

JULY

15¢

Speed

DETECTIVE

A
SPEED
MAGAZINE



**ESCAPE TO
THE SOUTH**

by
Wyatt Blassingame

H. J. Frank

same trial -
in hair color they see

Tests reported by a national magazine on women and men, ranging in ages from 21 to 60, whose conclusive evidence, have shown startling results. These people were given fairly large doses of certain vitamins, and in from 1 to 6 months 88% of them showed first signs of results.

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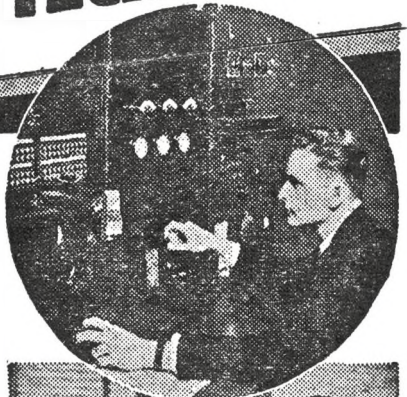
Broadcasting Stations, Aviation and Police Radio, Ship Radio and other communications branches are scrambling for Operators and Technicians to replace men who are leaving. You may never see a time again when it will be so easy to get started in this fascinating field. The Government too needs hundreds of competent civilian and enlisted Radio men and women. Radio factories, with huge war orders to fill, have been advertising for trained personnel. And think of the NEW jobs Television, Frequency Modulation, Electronics and other Radio developments will open after the war! This is the sort of opportunity you shouldn't pass up.

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BROADCASTING STATIONS (top illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. **FIXING RADIO SETS** (bottom illustration), a booming field today, pays many Radio Technicians \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week extra fixing Radios in spare time.

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Now!**



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SPEED DETECTIVE



July, 1943

Vol. 2, No. 1

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AMAZING FORECASTER

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24 HOURS IN ADVANCE



READ ALL ABOUT THE
"SWISS" WEATHER HOUSE
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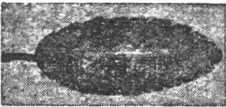
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Why pay \$5 or \$10 for a barometer when you can predict the weather yourself, at home, 8 to 24 hours in advance, with this accurate, inexpensive Weather House forecaster? It's made like a little Swiss cottage, with a thatched green roof and small green shutters.

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GET BURSTING STRENGTH QUICKLY

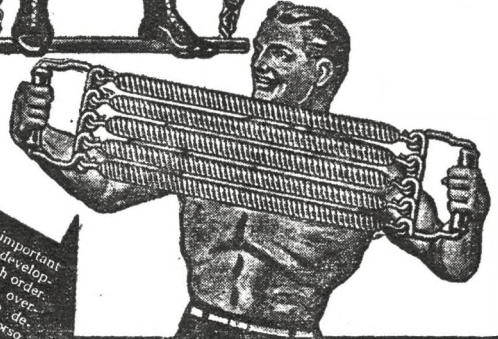
No matter if you are a weakling or no matter if you already boast of super muscles, you will find this outfit and instructions that go with it to be just what you need. The entire equipment which contains dozens of individual features are all adjustable in tension, resistance, and strength. This permits you to regulate your workouts to meet the actual resistance of your strength and to increase the power progressively as you build a body of mighty muscles. Men in training and men who have reached the top in performing strong-man feats unanimously acclaim this new progressive chest pull and bar bell combination as being a great advancement in the invention of practical equipment to quickly get strong and develop bursting strength.

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You get many specially posed pictorial instructions . . . a picture method showing short cuts to mighty muscles.

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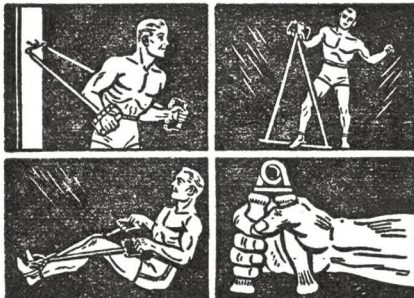
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*Charles
Atlas*

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115 East 23rd St., New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength!"

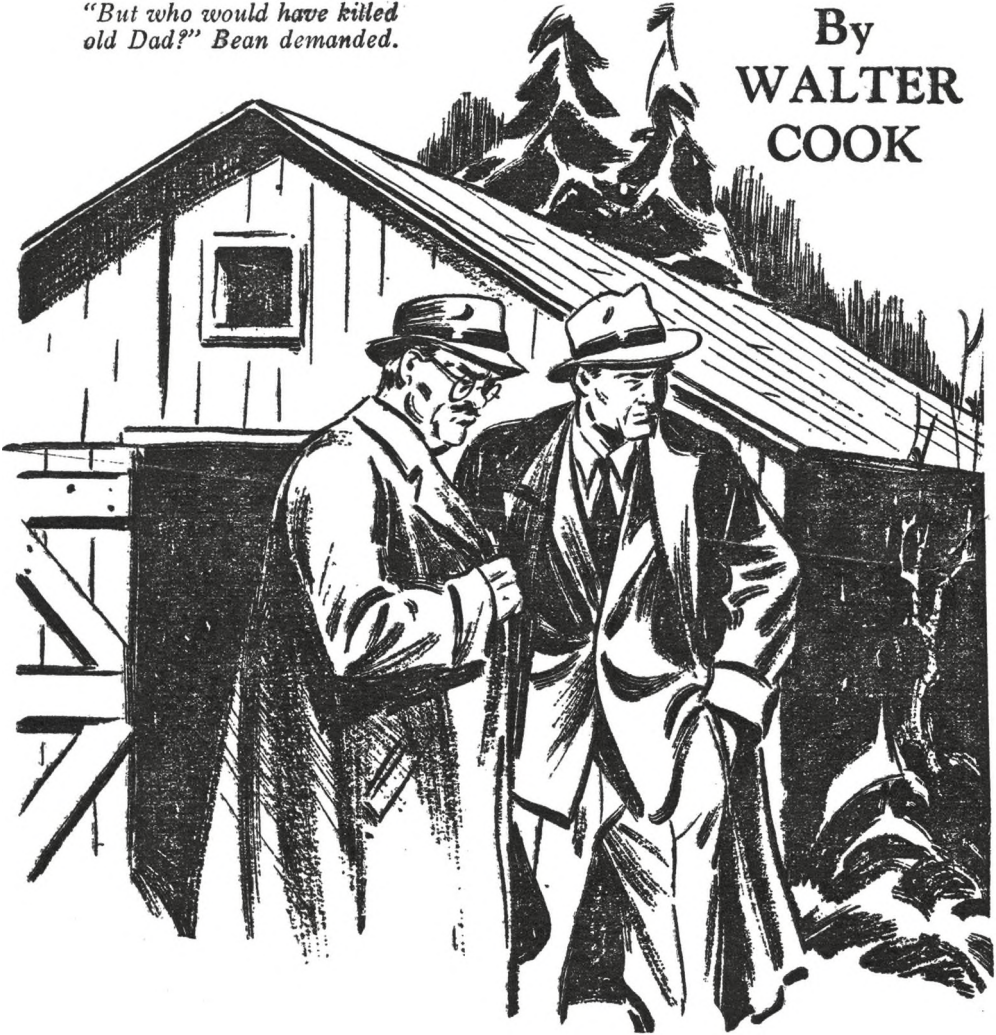
Name
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City..... State.....
Check here if under 16 for Booklet A

