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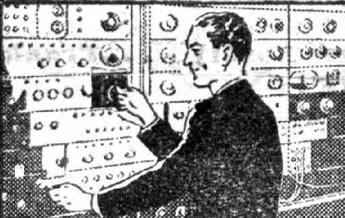
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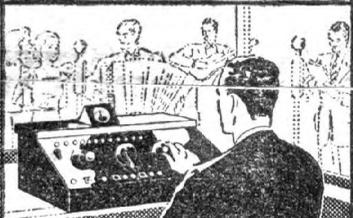
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RED MASK

detective stories

VOLUME 1

MARCH, 1941

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JERRY ALBERT, Editor

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BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
BRAIN OF THE OCTOPUS

by Stanley Richards



Who was the Brain of the Octopus? The Man in the Red Mask set out to track him down. Introducing a great new character.

CHAPTER I

“YOU think I’m kidding, don’t you, Perry?” Burke’s blue eyes were fierce and intense. “That guy sitting at the table could tell you who murdered the girl whose body was found on River street; he could tell you

who robbed Martin’s store; he could tell you who committed every one of the big robberies that took place in this town since General Walters became commissioner of police — and the five murders that went with the robberies. Yes, sir—that prosperous-looking citizen who looks as though butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth—

James T. Fox! The police inspector—Sampson—told me all about him.”

They were sitting at a table in the grill of the Jefferson Hotel—Perry Morgan, the owner of the hotel, and Donald Burke, who was Chairman of the recently formed Citizens' Committee for the Control of Crime, to which Morgan also belonged. Their topic of conversation sat at a table ten or fifteen feet away—a man dressed in a blue suit with a faint white stripe, over whom the waiter hovered solicitously. Fox's smooth, powerful brown hands held the bill-of-fare open close to his eyes—he seemed to be near-sighted, although he did not wear glasses. He looked like a prosperous merchant.

Perry Morgan's glance shifted from Fox back to Burke. He said lightly, “I didn't know I was entertaining angels unawares.”

“Black angels,” said Burke. “Remember that poor girl who was practically beheaded—Leila Gordon? She worked in Martin's store—saw the holdup. She telephoned and got the commissioner himself on the wire—wouldn't talk to anybody else. She told him she thought she'd recognized one of the holdup men. He told her to come down to see him—she said she would. Well,” finished Burke grimly, “she never did!”

Perry raised heavy eyebrows and shook his head slowly. “You're implying that there's a leak somewhere in the police department, Don. Or that Walters himself—”

“I'm not implying anything—just giving you facts!” Burke's tone was savage. “Pays to have civic consciousness, doesn't it? That girl would be alive today, if she hadn't felt it her duty—anyhow, we were talking about this guest of your hotel—James Fox.”

“He's had a suite in the Jefferson for several months,” said Perry reflectively. “I had no idea what sort of man he was.”

“I'll tell you what sort of man he is: He's the guy who lends money to the gamblers—and for that matter, he may be the bankroll for the underworld. My personal opinion is that he does the fencing for what they steal—damned crooked weasel! Look at him, will you? I'll bet he can sign a check for a hundred thousand dollars this minute, and get any bank in the city to honor it! Judges, district leaders—yes, even a United States senator, I hear—all pals of his. Sometimes I wonder whether it pays to be decent!”

He sat back and glared at Morgan.

Perry said quizzically, “Well, don't get sore at me, Don! I'm no partner of his!”

“No, but you're his host—and you don't even know who he is! Here's a city of only four hundred thousand—and there have been eleven big robberies, and five murders—in eight months! Damned shame, that's what it is! I've got a wife and a couple of kids—I'm afraid to let them go out at night. And I'll tell you this, Perry—it's all the work of one organization. Every one of those jobs was carefully planned. Law enforcement in this city is at a standstill—if something isn't done pretty soon, you'll have a lot of business firms moving out to where it's safer.”

“Sounds pretty bad,” said Perry vaguely.

Burke commented sarcastically, “You're one of those plutocrats who slaves his days away cutting coupons. Look out—you may be next. One of their main branches of business is blackmail. They specialize on guys like you!”

CHAPTER II

“HEADS up — the Big Cheese himself!” The bell-captain’s muttered warning came from the side of his mouth, and instantly the uniformed row of juvenile cynics ceased their low, corrosive criticism of the guests, sat up erect on the bench, and became sedate messengers, waiting to serve.

The slim man in blue swept them a swift, quizzical smile, and went straight to the elevator.

“Sometimes I think that guy is dumb,” remarked the captain, “and then sometimes I ain’t so sure!”

On the fourteenth and last floor of the hotel, Perry Morgan got out, and opened the door of the corner suite which, since his conversation with Burke five days before, he had had transformed into a large outer, and a small inner office, neatly but plainly furnished in oak. The sun streamed in from windows on two sides, and there was a general air of warmth combined with meticulous cleanliness.

Perry Morgan called, “Good afternoon, Gloria! And how’s the beautiful, hazel-eyed secretary at the end of a hard day?”

“The beautiful hazel-eyed secretary,” said the eye-ful at the typewriter with complete freedom from inhibition, “would like to resign and become the boss’s wife—forthwith! There might be a little excitement dodging breakfast dishes when hubby became temperamental or something, but there’s none at all in being a secretary!”

Morgan murmured reproachfully, “I wouldn’t mind a proposition at five p. m.—but a proposal! Woman, where’s your modesty?”

“Sitting here all day and waiting for that overworked slave at the

switchboard to bring up reports twice a day on what she overheard being said to and by Mr. James T. Fox is driving me crazy—and I don’t mean maybe! Now I know what it means to be a poor working-girl, and believe me I can feel for them! Here are this afternoon’s reports up to four p. m.”

“So Mr. Fox got all these calls in one afternoon, did he? Busy man—busy man—popular, too!” Morgan began reading the typewritten sheet. “Someone named Barney wants to borrow two grand for a month—no doubt at the usual fifty or one hundred per cent interest. Here’s a tip on a race—Gray Fox in the third—given by Jerry Connolly. Oh you Jerry Connolly—if I could only be sure! Poker game arranged for tomorrow night at eight—in his rooms in this hotel. Wonder if it’s a no-limit game—like those myself. And four—no, five different gals called Mr. Fox! How does he do it? Does he call them broads, do you suppose—no, he’s too ritzy from associating with judges, district leaders, and even a United States senator—according to Don Burke. Bet some of them are pretty nifty—those broads! Ah ha! What’s this?”

“I thought you’d see it after a while,” Gloria said disparagingly. “They’re all words of one or two syllables—you shouldn’t have any trouble reading them.”

Morgan was murmuring to himself, and paid no attention to her. “A man named ‘You Know Who This Is’—do you know, Gloria, that girl Margaret has no sense of humor whatever? Well, anyhow, Mr. You-Know-Who-This-Is appears to have telephoned the startling information to Mr. Fox that he caught one hundred and fifty fish last Tuesday — boy, what a fisherman! And he wants to

get rid of them because he's afraid they'll begin to—er—pardon the French, Gloria—stink! One hundred and fifty”—he looked at Gloria abstractedly—“fish!”

His secretary nodded quietly. “One hundred and fifty Government bonds stolen from Stearn & Crawford's messenger last Tuesday!”

“Now we're getting somewhere!” Morgan's eyes were alight. “The time has come, the walrus said . . .”

“I saw that stupid red mask in your desk!” There was no answering gaiety in her face. “Perry Morgan, you're acting like a juvenile! Why don't you turn your evidence over to the police—they're professionals—they're paid for it. These are dangerous men—Jim. Fox bank-rolls every criminal and gambler in the city. They'd bump you off as quick as say hello to you! Perry—please . . .”

Morgan said softly, his gaze fixed on her unseeingly: “I'm thirty-one, with enough money to last me twenty lifetimes—healthy, fair amount of brains—can handle myself better than most—can hit a tin can with a revolver at a hundred yards—and never did a useful thing all my life!”

“That's not true,” interrupted Gloria indignantly. “You give to every—”

“I know—I know—I give to charity—money that doesn't mean a damn thing to me! Other men risk their lives in war for their country—well, I'm going to take my chances in a war on this particular bunch that's been preying on Elm City. I'm well-equipped for it. Let's see—this Mr. You Know Who This Is will bring his fish to Mr. James Fox tonight at eight, he said. Okay, Mr. Fox! Shortly thereafter an apparition in a red mask will pay you a

visit—or shall we call it a visitation?”

“I think you're crazy,” stated Gloria sincerely. She added, however, “James Fox has suite 710—corner suite, just like this one. Suite 709 is empty.”

“Gloria,” said Perry Morgan, “you're a little fraud! You want me to do just what I'm going to do. And this is after office hours!” He took a step toward her—and she forgot to retreat.

CHAPTER III

THE shades were down, and the man at the desk was scribbling in a small, gilt-edged memorandum book. His hands were brown, smooth and powerful; he had keen eyes in a full, strong-jawed face.

Absorbed in what he was doing, he failed to see the door at his left, separating his suite from the adjoining one, open softly a few inches, and two eyes behind a red mask cast a quick look and withdraw. Next moment the door was opened wide.

James Fox looked up with startled surprise.

“Just keep your hands on the desk,” said a pleasant voice. The red mask the intruder wore was faintly grewsome—it had a death's head outlined in white, on a red background. Less grewsome but more convincing was the black barrel of a large-caliber revolver that pointed steadily at the gambler. “You know,” said Red Mask confidentially, “I could shoot out your right eye or your left one, nine times out of ten from here—that's on the level. So be good! Where are those bonds?”

Fox said coolly, “In here,” and made a motion to open the drawer of the desk,

"Now, now," remonstrated Red Mask, "that's an old one—please don't move! If they're in there, I'll get them—I don't want you to exert yourself. Just stand up and step away!"

Fox rose slowly. Suddenly he tensed and looked toward the door behind the Red Mask. He said, "Get him, Nick!"

The Red Mask laughed shortly. "And that one's got moss on it! I took the precaution of trying that door—it's locked." His tone became edged with menace. "I'm beginning to think the only thing you'll understand is a bullet. Where are those bonds?"

"What bonds?"

"The hundred and fifty bonds—Government 2's—delivered to you at eight o'clock this evening. I'll count till three. One, two—"

Fox stepped toward the safe, and Red Mask crossed the room and stood behind him as he worked the combination. The safe was a small one and stood near the window. Red Mask waited until Fox took out a thick bundle of bonds with a rubber band about them. Then, as Fox rose, he stepped back. "Put them on the desk," he ordered. After Fox had obeyed: "Now sit down in that chair." The gun pointed toward a chair near the hall door, and Fox sat down in it.

"Hands behind you!" As the handcuffs were snapped on his wrists, Fox muttered, "You can't fence those—you ain't got the facilities."

"That so?" The green eyes behind the mask gleamed with amusement. "Well, well! I'm afraid this is going to be a shock to you, Mr. Fox—I don't intend to fence them—I intend to return those bonds to their rightful owners!"

"Are you a dick?"

"No! If I were, I'd lock you up." Standing behind the gambler, Red Mask put a handkerchief over Fox's mouth and tied it. He said conversationally, as Fox gave vent to a smothered cough, "Remember that kid who was robbed of those bonds? That's just what they did to him—gagged him. The kid nearly suffocated.

"Well—I guess you'll be all right for a while. I'll telephone the hotel when I get out and tell them to come up here and release you. Be sure to complain to the police that I robbed you, will you?"

He stepped to the desk, picked up the bonds, examined them; then he distributed them in the various pockets of his coat. He was wearing black silk gloves. He opened the drawer of the desk, and as he had anticipated, found a .45 automatic. He grinned behind his mask, glanced at Fox, and slipped the weapon into his pocket. Fox's eyes followed his every move.

The Red Mask went to the door through which he had come, and opened it. He said jocularly, "The way of the transgressor is hard, Mr. Fox. Thanks for your unwilling cooperation. Good night—better not make it necessary for me to see you again. I might get rough next time."

He went softly through the door and closed it behind him.

In the office on the fourteenth floor, Gloria was waiting for him. She ran toward him as he came in. She said, "Well?"

With both hands he began taking bonds out of his pockets, while she watched him wide-eyed. He said, "One hundred and fifty fish! All it cost me was a pair of handcuffs—I'll have to put in a supply if I make Red-Masking a vocation. Tomorrow

we'll send them by registered mail to Stearn & Crawford."

"Why didn't you—why don't we call the police? A man like Fox should be behind bars."

"Won't get us anything. There's a better brain than his behind all these robberies—he'll lead us to him. On the way out toward the nearest palace of refreshment, we'll telephone and let someone know that Mr. James Fox is sitting in a chair in Suite 710, hoping there isn't a fire before someone sets him free. Chalk up the first round to the credit of Red Mask, the paladin of law and order. Come on!"

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the reform party swept into office, one of the first things they did was to bring General Hugh Walters to Elm City and make him commissioner of police. The general was a retired military man with a high opinion of his own worth, and a decided contempt for civilians. It was his idea that the best way to handle the crime situation was to charge down upon the criminals, horse, foot and artillery, and blast them out of their strongholds.

Trouble was he couldn't find where their strongholds were located. His arrogance antagonized the men under him; they resented his persecuting them with shooflies who spied on them, and with a thousand small regulations that harassed them continually. The deputy commissioners, handpicked by the general, were severe with fines and penalties.

That evening, a group of men sat in the mayor's study, and discussed the series of crimes, perfectly planned and executed, which had raised an increasing chorus of doubt

in the papers that the military gentleman was the right person for the job. Hizzoner was a short man whose powerful personality made one forget his stature. Present also were General Walters, the police commissioner, Major Ted Salter, who operated the famous Salter Detective Agency; Burke, chairman of the Citizens' Committee for the Control of Crime; Prendergast, who owned the Clarion; Police Inspector Sampson; Perry Morgan. Perry had received his invitation through Burke.

Hizzoner stated emphatically: "This can't go on, General! A dozen robberies, five murders—and not a single worth while clue! Discrediting the administration to such an extent that if an election took place tomorrow, we'd be snowed under. Gives weight to what these damned politicians keep shouting: Reformers are poor performers in office."

"If it weren't that I won't resign under fire, you could have my resignation right now!" There was a deep furrow in the general's brow; his eyes sought Major Salter's, where alone he knew he could find sympathy.

Hizzoner said curtly, "We won't discuss that tonight. Let's have something constructive . . . never mind sensitive feelings."

"You mightn't be so indifferent, sir," grumbled Walters, "if you'd been called a military martinet, stupid, inefficient, and a lot of other things."

Perry Morgan ventured quietly, "Well, the law authorities haven't exactly covered themselves with glory, have they?" Under the general's resentful glare, he smiled conciliatingly.

"I figured out the total of the loot taken since this administration appointed General Walters police com-

missioner," said Burke, his face grim, "and it hits around the three million dollar mark. Who says crime doesn't pay?"

"Before we're through with them, they'll find it doesn't pay," snapped the mayor. "Major Salter, have you any suggestion?"

"Only one." Salter was a distinguished-looking man, with a wide forehead under which a pair of somewhat quizzical blue eyes looked out alertly at the world. He had a drawling deliberate way of speaking. "I'd say look for the brain of the octopus. There is one, I think. Striking similarity in the care and thoroughness with which all these crimes are put over, don't you think?"

Burke said, "I agree," and Perry Morgan nodded. Perry remarked innocently, "Queer sort of thing happened at the Hotel Jefferson... fellow named Fox tied up and gagged by a man in a red mask... didn't take anything, according to Fox."

"He was probably interrupted by someone," said the general vaguely. "What seems still queerer to me, is that Stearn & Crawford robbery. A hundred and fifty thousand dollars in Government bonds stolen—and then returned by registered mail." He snorted. "In my opinion, they reported a robbery that never took place—just cooked it up to discredit me. At least that's my opinion." He glared about him as though challenging contradiction.

"Difficulty with that idea," said Perry, "is that Stearn & Crawford contributed to the campaign which put your administration into office. I don't think they'd be a party to any fake robbery."

Burke said shortly, "Neither do I."

"My agency has helped the police nab a couple of thieves here and

there," claimed Salter mildly. "Small fry, of course."

"You've been very cooperative, Major," said the general. "Wish there was a fund from which I could pay you."

Major Salter smiled gently. "Business is pretty good—I really can afford to give what help I can as a civic obligation."

"You were talking about the brain of a crime octopus!" Prendergast looked at Salter. "How about this fellow Fox? He's got a million dollars if he's got a nickel—he's the Big Bankroll for the underworld. Don't you think he'd qualify as the brains for this octopus?"

"He might," drawled Salter.

All eyes turned to the commissioner.

Walters said crisply, "I'll get him down to headquarters tomorrow, and before I'm through with him... He lives at your hotel, doesn't he, Morgan?"

Perry nodded.

"I'd like to get something on him!" The general's eyes held a vindictive light. "How about getting your girl at the hotel switchboard to listen in on some of his conversations?"

"It's an idea," agreed Perry gravely.

"I have a suggestion." It was Publisher Prendergast who spoke. "Mr. Mayor, why not bring in a couple of new men from out of town? Men the underworld of this city doesn't know?"

General Walters smiled grimly, then glanced at Salter. "We did—fellow named Clancy. He worked from Salter's agency. He wasn't here a week before he was found dead—skull smashed in—couldn't recognize him at first."

The telephone rang at the mayor's elbow, and he picked it up and said

"Hello!" He looked at Perry. "Yes, he's here!" He handed the instrument to Perry.

Perry said, "Hello, who's this?"

"It's Gloria," said a somewhat breathless voice. "Go over to the hotel as soon as you can, Perry . . . I'm at home . . . Margaret just 'phoned me . . . she's been trying everywhere to get you . . . James Fox was found dead in his room . . . murdered! Margaret says there was a knife stuck right through the back of his neck!"

"Okay!" said Perry. "See you tomorrow." He put down the telephone and faced the others, who were watching him, sensing something important. "Gentlemen," said Perry, "if Fox was the brains of your octopus, the octopus is dead. James Fox has been murdered!"

CHAPTER V

TWO days later, Perry Morgan sat in his office and smiled grimly as he read the account of the Van Alstyne robbery. He walked over to Gloria, who was hammering away at the typewriter, and put the paper in front of her.

"Well," he remarked, "there must be more than one octopus at large in this city, or the octopus has more than one brain. My idea is that Jim Fox was only a tentacle."

Gloria read the account carefully. "Protean Diamond—I heard about that one. It's a rose-colored stone that's supposed to render poison harmless. They raised a fake fire-alarm that took the officer off his beat—went in and took their pick—this description of the pearls they got is enough to make a lady envious. Listen to it: '—the famous string of Duke pearls, perfectly spherical gems noted for their translucent

white color with a delicate, subdued, iridescent sheen . . .' Just imagine their nerve, Perry—they pulled it off at six-thirty in the evening, when the street was full of people—and got away without leaving a clue! Nobody even saw where or how they got away—no one noticed a car or anything else!"

"This Van Alstyne runs an establishment that caters only to the very wealthy. Notice they only took the cream of his stock, Gloria? Whoever did that job must be quite a connoisseur."

"Two men," said Gloria. "They wore black masks—not red ones!" She grinned at Perry.

"Can't see the joke!" Perry's face was sober. "They shot that poor clerk down for no apparent reason—maybe he didn't jump fast enough to suit them. Damned cold-blooded murderers!"

"Pardon the levity," said Gloria meekly. She turned to the paper. "The Van Alstyne firm is under the protection of the Salter Detective Agency . . . Major Salter says the robbers were evidently professionals . . . well-organized gang . . . no fingerprints anywhere. There was another clerk, but the description he gives doesn't help any—he isn't sure whether the robbers had black, brown or blond hair, and he thinks they were both of about medium height. Major Salter says he'll run them down if it takes years."

"What does General Walters say?" asked Perry, who already knew.

"General Walters wants more police in uniform—two hundred more. And the paper wonders whether the general would like to place a man in uniform in front of every store in the city."

"When they went through Fox's suite," ruminated Perry, "they found

the place had been ransacked—safe open, cleaned out—same with the desk, the dresser.” He picked up the telephone. “Hello, who’s this? Oh, Margaret—on the day shift now, hey? Get someone to take the switchboard and come up here, will you?” He lowered his voice. “Bring any data you’ve collected—didn’t destroy it, did you?”

A few minutes later, a red-haired girl with a pert, cheerful face entered and put a sheaf of memorandums in front of Perry. She said, “It’s lucky I saved them—I thought”—she glanced at Gloria—“you didn’t want them any more.”

“It seems,” said Gloria gravely, “that the octopus isn’t dead, Peggy! At least not dead enough.”

“Oh!” said Margaret. She added, “I’m glad—I don’t like dead ones, do you?”

“Octopuses—I mean octopi,” stated Gloria, “are better dead—not from the viewpoint of the octopi, understand, but of the general public.”

“I get it,” said Margaret.

“Who’s this Myrna Fox that telephoned him so often?” Perry had been perusing the memorandums carefully. “Must be a relative.”

“Oh, didn’t you know, Mr. Morgan?” Margaret’s eyes danced with the delight of giving sensational information. “She was his adopted daughter! Can you imagine it—Myrna is at least twenty-two, and he’s in the thirties! Adopted daughter! Her real name is Myrna Allen.” She giggled delightedly. “His adopted daughter! Isn’t that a new one?” Encouraged by his interest, she added, “She’s very pretty, you know—you can see her face on every Rex soap-wrapper—and on a lot of other ads. She was almost made ‘Miss America’ in Atlantic City two years ago—she was the runner-up!”

“That night he was killed—you were on the switchboard, weren’t you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hear anything interesting that evening—anybody call him?”

“Oh yes—it’s on one of those memorandums.” She picked them up and riffled through them. “Here it is!” She handed it to him.

“I read that one. ‘Man called at 7.35 p. m. Told Mr. Fox he’d better make good. Terribly cold voice.’”

“Oh it was worse than that!” Margaret shivered at the recollection. “It was a dreadful voice—I just can’t describe it. And Mr. Fox sounded real frightened, too. He said something about a man with a red mask—”

“Thanks, Margaret.” When the girl had gone, Perry said to Gloria, “I think when I took those bonds from Fox, I sentenced him to death.”

Gloria nodded soberly. She said, “There’s one thing you haven’t thought of, Perry!”

“What’s that?”

“If there’s a gang behind all this . . . and if one of those telephone girls should gossip about having been told to listen in on all calls between James Fox and anybody else . . . don’t you see? We’d be in danger!”

“M-mh!” Perry looked thoughtful. “Looks as though to be entirely safe, we’d better cut out those girls’ tongues—or pension them off and send them to Thibet! You’d better talk to them, Gloria—tell them they get a raise in salary if they keep their mouths shut—and a raise out if they don’t!”

“I’ll do the best I can,” said Gloria. Her smile was a little wan. “Maybe you and I ought to go to Thibet, and let those girls stay here. How is Thibet for a honeymoon, Perry?”

Perry said gently, "There's nothing to keep you here, Gloria. You don't have to work—you're a volunteer. You could go away for a vacation—and when you come back, we'll see about Thibet—or anywhere else you wish to go for our honeymoon!"

She tried to wither him with her eyes. "What would you think of a girl who was cowardly enough to desert the—the man she . . ."

"Sorry!" Perry's tone became crisp. "Now the next move is to call on Myrna Fox—or Myrna Allen—take your choice. What excuse have we for asking her to come here?"

"There is an excuse—and a good one. He had a lot of stuff in the store-room—the police looked at it, but they said it wasn't important. You could ask her to call for it. Do you know where she's staying?"

"Fox had a house on Charlotte Street—he only used that suite downstairs for his various enterprises. I'll get Donald Burke on the telephone—he'll find out where she is from police headquarters."

CHAPTER VI

"**M**ARGARET didn't show up this morning," said Perry quietly.

Quick fear showed in Gloria's eyes. "Did you send —"

"Of course. Her mother says she left to visit a girl friend last night, and hasn't been back since. I spoke to the girl friend—she's employed at the Clarendon. She hasn't seen Margaret in a week."

"Well!" Gloria heaved a long sigh, smiled suddenly. "I was going to give

you my news, but you beat me to it. A gentleman with a particularly cold voice—he must be the one Margaret overheard speaking to James Fox the night he was murdered—called me up about half an hour ago." She grinned. "Never rains but it pours—and the plot thickens, darling."

"What did he say?" demanded Perry impatiently.

"His exact words were, 'A good way to get your nose cut off is to stick it into other people's business!'"

Now that real danger had come, Gloria was apparently enjoying it. She was smiling cheerfully.

"Wish you weren't in this," grumbled Perry. He followed his train of reasoning aloud. "Here's how they must have figured it out and found the firm of Perry & Gloria as the answer: Burke says there's a leak in the police department. They found out I was at that meeting at the mayor's home the other night. I remember someone suggested we ought to listen in on Fox's conversations . . . they may have figured we'd already done that, else how would the Red Mask—I don't think they really know who he is but they suspect some connection. . . how did the Red Mask know so soon about the delivery of those bonds to Fox? And then perhaps they got hold of Margaret—poor kid!"

The telephone rang and Gloria picked it up. She said to Perry, "There's a police inspector downstairs who want to see you—his name is Sampson."

"I remember him—he was at the meeting, too—didn't have anything to say. Old-timer. I don't think the commissioner approves of him, but the mayor has confidence in him—

that's why he was there. Tell them to send him up."

Inspector Sampson was a tall, solid man with a long face and grizzled grey hair. He had quiet grey eyes. He came in and shook hands with Perry.

"My fiancée — Miss Gloria Chalmers, Inspector Sampson. She knows all about me—all about my business, too. Unless you'd rather . . ."

"I know all about Miss Chalmers," said the inspector. "Your father is Burton Chalmers, Chalmers Aeroplanes. Fine man—doing a good job for the government."

Gloria said with a little malice, "You police know everything—except who commits crimes."

"Had that one coming." The inspector's tone was mild, but his face darkened.

"Oh, by the way—thank you for Myrna Allen's address," interposed Perry. "I sent for her—I have a lot of stuff here belongs to her—er—adopted father."

"Don't kid me," said Sampson brusquely. "He's no more her adopted father than I am — and he wasn't fatherly to her, either. Afraid his wife would get something on him, that's why he adopted her as his daughter." He looked at Perry quizzically. "You were at the mayor's meeting, Mr. Morgan—I remember you. You're a member of the citizens' committee, too, aren't you?"

Perry asked tersely, "What about it?" And Gloria, remembering what Perry had said about a leak in the police department, thought of the cold voice over the telephone that had threatened her, and tried to compare it with the inspector's. It was possible . . . a voice can easily be disguised over the telephone.

"Only this—you're in danger."

Sampson's eyes swept to Gloria.

"Miss Chalmers, too. They don't know about any such business as chivalry. Get any threats?"

"Yes," said Gloria quietly. "A woman called up and told me to tell Perry to lay off—or we'd be taken for a ride."

She watched Sampson's face, while Perry looked keenly at her. If Sampson knew the truth, he would show some sign of surprise.

All the inspector did was to nod slowly and look abstracted. "A woman, hey? Yeah—they've got female members in good standing." He said abruptly, "Your telephone operator didn't show up—she won't, either. Neither will the other one. We're holding them both as material witnesses."

Remembering what had happened to the girl whose body was found almost beheaded at the foot of River Street, Perry breathed a sigh of relief. He asked, "How did it all come about?"

"Couple of men got hold of her when she got off the bus a block away from her home . . . scared her into telling them all about her reports to you of what she overheard on the telephone . . . conversations with Fox. Told her to keep her mouth shut—or else. She came to me. Thought I'd warn you. Watch yourself." He rose. "When's Myrna coming here?"

"Myrna Allen? I don't know."

"Wish you'd give me a ring if she tells you anything might be useful." He favored Perry with a long, half-smiling regard. "Those bonds that were returned to Stearn & Crawford—you know anything about that, Mr. Morgan?"

Perry shrugged, shook his head. He met Sampson's look poker-faced.

"Guy in a red mask tied Fox up," ruminated the inspector. "I can tell you this—they didn't believe Fox's story about the guy with the red mask—that's why he's dead. They thought he was holding out on them. Reason they're after you: they think you're helping the police. Well—so long! Don't take any poisoned candy!" He took Perry's hand in a solid grip and grinned at him in a friendly fashion; smiled at Gloria; went out.

Gloria and Perry stared at each other.

"Do you think he's on the level?" asked Perry.

"Your guess is as good as mine," was Gloria's reply. "You said there was a leak in the police department—if he's the leak, we're in real trouble, darling!"

"Thibet for you!" said Perry positively. "Or at least Florida!"

She negatived that vehemently. "The way out is to put all the sources of danger behind bars. Let's find the brain of the octopus! Me—I'm here for the duration! I'm going to get me a blue mask—it's more becoming!"

CHAPTER VII

"I HOPE you don't mind my bringing Mr. Towers with me? He's my lawyer." Myrna Allen was a vivid platinum blonde in a green ensemble.

"Morgan," said Perry, shaking hands. "Miss Chalmers! Sit down, please. There's the package containing everything your — er — father —"

Towers said crisply, "No use keeping up that pretense. Myrna was not James Fox's daughter in any way except by adoption. They were

in love with each other—his wife was living—you understand!"

Perry understood.

"I happen to know you're a member of the Citizens' Committee For Crime Control," Towers went on. "Myrna is a friend of mine, besides being a client. All this publicity has distressed her—police, newspapers—they've made life miserable for her. She's not a member of any crime ring, regardless of what James Fox was . . . doesn't know anything about James Fox except that he was a generous friend and—ah—lover."

Perry waited, wondering what was coming.

"She showed me this," Towers said abruptly. He took an envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Perry. "Addressed to her, you see. Fox left it with me—to be delivered to her in case of the very thing that happened—and which he foresaw. She was afraid to give it to the police . . . asked my advice. I suggested, when I heard you had invited her to call—knowing your connection with the citizens' committee—that she ought to give it to you. You are at liberty to hand it to the police—all we ask is that you see she is not unduly annoyed or persecuted."

Perry had extracted the letter from the envelope, and was reading it. "This in Fox's handwriting?" he asked. The lawyer nodded.

Gloria said to Myrna, "That's a wonderful gown!"

"Isn't it?" Myrna glanced complacently at Gloria's burgundy tweed. "These emeralds go well with it, don't you think?" She hitched her chair forward eagerly. "I have a blue taffeta, and the most gorgeous string of pearls. I have a diamond necklace, too—rose-colored stones—oh, excuse me!"

Perry was reading aloud. "Myrna:

I am sorry, for your sake, that you ever met me. You're too sweet a kid for a man like me. We're the sort of people a girl like you should never know. I have a premonition that something is going to happen to me. When it does, I will leave you well provided for. It was I who killed that poor girl whose body was found on River Street. I didn't want to do it, but the order came from one none of us dare disobey. Some day I will disobey an order, and I know what will happen to me. If it were not that I fear they would wreak vengeance on you, as they threatened to do, I would tell the whole story. No one would suspect who the chief of this powerful crime organization of which I am a member is, because he is so high up in the police department. That's all I dare write. When this letter comes to you, I shall be dead.

"All my love. James T. Fox."

"It's dated August 5th," said the lawyer. "That's about the time he gave it to me—it's been in my safe ever since."

"You say I'm at liberty to give this to the police?" asked Perry.

Towers hesitated. "Yes," he said reluctantly. He was a lean, bony man, with an Adam's apple that worked incessantly. "Miss Allen would like to leave town, but the police have forbidden her. Naturally—in view of what the letter says—she's afraid of the police. They haven't let her out of their sight—there's a detective shadowed us right to this door, I'm quite positive."

"I'll turn it over to Inspector Sampson," said Perry casually.

"Inspector Sampson?" Towers looked startled; he cast a quick look at Myrna. He said carefully, "Well—whatever you think best, Mr. Mor-

gan. We have entire confidence in your judgment."

He rose, and Myrna got up, too.

"I hope," smiled Perry, "that he left you well-provided for, Miss Allen—he promised it in his letter."

"He left no estate that we could find," Towers said.

Myrna supplemented, "He didn't leave me a dollar. Everything I've got I've earned—nobody gives me anything."

"That's the way," Gloria murmured approvingly. "Nothing like being independent. And you've made enough to live on and buy good clothes—and a pearl necklace—and a diamond one—good for you!"

Myrna beamed. "If you ever invited me to one of them society jambourees," she said in a refined voice, "I'd show you clothes and gems would knock your eye out, kid!"

"I'll bet you would," Gloria agreed. She met the lawyer's sharp glance with a bland smile.

"Say, I'm going to the Schwab reception with Mr. Towers. Are you gonna be there?" As Gloria nodded, "Then we'll see each other there, won't we?"

Perry saw them to the door. Gloria was reading the note when he came back.

"Darned good English," Perry remarked. "Although sort of stilted—but Fox was never capable of it. It's a forgery."

"All right. Starting with that premise, where do we go?"

"Object number one: They want me to bring that to the police, and get them to lay off Myrna. Poor, sweet, innocent Myrna!"

"He didn't leave her a dollar," Gloria murmured, "but she has plenty! No one ever gave her anything—but she's rich! How come? She wasn't born that way!"

"Right! Object number two: To throw suspicion on Inspector Sampson! Which is proof to me that Sampson must be an honest cop—and either has something on them or is on the way to getting something."

"Then you think they're members of this crime organization?"

"Tentacles of the octopus—of course! Read Fox's admission that he killed that girl Leila. He didn't—his wasn't the killer's job—but someone connected with the gang did."

"You're smart," Gloria said admiringly.

"Nice little touch—that one about being afraid to disclose more for fear they'd wreak vengeance on poor little Myrna . . . and right on the head of it he casts a stone at someone high up in the police department!"

"Are you going to give that note to Inspector Sampson?"

"I've got to," Perry murmured. "No right to withhold evidence from the police. And if shortly afterward, Myrna and Towers—or either of them—are bumped off, it will be proof that Inspector Sampson is not the honest cop we think he is."

"Just the opposite," Gloria argued. "Don't you see? This brains of the octopus must be a pretty ruthless sort, don't you think?"

"Well?"

"Let's suppose he figured out this scheme, and wrote or had the letter written. It casts suspicion on Inspector Sampson—for which reason we think the inspector is all right. But then this brains of the octopus has Myrna or the lawyer killed—what's a life or two to a man like that? Result: We're perfectly sure—or at least very suspicious—that Inspector Sampson did it to get even! So he must be the higher-up in the police department—that's the conclusion they'd want us to draw."

"Did you say I was smart? A sort of double-double-cross! I'll bet those two didn't reason it out or they wouldn't have come here."

"They'd come, if they were told," Gloria said gravely. "From what we've seen happen so far, nobody disobeys this crime chief—whoever he is." She added, "That cold voice that threatened me over the telephone—the one Margaret said spoke to James Fox not long before he was killed—that was this high solon of crime. I'm sure of it!" She shivered. "I never heard a voice so cold and sinister!"

"Did it sound like Sampson's?"

Gloria shook her head uncertainly.

Perry said musingly, "There's another implication in that note, of course: that this crime chief who's high up in the police department is the one who murdered Fox!"

"M-m! Has Mr. Towers a large practice? Is he wealthy?"

"Well—yes and no. Certainly he hasn't a criminal practice. But he's been buying a lot of real estate lately in the name of a corporation—he made me an offer for this hotel about two months ago. Don't know where he gets the money—never knew he was wealthy." He lit a cigarette. "Of course, come to think of it—total of these recent robberies runs into high figures—three or four million dollars. And the gang may have other sources of income we never hear about—blackmail, perhaps. So if he's acting for them—they must have plenty!"

The telephone rang and Gloria went to answer it. As her shaky, "Yes, he's right here," sounded, he glanced at her. Her face was white. She said aloud, "It's for you!" She put her hand over the mouthpiece. "Our friend with the voice!"

Perry said crisply into the 'phone, "This is Mr. Morgan. Who's this?"

The deadly voice replied, "That hardly matters, does it? Is Mr. Towers there?"

"Been here and gone. He said he was coming back—do you wish to leave a message? Who shall I say called?"

"Just tell him I'm waiting for him at his office." The telephone clicked.

Perry grabbed his hat and started for the door.

"Where are you going?" demanded Gloria.

"He said he's waiting for Towers at his office. Maybe he's telling the truth—I want to see who he is."

"Wait a minute!" Gloria went to the outside phone and dialed rapidly. She spoke into the receiver. "Mr Towers asked me to find out whether anybody is waiting for him." She listened. "May I speak to him?" At her nod, Perry took the telephone.

"That you, Towers?" said a voice. "This is Inspector Sampson. How soon you expect to be back at your office?"

CHAPTER VIII

"MYRNA called me up," Gloria told Perry. "She wants to know whether we're going to the Schwab affair tonight—and whether we'd care to go with her and Mr. Towers—she calls him Rutherford."

"What did you say?"

"I told her we're making a stop on the way—that we'd see her there."

"Right! Are you thinking of the same thing I am?"

"The Pellegrina Pearl!"

"Move right up to the head of the class! Pete Schwab bought it for the missus last July—I read the description—most perfect pearl in existence—a globular Indian pearl weighing

twenty-eight carats—used to be in the Zosima museum at Moscow. And that won't be all the lady wears—she goes in for jewelry. I'll bet she'll be decorated like a Christmas tree."

"How do you suppose Mrs. Schwab came to invite Myrna Allen?"

"She's invited everybody in town, practically. . . . Towers wouldn't be overlooked, in any case . . . fairly successful lawyer . . . he must have wangled an invite for the gal." He added thoughtfully: "No doubt Schwab'll have protection—police—Major Salter and some of his operatives. Just the same, I'm going to stick around myself—and see what happens."

"And I'll be right with you!" Gloria's hazel eyes were bright with excitement.

"Why not wait till you're asked?" said Perry rudely. "You keep out of trouble—I shouldn't have brought you into this in the first place."

"I'm in it now—and I'm staying—for the duration!" Her small chin stuck out determinedly. "I'll quit when you quit—and not a minute sooner. Don't waste your breath trying to order me around!"

Perry shook his head sorrowfully. "A lifetime of henpecking—and I'm walking into it with my eyes wide open!"

Gloria and Perry were a little late; when they entered, the reception was in full swing. At the door they shook hands with Mrs. Schwab, a massive woman whose eyes were not the only things about her that shone. The famous Pellegrina Pearl gleamed iridescently upon her broad bosom, competing for notice with the harder glitter of a diamond tiara on her head, and diamond rings and bracelets on her fingers and wrists.

Perry's lips wrinkled with distaste.

