other.

A stream of fire tore through the darkness of the narrow thoroughfare, and the neighborhood reverberated to the sharp staccato of a machine-gun.

McGurn reached the family rooftop unharmed, but he looked grimly and without his accustomed smile at the three gaping holes in his expensive hat.

Twenty-four hours later, he was closeted with Al Capone, then the new chief of the old Torrio syndicate. The deal was soon made, and McGurn entered upon an intensive course of machine gunnery, with Ralph Sheldon, now serving life in San Quentin, as his instructor.

Within a short time McGurn was in the complete confidence of Capone, and he probably took considerable pride in his assignment with Sheldon on Oct. 11, 1926, when he helped to kill his former pal, Hymie Weiss, in front of the Holy Name Cathedral.

Vincent "Schemer" Drucci then took charge of the North Siders, but he lasted only until April, 1927, when he undertook to show Sergeant Dan Healy of the Detective Bureau just how tough he was. Sergeant Healy put a police bullet neatly through Drucci's head, and George "Bugs" Moran became the new North Side king and led the rest of the boys to the funeral.

Within a month or two after Drucci's funeral, Ralph Sheldon double-crossed Al Capone by kidnaping two of his best friends and extorting \$70,000 of the boss' money, and his sudden exit from

Chicago between days left an important vacancy. McGurn, now thoroughly proficient, was promoted to the post of Machine Gunner No. 1 in Capone's mob.

The North Side crowd had been severely jolted by the long series of Capone victories in the struggle for gang supremacy, and Moran turned his ingenuity in new directions. Within a short time he had effected an alliance with Jack Zuta, a West Side vice lord, and Joe Aiello, a Northwest side grocer who headed an alcohol ring similar to that of the Gennas.

**B**UT no sooner was this coalition functioning than Aiello grew overly ambitious. He had been looking with covetous eyes for some time on the huge revenue of the *Unione Siciliana*, headed by Tony Lombardo, a close friend of Capone, and he proposed to cut himself in. He dared not, however, come out openly with such a proposal. So to a henchman, "Ashcan Pete" Allegretti, a speakeasy proprietor, fell the task of bearding the lion. Ashcan Pete, a district collector for the *Unione*, refused to turn his collections over to Lombardo's representative, and the North Siders sat back to see what would happen.

The expected manifestation was the sudden appearance of Jack McGurn in the heart of Aiello's territory looking for Ashcan Pete. He was nowhere to be found, but McGurn learned that one Dominick Cinderella, a minor hoodlum and gunman of the Aiello crowd, knew where the fugitive was hidden. McGurn toured the district until he found Cinderella on West Division Street. Before Cinderella could run, McGurn jammed a pistol into his ribs and forced him into the automobile.

Presumably, Cinderella refused to talk, because he was never seen alive again. A month later, his body, sewn into a gunny sack, was found in the Calumet River on Chicago's far southern boundary. The man had been cruelly tortured and then shot to death.

McGurn was taken into custody for questioning, but he said nothing and smiled his denials. There was no legal evidence against him, although we all knew he was the killer, and so he walked to liberty.

By this time McGurn's lust for human blood apparently had grown to be an obsession. It was only three months after the Cinderella murder that he undertook a "job" for the owner of an uptown Chicago cabaret.

Joe Lewis, nationally known master of ceremonies who had been a great drawing card in the place, had received a much better financial offer and had given his hoodlum employer notice. Whereupon, on Nov. 8, 1927, when Lewis opened the door of his room in the Commonwealth Hotel, he was confronted by a tall, handsome youth who barked a question at him.

"Going to sign up back with —?" McGurn named the owner of the uptown cabaret.

"I can't," said Lewis, "because I've already signed another contract."

Whereupon the youthful caller whipped out a razor and cut the face of the entertainer almost to ribbons. Facial nerves and muscles were severed in a dozen places, and it appeared almost certain that Lewis' career as an entertainer was ended, if indeed he did not die.

However, the surgeons did miracles, and after fifteen months' torture, Lewis regained his health and returned to work. His loss in surgical fees and salary was \$50,000. When he had first been found, he had gasped the name of McGurn as the man who had attacked him, but three weeks later, after a "message" had been delivered, he changed his mind, and told police he did not recognize his attacker.

The attack on Lewis, however, was merely an interlude in the war raging over the revenue of the *Unione Siciliana*. Frank Uale, the national head of the organization, sent orders from New York that Aiello was to be given "an

end" by Lombardo. Al Capone promptly replied, informing the New York convict racketeer that he would have to come to Chicago and collect it in person. Two strangers thereupon appeared in Chicago, and when the Capone secret service ferreted out that their mission was the murder of Capone and Lombardo, Jack McGurn took the pair out and killed them near Melrose Park, a village suburb of Chicago.

In between these various murders, McGurn had assiduously kept up his golf, and he really attained high standing as an amateur, shooting a sixty-six. In that connection it might be pointed out that it was he and not his colleague, Sam Hunt, who originated the idea of toting a ready machine-gun in among the clubs in his bag whether he was on business or pleasure bent. Therein might lie the explanation of why, on June 28, 1928, McGurn boarded the Twentieth Century Limited for New York, natty in plus fours and with his golf clubs along. The police records of New York City reveal that two days later, on July 1, Frank Uale, the much-feared Brooklyn hoodlum, was cornered after a running fight with a carload of gunmen riding in a car bearing Illinois licenses. Uale was shot to death. One of the .45 caliber pistols dropped by his slayers was afterward traced to a friend of Al Capone's in Miami.

However, the Chicago North Side gang did not allow McGurn to swagger through the streets unchallenged. They nearly got him when a girl lured him to a date at the McCormack Hotel in the heart of the North Side territory. On that occasion, he went into a telephone booth to make a call and two men fired fifty machine-gun slugs through the door of the booth. Four struck him, inflicting painful wounds, but he charged from the booth with a .45 in each hand and chased his attackers for a quarter mile before he collapsed.

Two months after the murder of Uale in New York, the Aiello forces shot Tony Lombardo down at the corner of Madi-

son and Dearborn Streets at five o'clock of an afternoon. Capone's rage over this died within a few months and he nominated Pasquale Lolordo to head the Unione in Chicago. In January, 1929, three weeks after Lolordo took charge, he was murdered in his home by three early morning callers. When news of this leaked out, Capone packed his baggage and went to Florida for a vacation.

**T**HERE is absolutely no doubt that Jack McGurn planned and directed the St. Valentine Day Massacre of 1929, or that the fight for the revenue of the Unione Siciliana was the direct cause of that shocking affair.

However, McGurn did not appear in person at the massacre because he was well known to the North Siders who were trapped into an appointment in the garage at 2122 North Clark Street. Instead, three men who were strangers to the North Side gang, dressed in police uniforms, went in the front door and lined up the seven Moran gangsters they found there. The prisoners were disarmed and told to face the wall; and the visitors mowed them down with machine-guns. McGurn was in the alley back of the place with three trusted assistants just in case any of the North Siders escaped and came fleeing out the back door. None did!

We found McGurn two weeks later registered at the Stevens Hotel with an attractive blonde, named Louise Rolfe. He explained that his girl wife, Helen, had divorced him, and he smiled as usual when we questioned him. Louise won her sobriquet as "the blonde alibi" when she sat down and accounted for every minute of their time during the preceding four weeks! She was the only witness in any possible case against McGurn, and she was his witness. We knew McGurn was guilty, but once again we were without legal evidence to back up our case.

The day McGurn was released after that questioning, he and Louise smil-

ingly posed for newspaper pictures and departed for Hot Springs, Ark., to "rest up" after their ordeal of police questioning. And that precisely is what they should not have done. The G-men took up the trail then!

During the next several months, Uncle Sam's sleuths moved when they moved, stopped when they stopped, and McGurn and his girl friend even played in golf foursomes with G-men and their wives at various courses in winter resorts. And eight months after the Valentine Day massacre, the federal grand jury indicted McGurn and Louise for violation of the Mann Act.

**C**LEVER lawyers moved at once to their defense, and a wedding at the Waukegan, Ill., marriage mill before the trial in 1931 was the result. It was just about the time I warned McGurn at the Detective Bureau that he would finally trip on one of the three hurdles he had set up for himself. He laughed at me that day, because the lawyers were right. They succeeded in reversing his two-year federal sentence and a four-month sentence for Louise on the ground that their marriage had cured the offense. And Machine-gun Jack laughed again, no doubt, when he polished up his lethal weapon and prepared to take the trail once more.

Everyone knows how Al Capone was sentenced to an eleven-year federal prison term in May, 1932, and how he is now grinding out the days slowly at Alcatraz. What is not generally known is the rapid drop in prestige his conviction brought to his old gang. Some of them went to prison. Many died by guns. Others lived from hand to mouth at various rackets; still others died natural deaths.

A few carried on in the old way, and among them was Jack McGurn. His winning personality, plus his nonchalance in murder, doubtless helped him yet awhile along the path. The Unione was still functioning, and he was among those who had their grip on it. New

names and new faces, however, appeared on the roster of the secret society, and someone was bound to challenge the McGurn tradition. The financial milking of its membership was the only lucrative racket left.

And that challenge reached McGurn the night of February 14, 1936, a significant date, because as on that same anniversary seven years before, the mails were loaded with valentines bearing their messages of love. What quirk of Fate that McGurn should have chosen that night of all nights to go bowling with two friends!

There were twenty men in the Avenue Recreation Parlor on the second floor at 805 Milwaukee Avenue when the trio entered. One of McGurn's companions told William Aloisio, the proprietor, that they wanted an alley. The other walked to the cigar counter with the remark that he believed there was a message there for Jack McGurn. The porter of the establishment handed a small, white envelope to the master machine-gunner. McGurn broke the seal, read the contents, and with the envelope still in his hand, walked smiling to the space from which the players bowl. One of his "friends" wrote three names on the sheet as McGurn removed his coat. He was chatting and laughing, his back turned to the door, when it opened suddenly and three men strode in. They each had a gun in one hand and they began firing into the walls and ceiling. In a flash McGurn whirled—empty-handed!

He had reached his third hurdle!

Alas, for the blind, arrogant confidence that was his! The two "friends" with whom he had entered the place were behind him. As soon as McGurn turned his back to them they drew their guns. Simultaneously they fired at his back and both bullets sped accurately to the mark. With buckling knees, Machine-gun Jack McGurn sagged to the floor and rolled over on his back, staring at the ceiling with unseeing eyes.

The three men at the door vanished.



McGurn's "friends" raced down the stairway in their wake. The other patrons of the place went out the front door, or down a rear fire-escape to fade from sight in the darkness.

The silence that is Death's alone enwrapped the scene when Policemen Peter Ward and Bart Walsh pounded into the place with running feet. It required but a glance to tell them what had happened.

"Machine-gun Jack McGurn!" exclaimed Ward.