*"But who would have killed
old Dad?" Bean demanded.*

By
WALTER
COOK



WELL ENOUGH ALONE

IN THE cool, gentle drizzle, Cassel walked a few paces down the path toward the outhouse at the edge of the woods. Stopping, he looked down at the figure he had seen from the kitchen window of the farmhouse, the lanky body of Old Man Baumgartner. With real melancholy in his

voice, the detective murmured, "Gosh. The poor guy."

Old Dad was dead and stone cold. He lay face down, and his hair, like thin gray silk, was plastered to his long skull as though he had been rained on. That would mean he had been dead for two weeks at least, since

When Cassel stumbled on the body, it looked like death from natural causes, but, being of a suspicious nature, he couldn't just drop the matter there



the last precipitation before the drizzle just begun had occurred around the first of May. Likewise, the old man's clothing, the gaudily striped cotton shirt and the pants of baggy, faded drab cotton covert, stuck to his bony frame as though from a soaking. The body faced downward, away from the farmhouse.

No wonder Dad hadn't answered Cassel's letter.

Every year Cassel got his vacation when he asked for it, early, down here, for a particular reason. He and the old hermit had had something in

common. The farm was a mile and a half outside the town of Tollden, which was thirty-five miles southwest of the city of Groveland, where Cassel was first-grade on the city payroll. For five years he and Dad had hunted mushrooms together, just one species, the capricious and succulent morel which never grows in the same place twice.

Aside from his own woods, a deep stand of old oaks on rolling ground with dozens of small pools filled with frogs, Dad could guide Cassel to any woods worth prowling. In fact, he knew more woods in the region than could be prowled in the brief season,

which was good usually only from the middle of May to the end of the first week in June. Besides, farmers who would take a shotgun to trespassers knew Dad, and everything would be friendly. For him no land was posted. And besides, Dad knew how to handle a bull which started plowing up the ground with its horns and bellowing. Not that Cassel was timid; it just didn't occur to him that there was any means of arguing with the mad brutes the first time it happened. Well, Dad's worn-out pump had stopped at last. Cassel returned up the path and entered the farmhouse through the kitchen.

He cranked the old-style telephone hung on the wall and got the operator, telling her what had happened. He asked, "Do I call anyone in particular?"

"I'll get the sheriff and Dr. Bean for you. He's the coroner, you know. What is your name again? . . . Thank you. Will you wait there until they come?"

"Yes," said Cassel, and hung up.

WHILE he was waiting he looked around. The place was not poor, but there were no rugs on the hardwood floors of unvarnished planks. The planks were pegged, not nailed. The furniture was all black walnut and antique American—the chairs, tables, highboy, lowboy, organ, picture frames, racks on the walls with their scrollwork. It was a two-story house with an attic, but it was small; even so, Dad spent most of his time in the kitchen, where there was an excellent big radio, when he wasn't using the narrow, smallest bedroom upstairs. He entered the big bedroom of his mother and dad only to clean it.

On the kitchen table was a large package wrapped in brown paper, containing two quarts of bonded rye; Dad had a well-known tolerance for the silken-smooth stuff, and the pair of

bottles was Cassel's regular contribution to the cause.

Also on the table, at the window where he had first sighted the body, stood a bottle of brandy half emptied, and a single glass. In the bottom of the glass was a thin deposit of jelly left from the evaporated brandy, whose name on the label was Noyeau de B. Chambron. Something fancy. He pulled the cork and sniffed, and into his brain ascended the excitement of the peerless flavor of bitter almonds. And the danger.

Standing attentively still as though listening, he marveled at the magic of odors and how they functioned intimately with human memory. The word hadn't done it; he had forgotten the word. It was the incomparable odor, which made the air as bright as though filled with glints of crystal, and took him on the instantaneous journey back to that particular episode of the old, easy times.

He was at the university then, a junior at Minnesota, and it was during prohibition. His mother was canning peaches, as she did every year, and Cassel kept all the stones. In the quarter-sawed oak bookcase was a red clothbound book of formulas, a fat octavo volume once standard and perhaps still so in most respects. From that book he obtained a formula which was almost as close to his undoing as the first one. The first one came from a book in his father's shelf of rare works on mycology, in German and English mostly. The particular recipe concerned the poisonous mushroom known as the *amanita muscaria*, commonly the fly amanita. This fungus caused the death of the Czar Alexis of Russia and the Count de Vecchi in Washington. According to the work, the Siberians steeped dry specimens of the fly amanita in whortleberry juice, making a drink which produces an intoxication similar to that produced by the haschisch and majoon of the East.

Cassel tried that, being curious about everything, but he used a mixture of blueberries and huckleberries, akin to the whortleberry. The American muscaria must have been no more than akin, also, to the European variety. Imbibing the brew resulted eventually in a burning flush from head to foot, violent nausea, convulsing cramps and delirium. The Siberians might have been made of sterner stuff.