Gloria said, when they walked away, "I didn't think any woman nowadays would show so little sense."

"Well—I blame her husband, too. He's shrewd enough in business—you'd think he'd restrain her!"

"Maybe he tried and couldn't! They were very poor, I've heard—now he's wealthy, and she must have been hungry for this sort of thing all her life. What temptation to thieves!"

"Ought to stay at home rocking a grandchild to sleep," grumbled Perry.

"Maybe she does that, too—at the proper time! She may love jewelry, and still be a good grandmother!"

A voice called, "Hello, Morgan," and Perry turned and saw Major Salter. There was a young man with him—a quiet-looking fellow with dark hair and eyes, and very red cheeks. "My younger brother—Phil," introduced the major.

"I envy you," said Salter. "You're here on pleasure bent—I'm working." His eyes swept the room and he said somewhat fretfully: "Awful mob! Hard to keep an eye on so many. Lucky for me Sampson is here, too."

"Expecting trouble?" asked Perry.

"Wouldn't be surprised. That woman must be carrying a quarter of a million dollars around on her person. Might as well open the mint and invite the public to have a look but not touch."

"There's Myrna Allen," whispered Gloria. "And—of all people—isn't that Mr. Arnold?"

Salter glanced at her oddly. He said, "Yes, that's Conrad Arnold—one of the members of our men's club—gave us quite an interesting lecture on India and the Orient at the last meeting—you were there, weren't you, Morgan?"

Perry nodded. "Very interesting fellow—multi-millionaire—and quite

erudite. He had some excellent movies of what he'd seen in India. . . . all those people bathing in the Ganges to wash away their sins . . . must be filthy . . . how is it they don't catch some of those nice diseases, like leprosy? Unless the water really has curative properties—that's what Arnold said, didn't he?"

"Dance, Miss Chalmers?" asked the younger brother.

She hesitated. "I hope you don't mind, but I really don't feel up to it yet. A little later—if you'll ask me again."

Major Salter grinned at his brother. "They're a couple love-birds," he explained; "they only dance with each other."

"Oh, now, that isn't so," protested Gloria. "Don't forget to ask me again, Mr. Salter—if you don't, I'll ask you." Her eyes followed Myrna Allen and her escort. "They seem to be quite friendly—he's all smiles. I'd never have believed it!"

"That's one lady I'll keep an eye on," the major said grimly. "Fox's adopted daughter! Damnable—oughtn't to be permitted. Well, he's dead, and she seems to be picking her company more carefully now."

"I thought she was supposed to come here with Towers," remarked Perry.

"That's another of the same sort," the major said.

Perry smiled understandingly. "Another tentacle of the Octopus. You seem to have identified a couple, Major. But where, oh where is the brain behind them all?"

Perry and Gloria drifted away and after a while found themselves a few feet from Inspector Sampson. The inspector called to them.

"I got that confession and your note." His eyes dwelt probingly on Perry. "I wondered why you didn't

bring it down to headquarters yourself."

Perry shrugged. He said shortly, "When you telephoned you were waiting for Tower at his office, and refused to give your name, I got the idea the less you saw of me the better you liked it. There was no need to disguise your voice."

"What's this?" Sampson was frowning in a puzzled way.

"You're not going to deny you were waiting for Towers at his office last Thursday, are you?"

"I don't have to deny anything—sure I was at Towers' office—on police business." He glared at Perry, and Perry looked at him coolly. "Say, let's get this straight: Did you say I telephoned you and disguised my voice?"

"You said you wanted to speak to Mr. Morgan—I answered the 'phone," Gloria interrupted, gently. "It certainly didn't sound like your voice."

"What made you think it was?"

"Because," snapped Perry, "when I called Towers' office—after you told me to tell him you were waiting—and wouldn't give me your name—" He paused and stared at Sampson.

Sampson said, "I never telephoned you! Get that straight, Morgan! Not last Thursday, anyhow. And I never disguised my voice. No call to do it, that I can see!" He looked angry.

"He didn't—I'm sure he didn't!" Gloria's hazel eyes were fixed on the inspector. In her white velvet gown, she was a stimulating sight to any masculine eyes. "It wasn't Inspector Sampson's voice," Gloria stated definitely. "I'm positive of it now. His voice couldn't have been made to sound like that."

"Well"—Perry ran his hand through his hair uncertainly—"maybe I owe you an apology, Inspector. It happened after Towers and Miss

Allen left my office—before he got back to his own place, I should judge."

"It could have been his voice much more easily than Inspector Sampson's," Gloria said.

Sampson said harshly, "If I thought he was trying monkeyshines like that, I'd break a night-stick over his dome. That fellow's been slinging around more money than he can account for . . . bought up a lot of property on Pearl street in the last few weeks."

Down the center of the long room came Mr. and Mrs. Schwab; behind them followed a trio at whom Perry stared interestedly: Arnold and Towers, with Myrna Allen in between, holding to an arm of each. "Who's the handsome lad?" asked the inspector.

"That's Conrad Arnold—supposed to be a multi-millionaire," Perry explained. "Maybe that's where Myrna—"

"Gets her diamonds and gewgaws?" Sampson shook his head dissentingly. "Maybe she will from now on—but not until now." His eyes narrowed. "This lad Towers is the one I'm most interested in."

CHAPTER IX

"COME on—let's join the crowd," Perry suggested. "That Pellegrina Pearl seems to be drawing them."

They passed Major Salter, and drew closer to their host and hostess. In the group around the Schwabs were Arnold, Myrna, Towers and several others. They saw Inspector Sampson moving ponderously toward them.

"That pearl and the diamonds ought to be safe with all these bloodhounds around," Perry remarked.

"What are you looking at, Godiva?"

"Godiva had blond hair, dumbbell!" She took his arm and steered him toward a small door near the end of the room. "Is there a room behind that door—and where does it lead to?"

Perry grinned. "It's got you, hasn't it? Gunmen prowling behind every closed door."

Myrna called to Gloria, and waved her hand. A voice beside Gloria said, "You told me to ask you again," and there was Philip Salter. She turned toward him, still watching the group about the Schwabs. Myrna and her two escorts began strolling away—in the direction of the door Gloria had perceived. For the moment, the Schwabs stood alone. Then Mr. Schwab, a short round man, started across the room toward the punch bowl. His wife gazed about her with a fixed, uncertain smile. The huge pearl at her neck winked rosily under the lights.

And then, without warning, the lights went out.

Instantly there was a confusion of voices. Gloria whispered in Perry's ear, "That door—watch that door!"

There was a loud shriek, abruptly smothered.

Perry catapulted toward the door, his hands extended in front of him. Someone brushed by, and Perry clutched at him. Whoever it was evaded him. He found the door—it was open. He started through it. A voice muttered, "Who is it?" and a tiny light flared. Beside him loomed a face he recognized.

Then came a smashing blow to Perry's temple. He staggered, ducked, felt another blow on the side of the head and went down on hands and knees. The door slammed.

The lights came on. Perry got to his feet. He caught a glimpse of

Mrs. Schwab sitting on the floor, hair disheveled, mouth bleeding. The Pellegrina Pearl and the tiara of diamonds were gone. In a moment she was surrounded. He saw Major Salter staring about him in bewilderment. Toward him thundered Inspector Sampson.

Perry saw all this in one swift glance. He shouted to Sampson and Salter, "They went this way," and sprang to the door, turned the knob.

The door did not yield.

Sampson's voice behind him said, "Let me!" Perry stepped aside. The inspector threw his bulk against the door and it crashed in. The three men dashed through.

They found themselves in a small dressing-room and ran across to a window that looked out on the lawn. A gravel path was only ten feet or so away.

Perry got through the window first. He shouted, and a man came running. Both Sampson and Salter were beside Perry now. In the room they had just left were a score of people; heads thrust through the window.

The man said, "Damn nerve of him—crashed right through the hedge into the road."

"Which way did he turn?" demanded Salter.

"Turned right. It was a black limousine. I didn't even get a look at him—and I couldn't see the numbers—it was too dark."

"I've got my car out front," said Perry. "Come on!"

They ran around the house and jumped into Perry's car. It was fast and powerful, and they shot down the road at top speed.

In a few minutes, Sampson said gruffly, "He could have turned off in a half dozen places. No use. Come on back!"

When they got back to the hall, Sampson went to the telephone. Major Salter began interviewing guests. Gloria came up to Perry. She murmured, "It was Myrna Allen—I'm sure of it. She passed me in the dark—she was running."

"Where is she?" demanded Perry. Suddenly he perceived her standing with Arnold, and started straight toward them.

Gloria demanded in an alarmed voice, "What are you going to do, Perry?" and tried to hold him back.

But Perry pulled free. He went straight up to the couple, and shouldered Arnold to one side.

He said, "I'm returning the favor—with interest," and smashed Arnold full in the face. Arnold went down.

Gloria said urgently, "Please, Perry—no more!" Myrna stepped in front of Arnold, who got up slowly.

He was a lithe, powerful man, and he pushed Myrna aside and faced Perry grimly.

Salter came on the run, and then Sampson.

"That's one of the robbers," said Perry. "He socked me at the door!"

Arnold was bleeding. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. He said, "Of course I socked him! I heard Mrs. Schwab scream, and realized what had happened—and then Morgan came shooting toward that door like a bat out of hell. When I saw who it was, I was going to apologize, but there was too much happening."

Sampson pawed Arnold over expertly. He asked Perry, "Want to make a charge, Morgan?"

"It's up to you to make the charge," Perry said.

"Charge? What charge?" Myrna Allen pushed forward and stood beside Arnold. "This is Mr. Conrad Arnold, you bunch of dumbbells. He's

got more dough than the Schwabs'll ever have. Are you crazy enough to accuse him of trying to rob anybody?"

Salter looked at her; Sampson watched her from under lowered eyebrows.

Salter said, "I suppose it would be absurd to accuse you, too, wouldn't it?"

"You've got nothing on me—and you never will have!"

Watching her cool, defiant pose, Gloria murmured, "Scratch the doll and you get the moll!"

CHAPTER X.

IN THE police commissioner's office, Inspector Sampson was getting all kinds of hell—and taking it in stolid silence. With him were Major Salter and Perry Morgan.

"You can't blame the inspector, General," Salter remonstrated. "He did his best—we all did. We're up against super-thieves—that's about the size of it."

"Super-thieves? Absurd! If they're clever, you've got to be cleverer! The idea of leaving that room unguarded! Childish! Thieves came in, grabbed the jewelry off that woman's person, went right out. Nobody even made an attempt to stop them. This young man here—"

"The name is Perry Morgan," stated Perry mildly.

"Instead of trying to catch the thieves, stops the one man who had presence of mind enough to pursue them—Conrad Arnold." He turned on Sampson. "What'd that woman say—this Mrs. Schwab? Can't she tell us anything?"

"The lights went out," said Sampson, speaking slowly and carefully, his eyes avoiding the commission-

er's, "and next thing she knew, someone hit her in the mouth—hit her so hard it stunned her for the moment. She doesn't even remember screaming, but she did—I heard her. I ran toward her—so did Major Salter here. Then the lights came on, and Morgan yelled to us and we followed him through that door and into the small dressing-room—seems it wasn't used as a dressing-room at all, but only as a sort of rest-room. Whoever the robbers were, they had their car parked right off the path leading around to the back of the house. They jumped into it, crashed through the hedge and were gone before we even got into that room. The door was locked—they had this all planned very carefully—even had the key to lock the door with. Mrs. Schwab hasn't the slightest idea who robbed her—doesn't even know whether it was a man or a woman who tore the jewels off her. They only took the big pearl and the diamond tiara—didn't have time to get the bracelets and rings, I suppose."

"And you have no idea who the robbers were?"

For just a moment, Sampson seemed uncertain. Then he shook his head slowly. He said, "Perhaps Major Salter has."

"I?" The major snorted. "Wish I did. We all have our suspicions, of course . . ." He looked at Perry. "Mr. Morgan suspects Conrad Arnold."

"Nonsense!" The commissioner's interjection was a roar. "A man like Conrad Arnold—that's ridiculous. Look here, Sampson, I give you fair warning, sir: Either you make an arrest in this case within the next ten days, or I'll have to put someone in your place who can cope with these 'super-thieves.' 'Super-thieves!'"

He glared at Salter, who lifted deprecatory eyebrows.

PERRY was thoughtful. "This Arnold *hombre*—as far as I can find out, he comes from a fine Back Bay family—Boston—and he's been around the world, lectured, all kinds of degrees conferred on him—seems to have money. Yet I'll swear he passed that jewelry to someone inside that door—I saw him!"

"Did you investigate how those lights went out?" asked Gloria.

"Main switch in the cellar, the police think. Fuses were all right when examined. Someone slipped in and pulled the switch. One of the servants ran down and pushed it back."

"There was a chunky, redheaded man near that door when I first noticed it." Gloria was trying to remember. "I've seen him somewhere before—his face looked familiar. Yet I'm sure he wasn't one of the guests—he didn't even wear evening clothes. I had an idea he was some sort of servant, or guard."

Perry said, "I saw him, too. Look—this Arnold sticks in my crop. He looks clever, he's rich—and apparently all he does is spend money—exploring, giving free lectures. He doesn't earn any."

"Unless he inherited plenty."

"Of course—that's possible. But I'd say if there really is a crime organization—"

"Of course there is. Did you ever hear of a robbery more perfectly executed than the one at the Schwabs'?"

"You're right—of course there is an organization. If there is, I say, Arnold could be the brains to direct it. Don't you think so?"

She said reflectively, "They worked it this way: Someone knocked Mrs. Schwab out, grabbed the jewels . . . then they passed them from one to

the other . . . there were several of them in a line to that door . . . the last one who got it was Mr. Arnold. He probably handed it to the red-headed man, who went through the door, locked it behind him, then through the window and into the car." She became suddenly tense. "I know who that redhead is!"

"Who?"

"He's Rutherford Towers' chauffeur! I saw Towers getting into his car, on Pearl Street, in front of the big store. He called after I'd passed by, and I looked back—I saw this redhead just shutting the door. He was in a regular chauffeur's uniform."

After a while, Perry said slowly: "Now we've got James Fox, who's dead; Myrna Allen, Rutherford Towers, Conrad Arnold, this redhead—and I think we'll keep Inspector Sampson on the list for a while. Seems funny a man as long on the force as he's been can't get better results than he's been getting. Next to that pompous ass of a commissioner, he's highest in rank in the department. He was right there at the Schwabs' when it all happened—and he didn't do a damn thing!"

Gloria walked over to Perry and put both hands on his shoulders. She said seriously, "I'm worried about you, Perry."

"Any particular reason, kitten?"

"Perhaps you didn't notice the look in Arnold's eyes after you knocked him down—I did. He hates you, Perry. Add to that the other things they know about us . . . I pass my nights wondering when we'll suddenly find ourselves with a couple of burlap bags tied over us, and a lot of stones inside to make them sink when they throw us into the river . . . Perry darling! Let's quit and clear out."

Perry bent down and kissed her quietly. He said, "Remember our first conversation about this? I've enlisted for a cause . . . I'd feel like a traitor if I quit. But you're quitting—and that's final!"

Gloria said bitterly, "You've got a stubborn streak in you . . ."

"Not stubborn. If it were something unworthy, you might call it stubborn. I remember when Don Burke first told me about that poor girl who was found at the foot of River Street, almost beheaded . . . I visualized them torturing that poor, helpless kid . . . I made up my mind then—and I'm sticking to the finish."

"It's time for the Red Mask to appear again," Perry said after a while. "The one man we know who doesn't know we know—is the redhead."

CHAPTER XI

THE redheaded chauffeur's name was Tom Burney. When the somewhat dowdy-looking young woman in glasses handed him the message from his employer, he was a little surprised. He thought Towers had gone to New York and would not be back for two or three days.

The message read: "Tom: Come up to Room 807, 122 Bond Street. Don't say anything to anybody. R. T."

He looked questioningly at the girl. She said, "Mr. Towers said bring it to you and tell you to come right away. I've got to go back at once."

It was Saturday afternoon, but Tom 'phoned Towers' office anyhow. Towers' secretary was gone; the law clerk who was looking up precedents on a case for Towers, was vague. He wasn't in Towers' confidence any-

how. Tom drove to 122 Bond Street and went up in the elevator to the eighth floor.

Gloria had gotten there ahead of him. She still wore her costume and glasses. She said, "Mr. Towers is inside," and nodded toward the private office.

Some premonition must have swept over Tom, because he paused and stood looking about uncertainly. There was very little furniture in the office—just an oak table on which stood a typewriter, and a few chairs. No name on the door at all. But the girl sat down demurely in front of the machine, and started hammering keys.

Tom stalked across and opened the door of the outer office. A voice said, "Hello, Tom. I've been expecting you! Come in and shut the door."

An apparition in a red mask pointed a gun at him. The girl in the outer office went out quickly; he heard her lock the door.

"Better do what you're told, Tom—if you want to keep on living!" There was an ominous crispness to the command. "Come inside—sit down in that chair!" As the redhead still hesitated, Red Mask pulled the trigger. The bullet buried itself in the floor at Tom's feet.

"The next one will break the bone of your right leg," said Red Mask conversationally. "Don't kid yourself that I'm fooling. I picked this place because the walls are thick—one of these old-fashioned buildings, Tom. Now sit down."

Tom sat down.

"Put your hands behind you," ordered Red Mask. A moment later a pair of handcuffs had been snapped about Tom's wrists. They took all the starch out of him.

He muttered, "You a detective?"

"No. Related to the Schwabs—

through Adam and Eve." Red Mask remained standing behind the chauffeur. He said, "Keep looking in front of you, Tom; it's much healthier. You may get through this alive if you answer questions. Don't bother lying—I'm on the inside and I'll know when you're not telling the truth. Now then—are you ready?"

The redhead shifted uneasily but made no reply. A cold barrel was pressed against the back of his neck. Once more came the question, this time with the suggestion of an imminent threat. "Are you ready to answer questions, Tom?"

"Okay—go ahead."

"All right. Remember, I'll know when you're lying—the minute you do, it's curtains. That night you grabbed the stuff stolen from Mrs. Schwab, you hopped into that car waiting on the side of the house, and drove where?"

In the tense silence, not even the street noises outside could be heard. The shades in the room were down; a small bulb hanging from the ceiling lighted the room dimly.

"Where?" repeated Red Mask softly. Once more the muzzle of the gun touched the redhead's neck. "Maybe I know—maybe I'm testing you. I'm giving you a chance for your life, Tom."

Tom cleared his throat. His voice was hoarse and shaky.

"I didn't have the stuff—another guy had it. I don't even know who he is—never seen him before. I drove him to that big building on the corner of Pearl and Greene—the big office building. He went inside, and I drove the car back to the garage."

"Towers' car, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. Who else's? I ain't got no car of my own—I'm just a stooge."

"What's Towers' split on all these robberies?"

"How do I know? I don't even know the guys who're in it."

"What do you get for your valuable cooperation?"

"All I get is an extra hundred now and then—and a hundred and ten a month pay. And outa that I gotta—"

"I see. Towers probably has something on you."

No answer.

"Besides Towers, who are the other members of this organization?"

"Listen, Mister" — Tom's voice held a note of frantic sincerity—"I don't know anybody in this except Towers—and I don't wanna know. The less I know the longer I'll live. I seen this young guy that come into my car that night—he had black hair and dark eyes, I think, but I didn't see him very clear—and I never seen anybody else. I read the papers—I know what happened to Jim Fox and that gal was found on River Street. All right, I been a fall guy—I got in on this and I wish to God I hadn't. But I told you all I know, and that's on the level."

"Do you know what floor this young guy went up to? With the swag?"

"No."

"You can tell me one thing more," said Red Mask sternly, "and that'll end it. Whatever you tell me goes no further—no one will know you told me. Where is the next job to be pulled off?"

No answer. Red Mask prodded cold steel against the chauffeur's neck. The murmured reply was low. "Butterly National—next Thursday. I ain't sure—I heard the boss talkin' to another guy."

"And of course you don't know who the other guy was!" Red Mask's voice held a note of irony. "All right

—I'll be back in a moment—sit still."

He went outside and typewrote a brief confession. He put the confession on the desk in the room where Tom was sitting.

Over the telephone the voice sounded high and unnatural.

"Is this Inspector Sampson? Inspector Sampson, there's a redheaded chauffeur in Room 807 at 122 Bond Street. He's handcuffed and gagged. He works for Rutherford Towers, the lawyer. You'll find his confession that he was an accomplice in the robbery of Mrs. Schwab two weeks ago, and that his employer, Towers, was one of the principals. All you've got to do is get him to sign it—I don't think you'll have any difficulty. The rest that he didn't tell me you can sweat out of him."

"Hey—wait a minute—who is this?"

Perry put down the receiver softly, and went quickly out of the booth. In the car at the corner, Gloria was waiting for him.

"If Sampson is the leak in the police department, we'll know soon enough," said Perry grimly. He told her what happened. "Thursday happens to be the twenty-ninth—there'll be a lot of money at the Butterly National Bank for payrolls."

"Aren't you going to warn the police?" asked Gloria.

He said soberly, "I don't know. May be risking the loss of a lot of dough, but it doesn't weigh alongside of the chance of nabbing this bunch of murderers redhanded. Anyhow, Sampson is sure to get it out of Tom. We'll call the police—when they start with their boodle for that office building at the corner of Pearl and Greene. Trouble is it's such a damned big building—twenty-two

floors—and it's a dead sure thing they've rented space under a fictitious name. Unless"—he stopped suddenly, then went on slowly, "Well, I'll be darned! I remember now—Towers bought that building in the name of this corporation of his about four months ago."

"That still doesn't tell you on what floor their treasury—or hideout—is located. That's a big building, you said."

"Just the same, it's a step in the right direction. At least we know that's the place—or one of the places—where the gang go with their swag." He went on reflectively, "We know some of the gang . . . Arnold, Towers, Myrna, this chauffeur . . . wish we knew the rest. Wonder who the lad with the dark hair and eyes can be—the one Tom drove the night of the robbery. Must be someone important in the gang—they trusted him with all that jewelry. Did you notice anybody missing when the lights came on again?"

"At the Schwabs'?" Gloria thought hard. "No, I don't remember anybody in particular. They all seemed to be there. Perry, do you suppose the police will arrest Mr. Towers on the strength of Tom's confession?"

"If they don't . . . or if they let him get away . . . I'll have more than a doubt of Inspector Sampson!"

CHAPTER XII

WEDNESDAY morning found Perry at the office building located on Pearl and Greene Streets. The papers the preceding afternoon had carried scare-lines announcing Tom's arrest, and the confession in which he implicated Rutherford Towers. Towers' arrest was supposed to be

imminent. There was a warrant out for him. No mention had been made of the jewels having been brought to this building on Pearl Street.

The elevator man said, "Mr. Towers has the tower," and grinned at the joke. He added, "Penthouse!"

"Is he in?" asked Perry.

"I dunno, Mister." Apparently he hadn't seen the morning paper. "I ain't seen him, but maybe he went up in one of the other elevators."

Perry handed him a cigar. He asked, "Miss Allen been around—Myrna Allen? Girl with platinum hair—know whom I mean?"

"Sure—the nifty blonde! I know her. I thought she was Mr. Towers' sweetie, but lately she's been comin' around with a guy she calls Con—know him—good-lookin' guy? Say, I could go for that dame myself. Here you are—last floor—you gotta walk up two flights."

"You didn't tell me," insisted Perry quietly, "whether Miss Allen and Con were around this morning?"

"Yeah," said the operator vaguely. "Yeah," he repeated. "I think I seen them—I ain't sure. Down!"

He shut the door and the lift disappeared.

Cagey at the last minute, thought Perry. After all, Towers was his boss.

He walked up two flights of stairs, and found himself confronted by a door. The door was locked. Prepared for such an emergency, Perry took out a bunch of skeleton keys, and after a while succeeded in finding one that turned the lock. He heard elevators stop at the top floor twice while he was working.

Through a small ante-room, Perry walked into a much larger room, lighted by a skylight. There was a huge fireplace, andirons, an ancient musket. The floor was built of wide

planks. It looked like a replica of the living-room of a colonial house, and probably was just that—transferred at considerable expense. There was even an old spinning-wheel.

What Perry was looking for were the Schwab jewels. Tom had said that the dark-haired fellow he drove and who went into this building, had the jewels. No doubt Tom must have told the same story to Sampson, and Sampson must have been here investigating.

Where was Towers? It was not likely that either he or any other member of the gang now known to the police, would have dared an attempt to remove their plunder elsewhere—presuming it was cached somewhere in this building. Not with the police watching. But Perry had seen no policemen around. He wondered grimly whether Sampson had frightened Tom into suppressing all mention of this building . . . it would be the natural thing to do if Sampson was one of the gang. They had had two days in which to find a new hiding-place.

Of course, that was all based on the theory that Sampson was crooked. If he wasn't, if he had taken proper police precautions, everything was probably just as it had been before Tom's arrest.

There was no sign of a hiding-place in the immaculate rooms through which Perry wandered alertly. There were several small rooms behind the large colonial one—nothing in them but furniture.

He saw a closet behind a door and opened it. It was a roomy closet, and full of men's clothing. There were also golf-bags, some empty, some full of sticks. Perry stamped on the floor, felt around the walls,

examined everywhere. Nothing. He went out.

The place was full of rooms and closets, and he examined them all. He got the impression from the amount of clothing he saw in the closets that Towers had guests who actually lived in these rooms. That idea was corroborated when he came across three steel cots and springs, mattresses and bedding, in one of the small rooms.

At the far end of the floor, he found himself in a small vestibule, with a locked door in front of him, and another on the side. He opened both. A long stairway led down to the floor below, and when he descended he opened another door, and was in the distant end of the hallway of the floor at which the elevator stopped. He went back upstairs.

The other door opened on a bathroom. He went inside, turned on the light, and opened the window. He looked out on a rear court. Quickly he withdrew, closed the window again. As he stepped toward the door, he felt something under his foot. He bent down, and felt a round surface that made a thin ring in the linoleum covering the floor.

Lifting the linoleum, he saw a black ring. He braced himself, pulled on the ring, and up came a segment of the floor, leaving a square black hole, through which he saw a flight of stairs.

He listened carefully, quite well aware that his life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel if this was the headquarters of the gang and he was caught in it. Then he started down, catfooted.

At the foot of the stairs, he came to a long, empty loft. He remembered that he had climbed *two* flights of stairs to the penthouse—the penthouse, therefore, must be a sort of

duplex apartment or loft affair, since the elevator stopped at what was regarded as the top floor—a floor below this one. Perry made a tour of the loft; it was filthy in the same degree as the floor above was immaculate: a lot of empty shelves, dusty closets, piles of paper. The place was a fire hazard.

He had started back up the stairs again, when an idea struck him. There might be another stairway leading to the floor below—or there might be a concealed opening in the walls, connecting this loft with another.

As he thought of this, he heard the sound of feet above him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE feet above Perry became still, but as he stood listening, he heard them again. Then silence once more. There was probably an exit from this loft somewhere, although he hadn't seen one. It didn't seem possible that the only way of getting out intended by the builders, had been to climb up that flight of stairs to the penthouse, and then down two flights to the elevator. And yet—this had evidently been intended as one duplex loft.

On his toes, he wandered silently through the loft again, sticking closely to the walls. When he had made a complete circuit, he thought of the ring in the floor of the bathroom above, and started looking for something similar here.

He found it in the front end of the loft, only a few feet from the wall. The light was bad—it came from small, dusty windows high up in the wall—and the ring was gray, the exact color, almost, of the concrete floor. That was the reason he had missed it. Bending, he hooked

two fingers in the ring, and pulled. Nothing happened. He tugged again and again, with no result. He stood up, panting, and looked about. There must be a reason for that ring being in the floor.

Suddenly his eye fell on a spot in the wall—a thin line in the wall-paper. When he came closer he saw two more lines at right angles to the first, and pulled back a flap of paper. It disclosed a pearl button set in the wall. He pushed it. Nothing happened. He pushed it again. Then he went back to the ring. Bending down, he grasped it with his two fingers, braced himself and pulled. As he did so, the concrete under him went down, and he tumbled into the aperture that yawned.

He found himself on a landing, a flight of stairs in front of him, above him the block of concrete swinging on a hinge. The air was foul, and it was very dark. Feeling his way carefully, Perry started down the stairs, one step at a time. He realized that leaving the concrete block the way it was, was a giveaway, but he couldn't bring himself to close it and remain in that lightless, airless hole.

He brought out a small flashlight, and played the light in front of him. When he came to the bottom of the stairs, he found himself in a small cubicle, with no opening. There seemed to be no logic to that—people didn't build stairways to end nowhere. Then he noticed another pearl button.

He pressed it—and stepped back, startled, as the wall slid to one side, and left him standing on the threshold of a room. He stepped into the room—and instantly the wall behind him closed with a snap.

There was a partition in front of him, and he heard sounds. He took out his revolver and held it ready.

This room in which he now found himself was apparently a small office. The shades were down; the upper half of the partition on three sides was of opaque glass through which light came. Crouching, he stepped all around, keeping his body below the partition, so that it could not be perceived by whoever was outside.

There was a door at one end of the office. He heard soft steps outside, saw the handle turn. The door did not open. He waited quietly, then began looking around for some aperture through which he could get a look at the intruder—for an intruder he must be, judging by his stealthy actions.

And then suddenly the door opened, a face showed, two eyes perceived him. There was a loud cry, and feet raced across the floor outside.

Perry called, "It's me, Gloria!" and overtook her just as she reached the door. She was fighting with the strength of panic when she looked up and saw him. Then she relaxed and went limp.

"Now what on earth are you doing here?" asked Perry. He bent down and kissed her, then held her tightly until he felt her heart slow its mad beating. He said, "What made you turn burglar?"

"Well," she said tremulously, "you can't blame me—it's my home environment." She stepped away. "What's the idea of sneaking around that way and scaring me almost to death?"

Perry signed. "Next time I go sleuthing I'll bring along an announcer. How the dickens was I supposed to know who you were? I thought I was in danger of being shot full of holes any minute."

She looked at his gun—he still had it in his hand. She said, "The dan-

ger is over—put that thing away. It's a wonder it hasn't gone off."

"How long have you been in here—and how did you happen to get in?"

She stared at him. "I just walked in!"

"When? How?"

"Through the door—just a few minutes ago. The starter told me Mr. Towers' office—the office of the building, you know—was on the top floor, and there it was!"

"Told you it was on the top floor? The damned elevator operator told me he had the penthouse!"

"Well—he probably has both. And he isn't in either."

"That," said Perry, "I can testify to—having nearly broken my neck looking for him on three floors—mostly in the dark—with secret buttons and slabs and staircases. All leading nowhere worth while talking about. Say, what do you suppose happened to Towers?"

They stared at each other.

Gloria murmured, shivering a little, "I was afraid I might find him murdered—the way Mr. Fox was. Either that—or he's run away!"

"Skipped—that's my idea, too. In which case, our friend Sampson is nothing but a double-crossing crook—and probably the head of the whole gang. And that would explain all the leaks in the police department that have enabled these crooks to keep out of the clutches of the police!" He looked about him in a puzzled way, then went to the door opening on the hallway, and opened it. He said, "Did you say the starter told you this was the office of the building? There's no sign on the door!"

"Well"—Gloria smiled and blushed—"the starter didn't say that exactly—he said the office of the building

is in the penthouse for most people, but that Mr. Towers received his lady-friends up here. This is the annex for his lady-friends."

"And he took you for one of them!" He shook his head as he surveyed the trim figure surmounted by the cool, whimsical face and the thick, warm brown hair. "It's nothing to be proud of, young woman. If I were in your place, I'd feel insulted. Office of the building!" He looked about at the comfortable upholstered chairs, the rug on the floor, the excellent lithograph prints on the walls. "So this is where our friend Towers entertains! What I'd like to find out is where he and his pals cache their loot. Look, Gloria, what were you going to do if you did find him in?"

"Well—I was curious—the paper didn't say anything about his being arrested. And—to tell you the truth—I've been waiting around downstairs a long time—I wanted to see whether any of the others showed up . . . Mr. Arnold—or Myrna—or Inspector Sampson. I thought I'd find out what floor they went up to. But you—did you get down here from the penthouse?"

He told her about it. He said reflectively, "I'm still wondering whose steps I heard on the floor above me. I left the outside door open—if it was Towers, he'd know at once someone had been prowling around. Wonder if it was Towers?"

"Let's go and see!"

"What would be our excuse?"

"Oh—just that we were passing by, and I thought I might find Myrna here. Come on!" Perry shook his head, muttering, "Fools rush in!"

They went to the door and out into the hallway. "So far," said Perry gloomily, "we don't really know where those jewels are hidden. If

we did—if we could find them—"

"You do know where they're hidden! They're hidden in this building!" She stopped and put her hand on his arm. "It is sort of dangerous at that—going up to see whoever it is in the penthouse! We're not exactly popular with that crowd, are we?"

"You're right," Perry said. "Stay here and wait for me—I won't be long."

Gloria sniffed scornfully and did not even deign to reply.

They walked up the two flights of stairs and found the door of the penthouse still open. With Perry leading, they went through the rooms again.

When they came to the bathroom, the segment of floor through which Perry had descended was down again. He lifted the linoleum and pointed to the black ring.

"That shows someone was here, all right. I left that open when I went down. Someone has—"

The floor heaved upward, and a massive grizzled gray head protruded through the hole.

Perry's gun was already in his hand; Gloria had shrunk back. Perry said coolly, "How do you do, Inspector? Looking around?"

With an agility surprising in a man of his size, Sampson raised himself and stepped out of the hole. He put the board back in place, then turned to Perry.

"Put that gun away, Morgan! You've got a hell of a nerve pointing it at me!"

CHAPTER XIV

PERRY said quietly, "I didn't know who you were, Inspector." He put the gun into his pocket. "Did you find Towers?"

"No," Sampson growled. "He's skipped!"

"I read about that confession in the paper," stated Perry carefully, "and I felt sure Towers would be under arrest by this time. How did he happen to get away?"

"You tell me—I don't know. I wish I did. We kept it out of the paper Saturday, Sunday and Monday!"

"Did you just come here looking for him for the first time?" Perry's tone was corrosively polite.

"This is about the fourth time I've been here!" Sampson's face broke into a broad grin. "Both you and Miss Chalmers were seen coming in here by the man I've got watching the building—you took the longer way to get downstairs, Morgan, didn't you?"

"I preceded you, apparently. Look, Inspector, I'm interested, naturally. How did Towers happen to get the warning that made him clear out so fast—if he has cleared out?"

Sampson's face became gloomy—you're putting on a darned good act, thought Perry.

"I went over in response to a tip I got on the telephone," Sampson said, "and nabbed a guy who was there waiting to be nabbed—Towers' chauffeur. Brought him down to headquarters—made him sign a confession. Towers was in New York—I verified that. Well—so far as we know, he's still in New York—only he was supposed to be back Sunday. I got a notion he won't be back any more at all."

"Because of that leak in the police department I've been hearing about?"

Sampson shrugged and made no comment. He said suddenly, "What made you come here?"

"Oh—we came just to say hello to Miss Myrna Allen," interposed Gloria airily.

"You wouldn't be creeping through vacant lofts and climbing down dark stairways to say hello to Miss Allen, would you?" Sampson looked at Morgan.

"I came here," stated Perry bluntly, "hoping I'd do what the police have failed to do so far—find Towers. He should be behind bars by this time—if the police attended to their business properly. I could put it more strongly than that, Inspector."

"Come on," said Sampson. He dusted his hands and led the way out. Waiting for the elevator to come up after he had pressed the button, he said to Perry, "Watch your step, Mr. Morgan. I don't mind telling you I've been worried about you."

"Kind of you," said Perry dryly.

"Don't take it as a joke. I got an idea it was you who nabbed that chauffeur—maybe it was you got back those Stearn & Crawford bonds. You've got guts, Morgan. And maybe you've got a red mask, too!"

"Well, well," said Perry. "It's hard to deny the soft impeachment—I'd like to be able to say you're right. Sure you're not mistaking me for somebody else?"

"If I am, someone else ain't. I've had you shadowed ever since those bonds were sent back—and I don't mind telling you when you came down here, a certain pal of yours wasn't a block behind."

"A pal of mine?"

"Yeah—Conrad Arnold. Maybe he just happened to be coming this way, but he came right into the building after you—and went out again, when he saw me. He ain't the only one that's trailed you, either. That's why I'm telling you . . ."

The elevator door opened and they stepped toward it—just as Major Salter emerged.

Sampson said, "Hello, Salter," and went into the elevator.

Perry and Gloria shook hands with the major, and remained talking to him.

"Well, so long," Sampson said. The elevator went down.

"What was the inspector doing here?" asked Salter.

"He said he came here to find Towers," Perry smiled. "I presume that's what brought you here, too."

Salter nodded gloomily. "My agency was employed to protect that Schwab reception, you know." He hesitated. "There's a leak in the police department somewhere, Morgan . . . I think something should be done about it. Take this affair of Towers now. . . ."

Perry nodded.

"Sampson had the man dead to rights! This chauffeur made a full confession involving Towers—and still Sampson lets him get away! If he isn't anything else—he's incompetent!"

"He's having me trailed," said Perry.

Salter chuckled dryly. "Probably to make sure you didn't catch one of those crooks and spoil his record of one hundred per cent failure." He shook hands with Perry again. "Well—I'm going up into that penthouse and see what I can find."

"In the bathroom," began Perry, "you'll find—"

Salter kept on walking. "I've been there before," he called over his shoulder. "I know about that trapdoor. I'm just going back again to see if I missed anything."

When they were out in the street, Gloria asked curiously, "Why didn't you tell Major Salter about that robbery that's supposed to come off next Thursday—at the Butterly National?

If you don't trust the police—you'll need help. . . ."

"Who says I don't trust the police? I do, Gloria. It's only Sampson I don't trust. Even then, I don't know. I'll bet Sampson knows all about it—from that chauffeur."

"What don't you know?"

"This darned business has me so suspicious. Just an idea—I'm probably all wrong."

She didn't press him. "Do you suppose," she asked, "that they'll go through with the robbery of the bank on Thursday, now that Tom is in jail? Won't they be afraid he might have told the police?"

"Maybe. But maybe they don't know he knew about it. He told me he overheard them talking while he was driving them around."

They got into the car—and each stared out of a window. Their eyes met, and they burst out laughing.