His partner stooped and picked up a white envelope from the floor near the body. It was directed to "Jack McGurn" and had been opened. Walsh

withdrew the missive. It was, of all things in the world on that particular night, a valentine. Under a crude semi-comic drawing appeared the jingle:

"You've lost your job, you've lost your dough,  
Your jewels and cars and handsome houses,  
But things could still be worse, you know;  
At least you haven't lost your trousers!"

The doggerel writer who ground out that bit of bad verse had no idea that he was writing the epitaph of Jack McGurn, one of gangland's most vicious killers.

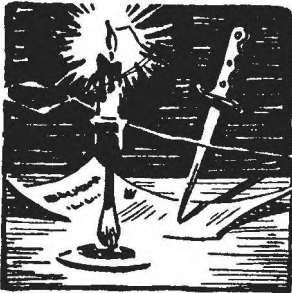
Public Enemy No. 6 made his misstep on the last hurdle I told him about that night in the Chicago Detective Bureau.

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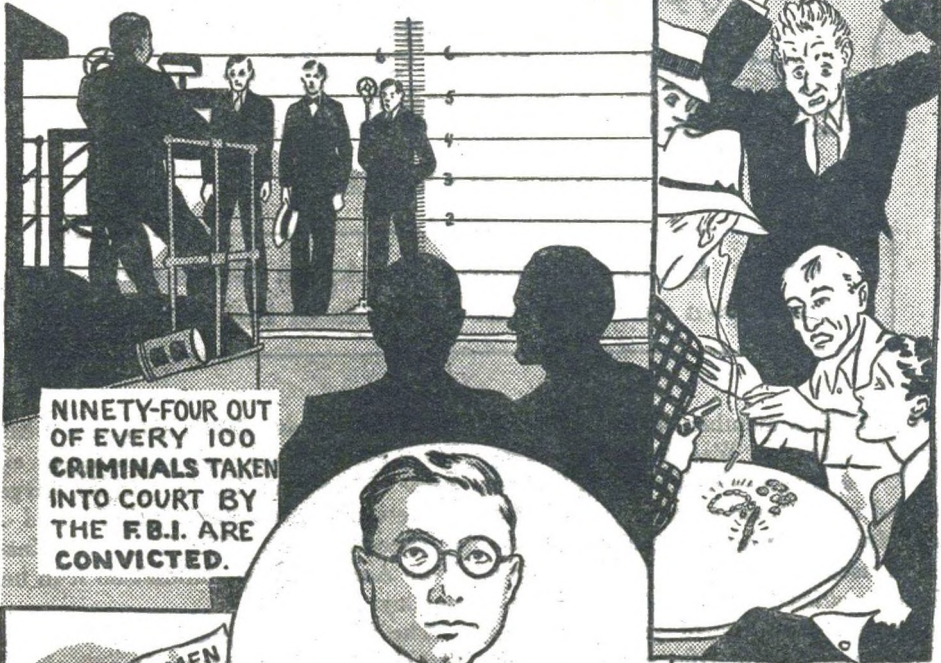
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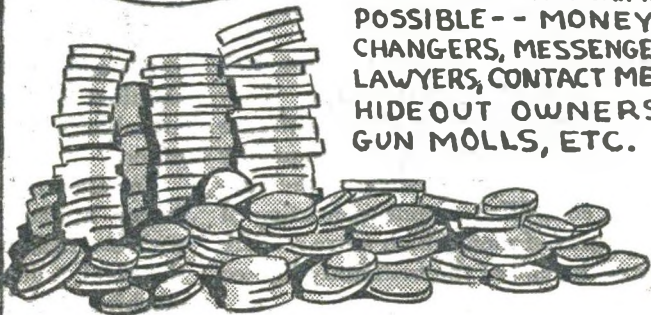


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O. G. STORCH

**HUGH D. HARPER, CHIEF OF POLICE, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO--THE MAN WHO REALLY STARTED THE F.B.I. AND THE "DISCOVERER" OF J. EDGAR HOOVER.**

**BESIDES THE 3 MEN WHO DID THE ACTUAL KIDNAPPING IN THE URSCHEL CASE THE F.B.I. ALSO CONVICTED 50 OTHERS WHO MADE THE CRIME POSSIBLE-- MONEY CHANGERS, MESSENGERS, LAWYERS, CONTACT MEN, HIDEOUT OWNERS, GUN MOLLS, ETC.**



**FOR EVERY DOLLAR SPENT BY THE F.B.I. THE BUREAU HAS RETURNED 8 DOLLARS IN SAVINGS AND RECOVERIES TO THE U.S. TAXPAYER.**

# WITH THE "G" MEN



By JOHN ALEXANDER

Public Enemy's Washington Agent Gives the Lowdown on Men and Methods of the F. B. I.

**W**HEN a member of the G-77 club comes to Washington he gets his biggest thrill sending bullets into a dummy from a Tommy gun—the same kind of death-dealing machine gun G-Men used to riddle the body of John Dillinger when he walked out of a Chicago movie a couple of years ago.

The sound-proof rifle range of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in the basement of the Department of Justice building is, perhaps, the most exciting spot in the capital. It is the place where the G-Men are taught how to shoot public enemies—and where the public itself is taught a little wholesome respect for the marksmanship of Federal sleuths.

Members of the G-77 club are welcomed at G-Men headquarters. They are allowed to examine all types of guns used by Federal agents and frequently are permitted to shoot them at the electrically controlled targets, consisting of four figures of men, which move realistically at the end of the brilliantly lighted room.

For every type of gun used by the thug, the G-Men have two better. The agents are all crack shots. They are

trained to mow down gangsters while lying prone, standing, kneeling or sitting. They can hit a moving target while standing on the running board of a speeding car. That's a real feat. Even Annie Oakley couldn't do it in her heyday.

The favorite weapon of the G-Man is the Colt Monitor automatic rifle, firing 30-caliber bullets at the rate of 500 a minute. One of these slugs is guaranteed to go through the side of a house; to rip holes in a "bullet-proof" automobile.

Another gun the Federal sleuth uses regularly, particularly in crowded cities, is the 351-Winchester automatic loading rifle, which has a deadly range at 200 yards and which can be fired from the shoulder with one hand while its operator hangs on to a car door with the other.

For shooting at night, the G-Men use tracer bullets in their guns, lighting with a streak of fire the destination of the steel pellets. When a half dozen machine guns have been emitting these tracer bullets for a few minutes the whole countryside around is brightly illuminated.

The F. B. I. agents also have a neat little trick used to ferret out the gangster who hides in an apartment above the ground floor. It consists of a tear gas gun with flare attachment. The tear gas projectile is thrown through a window and fills the room with fumes, while the flare is released high in the air. A parachute keeps it floating for several minutes with light bright enough to illuminate three city blocks. If the mobster comes to the window to escape the gas, the agents on the street below pick him off with their Winchester.

For use on gangsters who attempt to make their getaways in 100-mile-an-hour automobiles, the Federal agents use the Springfield Sporter, a short-barreled rifle which can hit—and ruin—a moving target three full miles away.

The special agent in charge of the target range is obliging. He will demonstrate any gun a visitor designates, sending bullets with a steady rat-a-tat-tat into the man-sized targets. If not too many people are around, or no classes are in session, he will let you shoot the guns yourself. He loads them, of course, and stands by to see that you don't kill yourself, or anyone else. After a few minutes of it, the room smells like a battlefield, despite the air conditioner which pumps the smoke outside.

The agents of the F. B. I. have learned surprisingly enough during the course of showing the shooting irons to visitors that women frequently are excellent natural shots. They seem to have a particular aptitude for handling the guns, even the heavy machine guns, and often need no instructions at all on the ordinarily difficult process of drawing a bead on the target. Maybe that's because of lots of practice threading needles!

After a G-77 member gets his fill of gunpowder, the special agents show him their four-ply bullet-proof vests, weighing twenty-six pounds and made of quadruple layers of chain steel. They're not much fun wearing on a hot day, but some days, hot or not, they're a real

comfort to the nation's ace detectives. They point out, incidentally, that Dillinger made the biggest mistake of his life when he succumbed to the wiles of a high-pressure steel vest salesman, putting out a special light, summer model. It was a nifty looking vest, but it failed to stand up. It was a two-ply number and it wasn't thick enough. Not nearly thick enough!

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*Tom P., Abilene, Tex.:* Yes, sir, American gangsters pick out some real lulus for nicknames. Here are a few from the files of the Department of Justice: Bum Eye, Bumpy Joe, Black Jake, Blind Horse, Apple Jaw, Alley Cup and (feminine) Baby Doll, Cantaloupe Queen, Cat's Eye Annie, Barney Google, Sugar Baby, Black Mae West.

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*C. S. T., Sedalia, Mo.,* wants another kind of list—the locations of F. B. I. field offices. Here they are: Aberdeen, S. D.; Atlanta, Ga.; Birmingham, Ala.; Boston, Mass.; Buffalo, N. Y.; Butte, Mont.; Charlotte, N. C.; Chicago, Ill.; Cincinnati, O.; Cleveland, O.; Dallas, Tex.; Denver, Colo.; El Paso, Tex.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Kansas City, Mo.; Little Rock, Ark.; Los Angeles, Cal.; Louisville, Ky.; Milwaukee, Wis.; Nashville, Tenn.; New Orleans, La.; New York City; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Omaha, Neb.; Philadelphia, Pa.; Phoenix, Ariz.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Portland, Ore.; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Tex.; San Francisco, Cal.; St. Louis, Mo.; St. Paul, Minn.; Trenton, N. J., and Washington, D. C. A visit to each one ought to make a grand tour of the country, C. S. T., and I hope you get to make it.

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*R.M., Chicago:* The "J" in J. Edgar Hoover stands for John.

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*F. A. S., Tacoma, Wash.:* Your newly invented invisible ink had better be good to defy the G-Men. I don't doubt your word that it cannot be detected

with heat, lemon juice or any of the chemicals ordinarily used to bring out the lettering. But the F. B. I. doesn't waste its time on any of those methods. It uses ultra-violet rays in its invisible ink reading lamp, which would make it possible to read a note written even with plain drinking water. The chlorine in the water from a city water works would show up enough under the rays to be legible.

*R. F. M., Las Vegas, Nev.:* That newspaper article you read about the new method bootleggers use to make drinking liquor out of denatured alcohol was perfectly accurate. The mysterious sub-

stance it mentioned was mineral oil, which, when shaken up with the denatured alcohol, is supposed to emulsify the denaturant. Maybe it will in the hands of experts, but I wouldn't advise you to try it, even if it weren't against the law.

*Roland P. S., Memphis, Tenn.:* No, Chief Moran of the Secret Service won't resign for at least another year, even though he is far past the retirement age. He is doing such a fine job that President Roosevelt recently signed an executive order extending his useful life as the nation's chief catcher of counterfeiters.