In the book of formulas there were several recipes for Noyeau. Poignantly he remembered that brew, which he had made at a time when there was a scare about splinters in bootleg alcohol, and blindness, and corroded livers. He took a mental note to look up those recipes, which ran: "Noyeau: For prussic acid content, should be partaken of moderately. 1. Bitter almonds, bruised, 3 oz.; spirit, 22 u.p., 1 qt.; sugar (dissolved in $\frac{3}{4}$ pt. of water), 1 lb.; macerate for ten days, frequently shaking the vessel, then allow it to repose for a few days, and decant the clear portion." Another one, "2. As the last, but substituting apricot or peach kernels, with the bruised shells, for the almonds." He and a friend who was instructing in American Lit. tried out the batch of tarantula juice one night, and neither was on the campus next day. They shook with ferocious hangovers, with headaches corkscrewing in throbs through their skulls from temple to temple. Cassel poured the rest of the brew down the drain of the laundry tub in his mother's basement.

The bitter almond smell of Dad's brandy was strong, too strong, and Cassel corked the bottle again. Things were wrong. The brandy wasn't obtainable in Tollden, where there were only two small liquor stores, but it probably was up in the City. Dad was a hermit, and hadn't bought the brandy. He had received it as a gift. Cassel wondered from whom. Dad's heart trouble wasn't serious, might be imagi-

nary, but for stopping hearts there was a lot of cyanide in that half bottle gone.

EXCEPT for the heavy rain on that one day, the Spring had been cold and dry. The drizzle in which Cassel had arrived diminished to mere fog. Dr. Harlan Bean, the coroner, looked down at Dad Baumgartner with arms akimbo for a moment. Rather plump, neat, and ladylike in the way he carried himself, Bean looked as though he would rather take care of colds and measles than touch dead men. He talked fast when he talked, short of breath. Cassel remembered his moist palm in the handshake, his hippy figure for which his dark suit was just big enough, and his intelligent, round, small blue eyes. Cassel was a full head taller.

"Well, he's dead," Bean said, as though it annoyed him very much.

"How was his heart?"

"Not bad. I told him to take it easy; he could have lived ten years longer. They all lived long, the Baumgartners."

"Have you got heart trouble yourself, by any chance?"

"I have," Bean admitted. "Damn it." His lips were purple, and if he lived past fifty, he would be lucky. He turned over Dad's body, and underneath there were still little scraps of ice. Cassel turned his back and looked at the surrounding woods through the trunks of the trees.

Two somber young men had come with Bean, but neither the sheriff nor a deputy had arrived. It was a simple death. The coroner had the boys take the stiff body out to the station wagon in which he had come, and they put it in back. Cassel took the coroner into the kitchen.

"Smell this," he said, proffering the bottle of brandy.

Bean sniffed, turned his head aside with a jerk and snorted. He said in a

When he put on his brakes, he'd skidded broadside into the truck.



way that pleased Cassel, "Cripes. Cyanide."

"That's what I think it is. That stuff is made out of bitter almonds or

peach pits. It has prussic acid in it. Would there be enough to kill a man whose heart wasn't any too good?"

"The way it smells, it would," said



Bean. "Baumgartner's heart wasn't bad. All I told him was not to climb hills too fast, nor drink ice-cold water. Take his time."

"I suppose it's a natural death."

"I don't know what else it is. He died."

"Heart trouble."

"Heart trouble." Bean breathed in jerks, but he wasn't noisy. There wasn't enough room in his body for his lungs. "Are you looking for something?"

"Yes. Murder."

After they had looked at each other for a while, Bean said, "Possibly, yes. I wouldn't like it. Don't believe it. There isn't anybody who would do it, not to him."

"No, of course not," Cassel agreed. "How long would you say he's been dead?"

"More than two weeks. Be hard to

tell exactly; it's been so cold up to now, and that's why he's in good shape."

"I'm probably over-suspicious, but can you tell whether he took a lethal dose of cyanide? I didn't notice any cyanosis."

"You mean bluing of the lips and nails?" The doctor grinned. "That's only a temporary phenomenon."

"How would you be able to tell, then?"

"There might be negative findings. A dead stomach digests its own stomach wall, since the wall becomes a

mere pierce of meat subject to the stomach juices. The mucosa of the intestines having gone first, there would be no trace of lesions if the poisoning was slight. On the other hand, shock would stop the flow of hydrochloric acid. Do you follow?"

"Yup, I follow."

"In the former case, how are you going to determine what a lethal dose might have been in this instance? Varies with the individual. KCN is very funny stuff. Now, I tell you. When I was in school, some of us used to bring our own lunch. Bunch of us were sitting around on the tables in lab one day, and a fellow reached behind him without looking to get some salt to sprinkle on half an apple he was eating. He got a salt, all right, but not common table salt. He sprinkled enough KCN on that apple to kill all the cats in Manhattan, and by George, I swear it must have been nine minutes before he was dead."

"Well, but he still died."

"Certainly he died," Bean snapped, "but you don't hang on for any nine minutes, my friend. It's unlikely that Dad would even get to the door, let alone outside, if he took enough cyanide to kill himself."

"Well, thanks a lot. I've been keeping you."

"Not at all; I'll see what I can find."

WHILE he was inspecting the brandy bottle, after Bean's departure, the telephone rang, two shorts and a long. He picked off the receiver and said, "Hello."

"Who's this?" a woman asked, nasally.

"Who do you want?" he countered.

"I'm calling Anna Novotny, not you," she twanged. "Get off the line. Don't you know your own ring?"

Returning to the table, he unwrapped his two quarts of rye; in the brown paper he made a package of the brandy, the used glass, and the outer wrapping of tissue and the torn seal

of the bottle which he found in a wastebasket near the sink.

Making another tour of the premises, he went upstairs, passing through a storeroom and thence to Dad's bedroom. He proceeded directly to the highboy and pulled out one drawer after another. In this solid old piece of furniture were all Dad's treasures. There was a little jewelry, mostly his mother's; the few precious stones were small. There was a box of musket balls, which he had still been finding occasionally when he chopped wood; considerable Indian fighting had gone on hereabouts. A box of stamps—the stamps from every letter he had ever received. There was a bankbook among a pack of documents, showing few withdrawals, no deposits, no interest credited for three years, and a balance of twenty-four thousand dollars odd. Cassel made a sound of comment, surprised that the amount was so great.

Dad had kept money on hand, much more than the ten dollars in bills and silver which he found. And all the gold was gone. He had had quite a hoard of ones, fives, tens, and double-eagles, which he had never turned in. Also gone were the cufflinks made of two and a half dollar goldpieces, and the heavy gold watch.