"Were you looking for the man who's trailing me, too?" demanded Perry, and Gloria nodded, still laughing. "Well"—Perry became suddenly sober—"cast your peepers in the direction of the guy in the gray suit, just getting into the car. I don't know whether he's a cop or a robber—but he's certainly interested in us. Watch and see if he doesn't follow us."

He did—right to the hotel. Then he passed and went by without even glancing at them.

"There's recognition for you," Perry bragged. "Shows you I haven't been throwing my weight around in vain. Someone thinks we're important enough to be followed."

Gloria looked at him wonderingly. She said, "You're too darned important—don't you realize that? To either side—the law or the lawless. The things you've done so far. . . ."

"With my little red mask," Perry said lightly.

HER telephone call over his private wire a little after midnight, startled him. He asked quickly, "Anything wrong, Gloria?"

"Nothing wrong. Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"I couldn't go to sleep without telling you this—it just came to my mind a little while ago. Perry, do you remember asking me whom I didn't see after the lights came on again at that Schwab reception?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I didn't see Philip Salter! And he'd asked me for a dance—when the lights went out, he disappeared—and that's the last I saw of him."

There was a long silence on the wire after that. Gloria asked finally, "Are you still there, Perry?"

"Yes. Remember my saying to you today that this whole darned business had me suspicious? Well—I was thinking of that red-headed chauffeur's description of the man he drove after the robbery—the dark-haired, dark-eyed fellow—and I thought of Philip Salter, too."

"Perry—does that mean that Major Salter. . . ."

"It means just that—to me. I'm beginning to remember a lot of other things—that out-of-towner they brought in who worked for Salter's agency—the one that was found with his skull smashed. The three big robberies, Martin, Van Alstyne, Schwab—all subscribers to Salters' detective agency—he knew all about what they had and when—and how their premises were arranged—listen, we'd better not do any more talking over the wire. Gloria!"

"Yes, Perry."

"Don't come down to the hotel tomorrow—I'll see you in the evening.

I'll be busy all day—won't get near the hotel."

Her voice was a murmur. "On account of what's happening tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow is Thursday," Perry said.

"Well—but why shouldn't I come to the hotel? Why should—"

"Because I don't want you to," Perry said peremptorily. "You stay at home—I don't want you mixed in this thing any more. It's too dangerous."

"Now, Perry, don't you go giving me orders. And as for it's being dangerous—pish tush! If it isn't too dangerous for you, it isn't too dangerous for me."

"That's completely different—"

"Well, I'm doing just what I please—tomorrow or after tomorrow. Maybe I'll be right there at the bank—"

"Sh!" warned Perry. "Please, Gloria—stay home, won't you?"

Gloria said sweetly, "See you tomorrow, Perry!"

When she had rung off, he sat up in bed thinking. The memories of various incidents, now startlingly illuminating, flashed into his brain as though on a trolley wire, clicked open, and were immediately succeeded by others.

Stupid to have suspected Sampson, a man who had been on the Force for more than twenty-five years, and had always borne a good reputation. Major Salter had fanned Perry's suspicion of Sampson . . . had probably done the same thing with the commissioner . . . Salter's voice when he spoke to Sampson in front of the elevator had struck a chord of memory in Perry's mind because it was so freezingly cold . . . it was like the voice that had threatened Perry over the telephone, he realized. That

poor girl on River Street—she had called the commissioner, and he had told his pal, Major Salter, about it . . . it was from the commissioner that Salter must have learned about Tom's arrest . . . and after that Towers had disappeared. It all added up.

Perry called Inspector Sampson on the telephone, late as it was, and his opening remark was an apology.

CHAPTER XV

AN ARMORED car drew up in front of the Butterly National Bank, and two men with drawn guns stepped out. They looked around, then one took up his position in front of the bank, while the other waited for a third man to emerge and begin carrying bundles of money into the bank. Another guard, also with gun drawn, accompanied him.

This Thursday happened to be also the day preceding the last day of the month, and the bank was preparing to meet the pay roll demands of its customers the following day.

Across the street, in his parked car, Perry Morgan sat and watched the bank through the window.

Fifty feet in front of Perry's car stood a taxi whose driver appeared to be drowsing.

A little before three o'clock, the delivery of the money was completed, the guards entered the armored car once more, and drove off.

Immediately afterward, Myrna Alen drove a black sedan in front of the bank, and got out, carrying a large suitcase. She went inside.

Two hard-looking men in dark gray and blue suits appeared and followed her in a moment later. Perry surmised they had been waiting for her.

He got out of the car, crossed the

street, and entered the bank. It was five minutes of three. He called a greeting to Myrna, who was standing at a desk and apparently writing out a check—very deliberately. The two men who had entered after her, appeared to be doing the same thing.

When the bank special guard went to lock the doors of the bank at three, Perry went with him. He met Conrad Arnold coming in. Arnold stepped to one side, nodded coldly, and went in after Perry had passed him. The special policeman locked the doors to prevent any more from entering.

As Perry reached the middle of the street, a group of obvious plainclothesmen began drifting toward the bank from both sides. He went back into his car and sat waiting and watching. His eyes roamed from the door of the bank to the black sedan in front of it, and then to the taxicab.

Inside the bank, Myrna and Arnold finished making out their checks, and stood chatting in front of the teller's window.

"Sort of an odor in here, isn't there?" remarked the teller, as he handed Myrna her money. He looked pale.

She sniffed and said brightly, "Not that I can notice." She waited until Arnold got his money, and went to the door with him. The special let them out. She no longer had the suitcase, Perry noted.

Disregarding her car, she and Arnold strolled down the street. The taxicab got into motion and moved ahead of them.

It seemed to Perry that the street became strangely quiet after that. To see people walking unconcernedly along the sidewalk, or crossing from one side to the other, seemed queer.

By this time, the plainclothesmen



And then suddenly the door opened.

had clustered in two small groups, one on each side of the bank building. One of them went into Myrna's black sedan and at once became invisible. He must have stretched himself on the floor or on the seat in the rear.

And still the big bank doors remained locked. There must be plenty of excitement going on inside of them, Perry surmised, but no sound issued into the street to indicate it. He hoped none of the employees would be hurt.

Suddenly one big door opened slowly. The two quiet men, who had followed Myrna in, came out. They were talking and laughing quite casually; one of them carried a suitcase. Perry grinned. It was the suitcase Myrna had brought into the bank a few minutes ago. The two men walked toward the black sedan. One of them opened the door—and stepped back as the officer inside presented the business end of a large revolver.

From both sides the plainclothes men converged on the robbers hemmed them in.

A tall man with grizzled gray hair came up, threw open the doors of the bank and went inside. Perry recognized Sampson. Three detectives followed the inspector. In a few minutes, Sampson came out alone. He went to the black sedan and pulled out one of the prisoners. Perry opened the door of his car and shouted to him. Holding on to his handcuffed prisoner, Sampson crossed the street. He shoved the prisoner into the back seat of the car, and sat down beside him.

The prisoner was Philip Salter Major Salter's younger brother.

"Now let her out," said Sampson "Here's hoping we're in time."

"There's plenty of time," Perry said. He looked back at Philip whose usually blooming cheeks were now a sort of greenish-gray. He said "You disappeared rather suddenly that night at the Schwab reception

after the lights went out, didn't you, Phil? You're the dark-haired guy Tom drove to the building at Pearl and Greene Streets, aren't you?"

Philip did not answer. He looked down at the floor.

"Open your window, will you?" pleaded Sampson. He had already opened his. "That blonde she-wolf had a couple of gas canisters in her suitcase—everybody in the bank was sick or unconscious. That's why there wasn't any noise—Phil here and his pal got a couple of gas-masks out of the suitcase, and put them on. When they pulled their rods, there wasn't anyone in the bank who could lift a hand. That's why everything went so slick and quiet."

"Nobody shot, hey?" Perry felt relieved.

"No one. Say, Morgan, put a move on, willya—let her out. I got a coupla men outside that Pearl Street building, but that's a slick, dangerous bunch. I don't want them to get away."

"That penthouse," Perry remarked, "was just a red herring. Their hide-out is somewhere else in the building. Ask Philip where it is—he knows."

Sampson looked at the prisoner beside him. He said, "You might as well come clean, Phil—we're bound to find out."

The young fellow remained stubbornly uncommunicative.

"Can't blame him for not wanting to squeal on his brother." Perry winked at Sampson. Perry was driving carefully—he didn't intend that any accident should delay them.

The prisoner spoke up for the first time. "My brother has nothing to do with this—he doesn't know anything about it."

Sampson laughed grimly. He said, "He had me fooled. I didn't have

any use for him—much—but I certainly didn't suspect him. The commissioner's pal!"

"It was there plain enough—if I hadn't been blind," muttered Perry.

Sampson growled, "What does that make me? I knew he was the only one outside of me who knew when I brought Tom in—the only one who could have gotten in touch with Towers and"—he spoke deliberately—"bumped him off!"

Perry twisted about like a flash, then back again. "Bumped him off, Inspector? Is Towers dead?"

"Yeah—thought that would surprise you. Found dead in a New York hotel—knife in him just like in Jim Fox."

"Can't you speed her up a little?" Sampson sounded anxious. "Salter may have been somewhere around the bank watching."

"He may have been," Perry said, "but he'd have to go back to the Pearl Street building to tell Arnold and Myrna. They'd be waiting to hear about the bank haul—everything was going nicely when they left. I've got a hunch this was supposed to be their last job—they probably intended to divvy up and clear out after it. Things were getting a little hot—what with Tom being tagged and Jim Fox and Towers—yes, sir, I feel pretty certain they wanted to grab the cash in that bank haul to keep them going until they could dispose of their other loot—they must have collected quite a bit, Inspector."

CHAPTER XVI

GLORIA knew that the bank robbery was supposed to take place about three o'clock; she knew also that immediately afterward the principals in the

crime organization—if they escaped—would probably come to the hide-out in the Pearl and Greene Street building. No harm in a little independent sleuthing.

She went to Pearl and Greene Streets. Sitting near the door, at the soda fountain inside the confectionery store, Gloria could see everyone who came in or out of the building.

Three o'clock came and passed, and she wondered what was happening at the Butterly National Bank.

Suddenly she saw Myrna Allen and Conrad Arnold come out of a cab, and swing into the building together. She went out at once and followed them inside. As she stepped into the doorway, a quiet man turned to watch her.

Myrna and Arnold were not in the hallway; they had disappeared. It did not seem possible that they had entered an elevator and gone up in the brief time it had taken her to get there. She glanced up at the elevator indicators. The only one of the three that was going up was already at the twelfth floor; the other two were coming down.

At the end of the hall she saw a door. She passed the starter without looking at him, opened the door and found herself in a small cubicle. A door with an opaque glass in front of her opened, she knew, on the haberdashery store in the building; to the right of her was the wooden door leading down into the basement. It was unlatched. She lifted the hasp and looked down into a clean, dimly-lighted chamber. Silently she stole down the stairs. She did not hear a sound anywhere. Yet she felt quite certain that this must be where Myrna and Arnold had gone, for the simple reason that they could not have gone anywhere else except into the haberdashery store.

For a moment she hesitated. She realized her danger, but she realized also how important it was to locate the gang's hiding-place. It would be quite a satisfaction to be able to say to Perry, "Just follow me, I know where it is." Quite a triumph. And somehow she could not visualize anyone offering her violence. The danger seemed a little unreal. She crossed the long basement, with its clean, open floors and concrete walls—no place here to hide. But at the other end, she saw a door, and stood before it, uncertain what to do.

Then she heard steps at the other end of the basement, and looking back quickly, saw feet descending the stairway. Desperately she looked about—there was absolutely no place to conceal herself.

She opened the door in front of her, and closed it behind. The room in which she found herself was dark, but she could see a long oak table in the center of it, and armchairs all about. The air was dank but cool. No place here to hide, either—the only entrance or exit seemed to be the door through which she had just entered.

Unless she hid under the table—and that was a mighty poor hiding-place.

Then the door opened. Major Salter stood for a moment silhouetted on the threshold; he closed the door behind him.

He said, "Who's in here?"

"It's me," said Gloria boldly.

A light sprang suddenly from a small globe hanging from the center of the room. The major said quite cordially, "How do you do, Miss Chalmers? This is an unexpected pleasure. To what do I owe it?"

"Why," said Gloria, "why—I was looking for Inspector Sampson and

Perry. They came down here a little while ago."

For just an instant he seemed startled. Then he smiled and shook his head. He said, "Naughty, naughty! Shouldn't tell lies." He gazed at her reprovably. "Well, I'd better get you out of here, hadn't I—this is a dangerous place for you to be in."

Gloria said gratefully, "Thank you, Major." She started for the door.

"No," said Salter. He stood in front of her. "You're pretty sure to meet someone not as considerate as I am." He turned and locked the door behind him, then faced her again. "This is our meeting-room," he explained conversationally. "They think I'm one of them—been trailing this gang for weeks—know this place like a book—know just where to go."

She knew he was lying. But remembering the girl who had been found on River Street, Jim Fox, the clerk shot down in Van Alstyne's, Clancy, she dared not anger him by resistance. If his was the brain of the crime octopus, he was not subject to any feeling of mercy. And then again, she might be all wrong.

"How," asked Gloria, "can they come down here without exciting suspicion? Isn't the starter or one of the building employes likely to see them and wonder what they're doing down here?"

"These are meeting-rooms," Salter said briefly. "Members of the corporation for whom Towers bought this building. This way—there's a passage leads right out to the street."

Gloria screamed suddenly, screamed again. In an instant he had her; his arm was about her throat, choking her. He said, "You little fool—shut up or I'll strangle you!"

He stepped away and a gun appeared in his hand. He pointed it at her. He said, "Walk—that way—behind you." As she turned and started walking, he came close behind her, pushing her. He went back a moment and switched out the light. Then he was beside her again. His hand reached out and pressed something in the wall. A panel slid open, and a dark passage became visible.

In a sudden sweep of panic, Gloria turned and dashed against him. He shoved her roughly against the wall. Then he dragged her into the passage. The panel closed behind them. They were in darkness. She leaned against the wall. The ray of a flashlight in Salter's hand played on her.

Salter said gently, "You'd better be good. I warned you a good way to lose your pretty little nose is to stick it into other people's business. Unfortunately, you're in danger of losing more than your nose now. I don't know—they got Philip—I have some vague idea of an exchange of prisoners. Maybe nothing to it."

It was a different man who faced her now. The chill voice was the one she had heard over the telephone; the face she saw dimly was cold and hard.

Salter seemed to enjoy standing there talking to her. He went on, "This passage leads to a room in the adjoining building. Towers had all this built after he bought the building—I told him just what I wanted. The adjoining building is, if you remember, a storage warehouse. We own that, too. The rear of the warehouse fronts on Truck Street—we can go out that way if it becomes necessary. I've had a car out there for weeks. You may be interested in knowing how a man with brains takes precautions, Miss Chalmers. Incidentally, we've sold our real estate,

my dear—we expected to divide up today and become respectable citizens again. Unfortunately, the Butterly National holdup proved a fiasco—I was there watching—saw them take my brother Philip. That's your only gleam of hope, my dear young lady—an exchange of prisoners. Well—our friends must be waiting. They'll be surprised to see you." He went on suavely, "Will you walk or be carried?"

Gloria had recovered her self-control. She said, "If anything happens to me, Perry will hunt you down if it takes the rest of his life!"

"I expect to do a little hunting myself," said Salter softly. "It's through him the job at the Butterly National failed—and they got Philip! I saw the trap—I saw him—it was too late. Too bad—for you—and for him, too! Walk ahead, please!"

She walked in front of him. Twenty feet or so ahead, he caught up with her, and tapped four times in rapid succession on a door. The door opened, and Arnold stood looking at them.

"I'm bringing company," said Salter genially, and as Arnold stepped aside, he shoved Gloria strongly, so that she stumbled into the lighted room.

She looked into Myrna Allen's amazed face. Arnold whistled low, and Myrna giggled. She said, "I always wanted to be in society—and now look! Society has come to me!"

Salter said sharply, "No time to waste—bad news. Someone tipped the police off to that holdup—they got Philip!"

"It was her—and that sneaking sweetie of hers," said Myrna viciously.

"Get your keys out, everybody," ordered Salter. "We'll divide and clear out, just as we planned. Every

man for himself. There's no time to waste."

"Easy does it," drawled Arnold. "They couldn't find us here in a hundred years. What are you going to do with her?"

Myrna snapped, "There's only one thing to do—play safe. Give me the job—I'll do it with pleasure."

"We'll decide about that later," said Salter crisply. "We might leave her in here after we go—they might be willing to release Philip—"

"That's out of the question," Arnold argued. "There's no safe way of doing it—and they'd never consent. Couldn't, in fact—the police have no right to enter into such a transaction. You know that, Major."

"Then we'll just leave her here when we go." Salter's voice was cold and decided. "Keys, please! I've got four—Jim Fox's, Towers', Philip's, and my own."

A huge iron vault occupied one side of the small room. Myrna inserted her key and turned it, then stepped aside. Arnold put his key into a keyhole above hers. After that Salter used his four keys, one after another. The he swung open a huge iron door.

Quite calmly he stood waiting while the other two began eagerly pulling black metal boxes out of the vault and putting them on the table. There were six boxes, all of the same size, some apparently heavier than others. Money, jewelry, bonds, Gloria surmised. All the plunder the gang had collected and not disposed of. They must have used a considerable amount in their operations, and perhaps divided some.

When the six boxes were out, Arnold said, "The fair thing to do is divide the extra three boxes between us—one to each." He looked defiantly at Salter.

"I'm satisfied with one," Myrna

said flatly. Her voice rose shrilly. "Only let's get finished and get out of here. If they nabbed Phil—I won't feel satisfied until I'm in —"

"Hell," said Salter, smiling. He shook his head regretfully. "I'm afraid there really isn't enough for the three of us. Besides, there's a chance of one of you being caught—you're not very clever—and I'm afraid if you were, you couldn't stand the heat they'd put on you. I'll have to leave you three in here—I hope you won't become too bored with each other."

Arnold leaped at him. Salter's gun made a deafening roar in that small room. The bullet smashed through Arnold's face. As he fell, Gloria turned away and buried her face against the wall. She felt sick.

"I'll leave you two ladies to keep each other company," said Salter's quiet voice. "Afraid there's no way of exchanging prisoners—poor Philip will have to do his stretch."

Myrna sobbed, "Why—why can't you trust me? Why can you trust Towers—and not me?"

"Towers is dead!" Salter sounded faintly amused. He said, "I suppose it would be more humane to kill you both than leave you here, but"—he sighed—"I can't bring myself to do it. It's the gentleman in me."

He took two large suitcases from where they were standing against the wall, and put them on the table—his gun always ready in his hand. One by one he put the metal boxes into the grips, locked and strapped them. Once Myrna moved as though to get up, and he paused and looked at her. Under that look, she subsided, her blue eyes staring at him out of a face that was white and pinched.

"Now, Miss Chalmers—if you'll please get away from that door . . ."

He wasn't taking any chances whatever, the cold, cowardly devil. Gloria walked to the table and sat down in a chair opposite him.

She said, "I'd rather you killed me than leave me here to die of starvation and thirst."

"Now, now—I couldn't do that," he said reprovingly. "If you were a different type, I could enjoy taking you with me—I'd like someone to see the world with me. You're quite pretty. But I'm afraid you're not amenable to reason."

"I'll go—take me," pleaded Myrna.

He surveyed her coolly, from her platinum hair down. He said coldly, "Didn't I mention I was a gentleman? What attraction could you have for me?"

When he had finished closing the two grips, he took one to the door and put it outside; then he went back and got the other.

He grinned at Myrna. "You're thinking you've got a key that will open that door, aren't you? I hope you haven't forgotten there's a bolt on the other side. I'll be quite sure it's secure before I leave."

There was a fiendishness in the man that made him gloat as the two helpless girls sat there and watched him.

"Still," he told them consolingly, "while there's life there's hope! Not much hope, I'll admit!"

Without warning, Myrna shrieked and rose. Salter dropped his case to the floor, and stood waiting, his gun leveled, his face cold and set.

"Sit down, Myrna," ordered Gloria decidedly. She got up and pushed her back into her seat. Myrna put her head down on the table and began crying and laughing.

Salter made a grimace of distaste. He started for the door.

Four quick, sharp taps sounded.

He stiffened and paused. The four sharp taps came again. He called, "Who's there?"

The reply came faintly through the iron door. "It's Philip! Open up, Ted—it's Phil!"

Instantly Salter let the suitcase fall to the ground again, and ran to the door. He shouted, "Door's open, Phil!" Nevertheless he flung it wide open.

Philip Salter faced him. At first Gloria didn't see the handcuffs, but Major Salter did—and stepped back quickly.

The young fellow cried shakily, "I couldn't help it, Ted—they tortured me—they made me tell—I couldn't help it!"

"Drop that gun," came Perry's command. "Drop it—quick!"

Salter's gun clattered to the floor. He said clearly, "I told you I'd find them, Sampson—I had no idea my brother was in this. Where did you pick him up? I had to kill Arnold for resisting arrest."

Behind Philip and Perry and Sampson, other men pushed into the room. Perry kicked the suitcase aside—and stubbed his toes.

Sampson looked down at Salter with cold distaste as he snapped on the handcuffs. He said, "Foxy to the last, hey? Not even enough courage to die quick when you know you're bound to burn anyhow. You're one of those guys who can dish it out but can't take it."

CHAPTER XVII

THEY sat at a table in the Jefferson Hotel grill-room, and Burke remarked wonderingly, "What I can't understand is your never even suspecting Salter, Inspector. All this time . . ."

"Well, I never did, that's all. Never liked him, but never suspected him. Looking back at it now, I don't see how the hell I could have been so dumb. That poor girl whose body was found on River Street—only the Commissioner and I knew about her telephoning him—and Salter. That telephone call cost the poor girl her life. Towers was found dead by the New York police after I brought Tom in—only other person who knew about Tom's confession the first three days was the commissioner—and he told Salter. Still it never occurred to me he was the brains of the 'octopus'—say, who invented that name, anyhow?"

"It's in the dictionary," said Gloria.

"Only one I ever did suspect," Sampson admitted dryly, "was Morgan. I suspected him of a red mask."

"You don't suspect General Walters?" Burke looked interested.

"No. He wasn't in with Salter—Salter played up to him, that's all—sympathized with him. He was slick, Salter—damned slick. I thought I had the Schwab reception pretty well covered, but he was too smart for me. Got to admit it—it's the truth." He grinned ruefully at Perry. "Not too smart for you, though—and you're just an amateur."

Gloria said, "I still don't understand how you got Phil Salter to guide you to that treasure-room of theirs, Inspector. All Perry told me was that he was 'persuaded'!"

Perry's face darkened like a thundercloud, and Sampson looked at him, smiled, shook his head.

Sampson said, "He sure was a wild man in that basement, Miss Chalmers—this man of yours. When we got to the house, one of my men who saw you walk in after Arnold and

Myrna Allen told us about it—and that got us started down into the basement—saved us wasting a lot of valuable time searching that pent-house again. And from that minute, Morgan here was a wild man—from the minute he heard you'd gone down there. We hadn't had a chance to search Phil thoroughly—just frisked him for a gun—and we didn't know he had keys to those doors. When we got to that locked door—Morgan, you sure looked as though you were going to bust things up!"

Gloria said softly, "Perry!"

"So," continued Sampson, "when young Salter kept refusing to talk, Perry asked me to let him do a little 'persuading.' He took Phil to the

other side of the basement, and we turned our backs—all of us—and walked away." He shook his head. "When it comes to giving the third degree . . ."

"I didn't know what they were doing to her in there," Perry said shortly.

"By the way," Sampson remarked, looking at Burke, "I heard General Walters is resigning—I understand you're gonna be my next boss, Mr. Burke?"

Gloria put a hand on Perry's arm. She said severely, "If you must drink, don't mix wine and whiskey and cocktails, Perry!"

"Why do we have to have bosses?" sighed Perry, and put down his glass.

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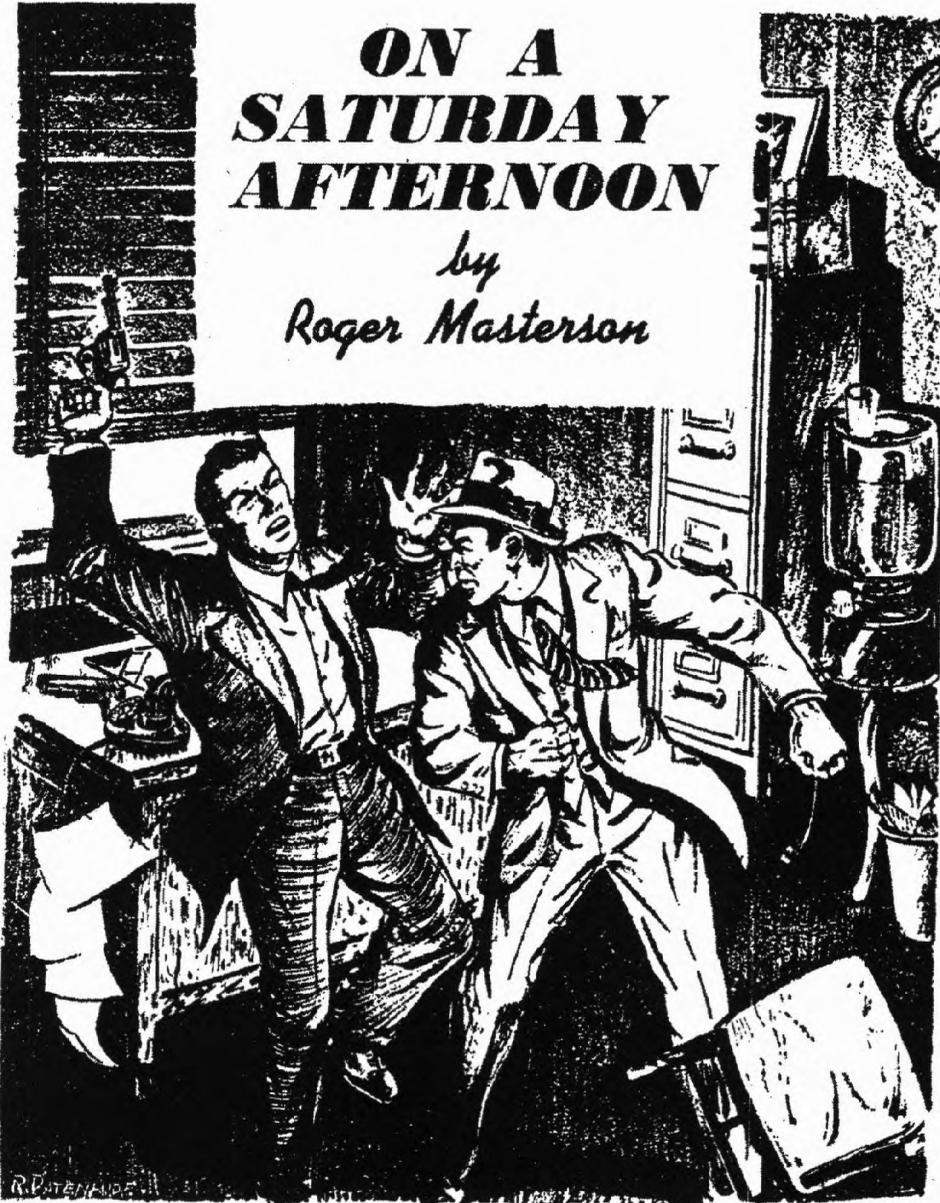
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MARCH FIRST

ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON

by
Roger Masterson



They'd prepared a neat little ambush for Terry Bradford. There was an important piece of paper they wanted. But they got more than just a piece of paper—in fact, much more than they bargained for.

WHEN he came back to his hotel, Terry Bradford found a note awaiting him. The young lady at Lawyer Starrett's office had a message for him from New York—would he please come and get it?

Terry had spent the entire morn-

ing in Starrett's office, and he remembered the young lady . . . quite an attractive number. He went there at once.

Even as he turned the handle of the door, a queer premonition held him. It was after two of a warm Saturday afternoon in August, and

the entire building seemed empty. The elevator was not running; he had had to walk upstairs. He surmised that the message was from his chief, Lije Prentice, President of Mammoth Oil, and might be important.

Finally he decided that the strain of the last few days had made him a bit nervous. A lot of people would have been immediately amused by that idea, people who had seen the black-haired thunderbolt in action. Whenever there was trouble, the Mammoth Oil Company called for its general utility man, its Mr. Fixem, Terry Bradford.

Nevertheless he opened the door cautiously and peered in. It occurred to him that the message might have been left on Starrett's desk in his private office, the door of which was closed. Suddenly impatient with himself, Terry strode across the long room and threw the door open.

A masculine falsetto called, "Come in, sweetie-pie!" He sprang back and reached for the forty-five under his coat—and as quickly stopped. Suicide did not appeal to him.

THERE were two men in the small office, and the window-blind was down. Their guns pointed straight at him. One, who sat behind Starrett's desk, was a big fellow with meaty shoulders and a moon-like face. His right ear was a cylinder; the hand which held the gun was huge. The other, standing against the wall, was dark, slender, immaculately dressed in a gray suit a la Broadway. There was a significant sureness about the way he held his weapon in a smooth brown hand.

The big fellow said jocularly, "Come in, Mr. Bradford, dew come in! The dame said to apologize for not keepin' the appointment. Didn't

she, Harry?" He seemed to be enjoying himself hugely.

Harry said unsmilingly, "Yeah!" He closed the door behind Terry. He said, "Hey, pull up that blind a few inches, Marty. It's hot as hell in here!"

"Sure, sure!" Marty complied. "Terry ain't gonna holler and disturb the neighbors, are you, Terry? He ain't that dumb—from all I hear he's a real smart guy!"

Without replying, Bradford seated himself close to the desk and watched them through alert gray eyes.

"See, he's gonna be nice!" approved Marty. "Why the hell should he get hisself bumped off for some oil company that don't give a damn about him? What does a good-lookin' guy like him wanna get slugs through his belly for? He's got too much sense. Don't he look like a guy who's got sense to you, Harry?"

"He'd better have!" said Harry.

Bradford said coolly, "I'd like to get my cigarettes out of my pocket, if it won't make you bozos nervous."

"He wants to smoke," Marty commented. "Do you think it's good for him to smoke, Harry?"

Harry seemed to consider. "No, better not. Cigarettes might stunt his growth." His diction was better than Marty's.

"In what reformatory did they preach that to you?" asked Bradford quizzically.

The big fellow laughed with great glee. "Say, he must know your family, Harry." He scratched his nose with his gun-barrel, and Terry wished fervently that it would go off.

Harry commanded grimly, "Stand up, Bradford! Raise your hands—now turn around and face the wall."

"You been a bad boy!" explained Marty. "Teacher is gonna punish you."

For an instant Bradford toyed with the idea of a swift snatch at the little fellow's gun, followed by a blow to one of several vulnerable spots whose location he knew. But he abandoned it. For all his frivolity, the big fellow was alert, his gun steady. Reluctantly he raised his arms and turned about, tensing involuntarily for the blow that might come. But Harry only reached for the gun under Terry's coat, and threw it on the desk in front of Marty.

With a bear-like left hand, Marty picked it up, opened the cylinder, and glanced at the lead noses of the cartridges reposing there. He snapped the gun shut. Bradford sat down again.

"Got two rods now!" Marty remarked. "I certainly could ruin you, Bradford, if you got me peeved. But you wouldn't do that, would you? Get poor old Marty worked up in this hot weather? Just come across with that sketch and the—the—what do you call it?"

"Patent assignment," suggested Harry. "No, we don't want the assignment—he hasn't got it anyhow—it's the plans we want."

"Yeah, them—and then we'll all go in swimming! It's too nice to stay in this office on a scorcher like this, or"—his face suddenly became grim—"in a morgue."

Harry added to that: "So bring out those things before we begin working on you, Bradford."

"Now look here, you wise guys"—Bradford pretended to lose patience—"you're talking screwy. What patent? What plans?"

"He's callin' us names," chided Marty, "and us so nice to him—thinkin' he's a right guy. Should we slug him first and then search him, Harry, or visey-voisey?"

"Marty isn't fooling," admonished Harry. "He's a good-natured guy, but when he's crossed he gets mad—and the next thing you know, there you are in an undertaker's back room, giving work to unemployed embalmers!"

"He looks tough," admitted Terry mildly.

"I'm no angel myself, but Marty's got no heart at all. Don't be a sap, Terry—there are other jobs but you've got only one life. Come across with the plans—I happen to know you mailed the patent assignment."

Bradford understood. If they got the plans, whoever was behind them would manufacture a similar gadget, and take a chance on fighting it out with the Mammoth on an infringement suit.

"Those plans," Bradford stated, "were mailed to Mr. Elijah Prentice in New York."

"Quit trying to kid us!" Harry's smile was complacent. "This morning you got the plans and the patent assignment from Bruce Kingsberg's lawyer, right here in this office, and you gave him a check for two hundred and fifty grand. Then you called old man Prentice and he told you to mail the assignment, but bring in the plans yourself. Now do I know what I'm talking about? Come across and stay healthy, Bradford—I'm speaking to you like a pal."

Marty commented admiringly, "Ain't he got the gift of gab, Bradford? I always tell him he shoulda been a mouthpiece. You kin see he's dead right, can't you? He's talkin' for your good, sweetie-pie."

"How would you like to go to hell?" Bradford was irritable. "You'd make a swell comedian—up the river."

"I was there!" bragged Marty proudly. "I played on the football

team—right guard. I was good, too! Ask anybody.”

They were certainly well-informed; Bradford wondered where they had obtained such accurate information. A leak somewhere. Arranging the trap in the very office where he had consummated the deal that morning was fast work. And neither of these two looked as though he had any more conscience than a weasel, and no more aversion to killing.

There was no doubt in Terry's mind that McMahon of the Benton Motor Company was their employer. The stake was a huge one, and McMahon was not one to be deterred by scruples. Those patent rights and the plans had cost Terry's company a quarter of a million dollars, but they were worth millions. He remembered how it had all come about.

SOME weeks earlier, a letter had come to the New York office of the Mammoth Oil Company signed by one Bruce Kingsberg, of Springfield, Massachusetts. In it the writer stated that he had perfected and patented an invention which would enable automobiles to travel two hundred miles on one gallon of gas.

It was turned over to the company's representative in Springfield, with instructions to interview the writer and report immediately. In a short time the reply came that Kingsberg's invention seemed capable of doing just what he claimed. Also, and what was more serious, that the inventor had also written the Benton Motor Company for a bid.

At once Bradford was dispatched to Springfield with a skilled engineer. The engineer confirmed the report already received, and the matter was then referred to Elijah Prentice.

That invention might mean the

loss of millions annually to the oil company; the laying off of thousands of men; general ruin and havoc in the industry. Kingsberg's contrivance could be used not only in automobiles, but in any type of gasoline-driven motor. It would curtail the use of gasoline fifty to sixty per cent.

So Bradford was sent back to Springfield with a blank check. And just about the time he was through negotiating with Kingsberg, the Benton Motor Company descended on Springfield like a wolf on the fold. The Benton's interests lay on the other side of the fence from the Mammoth. With this patent, every car sold would have to pay a royalty to the Benton Company. A contrivance that would enable a Benton car to run two hundred miles on one gallon of gas was worth anything the inventor asked.

The Benton Company's representative quickly persuaded Kingsberg's lawyer that his client was not being paid enough for so valuable a patent. The lawyer advised Kingsberg to break his agreement to sell to Mammoth. But Kingsberg, a Canadian, happened to be the sort of man who believed in the sanctity of a promise, written or verbal. To him the price he had agreed to accept was ample. Disregarding his lawyer, he went through with the deal and sold out to Mammoth.

Right up to the last minute, all kinds of pressure had been exerted on Kingsberg by the Benton Company's representatives . . . even threats of violence. But these only made the Canadian more resolute. And so that morning the final papers had been signed and executed in the office of Kingsberg's lawyer, and delivered to Bradford in exchange for the firm's check.

Old Elijah Prentice had told Brad-

ford over the telephone substantially what Harry had quoted: "Mail in all the papers, including the patent assignment, Terry—everything but the plans. Those are too valuable to be sent by mail—bring them in yourself. And watch your step. McMahon wouldn't stop at murder to get them."

Bradford had promised grimly, "I'll bring them in, Chief—don't lose any sleep worrying."

It seemed safer to go home by train; Bradford had decided that in a car there would be the risk of a holdup or an accident.

WELL, he just hadn't been careful enough. It looked very much as though curtains would shortly be rung down on the exciting career of one Terry Bradford, trouble-shooter for the Mammoth Oil Company. But if he felt any fear, he didn't show it.

"So you got the information that I'm carrying those plans back myself?" His laugh derided them. "You really think they'd trust them to me, instead of to the United States mail? Old Lijah foxed you, that's all—and you fell for it. Those papers are all in the mail. You're barking up the wrong tree."

The man called Marty turned a questioning look on his accomplice. But Harry shook his head.

"He's lying, Marty. I'm going through him. If he hasn't them on him, he knows where they are . . . we may have to get rough with this baby. Here, you, stand up and turn around."

"Sure, sure!" Bradford stood up and stretched his arms. "I suppose getting rough with me is going to get you the sketch, isn't it?"

"Shut up!" ordered Harry without heat. He went through Bradford

carefully, even forcing him to remove his hat and shoes. Then, "Take your coat off," he directed, and Bradford obeyed. With two swift rips, Harry tore the lining away from the inside.

Bradford said bitterly, "That suit cost me fifty bucks, you heel!" He was facing Harry again.

"Heel, am I?" Harry was suddenly enraged. His upper lips drew back from his teeth, fang-like. "Gabby guy, aren't you? They've been telling you you're tough until you got to believe it. Well—"

"Swing your toe into the seat of his pants!" advised Marty.

"Hell with that!" crackled Harry. "Let's quit fooling around: Where are those papers, wise guy?" His gun-barrel dug savagely into Bradford's stomach. Death glinted in the dark depths of his blazing eyes.

Marty said ominously, "Better talk quick, feller!" He had Bradford's gun on his lap; his own pointed at Bradford's heart. "It's easier to frisk a stiff than a live one."

A lethal silence hung in the close, heated air. From the street below came the sound of traffic; the August sun drove hot rays through the cracks in the shade and whitened the window-sill beneath it.

A plan took tenuous form in his mind . . . a desperate plan, with all the odds against success. But he decided it was worth a try. If it failed he wouldn't be there to worry over it.

He said with apparent reluctance, "All right, you win. The plans are in my grip at the hotel. I was coming back for them in time to make the four-ten train to New York."