### FREE INFORMATION ABOUT THE G-MEN!

Is there any question you would like to ask about the Federal Bureau of Investigation or any other law-enforcement branch of the government in Washington? Have you any special question as to the way in which agents operate, how they use science to combat crime, what training they must pass through, the requirements for joining the F.B.I., etc? . . . PUBLIC ENEMY MAGAZINE now inaugurates a brand-new exclusive service for G-Man fans—an information bureau. John Alexander, who conducts this department every month, is a recognized authority on Federal law enforcement. He knows the F.B.I. from A to Z, and he is eager to answer your questions through the columns of this magazine. . . . Address your questions to The Editor, PUBLIC ENEMY, 149 Madison Avenue, New York City, and they will be forwarded to Mr. Alexander's office in Washington.







# G-77 CLUB NEWS

**H**OW do you like this issue of PUBLIC ENEMY Magazine?

Of course The Chief and his assistants ask themselves that question every month—and we get a lot of help from you readers in answering it—but we are especially anxious to hear your opinion of this new June issue.

We have special reasons for requesting your criticisms.

In the first place, Lynn Vickers' adventures in "The Key to Murder" are considerably different from the crime-fighting novels that have featured him in the past. Here he is up against a brand new menace; he is trailing a pack of murderous fanatics intent on recovering a sacred jeweled symbol of tremendous value. Do you, for instance, prefer "The Key to Murder" to "Murder in Hollywood," which was published in the last issue? Which kind of full-length novels do you want to see in PUBLIC ENEMY in the future?

Secondly, this June issue contains a story taken from real life—a celebrated

police officer's version of the gangland life and death of "Machine Gun Jack" McGurn. We have run very few true articles until now. If you readers and all you members of the G-77 Club want more of them, please write to The Chief and express your desire.

Your letters help us formulate our policy. This is *your* magazine, and we want you to get the utmost enjoyment out of it. . . .

And now for the announcement of an **IMPORTANT CHANGE**. Beginning with the next issue, PUBLIC ENEMY Magazine changes its title to FEDERAL AGENT Magazine. Watch for the brand new name on the August issue, which will be available at all newsstands June 19th. Under the banner of FEDERAL AGENT, this magazine will be better than ever. Authentic and official action stories of Lynn Vickers and his G-men will continue to lead the lineup. There will be many other exciting mystery stories of the manhunters of

June, 1936

G-77 Club

I pledge to uphold the crime-fighting ideals of Agent Lynn Vickers, G-77. Enclosed please find stamped, self-addressed envelope for my membership card to the G-77 Club.

.....  
 Full Name Age

.....  
 Street Address City and State

I think the best Lynn Vickers G-Men novel you have published is.....  
 .....

the U. S. Department of Justice in action. For further information concerning **FEDERAL AGENT Magazine** turn to page 6 of this magazine.

And the full-length novel in the August issue — starring Lynn Vickers, Tommy Dewart, Bobby Bullard, Evelyn March and other old favorites—will be extremely timely. The setting is a huge political convention. The hand of the strange, unknown Public Enemy is first seen when the convention key-noter, in the midst of his powerful address, is dramatically killed by a poison arrow propelled from a blow-gun. G-77 and the other G-men come up against dozens of false leads, and are balked temporarily in the solution of new crimes even more fantastic than the murder of the key-noter, but then—

Well, be sure to get your copy on June 19th. You will not be disappointed!

Getting back to the current issue, when you read the novelette entitled "Dead Man Speaks," you will thrill to the work of a writer who has never before appeared in any magazine. The author, Ned O'Doherty, is a man all you G-77 Clubbers would like to meet—for he is a Customs Agent, assigned to the New York office, and crime-fighting in behalf of Uncle Sam is daily routine to him.

Mr. O'Doherty writes about the thing he knows best—the U. S. Custom Service—and you'll have to agree that he can spin a yarn that is mighty exciting. Watch for more stories by this up-and-coming author in the near future.

Day by day, the G-77 Club membership rolls are increasing. Not only is the organization represented in every State in the Union, but enlistments have arrived at headquarters from such far-off places as Alaska, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

How about you? If you aren't a member as yet, join TODAY. There is no cost, as the Club is being conducted

by this magazine solely in the interest of law-enforcement. All you have to do is clip the coupon, fill in your name and address, and send it with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to "G-77 Club Headquarters, **FEDERAL AGENT Magazine**, 149 Madison Avenue, New York City." In return you will receive a handsome certificate of membership suitable for carrying in wallet or vest pocket.

Don't forget. Mail your application now!

Following are a few of the typical comments shot in to G-77 headquarters by G-men fans. Due to space limitations, we can't print the letters complete nor can we begin to print excerpts from every communication received. We have picked a few of the most interesting, however, and here they are:

### G-77 Combats Crime

I think **PUBLIC ENEMY** magazine is one of the best I have ever read. One reason why I enjoy your novels is because they are different and are packed full of facts. **PUBLIC ENEMY** and Lynn Vickers are great and should be read by everyone because they will help combat the criminal element that is trying to destroy the country.

*Leonard J. Murphy, Pittsfield, Mass.*

### A Citizen from Puerto Rico

I want to say that I am a member of a Boys' Club here and that we find your magazine is one of the most interesting published in the U. S. My father is a Spaniard, but my mother is a native American. I, too, am an American citizen by birth. I am willing to do anything for my nation and for its welfare.

*Carlos Eduardo Rivera, Puerto Rico.*

### Perfect Entertainment

Dear Sir: A corking good magazine reaches the peak of perfection! The March issue of **PUBLIC ENEMY** has everything that goes to make up a first class magazine. Action, thrills, interest, humor and entertainment. Bigger and better than ever—and **PUBLIC ENEMY** was always good. All in all, **PUBLIC ENEMY** is the best buy on the magazine stands. P. E. stands for Public Enemy—and **PERFECT ENTERTAINMENT**.

*Joseph M. Farrington, Waterbury, Conn.*

### A Private G-77 Club

Dear Chief: I would like to join your swell club. I have a little club of my own called the "G-77 Club." All the members of my club are going to get certificates to **PUBLIC ENEMY'S** G-77 club so we will be full-fledged G-men.

*Edward Wopershall, Youngstown, Ohio.*

## The Key To Murder

(Continued from page 63)

turn," she told Fleming. "But you haven't seen the last of us."

"I'll see you in hell before I'm through," he snarled.

### CHAPTER XV

#### When G-Men Meet

**T**OMMY found himself stumbling on stiff limbs into the passage. Lallah backed out after him, closing the door softly. They hurried into the port corridor, turning aft. At the companion she stopped him.

"Wait, Tommy. Where are you going?" she said.

"To find the captain. I must tell him at once—"

"No," she said quietly. "There is too much danger. You must wait."

"Wait!" he cried. "What for? Those crooks have got the—"

"Tommy!" she murmured, moving close to him. "Why do you not trust me? You did not believe what I told you, before, and you got into trouble. Now you must believe me, please. It is of you I am thinking, of your own safety."

The mysterious force of her appeal gripped him irresistibly.

"All right," he muttered. "I trust you. I'll take a chance."

"Come," she murmured, seizing his hand. They ran down the three flights to E deck, and forward along the port corridor. For a moment Tommy thought she meant to hide him in her own stateroom, but she led him past the door of 420, and jerked open the narrow door at the end of the passage that opened onto the vertical hatchway. In the unlighted gloom the rungs of the ladder were barely visible.

"Climb down," she pointed. "I will follow you."

Tommy's arms were stiff by the time he reached the bottom, at the level of the lowest hold. Lallah was at his side. Her arm touched his; she was feeling

around the steel sides that shut them in like the walls of a well.

"The door—where is it?" she whispered. "Ah—here!"

Tommy heard a faint squeak as a screw-bolt was turned and a bar shifted; then he felt a draft of warm, fetid air in his face.

"The hold," she whispered rapidly in his ear. "You will be safe here. No one ever looks, while at sea. If I come, I will whistle—so!" She gave a faint piping, like a bird's call. "If anyone else comes, you hide behind the cargo, somewhere, and say nothing. Be patient, my Tommy; I shall fix everything, for you!"

Her moving lips came close enough to brush his cheek in the dark. Then she gave his arm a little push. At the first step he half stumbled, and pitched forward to his hands and knees. Before he rose he heard a gentle thump behind him, and then the faint rasp of metal on metal. He knew that the heavy door had been swung shut, and he guessed what a few moments later he confirmed for a fact. It was locked, bolted from the hatchway side, and he was a prisoner in the black hold!

A lighted match made only a feeble impression on the gloom. It showed him what looked like an enormous cavern, with here and there bales, crates, and boxes piled to the roof, cleated and lashed in place to prevent shifting. The G-man hauled his aching body to a comfortable position on top of some bales, and tried to straighten out the strange happenings of the past few hours. He wondered if he were a fool to trust the girl. But the darkness, the gentle roll of the ship, and his own fatigue soon overcame him, and he dropped off to sleep.

He woke abruptly to find light glaring in his eyes. Men were moving about in the cleared aisles, the cargo door stood wide open, and there were shouts and the creaking of pulleys coming down the shaft from the hatch.

Uncertain as to what to do, Tommy

decided to follow Lallah's advice and lie quiet. He slid quietly from the bale and crouched in a corner where he could see without being seen.

A cargo net dropped a load of four or five large crates to the bottom of the hatch, and the men proceeded to stow them in the hold. The net was whirled up for another batch.

For more than an hour the loading of cargo continued. Tommy recalled what Fleming, the leader of the outlaws in suite 40, had said. This was the freight coming on at Santiago. It must, then, be nearly morning.

The loading finished, the winch ceased its whining and the men departed, turning out the lights behind them. The big steel door was slammed shut, and the bar screwed in place. Once more Tommy was left alone in utter blackness. A distant whistle tooted hoarsely; he did not hear the clank of the anchor chain grinding in, but a few minutes later the engines resumed their measured throb, and he knew the *Munalbo* was again under way, steaming now for Rio de Janeiro and Santos.

And then the G-man heard a new sound. Very quietly the cargo door from the hatch opened and closed again. Though his eyes were accustomed to the darkness, it was so black that he sensed rather than saw the vague form that moved just below him. He drew back, waiting for the agreed signal. Something told him that it was Lallah, and when he caught a faint breath of a familiar perfume he was certain of it. Yet he heard no whistle. Perhaps she was not alone; puzzled, he continued to wait.

There flashed suddenly a feeble gleam of light, such as might be given by a small flashlight. It betrayed nothing of the person who held it, as it traveled along the tier of cases which had just been stacked along the aisle. It paused, went on, then paused again, and abruptly went out. Then there came the soft murmur of words. Tommy strained to

hear but could not understand them. Then he heard the creak of a board being pried loose.

In growing astonishment he waited. More noises, indicating that crates were being opened, and the sound of several voices, increased his bewilderment. The tiny gleam of light moved here and there, and he was sure that there were now quite a number of men present. After a time, quite unexpectedly, he heard a high-pitched whistle — the signal.

"Lallah!" he called, sliding down from his hiding place. "What is it?"

