

10¢

Copyrighted Material

JUNE



SECRET AGENT "X"

THE MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES



The
**CORPSE
CAVALCADE**
Powerful
SECRET AGENT "X"
Novel

Copyrighted Material



STUDENTS BUSY AT WORK IN GREAT COYNE SHOPS

Learn RADIO

I'll Finance Your Training

Yes, sir! I mean what I say. I'll train you in 10 weeks right here in the Great Coyne Shops — NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE — but by actual work on Radio, Sound and Television equipment. AND YOU WON'T HAVE TO START PAYING ME BACK UNTIL TWO MONTHS AFTER YOUR REQUIRED TRAINING PERIOD IS OVER AND THEN YOU'LL HAVE OVER A YEAR TO COMPLETE YOUR PAYMENTS.

This Is the Greatest Offer Ever Made by Any School

I MEAN exactly what I say. You can get a complete training by the world's oldest and largest Practical Radio School and I'll finance your Tuition. You won't have to start paying me back in small, monthly payments UNTIL 2 MONTHS AFTER YOUR REQUIRED TRAINING PERIOD IS OVER. I consider the fellow who is ambitious enough to want to get ahead by taking my Training, worthy of my help. MAIL THE COUPON BELOW and you can prove to me that you are willing to spend just 10 weeks in the Coyne Training Shops learning. Radio. Then, I'll tell you how I finance your Tuition—give you your complete Training and let you pay me back later.

Learn By Doing In 10 Weeks

I don't care whether you are 18 or 48. It makes no difference to me if you don't know an oscillator from a speaker. You don't need any previous experience or advanced education to master my Shop Training. Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the students at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my finance offer.

MANY EARN While LEARNING

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses and will tell me your problems I may be able to help you. I have thousands of others. I teach in 10 brief weeks in the great Training Shops of Coyne, you will learn on a wide variety of the new, up-to-date A.C. Superheterodyne sets, oscillators, mixers, and test instruments. Prepare for Amateur Broadcast, or Telegraph Radio Operator's License and to know all code and Dept. of Commerce rules for a government's License Examination.

TRAINING By Actual Work

Send all books, no battling charts, no classes, you get individual training — all real actual work with only the theory you will need. Building real radio sets, doing radio wiring and testing, trouble-shooting, re-



Auto Radio Instruction

Prepare for Jobs Like These: Here are a few of hundreds of positions in the Radio field. My free employment bureau gives you life-time employment service.
AIRCRAFT RADIO OPERATOR
SHIP RADIO OPERATOR
RADIO SERVICING
PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEMS
BROADCAST STATION OPERATOR
TALKING PICTURE STUDIOS
TELEVISION LABORATORY MAN



Home of Coyne Shops

This is our treasured modern Building wherein is installed thousands of dollars' worth of Radio equipment of all kinds. Every effort and convenience has been arranged to make you happy and content during your Training.

pairing and servicing. That's a glimpse of how I help to make you a Radio expert, and fit you to qualify for jobs leading to the biggest pay.

Jobs - Pay - Future

"Two weeks after graduation I received a splendid job. The main consideration given my application was that I was a Coyne Trained man." writes Harold Soucy of Illinois. "I wish to thank your Employment Manager for securing this position for me." writes Albert Yagon. "he sent me out to this Company the first day and I was employed there immediately." And I could go on quoting from hundreds of letters of successful Coyne Trained men. What, they have done, you should be able to do!

**Electric Refrigeration
Air Conditioning**
Right now I'm including my big new Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning course at no extra cost.

GET THE FACTS

Coyne is your one greatest chance to set into Radio. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne Book with photographs... facts... jobs... salaries... opportunities. Tell me how many extra expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

Get This
FREE
Book



H. C. LEWIS, President
Coyne Radio & Electrical School
300 S. Paulina St., Dept. 55-7E, Chicago

Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details; also tell me all about your "Pay After Graduation Offer."

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

COYNE R. C. LEWIS, PRESIDENT FOUNDED 1895
RADIO & ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
300 S. Paulina St., Dept. 55-7E, Chicago, Ill.

SECRET AGENT

RR XX

THE MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES

Rose Wyn, Editor

Again the Man of a Thousand Faces comes to you in an action-packed, baffling thriller taken from his casebook of crime

THE CORPSE CAVALCADE (Complete Book-Length Novel) 12
By BRANT HOUSE

Seven corpse-faced denizens of doom swept down on the Suburban Trust. Red-tongued machine guns blasted the way for their scavenger-like leader. But that leader did an amazing thing. He brought money into the bank, then disappeared with his buzzard brood And Secret Agent "X," scourge of the underworld, knew he had but one trail to follow—a trail that led to a gruesome gibbet, where the law and the lawless matched murder for his life.

THE MURDER RACE (Complete Novelette) 87
By EDWARD PAREISH WARE

For months the Panther prowled this mid-western city, leaving only dead men to tell of his bloody harvests. Only one person knew the Panther's identity—knew that that very knowledge meant death.

TOMB OF TORMENT By EMILE C. TEPPERMAN 109

Don Manton knew he was in the right place, for there was no hint of death in this crypt—only the chilling knowledge that there was another living being in the vault with him.

KILLER'S TEST By HUGH B. CAVE 120

A short short surprise.

THE SECRET COUNCIL 122

Behind the scenes with Secret Agent "X"

I will send you a Lesson Free



J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C. — the man who has directed the training of more men for the Radio Industry than any other man in America.

to show how easy it is to learn at home in spare time to fill a

Good Radio Job

Clip and mail the coupon. I'll send you a FREE lesson. I'll show you that Radio is *profitable*; that I give you practical, modern training information, easy to learn, easy to put into use. See for yourself why many men with less than a grammar school education and no Radio experience have become Radio Experts at two and three times what they were making before they enrolled with me. Get the facts about Radio's spare time and full time job opportunities.

Many Radio Experts make \$40, \$60, \$75 a week. Get ready for Jobs like these

Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, managers, and men for other jobs that pay up to \$8,908 a year. Radio factories employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen, technicians, buyers, and pay up to \$7,500 a year. Radio dealers and jobbers employ servicemen, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay up to \$100 a week. There are many opportunities to have a spare time or full time service or retail Radio business of your own. Radio business is picking up. It's a big business—big enough to absorb many more men than there are all the time. Get ready for Radio. Be a Radio Expert. I'll train you at home in spare time.

Many make \$5, \$10, \$15 a week Extra in Spare Time almost at once

The day you enroll I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which quickly show you how to do Radio repair jobs common in most every neighborhood. I give you plans and ideas that have made good money—\$50 to \$100 a year—for hundreds of fellows. My Course is famous as "the course that pays for itself."

Short Wave, Loud Speaker Systems, Television, Auto Radio, etc., included

Radio is growing. Loud speaker systems, radios, auto and aviation Radio, are recent new uses that have been found for it. Television promises many good jobs soon. Here is a field with a future. Get full information about it—how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Expert. My 60-90 method of training—half with printed and well illustrated lessons, half with Radio equipment and directions for conducting experiments—gives you broad practical experience and learning—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

You must be Satisfied

I make this agreement with you in writing—if you are not entirely satisfied when you finish my Course with the lessons and instruction service I have given you, please return your copy of me for tuition will be returned.

Get my book on Radio's Opportunities. Get a Free Lesson too

Mail coupon now. I'll send you "Rich Rewards in Radio" and a FREE lesson at once. Find out about Radio's spare time and full time opportunities; read what others who have taken my Course are doing and making. Read the lessons, decide for yourself whether my training is clear, interesting, practical. There is no obligation. Act at once. Mail coupon in an envelope or on a 10 card. Do it right now.

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



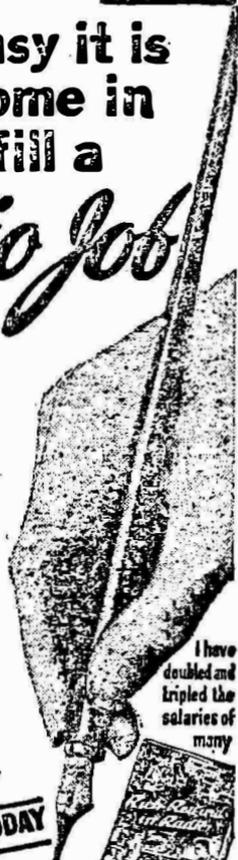
EXT SERVICEING has paid many N.R.I. men \$5, \$10, \$15 a week extra for their spare time. Full time men make as much as \$44, \$60, \$75 a week.



BROADCASTING STATIONs employ many technically trained men for interesting, fascinating jobs paying up to \$180 a week.



LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS are one of Radio's newest developments, gives interesting, well-paying jobs to many.



I have doubled and tripled the salaries of many

MAIL THIS TODAY

Send for **FREE SAMPLE LESSON** and **BOOK ON RADIO'S OPPORTUNITIES**

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

I want to take advantage of your offer. Without obligating me, send me your Free Sample Lesson and your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (Please print plainly.)

NAME AGE

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

The Tested Way to BETTER PAY

Please mention MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS GROUP when answering advertisements

How I Improved My Memory In One Evening

The Amazing Experience of Victor Jones

Of course I place you! Mr. Addison Sims of Seattle.

"If I remember correctly—and I do remember correctly—Mr. Burroughs, the lumberman, introduced me to you at the luncheon of the Seattle Rotary Club three years ago in May. This is a pleasure indeed! I haven't laid eyes on you since that day. How is the grain business? How did that merger work out?"

The assurance of this speaker—in the crowded corridor of the Hotel St. Regis—compelled me to look at him, though it is not my habit to "listen in" even in a hotel lobby.

"He is David M. Roth, the most famous memory expert in the United States," said my friend Kennedy, answering my question before I could get it out. "He will show you a lot more wonderful things than that, before the evening is over."

And he did.

As we went into the banquet room the toastmaster was introducing a long line of the guests to Mr. Roth. I got in line and when it came my turn, Mr. Roth asked, "What are your initials, Mr. Jones, and your business connection and telephone number?" Why he asked this, I learned later, when he picked out from the crowd the 50 men he had met two hours before and called each by name without a mistake. What is more, he named each man's business and telephone number.

I won't tell you all the other amazing things this man did except to tell how he called back, without a minute's hesitation, long lists of numbers, bank clearings, prices, parcel post rates and anything else the guests gave him in rapid order.

When I met Mr. Roth—which you may be sure I did the first chance I got—rather bowled me over by saying, in his quiet, modest way:

"There is nothing miraculous about my remembering anything. I went to remember, whether it be names, facts, figures, facts, or something I have read.

"You can do this as easily as I do. Anyone with an average mind can learn quickly to do exactly the same things which seem so miraculous when I do them.

"My own memory," continued Mr. Roth, "was originally very faulty. Yes it was—a really poor memory. On meeting a man I would lose his name in thirty seconds, while now there are probably 10,000 men and women in the United States, many of whom I have met but

once, whose names I can call instantly on meeting them."

"That is all right for you, Mr. Roth," I interrupted, "you have given years to it. But how about me?"

"Mr. Jones," he replied, "I can teach you the secret of a good memory in one evening. This is not a guess, because I have done it with thousands of pupils. In the first of seven simple lessons which I have prepared for home study, I show you the basic principle of my whole system and you will find it—not hard work as you might fear—but just like playing a fascinating game. I will prove it to you."

He didn't have to. His Course did; I got it the next day from his publishers.

When I tackled the first lesson I suppose I was the most surprised man in forty-eight States to find that I had learned—in about one hour—how to remember a list of one hundred words so that I could call them off forward and back without a single mistake.

That lesson *at* tuck. So did the other six. Read this letter from one of the most famous trial lawyers in New York:

"*May I take occasion to state that I regard your service in giving this system to the world as a real benefaction. The wonderful simplicity of the method, and the ease with which its principles may be acquired especially appeal to me. I may add that I already had occasion to test the effectiveness of the first two lessons in the preparation for trial of an important action in which I am about to engage.*"

This man didn't put it a bit too strong. The Roth Course is priceless! I can count on my memory now. I can call the name of any man I have met before—and I can't keep better. I can remember my figures I wish to remember. Telephone numbers come to mind instantly, once I have filed them by Mr. Roth's easy method.

The old fear of forgetting has vanished; I used to be "scared stiff" on my feet—because I wasn't sure, I couldn't remember what I wanted to say.

Now I am sure of myself, confident, and "easy as an old shoe" when I get on my feet at the club, at a banquet, in a business meeting, or in any special gathering.

The most enjoyable part of it all is that I am now a good conversationalist—and I used to be as silent as a sphinx when I got into a crowd of people who knew things.

Now I can call up like a flash of lightning most any fact I want right at the instant I need it most. I used to think a "hair trigger" memory belonged only to the prodigy and genius. Now I see that every one of us has that kind of a memory if he knows how to make it work.

I tell you it is a wonderful thing, after groping around in the dark for so many years to be able to switch the big searchlight on your mind and see instantly everything you want to remember.

This Roth Course will do wonders for you, office.

Since we took it up you never hear anyone in our office say "I guess" or "I think it was about so much" or "I forget that right now" or "I can't remember" or "I must look up his name." Now they are right there with the answer—like a shot.

Here is just a bit from a letter of a well-known sales manager up in Montreal:

"*Here is the whole thing in a nutshell. Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Anyone I don't care who he is—can improve his Memory 100% in a week and 1,000% in the month.*"

My advice to you is don't wait another minute. Send for Mr. Roth's amazing course and see what a wonderful memory you have got. Your dividend in increased power will be enormous.

VICTOR JONES.

Send No Money

So confident are the publishers of the Roth Memory Course that you will be amazed to see how easy it is to double, yes triple your memory power in a few short hours, that they are willing to send the course on this liberal approval offer.

Don't send any money; merely mail coupon. When the complete course is handed to you, pay the postman only \$1.95, plus few cents postage charges. But if you are not entirely satisfied, send it back anytime within five days and your \$1.95 will be refunded in full.

We believe you will be as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the course. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail coupon now before this "5-day approval" offer is withdrawn. Walter J. Black, Inc., Dept. 354, 2 Park Ave., New York.

5-DAY APPROVAL COUPON

WALTER J. BLACK, INC.,
Dept. 354, 2 Park Ave., New York, N. Y.

Please send me, in a plain container, the Roth Memory Course of seven lessons. When course is delivered to me, I will pay the postman only \$1.95, plus few cents postage charges. If I care to, I may return the course to you within five days, and you agree to refund my \$1.95 in cash.

Name

Address

Check here if enclosing \$1.95 WITH this coupon thus saving postage charges. Name refund privilege applies, of course.

.... "I have **REDUCED MY WAIST EIGHT INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT!"**

...writes *George Bailey*

LOST 50 POUNDS" says W. T. Anderson... "My waist is 8 inches smaller" writes W. L. McGinnis... "Felt like a new man" claims Fred Wolf... "Wouldn't sell my belt for \$100" writes C. W. Higbee.

So many wearers are delighted with the results obtained with the Weil Belt that we want you to test it for ten days at our expense!

REDUCE YOUR WAIST 3 INCHES IN 10 DAYS

... or it won't cost you a penny!

Because we have done this for thousands of others... because we know we can do as much for you... we dare to make this unconditional offer!

You will appear much slimmer at once, and in 10 short days your waistline will actually be 3 inches smaller... three inches of fat gone... or it won't cost you one cent.

IT IS THE MASSAGE-LIKE ACTION THAT DOES IT!

Now there is an easy way to reduce without exercise, diet or drugs. The Weil Health Belt exerts a massage-like action that removes fat with every move you make.

It supports the sagging muscles of the abdomen and quickly gives you an erect, athletic carriage. Many enthusiastic wearers write that it not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place... that they are no longer fatigued... and that it greatly increases their endurance. You will be more than delighted with the great improvement in your appearance.

NO DRUGS; NO DIETS. NO EXERCISES!

For 12 years the Weil Belt has been accepted as ideal for reducing by men in all walks of life... from business men and office workers who find that it removes cumbersome fat with every movement... to active outdoor men who like the feeling of protection it gives.



"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man". The boys kidded me about my big "paunch".

At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.

In a bathing suit... I was immense. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.



What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I had actually taken **EIGHT INCHES** off my waist... and 20 pounds off my weight!

It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!

I have a new feeling of energy and pep... work better, eat better, play better... I didn't realize how much I was missing!



DON'T WAIT... FAT IS DANGEROUS!

Fat is not only unbecoming, but it also endangers your health. Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity, so don't wait any longer.

Remember this... either you take off 3 inches of fat in 10 days or it won't cost one penny! Even the postage you pay to return the package will be refunded!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, INC.
215 HILL ST., NEW HAVEN, CONN.

Gentlemen: Send me **FREE**, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and giving full details of your 10 day **FREE** trial offer and Unconditional Guarantee!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Use coupon or send name and address on penny postage

REMINGTON

ONLY 10¢ PORTABLE

ADAY

FREE TYPING COURSE

Buy this beautiful brand new Remington Portable No. 5 direct from factory for only 10¢ a day! It is a 14" x 14" keyboard, standard width carriage, with 400 lb. release on keyboard, back spacer, automatic ribbon reverse — every essential feature found in standard typewriters. Carriage case, typing case free. Special 10-day trial. You need not risk a cent! Write Remington Land Inc., Dept. 137-5, 238 E. 42nd St., N. Y. C. Don't delay. Act NOW!



10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER



"My daughter's gout is gone, thanks to you. Our doctor says she is now sound as a dollar!" says the Rev. S. A. Cotton, Washington, North Carolina. Pictured above is Miss Sophia Kurie before and after using a simple, safe, harmless home treatment of a great Bismarck Special. This treatment which has already been used by 200,000 others is described in book on "How to Remove Gout Quickly." Anyone suffering with Gout will receive this book free by sending their name at once to

PHYSICIANS TREATMENT & ADVISORY CO. Suite 247-K, Eastmore Bldg. 3712a Cornwell Bldg.

CARTOON BOOKS

NEW STUFF—JUST OUT

Mother's Daughter, Coachman's Daughter, Peeping thru the Key Hole, Show Devil's Daughter, In the Shadows, The Night Shift, Original Peeping Tom, Rubby Tomes Home, Under a Texas Moon, First Non-Stop Film, Came the Dawn, Watching His Step, What the Window Washer Saw, Fireman Save My Child, Buzza! In Glasgow, A Tough Break, After Their Shave Leave, Kally the Iconian, I'll See You, etc. etc. There are all spicy scenes from cartoon books. Also 113 Miniature French Type Pictures of Beautiful Girls in Starling and Artistic Poses, 60 of them consist of Men and Women together in snappy and intimate poses. Free—a set of 30 Pretty Girls in sulking and naughty bedroom scenes and a Booklet containing 13 Beautiful women in inspiring and sensational poses, something new and Different. These Pictures are Post Card Size. We will send all of the above upon receipt of \$1.50. Send Cash, Stamps or Money Order. Franco Service, Philadelphia, Pa.

CRESCENT NOVELTY CO.

287 Broadway, Dept. 5F New York City

MEN! ALWAYS HAVE UR-GARD

4 FOR 1 WITH YOU! A MEDICAL CORPS Prosthesis, perfected by a former U. S. Army doctor. 2147 62E1. Order TODAY! 50¢ each—G.O.D. 911. HOLLYWOOD HYGIENIC PRODUCTS, INC., Dept. E-44, Drawer C, Hollywood, Calif.

BUY DIRECT AND SAVE.

Women Delayed?

Use MERRILL MENSTRUUM when delayed! POSITIVELY FORCES REGULAR, ACTIVE PERIODS! Results in great and permanent relief from all menstrual ailments, as QUINCHIN LACTIC and best established and best TREAT DOCTORS PREFER. Costs as over 200¢ more than ordinary remedies, but costs less as more effective, stays in sale, 10¢. Send a check to be worked. Offer expires Feb. 1, 1917. Write to MERRILL MENSTRUUM, 1000 Broadway, New York City. Send 10¢ for 100¢ order book received, plus postal tax. *UNPRECEDENTED INFORMATION.

50023 Corp., Dept. 5MPS, Chicago

Please mention MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS GROUP when answering advertisements

ACTUAL REPRODUCTIONS

Original Photographs

Made in Paris

As our SPECIAL, and to convince you that we have the stuff, we offer an GLOSSY FINISH photographic paper, well made and clearly developed, the following 4 groups of Photos:

- No. 1 Group consisting of 8 Pictures Combination
- No. 2 Group consisting of 5 Pictures Combination
- No. 3 Group consisting of 12 Pictures Combination
- No. 4 Group consisting of 12 Pictures Combination

These above include photos of men and women in interesting poses, scenes alone, etc. All real photos of the Lovest of Art. Remember, they are all actual reproductions of genuine French Pictures.

Also, with the above, we include a combination of 18 miniature pictures, 24 of which are of couples, at an extra cost. These are included as that you may select just such subjects, we will mail you a large photographic reproduction, of any size, at moderate price. These will be actual photographs made from original negatives.

FREE—Send this ad with your first order and we will also send you absolutely free, the following: 12 Love Letters, read two ways, also some short stories, and an illustrated booklet of interesting cartoons known. Offer your order to NOW and get acquainted.

EVERYTHING MENTIONED ABOVE INCLUDED ALL FOR \$1.00

Send cash, money order or stamps. Best scaled.

LE FLEUR COMPANY

Dept. 5 548 Madison Ave., New York City

Follow This MAN

Special Service October No. 25 to be on the job! Send your name and address to the Editor of the magazine on the cover of this issue.

Free The Confidential Letter to the Editor. Write for it!

Get a Regular Monthly Salary

YOU may be a member of the Institute of Applied Science, Inc. for only \$1.00. We will send you a copy of the magazine and a copy of the book "How to Make Money from the Air" for only \$1.00. We will also send you a copy of the book "How to Make Money from the Air" for only \$1.00. We will also send you a copy of the book "How to Make Money from the Air" for only \$1.00.

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, INC. 1228 Broadway Ave., New York City, N. Y.

LADIES DELAYED

Do not worry—use MONTHALONE the tried and proven remedy. Many of the longest and most obstinate uncurable delays are cured within a few days, even after other remedies have failed. Don't delay—order now \$2.00 cash or money order. Order shipped same day received.

MODERN LABORATORY, Dept. M.

7110 Woodward Ave. Detroit, Mich.

BUY DIRECT

Enormous savings on Hygienic Sanitary Products of all kinds for men and women. Write today for our FREE illustrated list of GUARANTEED Products.

RELIABLE PRODUCTS

504 S. Crawford Ave., Dept. 124, Chicago, Ill.

MEN STRENGTHEN YOUR VITAL POWERS

An astounding scientific discovery for men 45 and complete. Leads to Health, Power and Success for years without drugs or false stimulants. 50 Vitas Gland Tablets from W. BOBEA Box 2143 Philadelphia, Pa.

SPECIAL OFFER: Good Cartoon books, illustrated; 15 lively pictures of your complete before and after marriage; set of girl art models; whip illustrations; 12 hot love letters; the Venus Tummy law under the parlor door; French anatomy; Winkle Winkle; My Life in Paris; Great sex poses; Paris Strife; and more. ALL FOR 50¢ (Money Order). Service Post, 6110 S. W. N. WINKLER, 331 16th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

"CHICAGO MODELS"

An artistic pose. Sold by "ADULTS ONLY" 10 for \$1.00 (Post card size) Lists and Samples for a quarter. G. CREED, 6441 Cottage Grove Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ROMANCE corresponding club. Why be lonely? Join the Greatest Corresponding Club in America. Strictly confidential. Particulars Free. P. O. 54, 31st St. Sta., Detroit, Mich.



MOULDING A MIGHTY ARM

COMPLETE COURSE
ON ARM BUILDING

ONLY

GET AN ARM of might with the power and grip to obey your physical desires. I have taken weaklings whose arms were scrawny pieces of skin and bone and in a very short time developed them into men of powerful proportions with bulging biceps and brawny forearms. He-men with strong, solid arms of power that are respected by men and admired by women! I don't mean just a 16-inch bicep but a 15-inch forearm and a powerful 8-inch wrist.

PROVEN, SCIENTIFIC TRAINING!

This course is specially planned to build every muscle in your arm! It has been scientifically worked out for that purpose. Many of my pupils have developed a pair of triceps shaped like a horseshoe, and just as strong, and a pair of biceps that show their double head formation. The sinewy cables between the biceps and elbow are deep and thick with wire cable-like ligaments. The forearm bellies with bulk, the great supinator lifting muscles become a column of power, and their wrists are alive and writhe with cordy sinew. Start now to build a he-man's arm!

THE SECRETS OF STRENGTH REVEALED

You can't make a mistake. The reputation of the strongest armed man in the world made behind this course. I give you my secret methods of strength development illustrated and explained as you like them. Mail your order now while you can still get this course at my introductory price of only 25c.

25c

THIS BOOK SHOWS HOW TO BUILD A MIGHTY ARM AND A 16 INCH BICEP

I will not limit you to the arm. Try any one of my best courses listed below at 25c. Or, try all of them for only \$1.00.

Rush the Coupon Today!

I will include a **FREE COPY** of "NERVES OF STEEL, MUSCLES LIKE IRON". It is a priceless book to the strength fan and muscle builder. Full of pictures of marvelous bodied men who tell you decisively how you can build symmetry and strength the Jowett Way! Reach Out... Gasp This Special Offer!



FREE BOOK WITH PHOTOS OF FAMOUS STRONGMEN



GEORGE F. JOWETT
"Champion"
of "Clayton's"
Winner of many contests for strength and physical perfection!

JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE

Dept. 1191, 422 Postlar St., Scranton, Pa.

George F. Jowett: Send, by return mail, prepaid, the courses checked below for which I am enclosing—

- Moulding a Mighty Arm, 25c
- Moulding a Mighty Back, 25c
- Moulding a Mighty Grip, 25c
- Moulding a Mighty Chest, 25c
- Moulding a Mighty Leg, 25c
- Strong Man Starts Made Easy, 25c
- All 6 Books for \$1.00.

Name _____ Age _____
Address _____



LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR FUTURE

Know According to ASTROLOGY Lucky Days • Success • Failure • Love

Look forward to tomorrow with scientific knowledge of your future destiny and be guided according to your lucky days . . . avoid pitfalls . . . know your guiding star and let it lead you toward success, courtship, marriage, love, travel, health, etc. **KNOWLEDGE IS POWER** . . . know and you will succeed.

Learn Now What 1935 Holds for You

I will send you a complete scientific interpretation of your own horoscope according to the scientific factors furnished by your personal birthdate. You will be astounded, delighted and surprised with your astrological forecast and its accuracy. A new-found friend who enables you to travel in the light instead of the dark. Saves you from humiliations, embarrassments, mistakes, worry and woe.

You will find timely, astrological answers to practically all of your current problems in this forecast. Questions like these and others solved.

1. Will I have better financial success in 1935 than in 1934?
2. Do you see any family troubles over the near term?
3. I have an opportunity to purchase some stock which I believe are on the margin market, also in a speculative group. Should I buy them?
4. Will I do well in a new business venture?
5. Will I have happy or unhappy matrimonial experience this year?

GUARANTEE Absolute satisfaction guaranteed or money back. **ACT! Use Coupon Today**

Send coupon at once and I will answer 4 questions free (for your information, Enclosed \$10.00 for personal forecasts based on your own personal birthdate will be sent by return prepaid mail in plain, sealed wrapper. (Exclusive self-addressed stamped envelope for special answer to 4 free questions.)

The Great "ASSET" grade 405 P. O. Box 627, White Plains, N. Y.

Please send me detailed astrological interpretation for 1935 with free advice on 4 pertinent questions. Enclosed \$10.00.

My birthdate

Name

Street

City

State

If you have a friend or relative, who wishes a reading, enclose \$1.00 for 3 readings with birthdate.

FREE

Advice on 4 questions if you order at once. No 20 year study of the science of astrology is yours to command. My work has reached over the world. **WRITE ME!** The only I succeed as a divining physician; following is in answer to H. D.'s request:

- A. Thomas born natives make successful physicians. Have a keen intellect and successful in diagnosing illness and applying the proper remedy. By all means stay in this field.
- B. Will my son born June 18, 1935, have good health?
- A. Had you son been born a day earlier, he would not, I believe, outlive his infant years due to the Moon-Saturn opposition. However, his health outlook is very excellent and he succeeds in life thru his magnetic personality. It will likely be an author.
- C. Before I married, I courted a girl who now threatens "breach of promise." How will this turn out?
- A. You probably received this "breach" during the past 60 days when under adverse social aspects. You will never be sued by this person.
- D. Will I make more money in 1935 and what event of particular importance do you believe is in store for me during this period?
- A. You will do much better in 1935 in a financial way. There's plenty of hard work and much success. Money you thought lost will be recovered.

GAMBLERS' SECRETS EXPOSED

Card, Dice, Slot Machines, Punch Boards, Craps, Polarr, QUIT LOUING Systems. Special exposes, X-ray Cards, Know top card. 2nd, 3rd, 4th cards down in deck without taking part of top. CERTIFIED CARD EXPOSURE. \$1 X-ray cards \$2 each. Books, Tricks, Secret Index, Stud \$1 for CERTIFIED EXPOSURE and free sample cards. **JOHNSON'S BOOKS** Box 2488 KANSAS CITY, MO.

SEX SECRETS

127 pages of intimate information on love-life-marriage. Told in two amazing booklets, "Man's Sexual Life" and "Woman's Sexual Life." With confidential lists for adults only. All for 25c. Paid in plain wrapper. Get your set now from **NATIONAL BOOKSELLERS** Dept. 14 Cresson, Mich.

LITTLE & MAC

(NEW STUFF) Peaches and Brewings, Dumb Dora, Mantis and Jigs, Beans and Bubbles, The Gumbe, French Stenographer, A Bachelor's Dream, Adam and Eve, Kip and Alice, A Model's Life, Original—"High in Paris" Teds and Casper, A Conchard's Daughter and over 100 more. Also over 70 Empty French Type pictures including 14 Actual Photos. Montmarre type of Men and Women in various poses. Also including Women alone, in different positions, etc. Special free with order "Advice How to Win at Cards" also "The Night Life of Paris" and "Stories How to Start unusual stories, etc. etc. You will receive everything. Send cash, money order or stamps. Immediate shipment.

SPECIAL: ALL FOR \$1.00
PARIS IMPORT CO.

Dept. 8L 4166 Park Ave. New York City

LONELY HEARTS Join our Club, World's Greatest Social Extension Bureau. Happiness awaits you, correspondents everywhere, seeking congenial mates. Quick results. Confidential service. Particulars FREE. **STANDARD CLUB**, Box C, GRAYLAKE, ILLINOIS

BECOME A DETECTIVE

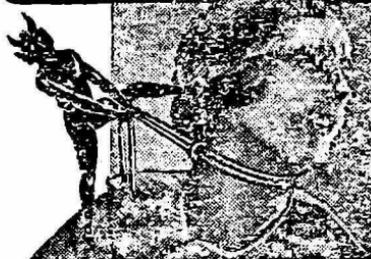
Earn Large Fees — No Experience Required. Interesting Work — Travel — Secret Investigations. Be a success—Write for Free Particulars. Universal Detective System, 38 Park Row, N. Y. C.

TEAR GAS PRICES GO BOOM

Here is your big opportunity! The market for Tear Gas Shooting Devices and Cartridges is established. It is now a matter of price and quality. Hagen offers customers both guaranteed quality and new amazing new quality system of \$1.20 in Automobile Pencil Guns with Tear Gas Cartridges. Refills from \$5 to \$4. Also Fountain Pen Guns with Shells at proportionally low prices. Do not miss this astounding money-making opportunity. Write for details. Or, for a quick start, send \$1.25 for complete set of Pencil Gun with 3 Fountain Gun Tear Gas and 10 Demonstrating Cartridges. Satisfactions Guaranteed.

HAGEN IMPORT COMPANY, 2117-E Hagen Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.

ASTHMA was Strangling her



Illustration

Attacks Stopped at Once

If asthma has kept you gasping and miserable, read this letter from Mrs. Will Case, Route No. 3, Hubbard, Nebraska.

April 19, 1921—"I was sick over 15 years with asthma. I couldn't get my breath and what little sleep I got was had while propped up in bed or in a chair. I tried Nason, but the time I had taken half of my second bottle my asthma was gone and has not returned."—Mrs. Will Case, Route No. 3, Hubbard, Nebraska.

FREE—No need to suffer asthma torments when Nason relief can be yours. For years Nason has helped thousands. Write for letters and booklet of helpful information about relief of asthma and bronchial ailments.

NASON MEDICINE CO. 600 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Indiana



DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco so thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Reducer. Not a substitute, no habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of marvelous effect of tobacco and dependent cure way to relieve the craving tomorrow.

FREE BOOK

NovelPharmaceutical Co.
Dept. 228 St. Louis, Mo.

MEN LIFE IS FUN WHEN YOU'RE FIT. Why do some people feel old and get 80 years younger. It's because they are fit. If you are "run down," under par, if each day is a hard dull grind, don't be discouraged. Give your life a chance. It may be just the thing you need to do the things you want. Health is positively guaranteed, or money refunded. Price per box \$1.00.

V. & V. SALES CO., Box F-27, Upper Darby, Pa.

EPILEPSY — EPILEPTICS!

Detroit lady finds complete relief for husband. Specialists home and abroad failed. All letters answered.

Appt. 6
MRS. GEO. DEMPSTER
 5000 Lafayette Blvd., West Detroit, Mich.

THE MYSTERY SEX HALF MAN HALF WOMAN

Read about the unembellishable love and passions of these strange people. 92-page book. "Hemosexual Life," describes their secret practices. Adults only. Postpaid in plain wrapper. Price 80c.

FEDERAL SALES CO., Box 3443, Indianapolis, Ind.

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Established Reliable Members everywhere (Many Wealthy) If lonely, write for scales, particulars.

P. O. BOX 1251 DENVER, COLORADO

TILLIE & MAC

Winnie Winkle, Kip and Alice and 100 more all short stories, snappy cracks, etc. 88 daisy miniatures, 78 papers, 15 love variations, 80 sketches, 100 real reproduced imported young French girls, 14 English stories, etc. All \$1. Extra big package girl photos, stories and 150 cartoons \$2. M. P. BRAUN, 253 W. 47th, Chicago.

MARRIED WOMEN TELL EACH OTHER!

Or irregularly use our new successful O. J. O. Relief Compound (Double XX strength) a Potentio Belief. Immediate Powerful effect. Acts quickly. Now often recommended, approved and depended upon by thousands of women for successful relief of irregular, discouraging, hard protracted or long overdue delayed periods, resulting from unimpaired nature that interferes with the normal function of the ovaries. Results are reflected very quickly. Not toxic or non-toxic. Used by Doctors. Amazing Proof: Mrs. M. R. writes—Missed period 3 months followed in 3 days. Mrs. A. writes—After 2 1/2 years failed and lost. Mrs. L. writes—I got relief from first box. Numerous others daily report quick relief. Many say our medicine is the best. SEND NO MONEY. Pay postman when delivered plus postage, or send money and we will post. \$1.00 a Box or 3 for \$5.00, or \$5.00 best Triple XXX strength. Trial supply 25c. We guarantee to ship orders same day, sealed, plain wrapper. FREE valuable Booklet. "What Every Married Woman Should Know." O. J. O. MEDICAL CO., Dept. 281-H, 1434 N. Wells St., Chicago, Ill.

TILLIE AND GUS!

THE LATEST STUFF

Also Tillie and Mac, Maggie and Jiggs, Dumb Dora, Ben and Bubbin, Peaches and Browning, French Micrographer, A Bachelor's Dream, A Woman's Life, Adam and Eve, Kip and Alice, Harold Peas and Gussie, Barney Google and Spark Plug, Boob McNuts and Fern, Tillie the Tollie, Care-man Love, Chorus Girl Love, Turkish Love, Apache Love, Old Maid Love, Sailors on Shore, What Tom Saw Through the Keyhole, When Euboy Comes Home, What the Window Washer Saw, Mabel and the Ice-man; A Turkish Harver; Marston Love; The 50 Reasons French Girl Uses 16 French Lovely Pictures, French Men and Women in Pastime Love Posses; All Hula-Hula Dancing Girl. All the above will be sent you prepaid for only \$1.00.

SEA-BREEZE NOVELTY HOUSE
 P. O. Box 1458 New Haven, Conn. Dept. M7-15-12

HERE'S THAT DARING BOOK OF SENSATIONAL SEX ADVICE



with rich and interesting details of life as you've always wanted, now at a price you can afford to pay, we state by the greatest lover the world has ever known. Thank you for the copy book sent to you. Now, post-paid for only 50c. Send for one O.K.

AMAZING FREE OFFER

With each order we receive for the above book we will ship FREE of charge, post-paid, One complete extra copy of our new book, Measures of a Gold Seal on a Friday Morning. A laugh in every line. Limited Offer. Write today and get your copy of these marvelous books, now, without delay.

Dept. 18 THE BOOKSHOP Sierra Madre, California

Play a Tune In 10 Minutes



On your Spanish Guitar, Uke, Tenor Saxo, Mandolin or Banjo Mandolin. No knowledge of music necessary. Don't wait. No practice. Play first by number. Then by note. Simply attach E-Z Player to your favorite instrument—press numbered keys and play.

FREE

Instruction book with numbered tunes and chords comes with every E-Z Player. Start playing popular tunes by number right off the reel. Be the life of the party—the center of attraction—a real star. Write today for 3-Day Free Trial Offer and Special Catalog of various instruments, harmonicas and accordion tunes.

FERRY SPECIALTIES, INC.,
 Dept. 165 Evanston, Ill.

GET ACQUAINTED CLUB

Why be lonely? Get acquainted by mail. Reliable members everywhere. I want to make YOU happy. Confidential service. Send particulars for 10c.

P. O. Box 58 Nashua, N. H.

SCIENTIFIC

NATURAL BIRTH CONTROL

for MARRIED PEOPLE

DISCOVERED BY DOCTORS OGINO AND KNAUS

20 Days Out Of 28 Are Safe

Doctors Ogino and Knauz, two distinguished medical scientists, discovered a new law of vital importance to every married person. Their discovery determines the monthly safe and unsafe periods. During the past few years gynecologists throughout the world have corroborated in their activity the findings of Drs. Ogino and Knauz. Now after such corroboration it is considered legal and helpful for married people to possess this happy information. Dr. Ogino has now written a book, "Conception Period of Women," which is available to all married people taking advantage of this special offer. The information you get eliminates fear and worry, creating the happiness intended by nature in a perfect wedlock. This priceless gift of science will bring a new blessing into every married life.

20 Days Out of 28 Are Safe

If one million married couples assembled themselves before you and certified:— that they themselves followed the direction of the Ogino-Knauz Law of Nature to their complete satisfaction; that 20 days out of 28 days they are safe from conception . . . they no longer need depend on the use of contraceptives . . . they are relieved from medicine and physical distress . . . that they now feel they are co-operating with God's wishes . . . that it costs but 30 minutes of reading time to learn this new theory as applied to each woman's cycle, they would not be asked to sign a copy of Dr. Ogino's original book and follow the directions. We believe that such testimony would be forthcoming were it possible to get all married couples together to consider this important discovery. **WRITE IN SAFETY AND IN HARMONY** for your copy of Dr. Ogino's "Conception Period of Women" by taking advantage of special offer below.

Unnatural Methods Harmful

The use of contraceptives is distasteful and repulsive to all. It represents a violence to nature, a degradation, a perversion and poisoning of normal conduct. It represents a moral sin and very often sets up local irritations and keeps up a sense of desire and lack of satisfaction. Their contact use is bound to cause pimples, serious headaches, nervousness and they are all so inconvenient. There is no substitute for nature . . . health fear and worry and live safely 20 days out of 28 days all year round.

"Eugenics and Sex Relations" Reveal Many Sex Facts

Above we told you we were about to make a very startling offer. HERE IT IS. We want every serious reader of this magazine to possess a copy of "Eugenics and Sex Relations."

"Eugenics and Sex Relations" contains 244 pages boldly setting forth the truth about everything you want to know. The secrets of sex are unveiled in plain, straight-from-the-shoulder, simple language. There are 27 chapters and 39 chapters. A few of the passages, lastly are: "How to Know if You are Pregnant," "Sexual Prevention," "The Sexual Embryo," "Secrets of Fascination," "Secrets of Sex Attraction," "Keeping Yourself Attractive," "Sexual Conservation," "How to Manage Men," "How to Know if My Lover Loves You" and many other questions which now puzzle your mind. The price of "Eugenics and Sex Relations" alone is usually \$3.00 and the price of Dr. Ogino's book, "Conception Period of Women" is \$2.98. Send your order as one and receive both books for only \$2.98.

How to Order—Send No Money

Give your name and address to sender. **SEND NOW!** We'll send your 244-page book "EUGENICS AND SEX RELATIONS" and Dr. Ogino's "CONCEPTION PERIOD OF WOMEN" by return mail in plain wrapper. Pay postman \$2.98. Plus postage on order.

5 DAYS' FREE TRIAL
Read both books at our risk for 5 days.



REFERRED PUBLICATIONS, Dept. 225
64 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y.

Send after I have checked below in plain wrapper by return COD mail. I will pay postman \$. . . plus postage, on delivery. (Enclose money order now and we will pay postage.)

- Dr. Ogino's "Conception Period of Women" . . . \$2.98
- "Eugenics and Sex Relations" . . . 3.00
- Combination offer, both books . . . 2.98

Name Age

Address
Orders from foreign countries must be accompanied by express or money order of \$3.45.

Approved by . . . Clergy Doctors

Ecclsiastical Bishop Approves
The Rt. Rev. George George Stewart, D.D., Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago approves the Ogino-Knauz method and states: "I, therefore, recommend and urge that all priests of the diocese of Chicago (including themselves) with the exception of its three general pastoral work, I make the same recommendation to all some members of this diocese. In our married couples and to those contemplating marriage, especially in those young couples who are desirous of marriage, because of their economic situation, they feel reluctant to engage in the practice I have mentioned. And I am happy to join the ecclesiastical authorities of our brethren in the Roman communion in approving the method." (Quoted from the Chicago Daily Times, Oct. 1, 1934.)
According to Dr. A. G. Miller's communication, 6 cases with a known conception date were all in accordance with the Ogino-Knauz period, and in 86 cases the sterility phase was recognized, the author reporting normal babies carried out 224 times in the post-menstrual sterility phase, and 271 times in the premenstrual sterility phase. In June, 1932 he wrote to Dr. Ogino that in 124 cases there had been no pregnancy as a result of sexual intercourse on 1528 occasions, it having in all cases taken place in the sterility phase. Dr. Miller's conclusions report of this finding is included in Dr. Ogino's book.

Not Acting Against Nature
Pope Pius XI, Encyclical on Christian Marriage, pronounces to the world that married people are not to be considered as acting against the order of nature, if they exercise their marital rights according to sound and natural laws, even though no new life can thus arise on account of circumstances of time. The dissemination of the findings of Ogino and Knauz serves but to verify the "circumstances of time" referred to by Pope Pius XI. We follow happily along the trail of clarity and frankness blazed for all Christians by the Supreme Pontiff. Professors of gynecology and statistics of prominent medical Colleges, write: "Send by copy of Dr. Ogino's book. We wish to use this as reference in lectures."

The Corpse Cavalcade

Book-Length Novel



Seven corpse-faced denizens of doom swept down on the Suburban Trust. Red-tongued machine guns blasted the way for their scavenger-like leader. But that leader did an amazing thing. He brought money into the bank. And leaving it there, he disappeared with his buzzard brood. . . . Secret Agent "X," the Man of a Thousand Faces, the lone-wolf scourge of the underworld, had but one trail to follow. And that trail led to a gruesome gibbet—where the law and the lawless matched murder for his life.

CHAPTER I

HANDS THAT KILL

MISTY rain held the winter's pall of smoke low over the city. The narrow strip of sky, visible from the street, was like thick gray flannel. There was a vague, un-

familiar quality in the sound of things, as if the bustle of the awakening business world was muffled by some tangible shadow.

In front of the Suburban National Bank and extending for half a block beyond its brass grated doors, was a line of people. There was anxiety on every face, and the mutter of angry threats in every mouth. Men, women, children clutched tightly at pass-books, each selfishly wondering if he

Breath-Taking Crime Chronicle Taken

By
Brant House

Suddenly it came—a roar that was a concentrated thunderclap. Hell seemed to crack open.



or she would be in time to make a withdrawal while the cash still held out.

The custodian of the Suburban National swept moodily with a broom behind the brass-barred gate. He glanced at his watch. It was five minutes to nine.

"Hey, granpa!" a man near the head of the line of depositors shouted to the bank custodian. "Open up.

What's five minutes or so? We want our money!"

"Yeah," another echoed. "Good, solid money. If we get it at the bank we know it's good!"

From the Records of Secret Agent "X"

The custodian scowled bitterly. "You'll get it! Suburban National's been open every day the law allowed. Never defaulted yet, and ain't goin' to start now! You people must be crazy. This bank's as sound as a rock!"

"You have a hard-earned twenty-dollar bill refused on the grocery bill, and you'd get scared yourself," a plump-faced woman called back. "We're getting our money while we know it's the real thing—and not counterfeit!"

Riot broke out in the rear of the line. A middle-aged man, drunk with panic, was lunging at the line, head lowered and shoulders bucking. A blue-coated policeman stepped from the curb, seized the agitator by the collar and pulled him from the line. Another cop, swinging his stick threateningly, restored some sort of order among the depositors. But the indignant man fought free from the hands of the policeman and lunged again at the line.

"Here, none o' that!" This time the cop was less gentle as he yanked the man back to his place. "You wait your turn like the rest or I'll give you a rap on that thick skull of yours."

The middle-aged man turned a white, frightened face up to meet the eyes of the policeman. "I've got to get in there," he pleaded. "I can't wait! It's a matter of life and death! My wife—she's got to have an operation! I've got to get money—real money. She's got to have a specialist. It's more than just grocery bills!"

The policeman's face softened slightly. But he shook his head discouragingly. "Sorry, buddy. You got to take your chance just like the others. Back to the tail of the line."

Somewhere, a clock boomed the first stroke of nine. A shout rose from the mob of anxious depositors. There was a sudden surge forward against the gates that barred the entrance to the bank. Simultaneously with the striking of the clock, the morning parade of traffic in the street was broken by

three big armored trucks that drew over to the curb in front of the bank. Some one in the line of anxious depositors saw the armored cars and shouted:

"Money! They're bringing our money!"

As if a bomb had burst in its midst the line of people suddenly broke and became a roaring crowd. The people turned in a disorganized mass and rushed towards the curb and the armored trucks. The handful of police, though battling valiantly to check the tide of humanity, were lost in the mob, their arms pinioned to their sides by the sheer weight of the frantic people.

DISREGARDING the threatening machine gun muzzles that were thrust through the slots in the armor plate sides of the trucks, the mob pressed close. Then some one in the foremost ranks of the bank depositors shouted:

"Back! Give them a chance to get out of the trucks. There'll be time enough and money enough for all!"

The crowd pressed back. A woman fainted, stifled in the jam. A policeman, poking and prodding with his stick, forced his way through the outer fringes of the crowd. He ran to the call box on the corner. Riot was impending. A squad of police would be needed in another five minutes.