"At the Brunswick? That where you left it? In your room?" Harry jabbed him again.

"Yes."

"What's your room number? Where's your key?"

"Room number 565. I left my key with the hotel clerk."

Marty said, "Aw, you don't need his key," and pulled out what looked like a cylinder with a button-hook attached. "Here, Harry, you know how to use this can-opener, don'tcha? I'll keep this mug here till you come back!" His light blue eyes had begun to redden. "If those papers ain't there, I'm going to blow your head off, feller! I feel like doin' it anyhow! You got a nerve callin' Harry a heel!"

Harry said, "I'll be right back!" and went out.

ALL the false jocularly had disappeared from the gunman's face. His eyes held no more mercy than those of a hungry tiger.

"Turn around! Sit down!" he snarled. "Unless you want to go for me! Come on, try it! I heard you was tough. Where's your guts?"

Only one man to tackle now, thought Bradford. Swiftly his mind revolved and discarded one expedient after another.

He said with his disarming smile, "All right, I know when I'm licked. I'm no glutton for punishment. You're on top and you're getting what you're after. What the hell more do you want? Give me a cigarette."

Marty threw over a cigarette with his left hand. "If we get it . . ." His tone was significant. "If we don't . . . well, they'll find you here on Monday, but you won't look so nice."

Bradford demanded, "What's McMahan paying you for, to bump me off or to get that sketch? Will he take the rap for you when it comes time for you to burn?" He loosened his collar and tie; it was hot.

"Hell, you shoot your mouth off too much!" But now there was less rage and more amusement in the crook's voice. "Don't worry about what we're gettin'. He's payin' us enough. We ain't no pikers, Harry and me."

There could be no further doubt of the intentions of these two men. They meant to kill him as soon as they had the plans. Marty had admitted that McMahan was paying them because, reasoned Bradford, there could be no harm in making such an admission to a man who would not be alive to tell tales.

"You go clear if you give up those plans," offered Marty. "All we want is to get them, give them to McMahan and get our dough."

Bradford knew he had to act quickly. The Brunswick Hotel was only three blocks away, and Harry would be back any minute. He would come back with empty hands, because the papers were not in his grip. Bradford visualized the paroxysms of rage and the swift finish—with himself as the victim.

"Listen, Marty," he began quietly, "I want to give you a friendly tip. You remember calling on Kingsberg, the inventor, and threatening him? It was you, wasn't it? Sure! He'll be able to identify you if anything happens to me. There's nothing against you in this transaction yet—at least nothing but threatening Kingsberg, and that don't amount to much. But if you rub me out—"

Now the gunman was his jocular self once more, and as nasty as a fly in a bowl of soup. "S'pos'n I do? I ain't sayin' I will, but s'pos'n I do? How'll they know it was I done it? There's a lot of other guys would bump you off for less'n we're gettin'. Who'd know Harry and I done it?"

Bradford puffed at his cigarette

and reached across for the ash-tray. He said scornfully, "First thing, Kingsberg would go through the picture gallery, and he'd have to be blind not to recognize you, having seen you at his house. Then again—have you ever heard of the science of ballistics? They'll find that gun of yours and—"

Marty interrupted, "Jeeze, but you are a dope, ain'tcha? Why couldn't I bury the gat somewhere—get rid of it? What kind of a sap do you take me for? Or—hell, I don't even have to do that!" He put his gun down and picked up Terry's—the very thing Terry had been hoping he would do. "How 'bout my pluggin' you with your own gun? Suicide! You was in love with some gal here in town, maybe—and she give you a standup and you committed suicide!" He chuckled self-approvingly. "Say, that's a good one, too, ain't it? You won't be around to say it ain't so!"

"Oh, hell, I suppose you got me!" Terry rose dejectedly and put his hands into his pockets. The gun in Marty's hand followed him, and Marty's eyes were alert, his lips twisted into an amused sneer as though he suspected Terry intended to attack and was quite ready to let him commit self-destruction. Terry strolled forward a step.

At the corner of the desk, Terry turned and faced Marty. He began, "Listen, Marty . . ." Then he threw himself forward in a fierce, iunging dive—one hundred and ninety pounds of mauling ferocity.

His fangs showing like a wolf's, Marty pulled the trigger of Bradford's gun. A futile pop resulted. Yelling hoarsely as Terry struck him, Marty dropped Terry's revolver and tried to pick up his own. But now Terry's fists smote him in the softness between chin and collarbone, and

abruptly the big fellow went limp. To make doubly sure, Terry banged him over the head with his own forty-five, scooped up the other gun, and stepped away. Marty slid half off his chair, and Terry let him lay. The gunman was out cold.

His eyes on the door, Terry grabbed the telephone. In another moment he was speaking to the Springfield chief of police.

"Hiyuh, chief—this is Terry Bradford! I'm in Starrett's office on Abington Street, suite 404. Got a prisoner for you—attempted murder and a couple of other things. His side-kick is due here any minute. . . . What? Yes, I'm all right now, bu' I wasn't a little while ago. Say, I really ought to duck this bird that's coming here . . . got no right to take chances with what I'm carrying . . . only I happen to be sore at him for ruining my coat.

"The fellow I have here is one of the two who threatened Kingsberg—remember? They tried to finish me off. . . . I just happened to be lucky. Hurry over here, Chief!"

He put down the instrument and ran out, closing the door of the inner office behind him. He raced through the outer office, into the hallway to the elevator shaft, and pressed the button several times. Then he remembered the elevator hadn't been running when he came.

To his ears came the sound of footsteps climbing up the stairs. He went back into the outer office and stood to one side of the closed door.

A moment later the door opened almost noiselessly. He could see Harry's form through the opaque glass. Harry carried a suitcase—Terry's.

Silently Terry rose behind him. The butt of his revolver came down with a vicious swing over the gun-

man's ear. Harry staggered sideways, his knees started to buckle. Then he folded up like an accordion.

Terry let him fall. He straightened him out and went through the inert form with expert fingers, removing a gun and a blackjack.

Opening the suitcase, he put Harry's weapons into it. He stuck Marty's gun into his own pocket . . . he might need it. It was a quarter of three, still almost an hour and a half short of train time. He made up his mind he would spend that hour and a half in the police station. He had

no right to take any more chances with those plans.

Then, smiling to himself, he drew out the cylinder of his own forty-five. All the cartridges were intact. And Kingsberg's sketch, made on tissue-thin onionskin paper, had been rammed into one of the cartridge cases—after it had been emptied of powder. That cartridge case had been one bullet removed from the firing-pin. Marty's shot had been ineffective because when he pulled the trigger, the firing-pin had fallen on a paper-wadded cartridge.

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THE STRIP-TEASE MURDER CASE

by Rufus L. Wilde



Sally Sloane's strip-tease past came back to haunt her. So Duke Bender was called in to do a little un-haunting. The trouble was, he did too good a job.

WITHIN fifteen minutes after he received her telephone call, Duke Bender was shaking Mrs. Sally Sloane's hand in her living-room at 34 Charlotte Street. His only client so far — no wonder he had come

a-running when she called. And what a client! Her husband was R. Hamilton Sloane, former deputy police commissioner, and now candidate for Congress from the silk-stocking district.

Queer, too, the way he had met her

again. Their acquaintance dated from a certain fall day when he had covered himself with glory running seventy yards to a touchdown for Columbia. She and her husband, an old Columbia man, had made quite a fuss over him. Then, after he began practicing law in the Big City, he had paused for a moment to watch a policeman make out a summons for speeding. The driver was Sally Sloane. She called to him, asked him to handle the matter for her, and then took him to her house for lunch. Thereafter he had been retained by her husband in several matters which brought very welcome fees.

Greeting him, she went right on, "I'm in trouble, Duke!"

"I got that idea from your voice," said Duke.

They sat down. A uniformed chauffeur appeared at the door—a slim, short, dark-haired fellow with button-black eyes.

"Not now, Larry," said his mistress. "Oh, Larry, what's Al Stephany's address?"

"Two-fifty Bogart Street." He glanced briefly at Duke, then turned and went out.

"I'm being blackmailed," said Sally flatly. So far as appearances went, she looked about the same as usual: a rather buxom but well-formed woman, with platinum hair and brilliant green eyes. Only her eyes showed her distress; worry and fear peered out from them unmistakably.

"Sounds like a matter for the police, doesn't it?" Duke was a young lawyer, just starting on his career, and he intended to be an ethical practitioner, even if he had to starve a while.

Sally shook her head. "I don't want the police in on it—I don't want any publicity. Look!" She handed

him a batch of pictures, and he glanced at them, suppressed a grin, and said "Wow!"

Nudes—or practically nudes—and all of Sally!

Sally shrugged, took back the photos. "Before I married Ham"—she was referring to her husband, R. Hamilton Sloane—"I had secretly married Al Stephany, out in Iowa—you've heard of him, haven't you?"

Duke whistled. "Who hasn't?" One of the most notorious pre-repeal racketeers in the country.

"My family was poor—found it hard to get along. I had looks but not much talent. Al Stephany got me a job in a burlesque show—after that he married me. Neither the job nor the husband lasted very long—I couldn't stand either one. As a matter of fact, hardly anybody knew about the marriage—we kept it a secret. I got a position as a secretary and divorced Al right here in New York—he didn't defend the suit—no publicity—you know how these things are done."

Duke nodded.

"Well," sighed Sally, "that was years ago. And after that I got a job in Ham's office—that was before he became deputy police commissioner—and before I'd worked for him a year, he married me. Now he's running for Congress in a district like this, where the slightest breath of scandal would ruin his chances—and this comes up—out of nowhere!"

Despair darkened her features.

"Who's behind it?" asked Duke.

"Al, of course. Nobody else that I run across nowadays even knows about my marriage to him—it happened out in Iowa while I was on the road with one of the shows he angeled—he had money then. And these pictures . . .!"

"How much does he want?"

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

Duke whistled. The horizontal furrow in his wide forehead deepened, and his jaw set pugnaciously. "What your dear ex-husband needs is a good sock in the jaw!" He looked quite capable of delivering it—six feet of sinewy strength, with cool grey eyes below a crop of wiry brown hair. "Does Mr. Sloane know about all this?"

"Oh yes—and he's been splendid about it. He's willing to pay the money, but I thought you'd go and see Al Stephany first and see if he'll agree to take less—and make sure he doesn't try it again." She added, as he looked doubtful. "Please, Duke . . . we don't know each other very well, but you're about the only one I feel I can trust—and who wouldn't be afraid of Al. Not that there's much to be afraid of . . . he's tamed down a lot . . . and he never was more than a big blowhard."

Duke said, somewhat reluctantly, "All right. Though I still can't see why you don't call in the police—particularly since Mr. Sloane used to be deputy police commissioner and—"

"Don't you understand," she interrupted earnestly, "that if the police were called in, the papers would get hold of it—they'd be bound to—Ham doesn't stand well with this administration at all. And if Ham went to see Al himself, there'd be murder!"

"I'll go," agreed Duke. "What's Stephany's address?"

"What was it—Larry told me only a few minutes ago?"

"Two-fifty Bogart Street," recollected Duke. "Maybe I'll pay him a visit right away—no use putting it off. You want it settled for as much below fifty thousand as possible——"

"And don't forget the negatives!" She held up the pictures.

Duke objected, "Sure, I'll get them, but nobody would ever dare print them without your permission."

"You think so! I had to sign a release at the time those were taken—they're supposed to be advertising stills. He could sell them—and the story that went with them—that I'm now the wife of the candidate for Congress for this district——"

"Then I've got to get those releases, too. And after it's all over, maybe I can change his features around a bit!"

TWO-FIFTY Bogart Street was a small, dingy office building on a side street. On the third floor, Duke saw the name on a door: "Alfred J. Stephany, Insurance." The door was locked. He went downstairs, waited around half an hour, then went upstairs again. The door was still locked. He was just turning away, when a man confronted him, key in hand.

The man asked, "You wanna see me?"

"If your name is Al Stephany," said Duke.

Without replying, the man swept Duke with one keen, searching glance, then opened the door and walked in. Duke followed. Dark outside office, small inner office poorly lighted by one narrow window.

"Come in!" growled Stephany gruffly.

Duke walked into the private office, restraining an impulse to teach this fellow a lesson in manners. He stood appraising Stephany with deliberate insolence, before he sat down. If Stephany had tamed down, as Sally Sloane had told him, he must have been a pretty bad actor in his prime.

Not that he was so big physically, but that he was quite obviously tough—as tough as he was reputed to be. Gray sprinkled the black in his hair, and the round face Duke had often seen pictured in the papers had become a little gaunt. But the small, light brown eyes were just as furious, just as ready for immediate battle, and his arms were as long and thick as an ape's, his hands huge and hairy. A formidable customer, all right—and Duke disliked him on sight.

"I'm here representing Mrs. Sally Sloane," said Duke curtly.

Stephany stared, said nothing.

Duke asked, "Anything wrong with your tongue, Mister?"

"Who the hell are you?" asked Stephany, his gaze sultry. "I didn't send for you."

This wasn't getting anywhere. A fight would certainly bring no good results.

"I'm here just the same to see if this can be settled right. If it can't, we'll leave it to the police to settle."

There was no mistaking the surge of rage that swept the man. But he restrained it—no easy job, for him.

He asked, "What's the proposition?"

"Twenty-five thousand for the negatives and the releases—and that's tops—no bargaining."

Stephany switched his stare from Duke's impassive face to look out of the window. After a minute of silence, he turned to Duke again.

"How do I know Sally sent you?"

"You've got a telephone at your elbow—she's at home now."

"Who'll I say you are?"

"Jerry Bender—they call me Duke Bender."

"Lawyer—or dick?"

"I'm not a dick!" Duke stirred

restlessly. "You're asking a lot of questions, Mister—and they won't get us anywhere. If my offer suits you, say so—and the money will talk."

"Got it with you?"

"No, but I can bring it in about an hour. How about those negatives and the releases?"

"They'll be here when you come back with the twenty-five grand." He got up and came around the desk as Duke rose. "And don't try any monkey-business with me, pal—and tell Sally that goes for her, too. Because if you do, I won't only spread it that she was a cheap strip-tease queen I pulled outta the gutter, but I'll make both of ya——"

He got no farther. Duke's right hit the button and smashed the racketeer against the wall. As he bounced back—almost involuntarily—Duke hit him again. There was one single instant when Stephany seemed to be out on his feet. Abruptly he shook his head as though to clear it, then leaped and reached for a drawer of his desk.

Duke was beside him as he opened it, and both men grabbed for the flat automatic inside. Stephany got it, but Duke twisted his wrist and made him drop it. Duke picked it up and put it into his pocket. He shoved Stephany aside and began rummaging through the desk.

No negatives, no releases. In fact, the desk was practically empty.

Stephany lit a cigarette and stood studying Duke. An opaque film spread over his eyes, but the flame that smoldered in them was still visible. His face was not pleasant.

"Well," said Duke grinning, "there was no harm in trying, was there? I'll still be back with the twenty-five thousand—if you say so."

"I'll be here!" Stephany's tone

was distinct, deadly. "And if you don't show up, I'll find you just the same. You ain't gettin' away with a thing, pal!"

"That so?" Duke took the gun out of his pocket and gazed at Stephany reflectively. "Sounds as though I'd be better off if I finished you right now—that's what you intend to do to me, don't you?"

He waited for the reaction. Not a muscle of Stephany's face moved; his eyes did not waver.

"You're no damned good, but you've got guts, all right," admitted Duke. He put the gun back into his pocket. "I'll get the money and I'll bring it right here. But don't kid yourself—I'll be taking the proper precautions not to get knocked off—I know your kind and your methods. You see that you have the negatives and the releases."

"You talk like a fool," said Stephany. "It ain't only those they want. They want me to keep my mouth shut about Sally having been married to me."

Duke realized that, too. If the story appeared in the papers that R. Hamilton Sloane's wife was the ex-wife of the notorious racketeer, Al Stephany, Sloane's chances of being elected to Congress wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel.

He said skeptically, "I suppose you're figuring on milking Sloane right along, aren't you? This twenty-five grand will only be a sort of first payment. Is that it?"

Stephany sat down deliberately at his desk. He rubbed his jaw with the palm of his hand. "Once I make a deal and pass my word, I keep it. Anyhow, he wouldn't pay me again, and I know it. After he's elected, he wouldn't care much if I did beef about her having been married to me. So just bring down that twenty-

five grand, and that'll settle it—so far as my ever squealing about Sally is concerned."

His glance flicked Duke, and Duke understood. There would still be his account with Duke to settle.

WHEN DUKE got back to the Charlotte Avenue house, he found Sally and her husband together. R. Hamilton Sloane was a man of fifty, with prematurely white hair and a lined face. To offset these, he had a lean, hard figure, and keen, alert eyes.

Sally asked quickly, even before Duke sat down. "Well—did you see him?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars—after two punches in the jaw—or rather in spite of them." Duke grinned. "And his promise that he'll keep his mouth shut about the marriage—if that's worth anything. I think he'll keep it."

Sloane said quietly, "If he thinks I'll pay any more blackmail, he's very foolish." He threw a quick, enigmatic glance at his wife—it was not a friendly look by any means.

"He agreed to accept twenty-five thousand?" Sally seemed puzzled, almost incredulous. "Why, that's fine! He's saved you twenty-five thousand dollars, Ham."

"Wonderful!" commented her husband dryly. Somehow his thoughts did not seem to synchronize with hers. "It really is, Duke . . . I'm very grateful to you. I'll pay you for your services, of course—a thousand dollars be all right?"

"Okay!" said Duke laconically. "I promised I'd bring the money to him right away."

"I'm afraid I can't let you have it today any more—banks are closed by now. Tomorrow morning—say at eleven."

Watching him, Duke sensed something behind all this that he did not understand. Sloane was an important man in this community, and nobody's fool. He had a firm, tight mouth, and the line of his jaw was hard. Not the sort of man who would yield easily to a blackmailer.

"I'd better telephone him then—he's expecting me. Unless you'd rather tell him to go to—where it's hot!"

"No, we'll go through with this affair," said Sloane evenly. "If you'll come here tomorrow morning, say about ten-thirty, Duke, I'll have the money for you. So you didn't have much trouble in persuading him to cut his demand in half. Tell me all about it."

Duke told him briefly, and when he had finished, the older man regarded him with quizzical admiration.

"And you're a lawyer! You should have been a cop!"

But his wife said somewhat sharply, "I didn't think you'd pick a fight with him, Duke. He remembers things like that—you're liable to have trouble with him yet."

"I'm expecting it," said Duke. He grinned disarmingly. "It did me a lot of good to take a poke at him—and I thought I might get those negatives and releases for nothing."

"Which wouldn't have done much good," she pointed out. "He could still make it public that we'd been married."

Instead of feeling happy that the whole matter was to be settled, she seemed actually resentful. Duke frowned and gazed at her uncomprehendingly. He caught Sloane's cryptic smile, and it puzzled him still more. There was much here that did not meet the eye, he reflected.

"Sally isn't exactly proud of that

phase of her past," explained her husband mildly.

AT TEN-THIRTY next morning, Sloane handed Duke a bundle containing twenty-five thousand dollars in one-hundred dollar bills. He said to Duke, "Watch yourself, my boy! Al Stephany is a bad actor."

"If I sized him up right, he'll feel all right when he gets this," replied Duke grimly. "If he doesn't—I've got his gun in my pocket."

"Have you a permit to carry it?"

Duke hadn't thought of that. He said, "No—I'll get rid of it as soon as this is over."

"Well—since you are carrying it—make sure it's loaded!"

"I did," said Duke.

"All right—perhaps you'd better use my car—unless you have one of your own." As Duke shook his head, Sloane sent for the chauffeur. The black-eyed young fellow appeared. "Let Mr. Bender have a car," ordered Sloane crisply. "Good luck, Duke—I'll be waiting to hear from you."

Duke waited outside until the chauffeur brought the car. There was that in the chauffeur's manner which showed he wanted to say something but wasn't sure he ought to. Duke gazed at him questioningly . . . rather a handsome fellow, small hands and exceptionally small feet . . . as small as a woman's feet.

"Beg pardon," the man began, in answer to Duke's look, "if you're going to two-fifty Bogart Street—"

Duke asked sharply, "How do you know?"

"I've driven Mrs. Sloane there twice," explained the chauffeur, "and she told me something about what's going on—naturally everybody knows Al Stephany is a pretty tough citizen. I was gonna say—better be careful, sir. He's a real bad actor—if you

don't know that yourself. He wouldn't stop at anything."

"Thank you," said Duke. He got in and drove off. But he wondered about it . . . it did seem a little strange that Sally should have taken her chauffeur into her confidence . . . pretty good-looking guy at that, and Sally had once been a strip-tease artist . . . this man might be just the type she'd fall in love with. He remembered how Sloane had looked at his wife.

He hadn't driven ten blocks, when the car slowed down and then stopped. Pushing on the accelerator didn't do a bit of good, although there was plenty of gas and oil. With the help of a couple of passers-by, he managed to get the automobile to the curb, and tinkered over the motor, hoping to find what was wrong. After a while, he came to the conclusion that the trouble lay in the feed-line. He had lost half an hour by that time, so he left the car where it was, and hailed the first taxi that went by.

When he came to two-fifty Bogart Street, he looked about him carefully, and asked the elevator-man whether Mr. Stephany was in his office.

"Must be—seen him go up and he ain't come down," said the man.

In front of the office on the third floor, Duke looked about him again. He was carrying the bundle of money under his arm. A light shone through the frosted glass of the door and etched a rectangle on the opposite wall. Well . . . a man who was expecting a gift of twenty-five thousand dollars wasn't likely to be looking for trouble. He opened the door warily and peered inside. The door of the inner office was closed—the light came from there. Catfooted, Duke strode across the room, stepped to one side and flung the door open.

He saw him at once. Stephany was slumped sideways in his swivel-chair, and blood still flowed from a neat hole in his forehead. His eyes were closed; over them the blood had coagulated. Duke walked quickly around the desk and seized an outstretched wrist. No pulse. Then he saw two other holes, both made by a small-caliber weapon, both close together over the dead man's heart. They were fresh wounds; the blood was still seeping through.

Suddenly, horribly, the eyes opened as Duke called, "Stephany!" and the man's mouth struggled as though he wanted to speak. Then he sighed and relaxed.

For a moment Duke's thoughts were wild and disordered. Then they vortexed into one definite channel: This was murder and he wanted no part of it.

He grabbed the telephone and called police headquarters. He said rapidly, "A man named Albert Stephany has been murdered—third floor, two-fifty Bogart Street." Ignoring the sharp question that followed, he put the receiver down. Then, grinning to himself a little, he took out his handkerchief and wiped off any possible fingerprints on the telephone instrument. At the door he turned for a last look.

A voice behind him said softly, "Put them up!" A gunbarrel pressed coldly against the back of his head. Duke put one hand up; he held the bundle of money in the other.

"Keep your face turned the way it is now," warned the voice in a hoarse whisper. "Here, gimme that!"

The money was snatched out of Duke's hand. He half-turned and caught a glimpse of a face masked by a handkerchief, and a short, slender form in a gray suit.

A savage blow on the side of the

head dazed and angered him, and he whirled about recklessly. There came a swish, a thud, and another blow exploded over his brain. Duke's knees buckled and he slumped to the floor. Still semi-conscious, he heard the clatter of feet across the outside office, heard them dimly recede down the hallway. The roaring in his ears died out. Fighting off his dizziness, Duke managed to get to his feet. He felt his face; there was no blood.

Trying to act as casually as though nothing had happened, Duke walked downstairs instead of using the elevator. When he got to the main floor, it was empty. He had only covered a block to the next corner when a police car whirled by and came to a stop in front of the building he had just left.

Almost without thinking, Duke felt the automatic in his back pocket. Al Stephany's gun . . . this was one time Stephany had needed it. It might not have done him any good at that . . . whoever had killed him had given him no chance to reach for a weapon.

But of two things he felt pretty certain: One, that the man who had attacked him was the man who had murdered Stephany; two, that he knew who that man was.

AT THE SLOANE house, Duke found nobody in but the servants. From the housekeeper he obtained the address he wanted: Larry Tripp, 1224 Beaufort Avenue. He knew the telephone number of Sloane's downtown office and tried to reach him there. The girl at the switchboard connected him with Sloane's secretary, who told him Sloane had just gone out. A taxicab took Duke to Beaufort Avenue. He got out at the corner and went into a drugstore. From there he telephoned police headquarters again.

A detective who gave his name as Grant listened when Duke told him he knew who the murderer of Stephany was. He told the detective where to meet him, then rang off and walked to 1224 Beaufort Avenue.

It was in Duke's mind to meet the handsome chauffeur before the police arrived, and settle the score between them. He had another idea in his mind, too.

Larry Tripp lived in a huge apartment house with all modern trimmings, including an elevator. Pretty swanky for a chauffeur. The attendant told him Tripp's apartment was 12B, and took him upstairs. In front of 12B Duke stood a moment listening, then rang the bell.

A voice called, "Who's there?"

"Western Union!" replied Duke in a sing-song voice.

There was a metallic click and the door swung back. Duke had the automatic in his hand. He pushed the door wide and jabbed the gun into Tripp's stomach. Both men stood motionless.

Duke said jovially, "Hello, Larry!" and closed the door behind him with his left hand, as the chauffeur stepped back, hands lifted high.

"Hey, what's this?" blustered Tripp. "What d'ya want?" His eyes swiveled about; his face became ghastly.

"Just keep your hands where I can see them," said Duke, "and you'll know what this is all about in a minute. Turn around—and keep them up high. All I'd get for shooting you would be a medal! Where's your cannon?"

As Tripp obeyed, Duke pawed him over carefully, and took a gun out of his back pocket. He slipped it into his own.

"Now where's the money you took from me?" demanded Duke.

"What money?" Tripp almost shouted the question. His voice held such apparent anger and astonishment that Duke was staggered. He looked down at Tripp's feet—not many men had feet as small as that.

"We'll soon find out," said Duke grimly.

It was a four-room apartment, and it was fitted up like a love-nest . . . rugs, upholstered furniture that looked expensive, pictures on the wall, Venetian blinds and drapes . . . pretty gaudy for just a bachelor.

In a closet between the bedroom and the living-room Duke found two closed grips. They were packed with Tripp's clothing. At the bottom of one he found the money. He pulled it out and held it up so Tripp could see it. Tripp's arms were weary from being raised, and he had lowered them so that his elbows were by his sides, his fingers on his shoulders.

"You louse!" gritted Duke. "The police are on the way, but I've got a good mind to take a sock at you before they get here!" His eyes glinted dangerously.

A pounding on the door of the closet inside the bedroom, which he had not yet searched, startled Duke. His nerves snapped taut, and he stiffened rigidly. He herded Tripp back into the bedroom, dropped the money on the dresser, then turned the key in the door of the closet and threw it open.

Sally Sloane almost fell into his arms!

He caught and held her with his body and shoulder. As he did so, Tripp stirred, and Duke pointed the gun at him warningly.

Sally was tied, hand and foot, and a handkerchief had been wadded into her mouth. Duke took it out at once. Even then she was unable to speak; she kept gasping for breath.

Duke said to Tripp, "You go over and sit down by that window—and don't start anything or I'll fill you full of lead poison!"

Tripp obeyed.

Using his pocket-knife, Duke cut the cord on Sally's hands. Then he bent to cut the cord around her feet. It seemed safe to take his eyes off Tripp for a moment; the chauffeur was sitting at the window and Duke had his gun.

Tripp's voice called sharply just as Sally screamed and stepped away. "Don't move!" ordered Tripp. Duke glanced toward him sideways and upward. He saw that Tripp was standing and had a gun in his hand. Duke remained where he was, still bent over, and Tripp repeated with gloating, triumphant eyes, "I said drop that gun, you!"

Without moving his body, Duke swung his arm and pulled the trigger of his gun. He saw Tripp stagger, drop his weapon, and fall back into the chair. Only then did it reach Duke's consciousness that another shot had preceded his.

A voice from the threshold said quietly, "Take it easy, Duke!"

Duke straightened up and saw Sloane, unruffled and immaculate, a smoking revolver in his hand. He said to Sloane, "There's your money on that dresser!"

"And there," cried Sally, pointing dramatically at Tripp, "is one of your blackmailers, Ham! The other one is dead!"

A VOICE that was weak but sharp as a whip replied to her. Tripp was bleeding from a wound in his neck and another in his arm, but he sat up, pallid and resolute.

"Yeah, I'm one of the blackmailers—and you're another, Sally—and damn well you know it!"

"You liar!" she screamed, and made a rush for him. Duke stepped coolly in front of her.

"You're the liar, not me!" Tripp said. "Al tried to doublecross us both by grabbing the twenty-five grand for himself—"

"That was the reason he agreed to accept twenty-five instead of fifty, wasn't it?" interrupted Sloane. Under his bushy white eyebrows, his blue eyes smoldered deep and hot. "He figured he'd get more that way than in a three-way split of fifty thousand."

Sally moaned, "Ham! You don't believe him, do you?"

Her husband's frosty glance dwelt on her with contempt. He said, "You cheap chiseler! I've had a man following you for a month! I know all about the love affair between you and this cheap crook. How do you suppose I happen to be here now?"

She listened with wide, startled eyes. She gasped, "I didn't! I didn't!"

"Oh, didn't you?" sneered Tripp. He was sitting bolt upright. "You came here because you thought I was gonna take a runout powder on you with the dough—after I knocked Stephany off. Or was it because you didn't want me to go away without you—you big horse!"

The woman's face went white, then red. Her hand darted to her bosom, and Duke jumped for her as her gun barked spitefully. He grabbed her wrist and twisted it. The gun, a small .25-caliber, barked again, but this

time the bullet hit the ceiling. Duke wrested the weapon away from her. When he glanced at Tripp, he saw where Sally's bullet had smashed into his cheek.

SLOANE handed Duke a check for a thousand dollars. He said, "It ought to be at least five times that much, you chump! The balance is there for you whenever you want it."

"Considering all the fun I had," grinned Duke, "that's plenty. I hope they're through asking me questions down at the D. A.'s office. . . . I was afraid they'd make a charge of carrying concealed weapons against me. So you're not running for Congress after all, Mr. Sloane!"

Sloane shrugged. "I didn't have a chance . . . with all that unsavory publicity. It was foolish of me to bail Sally out, wasn't it? I might have known she'd skip!"

"Just the same, I think you did the right thing." Duke buttoned up his coat. "Now that Tripp confessed—I never thought he'd survive—you've got the evidence you wanted for a divorce. She'll keep away from you, wherever she is."

When Duke reached the door, Sloane called, "Do you care to handle the divorce case?"

"Why not?" grinned Duke. "But I want to be the lawyer in the case—not the detective! After this last experience, I'm letting others do the detecting!"



CALLING GABRIEL

by
James Knox

Who was this man who was apparently risking his life in a burst of religious fervor? Was he a crackpot—or a shrewd criminal?

FROM a window on the seventh floor of a building on Fifth Avenue the voice blared through a megaphone: "Gabriel, Gabriel! Gabriel! Gabriel! The end of the world is at hand!"

Pedestrians on the avenue paused and looked up curiously, then stiffened in alarm. Precariously seated on a window-sill, his feet dangling outside, sat a man with a megaphone; it looked as though any moment he would fall or leap to his death.

"Suicide—he's going to commit suicide!" cried a young woman hysterically.

There were shrieks and shouts. A man shouted, "Go back inside—go back!" as though Gabriel's self-appointed announcer could hear him.

The crowd grew and overflowed from the sidewalk into the street; the stores on the avenue emptied.

And still the man sat on his dangerous perch, shouting, "Gabriel, Gabriel!" Now and then he varied it: "The day of judgment approaches. Give up your ill-gotten gains if you would be saved!"

The crowd had grown to such proportions that traffic was impeded. A policeman came on the run. He had to fight his way through.



"It's a vacant loft," a man in front of the door informed him. "I'd have gone up, but how do I know what kind of a nut he is? He might be dangerous."

Women all around had advice and caution to offer. "You've got to be careful—he may jump if you go near him." "Why don't they spread a net?" "The best thing to do is to get a minister or a priest to talk to him!"

"I'd talk to him with a night-stick if I were you," growled one merchant. "Why can't they commit suicide—if they got to enjoy themselves—where it's quiet?"

Another policeman arrived, then a detective. Someone turned in a fire-alarm. The policemen ran up the stairs. After a while they came down again, and they had a prisoner with them. As soon as the man with the megaphone disappeared, someone had the presence of mind to telephone the fire department not to come. Detective Palmer took the prisoner in charge. He commandeered a stalled limousine and got in with him. Express reporter Ethel Stevans slid through the crowd and got in, too.

AFTER A WHILE, the traffic jam cleared, and the chauffeur drove them across to Eighth Avenue, and then up to Central Park. While they were riding, the prisoner adjusted his clothing with shaking fingers. There were souvenir hunters in the crowd to whom even a button from the clothing of a madman was a treasure.

Detective Whit Palmer exploded gruffly, "I ought to lock you up for creating a disturbance. What's the idea?" He looked down at the megaphone—a large one—and then up into the face of the gaunt prisoner.

Ethel Stevans murmured, "Aw, keep your shirt on, Whit. Find out why he did it first. Maybe he's non

compos—and if he is—talking rough won't do any good."

The man protested quietly, "I haven't committed any crime, have I?" His thin shoulders drooped; he had a gaunt, scholarly face, devoid of color. "Anyhow, nothing matters—you can arrest me if you wish . . . the end of the world is at hand." This sounded almost like an afterthought.

Palmer said dryly, "It'll be the end of the world for you if you try that stunt again—although at that"—he eyed the man reflectively—"you weren't taking much of a chance." He said to Ethel, "He had a rope tied around him and fastened to a hook above the window inside! Can you beat it?"

"Ah!" sighed Ethel. "An end-of-the-worlorder who'd rather delay it as long as possible!" She asked the prisoner, "Are you going to do it again? Let me know when!"

The man made no reply. His dark eyes were somber, but they held a lively intelligence. He seemed frail, weary, done. In spite of his exasperation, Palmer began to feel sorry for him. But he was puzzled, too. Where was the religious fervor to account for this man's conduct? Palmer had had several experiences with religious maniacs in his fifteen years on the Force; this fellow didn't act like any of them. He was too calm, too sane.

Ethel asked Palmer, "What are you going to do with him, Whit? I'd like to go somewhere and get his story."

"He hasn't even promised he won't do it again," Palmer growled. "I ought to lock him up."

"You won't do it again, will you?" Ethel asked.

The man said promptly, "No! Once was enough." He even smiled.

"What's your name?" demanded Palmer.

"Paul—Smith! And I'm quite sane, I assure you."

"Yeah, you proved it today! You ought to be in an observation ward, if you ask me. Live in this city?"

"I live in—Philadelphia. I'm staying at the Hotel Morris."

"What made you pull that damn fool stunt? Were you ever in an institution?"

"If you mean an insane asylum, no. My sanity has never been questioned." And he looked it, too—his eyes were clear and steady.

"Then what in hell is your racket?" demanded Palmer with exasperation. "Some kind of religious hocus-pocus?"

Smith made no reply.

Ethel pleaded, "He won't do it again, Whit. Let me take him back to the Morris and get the story for my paper. You don't have to worry about him—I'll take care of him. You know me!"

"Sure, I know you—you'd risk your life or sell your grandmother for a scoop!" He appraised the reporter cynically. Ethel Stevans was slender and shapely, with a bold little face and coppery hair. She looked like a mischievous young college girl, and her smile was brilliant. But her eyes were shrewd, and she had the sharpest nose for a yarn on Newspaper Row.

The chauffeur brought the car to a stop near the Circle. He said, "This is where you all get out, please—I got to pick up my boss. This ain't a taxi, you know."

"I think I'll have to go through you," Palmer told his prisoner.

The man looked startled. "Through me?"

"He means," Ethel explained, "to

see if you have any dangerous weapons on you—gun, knife, blackjack."

"Oh!" Smith looked relieved. "No, I don't carry anything like that."

"That's what you say," said Palmer. "Lift up your arms!" He felt over the man expertly, and looked disappointed when he found nothing. He made Smith empty his pockets—still nothing of importance.

The chauffeur called impatiently. "Hey, how about it? I gotta get going—want me to lose my job? Jobs ain't so easy to get nowadays."

"You ought to give him something, Mr. Smith," suggested Ethel.

They got out and Smith gave the chauffeur a dollar. Then he stood waiting quietly.

"Let's see if you have any more money," Palmer requested.

Smith had put his wallet away. Now he took it out again. There was a thick wad of bills inside—authentic paper obligations issued by Uncle Sam.

There didn't seem to be a thing abnormal about the man. Palmer said, "Okay! Just don't pull that stunt again!"

Smith nodded docilely. He said, "You've been very kind, and I won't give you any more trouble." His glance swung to Ethel. "I'd be glad to go with you wherever you wish and give you the story for your paper."

Ethel agreed with alacrity. "Let's go to your hotel!"

"I can give you my picture, too, if you wish!"

A light dawned on Palmer. So that was it!

He said disgustedly, "They ought to put some of you publicity-mad hounds in the nuthouse. What's this you're advertising, a play or a movie?"

Smith looked at him, seemed about to speak, but didn't.

"'Gabriel, Gabriel!'" grumbled Palmer derisively. "It's a publicity stunt, Ethel. If he wants it in your paper, charge him advertising rates."

The reporter had been studying Smith. She said, laughing, "Well, if it's a publicity stunt, it's good enough to deserve free publicity. Is that what you were after, Mr. Smith?" As he remained silent, she went on, glancing at Palmer, "Let's go—Whit is only simmering now—let's scam before he begins to boil."

They got into a cab, and Palmer did not hinder them. But he looked after them, and he had a feeling that there was more here than was apparent to the naked eye.

EVERY PAPER carried the story, but the exclusive interview with Paul Smith, and his picture, appeared only in the Daily Express. In later editions, some of the other newspapers quoted the Express and also displayed Smith's physiognomy. The pictures were all different, although all were good likenesses. Palmer surmised that Smith had supplied several photographs.

But no religious cult was mentioned, and no play or movie. The object of the performance on Fifth Avenue still remained a mystery. Smith stated, according to the papers, that he lived in Philadelphia.

Ethel Stevans came around to see Palmer at a restaurant on West 44th Street which she knew the detective patronized.

She asked Palmer, "How did you like the yarn about our philanthropist, Whit?"