His feet were no sooner on the floor than his arms were both seized and held. By the dim glow of the shaded flash he could see now a ring of vague faces. They all bore a certain resemblance to each other, a racial similarity, and stared at him with ominous curiosity. But he knew that it was Lallah who stepped to his side, although she did not speak to him.

She was talking in a language that he could neither understand nor identify. There seemed to be a note of pleading in her voice. But as she talked Tommy saw one of the men near him draw a dagger from under his coat. The girl saw it too.

"Mukla!" she cried as she sprang forward and grasped the arm that held the knife.

The man with the knife made an impatient movement. Then another voice spoke, a voice that held the unmistakable note of authority. The dagger disappeared as if by magic. In a few seconds Tommy was dragged to one side, and swiftly but securely bound to the framework of a piece of machinery in one of the opened crates.

For a few minutes longer the girl talked in that strange language. Lallah seemed to be explaining something to these men, who had appeared from Tommy knew not whence. Though Tommy called to her twice, she did not come near him. Then the flashlight went out, and he heard the cargo door

creak open. After it thudded shut, there was a complete silence.

Tommy was convinced now that the girl had betrayed him. But he was puzzled by her repeated efforts to save his life. If she really meant to help him, turning him over to a gang who tied him up in the hold was a strange way of showing her loyalty.

"Damn me for a fool!" he cried aloud, struggling hopelessly to loosen the bonds that held him. "A woman-trusting fool—"

"Say that again!" commanded an unseen voice.

Tommy went rigid with shock. It seemed like the voice of a disembodied spirit, floating out of the impenetrable dark. A voice that was strangely familiar.

"Who was that?" Tommy called.

"Tommy Dewart, say that again!" repeated the ghostly voice.

"Vickers!" Tommy yelled. "Where are you?"

"In person," came the chuckled reply. "And what a swell spot I'm in! This crate is nailed shut tight as a drum, except for a couple of one-inch cracks. I feel like a sardine in a can."

"But how in heaven's name did you come *here*?"

Briefly Vickers related what had taken place on shore, up to the point where he was pursued out onto the stringpiece of the pier.

As G-77 talked, Tommy Dewart struggled with the bonds that held him prisoner.

"What's developed on board the *Munalbo*, here?" Vickers asked finally.

Tommy told him, describing what he had seen in Cabin 42, and how he happened to be in the hold. When Vickers asked if he had received the reply to his radiogram, he said no.

"That's why she used the name of Dewart," pointed out Vickers. "She must have represented herself to the radio operator as your wife, and received the message meant for you. Therefore, she knew all the time you were a G-man."

"But why should that thug, Jake, try to kill her? If she isn't working with them, what is she in this for?"

"I'm only just beginning to understand, myself. What has been throwing us off the track all along is the fact that we've been looking for one set of thieves. Actually there are two. The Indian crowd on one hand, and another gang, evidently professional jewel thieves. They had both made plans to snatch the Key of Vashnu from the Churchill Galleries that same night. But the professionals got there first. Some of the Indians must have been in the building at the same time; that explains the unlocked front door, and the shooting in the courtyard. But the local gang got away with the loot, although the Indians were hot after them, and have been close on their trail ever since. Closer on their trail, up to now, than we have been. But we're going to—"

A sudden loud sound came to their ears, muffled as it came through the steel door of the hatch.

Together they listened in the blackness. It had sounded like a shot. Then the sound was repeated, twice, somewhere up in the ship, just loud and sharp enough to penetrate to where they listened. It could be nothing but a gun shot.

"What do you suppose is going on?" queried Tommy.

"Whatever it is, we've got to get out of here, somehow," G-77 said grimly.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### Behind Closed Doors

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**B**UT it was some time before they devised a method. Vickers was imprisoned in his crate, unable to loosen the planks without help from outside.

Tommy was securely bound by the elbows and ankles; he could barely touch his finger-tips across his belly. But he managed to get one hand in a side pocket, and drew out a packet of matches.



By a straining effort he scratched one, and held it steady. Inside his case G-77 was ready with his revolver. By the flickering light of the match he took careful aim through the crack that was hardly wide enough for the muzzle, and aimed at the rope that bound Tommy. The gun barked, and Tommy felt his arm twitch. Vickers aimed again, and fired. The match went out.

Tommy grasped another, lighted it. After two more shots, G-77 said anxiously, "Try it now, Tommy."

Tommy strained with his left arm. It seemed to move a little. He relaxed, set himself, and gave a mighty jerk. The rope, frayed by Vickers' bullets, parted, and his left arm came free.

After that it was only a few minutes before he had ripped loose the rest of his bonds. Then he found a stray spike, and with it pried desperately at boards he could not even see until Vickers' shoulder was able to break a way out.

For a moment they stood close in the dark, and shook hands silently.

**B**UT all of this had taken time. The ominous sounds continued from overhead. Several more shots, and once a scream that, distant as it was, reached them with a note of terror. Also, the engines had stopped, remained silent for three or four minutes, and then started again.

First they tried the cargo door into the hatchway. It could not be budged from inside. Then Tommy remembered that the stevedores had closed it before leaving; yet the brown men had entered and left. There must be some other way out of the hold.

By using all his remaining matches they found it. A steel-grated catwalk led close up under the ceiling to a small door, no more than a man-hole, giving access to the hatch-shaft. Tommy opened it, thrust his head out, and drew back sharply with an exclamation just as something hurtled past his head to strike somewhere behind him with a sickening dull thump. The G-men

crouched back and waited. The hatch cover was pushed partly aside, and they could see figures moving above. They had time to get one look at that bundle. They saw bodies sprawled on the bottom. Three of them wore officers' uniforms.

Then the hatch cover was replaced and the shaft was in darkness. A low moan reached their ears.

"Those officers are alive, at least one of them," Tommy said.

Without further discussion Vickers climbed through the narrow opening and down the rungs set in the wall, with Tommy at his heels.

They found first Captain Creston, with a bullet through his skull. Across his legs lay the body of the chief engineer, also shot through the head. A man in civilian clothes, evidently a passenger, had his throat cut. The fourth body, also in uniform, was that of the second mate. He had been slugged behind the ear, and pitched down forty feet of shaft, but he was still alive. Vickers straightened the buckled limbs gently, and the poor devil recovered consciousness enough to talk.

"What's going on above decks?" G-77 asked him.

Between gasps and racking coughs the officer managed to tell them. The substance of his disjointed phrases was that a group of men, seeming to appear from nowhere, had seized control of the ship. It must have all been planned, and the plan had worked out precisely. They had struck simultaneously at the three vital points; the bridge, the engine room, and the radio office. There had been some resistance in the engine room, until they shot the chief where he stood.

The captain had been murdered on the bridge. Other ship's officers had been killed, when they resisted; the rest had been driven into their cabins and locked in under guard. All of the passengers had been herded into the writing rooms and library, near the stern, where they were also locked in, and

watched by an armed sentry. The pirates had then forced the engine room crew to start up the engines again—the chief had stopped them—and two of their number, on the bridge, had turned the ship off its course, heading her due east.

He himself, he said, had been on the bridge, handling the wheel. He had tried stealthily to change the course, and point her back toward Santiago harbor. But they must have known their navigation; they had discovered his tactics immediately. One of them had knocked him out with a blow of a gun-butt, and thrown him down the hatch. He had no idea of their purposes, but had noted that they first appeared from the neighborhood of suite 40, on B deck.

And this was all they learned, for suddenly the man's mangled limbs stiffened convulsively, and then relaxed. The death rattle sounded in his throat, and he lay still.

"Poor devil," murmured Vickers. "Thank God he could warn us before we stuck our heads up into a hornets' nest. We've got to get up there, Tommy, and see what can be done, but we've got to be mighty careful not to fall into their hands. Look here, there were only about twenty of them. If they've got guards over the passengers, in the engine room, the radio room, and on the bridge, and more of them are busy in suite 40, there can't be many wandering around the corridors. We might make a reconnaissance. I'll work back toward the stern, and see if I can't get in contact with the passengers. There might be a few bold spirits who would help us. You see if you can't reach the officers' cabins, up under the bridge. Don't take any chances, but if you can get a word through a port, ask them to meet us here if they can—as many as can—and we'll try to round up the pirates. Whatever you do, don't stay more than, say, fifteen minutes. Come back here, and we'll put our heads together again."

Without further talk they climbed up the ladder and through the door opening onto the end of E deck corridor. Here they separated, Tommy slipping cautiously up the forward companion, and Vickers going back along the passage toward the stern.

A MIDSHIPS G-77 came to a small side door opening inward onto a latticed steel landing, from which a steep flight of steps descended into the depths of the engine room. He glanced downward through the spaced iron bars. He could see stokers and oilers going about their work as usual, but casting sullen and fearful glances toward the single man in a brown suit of mufti who stood with a revolver in each hand near the foot of the steps. Quietly G-77 slipped past this door.

Continuing along the deserted corridor past the stewards' quarters and kitchens, he came to the after companion, beyond which lay the dining salon. Not a soul was in sight; he tiptoed up the carpeted steps with great caution. He found no one on D deck level, but as soon as his head rose high enough to give him a look at C deck, where the library doors were, he paused abruptly.

Both doors were closed. In front of each, his back to the door, stood a man. Both of these men had that odd, foreign slant to their features with which Vickers was becoming familiar, and both held revolvers poised in their hands. They stared straight before them.

Vickers backed down the steps without a sound. One man he might be able to handle. Two would be a little difficult, unless he and Tommy came together. There was no other way of reaching the imprisoned passengers except through one of those doors. This end didn't look hopeful. Perhaps Tommy was having better luck.

He retraced his steps along the corridor. As he neared the forward end frightful, blood-curdling shrieks broke forth. He could not immediately lo-

cate them. They were agonizing shrieks that only a person suffering tortures of the damned might make. For a few moments he hesitated, his scalp lifting anew at each horrid scream. Then he remembered his own caution to Tommy, to return without taking any chances. He passed through the door, climbed down the ladder in the shaft, and crouched at the bottom, waiting. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, twenty . . .

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## CHAPTER XVII

### Thieves and Torturers

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**I**N the meantime Tommy had mounted the forward companion to D deck, and then to C deck. Hearing sounds of activity above him on B deck, where suite Forty lay, he climbed no farther, but turned along a narrow passage that led forward to the fore-castle. He came to another small companionway here that led up onto the open part of B deck, in front of the bridge. Halfway up he paused. By raising his head he could look up at the glassed-in bridge itself. Heads were visible there; one stationary, gazing out over the bow, others that moved back and forth.

He waited until those moving heads were both turned away; then dashed up the steps and into a corner under the overhang of the bridge. Here he was flattened against a wall; on the other side of that wall were the captain's quarters, and those of several of the senior officers. There was a port close by his head, but curtains rendered it opaque from outside, and he dared not rap, lest he attract the attention of the wrong persons.

A little beyond was a door, which was closed. He slipped along the wall, and softly tried the knob. The door was locked, as he had expected. But beyond was another port, and in this one the curtains inside seemed to be drawn back. He crept closer, and got a foothold on the flashing along the base of

the wall in order to pull himself high enough to look in.