The armored trucks spilled men armed with automatics and machine guns. Some carried heavy leather satchels that were linked to their wrists with chains. All of them ran, with heads lowered and collars turned up, straight towards the bank doors.

In the lobby of the bank stood a man of perhaps forty years of age. His carefully brushed, thick, white hair contrasted sharply with smooth, tanned skin and sharp black eyes. He was Abel Corin, a director in the bank and an executive in half a dozen industrial enterprises. As the armed men from the trucks entered, Corin strode forward, seized the foremost bank messenger by the arm.

"What is the meaning of this?" Corin demanded. "There must be some mistake. You men came here once this morning at the regular time. We have sufficient cash to restore the confidence of the depositors. The people have simply permitted themselves to become overexcited about the sudden flood of counterfeit money that has been discovered in circulation."

The bank messenger did not reply. Instead, he raised his head and at the same time pushed his hat back from his forehead. Like a dead, unfeeling appendage, Corin's hand dropped from the man's sleeve. His face blanched beneath his tanned skin. He retreated step by step before the slowly advancing group of armed men. Corin's lower lip became pendulous. Saliva drooled from the corners of his mouth. His eyes were terror glazed, staring into the hideous face that the leader of the men had revealed.

It was a strangely inhuman face. Thin features contributed an expression of immeasurable cruelty. Thin lips were parted in a hellish smile as utterly without humor as the grin of a skull. There was a gleam of cunning in the small eyes.

Corin suddenly overcame the paroxysm of terror that had rooted him to the spot. "The police! This is a hold-up!" His hoarse voice tocsined throughout the building. He pivoted and fled through the door of the office. The hawk-faced man, shooting from the hip, drilled the window of Corin's office with a bullet from his automatic.

Then, with a gesture from their hawk-faced leader, the band of armed men broke into two groups and moved swiftly along the walls of the room where the teller's cages were located. One teller, of cooler nerve than his companions, stamped on the alarm bell. He turned his terror-white face towards his companion in the next cage. For no sound had come from the alarm bell.

"The power's been cut!" he shouted. "Try the telephone!"

Then following his own order, the teller ran toward the offices located on the balcony at the back of the bank. A tracer of machine-gun bullets chipped granite from the wall behind him. Still he ran—until leaden death caught up with him. He crumpled to the floor, where he lay twitching in a final death struggle. A sharp scream shrilled from a woman. Then a hush fell upon the bank.

THE criminal gang went about its work like a well generated army. Every man, with the exception of the hawk-faced leader, wore a flesh-colored mask over his face. Those who carried satchels hurried into the vaults at the rear of the building. Others who were armed with Tommy guns nailed bank officials against the walls. Still others ganged across the entrance way. Two police, who had evidently been attracted by the sound of machine-gun fire, were dropped in their tracks as they entered the building.

But with all the activity, not a single masked mobster spoke a word. They seemed like fearsome, tongueless beasts who knew no language but the staccato syllables of rattling machine-gun hail.

The leader seemed to take no part in the looting of the bank. He vaulted over the marble rail that separated the cashier's booth from the central portion of the room, and approached a white-faced paying teller. The teller flattened himself against the counter and stared at the immobile face of the gang leader like one fascinated by the evil eye of a basilisk. The hawk-faced man advanced slowly, the wolfish grin on his evil face still unchanged. It seemed that he enjoyed to the fullest extent the anguish of his intended victim.

The white-faced teller found his tongue. He mouthed incoherent sentences. "Wh-what are you going to do? I played up. I—I, God! *Don't stare at me!* I couldn't help it! Did everything you told me—" And his pale hands locked over his eyes, trying to

shut out the sight of that hideous, lifeless face with its leering slit of a mouth.

Then the hawk-faced monster abandoned his lethargy. He dropped his automatic upon the marble counter. The fingers of his hands crooked like steel talons. He sprang at the cringing teller, his fingernails digging so deeply into the man's flesh that they drew blood. A cry burred in the teller's throat—became a dry rasp as the hawk-faced man increased pressure. The teller made a piteous, desperate effort to free himself from the inexorable, killing grip. But as his strength waned, the killer seemed to absorb it. His fingers dug deeper and deeper until his victim's lolling tongue was tinged with blue, and his eyes bulged from their sockets.

Then with a movement that was without apparent effort, the hawk-faced man flung the dying teller to the floor. He jerked from his pocket something that was not unlike a fountain pen in appearance. He unscrewed the cap and bared a nib of some strange, wax-like composition. Pen in hand, he knelt beside his victim and boldly traced something upon the dead man's forehead. A viscous yellow fluid that fumed as it touched the flesh flowed from the nib of the pen. As the killer arose, an ugly wound appeared on the dead teller's forehead—a figure seven burned in the flesh with acid.

Then the gang leader sprang to the center of the room in time to join his men who were streaming out of the vault, bags in hand. Outside the bank, the bandits made no further attempt to hide the masks which marked them as desperados. One lone policeman tried to keep the gang from entering the armored trucks. But the three shots from his pistol were purposely high and wide to avoid hitting innocent bystanders. He was dropped in his tracks by a snap shot from the gang leader.

While part of the gang had been inside the bank, the rear guard had remained in the trucks and stood ready

for action. Up the street, just beyond the entrance of the alley, a huge van had been shunted across the street, blocking westbound traffic. This was obviously the work of the efficient criminal organization, for the cleared traffic lane offered an avenue of escape up the alley. Once there, the parade of three trucks put on full speed and roared out of sight.

The danger momentarily past, an excited tremor ran through the crowd. Where were the police? What had happened to the pride of the city, the capable John Laws? Two blocks beyond the bank an officer was busily engaged in handling a traffic jam. Evidently he was entirely unaware of the slaughter that had taken place only a few rods away. And throughout the neighborhood, the muffled roar of traffic was unbroken by the wail of police sirens.

One man in the crowd in front of the bank seemed suddenly to awake from what had been a hideous nightmare. "Our money!" he shouted. "They've taken our money from the bank! Where were the police?"

Spurred by this sudden realization, the mob moved as one man, pushing through the gates of the bank. Mr. Corin, his usually sleek hair hanging over his haggard eyes, met them with arms outthrust as if to check the crowd in its frantic dash.

"Wait!" Corin shouted, hoarsely. "Stop, everybody! You've got to listen! Your money's safe!"

For a moment, silence. Then the crowd broke into a renewed clamor.

"Go back to your homes!" Corin shouted. "The money's all here in the vaults. They—they didn't take a penny as far as we know! Incredible, but true. Some slip-up in their plans. All who wish to make withdrawals may do so, but please go away until later. Give the police a chance. There's been murder—"

"The police!" a man foremost in the crowd scoffed. "What became of the police when they were needed

most? Did they answer your alarm? Have they made any effort?"

Corin shook his head sadly. "Some of them have." And he nodded at the sprawled bodies of the two policemen who had been slaughtered in the path of the criminal army. "Please! They have made a supreme effort!" His voice was choked with emotion.

"Mr. Corin's right!" A man shouted. "We'll give the police another chance. Then, if they don't get busy, we'll demand a house cleaning!"

"Mr. Corin's always right!" the crowd shouted. And with considerable more calm than they had yet shown, the people turned and moved back into the street.

CHAPTER II

THE MYSTERY MAN

IT was five minutes past nine when a tall, gray-templed man entered the office of Police Commissioner Foster. His card—bearing the inscription: James Hunting; Division of Criminal Investigation, Department of Justice—gained him immediate entrance to the commissioner's private office.

But that card was false. And the face of James Hunting was false. For the face of James Hunting was but one of the thousand faces of Secret Agent "X."

Secret Agent "X" had just returned from Washington where he had been closely closeted with a high official whose true identity was hidden behind the alias of K9. K9 was the man who sanctioned the mysterious and sometimes greatly misunderstood activities of Agent "X." The alarming increase of counterfeiting had been the subject of their discussion.

Commissioner Foster regarded "X" unsmilingly. The commissioner was justly proud of the police force of his city. That government officials should have to step in, even in case of a federal offense such as counterfeiting, was a source of annoyance to him.

"X" knew the chances he took in confronting Foster. For the police, unable to understand the unorthodox methods of Secret Agent "X," thought him to be some archcriminal. "X" had often been called upon to trick Foster in his lone battle against crime and upon one occasion had narrowly escaped detection.*

However, if there was any apprehension in Secret Agent "X's" mind, on entering the office of the police commissioner, his marvelous control of facial muscles prevented him from showing it. The grim lips, that were James Hunting's, smiled as he said:

"Good morning, commissioner. I have a matter of gravest importance to discuss with you. My name is Hunting—"

Foster's brusque nod interrupted the Secret Agent. "I've seen your card. Now, let me examine your credentials, if you please." He extended his hand across the desk.

"X" was prepared for this. In his private files he kept proper credentials for many of the disguises which he was forced to assume. He took a pass case from the inner pocket of his coat, removed a folded and official looking document, and handed it to Foster. Then, while the commissioner was looking at the document, "X" dropped into a chair across the desk from Foster.

The commissioner handed back the papers. "Everything seems to be in order, Mr. Hunting," he said, his tone a little more cordial. "I do not envy you your assignment. You may rest assured that you will have every co-operation from the police. But just what do you purpose to do that has not been done before?"

"First," replied the Secret Agent, "let me ask you a question. Is there any doubt in your mind as to who is

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: It is my belief that at one time in his varied career, Secret Agent "X" was a character actor on the stage. He can, with the aid of his special make-up material, assume the features of any man. He is also capable of imitating any male voice at will. Upon the occasion mentioned above, he actually had the audacity to impersonate the police commissioner himself.



responsible for such perfect replicas as these counterfeit bills?"

Foster gnawed his lip. "None whatever," he replied quietly. "A German engraver by the name of Joseph Fronberg—the most skillful man in his profession who ever lived—"

"And Fronberg—" the Agent persisted.

Foster looked uncomfortable. "You know as well as I do, Mr. Hunting, that Fronberg is dead. So far as we know, he committed suicide to escape capture."

"X" NODDED. "His clothes were lying on a river-front wharf. Later, an unidentified body was pulled from the water. It was consequently presumed that Fronberg was dead. Well, suppose he is. Has it occurred to you that before his death he might have produced the plates, now used in printing counterfeit money, and hidden them before his gang was captured? You remember that though the gang was wiped out, the plates were never found. But some one *has* found them and is using them today."

Foster nodded. "Proceed."

"Naturally, we must eventually find the gang responsible for this flow of spurious currency. But until such a time comes and we have learned sufficient about the activities of a criminal organization, that I am convinced is as powerful as it is efficient, I propose that all the banks in the city be closed pending the examination of every greenback in their vaults!"

Foster, overcome by surprise, sprang to his feet. "You can't believe

that the banks are the source of this counterfeit money. Absurd!"

"X" checked Foster with a wave of his hand. "Not the source, but certainly some banks have served as distribution points. Do you recall that a certain well-known bank was entered not a long time ago? So skillfully was this entrance managed that no one was the wiser until it was found all the money on hand was merely worthless paper. That bank had unknowingly been distributing counterfeit money. How the counterfeit had been substituted for the real, we do not know, though I have a theory—"

And the conference between Secret Agent "X" and Commissioner Foster was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a powerfully built, red-faced man who stormed across the room, pulping the end of a cigar between his teeth.

"Inspector Burks!" exclaimed Foster.

"Yeah, and something's gone haywire!" Burks roared. "The Suburban National's been held up, and by the time the police got there, the crooks had ambled away from the place leaving a couple of cops and a bank teller stretched out fit for a slab! Headquarters got word in plenty of time to get squad-cars over there. An all-cars call went out over the police radio and not one of the cars picked it up! That was because of—" Burks checked himself. Only at that moment had he noticed Agent "X." He stared questioningly from "X" to Foster.

"You may speak freely in front of Mr. Hunting," said Foster. "He is an agent of the Federal Government assigned to investigate the counterfeit racket."

Burks did not pause to acknowledge his introduction to Hunting. "It was this way, commissioner. A few minutes before the robbery took place, nearly the whole upper police band on the radio was ripped to pieces by static—electrical interference of some sort. One of the prowl-car boys said it sounded to him as though a big elec-

trical generator was feeding directly into the antenna. The noise was right on the police radio station's frequency and completely knocked out the voice transmission. We did not find out what was wrong until one of the police reported that he couldn't hear anything from the police radio station. And that's why the squad cars didn't get to the Suburban National until after the damage was done!"

COMMISSIONER FOSTER pushed back his chair. "That must be investigated! I want to go over the scene of the crime with you, Burks. Mr. Hunting, I'd like to have you along. One moment, please. I want to get my hat and coat." And Foster stepped into a small ante-chamber and closed the door behind him.

Burks turned and shook hands with "X," said: "It's a long way from stealing real money to making phony stuff, but there's something in this that ought to interest a federal man."

"X" raised his eyebrows questioningly. "Yes?"

"That radio noise, I mean. Maybe that comes under the jurisdiction of the Federal Radio Commission."

"You mean that the electrical interference was not an accident, not some power leak somewhere?"

Burks nodded his head vigorously. "Right. The operator at the radio station made a quick check-up. The police announcer's voice left the transmitter perfectly clear. That static was broadcast over most of the police band by some mysterious short-wave station for the one purpose of preventing the police cruisers from getting orders. Find that mysterious station and we'll find the man who planned the bank stick-up!"

Commissioner Foster entered the room, saying:

"Mr. Corin, an officer in the Suburban National Bank just phoned. It seems that the bandits came in armored trucks similar to those used by the Bankers' Express Agency. However, they were foiled in their attempt

to take money from the vault. It looks as though they had had assistance from the inside."

"But there was murder!" Burks exploded. "Two of our finest men!"

Foster nodded grimly. "Let's go." And he started through the door.

Secret Agent "X" insisted on driving Commissioner Foster and Inspector Burks over to the bank in his own car. By the time they arrived, the morgue wagon had backed up to the door. Police had roped off a section of the sidewalk. Outside the cordon morbid onlookers stood in rapt attention while white-garbed attendants carried out a long basket containing the corpse of one of the victims of the ruthless slaughter.

Agent "X" followed Foster and Burks through the crowd and into the bank. The medical examiner had just concluded with the body of George Arthurs, the teller who had been murdered by the gang leader. "Over here, commissioner," said the medico. "I want you to take a look at the body before the boys move it out to the morgue."

"X," close upon Foster's heels, went over behind the counter where the body lay covered with a ripple of white cloth.

"Not a pleasant sight at all," said the medical examiner as he raised the sheet. "On first glance, it appears to be ordinary strangulation. But this killer was taking no chances!"

The face of the corpse was a frightful thing with its blue skin, swollen tongue, and protruding eyeballs.



Standing out starkly on the forehead was the cruel scar of the figure seven. The throat was marked with small, bloody wounds where the killer's fingernails had bit deeply into the flesh. These wounds in the throat were points of particular interest to the medical examiner. "The reason I said this killer was taking no chances, is that I believe this man was poisoned. Strangulation wasn't enough, you understand. The rapid advance of *rigor mortis* leads me to think a certain poison was used."

AGENT "X," had he desired to make himself conspicuous, could have readily told the medical examiner that he was correct in the assumption that Arthurs had been poisoned. There was little doubt in his mind but that the fingernails of the hands that had killed Arthurs had been stained with some preparation containing the deadly drug, curare.*

It was a significant point, "X" thought, that every murder victim who was left with the brand of Seven upon the forehead had been killed in some manner that attacked the vocal organs immediately. A man who has been shot or stabbed may utter some dying words of immeasurable value to the police in tracking down the killer. The medical examiner had been exactly right when he had said that the murderer had taken no chances.

Inspector Burks shook his head wearily. "It's the Seven mob again. That gang certainly gets all the breaks!"

A soft, unpleasant laugh sounded from directly behind them. "X" turned from his contemplation of the corpse to see a tall and remarkably thin man—a man whose distinguish-

ingly different attire, love of good living, and apparently unflinching source of income had made him a figure of importance in the social register. Lynn Falmouth was young in years and old in experience. Having fallen heir to an immense fortune, Falmouth had purchased a large interest in the Suburban National Bank as well as a number of other business enterprises.

Falmouth patted the marcelled wave of his suspiciously yellow hair. His eyes behind gold pince-nez were cold as a mackerel's. "You might add, Inspector Burks, that what breaks these criminals don't get, the police give them."

Burks' face flamed. His hands clenched. Foster put a restraining hand on Burks' shoulder.

"I am sure, Mr. Falmouth," said Foster, soothingly, "that if you knew all the circumstances, you wouldn't blame the police. I assure you that every effort will be made to track down the killer and his gang."

Falmouth smiled, and "X," studying the man intently, found much that was unpleasant in Falmouth's smile. He was evidently a man who would enjoy watching a worm squirm beneath his heel. He was fully conscious of the position his immense wealth afforded him. "I know every effort will be made, Mr. Commissioner. George Arthurs happened to be a cousin of mine." And with a smile that was all self-satisfaction, Falmouth turned and sauntered across to the door of an office.

Men from the morgue reappeared with a basket intended for the corpse of George Arthurs. Foster took "X" by the arm and steered him across the floor to where a group of press reporters were standing around Abel Corin, the gray-haired director of the bank. "I am anxious to get Mr. Corin's version of the holdup," Foster explained. "He's level-headed, and we can depend upon whatever he says as being fact. It might be well to sound him out on the counterfeit question, too, Hunt-

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Secret Agent "X" has neglected no science in his preparation for his lone war against crime. In addition to chemistry, physics, medicine, and psychology, he has made extensive studies in toxicology. Among the interesting poisons with which Agent "X" is acquainted, is the above mentioned curare. Its physiological action is unique in that it acts to paralyze motor nerves of the body. It attacks the respiratory organs and asphyxia results. Because even a small amount of curare injected in the blood stream is fatal, it has long been used as an arrow poison among the natives of South America.

ing. Corin is a man to think things through."

On seeing Commissioner Foster, Corin nodded cordially. A reporter, whose persistence had pinned Corin to the wall, fired another question: "An inside job, you say, Mr. Corin? Now, just a word about your suspicions in regard to the inside man. One of your bank employees, of course?"

Corin nodded sadly. "I regret to say that evidence points directly towards one of our tellers—a man by the name of Arthurs."

The reporter whistled. "The murdered man? That's a new angle!"

"Yes," replied Corin. "A fellow clerk who was only a few feet from Arthurs when he was strangled to death, heard a few broken sentences from Arthurs just before he died. As I have told you, our burglar alarm system had been cut off. The electric power was shorted. Arthurs was heard to plead for mercy on the score that he had done everything the leader of the gang had told him to do. In as much as Arthurs had had considerable experience as an electrician before he was employed by the bank, one may come to a logical conclusion."

The reporter nodded. "And the gang was afraid that Arthurs would squeal. Now, to what do you contribute the gang's failure to get cash?"

SECRET AGENT "X" waited for no more. It was then as he had feared. The gang had entered the bank with everything to its advantage and had left it without taking any money. It hardly sounded logical and "X" knew that he must act immediately if he expected to save the city from further spread of the noxious germs of panic.

So quietly did Agent "X" move that Foster did not notice that "X" had left his side. In the activity of police investigation, no one noticed him as he advanced to the rear of the bank where the vault was located. The door of the vault was open exactly as it had

been left. Certainly there was nothing to fear from a second holdup with the bank filled with police.

Two plainclothes men stood idly by, evidently under orders to watch the vault until a routine examination of its contents could be conducted. But they, too, must have doubted the necessity of such care, for they were busily engaged in conversation irrelevant to the crime. "X" had no difficulty in entering the vault.

Unbroken sheaves of currency were racked along the walls of the vault exactly as they had been delivered by the bank messengers early that morning. "X" hurriedly broke open a pack of new twenties and dropped them on the floor. Then he took from the inner pocket of his coat a folding case. Inside, was a number of bills that he knew to be counterfeit. A careful check-up must be made. The comparison of every line of the treasurer's signature, of every detail of engraving, of each serial number must be made. He knelt on the floor and began his task, aided by the intense light of a small electric flash.

A low, scarcely audible exclamation escaped from his lips. There could be no doubt. The twenty-dollar bills in the bank vault were worth no more than the paper they were printed on. Masterpieces of the counterfeiter's criminal genius. He was about to make examination of other bills of different denominations, when he felt a cold draft of air on his back. Alert to every threat of danger, in spite of how intent he might be on any phase of investigation, "X" pivoted. The huge, circular door of the vault was swinging shut.

Instantly, he flung himself forward towards the massive, moving section of impregnable steel. A low sardonic laugh that "X" recognized sounded outside the vault and was immediately chopped off by the clang of the huge bolts as the door completed its swing. "X" found himself pushing against the door of the vault—a door that defied even his Herculean strength. He

was trapped. And for what possible reason had he been taken prisoner? Surely no one had penetrated his disguise.

He passed a questioning hand over his features that were so carefully modeled in plastic material. He knew that it was impossible for anyone to discover his true identity, but it was something that he feared more than death itself. For discovery meant that he would be helplessly caught in the toils of the law—the law that hounded him though he befriended it.

What puzzled him still more was the laugh he had heard just before the door had completed its swing. For it was the low, cold laugh of Lynn Falmouth. It had been Falmouth who had trapped him.

CHAPTER III

EXPOSED

"X" KNEW that to shout, hoping to attract attention, was useless; for the vault was soundproof. Five minutes dragged by. Ten minutes. At last "X" saw the mechanism, that worked the bolts of the door, going into action. He dropped on the floor, nonchalantly lighted a cigarette, and permitted his eyelids to droop as though he had become sleepy with waiting.

As Commissioner Foster's head appeared in the aperture, "X" yawned. "It's about time," he said irritably. "Some one closed the door on me by accident. I might have been suffocated in here and no one would have been the wiser." He stood up. The vault door was open, but his exit was prevented by quite another barrier. Lynn Falmouth, Foster, Burks, and a man whom "X" had never seen before stood in the opening. Burks and the stranger trained automatics on "X."

The Secret Agent's jaw dropped in amazement. He tilted his hat back and scratched his head. "What the—say, it's no wonder you men have trouble in catching your criminals! Don't point those guns at me!"

Inspector Burks' eyes narrowed to mere slits. "This time we didn't have any trouble!"

"We?" asked Falmouth sarcastically. "I rather think you'll have to give me credit for this catch. I saw him sneaking over to the vault, followed, and watched him break into that money."

"X" laughed. "You should have introduced me to Mr. Falmouth, commissioner. It's my job, you know. I was merely comparing bank notes within the vault with some bills in my own possession."

Burks motioned with his automatic. "Come out of there. You'll not talk yourself out of this!"

With a careless shrug, "X" obeyed. "Washington will hear of this, inspector!"

"True enough," said Foster. "Mr. Lyons, here—" he nodded towards the stranger—"will hear quite a bit, I imagine. Mr. Lyons is a federal man here on the counterfeiting case. You see, just before leaving my office, I took the opportunity of having you looked up. I learned not ten minutes ago that James Hunting, so far as the Washington office is concerned, doesn't exist!"

"X" thrust his hand into his coat pocket.

"Hold that!" Burks rapped. His gun bobbed up so that his cold, narrowed eyes were centered on Secret Agent "X's" forehead. "Put your hands up in the air. I'm going to give you the once over."

"X" smiled disconcertingly. His eyes darted about the room. Police filled the bank. The front entrance was blocked. Iron-barred gates closing over the accounting rooms at the rear would prevent his escape through the back. But with the exception of a single cop, the balcony overlooking the bank proper was deserted. "X" withdrew his hand from his pocket. His fingers were clutched tightly over a small package.

"Surely you're not afraid of a pack-

age of cigarettes. Inspector Burks," he taunted. He flicked a cigarette from the pack, palmed it a split-second before he tossed the rest of the pack-age onto the marble counter.

BURKS stepped forward until he was able to hide the muzzle of his automatic in "X's" middle. "You keep your gun on this bird, Mr. Lyons," Burks directed, "while I frisk him." Then Burks eyes drilled the Secret Agent's inscrutable face. He said in a whisper: "I'm going to enjoy this, Mr. 'X'!"* And Burks proceeded to make a careful search of "X's" pockets.

The Agent's cigarette lighter, which also served as a tiny tear gas gun; a small vial of a powerful but harmless narcotic; a compact tool kit; his gas gun; and a wallet were all handed over to Commissioner Foster.

The contents of "X's" wallet created considerable disturbance. "Let me see those bills," Federal Agent Lyons demanded. And Foster had scarcely handed them over before Lyons uttered a triumphant oath. While Lyons and Foster were examining the bank notes which they had taken from "X's" pocket book, "X" passed his left hand over his mouth, took out the cigarette he had been smoking in the bank vault, and put the fresh one between his lips.

Burks was too good a policeman to allow his attention to waver toward what Foster and Lyons were doing. He watched "X" narrowly to find nothing suspicious in the way "X" lighted the fresh cigarette from the butt of the first.

"X" inhaled smoke deeply, luxuriantly. Actually, he was mentally timing the speed at which the cigarette in his mouth burned. His thumb and forefinger closed over the ciga-

rette as if he were about to remove it from his mouth. Suddenly, his middle finger snapped out, flicking the cigarette straight at Burks.

The cigarette burst with a sharp explosion, emitting a frothy cloud of vapor that for a moment completely hid Burks' head. For the half inch of tobacco acted simply as a fuse for a small tear-gas bomb concealed within the cigarette. Such a small cartridge could not contain sufficient tear-gas to fill the entire room. It had, however, immediately rendered Burks helpless. He dropped his automatic and dug both fists into his eyes.

But Agent "X" did not wait to see other results of his surprising trick. At the moment the bomb had burst, he had pivoted and dashed toward the balcony. He took the steps four at a stride. The single policeman on the balcony came for him with gun drawn. This was exactly what "X" had anticipated. He knew that police below stairs would not dare shoot at him for fear of hitting their companion.

"X" gambled on the man on the stairs shooting hurriedly and consequently inaccurately. Hurried it might have been but certainly not inaccurate. The slug from the police special walloped squarely into "X's" chest. Ordinarily, the Secret Agent's special bullet proof vest of choice manganese steel would have rendered the shot ineffective. But the distance between "X" and the cop was short and the terrific impact of the slug striking the bullet-proof vest was centered directly above an old shrapnel wound which occasionally caused "X" pain.

Master of himself that he was, "X" could not check a wince of pain. For a moment, he staggered and seemed to waver on the brink of oblivion. Then, teeth grinding, he made a superb effort and flung himself upon the cop. The policeman was so sure of the success of his shot that he was taken by complete surprise. "X's" left arm swung up sharply, his fingers closing over the cop's gun. The point of his

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Inspector Burks' fruitless efforts to unmask Secret Agent "X," whom he believes to be a master criminal, have led him to make some accusations that have at times been of considerable embarrassment to him. He had been tricked so often by Agent "X" that he cannot be blamed for making such accusations in his effort to ferret out the true identity of Secret Agent "X."

thumb dug deeply between the central knuckles of the policeman's gun-fist and struck a particularly sensitive nerve. The cop's fingers stiffened and his gun clattered to the steps. At the same instant, "X" drove hard and fast with his right, straight to the point of the cop's chin.

THE blow seemed to lift the cop from his feet. The point of his heels slipped on the marble floor. He began sliding down the steps. "X" side-stepped to avoid the falling cop and sprang to the balcony. He had lost precious time. Some of the other police who had received little of the effect of the tear-gas were ganging up the stairs. "X" leaped towards the rear window that looked out upon the alley.

He jerked a glance over his shoulder and saw that he would be hopelessly trapped in another moment. His eyes lighted upon a heavy desk that was used by one of the bank stenographers. Large casters were fitted into its walnut legs. "X" sprang towards it, crouched behind it, and gave it a powerful heave. The desk rolled straight to the top of the stairs, where its momentum carried it over the edge and crashing into the advancing police. The falling desk turned the group of policemen into a tangle of sliding, tumbling bodies.

"X" picked up an office chair and lunged with it towards the high-arched windows at the rear of the balcony. The pane crashed into a thousand cutting fragments. With a pang of disappointment, "X" saw that behind the frosted glass window pane were heavy iron bars. He dropped the chair and leaped into one of the private booths opening from the balcony and placed there for the convenience of the owners of safety deposit boxes. A frosted glass window at the end of the narrow booth admitted light. "X" twisted the window catch and threw up the sash. Nothing but a wood-framed copper screen was now between him and freedom.

A bullet lanced the thin wood panel of the booth. There was not a minute to lose. He kicked out the screen with his heel, threw a leg over the sill, swung full length out the window and hung for a moment from the sill. Since the balcony was between the first and second stories of the building, it could not be more than fifteen feet to the alley pavement. Kicking against the wall as he released his grip, "X" threw himself out as far as possible to avoid hitting any projections on the wall of the building. He landed on his hands and knees, and regained his balance only in time to scuttle crablike out of the way of a huge van that was bearing down upon him. Past experience had taught him to make the most of any opportunity offered, and as the truck rumbled past him he leaped to the rear platform and crawled beneath the tarpaulin that partially covered the end of the van.

In this haven of comparative safety, he immediately set about changing his make-up. Darkness and lack of make-up material made any elaborate disguise impossible. However, he removed his hat and tossed it into a corner of the van. He next took off his gray-flecked toupee that had been a part of his disguise as Federal Agent Hunting. His own natural brown hair was revealed.

His deft fingers smoothed out the lines in the make-up material which covered his face. Then standing upright in the moving truck, he removed his overcoat and quickly turned it inside out. A plaid gray lining rendered the coat reversible and, on putting it on again, it had all the appearance of a sporty topcoat. Simple as these alterations were, "X" looked like quite another person when he dropped from the rear of the moving truck a few minutes later.

Inasmuch as a few pieces of small change remained in his pocket, he boarded an elevated as the quickest means of getting to one of his hide-outs.

CHAPTER IV

DESPERATE PLANS

ON leaving the elevated, "X" walked westward for two blocks. He came to a small one-car garage that jutted out from an old house that appeared to be abandoned. He unlocked the garage door and went in. The garage contained a small sedan. Using his key, "X" opened a door in the wall of the garage that lead into the house. He hastened up creaking stairs and turned into a small room at the top. All the shades were drawn and it was necessary for him to turn on the light.

Seating himself before a small dressing table, "X" opened a drawer and took out a make-up kit. The disguise which he was about to assume was so well known to him that he might have made the changes in the dark. His fingers worked swiftly, building up the contours of his face with metal plates and layers of plastic volatile material.

When he had completed his task a few minutes later his face appeared to be that of a man about forty years old with commonplace features that no one would look at twice. While he was getting into another suit of clothes, he crossed the room to a small compact radio and tuned in the police band. He set the pointer of the dial for the local police radio station in hope of hearing a repetition of the mysterious "static" that had prevented police headquarters from communicating with the prowler cars.

As "X" buttoned the vest of a gray tweed suit, he heard the monotonous voice of the police announcer droning out the description of a man.

"About medium height; weight about a hundred and sixty pounds; hair, dark varying to gray about the temples; thin, slightly Roman nose; name, James Hunting. This is probably an assumed name. He is wanted by federal authorities on an alleged counterfeiting charge. All police be on the look out for James Hunting—"

"X" took a final look in the mirror above the dressing table. He wondered what Inspector Burks would think if he knew that the man known as James Hunting had become A. J. Martin, an Associated Press correspondent in the matter of a few minutes time.

Then, disguised as A. J. Martin, "X" left the house through the garage where he entered the small sedan, and drove in the direction of an office which he leased under the name of Martin. He stopped on the way, however, to telephone. On calling the Suburban National Bank, "X" left an anonymous message for Commissioner Foster. "Do not permit any of the money in the bank vault to be distributed until it has been carefully checked over," he said, disguising his voice. "I am convinced that it is all counterfeit." He did not say that it was his belief that the bank hold-up was not the failure it appeared to be. He was certain that the nefarious gang which trade-marked its exploits with the brand of the figure seven had actually looted the vault, substituting counterfeit bills in place of the real ones. Thus the criminals probably hoped to gain time for the disposal of their loot.

HIS first act on entering the office of A. J. Martin was to telephone the Hobart Detective Agency and get in touch with Jim Hobart.* He told Hobart to meet him at the office as soon as possible. Then "X" went over to a steel index file that stood in one corner of the office. He pulled a sheet of onion-skin paper from the division marked "F."

At the top of the page was a single name "Fronberg." The rest of the report would have presented an almost indecipherable puzzle to even a cryptographer. It dealt with the particulars of the German engraver, Joseph

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: The Hobart Detective Agency, to all appearances, is maintained by Jim Hobart, an ex-police detective whom "X" had befriended. Actually, under the name of A. J. Martin, whom Hobart happens to be a representative of the Associated Press, Secret Agent "X" sponsors this detective agency.

Fronberg, who had turned his genius into the paths of crime and was thought to have headed a band of counterfeiters that persistent federal men had wiped out a few years back. Every member of the Fronberg gang was either thought to be dead or behind the bars of some federal prison with the exception of one man.

That man was a killer known as Pete Tolman. It had been impossible to tie Tolman up definitely with the Fronberg gang, though "X" was convinced that he had taken an active part in the counterfeiting. But Tolman, too, was about to meet his just deserts. Tolman was being held in a Louisiana penitentiary on a first degree murder charge. One of Jim Hobart's most trusted operatives had been watching Tolman for some days and had already gained information that "X" considered invaluable.

As "X" was reinserting the report sheet in the cabinet file, he heard Jim Hobart's knock on the office door.

"Come in, Jim," the Secret Agent cordially invited in the voice that was associated with his identity as Martin.

Hobart entered, smiling. "Hello, Mr. Martin. I've got some good news for you."

"X" seated himself on the top of his desk and swung one leg back and forth impatiently. "Let's have it, Jim."

"You were right about Pete Tolman communicating with some one outside the penitentiary. My man has been watching Tolman's cell after dark. Tolman gets up to the window and smokes a cigarette. If you weren't on the lookout, you'd never notice it, but Tolman isn't smoking for pleasure. He sends Morse signals! He takes a long pull on the cigarette for a dash and a short for a dot. The glow from the cigarette can be seen from outside! What's more, every message is addressed to somebody by the name of Seven!"

"Good, Jim! You be ready to leave for Baton Rouge in about an hour."

Though Hobart expected quick moves from Martin, he was a little

taken back by this announcement. "What's up this time, boss?" he asked.

The Secret Agent's eyes twinkled. "No questions asked. Simply go out to that little airport where I keep my plane. There you'll meet a man in aviator togs. Obey him implicitly. His name will be Bedford. That's all now, Jim."

As soon as Hobart had left the office, "X" locked the door and set about changing his make-up. When the job was completed fifteen minutes later, "X" appeared to be a heavier man than Martin. His face was dark, brooding, and hell-scarred. A toupee that looked like a shock of unruly black hair added to his unpleasant features. He was wearing a suit of flagrant checks, a tan overcoat with exaggerated, padded shoulders, and a derby hat.

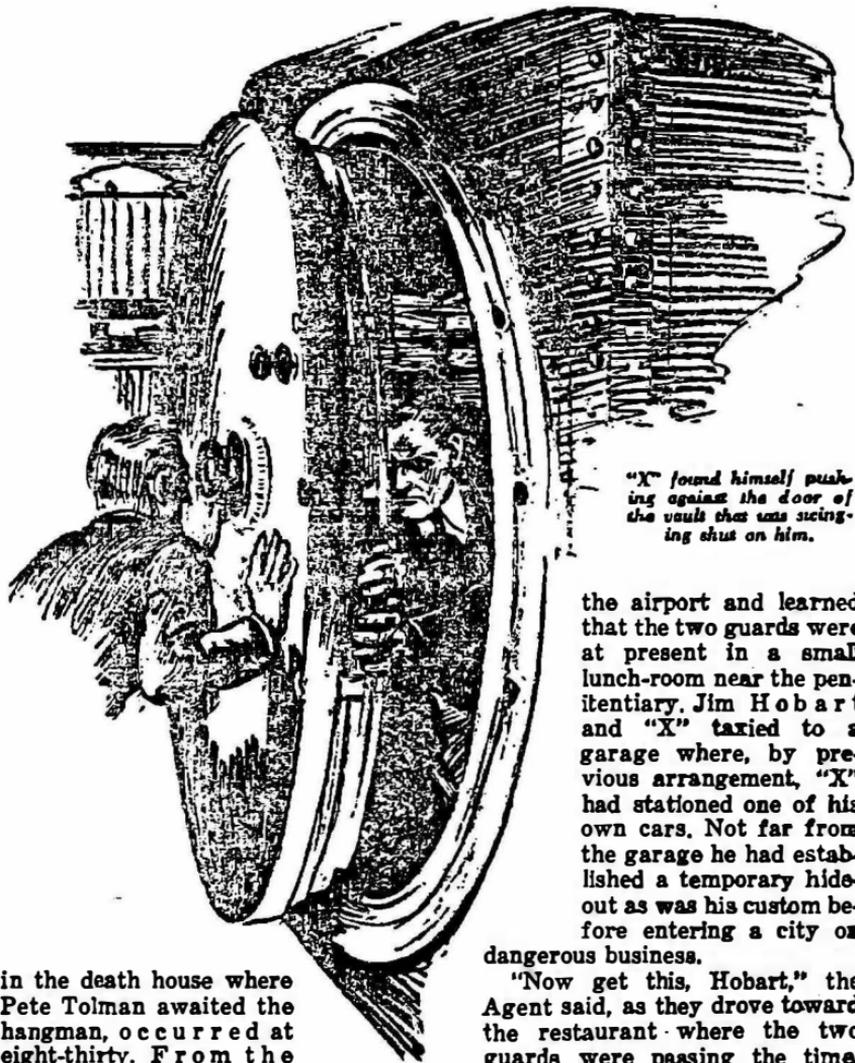
"X" LEFT the office of A. J. Martin and taxied out of the city to a small, private airport maintained in the name of Martin. He entered the hangar where his mechanic was fussing over a low-winged Lockheed monoplane.

"I'm takin' Mr. Martin's bus up," he explained to the mechanic. "Here's a note from him so's you won't think it's a steal." And "X" tossed an envelope to the mechanic. Then he went to a locker and had time to put on flying togs before Jim Hobart arrived.

"X" greeted Hobart with a deep, raucous voice that suited his rough appearance perfectly. "Guess you must be Hobart. I'm Nick Bedford, You've got your orders, so put on a flyin' suit and we'll get going."

Jim obeyed and in another ten minutes they taxied across the field into the wind. From a clean take off, "X" circled the field, pointed the nose of the plane southwest and gave it the gun.

It was nearly seven-thirty that evening when they landed at the Louisiana capital. According to information "X" had obtained through Hobart's operative, the change of guard,



"X" found himself pushing against the door of the vault that was swinging shut on him.

in the death house where Pete Tolman awaited the hangman, occurred at eight-thirty. From the same source, "X" had learned the particular habits of the two guards who were on night duty in the condemned cell. They were granted a few hours leave preceding their check-in for the night's work.

Hobart's operative had been directed to shadow these two guards and make reports at thirty-minute intervals to a companion who had been installed in a private dwelling in the city. Hobart telephoned directly from

the airport and learned that the two guards were at present in a small lunch-room near the penitentiary. Jim Hobart and "X" taxied to a garage where, by previous arrangement, "X" had stationed one of his own cars. Not far from the garage he had established a temporary hide-out as was his custom before entering a city on dangerous business.

"Now get this, Hobart," the Agent said, as they drove toward the restaurant where the two guards were passing the time. "I'm on orders, same as you. And what we do is wait until they come out of that hamburger house and then give 'em a blast with the guns—"

"Hold on," Hobart interrupted. "If it's just the same to you, I'll use my fists."

"Gas guns, yah sap!" "X" growled. "The boss wouldn't stand for any lead shooting." He took a pair of chromium-plated gas guns from his pocket. They were not unlike ordinary pistols.

in appearance. An invention of Secret Agent "X's" fertile brain, these guns could shoot a highly concentrated but harmless anesthetizing vapor. He handed one to Hobart. "Be careful with that thing and don't look in the end to see if it's loaded. What we've got to do is wait until everything's clear, then get out of the car and stick 'em up. Don't give 'em a chance. Give 'em a shot of gas right in the pan."

They were cruising past the restaurant and "X" saw two men wearing the uniforms of the prison guards hunched over the lunch counter. Another figure, standing in the shadow of a billboard, seemed intent on watching the lunchroom. "X" recognized this man as Hobart's operative. "That guy standing in front, is he your man?" "X" asked.

Jim Hobart nodded. "That's Carson."

"Right. You get out now and tell him his job's done. If we can do as well as he did—well, we'll be okeh." And "X" stopped the car long enough to permit Hobart to get out. Then he speeded the car to the next corner and turned around.

Hobart's man had no sooner disappeared than the two guards came out of the lunchroom, and started in the direction of the place where "X" waited with the car. The Secret Agent saw that Hobart was following them a short distance behind. He swung from the car and ambled leisurely towards the guards. An unlighted cigarette dangled from his lips.

"Hello, buddy," he said, addressing one of the guards. "Either one of you got a match?"

The two men stopped, and "X" saw, to his satisfaction, that Hobart was closing in from behind.

"I think I have," replied one of the guards, groping in his pocket.

"X" glanced up and down the street. Everything was clear. He jerked his gas gun from his pocket and fired directly into the unsuspecting guard's face. The man uttered a surprised exclamation. His hand got halfway to his

holster. Then his legs seemed to desert him and he wilted to the sidewalk. Hobart was somewhat slower than "X." The second guard fired a wild shot before the gas from Jim's gun pitched him forward on his face.

"Quick, Hobart!" the Agent snapped. "Get your man to the car. Not a spare second!" And "X" picked up one of the guards by the middle, slung him like a sack of meal over his shoulder, and hurried towards the car. Jim followed with his man, cursing his own clumsiness.

The two unconscious men had been tumbled into the rear seat of the car and the door had been closed before "X" heard the sound of heavy footsteps. Some one was running up the street toward them. "X" looked up just in time to see a policeman turn the corner.

INSTEAD of arousing suspicion by an attempted getaway, "X" rounded the nose of the car and opened the hood.

The policeman stopped abruptly and looked up and down the street. Then he looked over to where "X" was pretending to fuss with the motor of his car. "Say, didn't you hear a shot, mister?" he asked.

"X" said: "Just my car. Carburetor is a little off, I guess. You must have the shakes tonight. What's goin' on?"

The cop's face reddened. "Well, we've got some special orders to keep our eyes open for trouble. It's on account of Pete Tolman."

"Who?" the Agent asked as though he had never heard of the name.

"Tolman, the killer. He goes on a necktie party tonight. He always was a blowhard, and he's boastin' that they'll never hang him. He's got a lot of friends in the underworld who might try to stir up a prison break or something."

"X" laughed as he climbed into the front seat of the car. "Well, Telman or whatever his name is, must be an optimist!" He gave the motor a spin and steered from the curb.

"Gosh, that was a narrow squeak, Bedford!" Jim Hobart exclaimed. "You've got nerves like ice!"

"X" bent over the wheel. His face was grim. Minutes were sliding by all too fast. At eight-thirty the two unconscious guards in the back seat were supposed to go on duty. At twelve midnight Pete Tolman was to go to the scaffold. These were two things which Agent "X" was resolved should not happen.

"X" pulled the car to a sliding stop in front of a ramshackle old house that he had previously selected because of its comparative isolation. For some reason or other neighboring houses had been vacated. The street was dark and deserted. From the floor of the front compartment of the car, "X" took out a compact traveling kit.

"I'm going into that house and open up," he said to Hobart. "Make certain that you're not being watched, then carry the two guards in after me."

With traveling bag in hand, "X" hurried up the walk that led to the door of the dark old house. He entered without a light and walked through the central hall to the back room. There, he turned on a light. The windows of the room were all boarded over, and he was certain that not a ray of light penetrated to the outside. Agent "X" opened his traveling kit and removed a hypodermic needle and a small bottle which contained a narcotic compound known only to Agent "X." He had time to load the needle before he heard Jim Hobart stumbling around in the front part of the house. Calling softly through the door, he directed Hobart to bring the two guards into the back room.

When Hobart had completed his share of the task, "X" walked over to where Jim stood looking down at the two senseless guards. "I'm goin' to fade out now," he said gruffly. "And

the next guy who'll be your boss will look enough like that sandy-haired guard to be his twin brother."

Then with a movement swift as a striking snake, "X" drove the hypodermic needle squarely into Hobart's biceps. Hobart stepped back, bewilderedly clouding his face. Then before he could say a word, his legs buckled under him and he fell to the floor.

The hard-lined face of Bedford softened. His lips twisted in a smile. "Sorry, Jim," whispered the real voice of Secret Agent "X."

CHAPTER V

HOUSE OF THE DOOMED

"X" ENTERED immediately upon a task of seeming impossibility. First he removed the uniforms from the two guards. Putting these to one side, he opened his traveling kit and selected tubes of plastic volatile material, pigments, and plates for changing the contour of the face. Then he straightened out Hobart's crumpled form and, kneeling over him, went to work.

A few minutes later, he stood up and glanced from the face of the guard and back to the newly created face of Jim Hobart. No sculptor could have made a more remarkable similarity. He had only to select a toupee from the large stock which he carried to make the disguise complete. He noticed regretfully that Jim was about two inches taller than the guard.

"X" took out a folding triple mirror and set it up on a table in front of him. Following the lines of the sandy-haired guard's face, "X" reproduced every feature in his own make-up. He then stripped off the uniform of the sandy-haired guard and put it on. A glance at the identification card on the uniform he was wearing, told "X" that the man whom he impersonated was named Lawson.

Next, he gave both of the guards a dose of his harmless narcotic, dragged

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: This narcotic, only one of the battery of scientific devices which Agent "X" employs, takes effect immediately on application. It is unique in that it has no bad after effects such as are common to most of the drugs used in the practice of medicine.

them to a closet, and closed the door.

Though Secret Agent "X" had only heard Lawson speak four words, a moment's practice enabled him to imitate the man's voice. His next task was to revive Jim Hobart. This was accomplished by injecting the antidote for his narcotic into Jim's arm. When the private detective came to a few seconds later, he stared about in bewilderment. "Snap out of it, Hobart," said "X," speaking in the voice of Lawson, the guard whom he impersonated.

"Who are you?" Hobart asked. "Where's Bedford? He drugged me!"

"X" nodded. "He was acting upon orders just as I am. You can call me Lawson. Your name, according to the tag on that uniform which you are going to put on, is Johnas. That uniform will be a little small for you, but we've got to chance it."

Used to the strange orders he had received since being employed by the man whom he knew as Mr. Martin, Hobart obeyed without hesitation. However, his shock at seeing his own reflection in the mirror was almost too much for him. "I'll never believe it's me!" he gasped. "Will—will I ever get back to normal? This may be an improvement over my face, but I still don't like it!" He rubbed his fingers lightly over his new face.

"X" said: "Don't worry. It will come off. Now, I'll take the initiative in everything. You just keep still. Don't answer anyone except in grunts. Forget that you are Jim Hobart and try to identify yourself with the guard Johnas."