"I'd say it was a lot of boloney, especially that part about his seeing visions of Gabriel. What's his game, do you know?"

The reporter shrugged her shoulders. "Your guess is as good as mine, Whit. But he's really a very fine man—well-informed, educated—a gentleman."

"Is he still staying at the Morris?"

"Yes."

"Does he intend to hang out of any more seventh-story windows and holler 'Gabriel, Gabriel'?"

There was no amusement in Ethel's shrewd blue eyes. She said, "I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. But when you consider it, he took no risk at all, tied up as he was—and he got plenty of advertising. That's what he wanted, I'm pretty sure—he certainly was free with his photographs—every paper in the city got a selection of them. But what he's after, I don't know. I'll say this—and I'm not holding back anything, Whit—he's the least confiding man I ever interviewed—and he's perfectly sane and normal. Trouble is I don't know when he's telling the truth—I caught him in one whopper."

"What was that?"

"Well, he doesn't live in Philadelphia—he doesn't know a thing about Philadelphia. Always changes the subject when I begin talking Philadelphia to him. And his first name may be Paul, but his second name isn't Smith. I had 'Mr. Smith' paged while I was sitting with him in the lobby, and he never batted an eye—didn't even look up!"

"Has he got a lot of dough? Is he in the chips?"

"You've got me—I don't know. But you saw his wallet. On the other hand, that room at the Morris stands him only four smackers a day—does that sound like he's a millionaire?"

"You can't tell—some of them are pretty tight—that's how they come

to be millionaires. Is he screwy about religion?"

The reporter shook her head. "Not a bit, far's I could find out. And he isn't advertising a show—although I'll bet he could be a successful actor if he wanted to, with that ascetic, handsome face and his fine figure. You saw him when he was messed up—you ought to see him now."

"You sound as though this guy is one of your big moments," grinned Palmer.

"Nix! I'm too disillusioned for romance—I'm a newspaper woman!"

Palmer said irritably, "Hell with Smith! Tell him to behave—next time he won't get off so easy."

TWO DAYS LATER, Ethel buzzed Palmer at Headquarters. "Read this morning's Express," she said, and rang off.

The detective bought a copy. It contained a story to the effect that next Thursday afternoon, Paul Smith—his picture was displayed again—intended to announce a message from Gabriel from the top of some building, not yet selected, in the vicinity of Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. He expressed the firm belief that the end of the world would take place immediately after he had delivered the message. Only those who divested themselves of their earthly wealth had any chance for salvation. He intended to give away every cent he had, at that time.

There could be little doubt that there would be a mob on hand both to see and hear Smith, and to get their share of that earthly wealth of his.

"So he's a religious nut after all," Palmer murmured. Then he frowned. The man didn't look it at all, and there was still that lie about his coming from Philadelphia—and accord-

ing to Ethel he was using an assumed name. Palmer went to the Morris and showed the clerk his shield.

"Paul Smith been getting any mail here—or receiving visitors?"

"No—none outside of Miss Stevans of the Express." He grinned.

"Has he received any telephone calls?" persisted Palmer.

"No, sir."

Palmer turned away. He was lingering near the door, when the clerk called him back.

The clerk said hesitantly, "I just remembered—there was a call for him this morning—a gentleman who sounded quite mysterious."

"Did you listen in?" asked Palmer mildly.

A seamy grin lighted the clerk's wizened face. He had the pointed nose of a real Paul Pry.

"This is a small hotel, you know, and of course I had read about Mr. Smith in the papers. I was naturally curious—"

Palmer interrupted impatiently, "What did you hear?"

"It was quite a mysterious conversation. The man began by asking Mr. Smith not to mention his name . . . said he was sending him a letter with an address in it . . . he was to come there. And Mr. Smith asked him in quite a low voice whether he still had it all with him—whatever it may be. They seemed to know each other quite well."

Palmer said briefly, "All right—thanks. Keep your jaw buttoned up about this."

WHEN he got back to Headquarters, Palmer asked his side-kick, Kelleher, to shadow Smith. Kelleher was at the Morris Hotel early the next morning.

Shortly after one o'clock Kelleher returned. He reported he had trailed

Smith to a house on Wilson Avenue in the East End of Long Beach, deserted summer colony. Smith had remained in the house about an hour, then had hurried out and gone away. Inquiry of the real-estate agent who managed the property had developed that a man named Crumb, who said he was a radio script writer, had rented the house . . . the agent had been glad to get this unexpected revenue. Kelleher had gone in and interviewed Crumb. Seemed like a nice guy.

Nevertheless, Palmer went down to the Pennsylvania depot and boarded a train to Long Beach. When he got there, after more than an hour's ride, it had begun to rain, and thick black clouds had made the afternoon night. He was wearing a light coat, not having expected this sort of weather, and an old felt hat was pulled low over his face.

A bus took him to East End. The summer colony lay sunk in desolation and loneliness: wet streets, silent buildings, the roar of surf.

Twice he walked past the house on Wilson Avenue. This mysterious tenant might be a desperate criminal in hiding. Palmer was too wary to walk unprepared into a dangerous situation.

The third time he passed the house, he paused to light a cigarette. While doing so, he scanned the building and its surroundings furtively. It was a concrete, one-story house, one of a silent row of detached buildings that stretched from corner to corner. Far away through the slanting rain he saw a light, but on this particular block, every house was dark. Everywhere was silence, except for the pattering of rain and the rhythmic pounding of the sea on the beach two blocks away.

A narrow walk alongside the house

led to a garage in the rear. Traversing the walk to where he could obtain a view of the back of the building, Palmer perceived a light on the top floor—a faint light that was barely visible through the drawn yellow blinds.

Whoever Crumb was, he was altogether too secretive for an honest man. Palmer decided he was justified in making inquiries.

He went out, walked up the brick steps to the front porch and tried the door. It was locked. For a moment, he was tempted to press the buzzer, but decided against it. He returned to the rear of the house. There was a cellar cover in two wooden sections, fastened together by a padlock. He found a stone; one swift, hard blow and the padlock opened.

After another glance around, Palmer lifted one section of the cover and started to descend the wooden stairway. He let the cover down softly behind him. It was pitch dark. He felt his way toward the stairs leading to the ground floor. When he reached them he paused and listened again.

No sound except the pattering of rain.

Lifting and setting down each foot carefully, he reached the top of the stairs and felt a door before him. His fingers sought and found the knob; it yielded and the door opened. Through the hallway he walked cat-footed, and began climbing the stairs to the top floor where he had seen the light. In spite of his utmost efforts, the stairs creaked.

Suddenly he heard moaning, and a voice raised menacingly. Abruptly the moaning became a hoarse cry, suddenly choked off. The threatening voice spoke again; what it said was unintelligible to Palmer.

In spite of his utmost care, the

stairs creaked under the weight of the detective's body as he ascended.

Someone shouted, "Who's there?"

Palmer called, "Police! What goes on?"

Gun in hand, he bounded up the remaining steps. There came startled shouts, a light shone from the opened door. Palmer crouched low; then a shot tore over him and crashed into the baseboard at his right. Instantly he fired at a dim form, then flattened down once more.

The man Palmer had shot slid along the wall, thudded to the floor, silently. Then a gun sputtered again, lead whined over Palmer once more and smashed into the wall. Heavy feet clattered across an uncarpeted floor, a window was thrown open with a bang. Someone had jumped to the street, Palmer surmised.

Once more there was silence. Then came the moaning again. Crouching low, Palmer crept forward until he came to the dark blob on the floor. Stretching out his hand, he felt the face and body of the man. When he withdrew his fingers, they were wet and sticky. He wiped his hands on his handkerchief and made a brief examination. The man was dead.

Noiselessly he stood up, listening. What was this all about? Had Smith become aware that he was being trailed and arranged for gunners to liquidate the trailer? Who was moaning inside that room? Someone, perhaps, on whom Smith's hired thugs had wreaked vengeance? And how was that act on Fifth Avenue connected with all this?

All around the detective were darkness and menace. Palmer reloaded his gun, and stepped softly over the prostrate body. He peered into the room. It seemed empty. He rushed inside, ran to the window, looked out. He saw no one.

Turning about, he perceived someone lying on a bed in the room. A young fellow was moving about, feebly and restlessly; he seemed to be in great pain. As he stepped closer to the bed, the young fellow stared up at him. He wore an undershirt and trousers, and his feet were bare. Against the pounding of the rain, his groans sounded eerily.

Palmer showed his shield and asked gently: "What's this all about? What were they doing to you?"

The young fellow muttered, "Thank God you came!" His eyes fluttered and closed; he became still. Red stained the white sheet at his feet; there were burns on his arms and the soles of his feet had been cut and burned. Blood came from his nose and mouth. Wetting a finger, the detective put it to the boy's lips. He felt the warmth of breathing.

Whoever he was, this young fellow had undergone an ordeal of torture.

HOLSTERING HIS GUN, Palmer ran into the bathroom adjoining, and brought back a basin and a couple of towels. He ripped one of the towels into strips. He soon stopped the bleeding, but he could not find anything to apply to the burns.

The boy opened sunken, glassy eyes, and Palmer gave him a drink of water. The youth muttered unintelligibly. Palmer asked, "Is there a telephone in the house?" He wanted to call an ambulance.

"No," came the faint reply. His lips were still moving. Palmer bent lower to listen. "Tell Paul . . ." His eyes closed again.

Rain and damp wind were coming into the room from the open window.

Palmer shut the window and came back. The boy's eyes were still closed.

Palmer asked gently, "What's your name, son?"

Once more the tired eyes opened, and the reply came in a whisper: "Am I — all washed up?"

"I don't know," said Palmer. "I think you're gonna be all right. Anyhow, I'm not a doctor, but I'll get one soon's I can. Who did this to you?"

"I — don't — know!"

Palmer didn't believe him. He repeated, "What's your name?"

The boy began groaning again. Palmer brought him another drink. After sipping a little, the young fellow whispered, "There's an envelope under my pillow. He was here before—Paul—but I didn't give it to him. Now—I'm sorry—tell him!"

Under the pillow the detective found the envelope. It was sealed and addressed to Paul Clarke, at a street in Chicago. So Clarke was Smith's real name!

"Give it to him!" the boy begged. Then he passed out again. Palmer started to lift him a little lower on the pillow.

And just then a voice like a whip commanded, "Let him alone—put your hands up! Put them up or I'll shoot! Don't you dare touch my brother again."

Palmer looked over his shoulder. Paul Smith stood in the doorway, a gun in his hand, his eyes hot and menacing. He must have come in very quietly, with the pounding of the rain and the noise of the surf to cover his entrance. Mentally Palmer swore at himself. The fellow who had jumped out of the window could have surprised him in just the same way.

At the sound of his voice, the young fellow on the bed tried to raise

himself. He murmured, "Paul!" and fell back again.

Suddenly a girl's voice called, "Paul, Paul, what are you doing? Put that gun away."

Palmer looked over his shoulder again. Ethel Stevens!

"If he's killed my brother," said Smith hoarsely, "I'll kill him!" He said to Palmer, "If you make one wrong move, I'll shoot you! I mean it! Keep your back turned to me."

Ethel remonstrated, "But Paul — please —"

"Keep out of this," snapped Smith.

Quite slowly and deliberately, Palmer turned about. He said, "You've got this all wrong, Smith. I didn't hurt him, I saved his life."

"I can see that!" Smith's tone reeked with bitterness. "Gabe, Gabe!"

The young fellow lay motionless.

"I'd just as soon shoot you as not," gritted Smith to Palmer. "You damned beast!"

"Now look here," insisted Palmer, "you're entirely mistaken, I—"

Smith snapped, "Don't talk! Get me any angrier and I'll start shooting!"

"Do what he says, Whit," begged Ethel. "Please—he doesn't understand."

But instead of obeying, Palmer faced Smith calmly. He said gravely, "You'd better put that gun down, Smith — you're heading for serious trouble. I didn't lay a finger on your brother except to help him!"

"Yes—to help him—by beating him unconscious. If he's badly hurt, you'll pay for it! Step aside."

Palmer obeyed.

One glance and Smith's voice rose to a sudden cry. "My God, he's bleeding! What did you do to him?"

He ran to his brother's side and knelt down, the revolver still clutched

in his hand. Palmer bent over and took the weapon away, with a quick movement.

Palmer said quietly, "He isn't badly hurt—and I didn't do it. All I did was to bandage him and stop the bleeding. When I broke in here, there were two men at him—they shot at me, and I shot the one lying out in the hallway."

Smith turned a haggard face upward. "Get some water, will you please?" He murmured, "Gabe, Gabe!"

Ethel ran into the bathroom.

Suddenly the reiteration of the name "Gabe" struck a chord in Palmer's mind. On Fifth Avenue, Smith had called repeatedly, "Gabriel, I am here! Give up your ill-gotten gains!" What ill-gotten gains? Probably the two thugs Palmer had interrupted in their heartless torturing had known about those gains, whatever they were.

HE SAW the young fellow's eyes flutter open and suggested, "Give him another drink and let him rest a while, Ethel." It was Ethel who was tending the boy now, while Smith knelt beside her. "He isn't badly hurt—it's just pain and shock." He walked to the window and stood looking out. After a while he heard the low murmur of their voices. He wondered about Ethel.

Ethel called to him and he came over, and as he did so, Smith rose and faced him.

Smith said, "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Palmer—Gabe's told me all about it. When I came in, you were standing over him, and he looked so bad—"

And Ethel was saying, "—Paul wasn't himself, Whit . . . he's very fond of Gabe . . . the sight of you standing over him, and Gabe looking so white! When Paul left this morn-

ing, Gabe was perfectly all right. Gabe just told us how you shot that one outside, and how the other man jumped out of the window—you're a peach, Whit! They don't come any braver!"

"Thanks," said Palmer. "Now what's this all about, and where do you come in on it, Ethel?"

Ethel reddened and threw a swift glance at Smith. She said, "Oh, there's nothing much to tell. Gabe came here to write—he's a script-writer, you know—and these men broke in and attacked him."

"Where's what he's written so far?" demanded Palmer.

Ethel looked helplessly about the room, and then toward the boy on the bed, who was staring at Palmer wide-eyed.

"Now look here!" Palmer's tone was decisive. "I'll have to hold both you men while I make an investigation. I'm bound to find out all about it, so why not tell me now? They may have your fingerprints at Headquarters, Gabe. Come clean!"

Smith interposed, "They haven't—he never before—"

He stopped in time and Palmer grinned wryly. He said, "Not until this time, hey? Your name is Paul Clarke, isn't it?"

Ethel whispered, "Tell him, Paul," and after a moment, Clarke said, "Yes, Paul Clarke is correct—Chicago!"

"Professor Paul Clarke, of Illinois University," added Ethel. "They haven't done anything wrong, either of them!"

"So what?" Palmer glared at her. "I don't have to tell you that I'm a police officer, that a man's been killed—I killed him because he fired at me, but I still don't know what it's all about. And this young man on the bed was tortured. You got any notion

"I'll just pass all that by and walk out?"

He saw their swift interchange of glances.

Paul Clarke said mildly, "I believe you have an envelope my brother gave you for me. May I have it?"

Palmer took the envelope out of his pocket. He said, "I'll have to open it!"

"What right have you to open a letter addressed to me?" Clarke's tone was a little heated.

"Police business," said Palmer shortly. "Maybe something in here about those ill-gotten gains you were shouting about on Fifth Avenue."

The boy said in a weak voice, "Oh, what's the use—tell him!"

"Quiet!" ordered his brother sharply.

Palmer stared at the slip of paper he had extracted from the envelope. He read aloud, "Ed-407." He asked abstractedly, "Is your brother wanted by the police anywhere, Professor?"

"No!" said Clarke decidedly.

"Sorry to say I don't believe you. What does 'Ed-407' mean?"

"It's a telephone number," interrupted Ethel. "Now be a gent and give it to Paul."

"I'm a police officer first—a gentleman afterward," stated Palmer. His glance swept them and noted the tense expression on their faces. "If this is a telephone number, what's the exchange, and in what city?"

Ethel and the Professor looked at each other, but neither replied.

"I'll have to take you two men down to Headquarters." The detective's tone was regretful but firm. "You're concealing something—I'm interested in those 'ill-gotten gains,' whatever and wherever they are. Ought to get a doctor or an ambulance for Gabe, but I can't take a

chance of your clearing out. Maybe you'd better go and telephone, Ethel."

"All right," said Ethel. She started for the door.

Suddenly Palmer's face lighted up. "I've got it! Gabe, what's in room 407 of the Edison Hotel? Bad place to leave money or valuables—in a hotel room!"

He knew by their expression that he had hit a bullseye.

"Oh, go on and tell him," said Gabe.

"If you do," promised Palmer, "I'll help you if I can . . . especially since my friend Ethel is personally interested!" He laughed at her embarrassed look.

PROFESSOR CLARKE told the story briefly. "Gabe invested every dollar my father left us both in a company that was going to protect furs and fabrics against moths in a new and cheaper way—a powder. A man named Scott bought the patent from the inventor. It was Scott who induced Gabe to invest—oh, I was just as gullible as Gabe. Anyhow, the company began making money—I think Scott and his pals were surprised—Gabe and I weren't, we had faith in it. But Gabe only owned forty percent of the stock for both of us . . . they had the controlling interest . . . they fixed up a reorganization to freeze us out. Gabe was the treasurer, and—well . . ."

"He grabbed a lot of dough and took it on the lam," Palmer finished. "How much?"

"What we invested," said Clarke; "fifty thousand dollars."

"Is there a warrant out for Gabe?"

Ethel said eagerly, "No, that's just it, Whit. That's why Paul was so anxious to find Gabe. This fellow

Scott was so greedy he promised that if the money was returned, he wouldn't make a charge against Gabe—and he'd do the right thing, too."

"How did you know Gabe was in New York, Professor?"

"He telephoned me he was going to New York—and rang off without giving me a chance to argue." He shook his head reminiscently. "That was an ordeal, that act on Fifth Avenue—never thought I'd have the nerve! I tried advertising first—and then I met a man in the hotel who said he was a private detective out of work, and I hired him to find Gabe. . . . He didn't seem very impressive—feral eyes, if you know what I mean. But he was willing to work cheap. . . ."

"Wouldn't wonder but that he can explain how those rats knew about Gabe being here," said Palmer grimly. "They probably trailed you, and then jumped Gabe after you left. They might have stopped you, too, if you had come out with something—say a grip—that looked as though you were carrying loot. I'll look this private dick up when I get back. Now then, is this money in Room 407 at the Edison?"

"Look, Whit," pleaded Ethel, "now you know all about it—and there's no warrant out for Gabe. . . ."

"A felony has been committed," said Palmer slowly, "and I have knowledge of it. So I've got to do something about it. Is that money still in Room 407 at the Edison?"

"It's in a vault at the Packard

National Bank," said Gabe suddenly. "The key to the vault is in the top dresser drawer of the dresser in Room 407—I rented the room."

Clarke said, "I'm going out to telephone for an ambulance—I want to get Gabe to a hospital."

For a moment Palmer hesitated. Then he said, "Okay! After that we'll go to the Edison and get the key. Maybe I'll have a chance to go with you to Chicago—I'd like to see this guy Scott and talk to him."

Clarke went out.

"Well," said Palmer, smiling quizzically at Ethel, "I suppose this is just another scoop for you, is that it? Or is it something more than that?"

Ethel looked at him and the brashness of the girl reporter was entirely missing. Really an eyeful, thought Palmer, once you got to regard her as a woman and not as a news-hound.

"A girl gets tired of paying for her own steak and potatoes," said Ethel. "Yes, it's more than just a story, Whit—Paul and I are—engaged."

They heard the clang of the approaching ambulance after a while, and looked at Gabriel. His eyes were open and he was watching Ethel with a perplexed smile.

He said, "Then you're not going to pinch me, Mr. Palmer?"

Palmer shrugged. "How can I I'm going to be the best man at the wedding. Isn't that right, Ethel?"



ON THE EIGHTH TEE



by
Martin Brand

Two golf caddies turned murderers, a pretty young girl—and Lieutenant Jimmy Mersereau. Mix them together, stir well—and you have a bit of exciting action.

CHIEF OF POLICE FENTON of the City of Pittville-in-the-Berkshires pawed through the batch of out-of-town posters which had accumulated during the past four weeks. He picked one out.

"Here's a couple of hard-looking bozos from Frisco . . . Peter and Martin Carson . . . they were golf caddies . . . graduated into highway robbery and murder at one jump.

Brained a guy on the golf links with a midiron. Damn fool was carrying twelve grand around with him and these brothers found out about it. According to this, they were heading East—probably for New York."

He passed the circular to Inspector Tim Kelleher. Over the inspector's shoulder his brother-in-law, Lieutenant Jimmy Mersereau, scrutinized the pictures of the two wanted men.

"Might be coming here instead of

New York," commented Jimmy. "Hot in New York—mighty cool and pleasant in the Berkshire Hills."

Kelleher's thoughtful silence attracted the chief's attention. He asked, "What's bitin' you, Tim?"

"The mug on the older one reminds me a little of a guy I saw—let's see when was it?—day before yesterday—in front of 441 Wyona Street where Tom Shaw is the super. Prob'ly just a resemblance. . . . Tom was tellin' me there's a couple and a brother-in-law rented a furnished flat, and they stay indoors most of the time. Anyhow they're strangers—won't do no harm to ask them a few questions." Kelleher looked at his superior inquiringly.

"Yeah, that's right—question them just because they're strangers." Fenton's tone was gently sarcastic. "Then they go to the mayor and complain, and he raises hell with the police. We've only got about fifteen thousand strangers out here for their vacations right now—you oughta make the rounds and question them all, Tim."

Jimmy was reading the circular with bright black eyes. "Tough babies! They think it's the same two shot a cop in Des Moines, stole a car in Hartford, and knocked off the owner of a gasoline station in Stamford."

"When they get the killin' habit . . ." Fenton shook his head.

Kelleher rose, a grizzled giant of a man. "Come on, Jimmy, let's get started. We'll stop at 441 Wyona Street first. Shaw said the name was Slade. If we're wrong we'll give 'em a key to the city."

THE APARTMENT HOUSE was located in the middle of the block. Jimmy parked the car in front of it.

"What floor, Tim, do you know?"

"I think Shaw said third floor front."

"Guess I'll go up with you." Jimmy's voice was casual, and he paid no attention to his brother-in-law's contemptuous sniff. According to Kelleher, all crooks were yellow.

The street was quiet. A wind from the hills rustled the trees; the sky was clear, except for a few gray clouds as thin as wafers. As he got out of the car, Jimmy glanced upward. He thought he saw a form at one of the windows on the third floor, but when he looked again, there was no one there.

The two officers went up in the self-service elevator and walked to the door marked "3C." Kelleher touched the buzzer.

A high, sing-song voice demanded, "Who's there?"

"Police checking up on licenses," called Kelleher, using an old gag whose vagueness usually made it effective.

During a moment of tense silence they waited for the door to open. As time passed, Kelleher glanced at Mersereau with pursed lips and raised eyebrows. Then he pressed the buzzer once more—harder.

Without warning, a heavy slug tore through the thin wood and crashed into the wall behind Jimmy's head. Before the police officers could move, a second shot followed. It struck Kelleher and hurled him backward. He folded, slid to the floor in a sitting posture.

Shooting low and from different angles, Jimmy poured six shots through the door. Reloading, he stepped to Kelleher's side and asked softly, "Where you hit, Tim?"

"Here!" said Kelleher and swore weakly. He pointed to a spot above

his right ribs. "Never mind me now—don't let them get away."

Mersereau pulled Kelleher to one side. Voices had begun shouting questions, and there was the sound of feet in the hallways and on the stairs.

The lieutenant turned the knob and put his weight against the door. It remained closed. He braced his back against the wall and leveled a tremendous kick. The door crashed open.

As he stepped warily forward, Jimmy became aware that Tom Shaw was hurrying toward them from the head of the stairs. He waved the superintendent back, but Shaw's eyes were on his friend Kelleher. Shaw called, "What's the matter, Tim? You hurt?"

"Telephone police headquarters!" snapped Mersereau. "Get an ambulance out here quick! I'm going in!"

One swift stride brought him into the apartment, gun ready. He glanced around alertly, and saw a trail of what looked like blood leading toward a bedroom. He followed it, cat-like.

On the bed lay a still form. Two bullets in him, one through his throat. The bedclothes were a red mess.

Swiftly Jimmy ran through the other rooms. In the living-room he found a frightened, half-dressed girl, crouched close to the window as though tempted to jump out. She was shaking so hard he had to hold her up.

"Don't hurt me!" she begged. "Please don't—don't—"

"Who else was in here?" snapped Jimmy. "Where's the other one?"

Wide gray eyes looked out at him from a paper-white face . . . a slim, scared little thing with disheveled, hemp-colored hair and a half smudge of lipstick across one cheek.

Mersereau shook her. "Where's the other brother? Was he in here?"

"Pete — he — down the dumbwaiter!" she gasped.

Jimmy ran into the kitchen. The latch on the dumbwaiter was open. Looking down the shaft he could see the box at the bottom. He ran out of the apartment.

The hallway was full of men and women. Bending over Kelleher, now lying on his back with a pillow under his head, Shaw was trying to stop the flow of blood. Shaw looked up. He said, "The ambulance is coming!" Another voice stated, "I called the police!"

"There's a girl in there—keep an eye on her—don't let her get away!" ordered Mersereau crisply.

He plunged through the crowd, got into the elevator, reached the basement. He ran through it; no one was there. Suddenly Mrs. Shaw opened the door of her apartment.

"He was here right after Tom went upstairs!" she called.

"Who was here?" snapped the lieutenant.

"The older brother—Peter Slade—ain't that who you're looking for?"

"Where'd he go?"

"He ran out into the backyard! He certainly looked wild—had a gun in his hand. What's happened, Lieutenant? I always said—"

Mersereau didn't hear what she always said. He was in the backyard, then over the fence and asking questions. No one had seen anything or anybody.

When the police car and the ambulance arrived, Mersereau got into his automobile and covered ground. He finally found a taxi driver in whose cab the fugitive had been driven to the eastern fringe of the town.

"He jumps in and tells me to get goin' and keep goin'," related the

driver. "So I ask him what's his hurry? He pulls a rod! You bet I done just what he told me—wouldn't you? He got out the block past the House of Mercy, handed me a buck and told me to keep my mouth shut if I didn't want something to happen to me."

"Where'd he go after he left you?" demanded Jimmy.

"After he turned the corner from the hospital, I seen a car shoot down the road going east—it was a black sedan, going too fast for me to see the number. But I'm pretty sure he was in it—he musta had that car hidden somewhere near there."

When Mersereau got back to the apartment, Kelleher had been taken to the hospital, and the body of the younger Carson had been removed. One of the officers had found a wallet containing four thousand dollars in a locked drawer of the dresser in the bedroom. Evidently Pete hadn't had time to find the key and get it.

Remembering that only a short time ago the brothers had robbed a victim in Frisco of twelve thousand dollars, Mersereau was not satisfied. He made a further search—in vain. Then he thought of the girl, still waiting in the other room. He went to her.

"Where's the rest of the money?" he asked curtly.

She seemed too scared to talk, but she led him to the closet in the living-room. There, under a loose board in the floor, he found five thousand dollars in an oilskin wrapper.

When he reported to Chief Fenton, he turned over the entire amount, nine thousand dollars. But no one else knew of the second find, and when the story appeared in the papers, only the wallet containing the four thousand dollars was mentioned.

"That five grand may keep Peter

Carson in the neighborhood, hoping he'll get a chance to sneak in and cop it," was Jimmy's idea, and Fenton agreed with him.

WHEN HE entered her cell, Mersereau found the girl incongruously dressed in a cocoa silk jersey hostess gown. She was reading a newspaper one of the matrons had brought her. It was two days after the shooting, a coroner's inquest had taken place, and a judge had acceded to the district attorney's request that the girl be held pending the outcome of Kelleher's wound. The name she had given was Myra Dolliver.

"Well," said Mersereau, "you're lucky, Myra—the inspector is going to get well."

"I'm glad!" She looked as though she meant it.

"So you won't be tried as an accessory to his murder. But there's the killing of that policeman in Des Moines—and the owner of the gas station in Stamford. You'd better help us find Pete—if you want a break."

Her fingers gripped the newspaper convulsively. "I don't know where he is—really I don't! Even if I knew, I'd be afraid to tell. . . . I'm afraid of Pete. He'd kill anybody who crossed him." Her eyes became fixed. "He's crazy, Pete is—nobody knows it except me—Marty knew and he was afraid of him, too. You can never tell what Pete'll do—never!"

"Crazy, is he?" As he sat down next to her on the cot, she moved as far away from him as she could. She looked very young.

"I'm not the kind of girl you think I am—I'm not a gun-moll like the district attorney called me. I'd have left Pete long ago—but I was afraid.

He was so queer—crazy!" She repeated, "I'm not a gun-moll!"

"No, you're Snow White in disguise," Mersereau said cynically.

"I didn't know they were so bad," she protested. "I didn't know they killed that man in San Francisco. Pete asked me to go with them . . . he said he was going to marry me. He wasn't so queer then—he got that way after he killed the policeman in Iowa. I used to like him in Frisco—he took me to movies and nice restaurants. . . ."

"How old are you?" Mersereau's tone was sharp.

"Seventeen."

"Does Pete know anybody in town?"

"No, nobody! He made us keep to ourselves."

"Where'd he be likely to go—if he left town?"

She said with conviction in her voice, "Oh, Pete wouldn't run away without me . . . he loves me and he's too crazy to be afraid of anybody . . . and besides he didn't have much money on him."

There wasn't much more he could ask her . . . she'd been grilled several times during the past two days. As he sat studying her, her face broke into an ingratiating smile. She asked in a low voice, "Have you got a girl?"

Mersereau said, "No, only a headache—and I don't want another."

CHIEF FENTON was gloomy and exasperated. "He's as wise as we are, the rat—if he's still around. I've kept two men in the apartment on Wyona Street . . . not a sign of him, not even a peep."

"The girl says he's crazy!" Mersereau remarked. "You never can tell what he's likely to do."

"Crazy as a fox!" Fenton growled. The telephone rang and Fenton

picked it up. "Chief Fenton speaking!"

A high voice snarled, "Whyn't you let that kid alone? She ain't got no more to do with it than Mary's aunt!"

"Who is this?" Fenton was startled.

"This is Pete Slade, that's who this is. Now get this, Big Shot: If you know what's good for you—and for your wife and two kids—you turn my girl loose! I'm givin' you until Sunday—that's six days."

Fenton glanced at Mersereau, and his lips formed the words, "Pete Slade!" The lieutenant got busy on another wire.

"So this is Pete Slade!" Fenton's tone was jocular, even though his face was congested with rage. "Pete Carson you mean, don't you? How about coming up here for a talk, Pete? Maybe I'll turn Myra loose if you do."

The high voice was queer and deadly. "Foxy guy, ain'tcha? Think you'll keep me on this phone until some of your dumb dicks get here. Listen, Wise Guy: You live at 32 Fourth Street, right? I just got through talkin' to your wife over the telephone. You ask her what I said—and I mean it! You kin put fifty cops around your house—I'll get her, I'll get one of those kids—yes and I'll get you, too. I'm declarin' war, see! You got till Sunday to turn my girl loose!"

Fenton barked, as the wire became silent, "Did you get it, Jimmy?"

"No. Is he gone? He was on a dial phone. What'd he say?"

"Threatened my wife and kids," said the chief slowly. "Knows where I live, too. Gave me until next Sunday to turn his girl loose."

Mersereau whistled. "His girl said he was nutty! You'd better take precautions, Chief."

"Yeah, take precautions!" Fenton's tone was bitter. "The kids'll have to stay home from school—and that's bad enough. I can't help thinking what a desperate maniac like this one can do, even if I do put a guard around the house. A crazy killer loose! Maybe I can protect my own family, but how about all the other families in town . . . he might get a notion . . . he said he was declaring war. We've got to find him!"

"And before Sunday!" Mersereau's tone was grim.

They fine-combed and dragnetted the town from end to end, length and breadth, cellars to roofs, without finding a sign of Pete. Monday and Tuesday passed, and each day Chief Fenton seemed to age ten years. Three policemen had been assigned to guard his house, night and day; his children and his wife stayed closely at home. And yet . . .

"If I ever meet him," growled Fenton, "he'll have bad luck!"

SOMEONE did have bad luck but it wasn't Pete Carson, it was a rookie policeman named "Chick" Haggerty.

Mersereau was upstairs in Apartment 3C of the Wyona Street building, having relieved the two detectives stationed there during the day in the hope that Pete Carson might come calling for the five thousand dollars.

Suddenly the lieutenant heard two shots in rapid succession. He ran to the window in time to see a black sedan go racing down the street. Rushing downstairs, Mersereau found Haggerty lying on the sidewalk.

"Saw him sneaking down the basement," mumbled Haggerty, "and I hollered to him. He turned around and shot me—twice."

That was all Mersereau waited to hear. He commandeered the nearest car and started in pursuit of the black sedan. A dozen informants had seen a dozen sedans, black, green, all colors. But of Pete Carson and his black sedan Mersereau could not find a trace—even with the assistance of a score of helpers, both policemen and citizens. They searched every garage, every parking-place, spent the entire night at it—all in vain.

When he heard of it, Fenton ripped the cigar out of his mouth and crushed it in a huge fist. "He was coming for the money—you'd have gotten him! He was walking right into the trap. That fool rookie—that half-wit! After me sending out orders not to stop anybody going into that house!"

Fenton looked old, haggard; his face was a mottled gray. He was worrying himself sick.

"Haggerty forgot!" Mersereau explained gloomily. He added, "He'll be laid up quite a while—one bullet just missed his right lung."

"Too bad he wasn't killed!" growled Fenton.

Saturday morning came and found Fenton pacing up and down his office in restless desperation. He said to Mersereau, "We'll have to get help—we can't handle this alone, Jimmy. We'll have to call in the Federal men—he committed crimes in other states, didn't he?"

"They're on the job and have been right along!" Mersereau's voice was frustrated, compassionate.

The telephone rang. "My wife and my kids haven't stepped out of the house for days!" Fenton picked up the telephone. "Chief Fenton speaking!" he said mechanically. Then his eyes shot a swift glance to Mersereau. The lieutenant got busy instantly at another phone.

Pete's high, jeering voice assailed the chief's ear. "The Big Shot himself, hey? How's the cop I plugged? Dead, I hope."

Fenton's self-control was admirable. He said soothingly, "Now, now, Pete, that wasn't a policeman you shot, that was just a rookie beginner. What did you have against him, Pete? Tell you what: I'll meet you anywhere you say—alone—and you—"

The high voice broke in violently: "What kind of a dope do you take me for? Say, how many cops you got hanging around your house? It won't do you no good, see! If I don't get one of your family, I'll get somebody else in town—and I'll keep killing until you turn Myra loose. Get me? That's what I'll do! You turn her loose—and give her that money you stole from me, too. You better, that's all I'm tellin' you!"

"Why you rat!" Fenton gripped the phone as though he would crush it. "If you had the guts to meet me I'd bring you in by one of those long ears of yours — and lay you alongside your brother."

He looked urgently toward Mersereau; the lieutenant was trying desperately to locate the call. On the wire there was a moment of pregnant silence. The voice that broke it was half-choked with maniacal rage.

"Long ears, hey! Make your will, Big Shot! I'll get you! I'll get your kids! I'll get your woman! I'll show you! And quit wastin' time tryin' to find me! Watchin' you and your dumb cops searchin' all over town made me laugh so hard I near swallowed my false teeth. Try kickin' snow off the moon—it's easier! I'm gettin' busy on Monday!"

When Fenton hung up, he was green under the eyes and actually

shaking. "Where was he 'phoning from, Jimmy? Did you find out?"

"Crandall's drug store. Taylor and two men are on the way. I'm going, too!"

He came back two hours later, gloomy and baffled. "Nobody remembers seeing him. It's a busy corner... I suppose that's why he picked it."

"Maybe he's crazy," muttered Fenton, "but he's foxy enough to fool us all." He sounded tired and discouraged. Days and nights he had spent searching, working harder than any of his men.

LATE in the afternoon came a letter addressed to "Myra Dolliver, Police Headquarters," written carefully in a schoolboy hand. It contained a five-dollar bill. The letter read:

"Hello, kid, dont lose yore nerv I got the cops stymied. I know they will read this letter what the hell do I care. Before I get thruh they will be only too glad to let you go. They got nothing on you beecus you did nothing this letter proves it. Im the one to blame, me and poor Marty. So why dont they come after me the rats. I am sending you a fin more later if you need it. I hope the cops dont steal it. Be seeing you soon. Pete."

Fenton was like a caged tiger. His nerves and temper were running wild.

"Of all the blistering gall! That letter was mailed yesterday afternoon, right here in town." He paused suddenly. "How about baiting a trap with the girl—put her back in the apartment and let the papers print it?"

Mersereau shook his head. "You couldn't get him that way—he isn't dumb by any means."

"No, I suppose you couldn't!"

Fenton's fists were clenched. "If I could only lay hands on him! The murdering rat! Who knows what he'll do next. A fine lot we are... he'll be coming around to take her to the movies next... and he'll get away with it, too!" With sudden exasperation he shouted, "What the hell are you looking at? You've seen that poster before, haven't you?"

Jimmy was studying the California poster with the picture of the two brothers on it. He said thoughtfully, "Take it easy, Chief!"

As he was going out, Fenton said imploringly, "If you got any clue, Jimmy—tomorrow is Sunday!"

THE ROAD over which Lieutenant Jimmy Mersereau drove wound past the House of Mercy, and there it made a hairpin turn. Half a mile further it left the city and ran parallel with the shores of a lake. On the opposite side of the lake lay the sloping grounds of a summer camp for children; beyond the camp was the only public golf-course in that section. At least, although it belonged to the Pennville Country Club, the public were permitted to play it for a green fee.

Behind Greylock's towering peak the sun had begun its descent in a huge vista of glorious colors. Mersereau figured it would be light for another hour at least, a particularly important hour for those golf addicts who count that day wasted in which they do not go around eighteen holes at least once. There was an apple smell from the orchards all around, and Jimmy remembered that Tim Kelleher, still in the hospital, had often filled this very automobile with apples to bring home.

Near the entrance to the golf-course, he parked his car and got out. He walked through the rickety

wooden gate that was part of the fence separating the golf-links from the camp, and came to the caddy-house. The young professional in charge was sandpapering a wooden club.

Mersereau said, "Hello, Clyde! Going to win the tournament?"