Clinging to the rim of the port with both hands, he pressed his nose to the thick glass. The glass was salt-encrusted, and it was dark inside; for a moment he could see nothing at all. Then the white edge of a sheet swam into view, marking the position of a bunk. Was that a man lying on the bunk? Or was it only a shadow? He strained his eyes to be sure—and then two hands gripped his throat from behind.

He was at a disadvantage from the first, with his feet six inches off the deck, and his assailant was strong enough to hold him that way, suspended in midair, while choking him savagely. But Tommy writhed like an eel, his strength redoubled by desperation, and managed to swing a fist sharply behind his own head. It struck a bony skull, and he heard a hissed curse. He swung again, harder. He missed his invisible target. But his antagonist had to dodge, and Tommy got his feet on solid planks. He began kicking furiously.

A sharp blow to his attacker's shin, and Tommy felt that grip on his wind-pipe relax. He took a long breath into his cramped lungs and twisted about to face his foe.

But as he turned the butt of a gun descended on the back of his skull. Lightning flashed in Tommy's brain, and he folded up like a jackknife. Before his head cleared, his elbows had been trussed together behind him, the torn sleeves of his own coat serving for bonds.

Then he was jerked to his feet, and propelled roughly toward the door opening into B deck corridor. They stopped before the door to suite 40. Then the G-man's ears were assaulted by a high-pitched scream of sheer terror from within the room. A man whose face, in spite of those horror riven shrieks, was totally impassive, opened the door to them. Tommy was

thrust rudely into the sitting room of suite 40.

Now he saw where those unearthly yells were coming from, and his skin prickled with horror. In the bedroom numbered 41, where twelve hours before he had been sitting bound to a chair, a man whom he recognized as Jake, the strong-arm guy, was strung up to the bed, which was a four-poster. He was undressed down to the waist, and his ankles were trussed, one to each post at the foot; his elbows one to each post at the head, so that he was slung like a hammock, spread-eagled in mid-air, a couple of feet above the bed itself. A man knelt by the bedside, holding a lighted candle in his hand.

When he lifted the candle a few inches, the flame touched Jake's chest and a horrible scream would burst from Jake's livid lips. He hung helpless, face down. He had considerable hair on his chest. In spite of his frantic efforts to raise his middle, the tiny flame of the candle came just close enough to singe the hair with a faint puff, and to sear and blister the skin beneath it. Already the hair was almost gone.

A man's chest and stomach are very tender-skinned, no matter how his palms may be calloused. The very thought of a live flame approaching that area made Tommy's muscles contract in sympathy. A more painful method of torture could hardly be devised, as was evident from its effect on Jake. His eyes were wild and staring, his whole massive body quivered and twitched, he blubbered and drooled uncontrollably.

"Why don't you save yourself this discomfort?" urged the man who held the candle. "Tell me where it is hidden and you shall lie quietly on this bed, and have cool water to drink—cool water . . ."

"I don't know, I tell you!" shrieked Jake, in a voice that was hoarse with agony and terror. "Fleming hid it—he never told me where! He never showed anyone. I swear I'd tell you . . . No, no! For God's sake, don't!"

His words merged into a scream of terror as the candle again rose toward his trembling abdomen. He writhed and wrenched in frenzy as a large, crimson blister swelled inexorably on his white skin.

Biting his lips, Tommy forced himself to look away. In the presence of this atrocity, it required a tremendous effort to force his mind to consider facts. But he saw now that all three of these rooms had been ransacked, to the last inch. The furniture had been literally torn apart, the baggage emptied, the rugs rolled up. He knew what they had been looking for, and to judge from the methods being employed on Jake, they had failed to find it.

For a moment he wondered why they hadn't first gone to work on Fleming, the obvious leader. Then he saw the figure in the green bathrobe, crumpled in the corner. There was still an automatic in the dead hand, but there were two blue-rimmed bullet holes that strangely altered the appearance of that pasty countenance.

A revolting smell of burning flesh was wafted through the door of the bedroom. Jake's cries rose to a sobbing crescendo, then abruptly ceased. The frightful agony had temporarily defeated its purpose; he had fainted. The man who held the candle gave an order in a strange tongue. Several others stepped forward to loosen Jake's bonds. In the next instant Tommy went stiff with horror, for in that torture chamber he saw Lallah!

She turned her head and saw him at the same moment. Their eyes locked. Her expression did not change by so much as a lifted eyebrow. She did not speak. But it seemed to Tommy that she was trying to convey some message to him with her eyes. But he could not read the message, and the sight of her among these fiends sickened him. He turned away deliberately.

A fresh chorus of shrieks arose. They had lowered Jake to the floor and rolled him against the wall, and were seizing

the little rat-eyed man. He started bawling before even the first rope was tied.

"I know nothing about it, on my mother's soul," he howled. "Why don't you try the purser's safe; maybe Fleming put it there!"

"The purser has already shown us the inside of his safe," said the man with the candle, smiling faintly.

The little crook yelled and shrieked all the time they were binding him to the bed-posts. Imprecations, pleas, threats, prayers and curses, poured from his pale lips in a steady stream. Finally he blurted to the man at his side, who was evidently the leader:

"Let me alone, and I'll tell you something. I don't know where it is, but he knows!" He indicated the unconscious Jake with a flick of his head. "Fleming told him. Work on him a little more, and he'll talk!"

The leader's grave face curled in a sneer of contempt. He recognized that statement, as did Tommy, for a craven lie.

"You are lower than the yellow jackal," he said coldly. "Let us see, then, how loudly you can bark."

He calmly picked up the candle and relighted it. The rat-faced man burst into a torrent of frantic shrieks. The candle was passed in beneath his suspended midriff, and slowly raised. His shrieks became a perfect bedlam of ear-splitting screams that set the teeth on edge. But before the wavering flame had even reddened the first patch of skin, he fell suddenly silent.

The flame was withdrawn, while two of his torturers bent over his strangely limp body. Then they began untying him and Tommy knew what had happened. Before the first twinge of pain had coursed along his nerves, the rat-eyed man had died of heart failure from sheer terror.

They threw his body into the corner. The next victim was led to the bedside.

"My name is Copellard," he said firmly. "I am a diamond-cutter, with a shop

in New York. I was engaged to cut up a large ruby. I was told nothing of where it came from, though of course I guessed it was being stolen, because my fee was so high. I had nothing to do with stealing it, and I have never even seen it. I have only gotten my apparatus ready. I have no idea where it is hidden now. You can hold that candle under me for a week, and I could tell you no more."

The leader regarded him gravely. "I'm inclined to believe you," he said. "But just to be sure . . ." he nodded to his men.

In a few moments the unfortunate Copellard was strung up to the bed-posts, face down. At first he displayed admirable self-control, only biting his lips and uttering an occasional deep groan. But after a time, when his tender skin peeled back and the very tip of the flame danced against raw, red flesh, he broke down and screamed under the intolerable agony as loudly as the others before him.

WHEN they were cutting him down, unconscious, Lallah once more moved into Tommy's range of vision. Looking at her beautiful, delicately chiseled features, her sensitive hands, it was impossible to believe that she was one of these inhuman devils and helping them with their diabolic horrors. Yet there she was.

There seemed to be a conference going on in the smaller room. They had not found what they sought, and were apparently at a loss for further means of searching. Then the leader glanced out to where Tommy stood, a guard at his side. He asked a question; the guard replied. He turned to Lallah, and spoke unexpectedly in English.

"You said that *he* was once in this suite?"

The girl hesitated, then said: "Yes. But only a short time; I don't believe he—"

"Bring him in," ordered the Indian curtly.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Mad Men's Vengeance

**B**EING pushed toward the door of the bedroom, Tommy could feel the blood run cold in his veins. His eyes were on Lallah. She raised her hand in the beginning of a gesture, and he thought that she was on the point of making protest. But the words died in her throat, and her hand dropped. If she had intended to object, she must have realized that interference would be worse than useless.

They loosened his elbows. They stripped off his shirt and undershirt. In an uncanny preoccupation with irrelevant details, Tommy noticed that they threw his garments on the floor, and that Lallah picked them up and hung them on the back of a chair.

He lay on the bed now. Loops of rope passed about his ankles were slipped over the posts at the foot, and tightened until his feet were in the air. Similar loops were slipped up his arms and drawn taut just above his elbows. His forearms were thus left dangling, but he could reach nothing with his hands, anyway.

Now they were pulling the upper ropes tight, until his body was drawn up nearly to the horizontal. Suddenly he saw that Lallah was one of those who helped to tighten the knots. She leaned across him, so close that he caught a breath of her unforgettable fragrance, and even then, under those nerve-racking circumstances, it made his pulse quicken.

"Dog of a G-man," she said, in a strange, unnaturally harsh voice. "Now is the time to tell what you know."

But Tommy hardly heard the words. For her fingers were brushing along his wrist and he felt something pressed into his hand. He seized it and she drew away immediately. He did not look at it; he dared not risk the other watching eyes. But he knew immediately what it was. He could feel the tiny glass bottle, no larger around than his

little finger, and less than two inches long. The cork was of rubber.

And he knew instantly what it contained—poison, and doubtless a quick-acting one. Lallah was doing for him what she could. She could not prevent his ordeal, nor even postpone it. But she had given him a way to end the agony when it became intolerable.

"I will not insult your intelligence by telling you what we are searching for," said the calm, deep voice at his side. "But you were in these rooms while the leader, Fleming, was alive. I do not imagine that he told you where he had hidden our ruby. But your mind is keen; it is possible that you guessed something. If you did, it would be wise of you to tell us now, before . . ."

"Go ahead, damn you," retorted Tommy. "As it happens, I don't know where it is and never made any guesses. But if I did, I wouldn't tell you, not even the slightest hint. These methods may work on your blasted Hindoos, but you'll find a G-man is something different."

He was not thinking of the vial of poison when he spoke those words. He was resolved, at that moment, not to use it. He would have uttered the same phrases of defiance in any event. It was an expression of his nature; he was quite sincere in his belief that a G-man was different. He told himself grimly, with all the force of his will-power, that he would not break down like those others. No, never!

A feeling of warmth flowed up against his bare abdomen. It increased from warmth to heat. His muscles tensed slowly, lifting the middle of his body. The source of that heat followed him up inexorably. He was arched as far as he could raise himself, every sinew strained to the utmost in the unnatural contortion. The heat grew more intense, became a single concentrated, burning spot. The breath whistled through his clenched teeth. At last his muscles could hold him no more. His body sagged, in spite of his desperate efforts.



As his rigid stomach lowered upon the flame, the burning sensation rose to an unbearable peak. There was a moment when a lance of fire seemed to stab right through to his backbone. A faint groan was torn from his tight throat, and beads of sweat poured down his cheeks. Then the candle flame was lowered, just enough so that he still knew it was there—the exquisite cruelty of the experienced torturer.

“Perhaps you saw something that led you to believe where he had concealed it, yes?” suggested that diabolically even voice.