"Okeh. But what's the idea?"

"We're going to prison, Hobart. Right into the death house. Come along. I'll explain while we're getting over there."

They had only five minutes to get out to the penitentiary and check in. It would be necessary to use the car.

"Get this, Jim," Agent "X" explained as the car jounced over the rocky street, "I'm going to enter the cell of Pete Tolman. Tolman is coming

out. He will be wearing a guard's uniform, and it is your duty to watch him. He'll do whatever you say. Don't answer his questions, but let him know that you're a member of the criminal gang known as the Seven Silent Men. You get him back to New York in Martin's plane. Take him to Martin's office and guard him yourself until you hear from Martin. Remember, Tolman is a killer."

Hobart wagged his head. "I've got it all right. It's some risk, but it will make a knockout of a news story."

They abandoned the car a short distance from the prison gates and continued on foot. They were admitted to the prison without question from the guards at the gate. "X," who had acquainted himself with the plan of the penitentiary before they had left New York, led the way straight to the cells. He approached the head guard and said: "Lawson and Johnas going on duty, sir."

"A rotten time you'll have of it, too," responded the head guard. "Tolman's nuts."

"Nerve broke?" the Agent inquired.

"Nope. More nerve than ever now. He just swears he'll never hang. All the other cons have been removed from your block of cells. Tolman's yelling is a little more punishment than is due them."

"The rope will soon finish that," said "X" grimly as he passed into the hall that led down between the tiers of barred cells. Hobart followed him closely without uttering a word.

A BLACK steel door closed upon the condemned block. A knock admitted them into the beehive of iron-barred cells where many a man spent his last moments in the shadow of the scaffold. The condemned men had been removed to another part of the prison.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Jim Hobart has such faith in the man whom he knows as A. J. Martin, that he carries out any task given to him without question. He does not know the great cause in which his employer labors but believes that Martin is constantly in search of material of a sensational nature for the newspapers. No matter what queer things Martin appears to do, in the long run it is always for a good purpose. And that's enough for Hobart.

At least there was sufficient kindness in the law to spare them the sight of their fellow's hanging. At the end of the room was a sort of alcove, high and narrow with walls and floors immaculately clean. There stood the gallows, newly erected for the hanging of Pete Tolman.

The Secret Agent exchanged a few shallow pleasantries with the two guards whom he and Hobart relieved, watched them leave the death house, and listened to the sound of their footsteps receding down corridor. Hobart was pacing the floor nervously, glancing in the direction of the only occupied cell. From the bunk behind the bars came the sound of lusty snoring. Beyond the black door of the death house, guards paced monotonously back and forth, their footsteps sounding like a dozen death clocks, clicking off the narrow span of Tolman's life. Yet Pete Tolman seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

"X" walked over to the condemned man's cell. He cleared his throat. Tolman snored on. "X" coughed loudly. Tolman stirred and opened his vicious little eyes. He sat up and yawned. But Secret Agent "X," judging from the appearance of Tolman's eyes, knew that he had not been sleeping.

"What time is it, screw?" Tolman asked in a sharp, nasal voice.

"X" looked at his watch. "It's eight-forty-five." Then he added in a lower tone: "Are you waiting for Seven?"

At the mention of the number seven, Tolman's face became a studied blank. "X" was sure that his long shot had gone home. "Not long now until you trot up the thirteen steps," said "X" quietly. He was anxious to provoke further conversation with Tolman in hope of gaining some scrap of information.

Tolman, however, merely snorted through his high, thin nostrils, turned his back on "X" and paced to the window of his cell. Outside, the sky was tar black.

"X" quietly removed the keys from the belt of his uniform and inserted

the proper one in the lock of the grating. Tolman whirled. His hands clasped and unclasped as though he was eager to kill yet another man before his death.

"X" pressed a finger to his lips, swung back the door, and entered the cell.

"What the hell!" Tolman muttered. Hope and bewilderment battled on his face.

"You want to escape, don't you?" "X" asked quietly.

Tolman looked suspicious. He didn't answer, fearing to say the wrong thing and send his hopes on the rocks. "X" walked quickly towards Tolman. His right hand was hidden behind his back. There was a flash of fear in Tolman's eyes. He backed slowly towards the wall. Had "X" approached him with gun drawn, Tolman might have put up a fight. But the invisible threat of "X's" hidden hand was too much for Tolman's ratlike courage. He dropped to the bunk, shrinking, as far from Secret Agent "X" as he could.

"Wh-what are you?" he whimpered. "D-don't stare at me! I'm goin' to get topped anyway. Y-you get out a here!"

"Who do you think I am?" "X" demanded.

Tolman's little eyes screwed up as though he was thinking very hard. "Why, you're just a guard—Lawson or something like that."

"And who else?" "X" persisted.

Tolman swallowed. His voice was a scarcely audible whisper. "You might be one of the Seven Silent Men."

THEN the Secret Agent's conjecture had been correct. The Seven gang had been in communication with Pete Tolman. It was all the information he could hope to get from Tolman. If he questioned the killer further, Tolman might become suspicious.

Without a moment's hesitation, "X" jerked his hand from behind his back. In it, he held a hypodermic needle loaded with his special drug. He

plunged the needle straight into Tolman's arm. The killer squealed, tried desperately to get to his feet, then sank back as still as death.

"X" looked out of the cell towards Jim Hobart. The private detective was standing still, staring in awe at Tolman. "X" frowned, shook his head, and motioned to Hobart to continue his pacing.

Then Secret Agent "X" began his work. His nerves dictated frenzied haste. He realized that he was in the narrowest strait of his career. He knew that once he had taken the step he contemplated, nothing, *nothing* in the power of man could save him from death if the Seven Silent Men failed to do what Agent "X" expected them to do. But he must *make* sure. The hideous phantoms of panic and famine hovered over his country. The Seven Silent Men and the devils' coin they distributed must be checked.

"X" crossed to the window of the cell. Through this alone Tolman could have received communication from The Seven gang. Outside the window, "X" could hear the patient pacing of the guards in the prison yard. But standing out against the black sky, far from the prison, was a square of light. The name of a popular cigarette was emblazoned in colored lights that flashed in and out. "X" watched the sign, counting mentally the intervals between the flashes.

An exclamation escaped his lips. How simple it all was. For as he watched, he became conscious that the sign did not flash at regular intervals. It was sending out dots and dashes in Morse code. Yet the making and breaking of the circuit was so carefully handled that the casual observer would not have noticed it.

"X" translated as the message flashed out: "Seven . . . Seven . . . Seven," repeated over and over.

It was for this signal that Tolman had been watching. Then came a pause in the message. Not for long, however. Soon again came halting but intelligible words:

HAVE HOPE TOLMAN LOOK IN COT FOR TWO SMALL WHITE CARTRIDGES UNWRAP AND INSERT ONE IN EACH NOSTRIL BEFORE GOING TO SCAFFOLD BREATHE ONLY THROUGH NOSE YOU WILL BE SAVED . . . SEVEN . . . SEVEN . . . SEVEN.

"X" turned from the window. He lifted Tolman from the cot, then raised the scanty bed clothes that covered the hard pallet. Next to the thin mattress he found them—two small, white cellophane-wrapped cylinders. Putting these to one side, "X" hurriedly straightened the cot. Then he stripped the coarse prison garments from Pete Tolman's inert form. From beneath the uniform that he wore, "X" took his compact make-up kit.

For ten tedious minutes, he worked, molding and proportioning Tolman's face until it resembled the face of Lawson which "X" had assumed. The next part of his preparation called for his finest efforts. With the aid of a mirror, he transformed his own face so that it looked exactly like Pete Tolman's.

AFTER a short time, satisfied with the results of his painstaking efforts, "X" donned the trousers and coarse shirt that Tolman had worn. Then he clothed Tolman in the discarded clothes of the prison guard. He would have liked to spend more time on Tolman's disguise. He knew that he should have given Tolman some detailed instructions. However, at almost any moment, he expected to be interrupted by the entrance of some prison official. He immediately injected the antidote for the narcotic into Tolman's arm.

The killer opened his eyes. He stared about bewilderedly. His eyes met "X's" face and his jaw sagged in wonder. "It's over," Tolman muttered huskily. "They didn't save me after all. I'm dead. I'm—"

"That's enough!" "X" rapped, imitating Tolman's nasal voice. He held the mirror before Tolman's face so that the killer could see the remark-

able change that had taken place.

Tolman ran a finger around the band of his collar. "Lord! I'm not me! I'm that screw, Lawson!"

"Exactly," replied the Secret Agent. "Act like him. Get up on your feet. You're going to get clear of the big house. You're going to escape, just as the Seven Silent Men promised. You're perfectly safe as long as you obey that guard out there—" indicating Jim Hobart. "If you don't do as he says, you'll pray for a return to the death cell!"

Tolman stood up and wandered to the door of the cell. "You mean I'm to walk out?"

"Yes. Lock me in the cell and keep right on pacing the floor until you're relieved from duty or until the other guard gets an opportunity to get out. If you must talk, imitate Lawson's voice as near as possible. Tell anyone who questions you that you've got a cold. You can take that make-up off when you're out of here."

"Don't worry. I'm pretty good!" Tolman assured him. Something of gangland's eternal swagger was already returning to this man who had escaped the gallows—for a time. Tolman opened the door, went out, and locked the door after him. Then with burlesqued dignity, he began pacing the floor, following the amazed Jim Hobart.

"X" looked at his watch. Two short hours until midnight. One hundred and twenty minutes until he, Secret Agent "X," innocent of crime, would face the hangman. No horrible nightmare, but stark reality, the very thought of which would send the average man mad. But "X" immediately set about disposing of all his special weapons and devices. Make-up kit, gas gun, his kit of special drugs—all must be hidden in the cot in the death cell. From here on, "X" was in other hands than his own.

His train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the opening of an iron door that lead into the death house. Another guard entered, accompanied

by a man in severe, black garments. The prison chaplain had come to pay a visit to the condemned man.

And all the while, Pete Tolman, wearing the garb of a prison guard, smirked behind the sky-pilot's back, already confident that he had cheated the gallows.

CHAPTER VI

JAWS OF DEATH

WITH braggart gestures, Agent "X" scorned the ministrations of the prison chaplain. He was acting the part as Pete Tolman would have acted. He threatened to cram the chaplain's prayer book down his throat. By the time the chaplain had given up in despair, many minutes had passed slowly for "X." The impersonation of Tolman taxed his dramatic powers to the utmost.

As the time for execution approached, several workmen entered the room and proceeded to the end where the gallows stood. "X" knew that they had come to fix the four ropes, one of which would manipulate the catch on the gallows trap. These ropes would lead through the wall into a room beyond and for each rope there would be a guard to pull it. Since only one of the ropes actually opened the trap, the identity of the real executioner would be forever a mystery.

A short time later, reporters and witnesses of the execution could be heard filing into the end of the room. Even the most calloused reporter seemed awed by the proximity of the death swing and there was an almost churchly hush over the room. Then the black steel door at the opposite end of the room opened to admit the prison officials: chaplain, prison doctor, additional guards, and the warden.

Secret Agent "X" quickly inserted the two white cartridges, which had been provided by the Seven gang, in his nostrils. In another moment, he was gratified to see that Hobart and the real Tolman were ordered to leave

the room. "X" felt certain that Hobart would lose no time in getting Tolman away from the prison.

As the warden approached the death cell, "X" could see that his stern gray face was beaded with sweat. He tried to smile kindly, gave it up, and resorted to a scowl that he apparently hoped would hide his emotions. For the warden's was a disagreeable task—giving the signal for the gallows trap to be released.

"Are you ready, Tolman?" asked the warden huskily.

"Well, not exactly," replied "X" in the nasal voice of Tolman. "But see in' that it's you, I wouldn't keep you waitin'." He turned to the prison doctor. "It'd be hell to be late for your own funeral, eh, doc?"

The doctor did not answer. He had spent his life learning to save lives. Now, he must stand with arms folded and watch a man die without raising a finger to save him. He did not relish his job.

"My son," said the chaplain, kindly, "I beg you to think what you are about to do."

"Ah, nertz!" the Agent snarled.

The door was opened, and "X" was marched between lines of guards towards the scaffold that stood like some gigantic beast waiting to be fed. "X" nodded at the news reporters and shouted: "Give me a good send-off, boys. Tell 'em I'm game. Slap it on in streamers: 'Pete Tolman's got guts!' That'll—that'll—"

"X" pawed nervously at his neck. The yellow pine steps that led to the platform of death confronted him. It was becoming more and more difficult to be flippant. What was more, the two cylindrical capsules that he had placed in his nose interfered somewhat with his imitation of Tolman's voice. Then, if the Seven gang failed, if something went wrong with their plans—

AGENT "X" pushed such thoughts from his head. There was only a little time remaining. Somehow, his

legs carried him up the steps. The guards centered him on the trap so that in falling through he might not strike the sides and thus save his neck from breaking. Then heavy straps were tightened about his arms and legs. He found his brain groping frantically for some means of escape. He might, in his last seconds, call out that he wasn't Pete Tolman. He might demand that fingerprints be compared to prove it.

To the amazement of the guard who was strapping him, "X" uttered a sardonic laugh. Who would believe that he wasn't Pete Tolman? His disguise was perfect, his impersonation too genuine.

He saw the hangman, a citrous-faced, stocky man, picking up the black death cap that was to hide the hideous death grimaces of the condemned man. The rope dangled like a dead snake from the beam above, its noose yawning like the very jaws of death. "X" looked down upon the nervous spectators. He recognized only one face in the group—that of Milo Leads, a medical man interested chiefly in toxicology.

Not one man in this entire group could be "X's" rescuer. His jaws ached to spring apart and shout that he wasn't Tolman. He fought back the desire—as strenuous a battle as he had ever waged. He knew it was hopeless. If he was to die, if he had indeed overplayed his hand, his identity would die with him. There was no alternative.

The warden had taken out his handkerchief. He would drop it as a signal for the trap to spring. The hangman was inspecting his noose, getting ready to slip it over "X's" head.

"Peter Tolman—" the warden's voice was tremulous—"have you anything to say before you die?"

"No!" said "X" sharply. A black ring of shadow appeared on the pine boards of the platform. The noose was directly above his head. In a moment—

"Breathe only through your nose!"

A warning whispered within the death chamber. Perhaps it was inaudible to any but Agent "X." But "X" knew that the warning was intended for him. He knew that somewhere among the state witnesses was a member of the Seven Silent Men. The lips of Secret Agent "X" clamped shut.

Suddenly, it came—a roar that was a concentrated thunderclap. Hell seemed to crack open. "X" had a momentary glimpse of a black line that streaked across the floor. A jagged hole broke through the concrete and a venomous looking cloud of yellow green vapor spurted from the yawning pit.

With a sound like the twang of a bowstring, the scaffold trap sprang open. "X" felt himself dropping like a leaden thing straight into the pit of swirling green mist. "Poison gas!" his mind shrieked. It burned his eyes like acid. But he did not forget to breathe only through his nose.

He had scarcely landed at the bottom of the pit before strong hands seized him. In the glow of subdued light, he saw the heads of several men—faces that were rendered simian in appearance because of the gas masks covering them. He was hurried, surrounded by men, over a rough floor in a direction unknown.

As the green mist of poison gas cleared, he knew that he was being carried through a newly constructed tunnel, evidently reaching far under the prison wall. He knew that the people in the death chamber were helpless to follow. The poison gas would see to that.

His rescuers paused only long enough to remove the straps that bound his legs. When they continued their flight up the passage, "X" panted out, "Whew! That was some narrow squeak!"

There was no reply. Only the shuffling of feet along the floor disturbed the silence.

Directly ahead, the tunnel slanted sharply upward. Warm fresh air

fanned "X's" flushed face. In another moment they were in the open. A brief glimpse of his surroundings—a scattering of small houses, and "X" was lifted into a motor car. The man at his side removed his gas mask as the car rolled smoothly away.

The Secret Agent's eyes were searching the compartment trying to see the faces of the men who had saved him from the gallows. As the car sped beneath a lone street lamp near the outskirts of the city, a beam of light fell directly across the face of the man at his side. "X" could scarcely repress an exclamation of astonishment.

For the face of the man had not a single animate feature. Rather, it was like the painted, waxen face of a doll. The features were thin, the nose hawklike, the fixed expression terrifying. Only the eyes seemed part of the living man and they were deep, dark pools where nameless evil dwelt.

Suddenly, the creature at his side moved with startling rapidity. Pain knifed through "X's" arm. Fire flowed momentarily in his veins. He saw the flash of a hypodermic needle as it was drawn from his flesh. His brain suddenly became clouded. His body gained new buoyancy. He was plunged into a drugged sleep.

CHAPTER VII

ASSASSINS' COUNCIL

THE Agent's awakening was like returning from the grave. Something seemed to explode within his body. The shock was so sudden that he found himself panting as though he had been suddenly showered with water.

He was standing upright, body rigid. For an instant, his surroundings dazed him. He was in a vast, high-ceilinged room. The walls, paneled in oak were apparently of incredible age. A huge fireplace was a maw of crackling flames. The room seemed to be without doors or windows and the only source of light was a wrought-

iron chandelier that dropped from a chain from the ceiling.

"X" was in his shirt sleeves, and standing in the center of a circle of seven chairs. Six of the chairs were occupied by men wearing sombre gray suits, identical in every way. A small diamond badge, fashioned in the form of an Arabic numeral, was pinned to the lapel of each man's coat. The chairs, too, were all alike. However, the man whose badge designated him as Number One occupied a slightly larger chair than the others.

The faces of the six men were what astonished "X" more than anything else. For to a feature, all faces were alike—waxen, doll-like, hideous in their lack of human expression.

"Tolman," began the man who was designated as Number One, "you have been selected for membership in our organization for several reasons. You have an admirable criminal record."

"X" bobbed his head. "Thanks, chief," he said in the voice of Pete Tolman, better now that the capsules had been removed from his nostrils. "And thanks for savin' me from bein' topped."

"Silence! You must know that silence is our golden rule. Only because we, the leaders of a mighty order, have maintained silence have we successfully carried out every stage of our Herculean task.

"My purpose in rescuing you was a selfish one. Your service with this group will be for my own selfish purposes. However, you will find that you will be paid beyond your wildest imaginings and that you will be able to retire in a few years, independently wealthy—if you obey me in all things.

"Our battle is waged with the most powerful weapon known to man. I mean money—two kinds of money. Hard, sound currency for our friends and colleagues; spurious bills for our enemies.

"Let me enumerate your present duties. First of all, you will obtain for us the engraving plates for the production of five and ten dollar bills

which were made by your old friend, Joseph Fronberg. We have all of Fronberg's plates with the exception of the ones just named. Do you know where they are hidden?"

"X" thought quickly. It was evident that Pete Tolman had been an important wheel in the old Fronberg machine. Surely he would be expected to know what had been done with the plates. He replied: "Sure, chief. Old Fronberg hid 'em. I got a pretty good idea where they are. May take some time for me to get 'em."

"There is no great hurry, Tolman. There are other tasks of greater importance at present. There is but one man who might thwart our purposes. That man's identity is a mystery, making your job even more difficult. I speak of the man who has hidden himself behind the identity of Secret Agent 'X.' When you have found that man, you are to kill him."

"X" uttered a low whistle. "That's a tough un, chief! From what I hear he's a slick guy."

NUMBER ONE nodded. "Yet he is not as clever as I. You will have every assistance from other members of the group.

"Now, perhaps you have wondered why our group, wealthy and powerful as it is, has remained such a mystery to the police. I doubt very much if even Secret Agent 'X' has succeeded in gaining any information about us."

"We are known as the Seven Silent Men because to drop the slightest information regarding our organization means death—at the hands of the law or in our own execution chamber. On occasion in meting out punishment to members who might be inclined to inform, the law is our servant. Here at headquarters I have an iron-bound book. Upon its pages are signed confessions to murder.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Number One was entirely correct in this statement. Though "X" is in touch with the underworld constantly through his spies and secret operatives, he had been unable to learn anything about the Seven Silent Men.

"Every member upon initiation to our order must commit murder under the eyes of a witness and then sign his name to a full confession of the deed. If any member should be so careless as to let information drop concerning the Seven Silent Men, his confession may be promptly sent to the police. Admission to our headquarters, the one haven of certain safety, would be refused him. There is no escape for the traitor. Now you know why the Seven Men are also the Silent Men. Any question?"

"X" bobbed his head. "It's a swell idea, sure, but it looks to me as though there were only six guys in the gang."

"At present, there are only six leaders," replied Number One. "Number Six displeased us. His name was Arthurs, a teller in the

Suburban National Bank. He is dead. You will take his place—after you have proved yourself worthy.

"You will now advance to my chair," continued Number One.

"X" obeyed. The leader of the gang reached into his pocket and drew out a pair of ivory dice and a folded slip



"X" sprang toward the desk and gave it a powerful heave.

of paper. These he handed to "X."

"The dice," he explained, "will serve as a means of designating the servants of the Seven Silent Men. You will understand when you examine them. Carry them with you always. The slip of paper is inscribed with the name of the person whom you are to murder as a part of the initiation into our order. You may look at the paper now."

Secret Agent "X" carefully unfolded the paper. His heart was throbbing with excitement. The formidable difficulties which he must overcome to outwit this archcriminal and his gang were piling up ahead of him, forming a seemingly impassable barrier. Murder! He was expected to murder—Secret Agent "X" was expected to take life when his own code seldom permitted him to use lethal weapons.

But upon looking down at the piece of paper open in his hands, he experienced a stab of pain far more cruel than a wound from an assassin's knife. For the name written upon the paper was dear to him beyond all others. It was Betty Dale, the beautiful girl reporter who had aided "X" in countless battles against crime.*

"X" SUDDENLY became aware that all eyes were fixed upon him. He was thankful that the plastic substance covering his face would hide the fact that he had most certainly paled at the thought of what was expected of him. However, something in his eyes must have betrayed his shock to Number One. The leader of the Seven Silent Men spoke icily.

"Does the killing of a woman seem such a disagreeable task to you? Would you prefer to return to the death house?"

"Cheez, no, boss!" the Agent cried. "I just ain't never knifed a woman. Give me the goose pimples at first, a'

help me! But I'll do it. Just you watch me!"

"That is the better spirit!" Number One commended. "I intend that Betty Dale shall be killed, that she shall be branded with the mark of Seven, and that she shall be thrown into the river from the wharf. My idea is that such an act will force Secret Agent 'X' into open warfare. If I am any judge, Betty Dale is more to 'X' than a mere ally.

"You may wonder how this killing will be arranged. Leave that to me. Surely you realize the extent of our power. A group capable of tunneling under the walls of a penitentiary, blasting through the floor of the death house, and rescuing a prisoner from the gallows, is also capable of arranging a mere murder. And when Betty Dale is found, a corpse floating in the East River, well—" Number One uttered an evil chuckle—"Mr. 'X' will be pretty badly upset. He'll be in such a frenzy that he'll turn the city upside-down in a frantic effort to find the hiding place of the Seven Silent Men. Then—then he will show his hand. Then Pete Tolman's knife will know where to strike. Am I right, Tolman?"

"Sure, boss!" the Agent spoke confidently. "But you haven't told me where this headquarters is yet. Some old millionaire's dump?"

"Number One's voice lost every hint of cordiality. "Do not be too inquisitive, lest your eternal silence be assured. We are rather clever at this business, of ripping out a man's tongue!" Number One snapped his fingers. "Number Three and Number Four, you will attend Tolman. See that he is suitably disguised. Then take him away. He will be free to do as he pleases until his services are required to murder Betty Dale."

Two of the Silent Men rose from their chairs. "X" saw an oak panel open to reveal a scarlet-curtained doorway. Through this he was led by Number Three and Number Four into a small room hardly bigger than a closet. There he was furnished with a red wig, a sandy mustache, and

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Followers of Secret Agent "X" are by now well acquainted with Betty Dale, the courageous girl reporter, who has shared many a perilous adventure with him.

grease paints—clumsy accessories of disguise that would have caused Agent "X" to laugh had there remained any humor in his heart.

When "X" had completed this clumsy disguise, Number Four approached him with a large, brutal looking hypodermic needle. He was forced to submit to several injections to nerve centers throughout the body. He felt the strange drug oozing over him.*

He realized suddenly, that he was going blind. His mind was strangely dulled, his sense of equilibrium upset. He was like a corpse with only the motor nerves that activated his arms and legs remaining alive. Later, he recognized the rumble of a motor. Then he knew that he was walking. But his brain was far too deadened for him to remember the direction taken or the interval of time between the administration of the drug and his sudden and violent reawakening.

CHAPTER VIII THE CRIPPLED SPY

SLOWLY, Agent "X's" sense of sight returned to him. A red mist that swam before his eyes parted and he was dazzled by the glitter of a million lights. He was in the middle of the sidewalk. Hurrying people jostled him rudely. In the street was the continual stream of heavy traffic. He realized that he was in New York—in fact, he was standing in the very shadow of the mammoth Falmouth Tower Building. It was eight-thirty P. M.

But as far as he knew, he might have been brought miles and miles from the Seven gang's headquarters. Certainly among the gleaming spires and dancing lights of the city, he would find no old house boasting such a room as the oak-paneled one occupied by the Seven Silent Men.

As he walked down the street, three newsboys came by shouting their sensational ware. The *Herald* had put out an extra. Black headlines screamed:

COUNTERFEIT BILLS IN FALMOUTH PAYROLL

"X" reached into his pocket to find it well stocked with bills and change. Evidently Number One believed in keeping his hirelings happy with money. "X" hailed one of the news-hawkers and bought a paper. He glanced at the headlines as he hurried along. Much had happened since he and Jim Hobart had flown to Baton Rouge.

The caldron of trouble brewed and bubbled. Banks had closed to prevent runs. The Bankers Express Agency had been ordered to stop work because it was impossible to all their armored trucks from those employed by the counterfeiters in the distribution of spurious money. The Falmouth Manufacturing Company had actually paid out thousands of dollars in worthless currency—money that they had supposed had come from a legitimate bank.

"X" remembered the blond, unpleasant Lynn Falmouth. Falmouth presented a baffling enigma to Agent "X." He was a character beyond fathoming, even to an astute psychologist like Secret Agent "X." Nor could he forget that Falmouth's cousin, George Arthurs, had been Number Six of the Silent Men.

Rounding the corner, "X" came abruptly on a knot of people gathered around a hollow-eyed young man who was haranguing on the failure of the government to stop the flow of counterfeit money. He flaunted a copy of the *Herald* in their faces.

"Look, brothers!" he shouted. "A supposedly reputable firm has been paying for the daily labor of hundreds of our companions. Paying not in check and not in cash. Paying them in worthless paper! Shall we stand idle as the police do? How do you know, John Smith, or you, Mary Jones, that the money in your pocket will buy the

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Secret Agent "X" has never learned the exact composition of this drug but he believes it to contain minute quantities of cocaine used similarly to the spinal block anesthetic so important to modern surgery.

daily bread or be refused as so much waste paper?"

"X" waited for no more. He recognized the young man as Malvin Stein, an agitator who had given up his position as heir to the Stein fortune in order to air his crack-brained schemes and epic visions from soap boxes. He was a feeble orator and, had it not been that his subject was of such vital importance, he would have probably lacked an audience. Yet the incident plainly showed the spread of the germs of discontent.

"X" stepped into a rolling taxi and gave the address of an apartment building where he sometimes made his headquarters. Looking back through the window, he saw a crippled, twisted form of a man pull from the crowd and hobble into a second taxi. "X" wondered if the pitiful wreck of humanity was following him. Beggars seldom rode in taxis.

The cab containing the cripple nosed determinedly after them. When "X" ordered the driver to stop a few blocks from this apartment, he saw that the second cab dropped back to the corner, obviously to permit the beggar to alight. "X" walked on towards his apartment, certain that he heard the strange, shuffling steps of the cripple behind him. Once he turned his head and saw the grotesquely shaped man dragging himself along with a diagonal gait peculiar to a certain type of paralytic.

"X" entered the apartment building—a tall, stone-fronted old house that had been remodeled for its present use. He climbed the steps to the second floor and let himself in by means of a combination lock concealed beneath the mailbox flap.

HIS first act on turning on the light was to pull down the blinds. Then, through a small hole in the curtain, he looked down upon the street. Directly opposite the apartment building, he could see the cripple. The man was squatting on the sidewalk, holding a tray of lead pencils

which he offered to every passer-by.

Secret Agent "X" had previously devised a piece of apparatus for just such an emergency. He went to a closet, unlocked it, and dragged out a strange sort of motion picture projector. It was mounted on a steel frame and in place of the usual film spools there were two flanged pulleys mounted on two arms that extended from a few inches from the floor nearly to the ceiling. Over these pulleys ran a belt of motion picture film.

He focused the projector lens directly upon the drawn blind of the front window. An electric switch on an extension cord enabled him to snap out the light of the room at exactly the same time that he turned on the projector. The illusion was perfect. The projector cast the silhouette of a man sitting in a chair directly upon the blind. From the outside it must have appeared that "X" had suddenly seated himself in a chair and begun reading. As the belt of film turned, the silhouette made lifelike movements—turning the pages of a book and puffing on a pipe.

Then, taking care not to step in front of the beam from the projector, "X" walked into another room. There, he opened a small writing desk and produced a folded sheet of paper which he read over quickly. It was an invitation directed to Elisha Pond from Abel Corin, the wealthy bank director. It read:

Dear Mr. Pond:

As a philanthropist and public-spirited gentleman, I think you would be interested in meeting Sven Gerlak, a free-lance detective from Milwaukee. You are doubtless well acquainted with his enviable reputation for cracking down on criminal organizations. A number of wealthy gentlemen like yourself have contributed to a fund for employing Mr. Gerlak in hunting down the gang known as the Seven Silent Men.

I would be happy to have you present at a meeting in my office Thursday evening at about nine o'clock. Mr. Gerlak will be there and a subject of vital importance to our city will be discussed.

Cordially,

ABEL CORIN.

"X" returned the note to the desk and entered a small room at the back of the apartment. There he kept elaborate material for make-up as well as an extensive wardrobe. Seating himself before a three-sided mirror, he effected a miraculous change in his appearance. When he rose from the mirror he had become the wealthy, eccentric, and mild-faced man who was known throughout the city as Elisha Pond.*

OPENING a window in the same room, "X" swung over the sill, hand-traveled along the ledge until he could grasp the metal downspout leading from the eaves to the alley below. He was in the act of sliding down the pipe, when a window directly opposite opened. A shrill, feminine voice screamed:

"A burglar! Help! P'lice!"

"X" hastened his descent, sliding as rapidly as he dared without burning his hands. The woman was still screaming when he found footing on the alley pavement, "X," sprinting towards the end of the alley, was forced to leap to one side to avoid running headlong into a policeman. The cop yanked at his gun.

"X" drove a smashing, paralyzing blow to the cop's gun arm. The pistol bounded to the pavement. The cop swung his nightstick over the Secret Agent's head. But "X" ducked out of the way, and led his right to the policeman's jaw. The cop was set back on his heels by the force of the blow. "X" took the advantage thus gained to duck around the corner and run up the street.

A police whistle shrilled. The answering signal came from a policeman near at hand. The sound of running feet coming towards him through the darkness halted "X." He drew himself up to the full dignity that fitted

his portrayal of Elisha Pond; for Pond, although an eccentric, would certainly not be suspected of climbing down spouts and tussling with policemen.

The copper accosted "X," turned a flashlight in his face, but paused only long enough to apologize to Mr. Pond. Then he hurried up the alley to join his fellow policeman.

"X" hastened to a neighboring garage where he kept one of his cars. He backed it out, nosed into the street, and speeded downtown.

A short time later, Secret Agent "X" entered the gleaming, silvery doors of the Falmouth Tower. An elevator whisked him to the sumptuous offices where Abel Corin directed major cogs in the machine of finance. In an outer office he was met by a strikingly beautiful brunette. Her scarlet lips, and warm, dark eyes flashed him a smile of welcome. "X" stood in the doorway, fussing with a small, leather case.

"Eh—young lady, if you will just take my card to Mr. Corin, I—er—"

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Pond," said the woman. "Mr. Corin is expecting you. The meeting is already in progress. Please step this way." And she led "X" through a lavishly appointed lounge and towards Mr. Corin's private office.

Though he had never seen the woman before, "X" supposed her to be Alice Neves whose name had been closely linked with that of Abel Corin. She had acted as his secretary for some time, and it was rumored that the announcement of her engagement to Corin was to be expected. Miss Neves opened the door of the inner office and then followed "X" in.

The Secret Agent glanced about the room and saw several men with whom he had come in contact in the role of Elisha Pond. Abel Corin, of course, was there, as well as Police Commissioner Foster. Suddenly the heart of Secret Agent "X" gave a bound. For seated demurely away from the circle

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: The stock disguise of Elisha Pond which Agent "X" frequently employs is of no less importance to him than the A. J. Martin disguise. It is in the name of Elisha Pond that an inexhaustible fund of money, subscribed by certain wealthy and public-spirited men, is placed at his disposal.



of anxious-faced men, was Betty Dale, her reporters' notebook in hand.*

Never had she looked more charming. The arrangement of her golden hair seemed to lend new enchantment to her bright blue eyes. Her slim, lovely figure was attired so as to achieve that rare combination of practicality and smartness. She smiled pleasantly upon Elisha Pond, little knowing that beneath this disguise was the man whom she regarded with respect and admiration—even love, had she permitted herself to admit it.

Gray-haired Mr. Corin advanced, shook hands with Agent "X," and led him across the floor that was uniquely ornamented with colored tiles representing the playing pieces of a chess game. A short, heavy-set man whose broad face approached the flaming color of his hair was introduced to "X" as Sven Gerlak, Milwaukee's famed "Gang-buster."

COMMISSIONER FOSTER called the meeting to order. He plainly stated the condition within the city, then presented Sven Gerlak. The energetic, red-haired little man propped one foot upon a swivel chair and addressed his audience emphatically.

"A grave problem indeed!" he began abruptly, pounding the top of a desk with his big fist. "Frankly, I am

at a loss to know just where to begin. The underworld, in which my secret operatives are at work, is strangely inactive, or if not inactive, it is hiding its work so well that no information can be gained. Of one thing we are sure: the leader of the Seven Silent Men terrifies his hirelings into absolute secrecy. That, I think is evident.

"But there is one man, to my knowledge, who could give us immediate assistance." Gerlak paused, removing great horn-rimmed glasses and polishing them upon his tie. "That man," he suddenly exploded, "is that mysterious person known as Secret Agent 'X'!"

This announcement created a fervor in the audience. Agent "X," in the voice that was always associated with elderly Mr. Pond, spoke up. "But, my dear sir, Secret Agent 'X' is thought to be a criminal!"

"Precisely!" exclaimed Gerlak, fixing Elisha Pond with eyes that were greatly magnified by the lenses of his glasses. "But he is a most clever criminal. There is an old adage—something about it taking a thief to catch a thief. Why, so clever is Secret Agent 'X' that he might be in this room at this very moment!"

"Has it occurred to you," said Abel Corin, as he reflectively gazed at the wisp of smoke from the tip of his cigar, "that this man who calls himself 'X' might be at the bottom of this business?"

"X" glanced at Betty Dale. The girl reporter had turned a little pale. She caught her lower lip between her teeth. He knew that Betty would have liked to speak a word in defense of the Secret Agent.

Gerlak shook his head in answer to Corin's question. "Criminal, Mr. 'X' may be, but he is not a member of the Seven. You must admit that there are no police records charging Agent 'X' with murder. The Seven gang has no scruples about blood-letting."

Commissioner Foster had to admit that the records concerning Secret Agent "X" were very few in number.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Few men could be immune to Betty Dale's charm; certainly not the police with whom she is in daily contact in her work unassociated with the newspaper. The fact that she is often privileged to enter conferences denied to other reporters has occasioned considerable jealousy among periodicals which compete with the "Herald."

"The man has been too clever," he concluded.

The meeting was suddenly interrupted by an impatient knock at the door of the office. Alice Neves answered the knocking, and the door had scarcely been unlocked before a detective sergeant burst into the room. Commissioner Foster's reprimanding glance melted with the explosion of words from the plainclothes man.

"We've picked up one of the Seven gang, sir. I knew you'd want to know—"

"Where, man?" cried Foster, springing to his feet.

"Right outside the building here. He was thrown from a passing car—dead! But you can tell by his face. It's exactly like the face of the man who held up the Suburban National. But there's something else—"

"Speak up, man!" Sven Gerlak prompted.

"Well, sir," murmured the detective, "this sounds nuts, I know. But to look at his face—well, it just isn't like a human's face at all, and yet—"

"Imagination! Sheer lunacy!" sputtered Gerlak. He sprang for the door of the office. The meeting was abruptly terminated. All crowded out of the office at Gerlak's heels. And among the others, displaying remarkable vigor for a man of his years, was Elisha Pond.

CHAPTER IX

THE SILENT HORROR

POLICE had hastily formed a cordon about a sprawling thing on the sidewalk in front of the Falmouth Tower. Following through the opening in the ring of police made by Commissioner Foster, Agent "X," Betty Dale, and Sven Gerlak came within a few feet of the corpse. Though her life as a newspaper woman had to some extent hardened Betty Dale to the sight of sudden and violent death, the sight of the face of the man on the sidewalk made her gasp.

It was, indeed, as the detective-sergeant had said, an inhuman sort of a

face—the doll-like, leering visage of one of the Silent Men. The corpse was clad in a dark-brown suit, but there was no diamond insignia upon his coat lapel.

With a movement of catlike swiftness, Sven Gerlak knelt beside the body. "This is obviously the work of Secret Agent 'X,' Commissioner. The body was thrown from a passing car. 'X' has taken up the fight against the Seven Silent Men!"

"That's jumping at conclusions, Gerlak," said Foster dryly.

"This face, you see," said Gerlak, pointing at the grinning face of the corpse, "is merely a mask of something similar to wax." And before Foster could raise his voice to check the impulsive Gerlak, the private detective had given the waxen mask a quick tap with the butt of his automatic. The mask cracked from forehead to chin and fell apart in two jagged-edged pieces.

A scream from one of the onlookers; hoarse exclamations from the police; an oath from Foster. "X" turned to Betty Dale. She was braving the sudden shock of the gruesome revelation with eyes averted and lower lip locked between her teeth. Color had drained from her face.

The true face beneath the waxen mask was a hellish contortion. Unseeing, pain-seared eyes stared from beneath beetling brows. A figure seven was burned in the flesh of the forehead. Chin and neck were covered with a beard of clotting gore. Jaws



were strained open, and beyond the stained teeth was a hideous vacancy that screamed the revolting truth of the method of murder. The tongue had been torn out by the roots.

"Good Lord!" breathed Foster. "Good Lord! This isn't a member of the gang. This—this poor devil is Detective Fletcher of the homicide squad!"

Gerlak's dynamic energy was unchecked by the gruesome face of the corpse. His exploring fingers had yanked a slip of paper from the breast pocket of the corpse. He hastily opened the paper and read it to himself. Though he was several feet away, Agent "X" had no trouble in reading the large, clear handwriting.

My compliments, Commissioner Foster:

And accept this token of our esteem. The same fate awaits you or any others who pry into our affairs. Fletcher was unfortunate in identifying one Lewey, the Snoko, as a member of the gang which looted the Suburban National. Fletcher's success was due largely to Lewey's indiscretion. We have no room for bunglers in our organization, and Lewey has taken temporary quarters in the East River, where your police will eventually find him. Why don't you imitate our example in regard to the removal of bunglers? You've quite a number on the police force, you know.

Seven.

"X" turned suddenly and seized Betty Dale's arm. The girl's blue eyes widened in surprise. "Young lady," said "X" in the voice of Elisha Pond, "if you have any influence with your editor, do not permit him to dwell upon this incident in tomorrow's paper. The people are already beginning to lose confidence in their police force. Any hint that the police are not capable of grappling with this evil may be the brand that fires many a mob into action. Such a thing as this note which Gerlak has, has been sent for the sole purpose of goading the people to action. Do you understand?"

And without waiting for an answer, Elisha Pond, who was expected to make abrupt movements, elbowed his way through the crowd and disappeared.

SECRET AGENT "X" drove his car to a sedate old office building. There he maintained a hideout which was of great importance to him because of its location near the very center of the business world. He enacted a marvelous change, assuming one of his stock disguises—a red-haired, freckled reporter. Then he called the *Herald* office and asked for Betty Dale.

He knew that she would be at her desk turning out her story of the meeting in Corin's office and the grisly manner in which it had been terminated. When he heard Betty's pleasant but businesslike voice over the phone, he said: "Wouldn't you like to meet a gentleman of the press in about twenty minutes?"

"Who is speaking?" asked Betty, a note of cold restraint in her voice.

One of those brief, infrequent flashes of merriment appeared in Agent "X's" eyes. He puckered his lips and uttered a peculiar, vibrant whistle.

Betty gasped in surprise. "You! Why, of course, I'll meet you. Where?"

"At your apartment, please. And just as soon as you can possibly make it."

"Leaving right away," replied the girl.

"X" forked the receiver, and left the office. He drove as swiftly as traffic would permit to the modern apartment building where Betty Dale lived. Alighting from the elevator, some time later, he proceeded at once to her door. His knock was unanswered. She had evidently not yet returned from the news office.

Though special master keys would have permitted him to enter the girl's apartment, he refrained from doing so rather than run the slightest risk of jeopardizing Betty's reputation. He waited in the hall until he heard her brisk step. She took no notice of the freckled-faced man who was standing watching her. As she was unlocking the door, "X" stepped up to her and touched her arm. She was startled.

Her eyes searched his face, waiting for him to speak.

"I'm Mr. Harris," The Secret Agent whispered. Then he quickly drew an "X" on the panel of the door with his finger.

"Why, Mr. Harris!" Betty smiled, falling into the little act which was obviously for the benefit of any prying eyes. For since "X" had returned from the Seven gang's headquarters, he believed that Betty Dale would be watched as carefully as the man whom the gang believed to be Pete Tolman. "Just come in, please," Betty invited. "I'm sure we can iron out that little difficulty concerning that story in yesterday's paper."

On closing the door, Betty turned around, leaned against the panel, and looked earnestly into his face, or rather the face of the reporter called Harris. Neither Betty nor anyone else had ever seen the true face of Secret Agent "X."

"Something is troubling you," she said decidedly. "A master of disguise though you may be, I can read that much in your eyes."

"X" SMILED. "It has been my great misfortune never to see you unless there is something of the gravest importance to worry about. Betty, I have now partially succeeded in establishing myself as a member of the gang known as the Seven Silent Men. Will you help me when I tell you that you will be put to the most severe trial of your life?"

Unhesitatingly she nodded her head. "I'm not very capable; not very brave, either," she replied. "But I will do my best for—for your sake." Her eyes dropped. Her face flushed a little.

"For our country's sake, primarily," the Agent corrected her gently. "I must explain to you that every member of the Seven Silent Men is compelled to commit murder. In this manner his lips are sealed against squealing on his fellow members. In my case, the leader of the gang in-

sists that I kill some one who is very dear to me. Of course, since he does not know who I am, he does not know this. Naturally, I must pretend to murder this person, and I must coach you in the part you are to play in order to carry off this deception."

"You mean—you mean that I am the one?" Her cheeks flushed a deeper hue.

"Yes, you are the one."

For a moment, Betty was unable to speak, for the pounding of her heart warned her that if she opened her lips she would cry out: "I'm glad! I'm glad!" For though she had often guessed that this mysterious man held her in high regard, he had never openly stated that she was dear to him. Yet she knew that the important work of Secret Agent "X" must not be hindered by any emotion. When she was certain that she had complete control of herself, she asked: "What am I to do?"

"In a very few hours," he explained, "you will be confronted by a band of assassins. I will be among them. Rest assured that no hands but mine shall touch you. You will pretend to be terrified. I will pretend to stab you. You must feign death. It will be difficult, I know, but we dare not fail. According to present plans, you will be taken to the river front and thrown into the water. I would not ask you to do this if I did not know that you are an excellent swimmer. Upon striking the water, you must swim beneath the surface as far out from shore as possible. As soon as you break the surface, there will be a boat not far distant waiting to pick you up. I will make all arrangements. Are you game?"

"You know I am. It doesn't sound so very hard. But just how do you pretend to stab me?"

"We must prepare for that at once." And Secret Agent "X" took a flat leather case of make-up materials from the inner pocket of his coat. He opened it and took out a flat, rubber bladder that he had brought from his hideout. "This," he explained to Betty,

"contains an aniline dye of such color and consistency as to deceive the average person into thinking that it is blood. Though the little sack contains just a small amount of the liquid dye, I hope that it will be sufficient for our deception."

Agent "X" then told Betty to sit down. With a strip of light adhesive tape, he fastened the rubber sack to her throat. Then he covered the sack with plastic volatile material, modeling like a sculptor in clay until he achieved the desired effect. Carefully tinted with pigments, the make-up material concealed the small bladder perfectly. Next he placed a thin metal plate over Betty's forehead. This was similarly covered and tinted. Thus the white skin beneath was protected from the acid with which the Seven Silent Men were accustomed to brand their victims.

"Now," said the Agent as he repacked his make-up kit, "you must not be afraid of anything, but you must act afraid. Remember that when the gang members come, I will be there, too."

Secret Agent "X" pressed Betty's hand warmly, reassuringly, and left the apartment.

CHAPTER X

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

IT was ten minutes later that Secret Agent "X" drove his car in front of the apartment building where the crippled pencil vender still watched. He noted, to his satisfaction, the silhouette thrown on the blind of his front window. Certainly it had served its purpose in fooling the crippled spy of the Silent Men. He promptly returned his car to its garage and hurried up the alley behind the apartment. This time, there were no curious watchers to call upon the police when Agent "X" scaled the downspout and returned through the rear window of his apartment.

His first act in entering was to change his make-up back to the Pete

Tolman disguise. To this outfit he added the red wig and mustache that the Seven gang had furnished him. This done, he went into a small dining room and approached what appeared to be a sideboard. Actually, the cabinet concealed special radio receiving and transmitting equipment.

He drew a chair up before the instrument, sat down, and made several minor adjustments in the transmitting set. Then, using a telegraph key, he sent out spark transmission to a man by the name of Bates who maintained a large group of men and women employed by "X" for the purpose of obtaining information for him. Bates knew his employer only by the sound of his voice and by the special code he used in telegraphic messages.

When he heard the answering call which assured him that he had succeeded in contacting Bates, "X" tapped out complete instructions. Bates was to put every available man to patrolling the river front in small boats for the purpose of picking up Betty Dale after the murder hoax had been carried out and she had been thrown into the water.

"X" heard a vigorous knock at the door. He closed the radio cabinet, hurried into the front room, and turned off the motion picture projector. He then shoved the projector and all its accessories back into the closet and returned to answer the door.

"Telegram for you, sir," said a khaki-clad messenger as he shoved his way into the room. The messenger drove his hand into the pocket of his breeches. In the act of locating the telegram, a pair of ivory dice dropped from the messenger's pocket. The eyes of Secret Agent "X" followed the dice as they fell to the floor.