Clyde looked up with an engaging grin. "Hello, Lieutenant! No, not likely—but I'm aiming to give some of those big-timers something to worry about. Did you come for a lesson at last?"

"Maybe forty years from now when I'm chewing with my gums!" Jimmy took out the California poster. "Have you seen this guy around?" He pointed to Pete's likeness.

Clyde looked at it, shook his head. "No!"

"Look again!" urged the lieutenant. "No one even resembling him?" He shook his head again. "No, never saw anybody like that around here. That's the guy you're all after, isn't it?"

Mersereau nodded, bitterly disappointed. "Just the same, I'm coming over here tomorrow afternoon, when they're all on the course. Who's out playing now?"

"Couple of ladies and a fellow named Hartman."

"Who's he?"

"Not your man—doesn't resemble him in the slightest—just a crippled Dutchman with a sour puss and a Kaiser Wilhelm mustache. He's been staying over at Tecum Brook with old man Hickson." The sandpaper squeaked nerve-rackingly. "Hits some long ones off the tee, that bird! If you want to see good golf form, go and watch him."

Mersereau shook his head unsmilingly. "Not interested!" Then, because he had come so far, he

changed his mind. "Here, give me a bag of clubs, Clyde... I'll waste a little time!"

Near the end of the seventh fairway, he caught sight of a man hobbling along, favoring his left leg. Must be Hartman, thought Mersereau. He strolled across and climbed the squat knoll on which the eighth tee was set, and sat on the bench while Hartman holed out on a long putt. After that, Hartman came limping toward the eighth tee.

"Hello!" greeted the lieutenant affably. "How's it going?"

From behind gold-rimmed spectacles, light blue eyes appraised Jimmy without cordiality. The reply was a grunt.

"Mind if I go 'round a couple of holes with you?" Mersereau asked.

Hartman growled ungraciously, "If you want!"

He certainly did not look like the picture of Peter Carson. Limping over to the tee, he adjusted his ball, and bent a closely-cropped, bullet-shaped head as he prepared to drive off. And yet... well, perhaps it was the line of the jaw or the high cheekbones... or perhaps, thought Jimmy, I'm just imagining things.

Hartman's left leg seemed shorter than his right. As he drove, he bent his right knee. Down the center of the fairway whistled the white sphere, a good two hundred yards.

"Swell!" praised Mersereau, and the German's surly features relaxed perceptibly. Even the points of his mustache wiggled with gratification.

"I dink so! Now see vat you can do!"

The guttural tones were not at all like the high, singsong voice which had demanded, "Who's there?" through the door of the apartment at 441 Wyona Street. Still, that might have been Martin's voice.

Mersereau had not heard Pete over the telephone.

Swinging his club, Mersereau stepped to the tee. "I'm not much good at this," he apologized. He wiggled his stick as he had seen other golfers do. Out of the corner of his eye he glanced toward Hartman, who was watching him intently. The German frowned and remained silent.

Jimmy swung mightily. His driver topped the ball, and he followed through... followed through so completely that the head of the club came whistling straight for Hartman's head.

Hartman cried, "Hey!" and sprang back. The club missed him by about an inch. Rigidly erect, he stood and glared at Jimmy. "You damn fool, you near brained me!" he growled.

"Sorry!" apologized Mersereau easily. "I told you I'm a punk golfer." He brought out a package of cigarettes and offered one to Hartman, who brusquely refused. Mersereau lit one for himself, took a couple of puffs and threw it away. His glance rested on Hartman's legs, both now quite straight and even.

At once the German's right knee bent. "I go play py myself!" he said curtly. He picked up his bag and slung it over his shoulder.

Mersereau called, "Wait a minute! You don't recognize me, do you?"

"You? I nefer saw you before."

"That's right, you didn't, come to think of it. You couldn't see me over the telephone when you talked to Chief Fenton, could you?"

Hartman looked at him with bewilderment. "Vat you talking about? Crazy!" He started limping off.

"Now, now!" Jimmy's voice was full of gentle chiding. "Don't be in such a hurry, Pete. You should have worn green whiskers... those specs

and the mustache aren't enough. Put your hands up — high!" His gun pointed steadily at the golfer. "I'm afraid you're not going to finish this game—not ever. You're coming with me."

Hartman demanded indignantly, "Vat is dis—a holdup?"

"Sure, you hold up your knee and quit faking — it won't do you any good. You jumped fast enough when I swung that club at you!" Jimmy was enjoying himself thoroughly, thinking of Kelleher, and Haggerty, and the men this fellow had murdered in cold blood. "Put down that bag, turn around and stick your hands out behind you, Pete—unless you want lead. Chief Fenton is waiting to finish those conversations you started over the telephone — you never did give him a chance to have the last word, did you?"

Slowly the man slid the bag off his shoulder to the ground. He said, "How'd you guess? Listen, give me a break, willya? It's worth a thousand—two thousand. How about it?"

"I'll give you a break!" Mersereau's voice was bitter, hard. "The same kind of break you gave poor Tim Kelleher, and Haggerty, and the cop in Des Moines — and a lot of others probably. Come on, rat, turn around and put your hands back of you!"

Pete turned about slowly. Suddenly he stumbled over his bag of clubs—fell on his stomach. He rolled over. But Jimmy was watching closely. He caught a flash of the

blue forty-five as Pete pulled it from inside his shirt.

A second's hesitation and there would have been another murder for Pete to crow over. But Mersereau's gun boomed once and again. One bullet struck Pete in the chest, one went through his face. Their force threw him over on his back. Still he clutched the gun. Jimmy stepped forward swiftly and took it away.

But life was strongly rooted in the killer. His body jerked and he clawed at the lieutenant's face, drawing blood. Then he relaxed. His spectacles had fallen off, and his eyes were fast-glazing pits of hatred.

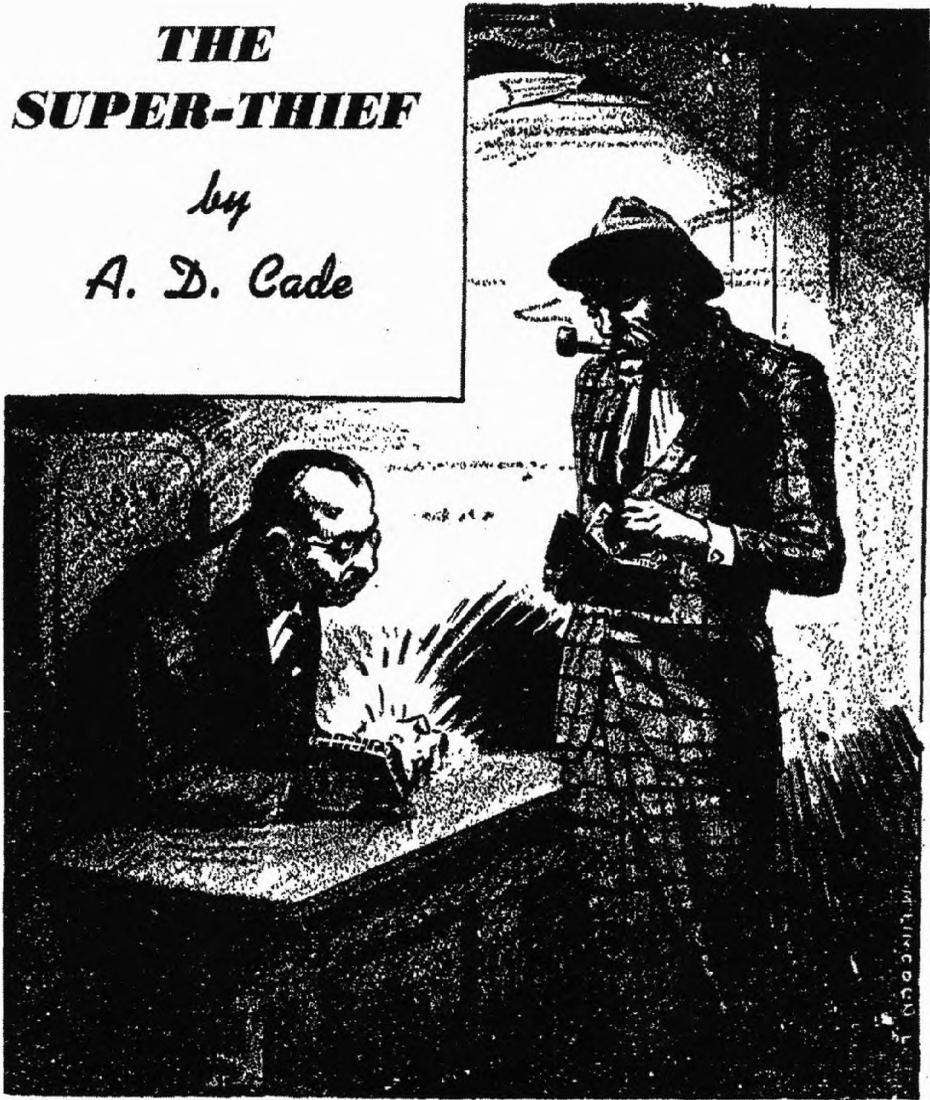
"**W**HAT PUT ME on the right track," Mersereau explained to Chief Fenton, "was that word 'stymied' in Pete's letter—that and the statement in the poster that the brothers had been caddies. The Pennville course is the only one within miles that's open to the public, and right near town, too—he could walk it in half an hour—although he chose to use the sedan now and then. I found that sedan in the woods back of the golf-course. I was dumb not to think of it before—that a caddie would naturally gravitate toward a golf-course and nobody'd think of looking there."

Fenton asked almost humbly, "If you're dumb, what would you call the rest of us?" He added with a grin: "That girl Myra's been knitting you a sweater — she wants to be your girl."



THE SUPER-THIEF

by
A. D. Cade



John Torrington was a well-known actor. It was his clever acting that enabled him to get revenge.

THE INSPECTOR in charge of the Homicide Bureau said gently, "I know how you feel, Mr. Torrington. But don't do it—you're an actor and a good one, but that doesn't make you a good detective. Every man to his own trade. Maybe we'll have some news for you soon—we can't solve every case."

"And mine's one of those you can't solve, is that it?"

"It's a tough one—you've got to admit that. All the information your

sister was able to give us was that there were two masked men, one shorter than the other — that they grabbed about sixty thousand dollars' worth of jewelry, including a valuable diamond necklace, all insured, and—"

Torrington spoke low and through gritted teeth: "Hell with the jewelry! I'm not thinking of the jewelry. It's just that scum like that have no right to live!"

Torrington's mother had died of

the shock and the beating administered by the callous thieves who had entered her home during the night; his sister was in the hospital as a result.

"How about the clue that one of them had only four fingers on his left hand? Didn't that help you any?"

Torrington himself had only four fingers on his right hand—a souvenir of an accident when he was a boy. The inspector's eyes rested on the hand absently.

He said, "There's only one four-fingered crook I know—Nick Trout. He was in the hospital when the crime was committed."

"Sure of that?"

"Absolutely. That's where we found him when we went looking, two days after the crime—and he'd been there for two weeks. He's out now. Hospital records corroborate it; nurses, internes, orderly, all back it up. He was on his back with pneumonia. It's not his kind of a job anyhow. He goes in mostly for robbing other thieves—finds out when one of them has made a haul and comes down on him—takes it away."

Torrington stirred, suddenly interested. "When can I see this Nick Trout? I've got to see him at once."

The inspector studied him fixedly. He said, "Bird dog, hey? We might be able to bring him down here tomorrow morning—say ten o'clock. If he's still in circulation."

AT TEN SHARP, John Torrington was there. In the Detective Bureau, Inspector Sheldon introduced Nick Trout, a slender man with an unusually fine complexion and light blue eyes.

"You can use the room next door if you wish to talk privately," Sheldon suggested.

They went into the next room.

Trout was puzzled and defiant. He said, "Hey, what's this all about? Anytime anybody steals anything in this man's town, the cops run to me to ask questions."

"Sit down!" Torrington's tone was brusque. He got a chair for himself and placed it opposite Trout. He said, "Let's see your left hand!"

Silently Trout extended it.

"Four fingers!" the actor said thoughtfully.

Trout flared up at that. "I know what you mean, Mister! Listen: I was on my back and fightin' pneumonia when that job was done. Cripes, do I have to get blamed for everything?"

But he was half-smiling, a look of amusement in those cold blue eyes of his; he met Torrington's boring glance without flinching.

"Don't you believe me, Mister?"

"My name is John Torrington. If I didn't believe you,"—Torrington's voice was as cold as the other's eyes—"I'd strangle you with my bare hands—right here in this room!"

He glared at Trout; Trout frowned but said nothing.

"Whenever you begin getting an idea this is funny," the actor gritted, "remember it cost my mother her life!"

And the look on Torrington's face was such that even Trout, hard character though he was, finally turned away.

Trout said, "Let's get down to cases. What d'ya want me to do?"

"It's worth ten thousand dollars in cash to me, to find out who the men were that did it!"

There was no mistaking the greedy gleam in the jewel-thief's eyes. "Ten grand, hey? How would I know it's on the level?"

"I'll give it to you in writing." Torrington took out a memorandum-

book, scribbled rapidly, tore out the sheet and handed it to Trout.

Trout read the memo slowly. He slipped it into his pocket.

"Okay, Mr. Torrington. If them guys can be got—if they was regulars—I'll get them. Got no use for guys like that anyhow—only a coupla women in the house — they didn't have to get rough."

"I'm not a welcher, Trout. Now, keep in touch with me. You'll find me at the Friars almost every night." He gave Trout the address. "I'm depending on you—I'll make it worth your while. Play square with me, that's all I ask."

"I gotta play square with you . . . you're a friend of the inspector's, aintcha? My flat is at 302 East 116th Street—you see how fast the cops got me when they wanted me." He went out.

Torrington went into Sheldon's office and told him what he had done.

"Well" — Sheldon looked thoughtful—"he's a damn good bird-dog—he might lead you to them all right. Then again—and this is a lot more likely—he won't. We've never been able to get him to sing, and we've put the heat on him plenty. Maybe the ten grand might do the trick, but I don't think so. I think he'll give you the doublecross—grab the stuff for himself, if he locates it—rather than squeal."

Torrington said slowly, "Glad you told me—I won't let him out of my sight. He's starting on the job tomorrow—I'll stick closer to him than his shadow."

The inspector appraised John Torrington's well-known features and six feet of good-looking masculinity with a quizzical smile. "You couldn't shadow him for a block without his spotting you!

"And don't let him kid you about

his starting tomorrow—he's starting tonight! He knows just where to go."

THE INSPECTOR was mistaken. At seven o'clock in the evening, the shabby-looking elderly man saw Nick Trout enter the house at 302 East 116th Street, and although he waited outside of the house until after midnight Trout did not come out again.

But the next morning at ten, Trout issued forth, looking as spruce as a salesman in a swell clothing shop. Behind him and on the other side of the street, a fireman in uniform strolled along. Trout went down in the subway, walked across town, and went upstairs in a building on Second Avenue near Seventh Street. He came down, grabbed a cab like a business man in a hurry, and Torrington had a job then to find another cab and follow him quickly enough not to lose him. Trout got out in front of a poolroom on Christopher Street, went inside. He came out almost an hour later.

Torrington caught sight of him at once, and followed him to the subway. Trout got off at the Fulton Street station, and walked straight to a building in the jewelry district on John Street. Torrington followed him to the second floor, and lingered on the stairs, watching as Trout paused in front of one door and studied it. Trout hesitated, turned and threw a quick look at Torrington, who seemed to be on his way upstairs. Then, without going in, Trout descended to the street again.

An hour later came the disappointment. Trout entered a hotel—and disappeared! Torrington waited for two hours; during that time he wandered through the hotel lobby half a dozen times, and finally discovered the door on the side street, through

which Trout must have exited unseen.

Trout did not go home that night, and his door was still locked the following morning at seven, when John knocked. Baffled then, the actor called Inspector Sheldon on the telephone, and Sheldon sent out his emissary to bring Nick in. The officer came back with the report that no one in the neighborhood, and none of Nick's intimates, knew where he had gone.

"I told you he'd give you the old doublecross," Sheldon said cynically. "They just don't squeal—it isn't safe. Not even for a super-thief like Nick Trout, who preys on lesser thieves. They hate a squealer!"

Torrington thought of the office door on the second floor of the house on John Street, at which Trout had gazed with so much interest. He went back to his apartment and changed his costume. It required every bit of skill John possessed—it was one thing to dress up and fix up to appear on the stage, and quite another to make up for the street, where his disguise would have to stand the light of day.

But he got through, finally, and went to John Street by subway. He climbed two flights of stairs and stood in front of the door that had attracted Nick Trout. The name on it was "Prentice & Co." Under it was the inscription, "Diamonds and Precious Stones."

He went downstairs to look it up, but there was no "Prentice & Co." in the telephone book. A new firm?

THE MAN inside the one-room office cast a quick look at the farmer standing on the threshold, and rose from the chair on which he had been lounging with an open lack

of enthusiasm, and a curt, "Well—what can I do for you?"

"Dunno! Mebbe you kin do something, mebbe not! All depends!" The farmer stared at the jeweler, noted particularly his hands. There were the usual five fingers on each.

"Oh, it all depends! Well, what is it that depends—what can I do for you, Silas?" The jeweler's frown of annoyance changed suddenly into a grin. He said, "I'm not the guy who sold you the Brooklyn Bridge, Si—that was another guy named Elmer."

Impassively the visitor took a step inside and closed the door behind him. He scratched a hairy neck with a dirty finger, and squinted through his spectacles. "Beats me," he murmured, "what makes you city slickers think you're so durned smart!"

"Okay, okay—no offense!" The jeweler sat down again.

"Nobody ain't sold me no bridge and no city hall, Mister—I know my way about."

"I'll bet you do—I'll bet you've seen all the sights, too—and that's more than I've done. How do you like this town, pal?"

"You couldn't sell it to me for a dime! Say, have you got a diamond ring for a bargain? This size?" He held out a piece of string.

Prentice took it from him. "For your wife or your sweetie?"

"For my wife. Looka here, Mister—I won't be int'rested in nothin' that ain't real handsome. When I got married—Goshamighty, it rained cats and dogs—and I had to borrow five dollars for to buy a plain gold band. Yes siree—and couldn't pay it back for nigh two years! Wal—now that I kin afford it, I'm figgerin' some of that oil comin' outa my farm oughta pay for a surprise for Lucy! Yes siree! I might buy two rings—

pervidin' you'll sell them at a bargain."

The gray eyes behind the spectacles read the self-condemnation the jeweler was heaping on himself as he came forward.

The jeweler asked, "What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say—yit! Don't matter anyhow—money talks, I reckon! Name's Bunting—Ed Bunting!"

"Mine is Prentice," said the jeweler quietly. He extended his hand, and after a moment's hesitation, the farmer took it. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Bunting, I feel a little ashamed of myself — took you for just an ordinary dirt farmer."

"Jest what I am."

"A man who feels the way you do about his wife . . . no, sir . . . if you're an ordinary farmer, what must the unusual farmers be like? Don't blame you for feeling the way you do about Mrs. Bunting. When you didn't have it, she didn't make any complaint, I'll bet. All the more reason to be generous with her when you can afford it."

"Reckon that's puttin' into words jest how I feel." Bunting permitted his antagonism to evaporate under the jeweler's sincere admiration. "We ain't had no easy times, Lucy and me—dry spells that burnt up the crops, and wet ones that drowned 'em—and dust storms. Say, you city folks don't know how easy you got it! Wal—reckon I'll look at a few rings now."

Silently Prentice took off his glasses and wiped them with an air. Then, with reverence, he took a blue plush box out of the small safe in the office.

"Here's a beauty! Three carats—a flawless blue diamond—platinum setting—there's real class! Here, take a peep through this magnifying glass!

If you find a flaw, you can have it for nothing. No yellow in that one—not a streak. Blue diamonds like this one are the kind the Four Hundred wear."

The farmer examined the ring without much enthusiasm. It was not part of the loot taken from the Torrington home.

"Don't give a durn about no Four Hundred—it's what Lucy likes," he grumbled.

"Well, she'll like this one, all right. It's the right size, too."

The prospective customer verified the measurement himself. "Seems like it's the right size," he admitted grudgingly. "How much?"

"Eight hundred and twenty-five dollars! It cost me eight hundred—all I'm making is twenty-five dollars!"

"Give ye six hundred!"

"Eight hundred!"

"Six fifty—won't give ye a dollar more'n that!"

"Seven hundred—take it or leave it! I'm losing money on it."

The farmer said, "I'll take it—don't think I don't know you're robbin' me. But the durned thing does look right handsome. You want check or cash?"

"Well now"—Prentice's smile was deprecatory—"this being our first transaction—and after all, I don't know you . . ."

"That's all right—don't make no diff'rence to me."

Bunting drew forth a large, greenish-black wallet, shabby but well-filled. Prentice's eyes glittered at sight of it.

"Here you are—seven hundred dollars!" The farmer put the money into Prentice's hand, returned the wallet to his inside pocket, and dropped the plush box into a side pocket. He buttoned his coat and started for the door. "Reckon I'll look 'round a little

—ain't a-goin' home with jest one ring—no, sir. Now I'm started, I'm aimin' to bring Lucy a handful of them gewgaws to play 'round with."

Prentice swallowed and drew a long breath.

“WHAT'S YOUR HURRY, Mr. Bunting? Sit down—here, have a smoke.” He handed the farmer a cigar; the farmer put it to his nose, then said, “Thank ye,” as Prentice lighted it for him. “I should have known you're the kind of man who has the money and doesn't care about appearances,” Prentice said.

The farmer sat down. Probably a waste of time, he thought; there was no basis on which to believe that this jeweler knew anything about the Torrington crime except that Nick Trout had been interested in the sign on the door. The ring he had just bought was not worth the money; he had overpaid. However . . .

“Ain't got no million dollars, and don't go thinkin' it,” the farmer stated. “What I got I aim to hold on to.”

“Of course, of course. But take that ring, as an example: you could convert it into cash any time you had a mind to. Listen: I've got something I want to show you—mind, I don't want to sell it to you—I want to show it to you—that's all! I have it at home. A diamond necklace that will make you dizzy just looking at it!”

The farmer was dizzy, all right. It took all his artistry to suppress the surge of excitement, hatred, eagerness, that swept him. He succeeded in looking only mildly interested.

“I allus thought necklaces was made outa pearls,” he said.

“Oh, there are pearl necklaces, and

there are diamond necklaces. But no one buys pearls who can afford diamonds. Now this necklace I'm talking about—my own wife is wearing it—being in the business, you can believe that I'm giving her only what's real classy. Of course, that necklace costs money.”

“I was thinkin' of rings,” Bunting protested.

“Aw, rings! Everybody has rings in your neck of the country—I'll bet on it. But who do you know owns a diamond necklace? Another thing: you can always get your money back on a buy like that.”

“Hull amount — not the hull amount?”

“Oh no, not the whole amount—but pretty near it. A necklace like that is like an investment. Anyhow, I'm not asking you to buy it—just want you to see it. Give you something to talk about when you get back home.”

Prentice fell into a reverie, and the farmer waited.

“Tell you what”—Prentice roused—“you come home with me and fill up on some real home cooking. Let's go now—the hell with business—let's get acquainted.”

Indecisively Bunting scratched his neck—scratching his neck seemed to stimulate his mental processes. “Wal, I dunno—”

“Now, now—I won't take no for an answer. If I were visiting your town and happened to run into you, would you let me get away without at least one visit? Wait here a minute—I've got to go down the hall to tell a man something.”

He went out, and Torrington began to wonder what crooked, devious scheme the jeweler was hatching. It might all be on the up and up, and even if it were an attempt to swindle

a too-trusting farmer, there might be no connection with the Torrington robbery.

Somehow, however, Torrington sensed danger. This was a small office, Prentice had seen a well-filled wallet, and he seemed to be a pretty smooth article.

If the necklace he wanted to show Torrington was the one which had belonged to Torrington's mother, then Prentice was either one of the murderers, or a fence. Murder may become a habit. He was going to Prentice's home . . . a micky finn, a blow from a blackjack, even a bullet, were all little contingencies not to be dismissed from consideration. Prentice might feel that it was unnecessary to trade jewelry for money when he could have both.

Of course, it was quite possible the necklace might not be the one. Nevertheless, Torrington stepped to the telephone and dialed Police Headquarters. Sheldon was out, but he talked to an assistant in Sheldon's office.

THE PRENTICES lived in a furnished apartment on the ground floor of a house in West 91st Street. Apparently Prentice had telephoned they were coming. A shapely blonde maid opened the door, and in the living room, Mrs. Prentice greeted Bunting effusively.

"Why, Mr. Bunting—you're not giving us any trouble at all. I'm the one that's obliged to you—for bringing my husband home so early. And anyhow—anyone coming from a farm—my dad was a farmer, you know."

She was a female benison as she hovered over Prentice, her large, cal-somined face exuding hospitality, her greenish-brown eyes literally beaming. No make-believe beam, either,

reflected Torrington. The thought of that wallet made her amiability both spontaneous and real.

The maid brought cocktails, and then Prentice disappeared for a few minutes. He came back with the necklace.

He said, "There it is, Bunting—what do you think of it?" And held it up.

It would have surprised him to know that his guest knew more about that necklace than he did. It would have surprised him if he could have read Torrington's mind that instant, and seen the red rage that swept the actor's brain, that curved his fingers into claws which literally itched to grip the jeweler's throat.

But looking at the farmer, Prentice saw nothing unusual.

After he had given his prospective customer a chance to see the necklace, Prentice dropped it carelessly into his pocket. He said, "We'll look at it some more later—let's see what Clara's got for us."

They sat down at the table, and the blonde maid brought in the fruit cocktail. There was something about that blonde maid which attracted Torrington's eye, and watching him as his eyes followed her, Prentice winked at his wife.

When the soup came, Bunting hitched his chair forward, arranged his napkin under his chin, and picked up the wrong spoon.

Watching covertly, the actor saw Prentice cast a droll look at his mate—and stare in surprise. Torrington's glance flashed to Mrs. Prentice. She was staring at him, and the blood left her face, leaving it mottled. Torrington could not understand what had frightened her.

She was looking at his hands; Prentice's gaze followed his wife's.

Then Torrington realized. What a

fool he'd been! His hands were smooth and white, certainly not the hands of a farmer. He had forgotten about them in making up.

But his swift glance at Prentice, at the panic in the jeweler's face, told him something else—something that flashed through his mind with the recollection that Nick Trout had only four fingers on one hand—his left hand, to be sure, whereas Torrington's four fingers were on his right hand. But these crooks might be thinking he was Nick Trout—Trout had a reputation—not many knew him personally, but every crook had heard of him, according to Inspector Sheldon.

They thought he was Nick Trout!

Something was impending; Torrington could tell by the sudden stillness. Poor actors, both these crooks—they couldn't hide their fear. Clara Prentice's face had become almost green under her paint.

Prentice rose and the farmer looked up alertly. Prentice managed a smile, a poor attempt. He said, "Excuse me—I'll get a couple of cigars."

"Cigars with the entree?" Torrington put down his spoon, grinned broadly, spoke normally. "You shouldn't—it isn't being done in the best circles, Prentice. But I don't think you're going after cigars—I've got a notion you're going for a gun!"

His hand darted into his pocket; when it appeared, a black muzzle pointed at Prentice. Without even waiting to be told, Prentice raised both hands high.

"Attaboy!" approved the actor. "Sit down—and keep your hands on the table. You too, Mrs. Prentice—if you please!"

She obeyed. Then he saw it! A finger was missing from her left hand! The short robber who had

broken into the Torrington home that terrible night! Mrs. Prentice in male attire!

Torrington looked at her with hatred. He gritted, "You must look wonderful in men's clothes, you fat beauty!"

"Listen—listen, Nick—I'll give you the necklace," Prentice chattered. "It's in my pocket—you can have it!"

He was sure Torrington was Nick Trout. Evidently he had heard of the super-thief, but had never seen him. The actor glared at him.

A subtle expectancy in the attitude of the precious couple puzzled Torrington. Some sixth sense warned him of danger.

He watched them narrowly.

Then a voice behind him ordered sharply, "Drop that rod—put your hands up!"

TORRINGTON dared a swift glance over his shoulder. There stood the maid, two feet away, pointing a gun at him. She could not possibly miss. He dropped his weapon and elevated his hands.

Stupid of him. Anybody working in an establishment of thieves like this one was worth watching. He had completely overlooked danger from the blonde maid. That one glance told him that she was dressed for the street and the look in her light blue eyes convinced him that she could not be trifled with.

"Step to your right!" she commanded curtly. "Move—move!"

He obeyed, and she walked over and picked his weapon from the floor. Then she turned her attention to Prentice.

"Get out that necklace and put it on the table!"

Apparently the order astonished

him, but he obeyed promptly. She took the necklace and thrust it into her blouse.

"Now be good everybody — stay right where you are! Anybody let's out a yip is asking for the undertaker!"

Mrs. Prentice shrieked suddenly, "Betty—wait for us! We'll go along with you!" And she made one impetuous step, overturning a chair in her haste.

The look in the maid's eyes became feral and deadly. "You stay where you are, you fat fool! And don't do that again unless you're tired of living. I'd just as lief put a slug in you as not!"

The ingratitude and disloyalty made Mrs. Prentice jump. She cried out, "You doublecrosser! You—"

Betty took one long stride toward her, and instantly Mrs. Prentice froze into frightened silence.

Betty asked, low, "What did you say?" and waited, her finger crooked on the trigger. "Open your mug once more and I'll blast it!"

Slowly she moved backward toward the door. "Remember now," she cautioned ominously, "the first one pokes his nose outa that door gets a chunk of lead!"

Reaching behind her, she turned the knob, stepped back and vanished, closing the door softly.

At once Prentice started after her. He paused and asked Torrington, "You aren't gonna let her get away, are you, Nick?" He rushed toward the door without waiting for a reply.

With two long bounds the actor overtook him. He smashed Prentice to the floor with a solid punch.

Slowly Prentice sat up. He seemed dazed. Through bleeding lips he protested, "You got any idea what that necklace is worth, Nick? I wanted to

get it and split with you. Maybe we can still catch her!"

"Don't worry about her," said Torrington. "I'm not Nick Trout, you swine."

"You aren't?" The crook's bloody face held a bewildered expression. "I thought you were Four-finger Nick. What are you—a dick?"

There was a banging on the door; then it opened wide. Betty came in. Behind her was the propelling power of a strong-armed plainclothesman; behind him came two others. Betty's blond wig was awry, disclosing a shock of brown hair, darker in color than the wig.

One of the officers explained, "She tried to pull a gat, Mr. Torrington, so we had to muss her up a bit. Only she isn't a 'she'—she's a 'he'!"

Torrington stared at the maid. "Nick Trout! You damned weasel!" He growled, "What a female impersonator!"

Nick said proudly, "Say, didja think you were the only good actor in this town, Torrington?" He added, "You never thought I could put on an act like that, did you? Know when I got wise you was following me? I saw you on the stairs in that John Street building—that fireman's uniform didn't fool me for a minit. But I fooled you, didn't I?"

One of the officers put handcuffs on him.

Torrington took off his spectacles and walked over to Prentice. He said, "I'll take that seven hundred I gave you for the ring—and here's your ring."

"Nothing doing — got to leave everything as is." A detective interposed between them.

Prentice said, "It's his money—I'm willing to give it to him."

"Can't allow it," the detective in-

sisted. He looked quizzically at Torrington. "Pretty good disguise, all right. Takes an actor."

"Didn't fool me," Trout bragged. "I knew who he was as soon as he came in."

"You didn't, did you?" Torrington's grim glance rested on Prentice. "I'm John Torrington, the man whose mother you murdered, you murderous rat!"

"Take it easy, Mr. Torrington," a detective said soothingly. Another put a detaining hand on Torrington's shoulder.

Prentice wilted, shrank back. He said, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Oh, yes you do," Trout broke in unexpectedly. "Heard you two shootin' your mouths off about it." His voice rose to a very creditable falsetto. "You shouldn't talk secrets in front of your help."

The jeweler glared bitterly at his wife. "You sure pick your maids good, don't you?"

"Like you pick your guests," she shrilled back at him.

Nick stood there grinning malevolently at them. He didn't have their reason for worrying. All he could be accused of was trying to rob a couple of other crooks—and he might beat the rap by turning state's evidence.

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Phoney Buyers

This is a sweet little swindle, and for a long time was a splendid revenue to the men who started it. Gradually more and more of the get-rich-quick gentry heard about it, and the field became overcrowded. But unlike many similar rackets, it has not been done to death, and is lying fallow until the advent of an administration that isn't so hard on the smart boys.

Let us say you are in the candy business — your advertisement appears in the papers. You receive a letter or a postal-card from Smith & Jones, Resident Buyers, requesting you to call and bring samples of your commodity. You call at the time specified, and are ushered into an office where a curt, business-like individual listens to your story and gradually unbends as you explain the good points of your product. After a while, the man behind the desk becomes quite cordial and friendly. He tells you to leave your samples, and he'll call you after he has had an opportunity to examine them. Incidentally, he explains that his firm does the buying for thousands of stores in the South and Middle West — some in the farther West, too. When you leave his presence, a warm, optimistic feeling permeates you. You have found the outlet you were looking for. This firm of resident buyers, for a reasonable commission that is half of what you pay a salesman, will represent you all over the country.

Fine so far.

In a few days along comes the letter you expect. Your merchandise is quite good—in fact the writer likes it and wishes to talk to you about it if you will call at such and such a time.

Promptly on the minute you present yourself, trying not to beam. Yes, Mr. Jones, of Smith & Jones, to whom your goods were shown, thinks they're just what the firm has been looking for. They're going in to exploit them heavily for you. All they want is their commission on any merchandise they sell.

Oh yes—there's going to be the postage on the twenty-five or fifty thousand letters they're going to send out to all their correspondents, with your prospectus in it. They send out their letters by first-class mail—about two hundred dollars will cover it. And you'll be kind enough to send Smith & Jones enough circulars so there won't be any delay.

You come across with that two hundred dollars—and you might as well kiss it goodbye. Your circulars are sent out, it's true! Post Office inspectors can't be treated lightly—they'll come around and ask questions if a complaint is made. But your circulars and the circulars of half a dozen other dupes like yourself are put into one envelope—and sent as printed matter—cheap, oh so cheap. There is a nice little profit on the transaction for Smith & Jones, and where is your kick? You say the two hundred was to cover first-class mail? It's your word against the word of Smith & Jones. It was mailed to the stores in the South and Middle West—and farther West, too. They have the list, and inquiry of any of the names will confirm their statement—if the recipients of the circulars happen to remember.

Yes, once in a blue moon you may even receive an inquiry from one of the stores. Manna once came down from heaven, too.

COMPLETE NOVEL
HOUSE OF HATE

by
Alan Beek



It might have been a simple case of murder during a burglary. But the house was so filled with hate that Chief Draper felt sure there must be more to it than that.

CHAPTER I

“**T**HERE ought to be a law forbiddin’ murderers to start workin’ before nine a. m.” Chief Sam Draper stretched

and yawned prodigiously. “Reckon I’m gittin’ old, Paul—I’m beginnin’ to think it’s ’bout time I retired.” “Why don’t you?” Lieutenant Leroy glanced at him without sympathy. “You always said you wanted

to be a farmer—what's keeping you? Give another guy a chance. The way you're going on, you'll last forever!" He added, "You were never intended to be a cop, and I'm here to tell it!"

"Dunno as you were, either—if I recollect right, you started out to be a doctor, didn't you, Paul?"

Leroy grunted. He was the chief's first cousin, and the two bore a distinct resemblance to each other. Both were stalwart men of almost exactly the same height, with well-shaped heads covered by wiry brown hair. But there the resemblance ended. Draper's brown crop was interspersed with gray, and his brown eyes were wearily humorous, with crow's feet radiating from them. Leroy, fifteen years younger, had fiery blue orbs which revealed a quick temper.

"At least," Leroy said disparagingly, "I wouldn't fall asleep when I was on a murder case. And I wouldn't shave one side of my face clean and the other not any!"

"One side," Draper murmured, "is for my wife, t'other's for my business."

They had just brought Draper's maroon sedan to a stop opposite the Slater house, and had gotten out to stand staring at the ancient structure: rock-faced masonry, brick chimneys, woodwork hewn and squared . . . an old-fashioned colonial building that pre-dated Richardson's Romanesque treatment, and was completely American. It had stood there for ninety years.

"Queer gang live in there," Leroy commented. "They sure go out of their way to make each other miserable!"

Draper nodded. "Greg Slater was one of the richest men in the county. Only saw him on the street yester-

day afternoon—looked like he might live to be a hundred!"

Leroy said suddenly, "There's Matt Quinlan — I'd call him our suspect number one!"

A young man wearing glasses waved to them from the porch.

"That," the lieutenant went on, "is the nephew Greg Slater pulled out of college the last year of his engineering course—wouldn't let him finish. Rotten thing to do if you ask me. I suppose the old geezer couldn't afford it—down to his last million maybe. I'll bet when he died, he still had the first dollar he ever made! If there's anybody in the world hated Greg Slater, it was his nephew, Matt Quinlan!"

"He had more reasons than you know, mebbe!" Draper's eyes closed reminiscently, then popped open again. "To git Greg started in business, nigh thirty years ago it was, a lot of his relatives and his wife's put in money—and none of 'em ever got a dollar back. Matt's father was one of 'em!"

They went up on the porch and shook hands with the young fellow.

Matt said urgently, "Better come right in—Aunt Martha's been expecting you." He led the way.

A somewhat shapeless woman whose dyed black hair was betrayed by neglected gray strands, sat in a rocker staring out of the window. She said querulously, "You took a long time getting here, Chief. Matt, you'd better start right down to the office now, and take charge until things can be arranged. And I hope you realize your responsibility—it's about time, I think."

Matt's lips half-opened in an irritable snarl, and Draper said mildly, "He'd better stay here till we git through askin' a few questions. Won't take long, ma'am. I'm right

sorry about this—know jest how you feel.”

“Why does he have to stay here?” she demanded, immediately angry. “What good can he do? He doesn’t know anything about it.”

“Now, now”—Draper’s smile and tone were soothing—“we got to find out for ourselves. Won’t take no longer’n we have to. Now, Matt, if you’ll—”

“I suppose”—her voice was high and corrosive—“you’re going to be officious and arrogant . . . instead of making it easier for us, you’ll probably add to our difficulties—and accomplish nothing in the end! As though we haven’t trouble enough already!”