“I hope he took it to hell with him!” grated Tommy.

The flame wavered up against his bare skin. The man at his side made mildly interested comments. Through a blur of pain his words came.

“You are a G-man, then? You are different . . . Yes, I see. Your skin is paler than the others’ . . . It chars more quickly; I must be careful . . . The scars, I am afraid, will be bad . . .”

**T**HERE were no longer any respites, even for a moment. The flame was always there, no matter how Tommy writhed and struggled. The whole surface of his body became a bed of intolerable agony. Incredible pain coursed through his veins like molten lava.

His resistance cracked in one terrible cry, the groan of a lost soul plunging into nethermost hell. It was more than human flesh could stand. In one awful instant he knew that had he known anything about the whereabouts of the Key of Vashnu, he would have blurted it out, and he gave thanks for his ignorance. Weakness, dishonor, even death was far to be preferred to this frightful agony. Yes, death . . .

Then he remembered the bottle in his hand, on which his fist was now tightly clenched. Thank God for that! His fingers began working desperately at the cork. It stuck. He pried at it with his thumb nail. It started to loosen. The flame lifted, close against his smok-

ing flesh, and a terrible cry burst from his lungs. The little rubber stopper popped out and dropped to the floor. His hand moved toward his lips . . .

But before the liquid reached his mouth a loud, excited cry came from the direction of the door; a voice charged with excitement cried, “The ship is on fire!”

Instantly the leader rose, flicking out the candle. In his native tongue he started issuing orders. Footsteps hurried across the floor. The bedroom emptied as if by magic.

Tommy relaxed slowly, hanging by his bonds. A dull throbbing came from his seared chest, but it was nothing compared to the hideous pain of a few minutes ago. But there was no guessing how long this respite would last. The vial in his hand was open now, but he was careful to hold it so that none of the contents should spill out.

From the other room he heard two voices in low conversation. He raised his head and saw Lallah talking to one of the men, the one she addressed as Mukla. Their speech grew vehement, though Tommy understood nothing of the words; the young man appeared to be reproaching the girl, accusing her of something, which she consistently denied by shaking her head. Once he pointed at Tommy as he spoke; she shook her head more violently than ever.

Suddenly Mukla turned and entered the bedroom; Lallah followed. He glared at Tommy spitefully.

“The G-man,” he snarled contemptuously in English. “He is so very brave—why? There must be some reason for his bravery, no?”

He leaned forward suddenly. Lallah grabbed for his arm, but was not quite quick enough. He seized Tommy’s wrists, one after the other, and twisted his hands, palm up. With a cry of fierce triumph he snatched the bottle from Tommy’s helpless fingers.

“*Bismillah!*” he shouted angrily. “I

thought so! No surprise he is defiant, eh? Where did you get this, dog?"

Tommy said nothing. The question was repeated. "I had it in my pocket," he replied sullenly.

"You lie!" The furious Indian whirled on Lallah. "You gave it to him! You gave it because he is your lover! It is *cianistii kalii*, which comes only from India; the odor betrays you! Wretch."

He switched abruptly from English to his native tongue again and advanced threateningly upon the girl. She retreated before him, saying nothing.

Tommy, strung up to the bedpost, cursed his helplessness. He knew that he was about to see Lallah murdered before his eyes. Lallah, the girl who had twice saved his life. In despair Tommy turned his eyes toward the door leading into the other room. And what he saw there made his heart leap into his throat.

A man was crossing the sitting-room with stealthy, cautious steps. He was crouched, like a panther prepared to spring, and in his hand he carried a revolver. It was Lynn Vickers!

G-77 moved warily into the open doorway. Tommy tried to signal him with his eyes, but Lallah saw him at once. She uttered a quick ejaculation of warning. Vickers leaped forward, raising his hand. The young Indian whirled, a gun half out of his pocket.

But Vickers was too quick for him. His hand, holding the revolver, descended in a crushing blow on Mukla's temple. The Indian collapsed on the floor with a faint groan and lay still. Vickers whirled to face the girl.

"Get back in that corner and stay there!" commanded G-77.

She obeyed without uttering a sound. Keeping his eyes on her, and the gun in his hand, G-77 turned to the bed.

"Tommy! Are you all right? Have they—"

"I'm okay," Tommy grinned weakly. "Just cut that rope, will you?"

Vickers jerked hurriedly at the knots.

With his arms freed, Tommy lowered himself gingerly to a sitting position. Vickers moved toward the foot of the bed and yanked at the ropes that held Tommy's ankles. He loosened one, and turned slightly in order to reach the other. Lallah seized her opportunity like a flash.

"Look out, Lynn—she's going!" Tommy shouted.

As the girl darted through the door into the room beyond, she shrieked cries of warning to others outside.

"Stop where you are!" ordered Vickers, leveling his gun.

But she did not stop. As she neared the outer door Vickers' revolver gave a staccato bark. Still the girl never even paused. G-77 had purposely fired over her head, more to frighten her into obedience than to kill. She flung herself against the door, jerked at the knob. It refused to open. Vickers had deliberately locked it behind him on entering, and pocketed the key. She turned savagely.

"You might as well behave yourself," grinned Vickers.

But she seemed to go insane with fury then. She acted as if she cared nothing for the gun in his hand. She hurled herself back across the room. Her frantic glance found the rough china vase that had once rested on the mantel. It stood now on the floor against the wall, where it had been placed before the mantel was ripped bodily away. The artificial flowers still dangled from its rim.

She snatched it up with a quick movement. Its narrow throat made an excellent grip, its bottom bulged like a war club. She sprang toward Vickers, brandishing it above her head.

"Don't be a fool," warned the G-man from the doorway.

But at that moment there came the sound of pounding on the far door. Immediately afterward footsteps raced around the corridor toward the side door of Cabin 42, which Tommy was

sure was not locked. In a moment her confederates would be pouring in to help.

But the girl did not hesitate. She leaped forward, swinging the vase like a bludgeon, straight at Vickers' head. Still reluctant to fire, the G-man dodged aside. The vase grazed his skull, but struck full on his shoulder where it smashed into a thousand pieces. In the next instant Lallah, Vickers and Tommy were standing, petrified by sheer amazement.

For Lallah held in her hand the Key of Vashnu!

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## CHAPTER XIX

### Gamble With Death

---

**A**LL the time it had been inside that vase! A more clever hiding place could hardly have been devised. Anyone could see at a glance that the neck of the vase was too small to admit an object of that size; therefore no one would think of looking inside. Evidently the vase itself had been molded around the key, closely enough so that there was no room for a betraying rattle. A simple enough task for any worker in pottery, even for an amateur like Fleming himself.

Vickers sprang forward with a cry. At the same instant the door of number 41 burst open, and half a dozen men poured in. Tommy, rising from the bed, was hurled back again by the impact of a burly form. Fingers clutched at his throat, forcing his head hard against the wall.

He squirmed sideways, sharply aware of a rasp of pain as the other man's body bore down on his tender breast. He brought his two fists up inside the arms that held him, and drove them hard against a bony chin. He heard the man's teeth come together with a click, and the grip on his throat slackened ever so little.

One elbow broke the grip completely now, and he lowered his chin to protect

his windpipe from a fresh attack. His antagonist, half on top of him, tried to writhe to his knees. But Tommy jerked the other man's neck sideways, and struggling furiously they both rolled off the bed to the floor without either relaxing the battle.

His opponent's hands were fumbling at his scalp, and suddenly Tommy realized that those thumbs were searching for his eyes, eager to gouge them from their sockets. He raised his head without warning, and caught the end of a finger between his teeth. He was rewarded by a howl of pain.

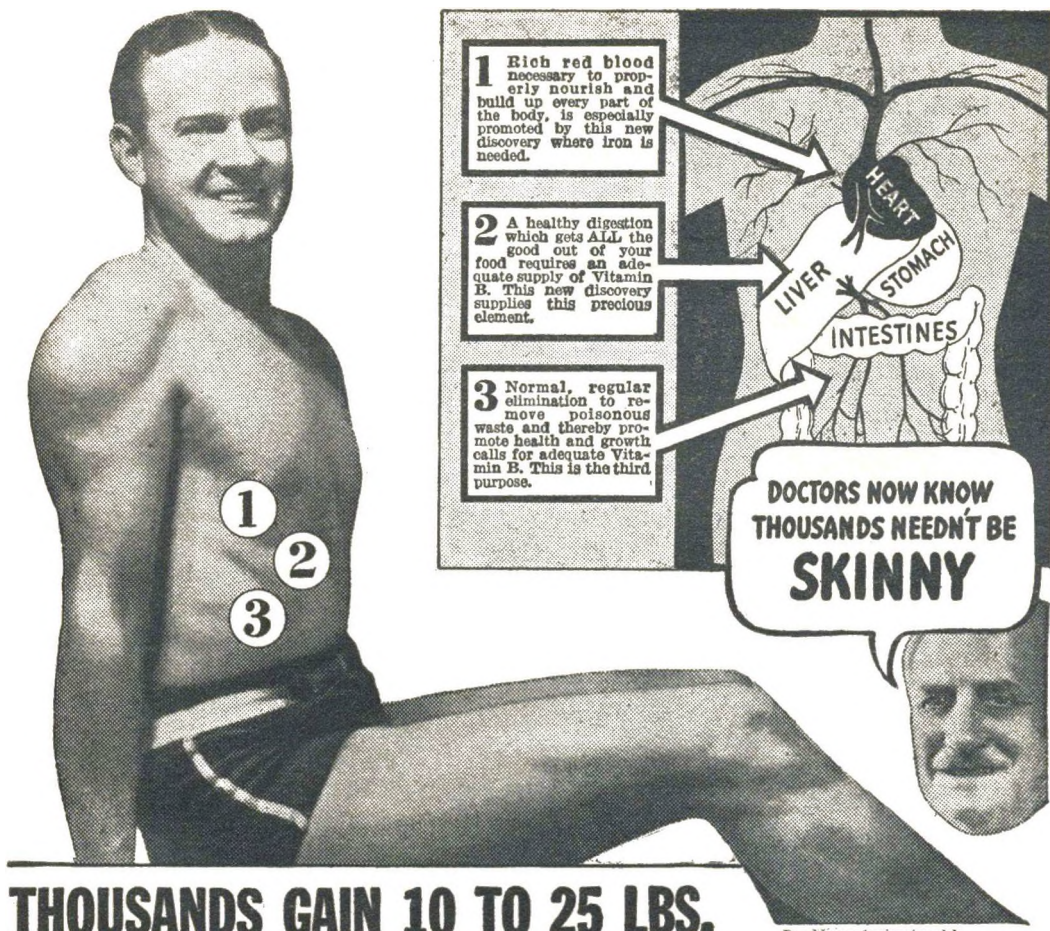
Tommy followed up the movement instantly, throwing himself on top of the other man. He pinned one arm under his knee, and disregarding the other seized a pair of ears one in each hand. He banged that close-cropped head viciously on the floor twice, three times. The resistance to his tugs stiffened. He changed his tactics abruptly, and jerked the head to one side. It cracked sharply against the leg of the bed, and the struggling foe in his hands became a limp heap.