HE knew that it was not mere coincidence that the dice landed with the five and two uppermost. Agent "X" remembered the dice that the leader of the Seven had given

him. He took them from his pocket and dropped them on the floor beside the other pair. They, too, rolled so that the sum of their exposed surfaces totaled seven. His shrewd eyes drilled the messenger.

The man in khaki nodded, handed a telegraph slip to "X." Upon its surface was scribbled:

"Two men will meet you with a car at the corner of this building in three minutes."

"X" winked knowingly at the messenger, pressed a fifty-cent piece into the man's hand, and opened the door for him to depart.

Secret Agent "X" required a few minutes to collect the equipment that he thought might be useful. True to his character as Pete Tolman, "X" had to carry a small dagger. Tolman preferred the knife to any other form of weapon. Then there was his own gas gun as well as small vials of drugs which he had found most useful in his battle against crime. The latter were contained in a small, velvet-lined leather case together with hypodermic needles for their injection.

Leaving the apartment building, he walked slowly towards the corner. Down the street, a car glided smoothly from the curb and cruised towards "X". A searchlight attached to the car's windshield was turned directly upon "X's" face as the car approached. At the corner, it drew up. One of the two men in the back seat lighted a cigarette. In the yellow flame, "X" made out the inhuman, waxen features of the mask which characterized a member of the gang. He walked to the car and without a word stepped inside.

Immediately, the driver shifted gears and accelerated to the center of the street.

"You are punctual, Pete Tolman," said a soft, curiously intoned voice of the man at Secret Agent "X's" side. "Might I inquire how a man so suddenly released from prison has

managed to engage an apartment so quickly? As you may have guessed, you were followed from our headquarters."

"That's easy," explained the Agent. "I leased that apartment for a girl friend of mine just a few days before the bulls picked me up. I had it paid for a long way in advance. When I goes up there tonight, whatcha think? The skirt has walked out on me! But you never catch me tearin' my hair over no dame!"

THE man seemed satisfied for he dropped the subject at once. "There has been some slight alteration in the plans of Number One. The river front swarms with police looking for the body of Lewey, the Smoke, who made his exit at the same time that Detective Fletcher did. It will be necessary to kill Miss Dale at the place where our spies say that she may be found—at her apartment."

At this announcement, "X" went cold.

"You are capable of killing without making a sound, Tolman?" asked the other man—a man whose voice "X" instantly recognized as belonging to that member of the gang whom the leader had referred to as Number Four.

"Sure," the Agent replied instantly. "They don't talk before ner after. A Chink in Frisco taught me a trick or two with the knife. No noise and not much blood, see? I use a toad sticker, give 'em just a little prick, and that's that. Some sort of poison smeared on the blade does the trick."

"Aconite?" questioned Number Four.

"Aco-what? Oh, I gets it. You mean the name of the poison. Cripes, I dunno! Some Chink stuff. It's sure death no matter what's its monicker."

As a matter of fact, there would be no poison on the knife. Agent "X's" hands were busily at work in the dark of the car. Through slits in his overcoat pocket, he had reached the little

leather-covered case containing various drugs. Different shaped caps on every bottle told him which one to select. As the car sped along, "X" filled a hypodermic needle with a powerful sedative which injected into Betty would immediately depress her heart to such an extent that pulse would be detectable only by an expert. But the one danger was—she was totally unprepared for it. This, however, "X" had to risk.

Suddenly, Number Four said to his companion: "Number Three, you are to hand Tolman one of our masks which designate the members of the Seven group. Such were the orders of Number One. He is to wear it when engaged in this job."

The soft-spoken man addressed as Number Three, handed the mask to "X". He put it on at once. Number Three and Number Four held a brief conversation in whispers. Suddenly, "X" felt a sharp, fiery sting in his left arm. A long needle had entered his flesh. Its cargo of dope was pumped into his blood stream. "X" cried out sharply: "Say, what is this?"

"Just a little something to make you relish the job," replied Number Three. "You will probably not recognize the symptoms of the drug as it spreads over your body. But if you had no appetite for killing before, you will have one now!"

Flame seemed to consume "X". He writhed with the agony of it, yet with the pain was a strange, exhilarating sensation. Muscles tightened. Fists clenched. An inexplicable voice in his mind screamed: "Kill . . . Kill . . . Kill!"

Then something snapped within his brain. He was plunged into a mental battle such as he had never before experienced. His knowledge of narcotics served him well. He knew the dread, fiery substance that was seeping through his body. He understood, too, the frantic desire to kill. The narcotic which had been injected in him

was some preparation of hashish.* What was more, he knew that the effects of the drug were augmented by hypnotic suggestion that at that very moment battled to enslave his mind.

The soft-spoken man at his side immediately became as noxious as a serpent. "X" understood the honey in his voice. For the man at his side was an expert of hypnotic suggestion.

Agent "X" feverishly marshaled his superb mental control to prevent himself from falling beneath the insidious charm of the dreaded assassin's drug. A cold chill trickled along his spine. For if he permitted both the drug and the hypnotic suggestion to take effect, he would have the desire to kill, would take the keenest pleasure in plunging his knife into the lovely body of Betty Dale.

CHAPTER XI

THE MURDER HOAX

IT was close to midnight when the car stopped at the rear entrance of the apartment where Betty Dale lived.

"Number One thinks of everything," the soft-voiced man explained. "That the custodian should be dead drunk tonight is not a coincidence."

They got out of the car and one of the men unlocked the door with a key that had probably been obtained from the drunken janitor. The hall was deserted, and they had no difficulty in entering the automatic elevator, and mounting to the third floor.

In front of Betty's door, the trio stopped. The man who was known as Number Three listened a moment at the door. "There's a typewriter going inside. The noise of it will mask the sound of our entrance." He fitted another key into the lock, twisted it

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Perhaps the most insidious of ancient drugs that he has encountered, Agent "X" informs me, is this hashish, sometimes known as "the assassin's drug." A preparation of Indian hemp, it is used in a number of forms by such fanatical murderers as the Thugs and Dacoits. It brings about subjugation of the mind and lowers the morale of its users. The subject of hashish and its evil uses has hardly been touched by Occidental scientists.

slowly, and flung open the door. An automatic sprouted from the fist of Number Three.

Agent "X," bathed in cold sweat, weakened by the terrific mental battle he was still waging, went unsteadily into the room.

Betty Dale sprang up from her desk. Her face blanched. She smothered a scream with the back of her hand, and retreated slowly step by step as the three sinister figures approached. "X's" iron will alone forced him to spring ahead of his companions. He was like a wolf eager for the kill. With the two gang members at his back, he brandished his drawn knife in such a manner as to draw a letter "X" in the air.

The glimmer of recognition in Betty's eyes would have been noticeable to only Secret Agent "X." His long left arm flung out, strong fingers seizing her shoulder, dragging her to him, smothering her scream against his chest. Betty kicked mercilessly at his ankles, pounded his back with small fists.

The knife in the Secret Agent's hand darted upwards. The terror at that instant in Betty Dale's eyes was involuntary. Yet it cut Agent "X" to the quick, unnerved him so that he dropped the knife as soon as the deed was done. The blood-colored dye, gushing apparently from the soft flesh of her throat, was almost too realistic. Still he held her tightly, teeth grimly clenched over his lips lest he open his mouth and cry out a word of encouragement.

Her struggle had abated somewhat. She was playing her part like a veteran actress. "X" snapped a look over his shoulder. The two waxen-faced witnesses were standing back near the door. They could not possibly have detected "X's" movement as he drew out the small hypodermic needle which he had prepared. He thrust the fine, sharp point deeply into her shoulder. He pressed the plunger to the limit. This was something that he had not prepared Betty for. Doubt

and pain of the needle-thrust battled in her eyes as they raised appealingly to meet his face—a face that was as hideous and inhuman as those of his companions.

That appeal was more than Agent "X" could resist. Beneath the mask, his lips parted. "Courage," he whispered, his voice sounding alarmingly loud behind the hollow of his mask. But it was doubtful if Betty could have heard it even so. The powerful sedative had already taken effect. Her eyes, still open, were glazed. Terror had frozen there as unconsciousness had crept upon her. Her body became limp in his grasp.

He let her fall as gently as possible and still retain a semblance of consciousness in the action. She lay on the carpet, a pitiful, huddled form, throat darkly stained in contrast to her pale face. So realistic was the picture, that "X" went cold with horror. He feverishly wondered if he had won the battle with the insidious hashish.

"X" stooped, picked up his knife, and wiped its edge on his handkerchief. With the swaggering air that was characteristic of Pete Tolman, he turned to the silent figures at the door. "That job's done. Neat, too, if I do say so myself."

THE men in the doorway bobbed their heads. Then Number Three advanced to where Betty lay. He gave her body a push with his foot. Wrath that was almost beyond control boiled within Secret Agent "X". Yet he swallowed it and watched with bated breath as the man knelt beside the girl and seized her wrist in his long fingers.

"A good job, Tolman," he commended. "No pulse. Sometime I would like to make an analysis of the poison you use. It would be an interesting study."

Number Three then took from his pocket something that appeared to be a fountain pen. When he had unscrewed the cap and "X" had a chance to observe the special non-metallic

nib, the Secret Agent quickly guessed that this was the instrument used for branding the gang's victims with acid.

"Hey, wait a second," the Agent interrupted. "This is my job, and I'll put all the finishin' on it. Let me do that."

Number Three turned. At the back of the eye cavities of his mask there was a suspicious gleam. "Do what?" he asked softly.

"Why, mark the dame with the good old Seven trade-mark. Ain't that what you're goin' to do?"

Number Three stood up. "You have been in prison for quite a time now. Just how did you know about that?"

"X" knew that in his eagerness to prevent Betty Dale's lovely face from being forever marred by an acid burn in case Number Three's pen should slip beyond the boundaries of the plastic material which "X" hoped would protect her, he had made a false step. "Why," he explained glibly, "didn't I read the papers tonight while waitin' for you fellows to give me the high-sign? There's ncthin' much in them except about the Seven Silent Men."

Number Three shrugged. "If you want to do it, I can see no objection. It is of the greatest importance in this case. Secret Agent 'X' must not have the slightest doubt but what this is our work. Only then can we be certain that he has turned his attention to the Seven. Number One hopes that his rage at the assassination of this girl will lead him to fight in the open. Go ahead." He handed the acid pen over to "X" and withdrew towards the door.

"X" knelt beside the still, silent form of Betty Dale. The powerful sedative had simulated death so effectively that the sight unnerved him. "Just what kind of a figure seven do you want?" he asked to hide his hesitancy.

No answer. "X" glanced over his shoulder. Then he stood up slowly, turning towards the door. His two

companions had disappeared. He stepped quickly to the door, pulled it open, and looked out into the hall. They were nowhere in sight. This was an unlooked for opportunity. He would have a chance to revive Betty, perhaps. Still, he was extremely puzzled at the actions of the two gang members. Had they discovered that he was an impostor? Surely in such a case they would not have deserted him. It would have been to their advantage to kill him on the spot, silencing him forever.

Still baffled by their untimely retreat, he was about to return to Betty, when his sensitive nostrils caught a vague, pleasant odor—the faintest hint of feminine perfume. He stepped farther along the hall only to learn that the strength of the perfume increased. Perhaps some one who occupied a neighboring apartment had passed along the hall. But surely that would not have occasioned the hasty retreat of the two masked men.

"X" returned to where Betty lay. He drew from his pocket the small case in which he carried his narcotics. He selected the vial containing an antidote for the drug which he had injected. He was in the act of loading the needle when he heard footsteps on the stairs. He paused, held his breath. If the two gang members returned at this critical moment—

HE ran silently across the room, shoved back the blind that covered the front window, and looked out upon the street. Two black cars were drawn up in front of the building. In the light that emanated from the door of the building, he could see that they were cars belonging to the police. Shadowy figures could be seen moving along the sidewalk. The place was rapidly being surrounded.

"X" sprang to the door and twisted the key in the lock. Then back to the unconscious Betty. With haste that did not sacrifice care, he made the injection of the antidote in Betty's arm. Then, to hasten her revival, he fol-

lowed it with a small dose of adrenalin, which he was in the habit of carrying at all times.

Almost at once, the bloom of life returned to Betty's face. Her eyes met his face and stared bewilderedly. "X" uttered his characteristic whistle very softly. Her lips curved in a tired smile.

"X" lifted Betty to her feet. "We've got to hide," he said. "Something's wrong. This place will be alive with police in a few seconds. Is there anyone in the building whom you can trust implicitly?"

"Trust?" she murmured. Evidently the effects of the drug had not completely worn off. "X" seized her shoulders and gave her a gentle shake. "You've got to help me," he said earnestly. "Surely you've some neighbor who will permit you to remain in hiding until this thing's over. Don't you see? Some one has informed upon the Seven gang—told the police that they had come here to do murder. If it gets out that you are alive, the gang will know that I am an impostor."

Betty nodded understandingly. "On the next floor, there's a young woman who works as a buyer for one of the stores. She's away nearly all the time. I have the key to her apartment so that I can keep an eye on things. She wouldn't mind—"

"Quickly, then. Get the key!"

Betty turned into her bedroom, and "X" stepped to the door. He pressed his ear to the panel and detected a movement in the hall outside. He drew his gas gun from a hidden inner pocket. With extreme care, he turned the key and eased the door open a crack. By the light of the hall lamp, he saw a slender, smartly dressed blonde woman pacing nervously up and down and muttering something about: "Why don't they hurry! Oh, why don't they hurry!"

"X" pushed the door wide and stepped into the hall. He took a step nearer the blond woman and thrust his gun forward. Then he coughed

slightly. The woman turned quickly, the long skirt of her evening gown swirling. At the sight of the immobile, grinning mask that "X" wore, her mouth opened to scream. Instantly the gas gun in Secret Agent "X's" hand hissed like a snake. The woman's scream was suddenly choked by the powerful gas. Her body stiffened and she fell full length on the floor.

But the sound of her fall was enough to hasten the police. Feet were pounding on the stair. The cold, piercing scream of a police whistle sounded. "X" turned. Betty Dale had just come through the door. The key to her friend's apartment was in her hand. The sight of the blond woman stretched out on the floor stopped her.

She would have asked some question had not "X" pressed a warning finger to her lips. Seizing her by the arm, he hurried her across the hall to the elevator. Fortunately, the car was still at the third floor. "X" pushed Betty inside, followed her, and pressed the button.

The elevator mounted, stopping smoothly at the next floor. Together, Agent "X" and Betty hurried across the hall. "X" took the key from Betty's nerveless fingers and unlocked the door. Inside, he turned on the light, closed the door, and made a hasty inspection of the apartment. Satisfied that it was empty, he returned to the girl.

"Keep in hiding until you hear from me," he cautioned her.

"But you—you haven't a chance of getting out of here! The place must be surrounded—"

"Don't worry," he interrupted her cheerfully. He stepped back into the hall and closed the door behind him. On the floor below he could hear the police. They had probably entered Betty's apartment.

Below stairs came a sharp command. "Search the next floor. We've got them cold. They'd have to have wings to get out of here."

"X" sprang into the elevator,

slammed the door, and pressed the button for ascending. The car did not move. He pressed again and again. He tried the other buttons on the control panel. The police, he knew, foreseeing that the elevator might be used as a means of escape, had cut the power probably not more than a few seconds after he and Betty had entered the apartment of the department store buyer.

Through the frosted glass window of the elevator door, "X" could see the shadowy forms of men walking around in the hall. He was caught as nicely as a rat in a trap.

CHAPTER XII

ESCAPE

TO stand there helpless in the elevator waiting for the police to find him was an absurdity. "X" knew those efficient, painstaking men from headquarters. He knew they would leave no stone unturned in their search. Furthermore, "X" feared that their search would lead them to the apartment where Betty Dale was hiding. Because the Seven gang must think that Betty had been killed, he knew that it would never do for the police to find her unharmed. There was but one way to prevent the police from looking farther. He must show himself, using the waxen mask he wore as a means of deceiving the police from Betty's hiding place. "X" slid the door of the elevator open a crack. Five plainclothes men were standing in the hall questioning a pajama-clad man.

"There's a woman downstairs who's been knocked out cold," a detective sergeant by the name of Mallon was saying. "X" knew that Mallon referred to the blonde woman who had taken a lung-full of the charge from his gas gun. "Did you hear anything?" the sergeant went on, addressing the man in pajamas.

The man shook his head. "I was asleep."

"Riley," Mallon rapped, "you and Jennings block off the fire-escape. Jones, Henniger, and I will finish up on this floor."

From the crack in the elevator door, "X" saw two of the detectives turn down the hall towards the fire-escape. Mallon and his two men crossed the hall to the door of the apartment where Betty was hiding. Agent "X" sent the elevator door slamming open. He sprang into the hall, gun in hand. At the sound of the opening of the elevator door, the police turned. But "X" fired first. His gas gun was effective at even a distance of twenty feet and there could be no doubt but what at least one of the detectives would succumb to the anesthetizing vapor.

Mallon received the very center of the gas discharge. The automatic in his hand blasted a hurried, ineffectual shot as he spilled forward on his face. One of the other detectives, staggering forward, hampered his companion, "X" gained the stairway. As he sprang up the steps, a detective got in two quick shots. One struck the iron banister of the stairway and buzzed off harmlessly. The other burned across the calf of the Secret Agent's leg.

Gaining the top of the steps, "X" ran straight towards the fire-escape at the back of the hall. He felt certain that any police following him, would think that he had continued to the next floor.

Stepping out on the iron stairway, "X" looked down in the alley below. He could see the two detectives that had been sent to watch the fire-escape. They both looked up as "X" stepped out onto the escape. Imitating the voice of Sergeant Mallon, "X" shouted: "Hold your fire, Jennings. It's Mallon, I'm coming down."

"X" knew that the gloom of the alley would hide him for the time being and he depended upon his skill as a mimic to maintain the illusion that he was Detective Mallon. He ran

down the steps, but as he came to the last flight, one of the police turned a flashlight full upon "X's" face, or rather the waxen mask that covered it.

"That's not Mallon!" shouted one of the men. "It's one of the Seven gang!"

But as soon as the light struck his eyes, "X" vaulted over the iron railing of the escape. It was a twelve foot drop. "X" landed squarely on the back of the surprised detective. Together, they rolled over, the dick clawing at his gun with one hand and trying to ward off the blows that "X" was driving into his mid-section.

The other detective, afraid of hitting his companion, dared not fire a shot. He blasted his whistle and jumped into the fight. One man was on top of "X". The Secret Agent got an arm free for a short, savage punch to the detective's jaw. It was a terrific jolt, actually lifting the detective. "X" rolled to one side, picked himself up and at the same time drew his gas gun. He swung around to meet the second detective who was ready with his gun drawn. The crash of the cop's pistol drowned out the spurt of "X's" gas gun. But while the slug whined inches from the Secret Agent's head, the charge of the gas found its mark.

"X" BROKE into a run, zig-zagging in and out of the shadows. Gun hail followed him. Lead flattened against the walls of buildings, ricocheted, snagged wooden telephone posts. Nothing stopped him. Nothing *could* stop him unless at the end of the alley he found the police waiting for him.

As he reached the corner, a moving car pulled up sharply. A powerful searchlight cleaved the darkness of the alley like a scimitar. It blinded "X"; it made him a perfect target for his pursuers. With the car blocking his exit from the alley and the police closing in on him from behind, escape was impossible. Suddenly, the search-

light was turned off. A harsh voice called:

"Get in here, Tolman! Do you want to get chopped down?"

Unmistakable, that voice. It belonged to the leader of the Seven gang. It was Number One himself.

Secret Agent "X" leaped for the open rear door of the car and had hardly landed before the motor picked up speed and the car leaped into the street. Bullets whanged against the steel sides of the car. But the car was as perfectly armored as the trucks which the gang used in delivering its counterfeit money.

Looking through the rear window of the car, "X" saw that an opaque cloud of smoke fumed from the exhaust pipe. The car was spreading a chemical smoke screen that would make pursuit impossible. Then "X" noted that another of the Silent Men shared the back seat with him. There were two more in the front—one of them was certainly the big boss himself.

Number One was driving, for he called over his shoulder, "Did you think we had deserted you, Tolman?"

"Right!" the Agent rapped in the nasal snarl of Pete Tolman. "And a lousy trick it was. Seems as if you'd take more care of a man who's of so much value as I am!"

"Softly, now, Pete," Number One soothed. "I was so anxious for your welfare that I myself chauffeured the car that brought you and the two other brothers to the apartment. Numbers Three and Four tell me you did a good job. It is unfortunate that a woman came so near to ruining your good work. Numbers Three and Four saw a very lovely blonde woman in the hall and nothing would do but what they must follow her!"

Number One was all scorn. "You see, that woman was the wife of Number Four, here. What is more, Number Four has the bad habit of drinking too much and babbling in his sleep. His wife overheard him talking about the plans for tonight's

little job. Because she is a mercenary woman, instead of going to the police with her information, she tried to blackmail her husband.

"Imagine! So she tipped off the police in an effort to frighten Number Four into giving her the money. What is more, she will hold on to her information, that her husband is a member of the Seven group, until she does squeeze the money out of him. Now, what would you do in a case like that, Tolman?"

"Me?" "X" laughed. "Why, I'd finish that! I'd give Number Four the works!"

Number One said softly, "No-no. He is far too valuable a man for that. It is the woman who is to get 'the works' as you put it. And his punishment for not catching her tonight and bringing her to me, is that he must kill her with his own hands. What do you say, Number Four?"

A groan escaped the man at "X's" side. "I—I won't do it," he muttered fiercely.

"Oh, but you will!" Number One insisted. "See what you will gain. The object of your affection is quite another person than your wife. You will be glad to get rid of her, really."

Number Four moodily murmured his assent. "True enough. But after all, to kill my own wife—"

"The alternative," said Number One, "would be exquisite torture at the hands of the bishop. By tomorrow night, you will be perfectly willing to do as I bid you!"

Secret Agent "X" felt the man at his side shudder. He knew that already Number Four had resolved to kill his own wife rather than be a subject to the mysterious tortures of which Number One spoke.

"And," Number One continued, "tonight by special messenger, your wife will receive the amount of money she demands for silence. Tomorrow, she will receive silence itself—eternal silence."

The gang leader had stopped the smoke which had plumed from the

car. The motor was idling now, the car barely moving. "X" saw that they were in a run-down section of the city.

"By the way, Tolman," Number One asked, as the car pulled over to the curb, "did you manage to brand the forehead of the girl whom you just killed before the police intervened?"

"Sure, boss," the Agent lied. "It was a good job. But say, are we gettin' out of here?"

Number One laughed. "Wouldn't you like to know!"

"X" suddenly felt a sharp stab of pain in his arm. He turned towards Number Four. The man was about to apply his hypodermic needle to yet another portion of the Secret Agent's body. He knew that they were preparing him to go to the gang headquarters. Or had they discovered his deception? How did he know whether the needle had contained drug or deadly poison?

His senses were already dulling. He had presence of mind to look at his watch this time. It was nearly two A. M. Somewhere, seemingly far distant, Number One was speaking:

"And tomorrow, when Secret Agent 'X' reads in the papers that Betty Dale has been found murdered by the Seven—"

The sound faded. "X's" sight dimmed. But his mind was drumming out the alarming thought, "You are trapped . . . You are trapped." For "X" knew that when the morning papers did not speak of the murder of Betty Dale, Number One would know that he had been tricked by Secret Agent "X".

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLACK BOOK

WHEN "X" regained full possession of his senses, he found himself in a small room, bare as a prison cell, and without doors or windows. It was lighted by a frosted electric fixture in the center of the

ceiling. He stood up, patted himself all over to make sure that none of his special devices had been taken from him. Evidently, he was trusted by the leader of the gang and had not been searched.

He was about to inspect the room, hoping to ascertain the method of entrance, when a sliding panel opened to admit one of the Seven Silent Men. This man, dressed in the usual dark suit, and wearing the doll-like mask, was marked by a diamond badge fashioned in the form of a figure two.

"Howdy, Number Two," said "X" genially. "I was just wonderin' when somebody was goin' to show up. This box would get on your nerves after a few hours."

"Yeah. Well, there's plenty in this house to drive you nuts," replied Number Two, slurring his syllables in a manner that "X" associated with underworld characters.

"Say, you speak my language," said Agent "X". "You're a top guy."

"Well, in this outfit, Number One's the top guy, and get that in your noggin. He sent me here to get you. You've got to put it down in writing."

"You mean sign a confession in the chief's record book?"

"You get ideas quick," replied Number Two. "And from then on, Tolman, you're in it up to your neck."

"Wait a minute," said "X" peevishly. "How come everybody in this joint knows me and I don't know anybody except by their number? How come they haven't even opened up as to where this shack is?"

"Don't be so curious," growled Number Two as he led "X" through the door. "You'll get a number soon enough. As far as knowin' where this dump is, you know as much about that as I do. Nobody but One, Three, Four, and Seven knows just where it is. Oh, The Bishop, he knows, but he's screwy. Five guys out of a gang that's got more members than you can count, ain't many. I get drugged the same as you when I'm brought

into headquarters. But we better get hikin'. Number One don't care about being kept waiting."

They were walking down a narrow corridor, arched and beamed after the ancient Gothic pattern. With the exception of the cell in which "X" had been held, the entire house seemed to be of incredible age. And it was as silent as a tomb. Not a murmur penetrated from the outside world.

"Who's this Bishop?" asked the Agent. "This dump gets more like a church every time I get a squint at it. Now you tell me you've even got a Bishop!"

"Church!" an ugly laugh roared from Number Two. "Church of hell, maybe!" Then he added, as though he feared that he might have been overheard by some one who was easily offended: "Oh, they treat you right enough. Pay your money down in good hard cash. It's pretty sweet. Better pay and no more risk than if you was on your own, runnin'—" Number Two checked himself. "The Bishop, now, you'll know him when you meet him. He'd get kicked out of any church just on account of his looks!"

THEY had come to the end of the passage and a door swung open at a touch from Number Two. The room they entered was similar in appointments to the rest of the house. At an antique desk, sat Number One. Standing directly behind his chair was another of the Silent Men—Number Seven. Number Two also remained in the room.

The inscrutable eyes of Number One looked "X" up and down for a moment without speaking. Then he said: "Well, Tolman, how do you like it?"

"Not so hot," the Agent replied promptly. "A lot of dope jabbed in you. You go croak some dame, and where does it get you?"

A low chuckle from Number One. His hand glided across the desk and

opened a large drawer. The eyes of Secret Agent "X" followed that hand and saw that the drawer was packed with bills—new, crisp greenbacks of large and small denominations. "This is where it gets you, Tolman," replied Number One. "Come here and help yourself."

"X" hesitated. Either Number One and the Silent Seven were wealthy beyond even the dreams of Midas, or there was some sort of catch connected with it.

"What are you waiting for?" demanded Number One.

A scratchy laugh from the Agent. "Ah, you're puttin' somethin' over on me! Ain't those bills phony?"

"You should know, Tolman," replied Number One. He dug both hands in the drawer and dipped out as much money as he could hold. He tossed bills carelessly across the desk. "X" advanced cautiously and picked up several bills. He looked at them carefully. Without doubt they were genuine. "Gosh, boss, t'anks!" And Agent "X" began cramming money into his pockets.

"Money, you see," Number One exclaimed, "means nothing to me." His powerful fingers closed crushingly on a wad of century notes. "Money in itself is worthless. It is what it will buy that is important—men, souls, power!" He stood up quickly. "Tolman," he said, "you've proved yourself a man worthy of my organization. You have only to sign the confession that has been drawn up for you, and you are one of us. Follow me."

Number One crossed the room and threw back scarlet portieres, revealing a small closet. In the closet was a writing desk of ancient design and upon it a large record book with an iron cover. The gang leader opened the book. As "X" approached, he noted that all of the page was blank with the exception of a small space at the bottom where the confession to the murder of Betty Dale had been

drawn up. Agent "X" guessed that the other confessions had been written in invisible ink to prevent "X" from learning the identity of the other members of the gang. He supposed that his own confession would vanish in the same manner that the others had done.

With seemingly great deliberation, "X" read the confession to the murder of Betty Dale. Actually, his eyes were taking in the closet and its contents. He noted that set in the two walls at either end were two rows of bullseye lenses. Certainly Number One would have provided a means of guarding his book in case some member attempted to destroy it. The lenses along the walls led "X" to believe that some arrangement of the electric eye, the photo-electric cell, watched over the book day and night.

He delayed no longer, but picked up the pen on the desk, and signed the name "Pete Tolman" with a flourish.*

NUMBER ONE nodded his approval. Then he reached into his pocket and brought out what appeared to be an ordinary penny. He handed it to "X" who examined it carefully.

"It is a convenient way that we leaders of the organization have of recognizing each other when outside the headquarters," explained Number One. "You will observe that a number is punch-stamped on the face of the coin—the number six, in your case. This badge may be carried in the pocket without arousing suspicion. Naturally, we cannot wear these diamond-studded badges, such as I have on my lapel, out in the street."

"I getcha," said "X."

"As I have no further use for you

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Before ever attempting the impersonation of any man, Agent "X" is always careful to acquaint himself with every detail of that person's character. He has learned that one of the most important tricks of disguise is to master the handwriting of the man to be impersonated. "X," in my opinion, has a natural penchant for forgery and could have made a fortune at that profession had he turned to crime rather than criminology.



He had raised the knife for a killing thrust just as "X" sprung into the room.

at present, you will be conducted from the headquarters. Your time is your own until tonight at eleven o'clock when you will appear in dinner clothes at the home of Mr. Lynn Falmouth."

"Cheez, boss, do I have to put on a

monkey suit?" asked "X" in apparent dismay.

"That is imperative. You would not be admitted otherwise. You will be there for the protection of another member of our group who has a job

to perform. In case you're needed, you will be called upon. There will be many people present—quite a number of our own organization as well as several of our hirelings. And I warn you to be on the lookout for Secret Agent "X." If he has any suspicions as to the identity of any member of our group, this party may attract him."

"Will you be at this blow-out, boss?" asked "X."

Number One drew himself up proudly. "If I were to go to that party, not even Agent "X" himself would recognize me. You must not attempt to learn my true identity. Only *two* persons in the world know who I am!"

Number One returned to his desk and pressed a button. Evidently, the room was perfectly sound-proof, for "X" heard neither bell nor buzzer.

"Later," Number One went on, "you may be called upon to obtain the plates for the printing of five and ten dollar bills which were hidden by Joseph Fronberg. At present, we have all the counterfeit money necessary for immediate needs. Rest assured that a few hours from now, this city will be mine—police and all officials will be under my thumb. Those who serve me well will be rewarded. For those who fail me, there is justice and execution as the law demands—or the *Bishop!*"

"X" noted that at the mention of the Bishop, Number Seven, who had been all the time standing behind the leader's chair, shuddered slightly. Who was the Bishop that men trembled at the name?

But "X" was given no time to reflect on the identity of this mysterious being. The man who was designated as Number Four entered the office, and "X" knew that he would be doped with the strange drug that deadened his body while his brain remained alive. He had only time enough to look at his watch before the dreaded needle was thrust into his arm. It was seven o'clock, and he supposed it was morning.

CHAPTER XIV

"CALLING SECRET AGENT 'X' "

WHEN Agent "X" again regained the use of his eyes, he found himself wandering aimlessly outside his own apartment. He looked dazedly up and down the street. There was no sign of the lame beggar who had followed him on the previous occasion.

He entered the building and took an elevator to his own apartment. He wanted to think. His problem, instead of slowly unraveling, was becoming more tangled every hour. So far, he had been completely successful in only one thing—Number One had been entirely fooled by "X's" impersonation of Pete Tolman. But that triumph, he knew, would not be long lasting.

He spent the rest of the day in ascertaining the extent of the deadly virus of discontent that the Seven gang had spread throughout the city. There had been numberless riot calls. Business had been tied up. Panic was impending in Wall Street. Nothing could be done to dam the flow of spurious currency, save close the doors of every bank and business house which distributed large quantities of money. The city was teeming with federal men, all busy in sorting real money from counterfeit. The populace was enraged. Nearly half the money in the working man's pocket was found to be spurious.

Turning on his radio for a few minutes, "X" was surprised to hear a familiar voice coming from a local radio station. It was the voice of gray-haired Abel Corin:

"Calling Secret Agent 'X,' the People of New York calling Secret Agent 'X.'"

With a puzzled frown on his face, Secret Agent "X" listened to every word that Corin uttered.

"Secret Agent 'X,' if you are within the sound of my voice, know that my fiancée, Alice Neves, has been kidnaped by the Seven Silent Men. If you have a spark of human feeling about you, move heaven and earth to return

her to me. This is much more than a personal appeal. I am speaking for thousands who are suffering at the hands of these ruthless criminals. Sven Gerlak, the noted detective, has advised me to call on you. He adds his appeal to mine. You can help us if you will!"

And there Corin's message ended.

IT was eleven-forty when Secret Agent "X," still in the guise of Pete Tolman, drove his car beneath the porte-cochère and crossed the veranda of the stately old Falmouth mansion. He had been careful to add the red wig and mustache that had been given him at the Seven headquarters.

For all he knew, the Seven headquarters might be located in the dark and lofty turrets of Falmouth House itself. In the lower stories of the house there was certainly nothing sinister. All was gayety, scintillating lights, rhythmic music. The dignity of the old walls was occasionally mocked by shrieks of drunken laughter. Even before Agent "X" entered the door he knew that glasses had clinked far too often.

A butler whose stiff attitude would have put a clothes-prop to shame, took the Secret Agent's hat and coat.

"Good evening, Mr. Six," the butler whispered.

"Cheez, you, too!" the Agent exclaimed. The butler put a warning finger to his lips. Lynn Falmouth was approaching, crossing the reception hall on somewhat unsteady legs. His too yellow hair was faultlessly brushed, his tie a knot of perfection. Nevertheless, "X" believed that unless his host slowed down on his liquor schedule, he would be unable to wish his guests good night.

An ugly scowl spread across Falmouth's brow as he approached. He turned toward the butler.

"Nothing wrong, sir, I hope?" the butler asked with the deepest concern in his voice.

"This person—" Falmouth gestured

indefinitely towards "X"—"I've never seen him before!"

"No, sir? But you invited him, Mr. Falmouth. This is Mr. Church, the author."

Falmouth's pale hand partially suppressed a drunken guffaw. He staggered over to "X" and pawed the latter's shirt front. "Sho shorry, old man. Should have guessed by the fit of your clothes. Author's privilege—wearing mussy clothes. Shtill can't remember of meeting a Mr. Church, but whatever Lewish says tonight goes. Come on, old fellow." And taking "X" by the arm, he led him into the next room where dance music swayed thirty couples across a polished floor.

Falmouth beckoned to a servant who was bearing a tray of tall, chill drinks. Falmouth offered Agent "X" a glass. "Have one with me," he invited cordially.

Agent "X" accepted a glass. He had avoided speaking to his host because he had not been able to decide whether he should attempt to sustain the character of Church, the author, which had so suddenly been thrust upon him, or whether to retain the rôle of Pete Tolman. If Falmouth or anyone at the party happened to be a member of the Seven gang, then "X" dared not speak in any other manner than that of Pete Tolman.

He decided that Falmouth, at least, was too drunk to notice much difference. As he clinked glasses with Falmouth, he said, "Sure, t'anks," in the nasal twang that was an exact imitation of Tolman's voice. He thought for a moment that he detected a flash of suspicion in Falmouth's cool blue eyes. Was Falmouth's drunkenness merely clever acting? At any rate, he was very much relieved when Falmouth said, "I've got to leave now, old man. Musht see that everybody has a nische time. But I'm putting you in good hands." Falmouth's liquor-cracked voice raised in a boisterous halloo: "Oh, Genevieve!"

A tall, strikingly beautiful blonde woman broke away from a circle of

admirers and came smiling towards Falmouth.

"Genevieve—" Falmouth stumbled over the name—"want you to take care of Mr. What's-his-name, here. Mister—mister, this is Genevieve—Genevieve—"

"Genevieve Leads," prompted the blonde woman.

Secret Agent "X" muttered some sort of an acknowledgment. Actually, he had trouble speaking at all. For the tall blonde woman was the same whom he had seen in the hall outside Betty Dale's apartment. It was she who had tipped off the police. It was she who had tried to blackmail her husband on information that he had inadvertently dropped concerning the Seven Silent Men.

"X" UNDERSTOOD now how the Seven gang obtained its powerful drugs. Milo Leads, this woman's husband, was one of the greatest toxicologists in the country. It was Milo Leads who drugged the gang members before they were taken from the Seven headquarters. It was Leads who had engineered the escape of "X" from the deathhouse. Milo Leads was Number Four in the gang.

For a longer time than he realized, Agent "X" had stared at this amazingly beautiful Genevieve Leads. With a provocative smile on her lips, she suggested that they dance.

"Sure, er, Miss, er Genevieve," the Agent stammered. He took the lovely creature in his arms, and dancing with the clumsy, familiar embrace that he thought best fitted his identity as Pete Tolman, he steered her towards the center of the floor.

Genevieve Leads was enduring him, nothing more, so well did Secret Agent "X" play his part. The farce continued for another chorus before "X" danced his partner towards French doors opening on a softly lighted conservatory.

"How'd ja like to sit the rest of this out with me, baby—I mean, lady?" he asked.

Determinedly, she disengaged herself from his arms. "I think not. I think Mr. Falmouth is looking for me—" Her voice tapered off evenly as her eyes compassed the dance floor in search of Lynn Falmouth.

Secret Agent "X" permitted his hand to slip down the length of her bare, white arm. His fingers locked tightly over her wrist. Mrs. Leads fixed him with a frigid look. "Please, Mr.—"

"Church is the name, but most everybody calls me Bill."

"I don't think I care," replied Genevieve Leads. But her austere glance seemed to have no effect upon "X." He drew her closer to him, holding her with his strange, magnetic eyes. "Chee, kid, you can't give me the air like that!" He thrust his head forward in a pugnacious attitude so that his lips were only a few inches from her ear. His lips scarcely moved, but his whisper was clearly audible to the woman.

"Mrs. Leads, I must talk to you. You are in deadly danger!"

The abrupt change of his voice, the power of persuasion in his tone, seemed so utterly out of place with the underworld character whom he impersonated, that Genevieve was astonished. For a moment, she could not speak. Then:

"Did you say something, Mr. Church?"

A dancing couple swung near to where they were standing. "X" was surprised to see that the man was short, red-haired Sven Gerlak, the Milwaukee detective. Gerlak's small eyes darted from "X" to Mrs. Leads. "X" raised his voice to imitate Tolman's.

"Sure I said somethin'. You and me is goin' out in this greenhouse." And "X" jerked his head towards the conservatory. He fairly dragged Mrs. Leads through the door.

With his arm tightly locked through hers, Agent "X" swaggered through the room. Here flowers and ferns of varieties found in tropic countries.

blossomed and grew for the delight of Lynn Faimouth and his guests. "X" lighted a thick, black cigar and puffed out a huge mouthful of smoke. "Some dump, I'd say," he commented.

"You like it?" Obviously, she understood that he was but making conversation for the benefit of a couple who occupied a small divan that had been placed in a shadowy corner.

"X" led Mrs. Leads to a similar divan at one end of the room. They sat down. His powerful fingers closed gently, impersonally upon the woman's hand. His right arm went about her shoulders. It was his purpose to deceive anyone at the opposite end of the conservatory into thinking that he had engaged Genevieve Leads in amorous conversation.

"Mrs. Leads," the Agent whispered in a deadly seriousness that his presuming smile did not betray, "you must leave this house at once. Take my advice and go at once to the nearest police station. Get in touch with Inspector Burks and tell him everything you know about your husband and the Seven Silent Men."

A frown of perplexity crossed the woman's forehead. "Who are you? A detective?"

"That is beside the point. If you remain here you will most certainly be killed—and by your husband's own hands. He has his orders to kill you. He dare not disobey."

MRS. LEADS uttered a laugh that was harsh and altogether out of tune with one so attractive. "My husband? Do you think he would dare lay hands on me in this house?"

"How do you know that you are not in the headquarters of the Seven gang right now? Do you know who the leader of the gang is?"

She was very serious, and "X" knew that she was speaking the truth when she said: "I do not. Certainly, the leader isn't Milo Leads! He couldn't be the head of anything except some rotten laboratory!" There was venom in her words, and Agent "X" guessed

that her marriage to Milo Leads had been anything but a happy one. Leads was noted for his ability to get into scandalous difficulties with other women.

"You will heed my warning if I tell you that there is more than one member of the Seven gang here tonight?" Agent "X" urged. "Why even the butler is in their employ." His voice suddenly mounted. His alert eyes had caught sight of a man moving behind the wall of ferns at the side of them. "Chee, baby, you're a swell looker!" he said in the voice of Pete Tolman.

The man suddenly stepped out from behind the ferns. He was tall and undeniably handsome. Yet there was craft in his eyes that glittered darkly against his olive skin.

The dark man flashed a smile, bowed low, and addressed Mrs. Leads. "Ah, the charming *Senora* Leads!"

Mrs. Leads stood up quickly. As "X" glimpsed her smile, he knew that she was already captivated by the continental manner of the man.

"Count Camocho!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been all evening? You have not been hiding from me?"

"Si, *senora*. I have been hiding lest your beauty turn this poor brain of mine. Ah, but I could resist no longer." The man who had been addressed as Count Camocho turned politely to the Agent. "I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting you."

Mechanically, "X" took the hand of the Spaniard. The feel of those soft fingers sent a sensation of revulsion over "X." For Camocho was a crook of international reputation.

"I am sorry to intrude, *senor*," said the count, "but I believe *Senora* Leads has already promised this next dance to me."

Dance? Would it be a dance of death? Was Camocho merely making an excuse to get Mrs. Leads away to some dark corner where Milo Leads, Silent Man Number Four, waited to kill her?

"X" placed himself directly between the woman and the count. He thrust

out his jaw and seized Camocho roughly by the coat sleeve. "She don't want to dance with you!" Agent "X's" hand started towards the pocket where he kept his gas gun. If he could get Camocho out of the way, he would take Mrs. Leads from the house if he had to carry her.

"Don't go for that gun, Pete Tolman, or I'll drill you!"

THE command in a voice that was as soft and cold as snow came from directly behind "X." He turned slowly to face Lynn Falmouth—Falmouth, whose every symptom of drunkenness had disappeared, whose chilly eyes narrowed over the bead of a revolver.

"X" took a step towards Falmouth. The latter's gun jabbed threateningly forward. "I'm rather a good shot, Tolman," said Falmouth. "And even if I miss you, Inspector Burks who has just entered the room will not."

"Right, Mr. Falmouth!" came unmistakably in Burks' voice.

"X's" eyes compassed the room. As soundlessly as if they had been conjured from the shadows, plainclothes men entered the room. Each carried a gun. "X" was rimmed by deadly, steel eyes that were focused directly upon him. The inspector and his men could not know that they were actually assisting the Seven gang in their plot to kill Mrs. Leads. He could not tell them. For to the police, he was Pete Tolman, a killer many times over, who had escaped from the death-cell of the Louisiana penitentiary.

Inspector Burks stepped forward. He was carrying a pair of handcuffs. "Put out your hands, Tolman," he ordered. "We'll have to hold you in New York until the Louisiana authorities are notified. That red wig of yours and that mustache might have fooled a lot of people, but not Mr. Falmouth. He recognized you from your picture in the paper the minute he set eyes on you."

Secret Agent "X" had no choice in the matter. He thrust out his hands to

receive the cuffs. As they nipped Agent "X" and Inspector Burks together, Lynn Falmouth seemed to relax. He smiled his unpleasant, one-sided smile.

"You really couldn't think I'd have let a person of your stamp enter this house unless I had recognized you and planned to trap you." He turned to Genevieve Leads. "Sorry I had to impose this fellow's company on you, Genevieve, but I thought if anyone could distract his attention while the police were getting here, you could. Count Camocho, Mrs. Leads looks a little tired. No doubt this has been something of a shock to her. If you will take her into the next room—"

"Si, *Senor* Falmouth. I shall be delighted." And offering Mrs. Leads his arm in a courtly manner, Count Camocho led her from the room. "X" knew that she was walking to certain death, yet he was powerless to stop her. Had he told the police what he expected to happen, they would have laughed. For he was Pete Tolman, a clever killer who would try any trick to gain his freedom.

CHAPTER XV

THE THIRD PENNY

SECRET AGENT "X" had been carefully searched by Burks' men. He was firmly linked to the wrist of the inspector by means of the handcuffs. Yet as he was led from the Falmouth home, he felt that he was not entirely helpless in spite of the police guns that were leveled at him. In his free left hand, he had palmed a small, round object that was hard as a marble. He had slipped the little ball out of his pocket at the very moment that Inspector Burks was putting the bracelet on his right wrist.

That hard little marble was made of compressed paper pulp, hollow inside, and heavily loaded with compressed magnesium powder. Protruding from its surface was a stubby little fuse. As he approached the police car, Agent "X" was still puffing on the

cigar he had lighted in the conservatory. In spite of the fact that he had been frisked, Agent "X" was prepared to surprise the police. The only thing that prevented his trying for an escape at that moment was Inspector Burks.

As far as Burks knew, this man whom he supposed to be Pete Tolman was firmly welded to his wrist. Nevertheless, the cautious inspector kept his eyes constantly upon his prisoner. But "X" knew that his time would come. It would be extremely awkward for Burks when it came time to enter the police car. It would be impossible for him to watch his prisoner then.

They stopped at the side of the police car. The driver was already at the wheel. A second car behind the first was already being loaded with men. One of the detectives entered the rear seat of the car in which "X" was to be taken down to headquarters. There remained room enough for Burks and "X" in the back seat. Behind Agent "X" was another detective, but the Secret Agent knew that the gun in this man's hand would be as useless as if it had never been loaded. This detective who brought up the rear would not dare to fire into the car for fear of hitting one of his companions.

As Burks stepped into the car, dragging "X" after him, the Secret Agent moved like lightning. His left hand came up towards his cigar. At the same time, the joints of his right hand compressed to such an extent that he jerked free from the bracelet.*

Before the inspector could realize that his man was free, there came a deafening, stunning explosion. The car was swallowed in blinding, silver light. And when Burks recovered from

the shock, both doors of the car were open and his prisoner had disappeared.

The Secret Agent's movements were simpler than they seemed. He had touched the short fuse of the magnesium bomb to the glowing tip of his cigar. He had dropped the little bomb on the floor of the car at the same time that he pulled free from the handcuff. Before the explosion came, he had marked the exact location of the latch of the opposite door, and in that moment when the police were stunned and blinded, he had opened the door and dived out the other side of the car. The magnesium bomb was comparatively harmless, though as was afterwards apparent, the explosion had singed the inspector's eyebrows.

As Agent "X" zigzagged across the lawn, darting in and out of the shadows cast by the numerous clumps of shrubbery, a tracer of slugs followed him from the second police car. But he was far out of range and running like a rabbit.

He doubled back towards the house with a twofold purpose in view. The house where Falmouth had betrayed him to the police was probably the last place where the police would expect to find him. Then, he hoped that he was still in time to save Mrs. Leads.