A small fire had begun to show in Leroy’s eyes. He said, “Now look here, Mrs. Slater—”

She broke in on him without ceremony.

“There’s nothing mysterious about this whole thing except how the burglar got into a locked room—or climbed up a straight wall two stories high. Greg was foolish risking his life for a watch, a ring and a few dollars. But it was a burglar, that’s certain, I should think—and the quicker you get busy trying to find him, the better. You’ll only waste a lot of time questioning Matt, or me, or anybody else in this house. Or perhaps you think one of us did it?”

Draper said stolidly, “Ain’t had no chance to make up my mind, ma’am!”

“I wouldn’t be surprised” — Mrs. Slater gave the impression she was talking to herself, but her words were audible — “if the man didn’t suspect me!”

Draper drawled coolly, “Well, we gotta begin by suspectin’ everybody—and work from there.”

He had been up almost the entire night, keeping the lid down on the festivities in the foreign quarter of the town, and this was only eight in the morning. He felt tired, and this woman was trying.

“Be obliged if you’d show us where he is, Matt,” he said to the nephew.

CHAPTER II

“THIS is the library — Uncle Greg used it as a study, too.” Matt threw the door open, and the three men walked in.

They found themselves in a large, square room, two stories above the ground, lined with filled bookcases along the south, east and west sides, their alignment broken at regular intervals by windows. A brown leather couch stood against the wall on the south side. At the opposite end was the desk, midway between the door and a window overlooking the tennis courts and, beyond it, the golf course. Of them all, this window alone was open.

On the floor near the couch lay the body of Gregory Slater, covered with a sheet.

“As I told you over the phone”—Matt kept his eyes away from the corpse as he spoke—“this door was locked. We can’t understand how the burglar got in, unless he had a key.”

“Killed him, then went out and locked the door.” Draper shook his head. “Have to be a cool one to do that. Still . . .”

Matt went on, “When Thomas smashed the door down, this window was open just the way you see it. But it doesn’t seem possible the murderer could have gotten in through the window.”

Draper walked to the open win-

dow and looked out, Leroy behind him. Sheer wall to the ground.

"Have to be plumb spry to do that," he muttered. "Take a monkey to do it—or to git into this window from any other. Did this here Thomas find all them other windows closed?"

"Yes, sir — closed and latched. Uncle Greg was afraid of drafts."

The chief's head was still out of the window. Suddenly the glass panel above him crashed into splinters, and he drew back quickly. He was conscious of hearing a faint report somewhere outside, and a thud against the opposite wall. Looking there, he saw where the bullets had smashed into the wood above the door.

"Why, damn it, someone's trying to shoot you, Sam!" Leroy rushed impetuously toward the window, but Draper's long arm reached out and stopped him.

"You hankerin' to git a chunk of lead agin your dome?" He grinned. "Likely it wouldn't go through, but it might make a dent!"

Crouching so that his head was level with the sill, he looked out across the tennis courts and the golf course. "Don't see a durned livin' thing," he murmured. "What's that there green and white cottage? Ain't that where Cliff Sherman lives?"

"Cliff Sherman and his daughter Ethel," Matt told him, looking perplexed and frightened.

"It's on the Slater property, isn't it?" asked Leroy.

Matt nodded. "They live there rent free."

"That so?" The lieutenant's surprise was obvious. "What made Greg Slater get so generous?"

"Well"—the young fellow spoke with reluctance — "from what I've

been able to gather—my uncle never confided in me, you know—there was a very good reason. It seems—"

They were standing to one side when the second bullet whiffed by. Like the first, it was high. It went through without breaking any more glass, and struck the wall a foot above the last one.

Instantly Leroy turned and shot through the door and down the stairs, with Draper right after him. They raced across the tennis courts and the golf course with a speed amazing for such big men. Leroy's gun was in his hand.

"This is about where them bullets came from," Draper panted when they reached a thin fringe of trees on the farther edge of the golf course.

They made a thorough search all around and straight through to the fence separating the course from the summer camp adjoining, but found nothing.

"Whoever done the shootin'," Draper said reflectively, "jest didn't have time to wait around and say hello! You better keep your eyes peeled, Paul—a chunk of lead'd go through you jest as quick as it would through a plain policeman." He chuckled.

"What's funny about it?" gritted Leroy. "He was trying to kill you. Let's go over and see who's in Cliff Sherman's house — it might have come from there."

When they reached the cottage, however, they found both the front and rear doors locked. As seen through the windows, the rooms appeared to be empty, and hammering on the door brought no response.

Draper said thoughtfully, "If some lunatic's loose with a rifle, it's a-goin' to be more dangerous walkin' back than comin' here. But we can't stay

here no longer—don't seem to be no use—and we got things to do back there."

They kept looking over their shoulders, but they reached the Slater house without having to dodge any more bullets. Mrs. Slater met them at the door.

"What's going on?" she demanded snappishly. "Who's shooting? It sounds like the Wild West! We certainly get fine police protection in this town, I must say. First Greg is murdered, and then they actually stay around and shoot at the chief of police—in broad daylight! They must certainly be afraid of you, Chief!" Her laugh was high and sardonic.

"They sure must be — they ran, didn't they?" He grinned at Leroy. "Mebbe it's you they're afraid of, Paul." More gravely he went on: "I'll put a couple of men down here, Mrs. Slater, until sech time as we git somewhere with our investigations. Dunno whether the shootin' had anythin' to do with the murder — more like some younker is prowlin' around with his pop's gun. It came from somewhere near the Sherman place."

"I wouldn't blame Cliff Sherman if he did shoot at us!" Her tone was bitter.

Draper looked at her questioningly.

"Because," she continued, "Greg not only robbed Cliff of his half interest in the paper mills—I'll tell the truth even if it means he might make a claim on the estate—but he even refused to lend him five hundred dollars last night. A trifle like five hundred dollars when, if Cliff got what was due him, he'd have hundreds of thousands—half of everything Greg had in the world!"

Through placid brown eyes Draper made his appraisal of her. "Then,

seems like you suspect it might be Cliff Sherman, that it?"

"Now, Aunt Martha"—Matt was standing behind her—"you surely don't want to give the chief the impression it was Cliff Sherman who murdered Uncle Greg, do you?"

The round grey eyes she turned on her nephew blazed with anger and dislike. "I'll give him any impression I think right, and I don't need you to censor my speech, young man! I said I woudn't blame Cliff if he did, and that's exactly what I mean! That's my opinion! And you know very well you didn't like your Uncle Greg any more than Cliff did — so don't be a hypocrite, Matt Quinlan!"

"I'm not a hypocrite — I just said—"

"You just said—you're always saying something you shouldn't!" She turned and pushed past him and walked inside, while the two police officers gazed after her interestedly. Then they followed.

Draper said, his eyes on Matt's gloomy features, "Don't take it to heart, young feller. Woman's tongue may be vinegar, and her heart sweet!"

"Oh yes!" Matt's grimace was expressive. "That's Aunt Martha—I don't think."

"We'll talk to her some more later —if she lets us git a word in sideways," the chief decided. "Let's go upstairs now—Matt, you come along with us."

CHAPTER III

 PENING the door of the library, Draper went directly to the still body on the floor. He knelt and lifted the sheet aside.

He had strong nerves, but the grotesque, shattered wreck of what had been a living human being brought

a sick look to the chief's seamed, wholesome face. Greg Slater's body lay flat on its back, one arm partly under the couch, the other by his side. The battered mass of bone, blood and gray matter above the neck bore little resemblance to a human head.

"Looks like the work of a maniac!" Leroy was white.

"Someone crazy mad — kept on hackin' and hackin'," Draper murmured. He looked up. "You know Cliff Sherman, Paul—can you see him doin' a thing like this?"

Leroy shrugged uncertainly. "He isn't what he used to be, Sam. Cliff was a big man in these parts once—guess you know that better than I do. Owned one of the biggest paper mills in the state, and a lot of property. He's broke now—he's a changed man. Someone told me—I don't remember who—something about him and Greg Slater being partners without any written agreement. . . ."

"Greg had a knack of makin' folks trust him and give him money, without nothin' to show for it." Draper covered the body and rose. "Yeah, I remember what happened: Greg jest took over the mills, and Cliff stopped comin' near them. There was a reason . . . seemed like Cliff was to blame, but now I know he wasn't . . . jest a plumb easy-goin', big-hearted fool! He ain't the murderin' kind!"

"Still, that shooting. . . ." Leroy looked troubled. "It certainly did seem to come from the direction of the Sherman place. Maybe he's gone loco, Sam — maybe he's wandering around with a gun and shooting at this place because he hates the Slaters!"

"Might be—there ain't no tellin' what a man's like to do when his mind goes." Draper took out his handkerchief, then bent and picked

up a blackjack lying in the crevice between the seat of the couch and the back. It was a flexible, wicked-looking weapon, and it was still sticky with blood and matter. He called to Matt, who was standing near the window at the other end of the room, "Notice this here, Matt?" He held up the weapon.

Matt said, "Yes—Thomas found it. He was handling it—I told him to put it down."

"Better keep away from that window, Matt," Leroy suggested. He said to Draper, "Careful how you handle that, Sam—fingerprints."

Draper's forehead was wrinkled with thought. "Funny thing to do, ain't it? Beat a man to death, and leave the weapon lyin' around?"

"Why is it funny? If a burglar got in somehow, why shouldn't he leave the damn thing here? He'd be a fool to hold on to it, and risk having it found on him." Leroy snorted scornfully.

"Yeah, if it was a burglar!" Draper sighed. "Lotta hate around here, Paul, lotta hard feelin'!" He wrapped the blackjack carefully in the handkerchief. "Let's go downstairs — mebbe Mrs. Slater's over her tantrum." A faint grin spread over his face. "Must be fun livin' with a woman like that, hey, Paul? Do you s'pose Greg Slater is any wuss off now than when he was alive?"

"I wouldn't put this job past her," Leroy muttered. "She's a pretty hefty woman—and what a temper!"

"Big, but flabby. She could git mad quick enough, but she'd use a gun, I'm thinkin', not a blackjack. She could've had an accomplice, though." He glanced toward Matt and lowered his voice. "Long time ago, when her hair was real black 'stead of bein' dyed, she left Greg and went to live with Cliff and his

ma. That was before Cliff was married . . . the easy-goin' dumbbell made his ma take her in. Greg swore Cliff had stole her . . . and Cliff jest stopped comin' to the mills. Kin you beat it?"

"Takes a woman to make a fool out of a man, doesn't it?" Leroy looked disgusted. "Cliff must be a bigger sap than I thought he was."

"He's right sensitive, that's his trouble. There was folks a-plenty ready to b'lieve the worst, o' course—'specially after Cliff jest left the mills to Greg. Years later, Cliff went broke—still is, I reckon. Lost all his real estate. Then Greg got big-hearted and let him come here—him and his darter Ethel—and live here rent free in that summer cottage. I know Ethel tried to find work—fine gal, that Ethel—don't come no finer. Cliff's up agin it purty bad, purty bad!"

"I heard a good deal of that before . . . with a grudge like that festering inside of him. . . ." Leroy shook his head soberly. "I'll bet he's gone crazy and is prowling around with a rifle. That's my hunch—see if I'm not right. The sooner we get hold of him the better—he'll be killing someone else if we don't stop him. And remember, he had a quarrel with Greg Slater about that loan of five hundred dollars last night—you heard what Mrs. Slater said. She's a pill, but she's telling the truth, I'll bet. Cliff Sherman's our man, Sam!"

Draper's eyes glinted with amusement. "You sure have an imagination, Paul! Now it's gone and taken one long, runnin' jump—and there's Cliff Sherman murderin' Greg, and runnin' wild with a rifle! And you ain't even seen him yet. Hold them hosses, Paul—they're runnin' away!"

He led the way back to where Matt

sat perched on the desk. Matt turned when they approached.

"This jest how Thomas found the room, do you know?" the chief asked.

"Well, no—not exactly!" The grey eyes that squinted behind thick glasses seemed to be frank and direct. "When he broke the door down, my aunt was with him—she's the one called him—and she went right in after him. You see, Uncle Greg hadn't been in his room all night, and that got her worried. I heard the screaming, and I came up on the run—as you can imagine."

"What time was all this?"

"Oh just before seven this morning—less than two hours ago. I remember looking at my watch a minute before that—I get up at seven to go to the mill office."

"Sleep downstairs, do you?"

"Yes, on the ground floor. My room is directly under this one—that is, my aunt's and uncle's room is under this one, on the second floor, and then comes mine on the ground floor."

"Ain't told me yet," Draper said, "whether this is jest how you found this room?"

"I was going to. No, it isn't. When I came in, Thomas had picked up a few overturned chairs, and books that had been thrown on the floor. He says it looked as though there had been a fight. Of course when Aunt Martha discovered the body, he stopped cleaning up. He shouldn't have touched anything, I know, but in the first place he didn't see the body immediately, and in the second, it's just a habit with him to put things to rights. From what he said, there must have been a struggle all the way down the room from the desk to where my uncle is lying now."

"Not a sign of anything like that now," Leroy commented frowningly.

"Floor scratched here and there—see them scratches on the floor—in front of the rug and on the side of it. Looks like he was wearin' house shoes with heels and got dragged all the way down."

"Dragged?" Matt looked puzzled.

"Yep—dragged. Didn't notice was the rug pulled back—and which way?" His gaze was suddenly keen.

"No," said Matt. "When I came in, Thomas had the place pretty well fixed up—at least the rug was flat down."

The chief's eyes were still boring into Matt. "You'n your uncle wasn't exactly friends, am I right?"

"No!" The young fellow's glance did not waver. He said quietly, again, "No!" Then resentment swept his features like a high wind. "How could I feel friendly toward him — after what he did to me? Ruined my career—pulled me out of college the last year of my course! After three years of hard work—I wanted to be an engineer! I pleaded with him, and all the answer I got was that he couldn't afford it, that he'd give me a job in his mill office." He got off the desk and stood there, his form rigid, his fists clenched. "I hated him and I don't care who knows it! I didn't kill him, but I'm glad he's dead. He deserved what he got. He didn't give a damn about anybody but himself!"

After the outburst, he turned away and stared out of the window, while the two police officers watched him speculatively.

Draper suggested softly, "Mebbe you're glad, but it's sorta rough on your aunt, ain't it?"

"Is it?" He turned about to face the chief, an unpleasant little smile on his lips. "If you think she's

brokenhearted, you're very much mistaken!"

"You're a mighty loving family," Leroy commented dryly. "Why in hell do you stick together under the same roof if you feel that way?"

Matt's glance flicked him briefly. "You haven't had to try and get a job lately, have you? He had the money—that gave him the whip hand over all of us. All of us—me, my aunt, everybody else in the house."

CHAPTER IV

"IT'S STICKIN' in my mind, Mrs. Slater," the chief remarked, "that there's some kind of a nut loose outside with a rifle and a hankerin' to use it. That shootin' came from over Cliff Sherman's way. You got any ideas about it?"

"No!" She still wore the green peignoir in which the chief had first seen her that morning, a large, flabby woman with hating greenish-grey eyes. The corners of her mouth drooped. "I told you I wouldn't blame Cliff if he did feel like shooting up this house. If you were in his place, you'd feel a little violent, too. But I don't think it was Cliff who got into the library last night; he's not the kind to walk off with a ring, a watch and a wallet, like a common pickpocket."

"You was sayin' somethin' 'bout a quarrel between Cliff Sherman and your husband over five hundred dollars. . . ."

"Oh, why go over that again? You keep asking the same thing. Yes, Cliff came here to ask Greg for a loan of five hundred dollars, and Greg refused. If my brother—I don't think you've met him—Captain Lee Quinlan—if he hadn't been around, there would have been a fight right

then and there. I wish," she said bitterly, "that there had been! Some of these muscular men who indulge their tempers when it's safe, might benefit by an occasional thrashing!"

Her face looked as though she had swallowed something sour. In contrast with her body, her features suddenly seemed haggard.

"Now about this quarrel, ma'am"—Draper's tone was gentle but insistent—"could you tell me a leetle more about it?"

"How long are you going to keep this up, Chief? Oh, all right . . . it seems Ethel hasn't been able to find any work . . . she's Cliff's daughter, I suppose you know that. Although Cliff has that cottage rent-free, I suppose he naturally needs money for other things—clothing and food and things like that. Anyhow, he came over to ask Greg to lend him five hundred dollars."

"And your husband refused!"

"Yes—and very insultingly! He practically called Cliff a beggar. Then Cliff reminded him that he was really entitled to a half interest in the mills—which by the way is the truth, and I'll say so even if it means Cliff will make a claim against the estate." She paused and the color flooded slowly into her cheeks. "I suppose everybody knows about it, even though they pretend they don't. I was young and high-strung, and Greg—well, he was just Greg! To anybody who knows him, that's quite enough. He could be very pleasant when it served his purpose, but to those dependent on him, he was arrogant and harsh. Well, anyhow, we didn't get along almost from the first day we were married. I left him and went to Cliff's home—his mother took me in. There was nothing wrong, whether you believe it or not."

"Don't seem nothin' wrong to me

—leastways far's Cliff was concerned," Draper murmured.

"Greg just chose to misconstrue it, that's all. He blamed Cliff. As though I could ever fall in love with a holier-than-thou, tepid little man like Cliff Sherman!"

The chief nodded understandingly. "Was Cliff in love with you?"

"No, of course not! But Greg accused us both—he accused Cliff of stealing me! He let it become public—he disgraced me. Like the sentimental, romantic half-wit he is, Cliff just stopped coming to the mill, and Greg took it over—in a little while he got so that he felt he owned it outright. I suppose it didn't matter so much to Cliff then, because he had plenty besides the mill. But now he's broke, penniless, and he certainly went into a rage when Greg refused to lend him five hundred dollars!"

"And your husband let him live in that cottage rent-free, did he?"

Her lips curled in a vinegary smile. "Kind of my husband, wasn't it? Considering he really owes Cliff hundreds of thousands! And don't think he didn't have it in mind that Cliff might get a notion to sue him."

"Do you think"—Draper asked the question bluntly — "that Cliff came back last night, after the quarrel, and killed your husband?"

She stared at him a long moment. Then she said, "How do I know? He was angry enough to do anything when I saw him. But how could he have gotten up into the library — it's on the second floor, and there's no way of climbing up there that I can see? We keep the outside door locked at night, naturally."

"Well, if someone opened the outside door for him—if he got into the house somehow—he could 'a' gone right upstairs and—"

"It wouldn't have done him any good even then," she interrupted. "Greg had the door of the library locked—he had a special lock put on there, and whenever he wanted to be alone or got into one of his sulks — they lasted for weeks sometimes — he'd go into that library, and Thomas would even have to bring his meals up there. I tried the door before I went to bed, about half an hour after Cliff left, and it was locked then. I think someone came in through that one window he always keeps open—though I don't see how."

The next question came abruptly. "Have you got a key to the library?"

"No, of course not!" Her eyes became murky. "Are you suspecting me of killing him?"

"Didn't say that, ma'am, didn't say that. Jest askin' questions. Did Cliff accuse your husband right out of cheatin' him?"

"Yes, he did just that—and it was no news to Greg."

"Was you there when Cliff went away?"

"Yes. My brother and I. They argued about it for an hour, but it didn't do Cliff a bit of good. Cliff went away about eleven o'clock. After that, my brother, Captain Quinlan, went up to his room, and I stayed with Greg a few minutes and. . ."

Draper waited for her to finish. When she didn't, he asked, "Had a quarrel with your husband after they left, I reckon?"

"I told him just what I thought of him—and it wasn't the first time I've done it, either. But you needn't waste any of your precious suspicions on me—I didn't kill him."

"Jest when was it you found out he'd been murdered?"

"This morning. You keep on asking the same questions over and over

again. I didn't sleep well—I tossed around a good deal last night — nobody in this house sleeps well. When I woke up, I could see his bed hadn't been slept in, and I went upstairs to look for him. I tried the door of the library, and it was locked, so I knew he must be inside —he keeps the key in his pocket." She caught herself and was silent a moment. "I keep talking as though he's still alive—I don't seem able to realize yet"—her face became bitterly sardonic—"that I'm a widow—a grief-stricken widow!"

"You was sayin' you found the door locked?"

"Yes. I knocked and knocked and got no reply. I called Thomas and he broke the door down. It was dark in there this morning, and I didn't see him at first because there were chairs in between. Then I saw him and screamed, and Matt came, and my brother. . . ."

"Like you said, ma'am, I never met your brother."

"He's only been living with us two years or so. His name is Lee Quinlan, and he's a retired army captain." She glanced at her nephew, who had come in. "Matt, will you please go upstairs and tell your Uncle Lee to come down and submit to an inquisition? He's got to some time, I suppose, and he might as well get it over with." As Matt still stood motionless: "Or am I asking too much of you?"

"No!" He almost snarled the word, and the queer, myopic eyes behind the glasses shot sparks. "You're not asking too much . . . and don't bother reminding me how much I'm indebted to you. I'm going to get out of here and stay out — even if I starve!" He stalked out of the room.

"Whoa!" murmured Leroy. He looked at Mrs. Slater. "Bad tempers

run in the family, sort of, don't they?"

"If he had any spirit, he'd have left long ago. Well—now I suppose you think perhaps Matt is the murderer! And perhaps you're right. When he gets into one of his rages . . . but I don't have to make you suspicious, do I? You have your own ideas, no doubt."

"Got to find out more about this case, before we git any ideas, Mrs. Slater—there's a lot we don't know about it yet."

"I thought," she said smoothly, "that you police knew everything? Everything, I mean, except who commits crimes."

Leroy snapped indignantly, "If you think you can do a better job than Chief Draper, why don't you ask to be made chief of police, Mrs. Slater? You seem to have done so well running your own home, maybe you could make a better job of the police department than he has."

Mrs. Slater smiled at him grimly. "You have quite a temper yourself, haven't you, Mr. Leroy? May I suggest that you save it to vent on your wife—she's probably accustomed to it."

"I don't happen to have a wife — and what I've seen here don't make me feel like I want one."

Draper put a restraining hand on Leroy's arm. He said, "A wise man don't try to get the last word arguin' with a lady. Now be still."

Leroy grumbled, "I'm not a wise man."

Mrs. Slater bit her lip; a half-smile stole over her face. She counted softly, "One, two, three, four . . ." Then she leaned back and closed her eyes tiredly. "Mother used to tell me to do that," she murmured, "such a long time ago. You ought to try it, Mr. Leroy!"

CHAPTER V

"**H**ERE'S Thomas — I thought you might want to talk to him." Matt reentered the room, with the butler following. "Uncle Lee is having his breakfast—he said he'd be here pretty soon."

"Be obliged if you'd telephone the coroner," Draper said to Matt. He gave him the telephone number, and the young fellow started out. "And Tim with his camera," Draper called after him. He looked at the butler, a tall, lean man, with unusually long, powerful arms. "You're Thomas, hey?"

"Thomas Freestone, sir."

Draper repeated the name softly. He probed the still blue eyes looking unwaveringly into his. "Where do you sleep, Thomas?"

"My room is on the top floor — in the attic — next to Captain Quinlan's."

"When was it Mrs. Slater called you?"

"About seven o'clock, sir. I went downstairs and tried the door of the library—it was locked. Mrs. Slater told me to break it down and I did. It's not a heavy door."

"And then what?"

"Well, sir, the room seemed to be considerably upset — chairs on the floor and books. I began picking them up and putting them into place — it's a matter of habit with me."

"Are you tryin' to tell me you broke down this door, got into the room and saw signs of a struggle — and instead of lookin' for Slater, you started pickin' up chairs and books?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across the butler's features. "I've had to do that before, sir. Mr. Slater frequently took it out on the furniture. You must remember it was quite

dark—and I had no idea there had been a murder.”

“And then what happened?”

“Mrs. Slater saw the—er—the body, sir. Then of course I ran over to her. I saw the weapon at once.”

“The blackjack? What did you do with it?”

“I picked it up, sir—I suppose now that I shouldn’t have. I—well, I hefted it, if you know what I mean. I realize now I shouldn’t have touched it.”

“So,” said Draper, his eyes stabbing at the man, “it will be your fingerprints I’m a-goin’ to find on the blackjack—is that it?”

“Very likely, sir.” He bore the chief’s gaze without wavering. “Mr Matt came in and told me I’d better put it down.”

“Who else was in the house at the time?”

“I presume the cook, and Kathryn, the maid-of-all-work — they must have been in the kitchen. We have no other help but the gardener, who stays in the lodge. We haven’t had a chauffeur in a long time.”

“Greg insisted that Thomas act as chauffeur—and butler, too,” Mrs. Slater interposed dryly.

“I see!” Draper nodded slowly. “That cause any hard feelin’ between you and your boss, Thomas?”

“Well—I didn’t feel it was what I had hired out to do—and in fact, I declined to do it,” Thomas said. He added, “Mr. Slater threatened to discharge me, but I believe Mrs. Slater dissuaded him.”

“And you was pretty sore on account of that, hey?”

Thomas said evenly, “He continued to pay my wages, and I did my work—satisfactorily, I believe.”

Draper switched the questioning abruptly. “Did you try the door of

the library last night, before you went to bed?”

“Yes, sir—about half an hour after Mr. Sherman left. That would be about half-past eleven. It was locked.”

“Any light in it at the time—that you could see?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’ll be all now,” Draper said curtly. “Stick around—I may want you again.”

After the butler had gone through the door, Leroy muttered, “He messed those fingerprints on purpose!”

“It sure is a long breakfast Captain Quinlan is havin’,” Draper remarked to Mrs. Slater.

She went to the door, opened it and called, “Lee! Can you come in here, please?”

A cheerful, incisive voice replied, “Coming in a minute, Martha!”

Mrs. Slater resumed her seat.

Leroy said, “That butler’s story doesn’t click with me. He isn’t so dumb but what he knew he shouldn’t handle that blackjack. Comes down, breaks open a door — and starts picking up chairs and books, with a dead man lying on the floor!”

Draper replied in an undertone, “It was purty dark this mornin’, Paul. Settin’ things to order gits to be a habit with a feller like him.” He added reflectively, loud enough for Mrs. Slater to hear: “But it gits me how the murderer got in. Couldn’t ‘a’ climbed up to the winder ‘thout a ladder, and the door was locked, ‘cordin’ to what you all say. Unless somebody had a key. . . .” His eyes dwelt absently on Mrs. Slater.

Instantly she demanded, “What are you insinuating?”

A lean man of fifty, with a thin, ascetic face, military carriage and graying black hair, entered the room.

Mrs. Slater said, "This is my brother, Captain Lee Quinlan—Chief Draper and" — she finished tartly — "his subordinate."

"Lieutenant Leroy," grinned Draper.

CHAPTER VI

THE THREE shook hands, while Leroy threw a dark glance in Mrs. Slater's direction.

Captain Quinlan remarked gravely, "Pretty terrible thing to happen, isn't it, Chief? You read of things like that in the papers — don't realize how terrible they are until they come home to you. And I've seen men die—I was across, you know—but somehow it didn't hit me like this."

You don't seem to feel so bad about it, thought the chief. Aloud he said, "You was there when that quarrel happened between Mr. Slater and Cliff Sherman last night, wasn't you, Captain?"

"Yes. They had quite a set-to! I think Cliff would have taken a poke at Greg, if I hadn't intervened."

"That so? And after the scrap, Cliff went away, did he?"

"Yes — but he came back, you know!"

Mrs. Slater's swift gasp was audible. Both police officers tensed and sat up alertly.

"You didn't tell me that," Mrs. Slater said accusingly.

"I haven't had a chance to. He came back about an hour after he left. I saw him through the window of my room and called to him — in fact, I went down and opened the door for him. He came upstairs with me and knocked at the door of the library, and Greg opened it. I was tired—didn't stick around—I went

up to bed. I figured if they wanted to fight it out, it was their affair. Greg seemed to me big enough to take care of a little fellow like Cliff Sherman, and I didn't think Cliff acted as if he were feeling violent any more."

Draper's eyes never left Quinlan. He asked, "And did you hear anything after that? Hear when Cliff Sherman went out?"

"No, I fell asleep. As I said, I had no idea Cliff would do a thing like that—if he did—which I very much doubt." Without waiting to be questioned, he went on, "The next I knew was when I heard a commotion—my sister called Thomas, and that woke me—and after that came the screaming and the noise. I ran down—and saw." His eyes dwelt commiseratingly on his sister. "How're you feeling now, Martha? You ought to try and take a nap."

"I'm feeling all right—thank you, Lee."

This was the first amiable interchange the two police officers had heard in that house.

"You and your brother-in-law — Greg Slater—git along all right?" asked Draper.

"Well—yes, fairly well. I didn't have any feeling against him." Captain Quinlan laughed shortly. "It wasn't easy to like him—but I could see his point of view. He wasn't very happy, either, you know. Had a knack of making himself unpopular—money was by way of being his god. Always treated me right, though—can't complain. I shouldn't wonder but what I'm about the only one who did make allowances for him—maybe it's because I'm older and have seen a little more than the rest—gone through a lot myself."

"Do you think Cliff Sherman mur-

dered Slater?" asked Draper abruptly.

The buzzer sounded, and a moment later the butler ushered in the coroner and the police photographer. Leroy led them upstairs.

After they had gone, Draper repeated his question: "Do you think Cliff Sherman done it, Captain?"

Captain Quinlan shook his head. "Wouldn't be fair to jump to any conclusions—too serious a matter. I can only tell you that I didn't—I'll answer for myself, but not for anybody else. If Cliff did kill Greg, do you suppose he'd have gone out and locked the door behind him? Would he think of that? And where would he get the key? That's rather an unusual lock, you know—Greg had it put on specially, so that no one could come in and bother him when he wanted to be alone or when he got into one of his tantrums."

"You in the regular army?" asked Draper.

"West Point—on the retired list. Hard on a man accustomed to active service."

"Ever see that blackjack before? The one was found next to him?"

"No. If," Captain Quinlan said quietly, "you have any suspicion that I killed my brother-in-law, I can only say that you're on the wrong track. I had nothing against him—he always treated me all right. I believe I'm about the only one he didn't actually dislike, although he was never cordial to anybody."

"Happen to know"—Draper turned to Mrs. Slater—"whether your husband had much cash on him—or anywhere around the room?"

"He always kept a thousand dollars or so on his person—in his wallet. He loved to handle money. The wallet was taken."

Draper asked the next question of

Quinlan. "Notice anything peculiar about Cliff Sherman lately?"

"Well—I always thought he was a little spineless, but he's been showing quite some spirit lately. As I told you, last night he was ready to fight Greg—even though he's about half Greg's size. I imagine it must have been eating him for years—a man with pride is eating poison when he's eating charity. And Cliff feels he's entitled to a half interest in the paper mills. I suppose you know all about that."

"You been living here quite some time yourself, I hear."

"At my sister's invitation—and Greg's!" snapped Captain Quinlan. He rose abruptly. "Now, if you'll excuse me—I'm at your disposal whenever you need me!" He walked out of the room; his sister rose to follow him.

She paused at the door. She said, "I don't like your attitude, nor your methods, nor your insinuations, Chief Draper. Please understand that you are to get out of this house as soon as possible."

A hard, stern look settled on Draper's face. He said, "I'm here in the line of police duty, Mrs. Slater, and not because I enjoy bein' here. When I've finished doin' what I'm supposed to do, I'll leave—and not till then!"

"We'll see about that!" She went out.

He was still standing there, waiting for Leroy to come down and trying to think things out, when Thomas opened the door.

"There's a gentleman on the telephone for you," the butler said. "This way, please!"

Draper followed him to the telephone in the small room adjoining, picked up the instrument and said, "Hello!"

"Chief Draper? This is Senator Binkerd. I understand you're investigating the murder of Greg Slater. That right?"

Draper said, "Yes, Senator. How are you?"

Senator Binkerd was the political leader of the state, and a friend of the governor.

"I'm quite well, thank you. I called to make a suggestion, Chief."

"Glad to have it."

"My suggestion is that you act a little more diplomatically in dealing with the family. Apparently the murderer was a burglar who broke into the house somehow. If that's the case, your investigations should lead you outside, shouldn't they?"

"There's as much likelihood it was done by someone inside as outside, Senator. I ain't been able to decide yet. As for bein' diplomatic, seems like the important thing is to catch the murderer, not to butter folks' tender feelin's. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, but you don't have to make accusations against members of the family, do you? The Slaters are important people in this community, don't you know that?"

"Didn't make no accusation—jest asked questions," Draper stated stolidly.

"There are ways of asking questions, too. Now look here, my dear fellow, just listen and follow my suggestion. Let the family alone and avoid a lot of trouble."

"Sorry, Senator. Reckon I'll have to do what I think's best. So far I ain't even got the least notion how the feller who killed Slater got in. Ain't said one word Mrs. Slater or anybody else got a right to take offense at. Don't see why they're entitled to any different treatment than other folks. One of 'em may be the murderer I'm lookin' for."

"Nonsense! You don't really believe that, do you?"

"Ain't formed no opinion, Senator. I'm here to try and find out. That's what I'm bein' paid for."

"Sounds to me"—the voice became edged—"as though you're trying to make trouble for purely personal reasons."

"No, sir, I ain't! I'm tryin' to find out who murdered Greg Slater. And if folks wear their feelin's on their sleeves, or expect a police officer to kowtow to them, they're due to be disappointed, so far's I'm concerned."

"That so? Well, just chew on this, my friend: I may decide to ask the Governor to investigate your conduct in this matter. You know what that means!" The wire became silent.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Leroy came down, Draper told him what had occurred.

"Looks like you'll git your chance to try your hand bein' chief of police," he said dryly.

"Oh yeah? Well, if they do anything like that, you know what they can do with the job!" Leroy's face flushed, his eyes glittered. "Looks to me as though that dame is awfully anxious to get us out of the house, doesn't it?"

"Might be that—might be she's jest plain cantankerous and stuckup. Can't stand bein' spoken to by a plain police officer 'thout his bowin' to her and sayin' 'Your Majesty'!" Draper grinned. "Anyhow, one thing's pretty sartin: If we don't land the feller who did it by the heels, the senator's goin' to have somethin' to complain about—which means I'll be fired or retired."

"I'd like to . . ." Leroy gritted his teeth. "They're up there doing

their stuff, Sam. I told the coroner to have the body removed, if he thinks it should be. Tim's taking pictures—and getting busy on fingerprints. How about giving him that blackjack?"

"Not yet. Might need it 'fore long. Be time enough later." He shook his head gloomily. "Ain't often I've run across a case where there's a suspect everywhere I turn. Butler, Captain Quinlan, Mrs. Quinlan, Matt—and Cliff Sherman! Looks like any one of 'em would have been glad to do it—given the chance! Never saw so many folks that hated each other under one roof!"

"They're a rotten lot," Leroy said viciously.

"Not rotten—warped. Warped by hatin' too long!" He rose and paced back and forth. "Sticks in my crop there's a feller with a rifle hangin' around somewhere that oughtn't to have one. We'll go outside and have a look around."

"Looks like Cliff Sherman, doesn't it?" Leroy's features set gloomily. "Too bad—his troubles must have driven him crazy. Sorry for that girl of his, Ethel. But one thing puzzles me."

"You got it on me," Draper said. "There's more'n one botherin' me!"

Leroy went on, "From the appearance of the room, the way they describe it, there had been quite a scrap—all the way from the desk down the entire length of the room to that couch. And nobody heard anything!"

"O' course! With a fight like that, there must've been a lot of shoutin', too. Well—we didn't see no signs of this battle, and we only got Thomas's word. Might 'a' been a plant!"

"I thought of that, too. If it's a plant, then it was an inside job, and any one of them, or a couple of them, for that matter, could have

done it: Mrs. Slater, Matt, the butler, Captain Quinlan."

"Captain Quinlan says he was the only one had any use for Greg Slater, and mebbe he's tellin' the truth at that. Then again, mebbe not!"

"With him in it, and leaving Cliff out of it, there are four that hated Slater enough to kill him—from the way they talk. They don't make any bones about it. With Cliff, makes five suspects. Where do we go from here, Sam?"

But Draper followed his own train of thought. "Cliff comes back—looks like they musta quarreled again. Cliff is a little feller—he might've come prepared—brought the blackjack along. They fight and Cliff kills him—that's one solution. Let's try another: Some feller comes in at the winder—dunno how he could, but s'pose he did! Stranger! If Slater saw him, and if he was awake—he musta been if he was at the desk—why didn't he run to the door? He could've opened it fast enough to git out 'fore the feller at the winder got in. Why didn't he holler for help?"

"It didn't happen that way!" Leroy pursed his lips and shook his head incredulously. "That doesn't sound logical, Sam. I'm afraid it was Cliff, all right. Let's go see if he's come home yet."

"Have a look 'round first—before them newspaper fellers hear 'bout this and begin pourin' in."

They stood on the path under the window of the library, two floors above them.

"That's the window was open," Draper muttered. "The only one." He stepped back and began examining the ground. Suddenly he grinned and pointed. He said, "Look, Paul! Musta been a giant!"

Two huge shoe-marks were clearly delineated in the clay soil.

Leroy laughed. "Are you kidding, Sam? What about them? Those are mine—can't you tell by the size of them?"

"Thought so," grinned the chief. "Jest couldn't b'lieve anybody else had feet as big. Well—we'd better go up to the library again. I'd like to prow around a bit more up there . . . Why should Cliff take the ring, the watch and the wallet, do you 'spose?"

"Why not? He wanted to make it look as though a burglar had done it—a stranger. That's your theory, isn't it? And he needed the money, too. Look, Sam, I say let's go and get Sherman. Plenty of time to look around after that. Don't you realize he's got enough cash to clear out, if he hasn't done it already?"

"Then you don't think he's the one did the shootin' a while ago?"

"He might've. And that's all the more reason for going after him."

"All right—let's 'tend to him first," Draper agreed.

CHAPTER VIII

THEY circled the tennis courts, came to the golf-course, and started straight across toward the white and green cottage.

"I've been expecting to duck lead again," Leroy remarked. "I'd sure like to lay hands on the guy with the rifle!"

Hardly had he spoken when they heard the report. Leroy shouted, "Duck!" and went down on hands and knees.

But Draper laughed at him. "No one's shootin' at us this time, Paul! Git up!"

Nevertheless he followed when Leroy started at a trot, and they rounded the green and white build-

ing in time to see a slim, athletic-looking girl aiming a repeating rifle at a can standing on a truncated tree.

She put down the rifle when they called, and said, "Hello, Chief Draper! Hello, Mr. Leroy!"