Downstairs the telephone commenced ringing insistently. He ignored it, shoving the drawers shut. Bringing his face close he studied the drawer knobs one after another. As though he were going to suck a lollipop he rounded his mouth and breathed on one of the knobs. The moisture of his breath condensed on the cool, polished walnut, and he watched the unbroken whiteness evaporate. He tried another knob. Combing his hair with his fingers to get a trace of oil, he planted an index fingerprint on the face of the drawer and blew on that. In the patch of tiny moisture beads the print showed plainly.

He wiped it off with his handker-

chief; when he breathed on the spot this time the lines and whorls were gone, but the outline of the print remained. That wouldn't help. After making another print he walked back and forth smoking a cigarette; whenever he got any ash he brushed it off onto the print. When he blew off the little heap of gray ash he had a daisy; the fine ash which he collected on an envelope taken from his pocket, he sifted on one of the drawer knobs.

"Nuts," he said, straightening up. The knobs had been carefully wiped. If there were any latent prints, experts with proper equipment would have to get them.

A car entered the stony drive which climbed in a long swing from the highway to the house. Cassel walked out into the storeroom at the front of the house and looked down through the window. Whoever it was had evidently used the drive only to turn around, because pebbles popped away from the car's tires when it backed down; Cassel got the meagerest glimpse of a black sedan through the foliage of trees, and it was gone back up the highway the way it had come. He didn't see the driver nor even discover the make of car.

Before he left, Cassel took a quick sneak through the fringes of the woods, scouting the bases of the oaks. The ground was loamy and likely beyond question, but in the brief tour he saw none of the sponge mushrooms even in the button stage. Probably it was too early, and unless there was more rain. . . .

Furious lightning cracked in the sky far away, and big drops were falling faster when he raced back to his car. He locked the farmhouse. It was something like locking the barn doors after the horses were in Canada, but the vanload of antiques in the house would ravish the eyes of the first dealer happening along with a van.

Cassel was certain that there had been robbery, that the highboy had

been judiciously looted by someone overly concerned with concealing the fact of robbery.

THE rain was coming down papply-daddle when Cassel dashed across the sidewalk in Tollden. The doorway footed wooden stairs ascending to the second story above the corner drugstore, where he entered the law office of Isham Kuttlers.

The lawyer was weaselish. He was small and smooth, and had an air of being interesting in his last life, or in his next, wearing a coat of sleek brown fur and cafe-au-lait down on his chest and stomach. His eyes were as bright as brand new brown emmies, he had an old face of hard tan ivory, and his mouth was carved straight across between parentheses of wrinkles curving down from the nostrils of a lean nose. Likewise, he was sizing up Cassel, and they became acquainted briefly.

"What can I do for you?" Kuttlers inquired.

"It's about Dad Baumgartner. He's dead."

"He is? Well. That's too bad." The lawyer wove his fingers together over a round little tummy.

"I'd like to know if he left a will."

"How are you concerned?"

Cassel explained, and if the lawyer required it would get an order from the sheriff. He identified himself, produced his shield. It was up to Kuttlers, who rose and stared through a window streaming with rain.

"I don't see any harm," he decided, and went to a safe. "Yes, he did make a will. Last fall."

After closing the safe he returned to the desk with a document, standard legal size and bound in blue when he opened it. He scanned it, glanced over the top at Cassel.

"Who inherits the money?"

"Miss Eleanor Wilde, 922 Ramsey Street, in Groveland, gets everything

as far as I can make out. Money and property."

"Who is she?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. I don't know whether she's a child or a tottering old hag."

"How does that will read? May I see it?"

"I'll read it." Kuttlers cleared his throat, and read musingly and distinctly: "I, Charles A. Baumgartner, of Tollden, Corbin County . . . sound and disposing mind and memory, hereby make, publish, and declare this my last Will and Testament, hereby revoking any and all Wills by me at any time heretofore made.

1. I direct that all my just debts and funeral expenses be, by my executor hereinafter named, first duly paid.

2. I give and bequeath to my nephew George Hermann Van Slyke my watch and chain.

3. I give, devise, and bequeath to my married sister, and in the event of her death leaving lawful issue her surviving, then to such surviving issue per stirpes, the sum of One Thousand Dollars, on the condition however that the total value of my estate shall be sufficient to pay my married sister or her surviving lawful issue per stirpes the sum of One Thousand Dollars and to each unmarried sister me surviving a sum greater than Two Thousand Dollars, after deducting costs of administration.

4. All the rest, residue, and remainder of my estate, real, personal, or mixed, wheresoever situate of which I shall die seized or possessed, or to which I shall in any manner be entitled at my decease, I give, devise and bequeath to Eleanor Baring Wilde, of 922 Ramsey Street, Groveland. . . . The rest of it doesn't matter," said Kuttlers, reading swiftly and silently down the sheet. "It's just 'In the event that . . .' and that sort of thing. The estate, if insufficient for the terms, to be divided in groups of One-hundredths. Eighty One-hun-

dredths to go to Miss Wilde. If she dies, to the unmarried sister or survivors of them, share and share alike, in fee simple absolute. . . . Take into account proceeds of life insurance, if any of life in force at time of decease . . . any of said devisees or legatees . . . All properly signed, sealed, published and declared by the Testator in the presence of witnesses. And dated," Kuttlers finished.

Cassel guessed that the estate would amount to more than thirty, and under fifty, thousand dollars. He asked, "You drew up that will, did you?"

"No, as a matter of fact he did. I suggested some changes, but I guess it's all right as it is. It'll stand up."

"Why did you say Miss Wilde gets everything?"

"Well, everything but the watch and chain. In January, the two unmarried sisters, the married one and her husband, who was driving like a fool on an icy road, and the two sons, were all killed. He was trying to pass another car and saw he couldn't make it; when he put on his brakes he skidded around into a truck broadside."

"Did Dad Baumgartner know about it?"

"Yes. It was in the papers; I phoned him besides."

"He didn't change his will."

"No; said to let it stand."

"Miss Wilde is related to him then."

"No, she's not, unless . . . No. Van Slyke is the only relative he has left."

"That's very odd. Thank you, Mr. Kuttlers."

DOWN on the street Cassel crossed the sidewalk in two strides in the rain. The windows were cranked up, and rapidly the faintly sour smell of the wet wool of his jacket filled the space in the car. He made a U-turn and headed back for the city of Groveland thirty-five miles away. Because of the rain it took him almost an hour to get to the city, downtown.