Tommy sprang to his feet just as a revolver roared in the next room. He jumped toward the door. Just as he rushed through it, a man fell flat across his path. Tommy tripped, stumbled, and caught himself with difficulty.

Through a dusty haze he saw the wild mêlée in the corner. Vickers was backed up against the wall, defending himself against three attackers. His gun was in his hand, but he was using it chiefly as a club, doubtless to save ammunition. He swung a savage blow at a form before him; the man recoiled. As he did so Tommy encircled his throat from behind.

The Indian writhed out of Tommy's grasp, and attempted to use his fists. But the G-man sent home a crushing blow to the solar plexus that piled the foreigner in a heap.

Tommy wheeled to see Vickers stepping over three prostrate figures, slipping  
(Continued on page 116)



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*(Continued from page 114)*

ping his revolver back into his side pocket as he did so. One glance around the room told him that there was no one else moving.

"The key—the girl!" cried Tommy. "Where is she? Did she take it with her?"

Vickers glanced about the room, which was an indescribable shambles through the dense smoke that billowed in through the doorway. "I'm sure she didn't leave it here. And we'd better get out and find out about this fire."

Tommy shook his head to clear it of the dizziness.

"My God, that's right—the ship's afire! I wonder who did it."

"I started the fire myself," G-77 said. "When you didn't come back in fifteen minutes, I knew something must have gone wrong. So I thought a fire would bring the pirates to the hold and cover our movements for a while. It drew one of the sentries away from the library, and I laid the other one out. The passengers are loose; at least, about eight or ten of the younger men. I told them to try the engine room, while I came up here. I guess they've made progress; I notice the engines have stopped. The next point to attack is the bridge."

"But the girl—and the key!" protested Tommy.

"When we control the ship, there will be plenty of time to find her. She can't leave the boat in mid-ocean," replied Vickers calmly. "I'll see if I can get into the officers' quarters and release some of them. We'll need them and the crew shortly, to fight the blaze in the hold. Meanwhile, you go down to the engine room, see how they're making out, and round up that squad of passengers for an assault on the bridge. Get them and meet me back here in ten minutes."

Coming out into the corridor, they separated. Tommy started aft, toward the engine room.

Vickers slipped out through the door

in the end of the passage leading to the forward deck. Here the smoke seeped out of the hatch in great waves and loops, hanging in the still, foggy air in fantastic shapes. The whole ship was swathed in a blanket of smoke and fog.

G-77's first object was to locate the girl in whose hand he had last seen the Key of Vashnu. As he dashed through a door giving onto a narrow passage a shot rang out, ahead of him. A bullet sang past his elbow. Simultaneously Vickers fired from the hip.

Through the haze he saw a figure at the far end of the passage collapse slowly. He jumped to the nearest state-room door. It was locked, but when he shook the knob a voice inside shouted, "Who's there?"

The G-man identified himself and asked who was in the cabin.

"First Mate Anderson," came the reply. "And one steward!"

There was no time to search for keys. Vickers held his revolver to the lock, at a slight angle. Its blast tore the name plate from the panel, and jammed the mechanism. With a wrench he jerked the door open. Two men burst out.

"Have you got guns?" Vickers snapped.

"No, but I know a locker where some are kept!" the first mate said.

"Get them first and follow me to the bridge," ordered G-77.

As the two seamen hurried aft, Vickers stepped to the next cabin and gave the door the same treatment. Only one officer emerged; the third mate, whose arm had been broken before he was subdued.

"Go into suite 40, and tie up the pirates that aren't dead," Vickers told him before moving on down the passage.

In a few short minutes the G-man had forced five doors, and released a total of ten men, officers grimly resolved to recover control of their ship, and gladly accepting Vickers' leadership in the emergency. By this time his automatic

*(Continued on page 118)*





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(Continued from page 116)

was empty. Slipping in a fresh clip, he darted out one of the side doors and emerged on deck. He was facing the stern and something he saw there brought him up short.

Through the billows of smoke he caught sight of a man up on the boat deck. He was doing something with the davit of one of the lifeboats. As Vickers watched, the boat began to drop as the man, unrecognizable in the haze, paid out the rope. He halted the boat's descent, ran around the cleat, and began to work at the other davit.

Then Vickers saw the second figure. He was near enough now to recognize the girl, Lallah. As he watched, she handed the man something—something that glittered even in that uncertain light. The figure thrust it quickly inside his belt, as the girl moved away.

Vickers acted quickly on a sudden hunch. He moved toward the ladder leading to the boat deck. By this time the lifeboat had been lowered until it hung suspended, just above the water. When the G-man leaped up the steps to the deck the boat had disappeared.

Hurrying to the rail, Vickers peered down to the water. Through the fog he could just see the hulk of the man and the little boat which was now floating gently on the oily swells. Vickers saw that it was one of the larger lifeboats, equipped with a small marine motor. The man was working over the motor, preparing to start it. Any moment the boat and man would vanish into the mist and smoke—and with them would go the Key of Vashnu.

G-77 thought fast. His marksmanship with an automatic was good. He could undoubtedly shoot that pirate through the head with the first bullet. But shooting men down in cold blood is not part of a G-man's training; and furthermore, the man had the key in his belt and if he should happen to fall across the gunwale and sink, the Key of Vashnu would go with him.

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Quickly Vickers thrust the revolver into his belt. Hurriedly he stripped off his coat and shoes. Then he vaulted the rail, balanced for a moment on the extreme outer edge of the deck, and jumped.

At the very moment the G-man launched himself into space, the motor in the boat started, and the boat itself surged away from the side of the ship. Instead of landing in the middle, Vickers came down astraddle one of the after thwarts. It was a drop of more than forty feet, and he struck with terrific force. The boat jolted and tipped precariously, until it shipped water over the side. But then it righted itself, and ploughed ahead.

Struggling to regain his balance, Vickers glanced toward the stern. In spite of its vicious snarl, he recognized the face that stared at him. It was Mukla. The dark-skinned man was drawing a knife from his belt. The blade was fully eight inches long, and had the bluish glitter of tempered steel.

Vickers tried to spring to his feet, but his left ankle collapsed under him; the jump had sprained it and it refused to support his weight. He clutched hastily at his belt. But his automatic was not there. The shock of landing in the boat had jarred it out. Quickly his eyes located it where it lay under the next thwart. In order to reach it, however, he would have to turn his back on that malevolent knife. He twisted hurriedly to face the stern, crouching on all fours.

As he awaited the attack, Vickers realized that the lifeboat was moving steadily away from the *Munalbo*, which was already lost in the smoke and mist.

## CHAPTER XX

### Tommy Dewart Takes Charge

**A**FTER leaving Lynn Vickers outside of suite Forty Tommy Dewart ran down the stairs of the forward companion. Here he found the  
(Continued on page 120)

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(Continued from page 119)  
smoke so thick that he could hardly see. In the corridor of E deck he might have passed a man at arm's length without knowing it. Under low ceiling it billowed and crept, choking his nose and throat until he coughed violently. It did something else; it stung his burns acridly, reminding him that a little care now would save much trouble later.

He ducked into the pantries, smeared butter liberally and hastily over his chest and stomach, and then started through the door that gave onto the engine room steps. A bullet crupped by his head.

He recoiled into the corridor, and explained by shouts who he was. In a few moments he was surrounded by an excited group of passengers and members of the crew.

"They found what they were after, and they still hold the bridge," Tommy told them. "We've got to drive them out of there. How many guns have you got?"

The G-man was relieved to find most of them armed.

"Good," said Tommy, leading them forward along the passage. "Now half of you go up the forward companion to B deck, and slip up on the bridge from the rear. The rest of us will go by way of the forecandle, and cut them off from that side. Don't hesitate to use those revolvers; these men are desperate devils. But watch out for Vickers, up there."

At C deck the two parties separated. Four men, of whom two carried revolvers, followed Tommy along the narrow passage that led forward toward the forecandle. The smoke grew thicker. The fire in the hold, which Vickers evidently did not think serious enough to destroy the vessel, was producing a vast amount of smoke, unchecked as it was. They were all coughing and barely able to see from streaming eyes.

Two or three shots rang out ahead of them. The stocky youth at Tommy's  
(Continued on page 121)



(Continued from page 120)

side toppled backwards, and carried two of the others to the bottom of the stairs in a heap. The last two rose again, but the youth did not.

With a curse Tommy took the gun from his dead hand and started up the steps again. The others were now not quite so anxious to follow, although the smoke below was strangling them.

Halfway up the G-man paused. He could hear a fusillade of shots somewhere above his head. He knew that the officers' quarters lay just aft of the bridge; perhaps Vickers had succeeded in releasing some of them. Or maybe it was the second party of passengers, coming up from the rear.

Tommy raised his head very cautiously toward the top step. When his eyes came into range of the glass front of the bridge, he saw that one of the panes had been slid open, and in that space was the vague outline of a head, blurred by the intervening smoke. He rested the revolver on the metal edge of a step and aimed with great care. He pressed the trigger. The head popped out of sight, and he heard a faint cry.

"Come on, gang!" he yelled.

Without looking to see if they followed, he dashed across the few feet of open deck under the shelter of the overhang. No shots greeted him. The door into the officers' quarters, near which he had been captured less than an hour before, now stood open. From somewhere inside he could hear a voice shouting orders. It was the first mate's voice. He knew then that Vickers had succeeded in releasing the officers.

Tommy sprang to the little door that opened onto a flight of steps leading up to the bridge where those shots had come from. He knew that the Indians were up there. He jerked it open, and a body rolled out against his ankles. Vaulting it without a pause, he leaped upward.

His head rose above the level of the bridge floor. He took one more step

(Continued on page 122)

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(Continued from page 121)  
upward, and came to an abrupt halt.

Except for one body that lay crumpled against the base of the wheel, there was not a single man on the bridge! But leaning weakly against the telegraph stood Lallah. In her hand was a little snub-nosed automatic, pointed squarely at Tommy's head. Her other hand held a tiny handkerchief to a trickle of blood from her ear.

Lallah's gun did not waver as she looked at Tommy Dewart. By pressing the trigger she could have shot him dead before he could have raised his hand. She did not press the trigger. Tommy did not raise his gun hand.

"Drop the gun!" he said sharply.

Her fingers relaxed, and the automatic thumped on the floor. Then she reeled, swayed loosely, and her knees began to buckle. Tommy leaped just in time to catch her before she fell.

SHE was still in a dead faint, several minutes later, when the mate and two quartermasters came charging up the steps. They informed the G-man that the officers and crew once more had control of the ship, and that the Indian pirates were all either dead or captured. The urgent need now was to get the pumps to work on the fire before it got out of bounds and overwhelmed them.