Crawling along behind the foundation planting of the old house, "X" came upon a wooden trellis upon which a stout, well-rooted ivy vine climbed up the wall of the house. Far across the lawn, he could hear the police beating through shrubbery. He must act quickly before they closed in on the house. Without further hesitation, he dug his fingers into strong, bare tendrils of the ivy vine and crawled up.

He knew that his ascent was dangerous. The vines in winter were dry and treacherously brittle. However, he gained the second story window without mishap. The casement was unlocked, and though the room beyond was lighted, it was also empty. He swung back the window and climbed

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: I once persuaded Secret Agent "X" to demonstrate this escape trick which he explained he had learned from a Hindu fakir whom he had met during his travels. It consists simply of muscular expansion of the wrist at the time the handcuff is put into place and muscular contraction when it is desired to remove the cuffs. This is followed by an extremely difficult compression of the joints of the hand in order to permit the cuffs to drop off. It is necessary for Agent "X" to practice this feat daily in order for him to be certain of accomplishing it in case of emergency.

over the sill. Passing the lighted window, he knew that he was in comparative safety.

HE crossed to the door, opened it cautiously, and peered out into the hall. Below stairs, dance music had been uninterrupted. Noisy laughter echoed throughout the house. Evidently, the gayety of the party was picking up. "X" stepped into the hall and started down its winding length. He had not proceeded more than half a dozen steps before he heard the sound of a door opening directly ahead of him.

Two men came stealthily down the hall. "X" sprang back into a darkened doorway. Looking around the corner of his hiding place, "X" immediately recognized one of the men as Milo Leads. The famed toxicologist was wearing evening clothes. His face was extremely pale and gaunt. And walking beside Leads was a broad-faced Japanese, also in evening clothes. The Japanese, however, did not continue towards Agent "X" as did Leads. Without a word to the toxicologist, he turned off into a small dressing room.

"X" watched Leads. Did he look like a man going to commit murder or like a man who had recently committed murder? If he had not yet killed his wife, then "X" knew that he probably would never have the opportunity.

Quickly knotting a handkerchief over the lower portion of his face, "X" sprang into the hall directly in the path of Milo Leads. And as he leaped, his right fist drove out. The blow landed with full force just behind the toxicologist's ear. Leads hadn't a chance even to groan. His long legs sagged under him and he collapsed on the floor.

Agent "X" sprang up the hall in the direction from which Leads had come. He glimpsed the Japanese in the small dressing room putting on his coat. Evidently, the wide-faced yellow man was going to leave the party. Ahead of him, "X" saw a pin-point of light coming through a keyhole in the door

at the end of the hall. "X" ran for the door, knelt, and looked through the keyhole. He could see some one moving about the room—a man whose round body was strangely familiar to "X."

As though some sixth sense had warned him, the man in the room glanced apprehensively over his shoulder straight at the door where Secret Agent "X" watched. Then the man walked across the room to a door in the opposite wall, opened it quickly, and disappeared beyond.

Agent "X" stood upright. A puzzled frown knotted his brow. For the round little man that he had seen within the room was none other than Sven Gerlak, Milwaukee's ace private detective.

"X" seized the doorknob, gave it a twist, opened the door and stepped into the room. Involuntarily, a gasp of horror escaped his lips. For lying in the center of the room, her evening gown torn as though she had engaged in a desperate struggle, was the body of Genevieve Leads. Her face was swollen and blue-black. Her mouth gaped hideously. The marks of fingers that had killed were on her white throat, and the brand of Seven was on her forehead.

On the other side of the body, "X" saw something that he pounced upon and examined closely. It appeared to be nothing more than a penny. But punch-stamped upon its surface was the number three. It was the badge of one of the Seven. "X" pocketed the penny. His own penny insignia had gone with the wallet the police had taken from him when he had been searched. Probably this penny had been dropped by one of the gang when the murder had been committed.

"X" was about to leave when he heard the sound of voices in the room adjoining. He crossed to the door and pressed his ear to the panel. He recognized the voice of Count Camocho talking in whispers to some one. He could not distinguish the words. But when the second man spoke, "X" immedi-

ately recognized the voice as that of the underworld character he had met in the Seven headquarters—the man who had worn the diamond insignia of Number Two.

"It's a hell of a note, count," Number Two was saying. "I've seen the dame alive. Number One thought it was funny that there was no report of her death in the papers. Then I seen her at the window just above the apartment where she's supposed to live. The chief is plenty sore! He's detailed me and the doc, and you, too, to light out after Tolman. He think's Tolman's crossed him. He's goin' to take up the dame himself. Then the doc went and lost his penny so he's got no chance of gettin' back into headquarters. I tell you, if some of us don't get a taste of the Bishop before ten hours go by, it'll be a surprise to me!"

The two members of the gang were directly outside the door now, and "X" heard the count's reply: "The doctor might have dropped his badge in this room when they were struggling with *Senora Leads*. Let us search, my frien'."

"X" waited for no more. The count's hand was already on the doorknob. "X" sprang across the room, hurdled the body of the murdered woman, and got through the door into the hall. The Agent's heart was pounding like a triphammer, for he knew that the "dame" to whom Number Two had referred could be none other than Betty Dale. Then his deception had been discovered. He was being hunted by the Seven Silent Men.

CHAPTER XVI

A CLUE

"X" WENT into the room at the opposite end of the hall through which he had entered the house. He closed the door behind him and stepped over to a mirror. He took the handkerchief from his face and examined his make-up critically. Removing the red wig and mustache, he

looked exactly like Pete Tolman. Lack of time permitted only slight alterations—the reshaping of his nose and smoothing out lines in his cheeks.

Then he turned once again to the window and climbed out on the ivy trellis. The breaking of a dried ivy tendril hastened his descent. He picked himself up from the bushes, waited a moment to see if the noise of his fall had warned anyone inside the house. But the noise within would have drowned out any disturbance that "X" had created.

He ran across the lawn to the circular drive where his car had been parked. He leaped in, started it, and turned directly across the lawn in order to avoid the slow procedure of backing and wheel twisting in order to get out of the line of parked cars.

As he sped through the gate into the street, several policemen tried to stop him. Shots from their pistols struck his tires, but had no effect upon his speed. For beneath the fabric of his special tires was a ply of woven chain armor. "X" knew well that the police would give chase, but he had a long lead on them even before they were started, and the terrific power of his car widened the breach between them every time he opened the throttle on a straightaway.

Soon he was lost in the traffic of theatre-goers returning to their homes. He made further provision against being halted by touching a concealed lever beneath the dashboard. This lever operated strands of piano wire which flipped his license plates over. On the reverse side of these plates, a new set of numbers was deceptively painted.

A short time later he pulled up in front of the apartment building where Betty Dale lived—where he hoped she *still* lived. He leaped from the car and bounded into the entrance. He sprang to the elevator and pressed the fourth-floor button. Out into the hall, he hurried to the door of the apartment that Betty Dale had appropriated. He did

not wait to knock; but using one of his chromium master keys, which he had taken from his car, he opened the door.

The searching eye of his flashlight swept the room. It was completely empty. He opened the bedroom. The bedclothes had been disturbed. Dainty lingerie was scattered about the room. He turned to the kitchenette. It, too, was empty. Betty Dale was gone.

But with all the keen disappointment that knifed the Secret Agent, there was one ray of hope: had the Seven gang killed Betty in the apartment, they would have left her body there. Perhaps she was still alive. Perhaps they were holding her, hoping to draw Agent "X" into a trap.

"X" turned into the hall and whisked down to the street floor in the elevator. Across the entry way and out to the street he went. He was walking towards his car when someone hailed him with:

"Oh, Mr. Robbins!"

"X" PIVOTED and saw a familiar figure coming towards him—old Thaddeus Penny, a blind man who peddled packages of chewing gum in the streets.* Though it was nearly two A. M. old Thaddeus still carried his tray with a few packages still remaining. He was walking as fast as he could towards the Secret Agent.

"Sorry, I haven't time to talk with you, Thaddeus," said "X" kindly, as he put his hand on the handle of the car door.

But the blind man's hand fastened tenaciously on "X's" coat sleeve. "I know you're a detective now, Mr. Robbins," the man piped in a thin, quavering voice. "What were you doing comin' out the Falmouth Building after two o'clock yesterday mornin'? Nobody but detectives, criminals,

and these good for nothin' playboys are out at such indecent hours."

"I wasn't coming out of the Falmouth Building at that time, Thaddeus," replied "X." "What makes you think I was?" He was extremely interested in the old blind man's deductions.

"Oh, don't try to fool me, Mr. Robbins. I'd know your step anywhere. I was out tryin' to get a few pennies from the theatre folk and I heard you come out of the Falmouth Building just as I was passing. I'd have hailed you except that there was two other men with you and I thought—"

Agent "X" gripped the old man's hand. "You're sure of that, Thaddeus? Positive?"

"Sure and positive. Say, your voice sounds tight, like maybe you was in some sort of trouble."

"Right, Thaddeus!" the Agent rapped. He pressed a crumpled five-dollar bill into the old man's hand. "You've helped more than you'll ever know!" And Secret Agent "X" leaped into his car. The blind man's super-sensitive ears never failed to identify "X" by his walk. If, then, as Thaddeus Penny had said, he had come out of the Falmouth Building, he had done so when he was under the influence of the Seven gang's powerful drug. It was possible that the headquarters of the gang was somewhere in the mighty Falmouth Tower, in the very heart of the city.

Secret Agent "X" headed for his apartment hideout. Motor open, he drove skillfully and at the same time planned a schedule of preparation that he hoped would cover every possible emergency. At his apartment, he changed his make-up and assumed one of his stock disguises, that of Roger Cole, a middle-aged business man. He thought that this disguise would be less apt to attract suspicion than any other when he was prowling around the Falmouth Building.

Many important business enterprises were controlled from the Fal-

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: The reader may remember Thaddeus Penny who appeared in "The Curse of the Waiting Death." On that occasion Thaddeus gave "X" some information of inestimable value. Thaddeus knows "X" only by the name of Mr. Robbins, an identity which he assumed when he once befriended the old blind man.

mouth Tower. Business men came and went at all hours of the night. The coat of the suit he put on had many secret pockets, and these he loaded down with special devices that he thought would prove helpful. Among them were a small galvanometer for detecting the presence of electrical current, a cubical black box with a dimension of about two inches, a small make-up kit, gas gun, and a case of special drugs. Beneath his coat he carried the waxen mask which had been given him at the headquarters of the Seven Silent Men.

Thus prepared, he left at once for the Falmouth Tower.

Five minutes later he was standing within the shadow of the mighty structure, that was like a steel gimlet boring through the sky. Lights burned in many of its thousand windows. Flood lamps, advantageously placed, gilded its gleaming metal trim, and touched what seemed to be from the sidewalk a tiny cupola at its top. Actually, this cupola was a magnificent penthouse.

Sales corporations, life-insurance companies, brokerage offices, offices of almost endless variety could be found in the building. Where, though, in this modern structure of steel, stone, and chromium would he find an ancient, oak-paneled room such as he had seen at Seven headquarters?

Far above the last gleaming light, was a belt of darkened windows that encircled the building. "X" smiled grimly.

Entering the building, "X" stepped to one of the elevators. The elevator boy stared at him sleepily and enquired, "What floor, please?"

"Straight to the top," replied Agent "X." And the car speeded on its seemingly endless climb.

WHEN the car came to a stop and the door was opened, "X" looked out upon a row of frosted glass windows of offices—some without any lettering on them, indicating that they had never been rented.

"Is this as far up as you go? Isn't there anything higher?" "X" enquired.

The boy scowled. "Sure, Mister, but you don't want an elevator. You want an airplane or one of those stratosphere things. Are you gettin' out or do you plan to move in here permanent?"

"X" fixed the boy with his peculiarly magnetic eyes. "Think," he said softly; "is this the top of the building?"

The youth flushed. "There's another floor and a penthouse yet, but it's never been finished. It won't be either. Take it from me, this building will never pay," he said importantly. "Not a lot of these offices are rented and there's not enough to pay them to finish the top of the thing. But I can't stay here all night, mister."

"Any way of getting up to the unfinished part?" "X" persisted in spite of the youth's impatience to be gone.

"Nope. You can't leave the unfinished part of a building open. It would be dangerous. Curious guys—" with a marked look at the Secret Agent—"would try to get up there and fall through most likely. If I was you, I'd go to the Alps!"

"X" stepped out into the hall. Few of the offices showed signs of occupancy. He couldn't search them all without arousing suspicion. He was inclined to believe that the floor above was a longer way towards being finished than the elevator boy had said. However, he did find a narrow hall at the end that because of its labyrinthian turns warranted special investigation. Guided by his flashlight, he came upon a door lettered with the one word "Private."

The Secret Agent took one of his master keys from his pocket, inserted it in the lock, and opened the door. Immediately his heart leaped with renewed hope. For directly behind the innocent-looking office door was a second panel of solid steel. It presented an unbroken surface apparently with-

CHAPTER XVII

THE ENEMY'S CAMP

out keyhole or lock. However, a moment's search revealed a small, circular indentation at the lower part of the steel panel at one end. "X" knelt and examined it closely. It looked as though a penny had been pressed into the steel while the panel was yet in the molten stage.

Every outline of the one cent piece was clearly visible with the exception of the fact that a peculiar design was embossed in the exact center of the surface. Providing himself with his pocket magnifying glass, "X" saw that the design was composed of the Arabic numerals one, three, four, and seven—each laid directly on top of the other.

Instantly "X" remembered what he had overheard in Falmouth's house. He had heard the underworld character known as Number Two say to Count Camocho: "The doc has lost his penny and can't get back into Seven headquarters."

The purpose of the indentation was then clear to "X." It was some sort of an electrical lock that opened when a penny was pressed into it. However, only a penny with the numbers one, three, four, or seven could have been placed in the opening because of the design in the center.

Agent "X" quickly removed the waxen mask from beneath his coat and fastened it over his face. Then he took the penny-badge bearing the number three from his pocket and fitted it into the little circular indentation. His heart was thumping with excitement as he pushed it home. Without a doubt he had passed through that door before, but then in a drugged state and in the company of one or more of Number One's trusties.

As soon as he had pushed the penny into the lock, a spring snapped. The coin jumped back into his hand, but the steel panel was slowly sliding back into the wall. Beyond, a pale blue light illuminated a room about eight by ten feet in size. Without hesitation, "X" stepped in.

SO smoothly, so silently that no one but a man of "X's" unusually acute senses could have noticed it, the little room began to rise. It was then, as "X" had guessed, an electric elevator. On stopping, the door slid open with the same silence. "X" stepped into a barren room and a steel panel, similar to the one which he had just succeeded in opening, closed upon the elevator.

Sliding doors directly in front of Agent "X" opened, revealing a short hall. Around the bend of the hall, moving with a shuffling, diagonal step that Agent "X" immediately recognized, came a hideous figure. It was the crippled beggar who had spied on "X's" apartment. Bleary eyes glared from beneath the overhanging tangle of his dirty gray hair. If the cause of his limping had come from paralysis, then the same disease had left its mark on his face.

His mouth was twisted to one side in a permanent, bestial snarl. His red tongue gaped between exposed teeth. His cheeks and chin were pitted with loathsome, open sores. The peculiar posture that his crippled limbs imposed upon him caused his powerful arms to dangle in front of him, lending something simian to his appearance. "X" saw that his gait, which could only be described as diagonal, was produced by extending the right leg at an angle and pulling its mate up to meet it.

The hideous monster of a man sidled up to "X." He seized the Agent's arm with a grip which actually brought a wince of pain to "X." "The sign," he mumbled from his crooked mouth.

"X" hesitated. He felt that the cripple's strange eyes were stripping off his mask, discovering him as the spy that he was. He had never been told any sign in particular used by the Seven gang. Anyway, he had to take a chance. He took from his pocket the

numbered penny and handed it to the cripple. As he did so, he noticed the monster's hands.

The fingers were knotted, big knuckled. Flesh had been eaten away from the fingertips until they were raw-looking and sponge-pitted. No vicious, flesh-corrupting disease had done that to the man's fingers. The fingertips had been eaten by acid—perhaps to prevent any chance of his fingerprints being recognized.

He fumbled the coin back into Secret Agent "X's" hands. "Come, Number Three," he grumbled. He dragged himself around the corner and down the hall. "X" followed closely and noted that the cripple unlocked a second door at the end of the passage by means of a penny exactly the same way as "X" had opened the door of the elevator. However, "X" saw that the face of the cripple's penny was centered with the strange design that combined the numbers one, three, four, and seven.

The room beyond seemed like the lounge of some exclusive club. Perhaps twenty men sprawled in chairs or leaned over card tables. And they were all criminals—men with police records, denizens of the underworld easily recognized by Secret Agent "X" who knew nearly every face in the rogues' gallery. They paid not the slightest attention to "X," but he noted that their glances followed the cripple with surreptitious, timid glances.

Through another door of immense thickness, the noise of the criminals in the lounge was muffled completely. Up a short hall, they turned into the Oak Room with its antique paneling and crackling open fire.

IN a small office just beyond, "X" saw Number One sitting behind his desk. He neither moved nor spoke. Dim light did not pierce the sunken eye-holes in his mask, and "X" could not discern the slightest sign of life in the man.

"Number Three," announced the cripple in a surly voice.

"I suppose, Number Three," came coldly from Number One, "that you have not brought Tolman with you?"

"No, sir," replied "X" imitating as closely as possible the soft, velvety voice that he remembered as belonging to Number Three.

"If I were a just man," Number One went on quietly, "I should hand you over to the Bishop, here, for a taste of the knout."

"X" looked at the hideous cripple. This creature, then, was the Bishop. The cripple's bleared eyes burned as if he anticipated, with pleasure, beating Number Three with the knout.

"However, present circumstances make it necessary for me to have every available man ready for instant service in case the populace does not respond to our present methods of persuasion. The revolt I have so carefully nurtured—" Number One stopped, uttered a sharp command: "Bishop, are you still here? Go! I must talk to Dr. Kousha in private!"

Dr. Kousha! Then Number One took Agent "X" for Dr. Kousha. Well did "X" remember the name. Kousha, a Japanese professor of psychology whose plottings in his own country against the military party had caused him to flee from the island empire. So Kousha had found his way to America. Probably, he was the broadfaced Japanese whom "X" had seen with Milo Leads not more than an hour ago.

How eagerly Number One must have snapped up Kousha for membership in his criminal council. For Kousha was a man entirely without scruples, a brilliant scholar, and a skilled hypnotist. It was easy for "X" to see how weak characters might have been enmeshed in the sinister web of the Seven gang by means of Milo Leads' drugs and Kousha's diabolical hypnotism.

When the door had closed behind the Bishop, Number One asked: "Just what would you propose be done in

order to ferret out this Secret Agent 'X' and prevent him from hindering our progress?"

"X" answered promptly: "I would broadcast by radio, communicate with Agent 'X' and tell him that you have Betty Dale here at headquarters. That would most certainly draw him from his hiding place."

After a moment's silence, Number One replied: "I heard Corin's appeal to 'X' over the radio. I wonder if he succeeded in putting 'X' on the job? But even Secret Agent 'X' could not find our headquarters. We dare not tell him that Betty Dale is here and further inform him where our headquarters is."

"Then, I should arrange to have Secret Agent 'X' meet several of our men," the Agent suggested. "He should give himself up as a prisoner in exchange for the freedom of Betty Dale."

"I shall think it over," replied Number One. "Having the girl in our power is the first step towards the removal of 'X'. We might use our own transmitter—" His voice tapered off in a mumbled soliloquy.

Certain now that Betty Dale had been taken by the Seven gang and was yet alive, Agent "X" inched toward's Number One's chair. He was well armed and he felt certain that he could overcome Number one. Under the threat of death, he might be able to make the gang chief tell where Betty Dale was held prisoner.

BUT the very simplicity of what he was about to attempt put "X" on his guard. Surely Number One had some insidious, hidden weapon, some powerful defense to hold his lieutenants in check. For Number One must live in daily fear of his life. His payment for servitude was lavish, but he was a cruel master. He must have made enemies among his own men.

Four feet only separated "X" from the criminal chief. Still, Number One had not moved. Somewhere, a gong rang out. "X" wondered if Number

One had sensed danger and was signaling for help. A crackling noise sounded somewhere as though an electrical circuit was being switched on or off. "X's" right hand sought the pocket where he carried his gas gun. He knew that he was taking desperate chances, but it was now or never. He leaped towards the silent, motionless figure. His left hand shot out, seizing Number One by the throat. His right brought the gun up to the gang leader's head.

"X" was about to speak, to demand the instant release of Betty Dale. Suddenly, he realized that the throat of Number One was as cold as death and that it was hard and unyielding. Nor had the gang chief made a single move to defend himself against "X." The man-thing in the chair with whom "X" had been talking was nothing more than a dummy, weighing all told not more than fifty pounds.

"X" sprang back. No wonder he had been permitted to speak to Number One alone. Somewhere in the building or perhaps miles away, Number One had spoken to "X" by means of a telephone and loudspeaker system. Probably the equipment was concealed in the dummy itself.

"Number One," said "X" softly, "do you hear me, Number One?"

There was no reply. Evidently the circuit had been switched off. Perhaps the gong that "X" had heard had been a signal to call Number One's attentions to some matter that required immediate attention. "X" was alone in Number One's office, and in the little closet at one side of the room was the iron-bound book of records that could spell doom for the Seven Silent Men.

"X" approached the little closet cautiously and pushed back the curtains. The book lay exactly as it had been when "X" had signed the name of Pete Tolman to the confession of the murder of Betty Dale. It seemed but a simple task to reach out and touch the book. But "X" knew that certain death lurked in that closet. It

was a man-trap constructed so as to protect the record book of the gang. "X" guessed that invisible infra-red light rays passed between the bullseye lenses at either end of the closet.

He knew that the slightest interruption of those rays, by even passing his finger across their path, would break an electrical circuit. He could only guess at the result. Probably some deadly weapon was hidden behind the walls of the closet.

But Secret Agent "X" was prepared for the occasion. He took from his pocket the small galvanometer for detecting electrical circuits. He moved it slowly around the inner frame of the doorway, watching the needle of the instrument. Suddenly, the needle dipped, telling him that beneath the wooden door frame ran a wire carrying current.

Moving the galvanometer slowly in the vicinity of the spot where the needle had first dipped, "X" determined that a wire led from the closet under the polished wood flooring and straight toward the gang leader's desk. In this way, he discovered that the wire led up the inside of the leg on Number One's desk, struck a small, brass ash tray and doubled back the way it had come.

Upon examining the ash tray, he learned that the glass lining rested on a delicate spring. The slightest weight, such as the butt of a cigarette, laid on the ash tray would operate the switch that broke the electrical circuit. "X" set his galvanometer down on the ash tray, thus breaking the circuit that operated the electric eyes which guarded the iron book.

Then he hurried back to the closet and opened the record book. He leafed through pages cluttered with figures that represented the huge financial strength of the gang. Then he came upon the page of confessions. Except for the heading "Confessions" written in black ink, and the lines that allotted seven divisions of the page where the gang members had signed, the page was blank. "X" knew that invisible

ink had been used as a further protection. The confessions could easily be brought out by treating the page with heat or chemicals.

"X" was not interested in reading those confessions. They were for the police and the law courts. For "X" had learned the identity of most of the gang leaders and had even gone so far as to deduce the name of Number One himself. He simply ripped the sheet from the book, rolled it into a neat cylinder, and enclosed it tightly in a small, black cubical box which he had brought for that special purpose.

Putting the box in his pocket, "X" returned to the desk and closed the circuit that guarded the closet. He had no more than returned the small galvanometer to his pocket, when a man entered the room. He wore the waxen mask of the Seven gang leaders and until he spoke was indistinguishable from any of the others. Then "X" recognized the voice of Count Camocho.

"Good news, my friend!" cried the count. "We have been successful in the capture of Secret Agent 'X'!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TORTURE TEST

"X" IMMEDIATELY adopted the soft voice of Dr. Kousha. "No! How was it possible?"

"He was found by Number Two and myself," declared Camocho proudly. "We were about to give up in despair and return here, when we saw the man who looks like Pete Tolman standing in the window of a downtown office—the office, curiously enough, of the Hobart Agency. We went up to the office to find that this Agent 'X' who tricked us into believing he was Tolman, was with another man. Number Two strong-armed the other man. I drugged Tolman and brought him to where Number Four was waiting for us, since Number Four knows where this headquarters is."

"I see," said "X" thoughtfully. He knew that the man who had been in the office with Tolman was Jim Hobart. "And I suppose," he said to the count, "that Number Four drugged you and Number Two in order to bring you here."

"Of course—of course," said the count impatiently.

"But what makes you think Tolman is Secret Agent 'X'?"

The count shrugged. "Number One says that he is. If he were not, why would he have taken the trouble to merely pretend to kill Betty Dale? My one mistake in getting this Tolman was that I didn't get a chance to kill the man who was with him in the office. You see, the noise of our struggle had attracted so much attention already that we had all we could do to bring Tolman here without being caught.

"But you need not say anything about this to—" Camocho stopped. He was looking beyond "X" at the dummy that was seated behind the desk. "Sometimes," the count said shakily, "that dummy deceives me. It would not do to let Number One know that we could not kill the man who was with Tolman!" Camocho waved towards the door. "Come, we must not keep Number One waiting. He is making one of his few personal appearances in the Oak Room. There, we will pass judgment on this Tolman or *Senior* 'X' or whatever his name may be."

"X" followed Count Camocho into the Oak Room. There, all of the seven chairs were occupied with the exception of the two that awaited Camocho and himself. Tolman had been strapped into the sixth chair where he sat trembling and darting furtive glances about the room. Tolman's thin ratlike face was as pallid as paper.

Number One nodded at the Agent. "I am sorry our conference was so abruptly terminated, Number Three. I had to hurry here in order to be present when the prisoner was brought in.

This man, who to all appearances is Pete Tolman, is none other than Secret Agent 'X.'"

"That's baloney!" screamed Tolman. "It's a frame, that's what!"

"Very clever acting, Agent 'X,'" said Number One to Tolman. "But you are already too well acquainted with our methods to suppose that it will save you. You have learned too much."

"I don't know a damn thing!" shouted Tolman. "All I know is that you fellows got me out of stir and shut me up in a stuffy office that wasn't much better."

NUMBER ONE looked at Agent "X." The latter had taken the chair that awaited him. "What do you say, Number Three?" Number One enquired.

"X" replied, "The man may be telling the truth." For killer though Tolman was, "X" had no desire that he should suffer the tortures which Number One might inflict upon him.

"We shall very soon find out," declared Number One. He turned to Number Seven who occupied the chair at his left. "You may retire," he said. "Tell the Bishop to bring Betty Dale into this room."

Number Seven left the room. For nearly two minutes, the council chamber was as silent as the grave. Then a door opened. All eyes turned towards the door, but none stared as eagerly as Secret Agent "X."

The Bishop entered, his scarred and misshapen hands locked over a rope. Tied by the wrists to the rope, was Betty Dale. A sensation of rage that he could scarcely restrain passed over "X." Her face was the picture of beauty and terror.

Number One spoke, again addressing Tolman: "Do you know this woman?"

Tolman's beady eyes darted towards Betty. "Naw, never seen her before!"

Number One turned to Betty. "Miss Dale, not only did you escape the

death which I decided should be yours, but you also escaped the brand of Seven which should have been implanted on your forehead. As a means of persuading Secret Agent 'X' to speak, we are about to remedy the omission of the brand. Acid would have been used formerly, because we find it inconvenient to carry a branding iron with us wherever we go. But seeing that you are alive, I believe that the pain of your flesh burning with a hot iron will have more effect on Secret Agent 'X' than the acid would." He nodded towards The Bishop. "Bring the branding iron!"

Agent "X" sprang to his feet. "Number One," he called sharply, "if this woman must suffer, I beg to be permitted to inflict the torture myself."

Number One regarded "X", suspiciously for a time. "Just what personal enmity do you have against this woman?"

"None whatever," replied the Agent. "But I hope to redeem myself for the gross negligence on my part which permitted Agent 'X' to fool me into believing that Betty Dale was dead. Permit me to be the instrument of her torture."

Number One considered for a moment. "This is somewhat out of keeping with your character, doctor," he said. "But I shall not pry into your affairs. Perhaps you have a personal grievance against Secret Agent 'X'. That is of no concern of mine, in as much as it does not have anything to do with this organization. You have my permission. But remember, the branding iron shall not touch the girl if Agent 'X' should decide to talk."

"Go ahead and fry her if you want to!" screamed Tolman. "I don't know anything about Agent 'X' or the Seven gang. But—" he added craftily—"I do know somethin' that I'll trade you to get out of this mess. You're not so damned clever as you think."

Ignoring Tolman, Number One turned to the Bishop who had just entered with a red hot iron held in a

pair of tongs. "Give the brand to Number Three," he directed.

AGENT "X" stepped over to the Bishop. The monster, who had apparently looked forward to the torture with sadistic delight, yielded the iron to him only after another sharp command from Number One. "X" turned and walked slowly towards Betty, the hot iron outthrust before him. Betty opened her lips as if to scream, but suddenly choked back the cry. For the Secret Agent had drawn in the air an almost imperceptible letter "X."

Agent "X" bent over the girl, holding the iron as close as he dared.

"Wait, Number Three," commanded Number One. He got up from his chair and walked across to Pete Tolman. That moment, when all eyes were fastened upon Number One and Tolman, gave "X" his opportunity. He had noted as soon as the girl had been brought into the room that the plastic material, with which he had insulated Betty's forehead, was still intact. He knew that the material had sufficiently poor conductive qualities to prevent the heat of the iron from reaching her skin.

"Don't be frightened, Betty," he whispered softly as he bent over her. "Keep your eyes closed. Scream at the proper time; then pretend to faint."

Betty nodded her head slightly. "X" saw her fists clenched. She was bravely preparing herself for the ordeal to come.

"Secret Agent 'X,'" said Number One to Tolman, "consider carefully the torture you are about to inflict upon Miss Dale. A word from you will prevent that. I must know how much you have learned about our group, and how much of that information you have turned over to the police. Then, I am extremely curious to know just who you really are."

Tolman laughed madly. "You think I'm nuts enough to go to the police with anything? Every cop's on the lookout for me. You're nuts!"

Number One signaled the Agent. "Proceed with the torture."

Very slowly, "X" brought the glowing iron towards Betty's forehead. She screamed, closed her eyes, and at the instant the hot iron sizzled against the plastic material that covered her forehead, she became limp. "X" could not tell whether her unconsciousness was pretense or not. As he jerked the iron away, the scar of the brand in the plastic material was so realistic that he could not suppress a shudder.

Pete Tolman was unmoved. "Give her the limit, chief," he muttered, "and just see if I give a damn!"

Number One shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Number Five, take the girl to Number Seven. When she has revived, we will see if the Bishop can get any information out of her. As for this man—" indicating Tolman—"either he has the nerves of iron and the heart of stone, or he is not Agent 'X.' Bishop, you will remove him to the execution chamber. Number Two, Number Three, and Number Four will accompany me. Perhaps on the scaffold, this man will talk!"

The Bishop backed up to the chair in which Tolman was tied. He hoisted chair and man upon his powerful back. Number One led the way through a sliding panel, down a short hall, and into a square, barren room. In the very center of the room, a scaffold had been constructed. The Bishop and Number Four, whom "X" knew to be Milo Leads, untied Tolman's legs and dragged him up the scaffold steps.

Tolman shouted vile epithets and struggled desperately. But he was like a child in the mighty arms of the Bishop. Tolman's legs were rigidly tied. Then he was centered on the trapdoor. The Bishop busied himself with the rope, while Number One went over to the lever that operated the trap door.

Suddenly, the Bishop seized an instrument not unlike a pair of pointed tongs. He leaped upon the helpless

Tolman and thrust the point of the tongs between Tolman's teeth. Held helplessly in the arms of Number Four and Number Two, Tolman could not jerk his head away. "X" understood the purpose of the tongs now. They were pivoted so that The Bishop could slowly force his victim's jaws apart. Tolman's screams echoed and re-echoed about the chamber. The Bishop seemed to relish the torture and would have prolonged it had Number One permitted him to do so.

THEN the Bishop picked up the rope and "X" saw that in place of the noose was a sort of clamp. For a moment, "X" was so astonished by the brutality of the scene that he was unable to speak. He saw the crippled madman thrust the clamp into Tolman's mouth. Tolman's screams were gagged. Slowly, The Bishop tightened the clamp on Tolman's tongue.

"X" knew the fiendish murder method employed by the Seven gang. He knew that in another moment, Number One would open the trap. The force of Tolman's fall would actually tear his tongue from his throat. The result could well be imagined. Even if Tolman withstood the shock, he would slowly bleed to death, would be strangled by his own blood lodging in his throat. Then Tolman's body would be dropped in the street as an appalling example of the fiendish cruelty of the Seven Men; as a graphic symbol of the silence they imposed.

The Secret Agent's sense of humanity overrode his better judgment. Tolman was a killer. The law would have hanged him. But Secret Agent "X" could not stand idly by, watching a man *hang by his tongue!*

"X's" hand crept towards the pocket where his gas gun was kept. He would use it if he had to. But first, one desperate effort to talk Tolman out of such a fate. As the Bishop backed away from Tolman in order to stand clear of the trap, Agent "X" shouted:

"Stop!"

All eyes turned towards him. "X" resumed the soft-spoken manner of Dr. Kousha. "Number One, have you considered how valuable this man may be to us? Do you remember what he said a moment ago about knowing something he would be willing to trade for his life?"

"Sheer bluff," rapped Number One. "He knows nothing. By what authority do you retard the punishment to which I have sentenced this man?"

"X" looked up at the platform of the scaffold. Tolman's agonized eyes stared beseechingly. His tongue was slowly turning black, so tightly had the torturous clamp been screwed.

"I have no authority," said "X" quietly. "But if this man is Pete Tolman then he may know where those five and ten dollar engraving plates, which Fronberg hid, are kept."

"True," said Number One thoughtfully. "But I doubt if it will be necessary to issue more counterfeit money. I have very nearly accomplished my ends. Still—"

The door of the execution chamber was flung open by one of the gang. "X" knew by the diamond studded number on his lapel that he was Count Camocho.

"*Senor!*" cried Camocho, "*Senor* Number One! You have succeed! You have accomplish!" he shouted, in his excitement forgetting to take his usual care in his grammar.

Number One strode across the room and seized Camocho by the shoulders. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that New York is yours! I receive a radiogram stating that a great body of people of all classes are gathering in a parade! They will march the streets. They will shout! They will fight! It is revolution!"

Number One turned, looked enquiringly about the room. Then he fixed the excited Camocho with his eyes. "*Who sent that message?*" he asked with cold emphasis.

"Why — why, Number Three," Camocho stuttered. "Number Three — who is Dr. Kousha!"

CHAPTER XIX

"HE IS 'X'!"

SECRET AGENT "X's" heart leaped into his throat. Dr. Kousha had been unable to get into the Seven headquarters because he had lost his penny-badge which would have admitted him. But he could still communicate with Number One by radio.

Number One asked: "But where is Number Three at this time?"

"At the counterfeiting headquarters in Jersey. He radioed from there since he was unable to come in person."

Number One turned slowly towards "X." "Take off your mask," he demanded icily.

"Impossible!" shouted the Agent. "Surely the secret of my identity must be kept from some of these men here. Number Five must be mistaken. Perhaps it is some trick." But while he talked, "X" was gauging the distance to the door. His fingers closed upon the gas gun in his pocket. He knew that his life was not worth a penny. But the black box in his pocket was dearer to him than his life. If he could only find a way to get that to the police. It contained evidence that would put an end to the Seven Silent Men for all times to come. Then, there was Betty Dale. What would happen to her?

"Take off that mask!" Number One insisted.

"X" saw that Number Two had come down from the scaffold and was edging towards the door. If that door was closed, he would be hopelessly trapped. From complete immobility, every muscle and sinew in the Agent's well knit body sprang into life.

He hurled himself towards Camocho who barred his way. So fast did he move that the Spaniard had not time to duck the powerful upward swing of "X's" right arm. The blow met Camocho's chin and flattened him to the floor. "X" gained the door just as Number Two snatched an automatic from his pocket. The Agent's gas gun

spurted. The powerful anesthetizing gas struck Number Two squarely in the face. He staggered back on his heels. Even before Number Two had struck the floor, "X" was racing down the passage beyond.

But on the instant he gained the Oak Room, a panel slid back. Pouring through the opening, as eager as hounds unleashed, came a score of gangmen—the hard-faced hoods "X" had seen in the lounge on entering the headquarters. Number One had evidently signaled to them and opened the door of the oak room by remote control.

Down the passage came Number One's crisp order: "Take him alive. He is Secret Agent 'X'!"

The criminal mob was upon him. "X" met the first man, seized his out-thrust arm in a jujutsu hold and threw him over his shoulder. Then he plunged into the midst of the mobsters, his arms working like twin windmills. His fists slammed into the noxious faces, cracked jaws, pounded fleshy bodies. Men went down before his pitiless onslaught; yet where one man fell, there were two to take his place.

"X" fought nearer and nearer the fireplace, dragging half the weight of the mob with him. He snaked one arm free from a hood's grip, brought it up to his pocket, and seized the black, cubical box. He had only a split second of freedom, but he used it well. His aim was perfect. He threw the box containing the Seven gang's confessional record straight into the blazing fireplace.

And not a moment too soon. The full weight of the gang was upon him. Blows were telling, exhausting even his superb strength.

He was thinking of Betty Dale now. He *must* save her. The vision of the Bishop's foul hands pawing over her loveliness while he planned some sadistic torture for her, drove "X" to desperation. He fought like one gone mad. His fearful blows wrecked one

man after another. Again, he got his hand into his pocket, this time to clutch the penny which would open the doors of the headquarters. Now, if he could slip one of those tear gas bombs from his pocket, he might gain a moment in which to rush from the room, a single minute in which to find Betty.

Something came hurtling through the air. Before he had time to duck, the missile struck Agent "X" on the forehead. The waxen mask he wore was shattered to fragments. His brain swirled, his eyes swam in red mist. But on the instant that he fell, he had presence of mind enough to put that all-important penny in his mouth. His tongue clamped down on it hard, holding it flat against his teeth. Oblivion caught up with him.

A PLEASANT sensation brought Agent "X" to his senses. Soft, cool fingers were gently stroking his hands. At first, he was under the impression that he had been thrown into the same room with Betty Dale. He opened his eyes. His head felt swollen, his mind feverish. He looked around a room barren of furnishings and without doors or windows. And he was alone. The hands that had caressed his brow were then but figments of his imagination.

He lay on the floor and for the moment relaxed. Then he drew a deep breath and slowly hauled to his feet. There was a strange, metallic taste in his mouth. He remembered the penny which he had put in his mouth just before he had been knocked out. He returned it to his pocket.

Then Agent "X" made a slow and careful inspection of his little prison. But though his rapping knuckles could detect the position of the sliding door panel, there was no electric lock into which he could fit the penny.

He had been carefully searched. All his weapons had been taken from him. None of the secret compartments in his clothing had remained unexplored

—with one exception. "X" dropped to the floor. Unless Number One was more clever than he appeared to be he would not have thought of examining "X's" shoes.

The Secret Agent gripped the heel of his right shoe and quickly unscrewed it. Inside the heel was a compartment where he concealed small objects that had at times been extremely useful to him. His heart gave a bound. The contents of his heel had not been tampered with. The small opening contained a miniature tube of his make-up material, a little vial of his special narcotic and two small, hollow needles.

He took out the vial together with one of the needles. With extreme care, he loaded the needle with enough of the drug to knock a man out and keep him unconscious for some time. Removing a small, leather plug from the toe of his shoe, he inserted the needle in the socket revealed.

If he were to kick some one, plunging the needle into that person's flesh, enough of the drug would be driven into the blood stream to knock a man out in a few seconds. It was a ridiculously small weapon, impotent beside the mighty organization he was up against. Still, it was the only weapon remaining to him. He resolved that it should give a good account of itself.

He had hardly time to replace the heel of his shoe before the door of the cell opened and Number Four, who was Milo Leads, entered. Behind him were four armed gangsters.

"Okay, you!" said one of the men gruffly. "Up on your feet. Do you walk or do we drag you?"

Secret Agent "X" did not utter a word. He stood up, and two of the men seized him by either arm. He might easily have pricked one of them with his doped needle, but now was not the time for his counter attack. Agent "X" knew that if his plan was to succeed he must wait until his efforts would create the greatest surprise.

GUARDED by the four men and followed by Leads, "X" was taken from the cell, down a short hall and into the execution chamber. In the room were Number One and his hideous aide, the Bishop. The crippled man mounted the scaffold steps, his ugly mouth twisting in a grin.

"X" saw that the floor below the scaffold was stained with blood. He knew why his execution had been delayed. Had Pete Tolman been the last victim, or had it been—

"X" dared not think lest his mind suggest that Betty Dale had been the last to mount those scaffold steps.

"Secret Agent 'X,'" said Number One, "I had hoped that you would be a more worthy opponent. I regret that our little encounter has to terminate so abruptly and, for you, ignominiously. Your removal is imperative. Therefore, I sentence you to hang—by the tongue!"

Two guards dragged "X" up the scaffold steps. The Bishop centered him on the trapdoor. "X" saw that Number One had walked to the end of the platform supports to where the lever that operated the trap was located. Two gunmen, with automatics drawn, stood at the bottom of the steps. One guard covered "X" with his gun while his companion picked up a piece of rope, preparatory to tying "X's" arms and legs.

At the moment that the man with the rope stooped to tie the Secret Agent's ankles, "X" kicked out with his right foot. The doped needle caught the guard in the calf of the leg. The gunman tumbled back against the legs of the man with the gun.

"X" leaped clear of the trapdoor, evading the clumsy fingers of the Bishop. The two guards at the foot of the stairs fired instantaneously and started up the steps. But Agent "X" swung around, leaped over the railing of the platform for a ten-foot drop that landed him directly upon the shoulders of Number One. Both "X" and the gang chief went sprawling.

"X" recovered his feet in a moment, ducked behind a supporting member of the scaffold, seized the lever that operated the trap, and gave it a yank.

The trap sprang. Two men dropped through the opening, arms and legs sprawling as they struck the floor. An automatic, dropped by one of the criminals, slid within six feet of "X." He sprang for it, swept it up not a split second before a shot gouged wood from the piece of scaffolding only inches from his head.

"X" swung out from under the scaffold. A gunman, who had dropped from the steps, raised his automatic. Though he disliked lethal weapons, Agent "X" did not hesitate a moment. He fired two quick shots. The first shot took the gangster in the thigh. The second crashed the lighting fixture in the ceiling. The room was plunged into darkness.

"X" knew well the location of the door. Yet he supposed that all shots would be aimed in that direction. He ran silently on his rubber soled shoes across the room until he encountered the wall. Darkness was splintered with gun flame. Shots crashed and reverberated throughout the room. "X" waited his chance. The gunmen were shooting at random now, hoping that a chance shot would find its mark.

"X" sprang for the door and swung it open. The sound of the opening door drew fire instantly. As "X" leaped through the opening, slugs screamed about his head. He slammed the door into place, ran the length of the hall, and into the Oak Room.

There he stopped. It would take many valuable seconds to locate the door that led into the lounge. Even so, the lounge would not be where Betty Dale was held prisoner—providing that she was still alive. Two doors beside the one through which he had just passed were open. One, he knew, led to the gang chief's office—a cul de sac, he knew. The other opened on a narrow flight of steps.

Though he did not know what was

at the top, "X" chose the stairs. Behind him, he could hear Number One roaring out commands to his men.

At the top of the steps, "X" ran squarely into one of the Seven who was just coming out of a small room. Unhesitatingly, "X" swung. His gun connected with the man's head directly behind the ear. The man dropped quietly at Agent "X's" feet.

"X" seized the man by the collar and dragged him into the room from whence he had just come. The room was empty, and "X" saw at a moment the purpose for which it was intended. A large bench held the layout of a powerful radio transmitter.

"X" kicked the door shut behind him, knelt beside the man he had just knocked out, and removed the wax mask. Beneath was a face unfamiliar to him. Because of the man's pugnacious aspect and scarred cheek, "X" knew that here was a man who had risen from the underworld to the criminal empire of the Seven Silent Men. Probably he was the raucous-voiced individual who was known as Number Two. Evidently the medical skill of Milo Leads had succeeded in reviving Number Two after "X" had blown the charge from his gas pistol into his face.

"X" dragged the unconscious gangman to a closet and locked him in it. Then he put on the waxen mask which he had removed from Number Two and sat down at the radio transmitter.

The door of the radio room opened and a waxen face was thrust through the aperture. "Did the *Senor* 'X' or what is he called come up here, Number Two?" asked the man—evidently Count Camocho.

"Nix," growled "X." "Has he given you the slip again?"

Camocho cursed and slammed the door without answering. "X" turned to the controls of the radio. His practiced eyes swept the layout. The transmitter was a flexible outfit capable of covering the police bands as well as

the true short waves. Used with a continuous spark gap arrangement, it might well have been the cause of the electrical disturbance which had tied up police radio communication. "X" plugged in a microphone, adjusted dials, and turned switches. He watched the various meters on the panel climb. The transmitter was now adjusted for the particular frequency used by the police radio prowler cars.

Placing the microphone directly in front of him, "X" spoke distinctly and softly: "Calling all cars. Secret Agent 'X' calling all cars. Listen! The headquarters of the Seven Silent Men is on the top floor of the Falmouth Tower Building. A secret entrance is provided, leading from the last floor occupied by business offices. This entrance is a door marked 'Private' at the end of a short hall. Move at once!"

Because he was not sure that this particular radio channel was clear, "X" carefully repeated the message three times. Since the radio room, like the rest of the Seven headquarters, was perfectly sound-proof, he had no way of knowing whether or not police squad cars were racing towards the Falmouth Tower. Why should they obey him at all? Agent "X" was thought to be a criminal. He was simply hoping that in their desperation the police would heed.

CHAPTER XX

THE BISHOP

"X" OPENED the door cautiously and tiptoed down the stairs. At the bottom of the steps, he paused. The headquarters, which had been the scene of such furious activity only a few moments before, was now filled with a sinister, foreboding hush. "X" was about to step from the stairway into the Oak Room, when the sound of the voice of Number One checked him:

"Leads, we've played a desperate game, you and I. We've played it well. The streets are filled with people, beg-

ging for me to take over the city and steer it—straight to hell!" Number One chuckled. "Even the mayor has agreed to resign if I will become city manager and rid the country of the Seven Silent Men. I'm ready to leave this place forever!"

"Are you sure you haven't forgotten something?" asked Leads anxiously.

"Not a thing. Most of the professional gunmen whom we hired have been locked in the execution chamber. It is upon their heads that the blame for all these crimes will rest."

"But when the police swarm over this building, they will—"

"Find death," interrupted Number One. "The building is mined. An electric time fuse is waiting to be started at any moment. Nothing will remain that can possibly give a clue as to who the Silent Men were. Silence has been our golden rule. Now that our work is done, it will guard us so that we may enjoy the fruits of our labors."

"And the girl, Betty Dale?" asked Leads. "What have you done with her?"