*He jerked on the ankle and the boy
crashed to the floor.*



He brought the rain along with him, and took the long flight of shallow steps three at a time in front of the Public Safety Building.

He bumped into the chief, who remarked, "I thought you were on vacation."

"Well, I am."

"Nothing like a cop's holiday, I guess."

Cassel took his package to the laboratories and asked that the contents

be gone over thoroughly, giving his suspicions. There was a lull in the rain. In it he made the rounds of the

liquor stores, and found two carrying Noyeau. At neither had a bottle been sold recently. Not for weeks. In fact, only one sale was recorded this year; the stuff moved slowly. The clerk did not remember who had made the purchase, whether male or female, and probably would not remember if he saw the customer again.

After lunch Cassel called headquarters for no results. While he was having a couple of beers in a bar in the afternoon he called again, and this time the findings were in.

They were: No fingerprints whatsoever; that is, excepting three prints on the bottle neck belonging to the detective himself. Two kinds of mucilage on the seal. Contents of the bottle—there was certainly prussic acid content, a dangerous amount, but not necessarily lethal unless, perhaps, the imbiber guzzled down a whole pint at a time. Apparently that was precisely what Dad had done. Cassel was disappointed, but he had the other facts to go on. There was three times as much cyanide in the brandy as in the bottle Cassel bought out of his own pocket for comparison. But then, even the best gin varies because the oil content of the juniper berries is not the same in every crop. No fingerprints on the glass. The consistency of the residue in the glass indicated that in a dry room it had formed in a period of at least eight weeks. If that was correct, Dad had been killed around the middle of March.

The last Cassel had heard from Dad was a letter in early March, just before when there had been a record snowfall. Dad had written, "The way the snow is heaped up on the old shack, it looks like a whopping puffball, so maybe there'll be morels after all. I still got a peck or so of dried ones, if you're out. You want to come down for puffballs one time. They're real tasty when you fix them right. Morels ain't the only mushies in the woods." But immediately after the

big snow came the big thaw, after which it turned cold and remained dry except for the one rain. So it wasn't impossible that Dad had lain out in the weather for two long months.

SINCE poisoning was a woman's method, Cassel called first on Eleanor Wilde. She was an exceptionally handsome girl, fashioned in firm curves; her legs were long and straight. She had dark hair and guileless eyes, and her skin was the color of cream. Cassel shut his mind to her likeableness.

Identifying himself and noting the widening of her eyes, he stated, "I came to talk to you about Mr. Baumgartner. He was found dead this morning."

"Oh, I'm sorry. He was such a nice person." She sounded genuine.

"Did you know him well?"

"Not really well. Really, I saw him only a few times, but I liked him."

"How did you come to meet him?"

"Why, what's the matter? Well, I drove down with—with my fiance."

"Did you know he left a will?"

"That isn't any of my business, Mr. Cassel."

"Yes, it is. He leaves everything to you, down to the last twig and pebble."

"That's impossible. I tell you, I don't believe I've talked with him more than a couple of hours altogether. Are you serious?"

"I'll say I am. Who's your fiance?"

Reluctantly she said, "George Van Slyke." She looked worried.

"Has he got a car?"

"N-no. That's why, you see. I drove him down."

"Why did he go down?"

"Just to see him, I guess. Dad was lonely, and he was George's only relative. What's wrong with that?"

"Has he got your car now?"

"Yes. Haven't I the right to know what you're trying to find out?"

"Only routine, Miss Wilde," he said innocently. "We do this all the time. Thanks very much."

No way of telling whether George had got the jitters waiting so long for the body to be found, had driven down today, and been scared off by the sight of the detective's car.

He hid himself to Van Slyke's place, a one-story address with a screen porch, on a narrow, deep lot.

"I suppose you've come to ask about Dad Baumgartner," the boy said promptly. "What's the idea?"

He was a handsome Nordic specimen, blue eyed, with smooth pink cheeks like a girl's, and light, curly hair.

"Oh, you know he's dead, do you?"

"Certainly. Eleanor just phoned."

Cassel made a wry face. "Well, how about you? You know about the will?"

"I did not. I didn't think he'd bothered, any more than I would."

"Everyone ought to make a will. Why wouldn't you?"

"What for? I haven't got anything to leave."

The bait was neat, and the detective took it.

"He had plenty to leave, though."

"That's news to me."

"If you thought he was poor, why did you go to him to borrow money?" This was a shot in the dark. A full year ago, Cassel had been at Dad's when Van Slyke called. Cassel hadn't seen him; Dad had excused himself from the kitchen, had a mild wrangle with someone in the parlor, gone up to his room and perhaps taken money from the highboy to give to Van Slyke.

AFTER a calculating look at Cassel he admitted, "Twenty dollars is borrowing, I guess. I owed someone a hundred dollars and they were getting tough about it. He insisted on giving me the twenty though I told him it wouldn't do any good, and

that's what convinced me he was poor."

"You pay off the debt? The hundred?"

Van Slyke's face turned slightly antagonistic at this prying. "Yes. Pawned some stuff."

"When were you down there last time?"

"Last year, in the Fall, with Eleanor. What's all the mystery, anyhow?"

"You weren't down there in March? You didn't take along a bottle of Noyeau to give to him?"

"No, whatever Noyeau is."

"You know what it is. It's a brandy handled by only two stores here, and it sold only one bottle until I got mine today."

"It must be expensive."

"It is. Another thing about it, it's made of bitter almonds and has a prussic acid content."

"Poison," Van Slyke murmured thoughtfully, and nodded. "I'm beginning to understand."

"Your bottle has more cyanide in it than mine has."

"Somebody else's bottle," he retorted softly. "Are you making accusations?"

"I'm merely asking."

Van Slyke shook his head, smiling. "I assure you I did not spike a bottle with prussic acid in the hope that Dad had a weak heart and would bump off and I would inherit all his money, supposing he had any. Anyhow, Eleanor tells me you said he left everything to her."

"But you two intend to get married."

"Not until I've got a job and some dough."

"All right. So long."

"So long, captain."

"Now where I am?" Cassel asked aloud, disgruntledly, while he drove away. He held the supposition that, if Van Slyke were guilty, he could not have known that Dad had left a will.