After seeing that a doctor was called to treat the graze wound on Lallah's scalp, Tommy cheerfully lent his aid to the fire-fighters. The blaze, while it emitted an enormous volume of smoke, was entirely confined to that section of the vessel by fireproof bulkheads. They fought it by closing all cargo doors, and pouring streams down through ventilators and flanged nozzles provided for that special purpose. Even so, it was almost an hour before they had it definitely under control.

Mounting at last to the open deck, Tommy drew a grateful breath of fresh air and heaved a great sigh. He climbed on to B deck, and entered the familiar

(Continued on page 123)

(Continued from page 122)

Forty suite where all of the Indians had been collected and were now under strong guard. Twelve of them were corpses. Seven others were wounded, two fatally. Only one of their number was without a scratch. Lallah wore a bandage about her raven hair.

"Say," he said suddenly, "where's Vickers?"

He did not know, the head steward said. He had not seen the other G-man at all. Tommy walked out of the suite, and around to the bridge, where the first mate now had charge. No, he did not know, either. He had last seen him when Vickers was running through the officers' quarters, shooting the locks off the doors. He thought the G-man had then dashed out on deck, but he had lost him in the smoke.

Tommy moved from one part of the ship to another. At first he walked, and asked his question casually. Before he finished, he was running. And finally he had everyone searching for Lynn Vickers. But after a half hour, during which every nook and cranny was combed, it became evident that Vickers had disappeared completely.

One of the seamen reported the fact that the captain's gig was missing. Tommy Dewart felt that, in some way, Lynn Vickers had had something to do with that. Just what it was Tommy couldn't figure out, but he had the utmost confidence in G-77's ability to take care of himself, and knew that if the G-man had left in the little boat there was a good reason for his doing so. When a search of the ship failed, also, to reveal the jeweled key, and the girl disclaimed any knowledge of its whereabouts, Tommy knew there was nothing more he could do until he heard from Lynn Vickers.

In the meantime the former first mate, who was now captain, had gotten in touch with his superiors in New York by wireless. He was ordered to abandon the voyage and bring the *Muralbo* di-

(Continued on page 124)



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## POPULAR MECHANICS

(Continued from page 123)

rectly back to New York, where the fire damage to the cargo and hold could be appraised and repaired. This suited the wishes of most of the passengers as well, who had had their fill of excitement. So the ship was turned onto a northward course, and steamed back toward her berth.

The living Indians were kept under a strict guard, though Tommy's repeated attempts to question them came to nothing. They would not give any names, and even refused to furnish the names of their compatriots who had been killed. Fourteen dark-skinned corpses, therefore, were consigned anonymously to a watery grave.

### CHAPTER XXI Death Strikes Once More

**F**IVE days later the *Munalbo* steamed into the lower bay and dropped anchor. Within half an hour a police boat bobbed alongside. The chief of the F. B. I. was one of the first to come over the rail, and he and Tommy immediately went into a long conference.

For forty-eight hours the steamer lay anchored off Staten Island. Police and government boats were the only ones allowed near her; all others were warned away by the special platoon of armed detectives who guarded the rails. Not one of the passengers or crew was allowed to leave.

In the meantime a squad of picked men, experts in their work, literally combed that ship from stem to stern. They worked in relays, by sections. They went into every stateroom, every passage, every closet. They went through the quarters of officers and crew. They tore open each piece of upholstered furniture, they ransacked every lifeboat in its davits. They sifted the stores of food, and winnowed the holds. They even screened the coal in the bunkers, and lowered themselves

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into the soot-caked funnels. But they did not find the Key of Vashnu.

The anchor was at last raised, and the *Munalbo* steamed slowly up the North River to her berth at the foot of West 11th Street. No sooner was she docked than the chief came on board again with a message for Tommy.

"Just had a wireless report from the *Canadia*. She picked up the *Munalbo's* power lifeboat in the middle of the North Atlantic. Empty, somewhat battered by the seas. No trace of any occupants."

Tommy's face, haggard and strained by hope long deferred, took on an expression of sullen despair. Up to now he had refused to even consider the possibility that Lynn Vickers might no longer be alive.

The chief, seated behind his New York desk, looked gravely across it at Tommy Dewart, slumped despondently in a chair.

"Tommy," he said kindly, "there's no use in our clinging to a lost hope. Vickers is dead, and we might as well face the fact. It's nearly three weeks since he disappeared off the *Munalbo*. It's exactly two weeks since that lifeboat was picked up, a thousand miles farther north. If he had been taken from it alive, he would have notified us immediately. Even if the ship that rescued him had carried no wireless, it must have reached a port from which he could cable by this time. I'm afraid he's gone; and there's not a man in the department I'll miss more."

Tommy moved uneasily in his seat and tried without success to swallow the lump in his throat. He would miss Lynn Vickers as more than merely a fellow operator in the F. B. I. And he knew of someone else, a certain young red-head, whom the loss would strike harder still. The chief himself could not hide the catch in his voice.

(Continued on page 126)

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(Continued from page 125)

"The Key of Vashnu seems to have vanished equally completely. Whether Vickers had it, and carried it to the bottom of the ocean with him, I don't know. Maybe we'll never know. However, we've got to clean up what's left of the case as best we can. We've got two prisoners, Jake Brickell and the jewel cutter Copellard, charged with robbery; there is no doubt about their guilt. We've got half a dozen of the Indian gang. Against the men we've got plenty of evidence to convict them of piracy, as well as murder. But with the girl Lallah it's different."

He paused, looking thoughtfully at Tommy.

"It's odd," continued the chief, "but it happens that the circumstances were such that the only evidence on which she can be convicted of a serious crime is your own. So before I press her case I want to know one thing definitely. Will you be willing to testify against her in court?"

There was a silence that lasted for nearly a minute. Finally Tommy raised his head and looked the chief in the eye.

"Yes, I will," he said huskily.

The chief pressed a button. A man appeared in the doorway.

"Bring the Indian girl in," said the chief.

A moment later Lallah walked in. Having had no chance to replenish her wardrobe, she still wore the same blue hat and fur-trimmed cape, but the slightly time-scarred appearance of her clothes could not hide the slim grace of her figure, nor detract from the exotic beauty of her face. She said nothing, but kept her eyes stubbornly on the chief.

"Would you mind repeating what you just told me, Tommy?" the chief said quietly.

Tommy looked up, his mouth set in a grim line.

"He asked me," blurted Tommy des-

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perately, "if I would testify against you. I said—I told him I would."

If he had looked for her to exhibit any violent emotions, he was agreeably disappointed. She turned on him a glance in which a faint scorn was blended with haughty pride.

"Why not?" she said calmly. "It is your duty. As for me, I am not afraid."

Tommy made a sound like a growl. She was making no attempt to sway him, either through reason or emotion. But the unforgettable memory of a tiny vial, pressed into his hand, arose in his mind and he knew instantly that it would be impossible to keep his word.

He was about to speak—to tell the chief that he couldn't—when the phone rang. From habit he picked up the receiver and put it to his ear. The chief motioned to him to take the message.

"London calling, transatlantic service," said the operator. "Hold the line open, please. Just a minute . . . here you are, London."

"London!" exclaimed Tommy. He listened for a moment, and his face shone with excitement. "What! . . . Say that again!" After another brief pause he blurted, "London—how in thunder did you get there?"

After that, for several minutes, he just listened, his face a mask of astonishment. He sank slowly to a sitting position on the corner of the desk, pressing the receiver to his ear as hard as he could, so as not to miss a single word. Occasionally he uttered an ejaculation of dismay, or a brief, "What then?" Finally the receiver went *pop* in his ear, and he was jiggling the hook furiously. "Hello! Hello! Operator, I think I've been cut off. London, yes. Get that connection again, quick!"

"What is it?" said the chief.

"It's Lynn Vickers," said Tommy excitedly. "He's in London."

He kept the instrument in his hands, and spoke without turning his head, repeating briefly what he had just heard.

(Continued on page 128)

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# POPULAR COMICS

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(Continued from page 127)

"Lord, what a story! He saw that Indian, Mukla, take the Key of Vashnu from Lallah, and hide it in a lifeboat. When Mukla lowered the boat in the smoke, Vickers followed him—fought with the Indian and finally had to kill him. By that time the lifeboat had drifted so far away in the fog that it was impossible to find the ship again."

"Did he have the Key of Vashnu with him?" cried the chief.

"Yes. He found it on Mukla's body. He drifted for three days before he was picked up by a fishing schooner out of Cardiff. He told the captain his story. The schooner purposely avoided the steamer lanes, and landed him in London just before dawn this morning. He went direct to the royal vaults in the Bank of England. The governor of the Bank identified the jewel. It's safe in the vault, right now. But something—"

"Thank God!" exclaimed the chief. "Now we can breathe easy again. What else did he have to say?"

"Something happened there, then," continued Tommy. "Lynn said he had sent word to Lord Ledyard to come to the Bank. He was just telling me that the baronet was coming in the door of the room where he was telephoning, when I heard a loud crack; then the connection went dead. Since then I haven't gotten a word. Wait . . ."

The phone rang then, interrupting him. He answered. "Here he is again," he said to the chief.

"I'm sorry to tell you," came G-77's clear voice over the wire, "that Lord Ledyard has just committed suicide right in front of my eyes. He came in the door and saw the Key of Vashnu lying on the table. Before anyone could stop him, he pulled a revolver from under his coat and shot himself through the head."

"Lord Ledyard — killed himself!" cried Tommy. The chief, too, looked

(Continued on page 130)



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(Continued from page 128)

his amazement. "But why, after his jewel has been recovered?" Tommy continued.

"Haven't you guessed yet, Tommy?" asked Vickers. "He was the instigator of the whole thing. He had two motives. First, the desperate need of money. He was overwhelmed by debts; the Key of Vashnu was his only remaining asset. Such a stone couldn't be sold privately, and he dared not face the political dangers of selling it publicly. Even half the value of the smaller rubies into which it could be cut would be enough to replenish his fortune. So he hatched the scheme with the gang of New York jewel thieves. That's why they knew so much about which wires to cut, in the Churchill Galleries. He told them.

"But his second motive was even stronger; the curse of the ruby. Since the key was originally seized by the first Lord Ledyard, every one of his ancestors has died a death of violence. He was consumed by a fear of a similar fate and wanted to get rid of the damned thing. But it seems that the curse caught up with him after all."

Vickers' tone changed abruptly. "Well, I guess this rather cleans up our case for us. I'd better hang up and save the department three dollars a minute. Get word to Evelyn March that I'm catching the next boat across, will you, Tommy? . . . Good-bye!"

It took Tommy only a few seconds to repeat to the chief G-77's final revelations. Then he remembered the girl.

He stepped past the corner of the desk before he saw her. She was crumpled in a heap on the rug. Tommy knelt by her side.

Thinking that she had fainted, he seized her hand to chafe it. Something dropped to the floor from her limp fingers. It was a small glass bottle. The rubber stopper was out and lay a few feet away. The bottle was empty, except for a last drop of clear liquid. Lallah was dead.





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