Number One laughed. "I have left her here, *as I shall leave you.*"

"What do you—"

A single shot crashed out. Agent "X" leaped from the stairway into the Oak Room. A door had opened and shut behind Number One. A wisp of gun smoke crawled through the dead air over the body of Milo Leads. Leads's face twitched in agonized death writhings.

Had he desired to do so, "X" might have pursued Number One. But his chief concern was for Betty Dale. For all he knew, she might be in the maniacal hands of the Bishop. He sprinted across the Oak Room to the door that led into the passage approaching the execution chamber. A piteous scream lent wings to his feet. He skidded around an abrupt corner and came suddenly upon an open door. Beyond was a small cell and inside was Betty Dale.

The girl was struggling in the arms of the Bishop. The mobster's right hand was clenched over the hilt of a long knife. His left hand held the girl in its merciless grip. He had raised the knife for a killing thrust just as "X" sprang into the room.

The Bishop turned with a snarl, lowered his head, and like a maddened bull rushed upon "X." The Secret Agent side-stepped, avoiding the criminal's knife thrust. He led with his left fist to the Bishop's jaw. The maniac recoiled, shook his head, and rushed again. "X" brought the barrel of his automatic down with terrific force to the Bishop's head. The man's crooked legs melted beneath him. He sank to the floor.

"X" sprang to the support of Betty Dale. She stared for one searching moment up at the wax mask. A little joyful sob burst from her throat. "It's you! I know it's you!"

"X" gathered her in his arms. "Pull yourself together, Betty," said "X" gently. "We've got to get out of here. You've got to save the police!"

She raised her head. "I don't understand," she said, blinking back tears of relief. "But whatever you say—"

A strange murmur filled the cell. "X" turned and saw that the crippled man was stirring slightly and muttering. The Bishop's voice grew stronger. "V a i t," he whispered. "Don't beat me, Carl. I am your brudder, Joseph; yet you beat me!"

"X" CROSSED quickly to the cripple's side. He saw that the man's eyes were staring vacantly, insanely at the ceiling. "I cannot help it if my mind is no goot," the Bishop whispered. "I do not know where I hid der odder plates. I could make more if you had not pour acid on my fingers. My fingers—" the Bishop held his scarred hands above his head and stared at them—"My fingers are no goot now because of acid. You want to destroy them so the police cannot catch me. Who would know

me now that I am sick and crippled? Better you should have saved for me my hands!"

Betty looked inquiringly at "X." "What does he mean?"

"X" shook his head silently. The Bishop was speaking again. "Carl, my brudder, why do you hurt me because I can't remember. All der plates I give you but the vons I forget—"

"X" took Betty's arm. "We haven't any time to waste. Number One is waiting to get this place filled with police. Then he is going to try and blow this building up—if he gets the chance!"

"Then you know who Number One is?" Betty asked as they hurried out into the oak room.

"X" nodded. "He is Carl, the Bishop's brother. And of course the Bishop is the German engraver, Joseph Fronberg—the counterfeiter whom the police think is dead. But we haven't time, Betty!"

"X" hurried her to the sliding door and unlocked it by means of the penny with the number three stamped on it. Soon they were in the secret elevator, speeding downward. When the car came to a stop, "X" pulled off the waxen mask he had been wearing and concealed it under his coat. He opened the door and led Betty out into the hall. Outside the building, a police siren was wailing.

"X" seized the girl by the arm. "Betty, there will be police here in any moment. Tell them that the building is about to be blown up. Get them to get the people out of here. Have them send out warnings—"

Agent "X" stopped suddenly. An elevator had just bobbed to the floor level. It was loaded with police. He had no time to talk with them. He sprang towards the stairway and bounded down the steps. Flight after flight he passed until he came to the tenth floor—leased entirely by Abel Corin's firm. He entered the general office where a telephone switchboard girl was just taking her place for the morning's work.

Aside from this girl, the office seemed deserted. She stared, amazed, at the man who ran across the general office towards the sumptuous reception hall that fronted Mr. Corin's office. She called on him to stop, but Secret Agent "X" seemed to have suddenly gone deaf. He charged the door of Corin's private office, smashed it open with a heave with his shoulders, and closed it behind him.

CHAPTER XXI

SECONDS OF DOOM

ABEL CORIN jerked around from the cabinet before which he had been standing to see the man who had just broken into his office and was now striding across the chessboard patterned floor.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" the business executive demanded. His eyes dropped to the automatic in the Agent's hand.

"Good morning, Carl," said Secret Agent "X" mockingly.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Corin. "You've made a mistake. My name is Abel Corin."

"It is Carl Fronberg," "X" insisted. "Carl Fronberg, the man who would turn the city into an underworld empire for his own evil purposes."

Corin laughed. "What fantastic tale is this?"

"The truth. The Bishop told me—the Bishop who is Joseph Fronberg, master of counterfeiting. Diseases warped your brother's mind and body. You destroyed the only means the police had of identifying him—his fingerprints. As far as the police were concerned, Joseph Fronberg was dead. But you took the plates which he had made before his sickness. With your head for organization, you built up the greatest counterfeit gang that I have ever run across. I think it more than likely that you were the brains behind the original Fronberg gang instead of your brother, Joseph. No one seems to know where you got your start in business, you know. It

might well have been from counterfeiting."

Corin's eyes narrowed. "Who are you?" he asked, softly.

"I think you know," replied the Agent. "You have been trying to get me to face you openly for some time now. Here I am. Curiously enough, with all your juggling of wax masks and numbers in an attempt to conceal your identity, it was the floor of this office which gave you away!"

Corin stared speechlessly at the floor.

"As soon as I heard the name by which you called your crippled brother, I knew who you were," said the Agent. "For the peculiar, diagonal gait of that cripple resembled nothing so much as the movement of a certain playing piece on a chess board. The bishop piece in chess can move diagonally only! Chess suggested that name for your crippled brother. And the very floor of this office screams that you are a chess enthusiast! Carl Fronberg, alias Abel Corin, is also Number One of the Seven Silent Men!"

Corin's eyes were scornful. "And now where are you, Mr. 'X'? Are you any nearer your objective than you were at first? Who would believe your story? Turn me over to the police? Man, in one hour from now I shall be the police!" He strode across the room and flung open the front windows. "Do you hear them? Thousands of people keyed to revolt! They are pleading for me to save them!"

Agent "X" could hear well enough. Wind screamed down the canyon between the lofty buildings and sucked up the roar of a thousand throats. The name of Abel Corin was on every lip.

"Do you hear?" shouted Corin, and in his anger his voice slipped to a higher register so that it sounded exactly like the voice of Number One. "They are shouting: 'Let Corin run the city and wipe out counterfeiting!'"

Corin sprang to his desk, seizing it as though he were about to tear it to

pieces. His words came quick and sharp like a string of exploding fire-crackers. "New York is mine! How New York once laughed at me, Carl Fronberg, an immigrant! It called me 'Dumb-Dutch!'" Corin twisted the name into a venomous snarl. His face was purpling with rage. "I've made New York pay for that name it gave me—Dumb-Dutch! But I changed my name. I trampled on the mob without them knowing it. I've *twisted* and *squeezed* and *pinched* millions from them. And they will pay more and more! In these two fists of mine I'll hold the power to crush the people or watch them grovel. I, Carl Fronberg, once a ridiculed immigrant, shall have the power of an emperor!"

Corin's voice hushed to burlesque seriousness. "Go to the window, Mr. 'X' and shout that Abel Corin is a thief, a murderer. Do you think those morons out there will believe you—you who are hunted like a rat by the police?"

Only then did Secret Agent "X" speak. He nodded his head soberly. "You're absolutely right—about them not believing me. *But*, there is one man they will believe."

"Who?" shouted Corin.

"Abel Corin," replied "X" calmly.

CORIN sneered. "You poor fool! Do you suppose that because they are going to trust me with the managership of this city that my conscience dictates that I should confess my crimes to them?"

Secret Agent "X's" eyes narrowed. "You *have* told them, Abel Corin." The deadly seriousness of his voice made Corin tremble.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"X" smiled slowly. "You are afraid, aren't you, Corin? You always were a coward at heart. Your thirst for vengeance, your greed for power, gave you a sort of synthetic courage. Yet always, you were the coward, hiding behind a woman's skirts. You made Alice Neves your dupe. You played upon the sincere affection with which

she regarded you, criminal though she may be. Every message that you sent over the radio or wrote on paper was signed with her name—the inverted Seven. The very name of your gang was developed from her name—for Neves becomes Seven when inverted. You made her take risks you would not take. You—"

A sob cut through the Agent's sentence. From the little closet off Corin's office, came a pitiful figure. It was Alice Neves. She wore a man's dark suit of clothes. The diamond insignia, the number seven, was on the lapel of her coat. Her blue black hair was streaming. She walked straight towards Corin, pointing an accusing finger at him. "Is that true, Abel? Is what this man says true?" she asked huskily.

Corin shook his head. "It's absurd!"

"But it's true! You're lying to me, Abel. After I stole, lied and cheated, even *killed* for you." Then Alice Neves moved so quickly that even "X" was not alert enough to stop her. He saw the flash of something that glittered like silver in her hand. He uttered a harsh cry, sprang towards her. But the girl's hand had darted up. The long, thin knife was driven straight into her left breast. She tottered and fell full length behind Corin's desk.

"X" forgot Corin for the moment in his anxiety over the woman. He dropped to his knees, hoping that her self-inflicted wound was only slight. But he did not need a moment to determine that her wound would be fatal.

"It is better so!" came Corin's harsh voice.

"X" looked up. A smile of self-satisfaction had spread across his face. With Alice gone, and Leads gone, and my brother too mad to tell—"

"But you have told!" cried Agent "X." "You and every other one of the Silent Seven committed murder and signed a confession in the record book. The witness who watched you sign your confession must have been

Milo Leads, since he was the only man beside the Bishop who knew your true identity. Milo Leads was your right-hand man. If it had not been for Leads' dope and duplicity, you would not have gone far towards your objective.

"From your conversation with Leads, I gathered that you held some threat over his head—something else beside the exposure of the murders he was responsible for. Leads was always in trouble with some woman. He was fundamentally a weak character. When Leads saw the possibility of huge monetary returns, he gladly fell in with your scheme rather than have you expose his true character.

"And remember that inside of an hour, the confessions of every one of your gang will be in the hands of the police."

Corin laughed. "But I destroyed that record book. None could touch it but me because of a battery of machine guns hidden behind the panel of the closet in which it rested. Had anyone else touched the record book, he would have been instantly riddled by bullets!"

"X" NODDED. "I thought of that. I took the trouble to trace out the electrical circuit that operated your machine-gun trap and turn it off before I removed the confessions from the book—"

Corin's face went suddenly from purple to ashy gray. He chewed his lower lip. Then, suddenly, a crafty gleam stole into his eyes. His hand dropped to the desk. One finger poised over a brass ash-tray. He pushed the tray to one side, revealing a black-handled electrical switch. "X" saw that tiny wires ran from it across the desk and to the large cabinet at the other side of the room. The Secret Agent's heart pounded in his throat.

"Now, will you surrender, Mr. 'X'?" asked Corin. "I started a time fuse going just a few minutes before you entered. In this office is enough

T.N.T. to blow the entire top off this building. But I have only to touch this switch under my hand, and the time fuse will be cut out of the circuit and the building will be blown to pieces at once! Now, do you surrender?"

"X" knew that Corin was in deadly earnest. The man dared not risk standing trial as the leader of the Seven gang. He preferred sudden death. But "X" knew that if Corin touched that switch and the building was blown to bits, thousands of innocent people might be killed. Not the flicker of an eyelash betrayed the thought that was going through Agent "X's" mind at that moment.

His eyes were steadily fixed on Corin's face. But the automatic in his pocket was nosing straight towards Corin's right arm. He knew that the pain of a bullet in the arm would cause Corin to jerk his hand back—a reflexive action that it would be impossible to resist. He squeezed the trigger of the automatic with extreme care. He could not miss at such a distance.

A sharp, metallic click—nothing more. The automatic was empty. But Corin had heard that click. It startled him. "X" saw the man's finger drop towards the switch.

In those seconds when destruction seemed evident, Agent "X" moved faster than he had ever moved before. He leaped towards the desk. His left hand clawed at Corin's hand. His right fist drove upwards towards Corin's jaw. Corin fell backwards to the floor, dragging switch and wire with him. He was unconscious—but he was lying directly on top of the fatal switch.

For a moment, Agent "X" was too dazed to comprehend what had happened. He stared at Corin, wondering vaguely why the building had not blown up. Had Corin been bluffing? He sprang to the cabinet before which Corin had been standing on "X's" entrance. He opened the door. His eyes lighted upon a perfectly wired bomb

large enough to blow up half of the city.

He pivoted, staring at the still form of Alice Neves. Blood crawled from the knife wound in her breast, but there were also little strings of blood trickling down her lips. "X" crossed over to where she lay. Across her mouth, but not touching, were two ends of a wire. "X" followed the wire with his eyes. It led to the switch beneath Corin and over to the cabinet of explosives. He knelt beside the woman, took her hand in his. Her pulse could hardly be detected, but her eyelids flickered back. Her lips moved in a husky, death whisper: "Did—I redeem myself—Mr.—'X'?"

There was a faint smile on her lips even after she was dead. Then Agent "X" knew why the bomb had not exploded. Alice Neves had found the wire leading to the bomb not far from where she had fallen. She had bitten the insulation from the wire, then broken it with her hands.

"X" sighed softly, got to his feet, and went to work. Removing the vial of narcotic from the heel of his shoe, he gave Corin enough to keep him unconscious for several hours. Then he took the waxen mask he had carried beneath his coat, and put it over Corin's face. The police could not fail to recognize Corin as Number One now!

And very quietly Secret Agent "X" left the office.

IT was two hours later. Thermite, that hottest of all substances, had enabled the police to melt through the steel door that guarded the Seven headquarters. Burks and his men had swept the place clean of criminal life, for, as Number One had said, many of the underworld hirelings had been locked in the execution chamber. The body of Milo Leads, together with the tongueless remains of Pete Tolman, were taken to the morgue.

Still marveling at the completeness of the gang's hideout, its electrical devices, and its sound-proof construc-

tion, Inspector Burks was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of a young man wearing the uniform of a telegraph messenger.

"Special message for Inspector Burks!" shouted the young man as he crossed the floor of the Oak Room.

"Here!" snapped Burks. He snatched the envelope from the messenger and ripped it open. Enclosed was a neatly typed note. It read:

Dear Burks:

You will find signed confessions to various murders committed by the Seven, in a small, asbestos box in the fireplace of the Oak Room. This should aid you materially in rounding up the gang. The confessions are written in invisible ink. Three of these seven leaders have already paid with their lives. Abel Corin, the actual brains of the mob, will be found in his office. I believe you will find secret telephone lines from Corwin's office to the Seven headquarters above.

Most of the stolen currency as well as a large amount of the counterfeit bills will be found in the gang's headquarters. Go to Jersey to find the plates and presses from which the phonies were printed.

Concerning the construction of the Seven headquarters: I have taken some pains to learn that Lynn Falmouth, the owner of the building, rented the unfinished top section to a Mr. Jephard who purposed to turn it into a studio for a local broadcasting company. You will understand the truth of this when you examine the sound-proof construction, the private elevator, the Oak Room which might well be used as a main studio. But Jephard could not find sufficient funds to put the studio into operation. As is actually the case, the place was never really intended for anything else than a headquarters for the gang. Mr. Jephard was simply an agent for Abel Corin.

The pretended kidnapping of Alice Neves, the sponsoring of Sven Gerlak, the holdup of the Suburban National Bank, in which Corin was interested—were all tricks to divert suspicion.

My regards to Lynn Falmouth, who has a flare for amateur criminology as well as an ability to throw whoopee parties—"

"AUTHOR'S NOTE: The reader will perceive that there was no mention of Joseph Frenberg in this mysterious message. Such is the quality of Agent "X's" memory. Recently, on visiting a friend who was ill in a local sanitarium, I met one of the patients—a man who answered Agent "X's" description of the Bishop, Joseph Frenberg. The crippled man was undergoing medical treatment of both mind and body. On inquiry, I learned that the man who paid for this cripple's treatment was the eccentric individual known as Eltsha Pond.

Thus, whimsically, the message ended. And though there was no signature, Burks knew that the note was from Secret Agent "X." Grim and tight-lipped, Inspector Burks hurried from the Seven headquarters. He was bent on following the messenger who had brought the note. How had the young man known where to reach Burks? Why had he so discreetly withdrawn without waiting for the usual tip?

In the street outside the Falmouth Building, Inspector Burks found his

answer. For as he elbowed through the crowd, eyes sharpened for the sight of the messenger's uniform, a strange, eerie whistle, weird yet mingled with a note of mockery, pierced the excited murmur of the crowd.

With an imprecation on his lips, Burks returned to the building. For he knew that that whistle had come from the puckered lips of Secret Agent "X," standing perhaps only a few feet from the inspector and looking for all the world like one of the thousands of people in the street.

Don't miss next month's GREAT NOVEL in which the Secret Agent is put to the test as never before in his battle against an unholy, relentless human fiend—THE GOLDEN GHOUL. None knew the Ghoul by any other name; none had seen his true face and lived. For the AMBER DEATH, weapon of the Ghoul, gave no quarter. It struck mercilessly—and those who could not buy immunity starved to death within their own ossified bodies!

12 BOOK-LENGTH NOVELS for ONLY \$1.00

How would you like to get twelve book-length novels delivered to you each month, at the price of only \$1.00? Not just ordinary detective novels, but breathless, thrill-packed novels detailing the exploits of that master man-hunter—SECRET AGENT "X."

From coast to coast this man of mystery has won the praise and approval of thousands of readers.

You have read the novel in this issue, which gives you an inkling of the kind of two-fisted, red-blooded, swift-moving action that awaits you in the chronicles of this high adventurer.

In addition to the book-length novel each month, there will be other short stories by star detective and mystery writers.

Why not make sure that you will get the next of these twelve complete novels by subscribing now to SECRET AGENT "X" magazine?

PERIODICAL HOUSE, INC.

58 West 45th Street,
New York City.

Gentlemen: Enclosed find \$1.00 for which please enter my subscription to SECRET AGENT "X" magazine for one year (12 issues). If stamps are sent, please use only two or three cent denominations.

Name

Street

City State

The M-P News Flash

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC. 67 W. 44TH ST., N.Y.C.



VOLUME 1

MAY, 1936

NUMBER 1



Take Your Pick

HERE'S your chance to get either a beautiful gold-plated Zippo lighter, bearing the sign of the universe under which you were born, or a genuine Winchester pocket knife—ABSOLUTELY FREE! In case you decide upon a rifle, we will send you free of charge an astrolological reading, indicating your characteristic, tendencies, capabilities, etc.

We are making this unusual offer as an incentive to you—a reader of one M-P magazine—because we feel that you appreciate GOOD reading, and should be acquainted with the other eight M-P magazines. Each is an ACE, in every sense of the word, and each bubbles over with instructive—action—adventure—romance. Of 9 features, we are the only publisher of spy magazines! SPY STORIES and SPY NOVELS are two great magazines of action and adventure; WESTERN TRAILS and WESTERN ACES contain the best cowboy and outlaw yarns obtainable; FLYING ACES and SKY BIRDS are the only two complete aviation magazines on the market; TEN DETECTIVE ACES and SECRET AGENT which are always chock-full of thrilling and mysterious readings, while LOVE FICTION MONTHLY is a magazine of vivid, human stories of love, romance and triangles.

We know that you buy this magazine because of its interior interest, and we want you to try out some of the other great M-P magazines WITHOUT ANY RISK! WEATSNOVELL All you have to do is cut off and send us the tops of the front covers of six current issues. (It is not necessary to read full covers—just send the tops, as illustrated at the top of this page.) In return, we will see that you receive ABSOLUTELY FREE either the beautiful Zippo lighter or the handsome Winchester pocket knife—the value of either being equal to the price of any six M-P magazines. Moreover, these magazines in your possession, you will be all set to enter one of our cash awards prize winning contests distributed monthly.

This offer expires May 15th. We have only a limited supply of these fine prizes and urge you to take advantage of our offer NOW!

MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC.
67 W. 44th St., N. Y. C.

Gentlemen:

I am attaching the 6 cover titles. Please send the article which I have checked.

Ring

Knife

Name

Street & No.

City & State

Birth Date for Ring

\$300.00 in Cash Prizes Enter Our Contest and Win Some Money

HOW would you like the postman to deliver a check to you? Well, everybody has an equal chance by entering our contest. All you have to do is write a letter, telling us what you like best about the current issues of any six of the following magazines: SPY STORIES — SPY NOVELS — WESTERN TRAILS — WESTERN ACES — FLYING ACES — SKY BIRDS — TEN DETECTIVE ACES — SECRET AGENT "X" — OR LOVE FICTION MONTHLY. You may thrill to the realistic "Western atmosphere" of stories in WESTERN TRAILS or WESTERN ACES; you may find the model building plans in FLYING ACES far superior to any others you have ever seen; SECRET AGENT "X" may hold you breathless by his daring exploits! Well—get out your fountain pen and tell us about it! You don't have to be a writer to make money in a case like this—just use your own words, for the judges are interested in what YOU THINK of M-P magazines.

There will be three contests, of which this is the first. For the best letters entered in each contest, the following prizes will be awarded: First prize, \$300.00; second prize, \$25.00; third prize, \$10.00; fourth prize, \$5.00. In addition, there will

be ten prizes of \$1.00 each. The judges will consist of a board comprised of editors of M-P magazines, and their decisions will be final. In case of a tie, duplicate awards will be made.

The few simple rules governing the contests are:

1. Your letter must not exceed 500 words; you are to write plainly and on one side of the paper only. (Copies of the magazines involved are available at all newsstands. In many cases they will be found on file in public libraries).
2. You are to print or write your name and complete address on the first page of your letter.
3. This contest is open to all, with the exception of employees of MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS, INC., and members of their families.
4. Letters to be considered must be received at this office not later than 8:00 P. M., May 15th.

The names of winners will be printed in this magazine. Remember, \$300.00 is waiting to be won, and you stand just as good a chance as anyone. THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY! ENTER TODAY!

The M-P Group at a Glance—

If you're interested in GOOD READING, and are really looking for the best in entertainment at a minimum cost, you'll thank us for telling you that... WESTERN TRAILS leads off the May issue with some top-hand tale-spinning—Frederick G. Davis, T. W. Ford and Clyde A. Warden... that WESTERN ACES' stories of the range and out-back trail are headed by T. W. Ford, L. L. Ferrans and R. Craig Christensen... that TEN DETECTIVE ACES—the biggest sensation value in detective fiction, 10 stories for 10¢—lays the lid with Frederick G. Davis, Carl McK. Saunders, Emile C. Toppens, and seven other ace... that LOVE FICTION MONTHLY is bristled of pulsating youth, sensuality and short stories of romance by such writers as Judith Mackay, Florence Corbaird, Mary Frances

Dover, Peggy Sedle, and others... that FLYING ACES, the greatest buy in the aviation field—recommends three magazines in one—a Model Building Magazine—an Aviation Fast Magazine and an Aviation Fiction Magazine—all for the... that SKY BIRDS gives you air stories by real heroes—Arch Whitehams, Donald E. Kayser, Major George Fielding Elliot—and every story is packed with action, adventure, thrills... that SPY STORIES and SPY NOVELS, the two new magazines of mystery, intrigue and romance, crowded with thrilling spy stories of war and games who play the dangerous, deadly games of international espionage. These two magazines are different and amazing! Try them all and you'll agree with us that they're also great magazines—each without an equal.

Complete Novelette

By
Edward
Parrish
Ware

For months the Panther prowled this mid-western city, leaving dead men to tell of his bloody harvests. Only one person knew the Panther's identity—knew that that very knowledge meant death.



"We're in a jam," he told her.
"I'm going to lower you from
the sill."

The Murder Race

CHAPTER I

MMUSIC, thudding hoofs, creaking leather. Gay women, proud men, laughter, noise. The musty smell of tanbark. Closing night at the American Royal, mid-western livestock classic, with the

horse show going full tilt in the arena.

A black limousine drew up directly in front of the flag-draped, brilliantly lighted entrance to the American Royal Building, and five masked men leaped out and ran across the pavement. They vanished inside.

The first car was followed directly by a second which parked at the curb about one hundred feet in its rear. A door opened and a slender, handsomely cloaked young woman got out. She was followed by a tall man in middle life, immaculate in evening dress; caned, gloved and silk hatted.

The tall man spoke sharply to the young woman, and placed a hand on her arm. There was a struggle, the sharp report of a revolver, and the tall man staggered backward a few paces. He stared at the woman, who stared back at him, then he pitched down on his face.

The woman ran for the entrance of the building, just as shots rang out inside. Undeterred, she went in. There were more pistol shots, and a blue haze hung over everything. Men scurried about. There were shouts, oaths, more sounds of battle. The girl dashed toward a door which gave entrance to the pavilion where competing stock was stalled. Almost there, she was stopped by a short, stocky man in a mask who leaped for her.

"No you don't!" he shouted.

His hands caught the opera cloak which sheathed her slim person. She slipped out of the cloak, jerked open the door and vanished in the semi-darkness of the pavilion.

Al Fane, of the Fane Detective Agency, was standing in a balcony above the horse show arena when the first pistol shot sounded in the office below. His agency had charge of policing the Royal during the week, and it had been an easy, effortless assignment until then.

Fane ran down the incline from balcony to office, saw the trouble at a glance, and pulled out an automatic. He fired once. The short man holding the woman's cloak went down with a bullet through him.

There were more shots. Fane fired at a man who ran toward the exit, and drew fire in return. Neither man was hit. The smoke was heavy, aim uncertain. When the detective reached

the door of the office, it was all over.

The black limousine, leaving one dead bandit behind, had rolled away—carrying twenty thousand dollars of American Royal money with it. An assistant treasurer lay bleeding on the floor of the office, and a city plain-clothes man was swearing over a wound in his right shoulder.

"The Panther!" he raged vehemently. "Nobody but the Panther woulda had the guts!"

Fane turned and walked outside. His glance ranged up and down the street, and picked up the dress-suited figure sprawled on the pavement. He went to it, and took a look at the dead man's face.

"Carter Crestwood!" he exclaimed. "Crestwood—and shot dead!"

It was Carter Crestwood, wealthy clubman, socially prominent sportsman who lay dead on the walk. Crestwood, whose niece, Nina, was scheduled to ride her champion stallion, Crestwood King, in the main event of the horse show that night.

A man in a chauffeur's livery came from back of the car.

"I'm Mr. Crestwood's man, sir," he said. "I hid until somebody came. Too much shooting—"

"What happened here?" Fane asked tersely.

"I don't know exactly, sir. I heard a scuffle after I stopped at the curb. Then a shot. Miss Crestwood ran past me, and I jumped out. Mr. Crestwood was laying just like you see him. There was a lot of shooting going on, and I ducked."

"Anybody near Crestwood when you saw him first?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"Who was doing the scuffling you heard?"

The fellow hesitated, then answered. "Mr. Crestwood and Miss Nina, sir. They had quarreled before they got out. Then they scuffled—and the master was shot. That's all I know."

POLICE sirens wailed along Genessee Street, and Fane turned back into the building. He opened the door and went into the pavilion.

Down the main aisle, a hundred feet away, a small group was knotted. It was composed of four or five men and one woman. Near the group, pawing the tanbark, stood a blood-bay stallion ready for the ring. A hostler held him by the bit.

"Don't ask questions, Lowman! Somebody tried to kidnap me, and Carter was hurt! That's all—"

The speaker saw Fane, recognized him and ran to him. "I'm Nina Crestwood," she said. "I've got to ride the King, no matter what has happened. Help me. I want to see you after the event is over. Help me up, please!"

They were standing then beside the King. Nina Crestwood was a charming young woman, but it was not because of her charm that Fane consented. It was something in the depths of her blue eyes. Pleading, desperation, terror was mirrored in them. The detective bent, stirred up his hands, and Miss Crestwood was in the saddle and away.

Two men were hurrying from the group in front of the Crestwood dressing room door. Both were tall, both in their early thirties, both in evening dress. Lowman Bostwick, managing-director of the American Royal, was one. Tommy Tarrant, noted Eastern sportsman, was the other. It was Bostwick who spoke.

"What happened outside, Fane?" he asked.

"Holdup. Carter Crestwood was shot dead on the pavement. That's all I know, Bostwick."

"Crestwood—killed!" Tarrant ejaculated. "In the holdup?"

"I don't know," Fane replied. "The holdup occurred inside, and Crestwood is dead on the walk outside, a hundred feet north of the entrance. We'll know more about it later."

Lou Carlin, a Fane operative, hurried down the aisle. "They got the

gate," he reported. "One crook killed, a clerk and a cop wounded. Crestwood must have been hit by a stray bullet from inside. That's all I can get, Al."

Fane nodded. He was content to wait until Nina Crestwood finished in the arena and he could talk to her. It did not require long, and presently the young woman, having won a third consecutive blue ribbon with the King, was back in the pavilion. There was no flush of victory on her cheek, and she drooped as though weighted with lead.

"Nina!" Bostwick cried. "What the devil did you ride for? You must have known that Carter was killed!"

She went hurriedly toward her dressing room, making no answer. Bostwick and Tarrant kept pace with her, Fane walking behind.

"It was a game thing, Nina," Tarrant complimented. "But was your reason adequate?"

"Quite," she told him, her voice sounding dead. They had crowded into her dressing room then. She waved them out. "I want to change," she said. "I'll call when I'm ready. Mr. Fane, I must see you first of all. Go, please!"

They left her alone. Curt Heflin, assistant manager of the Royal show, plucked at Fane's sleeve, and the detective followed him aside.

"Fane," he said, "I don't like the looks of this thing."

"We both don't, Heflin," Fane told him. "What, in particular, is eating on you?"

"What do you make of things? Do you credit the report that the Panther had a hand in this?"

Because he struck swiftly, surely, without warning, then slunk back to his lair without leaving so much as a track, a newswriter had dubbed him the "Panther." That caught popular fancy, and it stuck.

For all of that, the crook was real enough. He had kept the Kansas City police on the jump for two mad years.

and exercise was all they had ever got out of it.

Banks, payroll messengers, jewelry merchants, money-transporters, and the like constituted the Panther's meat, and never a month passed that did not mark the perpetration of some big money crime for his gorging. The cops were mad, and the people madder. The Panther was regarded as immune from capture and punishment.

"All bunk," Fane had often told himself. "He's the biggest ear of corn in the crib, right enough, but sooner or later he's due to get shucked."

Before the detective could answer Heflin's query, his name was called.

"Fane!"

Fane recognized Bostwick's voice. He went into the dressing room and found only two persons there, Bostwick and Tarrant.

"Where's Miss Crestwood?" he asked, sensing trouble.

"Gone!" Tarrant answered hoarsely. "With Bostwick and me standing directly in front of the door!"

"And she with no way of leaving," Bostwick exclaimed, "except by the door. It's impossible, Fane—yet she's gone!"

CHAPTER II

FANE looked about for a moment, then went to the back wall and examined it. Placing a hand against the boards directly below a binder strip which circled the wall, he pressed. A section, large enough to permit a person to pass through, gave outward, and he was looking into a narrow, dark feeding-chute used by the stable attendants.

"Tell Lou Carlin to come here," he requested.

Carlin came in response to Tarrant's summons.

"Miss Crestwood was abducted from this room within the past ten minutes," Fane explained to the big operative. "Have the whole place searched. Get hold of the Crestwood chauffeur, and hold him until I get back."

Fane entered the runway, went down it and passed through a door into the feeding room. At the far side of the feeding room was a door opening into an alley, and beyond the alley a section of the Kansas City Stock Yards. He crossed to the door, swung it open—and stepped through it into trouble.

Fane took a clout on the jaw which rocked him to his toes, then he went down under the weight of a massed attack. In the darkness of the alley, he could not determine how many men were on him, but there were enough. He was crushed flat to the ground, unable to do more than wiggle a finger. That finger, however, happened to be crooked around the trigger of a revolver which he had drawn when entering the feed room.

When Fane's gun blazed, making a muffled explosion, the huddle on top of him dissolved. He fired again as he struggled to his feet. There was an exclamation of pain in answer to the shot. An automatic snarled in the darkness, and lead spatted on the brick wall back of the detective.

Fane crouched, fired again, and started to run—to be tackled around his lower body and thrown flat. He slid like a greased rope out of the clutch, and once more got to his feet. A flashlight's beam cut through the gloom and rested for an instant on the face of the man who had tackled. Fane grunted in surprise.

The man who had tackled him was Thomas Tarrant, the sportsman from the East!

Fane ran across the alley, leaped a fence into a stock pen, passed through an open gate into a runway and raced on. Things had quieted in the alley, but that did not mean much. He would be pursued, of course. Whoever had wanted to capture him had wanted the job done quietly—and that fact had given Fane his margin of safety. But it was only a margin.

The runway, Fane discovered, led to a bridge across the Kaw River which was used only to shift cattle

from the stock yards to the packing houses on the Kansas shore. The bridge was in darkness, which was something in his favor. He started across it.

Lights of pleasure craft ringed the shores of the Kaw and dotted its surface. Music enlivened the night like red threads in a black curtain. A searchlight on the bow of a large cabin boat swept the lower deck of the bridge, and picked out a man running along beyond him. Coming his way, and hugging the rail. The searchlight also showed Fane up plainly.

Wham!

A gun snarled, and a slug of lead spatted the metal struts beside him.

Wham!

Fane wheeled to face another gunman who was closing up behind—and his own gun answered. The gunman dropped, kicked against the deck for an instant, then stopped kicking.

Only the poor light on the lower deck and his keeping on the jump had saved him so far. And that wouldn't serve for long. He had to do something—and right then he saw his chance.

Almost beneath him was the cabin boat whose searchlight had revealed the situation on the bridge. It was headed for a passage between the central piers, her nose almost under then. Fane emptied a gun at a man coming back of him, leaped to the rail, swung by his hands—and dropped.

HE hit the after-deck of the boat standing, made cover behind a davited skiff a pair of seconds thereafter, and began edging along the shadowed rail toward the forward companionway. The boat was doubtless a pleasure craft, and the occupants out for a good time, but Fane liked to know his ground before he did any circulating in the open. He reached the head of the companionway, crept downward halfway, then stopped.

At the foot of the steps a man had appeared abruptly. A tall, athletic

looking chap in a dinner coat—his face completely covered by a black mask!

For an instant only did the two men stand staring at each other, then the masked man's right hand dropped toward his hip, a smothered exclamation came through a slit in the mask—and Fane leaped.

His right foot, swung with all the power he had, caught the masked man under the chin, and he went backward, crashed against the capstan, clung there for a split second, then crumpled up on the deck.

Fane was on him instantly, dragging him out of the light of the fore-deck and around on the port guard. On the port guard, he ripped the mask from his captive's face and disarmed him.

He was a total stranger. About thirty, Fane thought, and certainly no common type thug. Rather a man from the upper levels of life. Anyhow, he was a stranger, and the mask made things look shady for him.

He was something of a problem, too, since Fane did not know what to do with him. He had more than a suspicion that his lower jaw had been fractured, and he wouldn't come to for quite a while, so he decided to leave him where he was.

Down the guard was a window, and light sifted from under a partly drawn shade. Fane went to it, knelt down and peered inside. At first, the lighting arrangement in the cabin baffled him, then he made out what it was.

One side of the room was brilliantly lighted, and the other side in deep shadow. That had been accomplished by a simple arrangement of a heavy shade to direct the rays where they were wanted. Fane was aware of the presence of several persons in the shadowed part of the cabin, although he could only make out that they were men.

There could be no mistake about the identity of the person the light revealed.

In an armchair in the lighted half of the room, smoking a cigarette and lounging at ease, was Nina Crestwood!

NINA CRESTWOOD, whom Fane had been picturing as in serious trouble, might have been posing there for a picture to be called "My Lady Nonchalant." She appeared to be right at home, and perfectly easy about herself.

Then the significance of the situation in the cabin broke on Fane. Nina was being subjected to a third degree. A third degree put on by crooks this time, for a change.

She was smiling, flicking ash from her cigarette. Then her lips moved, and Fane swore softly but venomously at the window pane which shut in her words. There must be some way for him to hear what was being said in that cabin. Had to be.

He got up and took another look at the man on the guards. He was stirring, moaning feebly, and might give the alarm any minute. Fane couldn't take chances, and was debating how best to dispose of him when the matter was taken summarily out of his hands.

A window two feet back of him swung outward and a long arm appeared, hand gripping an automatic. At the same instant a masked man slid around the corner of the cabin from the foredeck and covered him from that direction. A voice, bitingly sarcastic, drawled:

"Are you a good swimmer, Fane? If not, I suggest that you stand hitched—and go high!"

But for that gun at his back, Fane would have shot it out with the man on the guard. As it was, he went high.

The man with the fractured jaw sat up, grunted, spat out a tooth and snarled, "It's time you came! I've been lying here the past few minutes, with that ape plotting my end, and nothing I could do about it. My jaw feels like a piledriver had hit it!"

"Lucky to be alive," Fane told him. "I was just on the point of rolling you

into the drink to get rid of you. Too bad I hadn't the time."

"Shoot him, and be done with it!" the injured man pleaded, struggling to his feet. "Better yet, give me a gun and I'll do it! That will ease the pain a bit, at any rate!"

"Hold it!"

The voice of the man in the mask was brittle and cold, and the would-be killer froze at the command.

"When I want a man killed," the cold voice went on slowly, menacingly, "I'll say so. Take his weapons. Fane, if you so much as move, I'll fill you full of lead."

Fane didn't move.

"You were searching for Nina Crestwood," the cold voice went on, as Fane was disarmed and herded to the foredeck, "and you found her. Now, my dear cop, what are you going to do with her?"

He was laughing at Fane, and Fane didn't laugh back. Didn't say anything. He was listening, trying to identify the tones of the voice.

He was taken into the fierce light of the cabin, a gun muzzle at his spine. For an instant Nina Crestwood stared at him, her blue eyes widening to their utmost, then she arose dazedly.

"Al Fane!" she exclaimed, brushing a hand across her eyes as though to clear her vision. "What—where did you come from?"

"He descended from above," answered a voice from the shadowed side of the room, "but not as an emissary from heaven. He dropped from the bridge. That's what the thud we heard on the pilot deck meant. A nice stunt, that drop from the bridge, my dear sleuth, and I congratulate you on it. Too bad it gets you nothing—er, that is to say, nothing you will want."

"Tough luck for two of us tonight," Fane grunted. "Tall Boy got something he didn't like, too—and he had to take it. What's the idea, Panther? Why the third degree set-up?"

There was no answer at once. Then,

"So you identify me with that mythical person called the Panther, eh?" the masked leader queried, and chuckled. Fane didn't like his chuckle. It was too much like coffin-plates clashing. "A shot in the dark on your part, of course. As to the set-up, which you so readily recognize, it explains itself. I have been querying our charming guest, and doing it in the most approved manner. I trust you have no fault to find with it?"

"Not the slightest," Fane told him. "I saw through the window that you were getting nowhere. And," he added, glancing at the girl, "you won't."

"They are quite a beastly lot, Mr. Fane," Nina remarked, sitting down again. "For all that they wear attire commonly associated with gentlemen, they are animals, Jackals, I think."

If her scorn touched them, they gave no indication. On the contrary, the leader laughed amusedly.

"Miss Crestwood rates us very low," he said, "although we have accorded her every courtesy since she came aboard. A bit rough with her when she was taken from the dressing room, but that was through no fault of those who took her. It was your fault, Fane, who got so quickly on the trail."

"And I'd have been on it quicker," Fane told him, "if one of your thugs, Curt Heflin, hadn't stalled me away from the dressing room door while Miss Crestwood was being taken out. Well, that's something. I know one of your mob, Panther—and so does my man, Lou Carlin," he lied. "Lou won't be long nosing out your trail, now he has had something to smell of—"

Jeering laughter interrupted. A door into the corridor opened, and the sorriest looking wreck of a man Fane had ever seen came stumbling inside. His head was bloody, face bruised, eyes blackened. But for all that, Fane recognized him.

Lou Carlin was a prisoner aboard the boat!

CARLIN blinked rapidly in the white glare, then fixed his glance on Fane. "They got me, Al," he mumbled through swollen lips, "when I was searching the stalls. There was a fight. Don't remember how or when I got here, but—"

"You are here," the leader broke in amusedly, "which is what counts. Now that you have reported to your chief," the ironical voice continued, "I wish to say a few words."

He was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again his voice was not as before. Cold, yes—but the banter, the amused irony, was missing.

"Miss Crestwood overheard a conversation not intended for her ears," he stated, his words spaced like ice cubes in a tray. "And her reaction to that conversation precipitated tragedy. She may, if she chooses, disclose what she learned, what she overheard. What do you say, Miss Crestwood? Care to tell about it?"

Nina Crestwood's face, white and miserable, turned for a moment toward Fane. She started to speak, then her lids drooped, she shivered, and held her tongue.

The leader laughed softly. "I thought not," he said. "There are some things that can't be broadcast, and what Miss Crestwood learned late this afternoon is one of those things. There is something, however, that must be told, and that explains why the lady was brought here. We were querying her, without success, when your arrival interrupted, Fane. We shall try again."

Nina did not look up, and he resumed.

"Miss Crestwood learned a secret," he went on. "She learned the real identity of the person called the Panther—a sobriquet that you, Fane, very flatteringly bestowed upon me. So long as Miss Crestwood did not learn, did not even suspect, the identity of the second party to the conversation she overheard, all is well. But Miss Crestwood very stubbornly refuses to say as to that. She will neither deny

nor affirm. Perhaps now, Miss Crestwood, you will be less obdurate?"

It was perfectly all right for Miss Crestwood to know the identity of the Panther, but distinctly not all right for her to be aware of the name of a second person who was not the Panther at all!

The thing had Fane stumped. He was stumped, too, over the girl's refusal to say whether or not she knew the identity of the second man. What could she hope to gain by denying it, affirming it, or, for that matter, by her present course?

As Fane saw it, she was in the tightest kind of spot—along with Lou Carlin and himself. A spot so tight they couldn't worm out of it by their own efforts, and there was slight chance of help from anywhere else.

"Come, Miss Crestwood," the cold voice urged. "Will you make a clean breast of everything, or invite, by your silence, the—consequences?"

The girl raised her glance in an appeal to Fane.

"What can she expect at your hands," he asked, "in case she spills the dope?"

"That depends upon what the dope is."

"As I understand it," Fane put it, "if she is not as wise as you suspect she may be, then she has nothing to fear. Is that correct?"

"Quite."

"She might lie about it, you know?"

"A lie would not serve. I should detect it. I have given you a chance to speak, Miss Crestwood," he went on. "Are you going to take it?"

Nina Crestwood answered in one word. "No!"

"Take her away!" the leader ordered.

Two men led the girl from the cabin, and the leader turned to Fane.

"You and your man, bunglers both of you, have something coming," he said quietly. "As a preliminary, we shall all view the scenery from the pilot deck. Take them up."

GUARDED closely, Fane and Carlin were taken up to the hurricane deck of the boat, thence to the port guard where they were ordered to turn and face the leader, who leaned nonchalantly against a wall of the pilot house.

"You are aware, Fane, that no cop has ever got in scenting distance of the Panther, and told about it. None ever will. Why? Because they are invariably caught and disposed of—disposed of without delay. There will be a couple of dead flatties picked up in the river tomorrow. You and Carlin. Anything you want to say before I let you have it?"

Fane didn't answer. His attention was on something else. A boat had put out from the Missouri shore, the bandits' boat having left the Kaw and entered the Missouri River. The lights of the city beyond enabled the detective to place their position accurately. They were then almost opposite the Municipal Dock, and Fane knew that a fast police launch lay there always in readiness for action.

Was it the police boat he now saw coming out?

An exclamation from the pilot warned the leader, and he turned quickly to stare out across the water. He called a sharp command. A bell rang in the engine room below—and the boat leaped away down the stream, gathering speed instantly.

Sharp blasts from the oncoming boat told Fane what he wanted to know. It was the police launch, and it was coming at full speed!

And then, while Fane's eyes bulged and his voice stuck in his throat, Lou Carlin went into unexpected action.

He sprang to the starboard rail, leaped over it and plunged into the dark water below. A shrill yell broke from his lips as he disappeared, and almost immediately somebody on board the police launch broke the searchlight out. Its beam spattered over the water, steadied—and Fane gave a grunt of relief. Carlin was treading water, safe as yet—and the

launch was bearing down toward him.

The masked leader raised his gun and fired at the bobbing head in the water. The head kept bobbing. Before he could fire again, the searchlight was withdrawn.

The diversion Carlin had created gave Fane the chance for which he had been hoping. He leaped to the door of the pilot house, jerked it open and sprang inside. The pilot turned slightly—and took it squarely on the point of the jaw. He went down like a limp sack. With his left hand, Fane caught the wheel as it started a port swing, while his right grabbed the signal cord.

He rang twice, and the signal came back to him. Half-speed. The boat slowed, and Fane put the wheel hard over. The bow slued around and pointed toward the shore.

Wham! Wham!

Lead crashed through the glass of the pilot house, and Fane ducked far down, holding the wheel at the bottom. Again he reached for the signal cord. He called for full speed ahead. The engineer answered promptly—and the boat headed straight for the shore.

If he wasn't killed before he had the chance, he'd bring the boat about and lay it alongside the wharf. Otherwise, Fane meant to pile it up on shore.

He glanced out the starboard window, and saw something that puzzled him. There had been no more shooting, but there was plenty of smoke. A fog of it was boiling up from the lower deck, and it was thick and smothering. Was the boat on fire?

Then he got it. The Panther had been prepared for a chase. He had started a barrage of smoke. The boat was in the midst of a screen of dense, black clouds!

The police boat's whistle cut loose so near it caused Fane to jump. He sent back a blast in answer, whipped the wheel down to port—

They struck. First a slowing down, a ripping noise—a crash, a rending of timbers, and then the shock!

Fane went headfirst through the front window of the pilot house, landed spread out on the deck, was hurled forward like a pistol bullet into the forward-guard—and complete night!

CHAPTER III

SHOUTS, shots, whistle blasts—a bedlam greeted Fane's returning senses. Surprised to find that he still lived and was an actual part of the turmoil, he got to his feet, staggered to the starboard rail and peered over-side.

The smoke had partially cleared, the bulk of it floating off lazily toward the Kansas shore, and the police boat, grappled alongside, was quite distinct.

Fane hailed it, got no answer, and started for the forward companion-way. Evidently neither craft had sustained mortal damage, since both were afloat and neither listing appreciably.

He hurried down to the foredeck. There he encountered Lieutenant Bob Stone, officer in charge of the police boat. Stone's gun came up, then lowered as he recognized Fane in spite of his bleeding cuts.

"So you are mixed up in this, eh?" Stone demanded. "What the hell is it all about, anyhow?"

"Didn't Lou tell you?" Fane asked.