(Continued on page 93)

ESCAPE TO

SHE WAS working behind the stocking counter in one of the large Miami department stores when Ed Mahan finally caught up with her. He stopped and took the picture out of his pocket to check on it, although he already knew it, feature by feature, better than he knew the reflection of his own face in a mirror. This was the girl all right. But when she looked up at him, he thought suddenly: there's no need to cause a scene here in the store. It's

closing time in half an hour. I'll wait.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she asked. Her voice was like he had imagined it: a little breathless and husky and pleasant.

"I want to buy two pairs of stockings," he said, because he had to say something.

"What size?"

"I don't know. About the size you'd wear."

For two months he had tracked her across half a continent. Chief Conrad would compliment him, and there'd be a raise, maybe; and certainly he'd earned the money from Tink Davis and the morning *Star*. Yet now he had found her, he felt curiously let down.



"I'll take that money, pal," the man in the doorway said.

THE SOUTH

By WYATT BLASSINGAME



After the train wreck the girl had completely disappeared and, unless she could be found, the railroad stood to lose a lot of money

He shrugged and paid for the stockings without looking at them, and went outside to stand in the warm, white Miami sunlight and wait for the store to close.

SHE was one of the first employees out, hurrying as though there were not enough free time to see and do all the things that she wanted. She was smiling to herself and she did not see him until he had touched her on the arm. "Miss Huston," he said.

For an instant then he thought she was going to run. But she stopped, her face gone bloodless beneath its light makeup and the terror clear in her eyes. "You—you must have made a mistake! My name—"

"Sara Huston," he said. He took his badge and the picture of her from his pocket, holding them in the same hand so that she could see.

People were passing along the sidewalk: women in slacks or shorts and men in the inevitable white that tourists wear whether it is cold or hot. No one noticed the thick-shouldered, sandy haired man and the girl in her plain, dark colored dress. "I'm not going back," the girl said. "I have a right to my own life." And when he didn't answer she said, slowly, "It wasn't really stealing. At least, I didn't mean. . . ."

They were standing in front of a bar and when its door opened the sound of music came out to them. All at once Ed Mahan wanted a drink, bad. "Let's go in here," he said.

He led her to a booth at the rear, and when he had the glass in his hand and half the liquor down his throat he said, "Tell me about it, Miss Huston," and leaned back to watch her. It was all familiar, all the way he had expected it to be from the first. And yet it was wrong too. Even the taste of the liquor was wrong.

CONRAD, in charge of the railroad's detective force, had called him

into the office. "It's about that wreck out in Montana," Conrad had said.

A split rail on a lonely stretch of track in the badlands had resulted in the death of four people, injury to twenty more. One of those killed had been Abe Torousi, head of a local numbers racket. "Is he causing trouble dead as well as alive?" Mahan asked.

"No, this is about the girl who disappeared. A girl named Sara Huston. We know she was in one of the cars that overturned, but since that time there has been absolutely no trace of her. If she had been killed, her body should have been found. And it hasn't. She just disappeared, completely."

"And so?" Mahan said.

"Her mother is threatening to bring suit. We are willing to make proper adjustments, but not for a death that didn't occur. I want you to find the girl, find out how badly injured she is, if at all."

That was all the railroad wanted, but the morning *Star* had bargained for more. The *Star* was a new newspaper, backed by big money but having tough sledding to gain circulation against entrenched and cutthroat rivalry. Mahan had run into Tink Davis of the *Star* just before he took the train west.

Davis told him, "We mentioned the girl at the time she disappeared. She was a school teacher in a little country town out there, and fairly nice looking, according to her picture. There may be a really good story in this. A mystery element, and human interest too."

"I'll give you an exclusive on the details—for a little money," Ed Mahan said. He could always use money, and he didn't doubt that sooner or later he would find her. Maybe dead, maybe alive. It didn't seem important to him then.

He got a hundred dollar advance, a promise of more if the story worked

out. And he lost the hundred, and five dollars besides, playing poker between Chicago and Montana, and shrugged and forgot about it.

The town where Sara Huston had lived and taught school had a bank and a drugstore and a population of 1,500. Ed Mahan called on the railroad agent first. "'Did you know this Huston dame?" he asked. "The one who disappeared after the wreck a month ago."

The railroad agent leered at him. "I got a wife and four kids, and my old lady's the jealous type. So I didn't know her as well as I might."

"She was that sort, eh?" Mahan asked.

"That's what folks said, but she taught school, you know, and it's a small town. She had to be careful."

"Where was she going on that train?"

"To a teacher's convention over at the Capitol. At least, that's the explanation."

"Who'd know the truth about it? What man did she run round with most?"

"Well, I don't think she went with anybody. She had to be careful, you know."

"So it seems," Ed Mahan said.

He called on the school principal next, a woman with a face like that of an ill-natured horse. "I haven't an idea what's become of her," the principal said. "Although I must admit I'm not sorry to be rid of her."

"She was a poor teacher?"

The principal snorted. "Average perhaps—though she read to the children more than she worked with them on the fundamentals of education. She was bad for their morale. A woman of *that* type should never be allowed to instruct children."

"What type?" Mahan asked.

"With her background, and the scandal. . . ." Her tongue made a snicking noise. Mahan looked inter-

ested, and the principal said, "Her mother is a dipsomaniac—and worse, if you believe the things you hear. And it's certain that nobody knows much about the man she claims to have married. It's outrageous to have a teacher who's father you don't even know."

"Why did you employ her?"

"It was against my better judgment. I can certainly say that with a clear conscience. But A. T. Boswell—he's president of the bank and head of the school board—practically forced her upon us."

"She was a particular friend of this Mr. Boswell?"

"No. I haven't an idea why he insisted on her being employed—unless it is true that he was once in love with her mother and passed her up to marry the present Mrs. Boswell, who was wealthy. But that's sheer gossip, of course."

"Of course," Ed Mahan said.

THIS was in late November and already a thin coat of snow covered the earth. He couldn't tell much about the little house in which Sara Huston had lived, except that nobody had bothered to clean the walk recently. He followed the dirty tracks through the snow to the porch and rang the bell.

The door opened almost immediately and a woman peered out at him. "Oh, I thought you were . . ." He stepped inside without waiting for an invitation.

The woman wore a robe that was not quite clean and he couldn't tell much about her age: she could have been anywhere between forty and sixty. There were dark circles under her eyes and her face had a loose flabby look. Her breath smelled of liquor.

"I'm from the railroad," he said. "I want to ask you about your daughter."