Both officers went up to her. Draper asked, "You been carryin' that rifle around all morning, Ethel?"

"No." She looked at him out of smiling hazel eyes. "I just happened to see it standing on the porch, and thought I'd try a couple of shots. I missed that can with the first shot!"

"Mind if I look at it?" Draper took the weapon from her while she gazed at him wonderingly. He pulled out the clip; there were only two cartridges left. "How many times did you shoot, Ethel?"

"Only one. Is it wrong to shoot at a target out here, Chief?"

"Not at a tin can. Did your father have this rifle this morning, 'fore you took it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Should be five cartridges in the clip—there's only two."

"Well—I don't know how many there were—I only shot once. I just didn't happen to have anything else to do. . ."

"We was here earlier this morning—'bout an hour ago—door was locked." Draper's tone was casual.

"I drove into town," she explained. A puzzled look came into her eyes, a look of apprehension. "Dad's been feeling pretty nervous—he didn't sleep all night. I thought I'd go to town and get a sedative the doctor prescribed for him a couple of months ago. Wasn't dad here when you called?"

"No."

"Then he must have gone out walking or something . . . he hasn't been able to sit still for a moment. He's terribly nervous—I don't know

what's the matter with him."

"Is he inside now?"

"Yes—he's trying to get a couple of hours sleep. I do hope you don't have to wake him. Is anything wrong?"

"'Fraid we'll have to wake him," Draper said.

With the rifle still in his hand, he walked up on the porch of the house and opened the door.

"I'll tell him for you," Ethel said. She passed him and went to the threshold of a room opening on the living-room in which they were standing, and called softly, "Dad! Chief Draper is here to see you!"

"Who? Chief Draper? I'll be right in! Please shut the door, Ethel."

Draper shook his head and stepped forward. He said, "Better not. How're you, Mr. Sherman?"

A thin, short man, with fierce, cavernous green eyes got up from a bed, and began putting on a shirt and coat. He came out and sat down, still rubbing his eyes.

"What's this all about?" His voice was extraordinarily heavy for so small a man. His hair was all gray, but his eyes were alive and vivid with intelligence and an inner fire.

Draper wasted no time in small talk. He asked, "After your quarrel with Greg Slater last night, you went back and saw him again, Mr. Sherman, ain't that right?"

"Yes, why? Is he making any complaint?"

"That's right smart," murmured Draper. "What did you go back for?"

"I don't know whether that's any business of the police, but all right, I'll tell you, Chief: I went back to tell him that if he didn't lend me five hundred dollars, I'd start suit against him for a half interest in the paper mills, and an accounting."

"Did he give you the five hundred?"

Sherman hesitated; his brow furrowed. Finally he said, "Yes!"

"Got it here?"

"Yes—it's in the drawer of my dresser. Look, Chief, what's this all about? Has Greg Slater made a complaint against me?"

"No, he ain't makin' any complaints against anyone."

"Then what . . ."

"Where was you this mornin' when I called?" demanded Draper.

"Out walking—around the golf links—I've been pretty restless—a long walk seems to be the only way I can soothe my nerves."

"Carry this rifle with you when you went walkin'?"

"No."

"Where was it?"

"I don't know—in the house, I suppose."

Ethel broke in, "I found it out on the porch, dad."

"Then," said Sherman, "someone must have taken it out and put it there. I didn't!"

Slowly Draper pulled forth the handkerchief in which he had wrapped the blackjack, and removed it carefully. He said, "That's yours, Mr. Sherman, ain't it?"

A wary look showed shadow-like in Sherman's eyes. "I had one like it—I don't know whether it's that one or not. Why?"

"It was found where you left it," Draper told him gravely.

"And where is that supposed to be?"

"'Longside of Greg Slater's dead body!"

Ethel stood as though petrified. The look in her hazel eyes was one of terror and uncertainty, and the lines of her shapely young figure were taut. Even the fine brown hair

that fell almost to her shoulders seemed to lose some of its lustre. Then suddenly she ran to her father's side. She cried, "He didn't, he didn't! It's a lie!"

Draper shook his head regretfully. "All adds up, Ethel—I'm right sorry. He quarreled with Slater, didn't git the loan he wanted. He came back—and now he's got the money and Slater's dead—head stove in by your pop's blackjack. And this here rifle now—you fired one shot. Figgerin' there was a full clip, that makes two more to account for. Well—I reckon your father can tell you what happened to those other two cartridges." He looked at Sherman.

Sherman said wearily, "That's all nonsense. Are you arresting me?"

"Dad!" cried Ethel. She seized both his arms and faced him. "It isn't true, is it?"

"No, dear, of course it isn't. Chief's mistaken. But I should have known—you can't touch pitch without being defiled. A long time ago I made up my mind not to go near Gregory Slater. I did—and now I'm in trouble again. Every time I've had any trouble, it was through him. It may sound wicked, but I'm glad he's dead—if he really is."

"You knew he was dead before we did," Leroy said crisply.

Ethel turned on him, and her eyes were no longer pleasant; they were blazing. She said, "I never knew my father to lie—and he isn't lying now. Not that he had to tell me he didn't do a thing like that—he's incapable of it. And if you weren't so stupid, you'd know it!"

Draper said, "Better git your hat and coat, Mr. Sherman—it's sorta chilly. I'm sorry, Ethel!"

"I'll get the best lawyer in town," the girl assured her father. She had both her hands about his arm. "Don't

worry, dad—everything will come out all right."

"With what will you hire this best lawyer in town?" His lips twisted into a wry smile. "The only money we have is this five hundred dollars—and they're going to take that." He glanced at Draper.

"Got to," Draper said. "It's evidence."

CHAPTER IX

THEY were on their way back to the Slater house, after having left Cliff Sherman in a cell.

Leroy grumbled, "I still don't understand what you're going back for. You've got enough on Sherman to make an open and shut case. What are you after?"

"Jest ain't satisfied," Draper said laconically.

Several minutes passed before the lieutenant spoke again. "Who do you suspect, Sam?"

"Suspect everybody in that house. . . house of hate, that's what it is." He went on abstractedly, "Don't seem like a man with Sherman's savvy would go up there and commit a murder, and leave the weapon he did it with—and then admit it was his weapon. Don't seem like he'd be fool enough to admit he's got the money if he stole it . . . or be right there for us to arrest after committin' a murder with all the signs pointin' to him as the murderer."

"I suppose," Leroy grunted sarcastically, "you believe his story that someone took the rifle out of his house and shot at us!"

"That don't make sense, either. Trail's too plain. If he done it, he'd have taken that clip out and put in a fresh one with five cartridges. And what would he do it for in the first

place—shootin' at us from 'round here? No, there's one big thing in all this makes me plumb dissatisfied, Paul—every sign, every clue, points too plainly to Cliff Sherman! Looks too much like red herring!"

"What you're saying," Leroy countered, "is that it can't be true because we didn't have much trouble following the clues we found."

When they came to the Slater house, they got out and rang the bell. Thomas opened the door for them.

He said at once, "I'm glad you came back, gentlemen. I have something important I think you should know."

"What's that?" Draper demanded.

"If you'll come in here . . ." Thomas led the way into the living-room. He said, "Mrs. Slater is lying down in her room."

Both police officers seated themselves; Thomas remained standing.

"This is it," the butler said. "The gardener, Langworthy, has keys which fit almost any lock. I know he can get into any room in the house." He paused, then went on: "He came into the house last night, near midnight. I saw him up in the attic."

"Go on," Draper ordered brusquely. "Why didn't you tell us this before?"

"I'm sorry—it didn't occur to me. Mr. Slater discharged him more than a week ago. I believe he disliked Mr. Slater, and felt that he was discharged without sufficient cause, sir."

"If he was discharged . . ." The chief looked puzzled.

"He's been sick in bed ever since—down at the lodge, sir. At least, he says he's sick . . . and so he's still there. I have an idea that he may be your man, sir."

Leroy snapped, "You don't think it was Cliff Sherman?"

"Well . . ." The butler hesitated. "Of course you are better qualified to decide than I am, but it doesn't seem to me that Mr. Sherman is the sort of man who would commit a murder, sir." He glanced from one to the other. "Shall I show you where the lodge is?"

"I know where it is, thanks." Draper rose. "We'll go have a look at that library again first . . . mebbe after that we'll walk in on this gardener—what's his name?"

"Langworthy, sir—Walter Langworthy. We call him Wally."

Draper nodded. "Library's open, ain't it? And nobody's teched it."

"They removed the body, sir—under the direction of the coroner, I believe. Otherwise the room hasn't been touched. I'm sorry I handled that blackjack, Chief Draper—or did those other little things. I assure you I had no intention—"

"It's all right, Thomas," Draper said.

He and Leroy walked upstairs and entered the library.

"Do you suppose there's anything in that Langworthy lead?" Leroy asked.

"Dunno—might be. You'll notice I ain't the only one doubts Cliff Sherman could've done this."

"The only other help around here," mused Leroy, "are those two women, the cook and the maid."

"This wasn't a woman's job—a man did that, and a strong man, too. You saw how the head was busted up." He began walking aimlessly about the room, and ended up in front of the desk. He murmured, "Slater musta been settin' right here when the feller came in—through the winder or through the door. Tim's been dustin' around, I see—he may find some fingerprints. I'll have to give him that blackjack. Now this

desk . . .” He opened the hinged top and looked inside. “Well—here it is—I sorta expected it. Shoulda looked for it before.”

“Here’s what?” Leroy peered over his shoulder.

“Blood seeped through between the hinges.” He wet his finger and rubbed it against the wood inside; it came away red. “This is where Slater was killed—or knocked out first and killed afterwards. Must’ve been settin’ here and the feller came and clipped him with that blackjack. Then he wiped the blood off’n the top of the desk real careful, but he didn’t think of the inside.”

“That could have been Sherman,” Leroy said triumphantly.

“Mebbe so, mebbe so.”

“But why did he drag him clear across the room to the couch? Why didn’t he finish him right here and leave him?”

Draper smiled. “Let’s figger the feller was somebody Slater knew—Sherman or somebody else. Slater sees him come in—don’t move ‘cause the feller ain’t a stranger and he ain’t suspicious. All right—let’s say the killin’s done right here at this desk. See? Murderer wants to show it wasn’t someone Slater knew, but a stranger. So he does a mite of camouflagin’. Git it? He wants it to look as though, seein’ it was a stranger, Slater jumped up and put up a fight. So he pulls him clear across the room, turns over a few chairs, throws a few books on the floor—and leaves the body away over there! Now nobody’s a-goin’ to think it was anyone Slater knew done it—’specially with the watch, ring and wallet missin’. Looks like jest a plain burglary by an ornery porch-climber.” He walked down the room. “See where Slater’s body was dragged; I showed you that before. Marks of his

heels scrapin’ the floor. House shoes—they made scratches all the way.”

“All of which,” Leroy said slowly, “only makes it still tougher for Mr. Cliff Sherman.”

“It sure does, don’t it?” Draper grinned absently. “One more thing makes me feel purty sartin the signs of a struggle are fake: Nobody heard anything!” He paused and stared at Leroy. “If Slater put up a fight all the way from the desk to the couch, he’d ‘a’ yelled his head off, too—been bound to be heard. No, he was killed right at the desk by someone he knew—and the feller who done it tried to make it look like it was a battle agin a stranger.”

He went to the window and glanced out. The pieces of glass on the floor had been removed, but the jagged hole in the window remained.

“Now what do you s’pose made him shoot at us—’less it was an accident?”

“Two shots, and they weren’t accidents!” Leroy said. “My opinion is Cliff Sherman’s gone loco. He’s become one of those cunning homicidal maniacs—looking at him you can’t tell—till you catch the wild look in his eyes.”

Draper grinned. “Didn’t notice that wild look. Mebbe imagination.”

“Seems to me,” Leroy snapped, “that your imagination isn’t asleep, either. You just described exactly how it happened.”

Draper went around and examined the other windows. They were all latched on the inside.

“Let’s go visit this feller Langworthy,” he said at last.

On the floor below, Mrs. Slater came out of her room and called to them. She said, “I asked Senator Binkerd to speak to you, Chief Draper.”

"He did!" Draper's tone was mild, but his eyes were icy.

"Well then, what are you doing here? I'm sure you've had time enough to search through this house a dozen times."

Draper leaned against the banister. He said, "Mind my askin' why you're in sech a hurry to git rid of us, Mrs. Slater?"

"In a hurry?" Her voice rose a full octave, and her head jerked back with all her pride and antagonism showing. "I suppose you'll construe that as an admission of guilt somehow. Why shouldn't I be in a hurry? Would you like to have a lot of strange men running through your home and acting as though they owned it? You've arrested Cliff Sherman, I hear. What more do you want?"

"If we've been runnin'," Draper said mildly, "we'll go slow from now on. As for actin' as though we owned this house—ma'am, I don't think that's quite accurate."

"Meaning that I'm lying!"

Leroy broke in hotly, "Meaning anything you please! If you want to know—yes, I do think it's mighty strange your being in such a hurry to get rid of us. I do think it's suspicious. So what of it?"

"Paul," Draper said, "shet up!"

"I think that would be a good idea, young man!" Her eyes dwelt on the lieutenant coldly. "You're quite uppity now, aren't you—both of you! When you no longer have your positions, you'll sing quite a different tune, I'm sure. Now I'm warning you, I don't want you to come into this house again. If you do—I'll take measures to stop you!"

She went back into her room.

Leroy muttered, "Damn it, it is suspicious, Sam—her being so anxious to get us out of here."

Draper looked thoughtful. He said, "I'm hopin' the Guvnor don't accept our resignations 'fore we git through with this case!"

CHAPTER X

IN FRONT of the house, they met Ethel Sherman. She would have passed them without speaking, but Draper called to her.

She said, "I'm going in to see Mrs. Slater."

"Your father's gittin' along all right, Ethel," Draper told her. "He told me to tell you so. You can go see him when you've got a mind to."

The girl burst out, "You know he didn't do it, Chief! You've known him for so many years—you know he didn't do it!" She fought down a rising tide of emotion.

Leroy said stubbornly, "Sorry, Ethel. He went back to see Slater after Slater had refused to lend him that five hundred, didn't he? He admits that. Why did he go back? He knew he couldn't get the loan."

"I know the reason he went back," the girl flared. "He didn't go back for the money as a loan—he went back because he felt he was entitled to it. Dad has little left but his pride, but he has plenty of that. He wouldn't have gone to Mr. Slater for a loan in the first place, if he hadn't felt he was entitled to the money. He asked it as a loan the first time—the second time he went back to tell him he intended to sue for what was rightfully his—and I suppose Mr. Slater gave him the money then because he realized dad was bound to win the suit."

"Funny he didn't tell him that the first time he called," Leroy commented gloomily.

"He didn't—and it's the truth—whether you believe it or not!"

Looking at her, Draper felt a surge of compassion. But Leroy growled, "Wish you could prove that, Ethel, but I don't think you can. Nothing would please me more than your proving it. Damn it, you know that!"

They walked to the gardener's lodge near the entrance of the estate, after Ethel left them and went into the house, and Leroy repeated again, "Wish she could prove Slater gave her father the money. She certainly deserves better luck than she's been having!"

"I could never figger Cliff Sherman strong enough to pull a man as heavy as Greg Slater clean down that room," Draper said.

"Well, maybe not, but he's pretty wiry, Cliff—little fellows like that are. Say, I heard Matt Quinlan is soft on Ethel. Someone ought to warn her against him—he has one hell of a temper. I wouldn't put this job past him, either."

Draper nodded. "You called him the first suspect. I ain't forgot about him—still waters runnin' there."

They stepped up on the small, square porch of the gardener's lodge, and Leroy knocked. Receiving no response, he turned the knob and they entered. The lodge consisted of three rooms: an outer room with a stone fireplace, a kitchen and a bedroom. All the partitions were of thin domestic pine; it was evidently a cold place to live in during the winter.

A voice called, and they walked to the bedroom and opened the door. On the disordered bed lay a bulky man with a florid, heavy face. He looked up from a book he had been reading.

Leroy asked, "Are you the gardener, Langworthy?"

"Yes." The fellow looked at him coolly; he was dressed in a neat brown shirt and slacks; he had small, pale eyes, set close together. "What's

on your mind, gents? Better not get too near me—doc says what I got is catching."

"What have you got—besides a lot of crust?" demanded Leroy.

"Hey, what's this?" The fellow sat up. "Who're you—police?"

"Yes."

"What am I supposed to've done?"

Draper pushed Leroy aside. "Mr. Slater sent us here to bring you to the house for a talk."

Langworthy looked at him sullenly. "Quit kidding me—I know he's dead! I heard all about it. That crazy mug Sherman did it—and listen: I'll bet you ain't met anybody's grieving much over it. I'm not—I don't mind telling you."

"How'd you git into the house last night?" snapped Draper.

To the astonishment of both officers, Langworthy replied promptly, "Walked in—I have a key!"

"You walked in! Went right up to Slater's room and killed him."

"I did not!" shouted Langworthy. "I went in to get something to eat. I got a touch of TB working for the old miser and living in a house without heat all winter. You don't s'pose I'm going to starve, do you? I went in to get something to eat!"

"What time was this?"

"A little after midnight," was the sullen reply.

"Meet anybody goin' in or comin' out?"

"No."

"You're lyin'!" Draper's tone was harsh. "Come clean or I'll take you down to headquarters and work on you. Come clean!"

"I told you I didn't meet anybody."

They heard the outside door open, and steps ran across the floor. A moment later Ethel stood on the threshold staring at them.

(Continued On Page 120)

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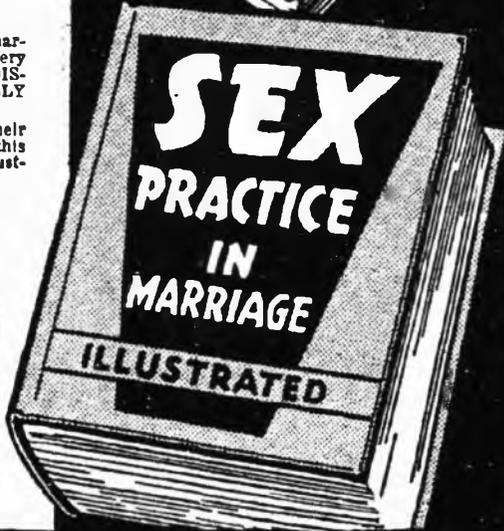
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(Continued From Page 118)

She said, "I was just talking to Thomas—he told me Wally Langworthy was up there last night. Everybody knows he hated Mr. Slater. Ask him what he was doing there last night. Ask him!"

The chief went close to the bed. He said ominously, "A night-stick won't catch your TB, Langworthy. What was you doin' in the house last night—who did you see? You got keys can open any door, I hear."

"He went all the way through the house, right up to the attic. Thomas saw him." Ethel's voice was determined.

Draper squinted at the gardener thoughtfully. "Was you lookin' for something to eat up in the attic, Langworthy?"

"And he stopped on the way upstairs, murdered Slater, and then locked the door of the library behind him. He answers all the specifications!" Leroy's tone held huge satisfaction.

"Hey, hey, wait a minute, wait a minute!" Langworthy's voice rose to an angry bellow. "Yeah, I did go upstairs into the attic—I went up to get weather-strips. That's where I keep them. This damn house is as cold as the grave—I gotta put weather-strips on the door and windows every winter. That's what I went up for. That sneaking butler knows it, too. What's he trying to do, get me into trouble so you'll lay off of him? I didn't go near the library."

"Are you accusin' Thomas of murderin' his boss?" Draper asked.

"I don't say he did, and I don't say he didn't. I'll say he would've liked to!"

"Who did you see inside the house—or outside it?"

Langworthy muttered, "I ain't a squealer—but if I'm being accused of

murder, that's another thing. A man's got to look out for himself. I saw your father comin' along when I came out with the weather strips, Ethel—I even saw Captain Quinlan let him in."

"Who else did you see?"

"Saw the butler upstairs in his room—he came out, and Captain Quinlan came out. Both of 'em knew what I was there for—and from what they said, they didn't blame me."

"Both of them dressed?"

"Shirts, pants and shoes. Captain Quinlan had on a smoking-jacket, too. His room's next to the butler's. After I left, Mr. Sherman came along, and Captain Quinlan came down and let him in. I saw it."

Draper asked with sudden interest, "You say Captain Quinlan's room is in the attic—next to the butler's?"

"Yeah—sure. Slater didn't want him around, is what I heard. When he wouldn't go, he moved him up there!" He looked at Ethel. "I ain't saying your father did it, Miss Sherman—but I did see him last night. I ain't accusing him of anything, like you did me."

White and rigid, Ethel stood staring at him. She turned and went out. Both police officers followed her.

Draper called, "Jest a minute, Ethel!" She waited for them.

CHAPTER XI

"YOU and Matt Quinlan are pretty friendly, I been told," began the chief.

"Yes. What are you implying?" Her tone was frankly antagonistic.

Draper said good-naturedly, "Now, now, don't bite my head off, Ethel. I'm tryin' to git to the bottom of this—mebbe you can help me."

"Well, if you're suspecting Matt

HOUSE OF HATE

Quinlan, all I can say is I don't believe he'd do a thing like that. He hated his uncle for what he did to him, but—"

"Feller with a temper like his . . . I got to suspect anybody. Now this here Captain Quinlan, what about him?"

"Oh no! Not Captain Quinlan! He's too much of a—well, he's too fine. Of course he had plenty of cause to hate Mr. Slater too."

"Army officer, ain't he?"

"Yes—he's a retired captain."

"Pension?"

"I suppose so—I don't know anything about that."

"Now what d'you s'pose made him stay in that house knowin' he wasn't wanted? In a room up in the attic, next to the butler? Don't seem like a man with any pride would force himself on a feller had no use for him!"

Ethel remained silent, frowning in a puzzled fashion. After a while she said, "Maybe he realized his sister was having a miserable time of it, and he wanted to be around—really I don't know. Matt isn't a gossip—he keeps family affairs to himself, and I respect him for it."

"Perfectly right, perfectly right," Draper said warmly, his eyes approving her. "Well, that's about all now, I reckon."

She hesitated. Her glance was both an appeal and a question.

Leroy said suddenly, "How about coming over to my house and staying with my mother till this is over, Ethel? You can't stay in that house alone—with a prowler loose."

She repeated, "In your house?" and stared at him.

"Intentions one hundred percent honorable," grinned Leroy. "I'm not talking as a police officer now."

"His ma's a good cook—I guaran-

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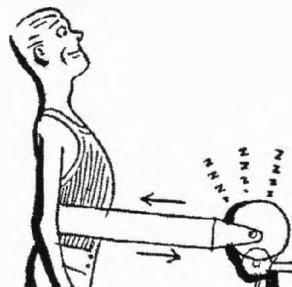


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tee that." Draper smiled at the girl reassuringly. "That's a durned good suggestion, Ethel. Well—got a lotta things to 'tend to yet." He walked away, leaving the two together.

After a while, Leroy overtook him in front of the lodge. He said nothing, but when Draper cast an oblique look at him, the younger officer reddened.

"Is she acceptin' the invitation?" Draper asked mildly.

Leroy's eyebrows lifted, he stuck out his chin and grinned. Then abruptly he became serious.

"Damned if I believe now that Cliff Sherman did it! If we could only find out how the murderer got into that room—doesn't seem possible he could have climbed up that wall from the ground."

"Mebbe he didn't," Draper said placidly.

"Well then, how did he get there?"

"Dunno yet. But he could have climbed down, couldn't he?"

Leroy whistled long and low. He said, "Boy, but wasn't I dumb? But he'd have to get up into the attic first, wouldn't he? What makes you think—"

"Imagination again, Paul—reckon it's a family weakness. Paul, you drive back to town and git in touch with the War Department in Washington. Find out what you can about Captain Lee Quinlan, retired. Then hurry back here—I'll be 'round the Slater house somewhere. Jest toot your horn and I'll hear you!"

Leroy hurried away.

For more than an hour, Draper sat on the porch of the lodge and waited. Then he saw Captain Quinlan and Mrs. Slater come out and go toward the garage, and knew that they were obeying the summons to come to the coroner's office that he himself had arranged to have tele-

phoned. When the captain drove the car toward the gates, Draper went inside the lodge. Langworthy shouted, "Who's there?" and the chief called a low, reassuring reply.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Thomas opened the door, he looked at the chief askance, but Draper merely shoved past him, and started up the stairs.

Two rooms had been partitioned off the attic, and both doors were locked. The rest of the attic had been divided into two large chambers, one of which was quite evidently used as a tool-room; the other for storage.

Draper went directly to the window fronting on the tennis courts, one story above the library. He smiled grimly when he saw the hook which had been screwed deeply into the wood to the right of the window-sill. Now he knew what he was looking for, and he began a thorough, systematic search. With a skeleton key, he opened one room after another, and looked meticulously through every drawer, in every closet, through every bit of clothing. He even tried the walls and floors and, using a small ladder he found in the tool-room, climbed up and felt with his hand along the broad surface of the rafters.

His search netted him nothing of importance except a dunning letter addressed to Captain Quinlan from an automobile dealer, threatening criminal action unless a car he had bought on time were returned. That letter was less than a week old, to judge by the date.

From the rooms, the chief went into the tool-shop, and while he was there, Thomas came upstairs and glanced at him.

HOUSE OF HATE

Draper said curtly, "Go downstairs, Thomas—don't want no one around for the next half-hour."

"I feel I have a right to stay up here in my own room," the butler said. Draper strode forward and confronted him menacingly.

He said, "Mebbe I've been a mite too easy—mebbe you're forgettin' there's been a murder done. Git downstairs!"

Without another word, Thomas turned away. Draper heard him descending, then went back into the toolroom. He followed the same procedure here as he had done in the other two rooms. Then he moved the ladder into the next room, a little discouraged and fearing that his quest was going to be in vain.

On top of a rafter that stretched from the wall above the window to a supporting post in the center of the attic, Draper found one of the things for which he was looking: a knotted rope. It had been laid carefully along the length of the rafter, and could not be seen from the floor.

He took a sheet off Thomas's bed, and wrapped the rope in it. Then he went back, with not much hope of finding anything more, yet determined to try. After half an hour, he gave it up and turned to leave. He was on the stairs going down when he remembered something, and immediately went back, this time to Captain Quinlan's room. He went straight to a large can of tobacco, filled to the very top, and thrust his fingers into it.

He had hoped to find a wallet; instead he pulled out a handkerchief. Inside the handkerchief were a ring, a watch, and a bundle of money.

He smiled grimly and put these into his pocket, then took the rope and went back into the library. There he put the sheet containing the rope

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on the desk, then went downstairs and outside.

When Leroy drove in, the chief called to him from the porch. The lieutenant hurried across, and there was a certain determined eagerness in his walk. Both men ascended to the library once more.

The bookcases were heavy, but they managed to move one sufficiently for their purpose.

They heard a car drive in, and looking out of the window, saw Mrs. Slater and Captain Quinlan get out and leave the car where it was.

When Draper got down to the second floor, Mrs. Slater was standing in front of her room. She had heard him, apparently, and was waiting for him.

She said angrily, "Now Chief Draper, this is really an outrage! I'm not going to stand for it a moment longer! Why, you've taken possession of this house! I'm sure you've had plenty of opportunity to complete your investigation, and I insist—"

He continued down deliberately, leaving her still ranting. He caught a glimpse of Thomas talking to Captain Quinlan near the door. The butler turned away at once, and the captain looked up at Draper with a heavy scowl.

He said, "There's a point at which good-nature breaks down, Chief. I understand you've been going through my room. I hope you're through, because I don't intend to permit this sort of thing to continue."

Draper smiled deprecatingly. He said, "Dunno's I blame you. If I was in your place, I'd feel jest like you do about it."

Somewhat mollified, the captain continued nevertheless, "After all, it's quite obvious that you arrested

the right man, isn't it? Or are you now proceeding on the assumption that the crime was committed by someone inside the house?"

"Jest my curiosity," Draper murmured apologetically. "Can you spare a few minutes, Captain? Like to talk to you in the library."

"Well, I don't know—I'm rather busy."

"Won't take long!" Draper eyed him with a steady half-smile behind which a tight determination was easily discernible. "Up in the library, please!"

Captain Quinlan said crisply, "Very well," and the chief allowed him to pass and precede him.

On the floor above, Mrs. Slater came to her door and called, "Now what's going on?"

"A consultation between the military and the police," was Quinlan's cheerful reply. "I'll be down soon, Martha. You'd better call the office and find out whether Matt needs any help. And lock the door downstairs and keep it locked—you're going to have a flood of reporters swooping down here soon."

When they got to the head of the stairs on the third floor, the captain asked curiously, "Why the library? Are you fond of gruesome associations, Chief?"

"Wish I could sling the language like you do," Draper said wistfully. "Got something in the library I'd like to show you, that's why."

When they walked inside, the chief sat down in front of the desk. A tolerant smile on his face, Captain Quinlan sat down opposite him. He eyed the bundle tied up in the sheet curiously, then a faint disturbance showed in his eyes, and was gone at once. But Draper had seen it.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH quiet deliberation, the chief began untying the knots in the sheet. "What's in there?" the captain asked.

Draper paid no attention to the question. He said, "Did seem queer to me Cliff Sherman going back to see Greg Slater that night—and then admittin' he got five hundred dollars as a loan, after he'd been refused only an hour before. But when I began figgerin' it out, it wasn't so onnatural. Cliff's by nature a retirin' feller—but no man can take what he did lyin' down forever—and bein' broke and livin' on Slater's charity musta near driven him wild."

The captain nodded. He said, "Yes, I knew it was Cliff all along. Poor fellow! Greg practically swindled him out of his half interest in the mills. I suppose he brooded over it—and then came the refusal to lend him even five hundred dollars—and that must have unhinged his mind. I heard about that shooting—you were lucky he didn't hit you, Chief!"

"I sure was!" He glanced up at Quinlan. The bundle lay open, and Quinlan was staring at the rope. "Got the notion somehow, that whoever shot at me didn't really want to hit me," Draper murmured. "Might have had another idea in mind—sech as makin' me think it was someone else did the shootin'."

"Well—it must have been Cliff. Don't you think so?"

Draper shook his head. "Reckon not! That poor feller's been blamed for a lot of things he didn't do—one of them easy-going fellers lets people step on him and git away with it. Like the time Greg blamed him for stealin' his wife, when all he was

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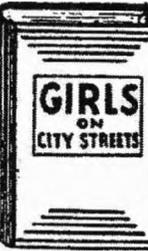
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doin' was givin' the poor woman shelter."

A shadow darkened the captain's face. "That was pretty decent of Cliff," he admitted slowly.

"Cliff Sherman wouldn't kill a mouse," Draper stated.

"Well . . . you arrested him for murder!"

"My mistake. Sure am sorry, but I aim to make amends."

Quinlan shifted in his chair, and stared at Draper with increased interest. He said, trying to speak naturally, "Still, a man who's been swindled like he was, mightn't take it lying down, just as you said. He might finally decide to take a direct physical action—especially with Ethel before him all the time, suffering the same as he was suffering—an object of charity the same as he was."

"Cliff wouldn't do nothin' physical, like you call it." Draper sat back in the chair, looking reflectively at the man in front of him.

"Greg Slater," the captain said suddenly, "was a skunk—a miser! I'll say it even if he is dead—dying didn't purge him and it didn't sanctify him! Why make all this fuss over him?"

"He was purty hard!" Draper shook his head. "But if I was you, I wouldn't cast the first stone."

"What do you mean?" The question was sharp and incisive.

"What got me to wonderin'?"—Draper seemed to ruminate aloud—"was how a feller like you, related to Greg, his wife's brother, could keep on livin' here even after Greg showed he didn't want you around by movin' you to a room in the attic—next to the butler!"

"Greg was a swine," Quinlan snarled.

"I found out why," Draper went on

dreamily. "You told me you was retired on a pension, Captain, didn't you?"

Quinlan's eyes narrowed; he sat silent.

"You was cashiered—that's the word they used tellin' Leroy about it in the War Department—for takin' commission on the purchase of supplies while attached to the Quartermaster's Department."

"Well"—the captain's tone was testy—"don't be so dramatic about it. Yes, that's right—I was dismissed—and I haven't a dollar in the world, and I had to stay here whether I wanted to or not. Greg never allowed Martha anything but slim pocket money, or she might have loaned me enough so I could live elsewhere. All right—I was one of those caught with the goods—there were plenty and are plenty who're getting away with it."

Draper's shoulders stirred noncommittally.

"Funny how people's minds work," Draper continued. "Never came to my mind the murderer could've gotten into that room through the window from above—kept thinkin' how he could've come in from below! And there was the attic only one floor above this room—where a man that's active could climb down easy—on a knotted rope like this one! Came to me all of a sudden, though—so I don't feel so dumb, after all. Found it on top of one of them wooden rafters in the attic, Captain—laid out jest as neat as you please!"

"You did? In the attic?" There was a slight change of color in Quinlan's face, but his smile was wonderfully natural—a smile of admiration for Draper's astuteness. "Well, well! Where does that lead us to?"

"Leads someone to jail—and it ain't Cliff Sherman." Draper sighed.

"Had a notion it might've been Thomas at first," he confessed. "Purty good friend of your'n, Thom-as, ain't he?"

"Bound by a common hatred—of Greg Slater," the captain said lightly. Then he asked bluntly, "Look, Chief, are you accusing me of this murder?"

"Got a notion in the back of my mind that your sister knew who done this right along," Draper went on placidly. "She didn't want the police around the house . . . didn't exactly say it was Sherman . . . fact is, she said she didn't believe it was. But she sorta pointed suspicion at him—like you did, Captain. Like shootin' off a rifle from the direction of his house . . . I'm obliged to you for not hittin' me, Captain!"

Quinlan sat back and laughed heartily. "You ought to write detective stories, Chief—with an imagination like that! Why, it's preposterous! I was having breakfast, don't you remember—came right in and submitted to questioning by you and your assistant—by the way, where is he?"

"Dunno! Went into town a while ago—mebbe he's come back. About your bein' at breakfast when we came"—Draper shook his head—"if you was, it was a tarnation long breakfast! No, you came runnin' back here after shootin' off that rifle, got into the house from the rear—oh, and you even left the rifle on the porch of Cliff's house! Did you find it outside—or did you git into the house somehow?"

"Go on," said Quinlan, "I'm enjoying this. The drama unfolds!"

The chief eyed him steadily. "I'd call it a tragedy, Captain."

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Draper took the handkerchief out of his inside coat pocket, spread it and let the money, watch and ring show. He looked at Quinlan.

"The jig's up, Captain Quinlan!"

"What jig?" Quinlan glanced around the room and smiled slightly. "Have you any witnesses planted in here—or a dictaphone?"

"Found these in your can of tobacco, Captain. Smart place to hide it, at that—right out in the open on your dresser! Right smart!"

"If," said Quinlan easily, "you found it there, and didn't plant it yourself, someone else did."

"Thomas?"

"No, not Thomas! He wouldn't murder anybody."

"If you blamed him," Draper murmured, "I got an idea he'd come back with some damagin' evidence I ain't found." He stirred and leaned forward. "Got an idea I could hold Thomas as an accessory after the crime. You sure did hate Greg Slater, didn't you, Captain?"

A change came slowly over Quinlan's face. He stared at Draper through narrowed eyes that held a light of sheer ferocity. "Why shouldn't I have hated him? He was a double-dealing skunk—and he got all the breaks! I rotted in trenches during the war—what did I get for it? Thrown out and disgraced for taking a few dollars commission! He stayed at home and made millions. Cheated his relatives who staked him to the money that enabled him to go into business, cheated his partner, that spineless ass of a Cliff Sherman! He married my sister, and she's never had a moment's happiness with him! Sure I hated him!" He leaned back again. "But I didn't murder him—even though lots of times I wanted to!"

"Reckon your sister knew who

done it right away," Draper said thoughtfully. "Have to question her some more."

"I don't want her bothered," Quinlan said violently. "The poor girl has had trouble enough." He rose and began pacing back and forth.

Watching him alertly, Draper said, "Better sit down, Captain. Ain't easy to talk to you while you're walkin' up and down that way."

"What difference does it make?" He went to the window and looked out, then came back and seated himself again. "Well?"

"Case against you is finished, Captain—even to the hook you screwed onto the wall in the attic to tie your rope to. You got a chance for leniency—your war record shows you was gassed—might be what the jedge calls a mitigating circumstance. Your best chance of duckin' the Chair is in makin' a full confession, Captain!"

Quinlan merely stared through half closed eyes.

"Where'd you git the blackjack?" Draper asked suddenly.

Quinlan sighed and relaxed tiredly. "Found the damn thing on the lawn near Sherman's house! You'd never have convicted him, Chief—I felt sure of that. How could you convict a man who was innocent?"

"It's happened," Draper said laconically. "Well, we better git going to town, Captain—you and me."

Quinlan sat up, and a gun appeared in his hand. He pointed it at the chief.

"My kind doesn't go to jail, Chief—I'm afraid I couldn't stand the confinement." He spoke quite casually. "You and I are going to take a walk. Rather foolhardy on your part to come in here alone and tell me all this, wasn't it?"

"What're you aimin' to do?" asked Draper coolly. "Kill me?"

"I may have to—perhaps not. It depends on yourself. We'll go downstairs and you'll lead the way—and don't sacrifice any chance of living you still have by trying anything. I'd shoot you down at once, take my word for it." He reached across, took the money lying on the desk and stuffed it into his pocket. "I'll need this to give me a sporting chance after you raise the view-halloo!"

Draper rose to his feet slowly and stepped to one side. He shook his head sadly. "Better put that gun down, Captain! Won't git you anything. Like I said, your best chance is a full confession."

"You certainly have guts," Quinlan said admiringly. "Well—come on

—and remember!" His gun vibrated significantly.

The chief started around the desk. "Steady!" warned the captain sharply. His finger on the trigger crooked a trifle. "We're walking out together—you a little ahead of me. When we get downstairs—"

There was a sharp report, and Quinlan whirled about. Instantly Draper was upon him. Leroy came running from behind the bookcase, and a moment later Quinlan was handcuffed. His face was gray with pain; he was bleeding from a wound in his right arm.

He muttered, "I thought it funny your coming here alone!"

Draper said reproachfully, "I warned ye, Captain!"

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51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
1-5	150.00	300.00	450.00
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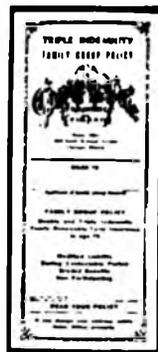
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