"Lou got a bump on the head when the boats rammed, and didn't tell me anything!" Stone snapped. "Here we get orders to run up to the stock yards bridge and find out what all the shooting was about, we sight a cabin boat, the boat arouses suspicion by trying to run away, we give chase—and have hell rammed out of us. On top of that, we are fired on, come aboard and have found nobody home so far except a bone-headed private cop—"

"You didn't find a woman?" Fane snapped in.

"Didn't find anybody," Stone repeated. "So I ask you—what the hell?"

"You should have found some men in masks, and Nina Crestwood. She was abducted from the American

Royal Building, after her uncle, Carter, was killed and the box office robbed. How the devil they made a getaway is beyond me."

"I can explain that. They had a couple of motor boats trailing this boat, *The Firefly*. After we rammed, they piled in and got away under the smoke screen. We heard the launches but couldn't see 'em. Two of our boats are out on the river now, trying to jump them up. Maybe they will. Now, Al, you come through."

Fane related the story to Stone, since there was no reason for holding out. There was this exception—he told him that Nina Crestwood was being held for ransom, and mentioned nothing at all about the real purpose for which she had been brought aboard.

"And you say the leader was the Panther?" the lieutenant asked when he had finished. "What makes you so sure?"

"I called him Panther, and he didn't deny it. Besides, he fits my idea of that animal."

"And we were that close to nabbing him!" Stone cried exasperatedly. "Hell, what a rotten break?"

Lou Carlin came along just then. He was a sorry sight. "I'm going home and get me some shut-eye," he grumbled. "If you want to make a night of it, Al, okay by me."

"I'm going along," Fane told him. "I'll make a detailed report at headquarters first thing in the morning, Stone. If you get news of the Panther, or of Nina Crestwood, let me hear it quick. See you later."

There were several motorboats alongside the police launch by then, and Fane and Carlin commandeered one and were set ashore. They taxied to town, and Carlin continued on to his home and to bed. Fane went to his office.

Fane's first job would be to get on Tommy Tarrant's trail and, regardless of the hour, he got at it. He called the hotels, and found him registered at the Van Horn. But that's all he

found. Tarrant had not come in since early evening.

Fane hung up, changed clothes, got a pair of six-guns to replace the ones which had been taken from him, and went to the Hotel Van Horn. The clerk gave him a key, and he let himself into Tarrant's suite. If he couldn't find Tarrant, it might be that he could find something in the room that would give him a lead.

That hope blew up. Tarrant was in the clear, in so far as his personal effects revealed. Fane gave up that line, and went back to his office. He started calling his operatives, scattering them in the stock yards district with orders to find Tarrant. It would be strange if they failed to run across his trail somewhere.

After that was done, he gave thought to the thing that had him puzzled more than all else concerning the case up to then. It was this: Why had a section in the back wall of the Crestwood dressing room been made removable?

At first glance, it seemed easily answered. The little door had been made for the purpose of abducting Nina. As a matter of fact, she had been taken out by way of it. But here was where the rub came in. If it had been arranged to abduct her from the dressing room, why had the attempt been made on the street in front of the American Royal Building?

He took up the phone and got the night desk at police headquarters. "Give me Cap'n Bream, Sarge," he requested, and got him.

"Cap," he asked, "was it possible for a bullet fired inside the lobby at the Royal to have got Carter Crestwood last night?"

"Hell, no!" Bream came back promptly. "Crestwood was shot at close quarters, Al. And we know who bumped him, too, if you're asking me that."

"I am. Who did it?"

"Who?" Captain Bream snorted angrily. "Who but that high-stepping, horse-riding niece of his—Nina

Crestwood! Nina got him, Al, and nobody else—”

“A dish of raspberries to you, Cap!” Fane cut in. “Of all the damned fool theories—”

“Theory hell!” Bream bleated back. “Nina and her uncle had a bitter quarrel yesterday afternoon. They were still at it when they started out for the horse show. When the chauffeur stopped at the door, the girl jumped out and Carter after her. He tried to stop her, catching her dress and tearing it. There was a shot—and Carter fell. Nina ran. *And there wasn't another person near enough to have shot him.* What are you going to do with that? Got any more raspberries?”

Fane hadn't any. He hung up.

BEFORE Fane could recover from the clout Captain Bream had dealt him, his telephone rang. He glanced at his watch. Four o'clock in the morning. The call couldn't be from anybody but an operative. He lifted the receiver.

“Fane,” he announced.

He had guessed wrong.

“Thank God I've succeeded in getting you!” came in the voice of Lowman Bostwick, the Royal's managing-director. “Stay where you are. I'll be with you within fifteen minutes!”

Without waiting for an answer, he hung up. Somebody else wanted Fane a moment later. It was Curtis Hefin, the assistant-manager.

“Things are in an awful mess, Fane!” he declared. “I've got to see you at once! Have you had any word from Bostwick?”

“I'm running a detective agency, not an information bureau!” Fane snapped back. Somehow or other, he didn't like Hefin. “If you want to see me, I'm right here in my office. Are you coming up?”

“Just as soon as I can get there,” he replied. “Fifteen or twenty minutes.”

Fane answered a rap on the door, and admitted Bostwick. The Royal managing-director's fine, swarthy face

had worry written all over it, and his slate-gray eyes were strained.

“The dumb police have decided that Nina killed Carter!” he exploded without preliminary. “They will arrest her the minute they find her. You must get on the job, Fane. Can you think of anything to do that will help?”

“Certainly,” Fane replied, pushing bottle and glass toward him. “Pinch the bird that killed Carter. That's the only thing that will help.”

“The gang will probably communicate with me, or some other known friend of Carter and Nina, and demand ransom. That goes without saying,” Bostwick offered. “I'm prepared to pay whatever sum is asked, and let the matter of the abduction drop—but I will never rest until the killer of Carter Crestwood dangles from a rope!”

“He'll dangle,” Fane assured him. “In the meantime, have you any idea where Thomas Tarrant is at the present moment?”

“That is something I hoped you would know,” Bostwick came back, his brow deeply corrugated. “Tarrant disappeared from the dressing room directly after you left it through the secret door. I have not seen him since.”

Curt Hefin came at that moment. His face, like Bostwick's, was worried. He took a long drink, and asked, “Have you heard the news?”

“Plenty,” Fane grunted. “What's on your mind?”

“What would be, except the asinine accusation against Nina Crestwood!” he ripped. “Bream and his cops are damned fools, and I want you to prove it to everybody's satisfaction—”

“No can do,” Fane interrupted. “Even the great Al Fane, at your service,” he went on sarcastically, “can't prove what isn't true. Bream is not a fool. He is acting as any good cop would. A quarrel between Nina and Carter at home. A row in the car. Both get out. They struggle—and Carter is shot dead. Nobody but Nina close enough to have done the job—”

"Good God!" Bostwick broke in amazedly. "Do you believe she killed him?"

"I do not. But Bream does. Nina Crestwood is just another woman to him. The female of the species will kill upon occasion, gentlemen, and Cap Bream is not unaware of that fact. So he is going to arrest Nina—if he finds her."

"He must not find her!" Bostwick ejaculated.

"Not by a damned sight!" Heflin applauded vehemently.

"That is as may be," Fane said. "Somebody must find her, or she will be left long in her present fix—else killed. That sounds harsh, I know. But it is true—"

"But the ransom," Heflin demanded. "Won't they release her when that is paid?"

"Who the hell is talking about a ransom—except you two?" Fane wanted to know. "There will be no demand for ransom, for the very good reason that Nina Crestwood was not taken with a ransom in view."

Heflin recovered first. "What—what are you saying, Fane?" he managed.

"That no ransom figures in the abduction," Fane repeated.

"I don't believe that," came from Bostwick. "Why, man alive, the thing was all planned out in advance, as witness that carefully arranged hole in the dressing room wall!"

"It was planned to abduct Nina that way as a last resort," Fane told him. "In case they failed to get her when they killed Carter."

"Who would wish the death of Crestwood?" Bostwick demanded. "Why should anybody plot to kill him? You are all wet! Carter was killed by a bandit on guard outside the building. One of the mob that robbed the gate. Had Carter been five minutes later in his arrival, he would be alive right now!"

"Exactly!" Heflin declared.

"Bunk!" Fane told them.

"It's all too complicated for me to follow," Bostwick declared. "But I can understand this. Carter was killed by somebody other than Nina, and I want that somebody behind bars. Write your own ticket, Fane—but get him!"

"Fair enough. Now, tell me this. Do either of you own a cabin launch called *The Firefly*?"

Neither owned such a launch.

"Ever hear of *The Firefly*, or see it on the river?"

Neither had.

"Well, you'll hear plenty about the boat tomorrow, or rather, today," he informed them. "And now, gentlemen, that's all I have to ask you."

LIEUTENANT STONE called Fane up just after Bostwick and Heflin left the office.

"We drew a blank all around, Al," he grumbled. "No trace of the boats they got away in, thanks to the smoke. Furthermore, we haven't got any dope on the ownership of *The Firefly*. A lot of the folks visiting the Royal this week came up the river in their own pleasure boats, and no check was made on them. *The Firefly*, we found, had recently been given a fresh coat of white paint, and her name boards are brand new. And that is that. You got anything?"

"Nothing but a grouch," Fane answered.

"Take something for it," Stone advised. "That's what I'm doing for mine."

One by one, Fane's operatives reported. No trace of Tarrant. The Van Horn reported him still missing. The police, queried, knew nothing about him. Fane shot a wire to New York City. Nothing much from there. Tarrant had a good record, but had grown up abroad. Wealthy, old family, good sport. That was all.

Lou Carlin dropped in at eleven o'clock. He looked bad, and felt worse.

"Al," he offered, dropping into a chair, "we're all tangled up with some lads from the chocolate cake division.

Dress suit bozos—and they're bad medicine. We needn't buzz around among the cornbread boys a-tall!"

Fane grunted. "You get track of that chauffeur?"

"Yeah. He's still at the Crestwood place. Sticks to his story, Al. Thinks, even if he don't come right out and say it, that Nina bumped Carter off."

"Does he know what they quarreled about?"

"He says he don't."

"You keep that bird located. He may be important yet."

The telephone rang.

"Al Fane," the detective answered.

"I am Nina Crestwood," came in a low voice. "I'm down at Lexington. Be at the Hotel Lexington—it's a small place on a side street near the river—at seven tonight. Don't fail or be late—"

"Hold it!" Fane ordered. "Why not go to the cops where you are, put yourself under their protection—"

"I cannot!" she cried. "I must see you first! I need advice, help, and I can't turn to my so-called friends! I do not know any more who is my friend," she went on, heat in her voice. "Please, will you come?"

Fane thought rapidly. Then, "On this condition. Go to the long-distance telephone office. Wait there until you get a call from me. Then answer. Can you manage that?"

"I—I think so. Yes. Is it so very important?"

"It absolutely is. Get there at once."

She hung up. Fane waited a few minutes, then got Lexington.

"Why did you have me come here, Mr. Fane?" Nina asked, when he had her on the other end.

"Just to make certain that you were free to move about of your own will," Fane answered. "No trap for your Uncle Al—and he'll be there on time. Sure you're safe until then?"

"Yes—as sure, that is, as I can be of anything. You will be on time?"

"To the minute."

She hung up, and Fane turned to Carlin.

"Nina Crestwood got away from the Panther and his crew," he informed him. "Don't know how. She's hiding out in Lexington, about thirty miles down the Missouri, and we can't do a damned thing about it until seven o'clock tonight. Don't dare make a move for fear of landing her in hot water. That's what I gathered from her reticence about things. She's in bad in some way, and doesn't dare go to the regular cops. You handle things here, and I'll take the Lexington end."

"What about some help down there, just in case?" Carlin cut in.

"One man will be lucky to get by without being spotted," Fane pointed out. "I'll be the man. Watch things at this end, and use your own judgment. That's all I can tell you to do."

CHAPTER IV

SEATED at a table in the dining room of the Hotel Lexington, the lobby visible through open doors, Fane ate supper while waiting for Nina to appear or get word to him. He had hardly begun on the platter of fried fish he had ordered, when he observed a tall man standing on the pavement outside, his face near the front window. Only for an instant was the face there, then it vanished.

But that instant had been enough for Fane. The man outside was the chap whose jaw he had been near to fracturing on board *The Firefly* the past night. Fane knew he could not be mistaken.

Had he been shadowed to the hotel, or had the girl been seen?

In either case, the situation was one full of menace. He glanced around the dining room—and caught the eye of a waitress who stood near the door to the kitchen. The waitress looked at him steadily for an instant, then made her way to his table.

"Message for Al Fane," she said under her breath, while brushing imaginary crumbs from the cloth. "Know him?"

"Sure. I'm Fane. Spill it."

"Up stairs, first floor, room number 240. Girl wants you."

She passed on toward the front of the dining room, and Fane went into the lobby. The waitress might have given him a bum steer. Might, in fine, have been sending him into a trap. On the other hand, Nina Crestwood might well be in room 240, waiting for him. It wouldn't take long to determine the matter, at any rate.

Fane went up the stairs, found room 240 at the end of a corridor, and knocked.

"Who?" came in a woman's voice from the other side of the door.

"Al Fane."

The door opened and Fane walked in. Nina Crestwood, dressed in cheap clothing which she had doubtless secured during the day, was alone in the room. She started to speak, but Fane was abruptly peering through a crack in the doorway. What he saw caused him to slap the door shut and lock it. To push the bed over against it and to pile the bureau on top of the bed.

"What is the matter?" Nina cried.

"Plenty," Fane answered, going to a window and raising it. "We have callers outside—two of them. Come here!"

The tall man whom Fane had seen at the window and a short, dark companion, had been coming down the corridor, guns drawn, when the detective peered out. They would be at the door soon.

"We're in a jam," he told Nina, and lifted her onto the window sill. "I'm going to lower you from the window, and drop you. It's an unpaved alley below, and you probably won't be hurt."

The door bulged under an assault from the corridor, and the barricade began to move. Fane lowered Nina from the window by catching her hands, and dropped her. He heard the thud of her body on the ground.

Crash!

The door gave, the barricade went skidding across the floor—and Fane swung out, down, and dropped. He landed on his feet, and found Nina on

the ground nearby. She had turned an ankle. He caught her up, tossed her over a shoulder and went pounding off down the alley.

The chase was on immediately. He heard footbeats back of him, and put on all the speed he had. As he neared the mouth of the alley, a man suddenly loomed up there. Before he had a chance to fire, Fane let him have a slug from his gun. He shot for his stomach—and didn't miss. Couldn't afford to miss. He went down screeching, and Fane made the street over his body.

Blindly, not knowing the lay of things, he turned to his right and headed down the poorly lighted street. Nina, light though she was, began to slow him down. He had to make a haven of some sort soon, or it was curtains. He staggered across an intersecting street and saw the Missouri just below. It was dark down along the shore, and he made for the river.

"Put me down!" Nina told him. "You can't make it with me to load you—Oh!"

The scream was coincidental with the report of a revolver from back of them. Fane staggered, his arms relaxed, and the girl slid to her feet. Fane swore, clawed at his head—then slapped to his knees, to surrender to a swirling night he couldn't fight away!

WHEN the detective regained consciousness, he was lying on his back in darkness. His head ached, and his lips were parched. He groaned aloud.

"Fane!"

Nina Crestwood spoke his name from somewhere close at hand.

"Here!" he answered. "Tied up!"

"I'm tied, too," she told him. "So tight it hurts!"

"Any idea where we are?"

"Only that we were taken a short way out of town in a car. My head was covered. But from the smell in here and the feel of things, we're underground."

"Yeah. Coal mine. Lots of them around Lexington. Well," he went on, "I guess the Panther takes this trick—damn him!"

The place in which they lay began to glow dimly, and a man came in with a lantern. By its light, Fane made out that they were actually in a room in an abandoned coal mine. The walls were streaked with black, with here and there chunks of slaty substance jutting out. There were chunks and bits of coal on the floor.

The light showed him something else. In the middle of the room was a table with chairs about it. Other seats, boxes and kegs, were here and there. Evidently it was a meeting place of some kind.

The man with the lantern went to the table, set the lantern down, and Fane saw his face. It was the tall crook whose jaw he had damaged.

"Well, Al," he said, sitting down at the table and turning his eyes on Fane, "how do you like the little game now?"

"Can't say that I'm sold on the hand I'm holding," Fane told him. "But maybe I'll better it in the draw."

"There won't be any draw," the crook jibed. "You must play 'em as they are—and it isn't a good hand. You can't win. Don't you understand that you've lost? That this is the end?"

"Looks like it. But something may break in my favor yet. It has been known to happen. What's the idea for all the crowing, anyhow?"

"I'll explain things to our guest," a voice announced, and from the entrance to a stoop forward, the killer of *The Firefly* entered. He was dressed immaculately, and his face was masked as before. "You have managed to disarrange some plans of ours, Fane," he went on, sitting down at the table, "and we don't feel any too good about it. However, we're going right ahead with them—and put them over. Things had to stop until we got you, and the Crestwood girl. We have done that."

He paused, and gave that coffin-plate chuckle.

"Picture four motor cars loaded with men who have been carefully picked by our expert picker, Mr. Croaker Stevens, whom you see before you," the speaker went on, his tone a brag. "They are armed with sub-machine guns, gas bombs, high explosives. Picture such a crew as that, numbering twenty, attacking an unsuspecting town known for its wealth stored in two big banks. Two million in cash and more!

"Picture those determined men attacking those banks at a given moment, looting them of their last dollar, mowing down with machine guns all who resist or get in the way! A desperate, bloody picture, eh? Something to make the shivers run up the spine of the entire nation!

"After it is over, a hideout that is undiscoverable, where those men will remain secure until they can get clear of the country, singly and in pairs, after the rage has died down. Isn't that a fine program for the final appearance of the man called the Panther? Tell me, Fane, isn't it a magnificent exit gesture?"

"Yeah," Fane yawned with pretended unconcern, "if it works. You may have heard that old wheeze about the best laid scheme of mice and men?"

"It will work, never fear!"

Again that cold chuckle.

"Well," Fane told him, "I'll never believe it. And since I'm slated to go out soon, I'll never know about it anyhow. Why bore me with the details?"

"That is where you are wrong!" the masked man exclaimed. "You are going to live long enough to congratulate me on my master stroke—after it is an accomplished fact. I hate you, Fane, and I hate that damned pink-faced hussy with you! I'm going to let you live in slow torture. Cause you both to wish I had mercifully ended things tonight. You are going to beg me to kill you—damn you! And I shall—with my own hand! After I have retired and have time for leisurely

satisfaction. Does that prospect please?"

"No," came from the girl. "Neither does it surprise. That would be in keeping with your nature. You're cursed with a blood lust—and it will get you in the end. I should like to see it get you, but if I do not, I shall go out knowing you won't be far behind. And now, if you have nothing more to say, I'd like to get a breath of air you haven't tainted."

"Yeah, Panther," Fane seconded, "let us see as little of you as possible. Just having you around is about the worst torture you could inflict, though, so I guess we're out of luck."

"You'll get your wish—for a short time," the cold voice of the masked man informed them. "I'm sending you to that safe hideout I spoke of, where you will be waiting for me when my work is done. Thoughts of seeing you two again will hearten me greatly," he ended with his cold chuckle.

Croaker Stevens called out, and two burly, unmasked gorillas came from the stope. The ropes were removed from Fane's legs and from the girl's, and they were helped up. They were led to the table, bandannas were bound over their eyes, and they were gagged. But before the bandage was secured, Fane's glance found something on the table that made him get his breath in a gasp, while cold chills actually did run up his spine!

"Take them away!" the hard voice ordered. "See you tomorrow night, you poor saps—and how!"

Fane and the girl were led along a passage, placed in a big tub with a rope attached. A windlass creaked, and they were hoisted from the mine into the fresh, night air. A truck with a tarpaulin cover over the bed stood near. Fane was lifted into it and ordered to lie down. He did, and his ankles were tied again. Nina was placed beside him, and her legs were securely bound. The tarpaulin was pulled over them, and the truck rumbled away.

Fane had for the moment lost in-

terest in what might happen to them. His mind was tortured by other things. Things that threatened violence to dozens, perhaps hundreds, of defenseless people.

He was thinking of that final appearance of the Panther, and his mind was numbed by the monstrous possibilities it held.

WHAT Fane had seen lying on the table in the mine was positive evidence that the Panther's scheme was a real one. That he had not been boasting just to make them squirm.

On the table, spread out with its four corners fastened down with thumb tacks, had lain a blueprint—a map of a town, picturing every street, alley, and the various roads leading into it. There was a square in the center of the map, with a smaller square to represent a building in the middle of it. A court house. Around the large square other smaller squares were placed, representing business houses—and on two opposite corners were black dots, each lettered with the word: BANK.

It was a map of the town where the Panther meant to stage his final raid. Where people were to be mercilessly slaughtered, if they resisted, and millions taken from those who survived. It was an act almost too savage for the mind to accept as possible, yet Fane had no doubt that the Panther would do just what he had said he would do.

Fane had seen one thing more in that brief glance at the map. He had seen the name of the town at the top.

Lexington!

The Panther meant to rob the wealthy mining and farming town, and on the day approaching!

What could Fane do about it?

So far as he could determine, they were in charge of the two gorillas, one driving the truck and the other on the seat with him. Doubtless the canvas tarpaulin bore the name of some mining concern, or a farm products com-

pany. It would not be stopped or bothered no matter what route it took. Trust the Panther's scheming brain for that. If he were to escape, it would be through his own unaided efforts.

During the first half hour, while the truck jolted over what was unmistakably a rough woods road, he considered the possibilities—and got an idea.

Working himself up toward the front end of the truck, his movements concealed from the front by the tarpaulin, he managed to bring his hands, which were tied back of him, against Nina's face. The girl was lying very still, probably sensing the fact that he was trying some plan or other.

Presently Fane's fingers closed on the cloth with which she was gagged, fumbled for a minute or two, and the gag came out. Then he managed to get his bound wrists against her lips. He held them there, waiting. Would she catch the idea?

She did. With a feeling of satisfaction, Fane felt her teeth graze his wrist, then fasten on the cords around it. It was a slow job, often interrupted when the jolts separated them. But it was accomplished at last. Fane's hands were freed!

He freed his ankles, then got the ropes off the girl. "What next?" she queried in an excited whisper.

"Wait!"

Fane began to feel about him in search of something he might use as a club. Surely there would be something useable in the body of the truck. He found it. Against the front end was a box, and the box contained mining tools. Fane selected a two-foot Stilson wrench, then laid back down beside the girl. They might have got out at the back and run, but bullets from the two gorillas' guns could outrun them. Fane had a better plan than that. He waited.

Half an hour later the truck stopped.

"Lie still!" Fane whispered. "Act as though you still were tied."

"Yes!"

The two gorillas came to the back of the truck, and one caught hold of the tarpaulin.

"Going to pack 'em on our backs, or untie their legs an' make 'em walk?" one asked.

"Hell, make 'em walk!"

The canvas was jerked off—and Fane acted.

He jack-knifed upward and forward, swung at the head of the man nearest him, and sent him down with a crushing blow of the wrench. The second gorilla, taken by surprise, had time to yell once, to go for his hip—and then the wrench split his skull like so much paper.

Fane lost no time. He took the guns and cartridges from the bodies and he and the girl got in the truck. Fane turned it around and headed it toward Lexington. He had to get to the city and warn the cops about what was waiting for them tomorrow. That was his one idea at the moment. Nina Crestwood and her troubles could wait. She was but a mite in the bigger thing.

"What now?" Nina asked, her breath coming fast.

"Tell you later! I've got something important as hell to do now!"

IF they could get into the town without meeting any of the Panther's gang, then the bloody scheme of the arch crook would be defeated. There would be time to get the militia, machine guns, armed citizens—

Fane saw the green touring car just as the truck's front wheels rolled onto the pavement outside of the city. It was coming toward him, and loaded with men. There was but one thing to do, and he did it.

"Hold on!" he shouted to the girl. "And duck low!"

He slammed his foot down on the gas pedal, shot toward the oncoming car, swerved just before he reached it—and sideswiped it against the curb. The truck careened, righted itself and went on. Went on for a short distance only—then coughed itself dead.

"Out!" Fane ordered, and leaped to the ground.

The girl followed, keeping close to him. Men were coming back of them. A bullet sang near. Fane turned left into a dark street, and he and the girl ran. The street dipped toward the river, and ended at a wharf. They were pocketed, and, unless a means of escape offered at once, there would be nothing for it but to fight it out.

"Maybe we can get a boat!" Nina suggested, as they raced onto the wharf.

A man came out of a shack nearby, carrying a lantern.

"You folks wanting a boat to go somewheres?" the man asked.

Fane heard them coming along the dark street above him.

"A motorboat," he answered. "Got one?"

"Shore. Best on the river. I'll git it."

He did—but an interruption came from the street above.

"Stop down there!" a voice bawled. "Stop, in the name of the law!"

"Hurry!" Fane snapped, tossing Nina into the boat. It was not the law up there, and he knew it.

"No!" the boatman bleated. "Them's police up there! You ain't going nowhere in this here boat—"

"Like hell we ain't!" Fane told him—and dropped him with a jolt to the jaw.

He leaped down into the boat, kicked the motor over—and it caught.

"Grab the tiller!" he ordered.

"I've already grabbed it!" Nina informed him tersely.

Out toward the channel they sped—with lead singing around them, plunking in the water to port and starboard. Fane sent a few compliments of his own into the night, but couldn't tell whether or not they reached home.

For the time being at least, they were safe!

"Know anything about this man's river?" he called to Nina.

"Yes. Peddler's Island is ten miles below. The channel splits there, and

Poor Man's Bayou can be reached from the left hand shute. We'd better make for the bayou. The Kansas City highway crosses it three miles up."

"Make for it," Fane told her. "And don't save the gas!"

He moved up close to Nina. It was certainly not a good time to ask questions, but he had some that must be asked. Something might happen later to queer the question-and-answer game. So he snatched what might be only a passing opportunity.

"Keep your glance ahead, Nina, and I'll take care of the rear," he cautioned, then asked:

"How did you escape from the Panther?"

"I didn't. There was no Panther. I was taken off *The Firefly* and put into a motorboat with three other men. All masked. The tall man, whom you remember, was one. But he was not in the boat for long. We put him ashore across the river on the Kansas side, and then we made a run down the stream.

"Something went wrong with the motor, and we put in to shore at a little village ten miles above Lexington. It was dark, and I ran. A motorcar was handy, key in the ignition lock, and I took it. Half a mile from Lexington, I left the car, walked in and got a room at the little hotel. That is all, Mr. Fane."

"Not by several closely typed pages!" he told her. "Just filler-stuff, Nina, so far. For instance, why are you scared of the regular cops?"

"Because I cannot tell them my story."

"But you can tell me?"

She was silent. Changed her mind, eh? Well, maybe not.

"You are accused of murdering Carter Crestwood," Fane told her. "What about it?"

That roused her.

"What?" she demanded. "I am accused—Oh, what nonsense!"

"Sure it is. But who did kill him?"

"That man we heard called Croaker

Stevens. Carter and I were quarreling when the car stopped at the Royal. There were several other cars parked there, and one sedan double-parked right across from us. Uncle Carter tried to stop me from entering the building, when he heard shots, and we struggled. My face was turned toward the open door of our car, and I saw the opposite door open and a man creep in. I thrust Uncle Carter off—and the man fired. It was the man we saw tonight—Croaker. I screamed and ran. At the door of the Royal another man grabbed me, but I eluded him. There was shooting, and I knew it to be a hold-up. You know the rest."

"Wrong again," Fane corrected. "You had to ride the King to win, you told me. Why?"

"Because—because I could no longer accept money from Carter Crestwood!" she flared. "I had none myself. The King was worth fifty thousand dollars, should he win. That is why!"

FANE began to see a great, white light! What a fool he had been not to see it before!

"You say that the tall bird with the icicle voice was not the Panther," she reminded her. "How do you know that?"

"Because I had found out the Panther's identity. And he could not—he could not have been there on the boat—because—because—"

She hesitated, and Fane finished for her, "Because the Panther was dead?"

She shot him a quick glance, and her lips trembled. "How—how did you guess that?" she asked.

"Didn't exactly guess it. On the boat, for instance. The tall bird said you knew who the Panther was, and that did not matter. If you even suspected the identity of a certain second party, that did matter. He, of course, was the second party. Easy to see it now. You overheard Carter talking on a telephone. You confronted him with your knowledge—"

"Yes, yes!" And words came tumbling thereafter. "Carter had a hidden phone in his own study. A private wire to some place. He did not like me to be in his study, but I was there yesterday afternoon, reading. I heard him coming, and hid back of a divan. Carter was in a bad humor. He took the phone from back of some books in a case, and got a party. And—and, Mr. Fane, I heard Carter Crestwood, my own uncle, discussing the final details of a plan to rob the American Royal! Carter Crestwood, shielded by a respectable name, enjoying an enviable reputation, supposedly a man of great wealth, was in reality the blood-stained beast called the Panther!"

Fane waited. Presently she recovered and went on.

"I taxed him with it. He admitted it, because he could not deny it. But he pointed out that if I told it, there would be terrible disgrace for our name. I'm proud of that name. Carter swore the hold-up should not take place, that he would disband his men, do all he could to right the wrongs he had done—and I, like a fool, agreed never to tell what I knew!"

Could it be possible, Fane wondered, that Crestwood had not canceled the plot to rob the Royal? That he had planned the kidnapping of his niece there at the door? It didn't ring true. Nina went on talking.

"It was on the way to the Royal that I suspected he might not have called off the robbery," she informed Fane. "Carter had made all kinds of excuses to delay our arrival, throwing me late—"

"That's it!" Fane broke in. "Carter figured the hold-up would be pulled before he got there—and it was really timed for the exact moment of his arrival! But go on, Miss Crestwood."

"There is nothing else."

"There is," Fane broke in. "The name of the second party to that telephone conversation. What is the name?"

Then he got the real surprise of the evening.

"I don't know who the other man was. I heard only one side of the conversation, and the name of the other was not mentioned. I held my tongue about that when questioned on the boat, believing my life would be safe so long as they wanted that information."

A case in the bag—and out again! Fane swore under his breath.

"Wasn't there something in the papers, some time back, about your engagement to Lowman Bostwick?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes. But the engagement was broken. I became engaged to another—Tommy Tarrant, if you must know. But why the question?"

Engaged to Tarrant! Fane saw another suspect ~~pop~~ away from him. Before he could answer Nina's query, she called warningly:

"Listen!"

CHAPTER V

THE exclamation from Nina brought Fane back to the business immediately in hand.

"Boat coming behind us!"

He heard it then. The staccato exhaust of a motor beat its warning into his ears. He looked back, but could see nothing. He would see it soon enough, though, unless he could get more speed out of his boat than it was showing. He tried, but it was no use. The little motor was then doing its best.

The motor behind was doing better. The boat itself appeared in the gloom not more than a quarter mile away, and it was streaking through the water like a torpedo.

"There's Peddlar's Island ahead!" Nina called back. "I'm going to run around its head and into the left-hand chute!"

"Make it snappy!" Fane yelled back. "We're outclassed in this regatta!"

Pop! Pop! Pop!

The pursuer had drawn closer, and had opened up. Fane would have given a lot for a rifle right then, but a pair of .44 caliber sixes was the best he had to offer them.

"I'm going to make a sharp turn out of the channel!" warned the girl. Pop! Pop!

Two more shots back of them—and yet no song of lead had screamed in their ears, and no little missiles had hissed as they kissed water. What was wrong? Could the rifleman be that far off his target? Damned poor shooting, if you asked Fane.

Pop! Pop!

Then he understood. The rifleman was not shooting at them at all. He was firing on somebody that was chasing him, just as he was chasing Fane and the girl!

"Hit the high spots!" he yelled to Nina, as he felt the boat swerve. "We've got a chance, if we can make it into Poor Man's Bayou."

At sound of his voice, Nina turned her head slightly, took her eyes off the course, the boat swerved sharply—and the next instant it sloughed out of the channel far to the right, struck thin water and was fast in the mud!

Fast in the mud, Peddlar's Island a hundred yards over the bow—and death hot at their heels!

The shock of the grounding had thrown Fane against the girl, and but for that she would have gone over the bow. He caught her and saved both from a ducking. She screamed at him:

"Why did you have to speak when you did?"

"Why did you have to turn your head?"

No time to quarrel. The motor boat was coming down like a wolf that had sighted its kill, and chasing it was another wolf—also bent on a kill.

Fane jumped into the water, lifted Nina to his shoulder and started sloshing his way to shore. He reached it, put her down—and then stared at

the strangely maneuvering boat beyond.

The first boat was swerving out of the channel as Nina had done, and heading for the left-hand chute. The driver of that boat did not turn his head at a crucial moment—but made the chute with perfect ease. Made it, and swept on out of sight along the wooded line of the island.

The boat in pursuit, a bigger one than either of the others, slowed speed just above the island, seemed to hesitate for a decision, then kept on in the channel, taking the chute on the right-hand side. Its speed was promptly cut more, then the engine died entirely.

"Nina," Fane said, "you hide in the brush. I'm going to find out who was manning that second boat. I already know who was in the first—the one that took the left-hand chute. One of them at least. It was Lou Carlin doing the driving—though how he happens to be here is something I can't even guess. Stay hid, and I'll be back soon."

HE stepped off rapidly toward the right-hand side of the island. He had not told Nina why he wanted to do that, but he knew why himself. He wanted to do his best to stop the two men who had manned the second boat, and do it before they could set foot on land—if that happened to be their aim. He hurried along, and broke cover.

Hugging the opposite shore, too far off for Fane to reach them with his six-guns, the two men sat in their boat. Not for long, however, did they remain there. The motor popped again, and the boat began heading toward the shore of the island.

In the bow stood a tall figure, a rifle at ready. He evidently only suspected there might be somebody hiding in the timber.

"If only I had a rifle!" Fane exclaimed aloud, and with feeling. "I'd give a thousand cold for a rif—"

"Take mine, Fane," interrupted a quiet voice back of him. "I'd rather trust your marksmanship than mine."

Fane wheeled as though a snake had hissed, gun forward—and looked into the white, drawn face of Tommy Tarrant!

"Drop it!" Fane snarled. "Drop the gun—"

"Hold hard, Al!" came the familiar voice of Lou Carlin, who made his appearance from the brush just then. "Tarrant is a square guy. I found him tied up and gagged in a houseboat below the stock yards bridge today, and we took your trail—"

Wham! Wham!

The tall man in the boat was tall no longer. He had shortened himself by squatting down. His lead raked the foliage, and they flattened out on the ground.

"Give me that rifle!" Fane snapped savagely.

Tarrant passed it to him, and he drew down on the man in the bow, his head barely visible.

Once, twice, thrice— At the third shot, the crouching rifeman arose suddenly, staggered a bit, then pitched into the water. The man at the stern made a wild leap to grab the falling rifle—and Fane got him in mid-air.

"Get the boat!" Tarrant cried. "It's drifting!"

Carlin, a fish in the water, plunged in and swam rapidly toward the boat, caught it at the bow and piled in. He broke out a paddle and steered it to the shore.

The man in the boat was not dead. He had been shot through the chest, and was going fast.

Fane looked down at the white face, into the dimming eyes of Lowman Bostwick!

Bostwick, managing-director of the American Royal, sportsman, wealthy favorite of society, had only a few minutes to live, and he realized it.

"You win, damn you!" he gasped as Fane bent over him. "But for you, and your unbelievable luck, I'd have put over the biggest single coup today that

this country ever heard of! But you beat me out—and I'm dying in a boat like any ordinary crook. Well, anyhow, I hope I gave you a good scrap."

"You did," Fane told him. "Who was it doing the rifle shooting?"

"Croaker Stevens. I got hold of the Croaker when I decided to rub out Carter Crestwood and take his place. Carter wasn't hard enough, and that damned niece of his—to whom, by the way, I believed myself engaged until I learned she'd gone over to Tarrant—was getting dangerous. Croaker got together some of his gang and recruited some more picked scoundrels, and we would have made a fine team—but for you."

"If it hadn't been me, Bostwick," Fane said soberly, "it would have been somebody else."

"Perhaps," Bostwick agreed, and his voice grew weaker. "Ambition is a—hell of a—thing, Fane!" he said with a ghastly grin. "In my case it—proved so. I—got tired being—second to Crestwood. Tired doing—the bloody work for—him, I wanted to be the Panther—instead—instead—"

"Of just the Panther's paw?" Fane supplied.

Bostwick managed a chuckle which became a rattle. "Exactly. When he—told me that—Nina had learned he—was the Panther, I decided to—strike quick. To rub Carter out. Had

it fixed—to abduct Nina from the dressing room, in case—we failed to get her outside. We did fail there. I timed the raid well, too, so—as to get—Carter—and we didn't fail. Had to—silence Nina—in case she knew who—I—was—"

His voice failed, blood wet his lips—and Lowman Bostwick died.

Fane turned to Tarrant. He was busy. Nina Crestwood was in his arms.

"Why, I wonder, did that bird try to stop me in the alley?" he speculated.

"He didn't," Carlin answered. "He followed you down the runway, through the feed room, and just as he stepped out of the door, somebody clouted him. As he went down, he grabbed for something to hold to—and got you. A bullet clipped his arm, and you got away. Then he was sapped good and plenty, and tied up in the shanty-boat, where I found him while prowling around. You can figure out the rest for yourself."

The public raised a great jubilee over the killing of the Panther that night at Peddler's Island, and Nina and Fane decided to let it go at that. The Panther was dead, and Bostwick, the far more deadly paw, would never mangle another victim. What the public didn't know, wouldn't hurt it—nor hurt the name of Crestwood.

"REAL SHAVING COMFORT NEVER COST ME SO LITTLE!"

"I never dreamed a low-priced blade could shave a rough beard like mine until I tried Probak Jr.," writes T. C. Schreiber, Jr. "Now I get clean, easy shaves with never a bit of irritation and I'm saving money on razor blades."

Get the benefit of unequalled manufacturing methods—automatic tempering, grinding, honing and stropping. Enjoy real shaving comfort at lowest possible cost. Try Probak Jr.

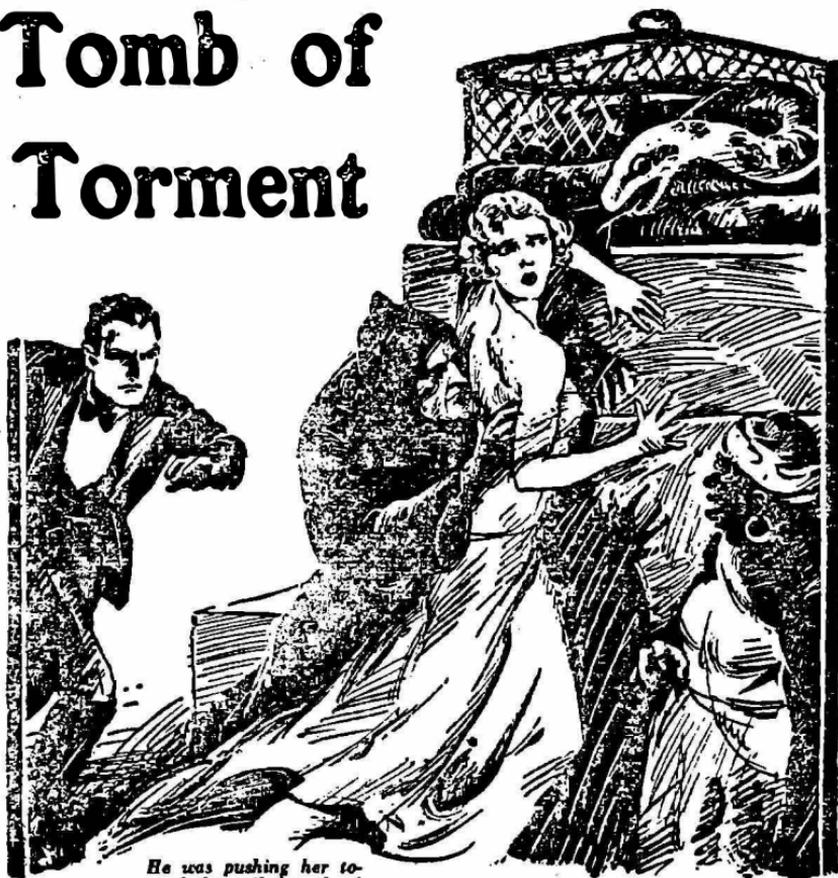


Probak Junior is a product of Gillette and fits all Gillette and Probak razors.

NOW!
PROBAK JUNIOR
4 BLADES
FOR 10¢

Also packages of 10 blades for 25¢ and 25 blades for 59¢ at your dealer.

Tomb of Torment



He was pushing her toward the coiled neck of the serpent.

By *Emile C. Tepperman*

I WAS sitting in a box with Anne Seymour, viewing a revival performance of "Emperor Jones" when I became aware that the man, Borchart, was in the house.

It was a sweet job, and I had begun to appreciate it after three days of acting as bodyguard for Miss Seymour. When her old man had hired

me, he said, "Mr. Manton, expense is no object. You understand that Anne is our only daughter. Whatever this thing is that threatens her, it will be your duty to guard her against it, to find out the nature of the danger. We ourselves have been unable to get any information from her. All we know is that she's deathly afraid of some-

After three days of chasing around town as bodyguard to a beautiful girl—at a hundred bucks a day and all expenses paid—Don Manton was beginning to feel that life had its moments after all. But it wasn't long after he looked into the gaunt, parchment-like face of a man named Borchart that he realized how few those moments can be

thing, that it is rendering her melancholy, is reducing her to a mere shadow of herself."

Well, if you can't soak millionaires, whom are you going to soak? So, for the past three days I had been going to parties and shows, riding in taxis—in short, living on the fat of the land, with all expenses paid, and a hundred bucks a day salary.

That was all to the good, except that it was a little monotonous. It's not bad racing around all over town with the most beautiful girl in the city, if she'd only loosen up and talk a little. But in all the three days, Anne Seymour hadn't said more than about fifteen words to me. Always there was that queer sort of haunted, frightened look in her eyes. Whenever I took her arm to lead her to a table in a restaurant, or to guide her down the aisle of a theatre, she felt cold and clammy to my touch. I guess it was beginning to get on top of my nerves.

And on top of this we had to be seeing this goofy show that takes place in the African jungle or some place, with this guy running away through the forest, chased by natives who want to stick pins and needles or something into him and make him miserable in general. And all through it there's this queer, insistent beating of the tom-toms, like water dropping on your forehead, drip, drip, drip.

Anne Seymour was sitting straight and still next to me, her proud, beautiful profile seeming to be cut out of marble.

And then I got the funny feeling that there was somebody in the house staring at us. I looked around quickly and, as if drawn by a magnet, my eyes found the eyes of a man who was sitting in the fourth row of the orchestra. He was lean, and his face was like parchment. If it weren't for his eyes, you'd think he was a mummy in evening dress. Those eyes were deep and black—and bad. Somehow or other, I got the idea that this guy might be the devil himself, all dressed up. He hadn't been looking at me; he had been star-

ing all the while at Anne Seymour in a curiously appraising sort of way.

I swung my eyes away from him as if I hadn't noticed him particularly, looked toward the stage, and nudged Anne Seymour, whispered to her out of the corner of my mouth, "Don't turn now. But see if you know that man in the fourth row."

"I've already seen him," she said huskily. She hadn't turned either, was still sitting straight, erect, and was whispering with hardly any motion of her lips. "I told dad it was no use getting me a bodyguard. You'll only be killed. I can't escape that man."

"Listen, Miss Seymour," I said earnestly, "my name is Don Manton. I'm no baby, and I'm no youngster at this game. You tell me what it's all about, and I'll fix that guy's wagon for him. What's he got on you?"

Suddenly a shudder seemed to rack her body. "I suppose I ought to tell you all about it. It's not fair to you not to. Will you promise not to tell dad or mother?"

"Okay," I said. I'd have promised her anything right then, if it meant getting the truth out of her.

She went on tensely. "His name is Borchart. He's been at several places where I have been in the past week or two—theatres, night clubs, parties. Nobody knows his business, but he's extremely wealthy. And—he always looks at me like that. I seem to feel the blood freezing within me when his eyes are on me."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"No. One thing more. Monday night—that's four nights ago—I woke up from a sound sleep. It must have been three or four o'clock in the morning. I had felt a sudden pain in my arm—like a pin prick. I opened my eyes, and there was his face, leaning over me. And—God—it was the most horrible thing in the world. He seemed to be exuding evil. I started to scream, but my muscles were frozen. And then I suddenly became weak, and lost consciousness. I woke up in the morning,

weak and dazed. I might have thought it was all a dream, except for a little red spot on my left arm. He must have done something to me—given me some sort of injection."

"Why have you kept all this a secret?" I asked her, raising my voice a little so as to be heard above the terrified shrieks of the man on the stage who was being haunted by the ghosts of his past crimes.

Miss Seymour said, "I don't know. I suppose I was afraid of being laughed at. And since that night I've had all sorts of queer feelings. Perhaps a dozen times I've had a sudden desire to leave everything and run out into the night. It seemed that this Borchard was calling to me, calling to me, always calling to me."

Her face was white, drawn, tense. "He—he's calling me—now." Her little hand was clenched in her lap as if she were resisting some powerful, magnetic urge.

And just then the curtain dropped on the stage. Intermission had come. I looked down to the orchestra. The man, Borchard, was not staring at her now. He was getting up from his seat.

I turned back to Anne Seymour. She seemed to be more at ease. She managed a faint smile. "I'm—better now."

I got up, and excused myself. "I'm going to see what's to be done about this. You stay right here, Miss Seymour, and don't move. Wait till I come back."

She nodded meekly. Somehow, she seemed to feel better for having unburdened herself to me.

"Be careful, Mr. Manton," she said. "Don't worry about me," I grinned. "I've taken care of myself for a long time now. You just take it easy, and leave everything to me."

I have to laugh now, when I think of my swell-headedness. Leave everything to me! I thought I was good. I wouldn't have thought so, if I had known what kind of a bird this Borchard was.

DOWNSTAIRS in the lobby, I looked around for him. He wasn't there. I started for the smoking room, thinking maybe he had gone down there, when suddenly somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and a cool voice with a hint of a nasty laugh in it asked, "Were you seeking me, sir?"

I swung around and looked into the long, gaunt face of the man named Borchard. He was very tall—as tall as I am, and that's saying a good deal, because I'm five feet, eleven myself. And he certainly was one to give you the creeps. If you looked at him, you couldn't help feeling sort of soared. His skin seemed to be stretched on his head as if it had been taken off at some time and shrunk, and then put back on. It was of a pale, white, sickening color—like the color of death. But the man had poise, power. You could see it in his eyes, in his whole bearing.

His face twisted into a mean sort of smile that I didn't like at all. I had a feeling suddenly that this guy had lived for ages and ages; that he would go on living forever, as long as evil lived in the world.

He said to me, "I knew, of course, that you would come looking for me. I wanted to meet you. I have a proposition for you."

I sort of gulped, and put on a bold front. "Go ahead, mister, but talk quick. I got plenty to tell you."