"There's nothing I can tell you I haven't told the other men you've sent. Like I told the man you had here two



Among those killed they'd found Abe Torousi, the numbers king.

days ago, it seems clear enough she was killed in the accident."

"Two days ago?" Conrad had told him that an adjuster had called on her two weeks before.

"Yes. The dark man with the scar on his face."

He said, "We are willing to make whatever adjustment is proper, but we must have some proof of what happened to your daughter. We are willing to be very generous." He was watching her and he saw the greedy, hungry look flicker in her eyes. "Even if your daughter was not actually killed; even if she was only inconveni-

enced, we would be generous. Very generous," he said, stressing the words. And then he said, "But we won't pay a dime until we have some proof."

The greed went slowly out of the woman's eyes. "How can I give you any proof?" Her voice began to take on a sharp edge. "You can't pay me for what's happened to my daughter anyway! I don't want any money! I'm sorry I ever wrote for it! Just leave me alone! Leave me alone!"

As he left, a delivery boy passed him carrying a bundle from *Benny's Liquor Store*.



MR. A. T. Boswell had graying hair and a heavy face. He said, "I know no more about what happened to Miss Huston than you do."

"But you know about her past," Ed Mahan said. "I've been talking to people around town. What is it they had against her?"

He thought the banker wasn't going to answer, but after a while the man looked up from his desk. "Accumulated gossip," he said. His voice was slow and a little wistful, Mahan thought. "Her mother was always reading books and plays and things, even when she was just a child. And, well, she went away with a traveling show when she was nineteen. She married the man who ran it, but that

was in Butte, and people around here . . . especially after he left her. And when she came back here nobody would have much to do with her. She took to living more and more alone, and to drinking."

He stopped, and Mahan was quiet, watching him. The banker said, "Most of the little girls wouldn't play with Sara. When she got older, the boys started to slip around there at night. It didn't take her long to learn that she couldn't go out with them. Most of them wouldn't act decent, and the few that would, she wouldn't go with them either because of the talk. I don't reckon she's had a date with a boy in five years."

"Why did she stay here?"

"She had a job here, and her mother to support. And they had the house to live in, though they couldn't sell it because the back taxes were so much nobody'd touch it."

He looked up, his eyes hard and

steady on Mahan. "If she's alive," he said, "I hope you don't find her."

Mahan said, "If she's alive, I'll find her. That's my job."

He was a thorough man. He hung around the streets until he found a boy of about eight or nine, walking homeward with school books under his arm. Mahan put a cigarette in his mouth, said, "You got a match, buddy?"

The kid searched his pockets thoughtfully. "I ain't got any," and added, "I don't smoke—yet."

"What grade are you in?"

"Second."

"Didn't Miss Huston teach that grade?"

"She used to. But she ain't there any more."

"Where is she?"

"How'd I know? She just ain't there."

"Was she a good teacher?"

The kid grinned. "Sure. If you didn't know your lesson, you could just ask her to read to you, and fool her almost every time. She'd even make up stories to tell you."

"Well I'll be danged!" Ed Mahan said. "What kind of stories?"

"Oh about places way on the other side of the world, and about ships, and about how birds can just up and fly anywhere they want to go. That sort of stuff."

"I see," Ed Mahan said. His eyes were narrow and thoughtful as he took a match from his pocket and flicked it with his thumbnail.

"Hey!" the kid said. "You got a match?"

"Yeah," Mahan said. "I must have forgot to feel in this pocket."

HE made one other trip, to Benny's Liquor Store. Mrs. Huston had changed her brand of liquor two weeks after the train wreck. The new brand cost fifty cents a quart more than the other.

He hired a guide and rode out to the place the accident had occurred. From here they circled, and it was ten days before they located the Mexican family with which the girl had stayed. The Mexicans couldn't speak English, and Mahan couldn't speak Spanish, and his guide didn't do very well. But they learned the girl had been brought here sick and had stayed for a week, ten days maybe, maybe two weeks. Who knows how many days pass? Then she had paid the Mexican and he had driven her in his wagon to the nearest paved road and he had never seen her again.

Mahan gave him a dollar and the Mexican put it in his pocket, muttering. "What's he saying?" Mahan asked.

"He says the other man gave him more money."

"What other man?"

"Some fellow with a scar on his face," the guide said.

From there on it was a slow trail, but not especially difficult for Mahan. Aside from changing her name the girl had done little to cover her tracks. She had bought a train ticket to Chicago. She had stayed at a nice, but not expensive hotel. She had bought new clothes. She had bought a train ticket to Tampa. From Tampa she had ridden the bus to Miami. He had spent a week in Miami before he located her working in the department store.

And now he sat in a bar with a string orchestra playing softly and listened to her fill in the parts of the story he had only guessed at. Her memory of the wreck and of the first hours afterward were blurred. "I remember running. The car I was in was piled close beside the engine and I remember being afraid it would explode. My head was bleeding from where something struck me and I couldn't think clearly. And then—I must have run away from the tracks, because I

couldn't find them again. I kept going, looking for them, and I must have been going the wrong way. And my head was hurting. Then there was a Mexican in a wagon though there wasn't any road."

"And the money?" Ed Mahan said. "You couldn't have had as much with you as you've spent since then."

Her hands were clenched together on the table. "It was in the bag," she said. "I was carrying a bag when I ran from the train. I thought it was mine; it was about the same size, same color. I didn't know it was filled with money until I opened it at the Mexican's home."

Now her hands lay quietly on the table. "I meant, at first, to give it back. I felt sure that when my head had quit hurting I would find the person it belonged to, and give it to him. But in the meanwhile I couldn't help but think of what I would do if it were mine. Maybe that's why I stayed there with the Mexicans for so long. I didn't want to get well enough to travel—I didn't want to quit dreaming the money belonged to me."

"How much was there?"

"A thousand dollars," she said. "Exactly one thousand dollars. I thought I could send five hundred to mother, and that would keep her until I could go somewhere and get a job and start making money. I kept thinking about coming to Florida, because I've always wondered what it would be like to be warm in the Winter, to go swimming in January. So I stayed on there with the family of Mexicans for almost two weeks."

"When did you decide to keep the money?"

"It was after I had got a ride into Butte. Nobody recognized me and I sat there in the bus station and read the papers. There wasn't anything about a lost suitcase full of money. And then I saw the picture of Abe Toronsi, the racketeer who was killed

in the accident, and I remembered he had been sitting across the aisle from me. I knew then it must be his bag I had picked up." Her tongue moved across her pale lips. "He was dead. I couldn't give it back to him. And suddenly all the dreams I'd had were too much for me. I put five hundred dollars in an envelope and registered it and sent it to mother. Then I caught the first train toward Chicago."