"There is no need to talk quick. There is no need for hurry, my friend. We have ages and ages before us." Borchard put his hand on my arm, and I winced, surprised. Because his grip was like steel. "But I forget," he went on, "that to you, time is fleeting. I will not keep you long. In brief, my proposition is this—you are receiving one hundred dollars per day plus expenses to act as bodyguard to Miss Seymour. You are a private detective, and you are interested in making money. Say you are employed for ten days. That will be a thousand dollars plus expenses. All right, I will give you a cash sum of five thousand dollars. You will notify Miss Sey-

mour's father that you can no longer continue on the job."

I started to laugh, but stopped quick, when I saw those eyes of his boring into me. He had talked with the assurance of one whose word is law. Now he went on in the same vein. "When you return to your hotel, you will find the money in an envelope in the top bureau drawer of your dresser. Take it, and live in peace, my friend. Otherwise, you will learn what—terror is!"

Well, I'm no saint, and five grand is five grand—especially when turning it down means bucking up against a guy like this Borchard. But I'm a pretty stubborn sort of egg, and in spite of what people say about me, I have principles of my own. Also, I remembered the beautiful curve of Anne Seymour's throat.

So I said, "Nix. Your proposition is rejected. Now listen to what I have to say."

Borchard had been holding on to my arm all this time. Now he let go, and bowed, smiling ironically.

"I know what you have to say, Mr. Manton. You wish to tell me that you are a very honest, capable and efficient private detective; that if I do not leave Miss Seymour alone, you will break my neck, or do me other serious physical injury. I understand all that, and I wish you a very good night."

With that, he bowed again, and turned away, walked out into the lobby of the theatre.

For a minute you could have knocked me over with a feather. He had taken the words out of my mouth, stolen my thunder. What was I going to do—sock him in the jaw right there in the crowded theatre? That wouldn't have helped any. I would only have gotten myself into a jam, and left him free to work on the girl. I began to figure that I would be earning my hundred bucks a day in the near future.

The bell rang for the end of the intermission, and I started across toward the box. I looked up in that di-

rection, and stopped short with a cold sensation in the pit of my stomach.

Anne Seymour wasn't up in the box. She should be visible from here, but she wasn't. The box was empty.

I guess it was instinct that made me swing out through the doors into the lobby. And there I saw it.

If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have believed it. There was a swell looking, maroon-colored limousine drawn up at the curb, chauffeured by a huge negro in a uniform that matched the color of the car.

The man, Borchard, was stepping into the car just as I caught sight of it. Another negro, who had been holding the door open, slammed it shut and swept around into the front seat beside the driver. The limousine got into motion.

But the thing that made me jump after it headlong, pushing a couple of bewildered theatre patrons out of my way without any consideration, was the glimpse I had caught of the white, proudly tilted face of Anne Seymour—sitting quietly inside that car as if she belonged there!

The car was already moving when I got out to the curb. I sprinted, came up alongside it. The windows were closed. I put my hand on the handle of the door, twisted it, but it didn't open. It was locked.

I yelled, "Miss Seymour! Miss Seymour!" But she didn't even seem to hear me.

Borchard was sitting next to the window, and I started to pound at it with my fist. The glass was shatter-proof. Borchard didn't even turn to look at me. He merely leaned over and whispered a few words to Anne Seymour. She finally turned her head, gazed at me impersonally, as if she had never seen me before, and then looked away again and stared straight ahead.

Suddenly the car gathered speed, leaped away, and the handle was torn out of my grip. I stood there in the middle of the gutter, panting, and I must have looked like one awful sap.

I STARTED to curse out loud, and then I realized that that wouldn't do any good.

There was a cab across the street, and the driver was sitting there and looking at me as if I was pulling some sort of freak advertising stunt.

I sprinted across, swung inside the cab, and yelled, "Follow that limousine, guy. Twenty bucks if you don't lose it!"

I needn't have promised him the twenty dollars. The limousine made no effort at all to lose us, though Borchard must have known that I was after him. On the contrary, they seemed to slow up accommodatingly so as not to get too far away from us.

A left turn, then five blocks west through the night toward the express highway; here the speed of the limousine increased so I figured we were making fifty or sixty miles an hour.

The express highway ended, merged into Riverside Drive. The pace slackened, there were halts for red lights, and I was burning up, trying to figure what to do. I could have cut them off and had a showdown. But I remembered the way Anne Seymour had sat there in the car, not making any effort to get away, as if she wanted to be there. Borchard would probably have me arrested for disorderly conduct if I tried to start anything. The only thing was to keep on their tail, and see where they went.

At the northern extremity of the Drive, the limousine swung around in a wide curve and entered Van Cortlandt Park. Through the park we followed them slowly, then up through Yonkers and into a quiet, dark section of Westchester along dimly lit roads where there were very few houses.

And then suddenly the limousine spurted ahead, and we lost them. My driver slowed up alongside the mouth of a road that led away at right angles from the one that we were on. He turned around and said to me, "They must have swung in here, boss. They ain't up ahead."

"Go ahead then," I told him. "Keep after them!"

The driver shook his head. "Not a chance, boss. This thing looks phony to me. I got my own troubles, and I don't want no part of other people's. This here neighborhood is dead and God-forsaken; there could be a dozen murders happen up here, and nobody would know about them."

"Where are we?" I asked him.

He pointed to the side road. "That there path leads up to an old cemetery that ain't been used in thirty years. The people up around here keep away from it at night. And this is as far as I go, mister."

I shrugged, got out and handed him his twenty dollars. There was no use arguing about it.

"All right," I said to him. "As long as you're afraid to go any further, you can wait here. I might be going back."

He didn't say whether he'd wait or not. I left him there and worked my way along that path, guided at first by the headlights of the cab. Then there was a sharp curve, and I lost the benefit of the lights. I went along slowly, carefully, feeling my way. Ahead, there was impenetrable darkness.

Back at the road I caught the sound of a taxicab's motor racing, heard the clash of gears. The driver wasn't waiting, and I didn't blame him much.

I was in evening clothes, and I had no gun. Miss Seymour had been rushing me around like mad for the last couple of days, from parties to theatres and back again to parties, so that I'd been a little dizzy—and in changing to the tux that evening, I'd clean forgotten to take the little twenty-two that I usually lugged around with evening clothes.

I swung around another curve and saw a white wall ahead. It was a cemetery wall all right, and the gate was open. Inside, there was no sound, no hint of motion or life.

There was no other place that the limousine could have gone, so I worked my way in among the white

stones which rose stark and bleak all around me. You will probably laugh at me when I tell you that I had worked up a nice little sweat by this time, and that it wasn't because of any physical exertion. I was just a little bit scared. And if you think I'm a sissy or anything, you are hereby invited to go up to that cemetery *without* having met a guy like Borchard in advance, and wander around in there for a half hour. I'll give you the address any time you ask for it.

Well, I guess I wandered around through that spooky place for about fifteen minutes before I found the limousine. It was standing in front of a faded, granite mausoleum, with the lights out. It must have been a couple of hundred years old; probably one of those crypts where they put whole generations of some family that was probably extinct by this time. The name, which had been carved in the stone above the doorway, was indistinguishable in the dark.

But one thing I saw that didn't make me feel much better. It was the wrought iron handle on the door. It had been fashioned into the likeness of the head of a snake!

I suppose ordinarily I wouldn't have noticed it, but all my senses were keyed up now, extremely acute.

Everything was quiet now, except for the rustling of leaves falling in the pathway from the overhanging trees. They stirred and seemed to whisper, to cackle hoarsely.

I took a peek in the limousine, saw that it was empty. Then I swung around to the door of the mausoleum, grabbed hold of that disgusting looking snake head, and swung the door open.

THE interior of the vault was in absolute darkness. And I knew that I was in the right place. Because, though there was no hint of life, neither was there any hint of death. You know what I mean—that musty smell, which is peculiar to vaults of the dead, was lacking here. This place

had been opened recently. Fresh air had entered here earlier in the night.

I left the door, stepped inside cautiously, and groped around.

I felt a wall at my right, started to follow it like a blind man, touching it with my right hand while I kept my left hand extended in front of me in case I should meet somebody or something in the dark.

And suddenly I stopped still. I had the chilling knowledge that there was someone else in the vault with me. It was nothing I saw, nothing I heard; just that strange feeling that you get sometimes.

And almost at the same minute my outstretched hand touched a living being; I saw two eyes staring at me—right in front of me. I slammed out at those eyes with my right fist, and felt the crunch of bone under my knuckles, heard a gasp, and a grunt of rage.

Fingers reached out and gripped my shoulder, a fetid breath brushed my cheek. I slammed out again, this time a little lower, hoping to find a chin. And I guess I did, because the grip on my shoulder was suddenly relaxed.

But it was my unlucky night. Because from the left a flashlight suddenly clicked on, glared in my face. I started to swing toward the light, but something crashed against the side of my head.

That was an awful sock, and for a minute I staggered, weaving dizzily on my feet. And that was the minute that licked me. Because two massive arms gripped me from behind, twisted my hands in back of me, and held me helpless like a baby.

I'm no weakling, and I've been able to put up a pretty good fight in the past, even when I was groggy. But I made no headway at all against whoever it was that had this grip on me.

My head started to swim from that blow. I could feel the left side of my face wet where the blood trickled down from the split in my scalp. It had been a harder sock than I thought it was. I kept my senses all right, but I was kind of woozy. I guess for a few

minutes the only thing that kept me on my feet was this guy that was holding on to me.

As if in a daze, I was aware of figures passing in the darkness, of whispered orders, and shuffling feet.

I was suddenly lifted up in the air by the man who held me, carried a few steps and then lowered.

The guy let go of me, and I dropped—but not just a foot or two to the floor. I had been dropped through some sort of trap door, and I traveled about a dozen feet before I landed with a jar that sent the breath whistling out of my body.

Above me I could see the opening through which I had come. And even as I watched, it disappeared; a slab of stone had been shifted into place up there.

I rested on my back, breathing hard, trying to regain my wind. It was absolutely black here, but I had an idea that something was moving around—there was a kind of gliding, scraping sound not far away.

I got to one elbow, tried to stare through the darkness. And I caught a whiff of something—a noxious sort of stench. This was something I could recognize; it was snake stench. Some place around here there was a snake.

Once more I caught that slithering, scraping sound.

I put out my hand and touched some sort of wire mesh screen. There was a swift, vicious, hissing noise, and something struck that screen close to my hand.

I jerked my fingers away, took out a book of matches, and shakily lit one. I raised it up high, and I can tell you that that light was doing a waltz. My hand was certainly not steady. By the flare of the match, I saw what I was up against. Right beside me was a sort of wire mesh cage, about five feet square and as many feet high. Inside that cage were two tiny pin points of eyes that squinted redly at me. Those eyes belonged to a squirming, wriggling reptile that was about twice as long as I. And somebody must have

figured that it wasn't horrid looking enough, because they had painted its entire length in red with some ghastly design that seemed to move and have life as the snake wriggled.

The match flickered and went out. I lit another one, raised it high and took a look all around. This wasn't just some sort of pit under the mausoleum. I was on the gallery of a vast, cleverly constructed chamber. If I had been unwise enough to take four steps forward, I would have fallen from the ledge to the floor of the chamber below; and that would have been a drop of about thirty feet.

This place must have been cut into the ground away back when the mausoleum was built—and that had not been done haphazardly, for the walls, floor and ceiling were of brick, solidly constructed. I began to wish that I was in some peaceful business like the Chaco War.

I started to inch away from the cage next to me, feeling in the darkness for some way to get off the gallery. My head was throbbing now, and I started to have burning pains flashing across my eyes. My hair was matted at the spot where I had been hit, and it was cloyed with blood. I put my head down on the brick floor of the gallery, which felt nice and cool, and I lay there quietly for a few minutes to let the cold stone draw the fever out of the wound.

In back of me, the scraping at the wire mesh of the cage seemed to grow louder. I guess the snake was kind of sore at me for not coming inside and providing him with a meal.

AND then, all of a sudden, things began to happen. There was a glare of light from the floor of the chamber below, and I caught the sound of measured footsteps.

I crawled to the edge of the ledge, raised my head and stared over at the singular procession that was marching in through a door at the far end of the chamber below.

Two negresses, immensely fat,

dressed in long, red flowing robes, came in first. Each of them carried a tall taper whose flame flickered, casting weird shadows on the wall.

Behind them came a man who was dressed all in black, with a peaked cowl over his head, and a flowing robe that hid his feet. Out of the cowl peered a gaunt face. It was Borchard's face all right, but there was something different about him. He looked like a high priest—reminded me somehow of strange, outlandish, African rites.

The two negresses crossed to a sort of dais in the middle of the floor, and set their tapers in two tall sconces on either side of the raised platform.

Then they turned around and faced toward my ledge, standing immovable.

Borchard marched solemnly across the room until he stood directly below the ledge. Then he raised his face toward the cage in which the serpent lay, and began to recite a kind of invocation in a voice that gradually grew louder and louder until he was talking so fast that the words seemed to trip over each other. He was using some sort of strange, outlandish language that I didn't recognize.

By the light of the flaring tapers, I could see the snake in his cage, and he must have been used to this sort of ceremony, for he rested his head against the wire mesh and seemed to be listening.

Suddenly Borchard's voice dropped to a whisper, and then became silent. As if it had been a signal, one of the two negresses produced a flute from under her robe, put it to her lips and started to play the weirdest, creepiest kind of tune I'd ever heard. The time was so swift that my ear could scarcely follow it. The snake responded to that music by wriggling its gruesome, sinuous length faster and faster. The hideous red marks with which it was painted made me dizzy to watch them.

Borchard reached over and pulled a chain down below there, and the cage began to move slowly. I noted for

the first time that there was a kind of pulley fitted to the top of the cage, and that the pulley rode on a cable extending from the ledge down to the platform near which the negresses stood. Slowly the cage descended via the cable, until it came to rest upon the dais on the floor below.

The negress continued to play that damned flute of hers even faster, and Borchard strode across the room and unlocked a small door in the cage. The serpent was writhing frenziedly now, in tune with the music, but made no attempt to slip out of its prison.

Borchard turned and faced the doorway through which he had entered the room, and stood in an attitude of expectancy. I looked in that direction, too, and started to feel a cold sweat all over me, forgot all about the pain in my head.

Anne Seymour had come into the room.

But let me tell you *how*. She was *crawling*.

Like the two negresses, she was wearing a long red gown. She wriggled across the room slowly, sinuously, as if she were some sort of reptilian being, keeping time to the wild strains of the flute.

Her face was changed, somehow distorted. Of course, she was under the influence of some sort of drug. And she was crawling straight toward that vividly painted serpent in the cage.

And then I found out what this dizzy business was all about. Because I happened to turn my head, and there, right near me on the ledge, were these two tall negroes—still in the livery which they had worn while driving the limousine. I had been lying so quiet, with my head on the stone, that I guess they thought I was still unconscious. The face of one of them, I noticed with satisfaction, was kind of marked up. I guess that was the one that I had slammed into in the dark up in the vault.

This one was setting up a camera on a tripod, focusing it on the scene

below. The other was watching him and holding a large flash-bulb overhead.

Now I got the whole picture. And was it a laugh? It was not!

I turned around, grabbed a quick look down below. Anne Seymour had crossed the floor, had reached the top step of the dais. She was resting on her elbows, so that her head was on a level with that of the serpent. Slowly, those long, powerful coils oozed out of the cage. The snake reared its ugly little head high, arched itself over her.

The flute was still playing.

And it was at that minute that the flash-bulb went off.

The two negroes had taken the picture of Anne Seymour and the snake.

A lot of things happened at once. Anne Seymour screamed—screamed loud and sharp and clear. It was a scream of mortal fear and agony; and though it didn't sound so nice, it indicated at least that she had come back to her senses. Then I made a flying leap at that camera from my position on the ledge, sent it smashing over the side to crash into pieces on the floor below. The plate of that picture would never be developed. And the third thing that happened was that the flute stopped its infernal music. Why the negress stopped playing, I'll never be able to figure out for sure, but I think she'd seen me lunging for the camera up there on the ledge; or else Anne's scream had made her quit.

Then all of a sudden those two negroes were on me like a ton of bricks. I wasn't dizzy any more now. I was just mad—good and mad. And I used a couple of stunts on them that I would have hesitated to use under ordinary circumstances. In any boxing or wrestling ring in the country they would have been declared fouls, and the guy who pulled them would have been forever barred and black-listed.

Well, I confess I used them. And though I got a bad cut under my left eye, and a long knife gash in my side from one of those two boys, I had them

on the floor, dead to the world inside of what must have been about sixty seconds. One of them was altogether out, having cracked his head against the stone ledge when he fell, and the other one was just doubled over, holding onto his middle and moaning with agony.

I didn't wait to offer them any consolation, but turned and raced along to the end of the ledge. I had noticed a flight of stone steps that led down to the chamber below.

I GOT down there in time to see Borchard standing at the foot of the dais with a vicious, hateful look on his face, and pushing Anne Seymour toward the cage. She was trying to get away from there, trying frantically; striving to get away from the coiled neck of the serpent which was arched above her. And Borchard wouldn't let her.

Borchard was standing as far away from the damned snake as he could, and he was holding Anne Seymour at arm's length, gripping her shoulder with those powerful fingers of his. He was afraid of that snake, I could see, for the reptile was no longer under the spell of the flute's music. Borchard hadn't intended letting the thing go so far, of course, but now that the snake was really after some supper, he figured the girl would make a better tidbit than himself.

He must surely have heard the camera smash, must have heard the sounds of the scrap I had up there on the ledge with the two negroes; but he had his hands full trying to sell the snake on the idea that the girl would make a tastier dish than himself.

Well, anyway, it's funny how one million thoughts and pictures will fill your mind in the space of about thirty seconds; because I think that's all it took for the whole tableau there by the dais to register with me.

And then I was across that floor in nothing flat, sprinting the way I had done many years past when I hung

up a record for the hundred-yard dash in the Marine Corps—only I did it faster this time.

I had to stop short, or else I would have slammed into Borchard, and he would have slammed into Anne, pushing her right up against the serpent.

So I slid the last five or six feet, reached across his shoulder, shoving him sideways, and yanked Anne out from under that serpent.

Anne went sprawling on the floor, and Borchard came for me, his thin, parchment-like lips pulled back from his snarling teeth, and his hands raised like two claws. We tangled, and his hands went for my throat. I could see that snake's pin-point eyes watching us as Borchard dragged me to the floor, slammed himself down on top of me, driving the breath out of my body, and clamped those powerful fingers of his around my throat. His breath was in my face, and it smelled foul, fetid, like the stench of death.

I squirmed around, trying to break that grip, but it was no use. His hands were powerful.

I began to gasp for air. My head was getting dizzy again. I slammed out with my fist, kicked him in the shins, but he held on.

His face was close to mine, and he snarled, "Damn you—damn you! You have robbed me of a fortune!"

I couldn't talk any more, and I felt myself getting kind of weak. I wanted to yell out to Anne Seymour to get the devil out of there, but I couldn't make any sounds come out of my throat. Things began to get spotty in front of my eyes. I figured I was about through.

And then, without warning, Borchard's grip on my throat relaxed. He shrieked—again and again—while I drew great gulps of air into my lungs. I rolled away weakly, groped to my feet. And I stood there, staring stupidly, uncomprehendingly, at the struggling, thrashing body of Borchard, about which was wound coil upon coil of the sinuous body of the great snake. The serpent had picked him for its

supper. And I wasn't going to do anything about it except to hope that it choked on him.

A hand clutched at my sleeve, and I looked down to see Anne Seymour. She was sane now, scared out of her drugged trance.

"Take me away!" she gasped. She took one look at Borchard, just as some of his bones started to crunch. She closed her eyes and swayed, would have fallen if I hadn't caught her.

I picked her up, started for the staircase leading up to the ledge. Borchard kept on screaming behind us, but his screams were getting weaker and weaker.

WE weren't out of the woods yet, by any means. I found out that the two fat negresses could do something else besides play the flute. The last glimpse I'd gotten of them was when Borchard had me down; I had seen them standing, each at her corner of the dais, rooted to their places with fear of the serpent, afraid to come any closer than they were.

Now, as I made for the staircase, I suddenly heard the wildest, most frenzied sort of shrieking that yours truly has ever had the privilege—if you want to call it that—of listening to. I took one quick, startled look behind, and, sure enough, it was my flute playing pal and her girl friend.

They were coming after us.

Their hair was streaming out behind them as they ran; they were drooling at the mouth and shrieking at the same time; and their eyes were wide, mad, rimmed with red. They had long nails, and their hands, flourishing knives, were sort of reaching out after me as if they wanted to rip me apart and take me home for souvenirs. They looked like the pictures I had seen of those mythological dames who are known as "The Furies."

Well, believe me, I put on a burst of speed. If I had been clocked then, I bet I would have broken not only the record for the Marine Corps, but the world record. The only thing that

saved us from those two dames with the long nails and knives was the fact that they were fat, and waddled.

I beat them to the stone staircase, swung Anne Seymour over my shoulder, and raced up.

On the ledge I stumbled over one of the unconscious blacks, almost fell, but recovered my balance by a miracle. The stone slab was in place in the opening above.

I set Anne on her feet, let her lean against the wall, and climbed the few steps of the short wooden ladder that led up to it. I pushed hard with my shoulder, the slab gave, and I had it opened in a moment.

Those two fat negresses were waddling up the stairs, still screaming, but no sound came from Borchard. And I didn't look over there to see how he was getting along.

I reached down, gave Anne a hand, and fairly dragged her up the ladder into the vault.

The two negresses were paddling across along the ledge now, and I literally slammed the slab down in their faces. We were up in the darkness of the mausoleum now. I turned, found Anne Seymour's hand, and raced with her out into the night.

We didn't stop till we got out onto the highway.

Behind us we were able to see the two shadowy figures of the negresses, still coming after us.

I had no desire to tangle with them, and I looked up and down desperately for some sort of vehicle.

And there it came.

My taxi driver!

And out of the cab leaped a couple of State policemen.

The driver got out, explained sheepishly, "This business looked phony, mister, so I went back and got a couple of cops."

"Boy," I exclaimed, "you're Santa Claus?"

I said to the two cops, "We'll have company here in a minute—two negresses. Grab 'em."

I couldn't be of any assistance to them, because Anne Seymour was leaning heavily against me, and I had to hold her up.

I fairly carried her into the taxicab, sat down alongside her. We watched while the two State policemen subdued the negresses.

"What—what did Borchard want with me?" Anne Seymour asked. She was still trembling. "I—hardly seem to remember what happened."

"It was just a blackmail racket," I explained to her. "He had a couple of guys there ready to take a picture of you as a snake worshipper, and then he would hold your old man up for plenty of jack—make him buy the picture back. It's an old racket: I've been up against these cults before; but I never saw it worked in just this way."

"But—but what was I doing there, with that snake?" She shuddered as she asked.

"Just forget about it, kid; just forget about it," I told her. "It's all over now."

I wasn't going to tell her what she had looked like to me as I saw her from up there on the ledge. Better to let it stay in the limbo of her subconscious.

The only thing I regretted was that my hundred dollar a day job was over. I consoled myself with the thought that maybe old man Seymour would come across with a bonus.

And he did. And it was a fat one.

But I didn't tell the old man about a little secret that I'm going to let you in on now—provided you promise to keep it to yourself. This is it: Borchard might have been a pretty screwy kind of blackmail artist; but he was as good as his word, and I guess he had been pretty sure of himself.

Because when I got back to my hotel, I took a chance and looked in the top drawer of my dresser. And sure enough, there was a neat little package. When I opened it, I found that it contained fifty brand new one hundred dollar bills—just as he had promised!

Killer's Test

By Hugh B. Cave

SMILER BLANE had a sense of humor. Always. Even when pushing murder slugs into the clip of a personal thirty-eight. Even when issuing grim orders to have rival mobsters wiped out collectively with Thompson sub-machine guns. Always a sense of humor.

It harmonized with his patent-leather shoes, mauve four-in-hand, tan silk shirt, vaselined hair part, and went well with his womanish face and slender 150-pound figure.

"Sure, sure," Smiler said, when Mugs Moley told him about the kid. "Sure. Corner of Seventh and Forty-ninth, at eight o'clock. Sure. I got half a grand says the kid won't have guts enough."

Moley, the Smiler's right hand man, had a big mouth with a big grin all over it. He looked at the silver clock on the mahogany table in Smiler's Park Avenue apartment. The clock said six-thirty.

"I'll go talk to the kid," Moley said.

He went out, took a cab downtown, and found the kid waiting in a booth in a joint. He slid into the booth and leaned over the kid's beer glass and said:

"You still want to join the Smiler's mob?"

"I'm here, ain't I?" the kid said.

"You're young, kid. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"Yeah—minus six. Well, it don't matter. I fixed it for you."

"You fixed it?" the kid said eagerly.

"Yeah. But like I already told you, you got to show the Smiler you got guts, or else he ain't interested in

meetin' you. There's a guy the Smiler wants bumped off, see? He ain't important, but the Smiler wants him out of the way, see? Later you'll get a real job to do."

Later the kid would get a real job to do, and burn for doing it. That would save the Smiler a lot of trouble.

"About this guy," Moley said. "All you got to do is be at the corner of Seventh and Forty-ninth at eight o'clock. The mug'll be wearin' a light gray suit and a tan shirt and a pansy-colored tie, and he carries a cane. Here's a picture of him. Take a good look at it."

The kid took a good look.

"You got a rod?" Moley asked.

"No. I never had no money to buy one."

"Well, use this one. There's a silencer on it, and on a close-up job like this, you got to use a silencer."

The kid took Moley's gun. Moley stood up and said: "Well, okay, kid. When you get the job done, come down to Kelly's joint on Twenty-seventh."

Moley went to Kelly's joint on Twenty-seventh. He nodded to Kelly, behind the bar, and went into the back room and nodded to four men sitting there, and hung his hat on a hook and sat down. The four men were playing draw poker. Moley played with them.

"What's this about that kid you picked up?" one man said.

Moley laughed. "The kid come to me a couple of days ago and said he wanted to be big time. Yeah, big time. 'I'm gonna join the Smiler's mob,' he says. So I ask him does he know the Smiler and he says no, but he can use a rod and he's got what it takes."

Moley laughed again. "Well, I talk to the Smiler and he says, 'If the kid's got guts, we can use him. We can put him onto a couple of mugs that've been musclin' in lately, and use him to rub out some personal friends of mine. It'll save me a lot of trouble,' Smiler says. 'And if the kid burns, well he asked for it.'"

"What's this about Seventh and Forty-ninth at eight o'clock?" one of the men said. "It's after eight now."

"Yeah, and it's all over," Moley said. "Right now, the kid is most likely the most surprised guy in New York. I give him a picture of the Smiler and a rod loaded with blanks, and told him to go down there and do the job. It was the Smiler's idea. The Smiler has a keen sense of humor. 'It'll prove the kid's guts,' he says, 'and besides, I'll get a laugh out of seein' his face when I don't drop.'"

The men laughed and played poker. At eight-thirty the phone rang, and one of them got up to answer it. He listened a moment and his face went white. He said thickly:

"What? For God's sake, who done it? *What?* Well, find out and get down here in a hurry! Yes! In a hurry!"

He turned around and said to the men staring at him, "The Smiler's croaked. Yeah—croaked, rubbed out!

They don't know who done it. He was walkin' acrost Seventh Avenue at Forty-ninth, and—" The man licked his lips. "Jeeze, this is awful. It'll bust up the mob. It—"

He looked at Moley and made fists of his hands. "That damn kid must've done it! If he did, you'll pay for it, Moley. You'll go for a nice long ride. You and your phony ideas!"

"It was the Smiler's idea, not mine," Moley whined. "And the kid didn't do it. He couldn't. He—"

THERE was a rap on the door and the door opened. The bartender from out front said, "There's a kid out here to see Moley."

"Send him in," Moley mumbled.

The kid came in. He stuck out his chest and said proudly, "I suppose you guys heard, huh?" They stared at him.

"Well, why'n't you say somethin'?" the kid demanded. "I done a good job, didn't I? I got there early and seen how crowded the corner was, and I figured I'd get caught if I used a rod, so—so I swiped a twenty-two rifle off Jerry Manny's shootin' gallery, and got up in a second story window acrost the street, and give it to the mug."

The kid scowled. "Well, why'n't you say somethin'? What're you starin' at me for? I done a good job, didn't I?"

EVERY STORY COMPLETE!

LOVE

Thrills! Glamour!

FICTION MONTHLY

If you like romance — and who doesn't? — don't miss this leading love magazine. In its pages each month you will find a glittering array of stories by best writers. Also, its special feature, **HOLLYWOOD HIGHLIGHTS**, gives you the latest news of the screen world direct from the studios.

10c A COPY

Now On Sale At All Newsstands

THE SECRET COUNCIL

Behind the Scenes With Secret Agent "X"

AS night descends in the sweltering heat of tropic jungles, a strange and sinister activity begins. Scaly pythons slide earthward from the trees. Triangular-headed vipers squirm from beneath the rocks. Hairy, poisonous spiders, black as death, scuttle out of hiding with venom-dripping fangs. Jaguars, panthers and ocelots prowl through the brush. Huge vampire bats flit silently overhead. A hideous carnival of bloodshed, fear and horror commences, with the grinning figure of Death, the carnival king.

It is the same in the jungles of the criminal underworld. From the secret haunts that are locked and hidden during the day, predatory human monsters creep forth. Remorseless murderers bent on unholy acts. Gunmen with dope-crazed minds and fingers itching to kill. Strangers, poisoners and knifemen. Racketeers and gangsters with their snake-hipped, painted molls.

Society protects itself from this motley, hideous horde. There are police forces and detective bureaus in every city. There are prowling cars on the street and bluecoats on the beat. There is the Division of Investigation of the Department of Justice down in Washington, D. C. There are thousands of brave, resourceful men ever ready to risk their lives to safeguard law-abiding citizens. But sometimes even these protections are not enough.

Sometimes the criminal mind outdoes itself. A genius of evil, or a group of wicked men banded together, weave plots too cunning for even the police to fathom; plots that seem to have the stamp of the Arch Fiend upon them. Plots that threaten to spread and course through the land like a devilish, leprous blight.

Yet there is one whose pledged duty it is to combat such menaces. One whose amazing talents, startling courage and unusual methods are dedicated to the cause of Justice. He is Secret Agent "X," Man of a Thousand Faces, foe of criminals and mysterious avenger of crime. —

Like a human scourge, he moves along the black alleys of the underworld. Like an all-seeing wraith, he prowls through those dark jungles of hideous outlawry where there is no rule save that of flashing blade and whining bullet.

A hunter of men, he himself is hunted—as we of the Secret Council have seen. For his work is too perilous to make it possible for him to take others into his confidence. He cannot divulge his plans beforehand. He cannot make his disguises known. Even his identity is a secret, guarded with his very life. And so it is that the Law does not recognize him. The police suspect him, and the criminal hordes hate and fear him.

Yet we who have followed his published chronicles know that he can be a friend as well as a foe. Faithful unto death to those who serve him. An ally of all law-abiding citizens. A merciful benefactor to those who have suffered poverty and disgrace beneath the crushing heel of crime. A sportsman and high adventurer in an underworld of terror, hurling defiance into the bloody, snarling fangs of Death itself.

It is no wonder then that this strange man of mystery and destiny has won acclaim in every state in the union. It is no wonder that his friends have become legion.

We take from the mailbag again this month a few of the many letters that have poured in. Robert J. Bru-

beck, 1311 Green Road, South Euclid, Ohio, says:

Dear Secret Council: I like the stories of Secret Agent "X" because they are so exciting and adventurous, and I hope the publishers can print many more of them. I've read the "Octopus of Crime," "The Hooded Hordes," "Servants of the Skull," and "The Murder Monster." Also several others. I'd like to be a secret investigator of crime myself, and the stories of Secret Agent "X" are the best detective novels I've ever read.

A girl reader, Miss Edith Benson, of New York City, writes:

Dear Council Boss: I guess you know how to pick stories that will please girls, too—because I've been reading the adventures of Secret Agent "X" for six months now, and haven't yet become tired of them. In fact, each time I finish with one adventure, I'm just-tingling to get hold of another. Some girls like love stories, but not me. Detective stories are what I go for.

I've tried the other magazines, too, but they certainly don't compare with Mr. "X" as far as real character goes. They just can't.

Almost always I enjoy the other stories that run in the same issue. So I just had to break down and write you. For the "X" adventure this month was not only outstanding, but the novelette, "Corpse Number 4," sure gave me a case of jitters. I could really feel myself out there on that ship with Carlyle Craig hunting for the murderers. Then when that corpse came to life—my, oh my! I'd sure like to see some more by this writer.

Trusting Agent "X" will continue his thrilling adventures, and wishing that the magazine came out twice a month, I remain, yours faithfully.

From Chicago, Illinois, comes a letter by J. Thomas Pielichowski, of 1113 North Wood Street. He writes:

Dear Council Members: On this meeting of the Secret Council, I wish to say that I've been a silent reader of the Secret Agent's adventures since they first appeared on the newsstands, and I think it's about time I voiced my opinions.

I think the stories are great and I enjoy them immensely. They are so different from all the others in the field.

It is my belief that we should have a sort of detective club and adopt a badge. What do you think about it? Please don't keep members' addresses a secret, for many of them would like to correspond. So long and good luck until next time.

Several other members of the Council have asked that a badge of some kind be adopted, and the council committee is considering it now. It would help if some more of you secret, silent members would write in your opinions. As for publishing addresses—we're glad to do it when they are given, but many members prefer to follow the Agent's example and keep their identities and addresses secret.

IT will come as good news to friends and followers of the Agent everywhere that one of the most thrilling chapters from his casebook of crime is to be published next month. Once again a menace so hidden and horrible that the police cannot cope with it challenges his strange talents.

There is a chuckling, relentless human fiend at work—THE GOLDEN GHOUL, master of the black, awful arts of pain and death, whose only law is that of his own fiendish will. None knew the Ghoul by any other name; none had seen his true face and lived. And even in the vile dens of the underworld, men cringed at the mention of his name. For the Amber Death, weapon of the Ghoul, gave no quarter. It struck mercilessly, hounded its victims to a hell of living torment, killing by inches all who refused to pay tribute to the Ghoul. And those who had paid again and again for immunity until they could pay no more, died in the same way—starved to death within their own ossified bodies!

The Secret Agent himself is baffled, menaced, put to the test as never before—but, as always, it is he who leads the chase; he who pushes into the black cavern of Doom.

Don't fail to go with him along the unblazed trails of terror into the labyrinth of a baffling, sinister, thrilling mystery.

And remember that letters from Council members and friends of the Agent are always welcome. Address communications to the Secret Council, Periodical House, Inc., 56 West 45th Street, New York City.

SEX LIFE IN AMERICA



CURIOUS SEX CUSTOMS
SCIENTIFIC SEXUALIA
MYSTERIOUS PRACTICES
SEXUAL SLAVERY
UNDERWORLD VICES

The largest publishers
in America of
Privately Printed Books on
LOVE • WOMAN • SEX
will send you
ILLUSTRATED
Confidential Catalogues
FREE

MAIL THIS COUPON AT ONCE!
YOU'LL GET THE SURPRISE OF YOUR LIFE

THE PANURGE PRESS • 70 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK

Please send me in plain sealed envelope **FREE**
your **ILLUSTRATED** brochures on privately printed books.

Name Age

Address
Dept 605

PANURGE BOOKS ALL PRIVATELY PRINTED ARE NOT SOLD IN GENERAL BOOK STORES

Please mention **MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS GROUP** when answering advertisements

MARRIAGE

no trespassing!



Ask yourself this frank question—

“Am I earning enough money to get married?”

Then this question—

“Is there a prospect of my ever earning enough money to marry?”

If the answer to both questions is “no,” you are in a quandary!

Do something desperate—**MAKE** yourself worth more money!

Many, many other bewildered men have found the answer in more training. This coupon was their very first step.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

★ *“The Universal University”*

BOX 3338-B, SCRANTON, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, “Who Was and Why,” and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- Architect
- Architectural Draftsman
- Building Estimating
- Wood Millworking
- Contractor and Builder
- Structural Draftsman
- Structural Engineer
- Development and Production of New Products
- Electrical Engineer
- Electric Lighting
- Welding, X-rays and Gal.

- Reading Shop Sketches
- Telephone Engineer
- Mechanical Engineer
- Mechanical Draftsman
- Machinist
- Toolmaker
- Patent Draughtsman
- Fresh Treatment of Metals
- Bridge Engineer
- Bridge and Building Foreman
- Diesel Engineer
- Aviation Engineer

- Automobile Mechanic
- Plumbing
- Heating
- Sheet Metal Worker
- Power Engineer
- Civil Engineer
- Steam Electric Machine
- Surveying and Mapping
- Refrigeration
- R. E. Locomotives
- R. E. Section Foreman
- R. E. Bridge and Building Foreman

- Air Brake
- R. E. Signalman
- Highway Engineering
- Chemistry
- Pharmacy
- Coal Mining Engineer
- Navigation
- Air Conditioning
- Boiler Maker
- Textile Dresser or Dept.
- Cotton Manufacturer
- Woolen Manufacturer
- Agriculture
- Fruit Canning
- Poultry Farming
- Machine Engineer

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- Business Management
- Office Management
- Industrial Management
- Traffic Management
- Bookkeeping
- Cost Accountant

- O. P. Accountant
- Bookkeeping
- Secretarial Work
- Spanish
- French
- German
- Advertising

- Revue Station Salesmanship
- Two Year College
- Business Correspondence
- Lettering Show Cards
- Signs
- Stenography and Typing
- Civil Service
- Mail Carrier

- Railway Mail Clerk
- Grade School Subjects
- High School Subjects
- College Preparatory
- Illustrating
- Cartooning

Name _____ Age _____ Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Occupation _____

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

ACCOUNTING

the profession that pays

Accountants command big income. Thousands needed. About 12,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn \$3,000 to \$20,000. We train you thoroughly at home in your sparetime for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is supervised by Wm. B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., assisted by staff of C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 64-page book free, "Accounting, the Profession That Pays."

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
Dept. E-147 Chicago, Illinois



MARRIED WOMEN

Send 3c stamp today for amazingly beautiful illustrated booklet *Feminine Hygiene* containing facts and articles for private use.

IGAN PRODUCTS CO., 674, 4301 Cottage Grove, Chicago, Ill.



ALL FOR 25c

SPECIAL OFFER—33 miniature pictures of handsome men and beautiful girls in thrilling love scenes—120 pages of beautiful color illustrations—120 pages of beautiful color illustrations—120 pages of beautiful color illustrations. All for 25c. Send cash or stamps. **FAMOUS NOVELTY COMPANY**, Dept. MP, 30 Irving Place, NEW YORK CITY.

MEN

and Women. 3c. stamp brings catalog of finest Rubber Goods. Fresh Stock. Guaranteed. Best Goods. Lowest Prices. Save 60%.

SEX DRUG CO., Dept. 29-E, 281 E. 35th St., Chicago

RUBBER NEW supersensitive. Transparent. Thinner, stronger. Finest ever made. In very fancy **GOLD BOXES**, rolled. 2 doz. \$1.00, 5 doz. \$2.00. Sealed. **POSTPAID**. Rushed.

VITAL PRODUCTS CO., Dept. 4, Hoboken, N. J.

We Buy PENNIES

MANY OLD COINS WORTH A FORTUNE GET POSTED

Top Price Paid For All Rare Coins, including Pennies. Join our club and receive reliable information on the value of coins. We buy for cash all old coins in demand. Send 2 dimes for complete Drying Catalog and membership card entitling you to club privileges. Mail 25c today.

CHARLES GOM HARVEY
700 E. 63rd St., Dept. CL-3, Chicago, Ill.

Married Secrets Now



DON'T be discouraged or alarmed because nature fails you. You can now depend on this new wonderful **P. P. PERIODIC RELIEF COMPOUND**. Double **XX Strength** (Pills) once successfully relieves some longest, overdue, unusual, discouraging, suppressed periods generally very quickly if due to usual abnormal causes. Some say it's like a quiet lightning bolt in action without danger, pain or inconvenience. Rely on this new wonderful **RELIEF COMPOUND**. It is one of the most successful compounds that often produces the most unbelievable and remarkable results. Doctor recommends it because it is compounded of the best fresh effective ingredients strictly according to U.S.P. Standards. Thousands of women who have tried many European models that failed have had their greatest desire gratified in the satisfying relief given by this wonderful new **P. P. PERIODIC RELIEF COMPOUND, DOUBLE XX STRENGTH**.

TRIAL SIZE ONLY 25c
FULL SIZE \$2.00

If you have tried other methods without success and are skeptical we will send you a trial size of the Double **XX Strength** for 25c. See coupon. Other women have tried the trial size and now have ordered the full size packages at \$2.00 each or 3 for \$5.00 because the new **P. P. PERIODIC RELIEF COMPOUND** has given them relief and gained their confidence. Orders shipped same day received, in plain wrapper, sealed.

SEND NO MONEY

You need not send one cent with your order. Just pay postman when your package is delivered to you. While we are very glad to send your order, we want to caution you that the Post Office charges small collection, and C. O. D. fees for this service. These charges you save if you send money with your order and besides you may be saved some embarrassment because we have to sign for a C. O. D. package. Your money is safe with us because we guarantee to ship all orders same day received in plain wrapper sealed. We have been in business many years and are highly recommended by women everywhere.

QUICK IN ACTION: The new **P. P. PERIODIC RELIEF COMPOUND** (Pills). Read what grateful ones have to say of the wonderful relief it brought to them in their irregularities, unusual abnormal cases which were long overdue. We have hundreds of grateful letters and cards arriving daily now. You owe it to yourself, your health and your happy future to help nature when it fails. Don't be late, send your order now.

GRATEFUL USERS SAY: I received your **P. P. Periodic Relief** (Pills). I took your first month's supply. Within 3 days the flow started.—Mrs. F., Iowa. I returned the package of **P. P. Relief Compound** and I think they are simply wonderful. I only had to take 3 tablets. I will be sending another order soon. I would not be without them.—Mrs. A. P., Ind. I ordered your Periodic Pills some time ago and they brought results. I had missed my monthly flow for two months, but I took your pills and in three days the flow started.—Mrs. N. R., Ohio. I have tried one box of your **P. P. Periodic Pills** and think there is nothing like them. They are just fine. Please send me two more boxes to keep on hand.—Mrs. B., N. Y. I received your trial size you sent me, and have taken them, and they helped me. They are sure wonderful pills. I never had any like them.—Mrs. A. M. N., Pa.

FREE BOOKLET "What a Married Woman Should Know" will be sent to you, and literature on many of the female troubles, in plain wrapper without obligation. Rush coupon.

Don't Delay — Cut Out and Mail the Coupon Now

SNYDER PRODUCTS COMPANY,
Dept. 07-E, 2434 North Wells St., Chicago, Illinois.

Send me all once your new Hygiene Booklet "What a Married Woman Should Know" and literature. I have checked below what size I want. Remittance enclosed.

If you want to pay postman when here

1 Box **P. P. Standard X Strength**..... \$2.00

1 Box **P. P. Double XX Strength**..... 2.00

3 Boxes **P. P. Double XX Strength**..... 5.00

1 Box **P. P. Triple XXX Strength**..... 5.00

1 **P. P. Trial Size Double XX Strength**..... 25c

Name.....

Address.....

Town.....State.....

Please mention **MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS GROUP** when answering advertisements

Banish Fear
Prevent Disease
End Self Denial



KNOW THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT SEX AND LOVE!



Stop Worrying
Conquer Ignorance
Overcome Shame



The Forbidden Secrets of Sex are Daringly Revealed!

AWAY with false modesty! At least a famous doctor has told *all* the secrets of sex in frank, daring language. No prudish beating about the bush, no veiled hints, but TRUTH, blazing through 376 pages of straightforward facts.

Love is the most *magnificent ecstasy* in the world... know how to hold your loved one... don't glean half-truths from unreliable sources. Now you can know how to end ignorance... fear... and self denial!

MORE THAN 100 VIVID PICTURES
The 106 illustrations leave nothing to the imagination... know how to overcome physical misgiving... know what to do on your wedding night to avoid the scorching results of ignorance.

Everything pertaining to sex is discussed in daring language. All the things you have wanted to know about your sex life, information about which other books only vaguely hint, is yours at last.

Some will be offended by the amazing frankness of this book and its vivid illustrations, but the world has no longer any use for prudery and false modesty.



A FAMOUS JUDGE SAYS THAT MOST DIVORCES ARE CAUSED BY SEX IGNORANCE!
Normal, sex-satisfied young people are torn apart because they lack sex knowledge.

WHAT EVERY MAN SHOULD KNOW

The Sexual Embarrass
Secrets of the Menstruum
Mistakes of Early Marriage
Venereal Diseases
How to Regain Virility
Control Ejaculation
Climate and Sex Instinct
To Obtain Greater Delight
The Truth About Abstinence

WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW

Just of Perfect Mating
What to Allow a Lover
To do
Imitative Female Myriad
Prostitution
Birth Control Chart
How to Attract and Hold
Men
Secret Signs of Woman
Essentials of Menstruation
Marriage
The Sex Organism

HOMOSEXUALITY...SEX ABNORMALITIES

Do you know about the astounding world of "half sexes"? They crave the companionship of their own sex... their practices are unbelievable to the normal mind... yet you should understand them.

Money back at once if you are not satisfied!
376 DARING PAGES

Don't be a slave to ignorance and fear. Enjoy the rapturous delights of the perfect physical love!

Love... scandal... divorce... can often be prevented by knowledge. Only the ignorant pay the awful penalties of wrong sex practices. Read the facts, clearly, startlingly told... study these illustrations and grope in darkness no longer.

You want to know... and you should know *everything* about sex. Sex is no longer a sin... a mystery... it is your greatest power for happiness. You owe it to yourself... to the one you love, to start aside the curtain of hypocrisy and learn the *naked truth!*

ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX!

Know how to enjoy the thrilling experiences that are your birthright... know how to attract the opposite sex... how to hold love.

There is no longer any need to pay the awful price for one moment of bliss. Read the scientific pathological facts told so bravely by Dr. Rubia. The chapters on venereal disease are alone worth the price of the book.

IS SEX IGNORANCE
DRIVING YOU ONE BY ONE
LOVE INTO THE ARMS
OF ANOTHER?
Let "Sex Harmony"
teach you how *easy* it is
to win and hold your
loved one!



SEND NO MONEY BY MAIL COUPON TODAY

PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.

Dept. 558, 1270 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.

Please send me "Sex Harmony and Eugenics" in plain wrapper. I will pay the postman \$2.98 (plus postage) on delivery. If I am not completely satisfied, I can return the book and the entire purchase price will be refunded immediately. A **NO REFUND POLICY OF CHANGE**, your book on "Why Birth Control?"

Name _____

Address _____

Orders from Foreign Countries 15 Shillings in advance



THIS BOOK NOT SOLD TO MINORS

FREE! NEW BOOK

"WHY BIRTH CONTROL?"



This startling book discusses birth control in an entirely new way - tells you many things about a much discussed subject. "Why Birth Control?" will be free to you - free free to all those who order "Sex Harmony and Eugenics" at the reduced price \$2.98. **PIONEER PUBLISHING CO.** Radio City 1270 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.