"I'd figured it pretty much that way," Ed Mahan said.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I don't know. I'll have to get in touch with the office." And with Tink Davis, he thought, making empty circles with his glass upon the table top. That would mean newspaper stories, and people staring at her again, whispering behind her back. She would lose her job, and there would be the search for anything to keep herself and her mother. He kept thinking of how she looked as she walked out the store tonight, smiling to herself and hurrying because there would never be enough time to get back all the happiness she had lost.

HE looked at her, his face hard now and a little bitter. "There should have been more than a thousand dollars in that bag. What did you do with the rest of it?"

"More—? I— There was exactly a thousand. I swear!"

"Where is it?"

"The bag?"

"Yes."

"At my room, the place I'm staying."

"Let's go look at it," he said.

They took a taxi. It was late twilight now, with a half moon pale in the sky. Lawns were green and poinsettias were huge red-black stars in front of the white and pink and blue stucco houses. Looking at them the

(Continued on page 97)



Shooting Schedule

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

*Dave beat him to the trigger by
three seconds.*



WHEN I finally located Slugger Brennan in a cheap groggery on Western Avenue he didn't look like a bozo who would be croaked before the night was over. He was

merely plastered to the adenoids; and when I spoke to him, he answered by heaving a roundhouse punch at my profile.

He was a big loogan, at least an

inch taller than my six feet plus and outweighing my hundred and ninety by an easy eleven pounds. Moreover, he was a former heavyweight fighter; and while he'd abandoned the ring racket in favor of an acting career here in Hollywood, he still packed copious power. Drunk as he was, the hulking brim could have strewn me all over the premises if that wallop had connected.

It didn't connect, though. I yipped: "Hey—!" and ducked his knotted knuckles; stepped inside the poke and fastened the grasp on him. "What's the idea?"

"Aren't you Dan Turner, the private snoop?" he breathed a fog of gin in my features.

"Yeah."

"So I don't like private snoops. Leggo me and I'll take you apart." Then he added through a hiccup: "That goes for Walt Lorimer, too."

"Oh. Then you know Lorimer sent me to find you."

"That'sh what I figure," he leered wisely. "Am I right?"

I saw no reason to deny it. "Sure," I said.

TWO hours before, Walt Lorimer, the guy we were talking about, had ankled into my apartment stash; hired me to hunt this Slugger Brennan character. "I need him on the set tonight," Walt had told me earnestly. "It's a matter of shooting schedules. My money's running pretty low."

I could savvy that remark. Lorimer was a tall, handsome hombre who'd been a star in Masterpiece Pix; a box office gold mine. Now, having saved a stack of geetus out of his weekly wages, he'd broken away from Masterpiece and established his own independent unit—writing, producing, directing, and starring in a prize fight opus that belonged strictly to him and nobody else. If it clicked, he stood to make a young fortune.

But a failure would cost him every coupon in his ration book. He'd dumped his last dime into the venture, and you can't make a class A movie on a shoestring. That's why he was worried now that his bankroll was down to bedrock. He hated to fold up and go back to Masterpiece with his hat in his hand, begging for his old job. They'd sign him on a contract fast enough; but his pride was involved. He didn't want the world to know he'd come a cropper on a pet project.

"One more scene will finish this boxing pic," he said. "And I have to shoot it tonight."

"What's the hurry?"

"Well, as you know, I'm renting sound stage space on the General Features lot. The lease is up at midnight—and I haven't got enough cash for another day's rental. Once this climax scene is in the cans, though, I'll be okay."

I asked him: "What is the climax scene?"

"The big championship fight between Slugger Brennan and myself. We've rehearsed it until it's perfect; there won't be any retakes needed."

"And you can't find Brennan?"

"No. He's on a binge. You've got to locate him for me, Hawkshaw. Otherwise—"

I said: "Okay, quit jittering. I'll have the big lug in front of your cameras if I have to drag him by the ears."

NOW, here in the cheap cocktail emporium, it began to look as if my boast was going to backfire. The Brennan beezark was sullen, stubborn, nasty. "Nuts to Walt Lorimer," his voice sounded meaner than poison. "Whadda I care if he can't finish his lousy epic?"

"That's no way to talk, bub," I argued. "He never did you any dirt."

"He did too. He swiped my sweetie."

This was news to me. I started to say so; but before I got the words out, someone horned into the dialogue with: "Hello, gumshoe. Hi, Slugger. Pardon me for butting in, but I couldn't help overhearing the beef."

I turned; fastened the focus on a tubby, smiling little ginzo whose skull was as barren as a cue-ball and whose puss resembled a full moon brimming with good nature. This hairless citizen was Lew Scanlund, president of Masterpiece Pix—one of the real powers in the cinema industry. When Scanlund snapped his pudgy fingers, half

shots for disobeying the tubby little studio mogul's orders. It didn't pay to cross Scanlund.

Slugger Brennan seemed to realize this; seemed to savvy that if he left Walt Lorimer in the lurch it would bounce right back in his own teeth—thanks to Scanlund's friendship for Walt. You couldn't buck that kind of combination, not if you hoped to stay in pictures. Brennan shrugged, reddened to the roots of his cauliflower ears.

"Awright," he growled. "I was only kidding." Then he linked arms with

It was only a movie and the Slugger was supposed to pull his punches. But, instead, he was making a real fight of it and cutting the handsome star to ribbons! Swift on the heels of that came murder, and it all happened at a time when Dan Turner was listening to the birdies!

of Hollywood shivered like jello in an earthquake.

He slipped me an impish grin. "Having trouble with this lame-brained bruiser, Sherlock?"

"A little," I said.

"Maybe I can fix it." He narrowed his peepers at the scowling Brennan. "Look. I've made plenty of bucks out of Walt Lorimer. He happens to be a nice joe and a pal of mine, even though he decided to quit me and strike out for himself. In other words, I'm for him a hundred per cent, see?"

Slugger glowered. "So you're for him a hundred per cent. But I ain't."

"Better change your mind, sweetheart," Scanlund's tone was a velvet glove stretched on brass knuckles.

He didn't have to say any more than that. Listening to him, you knew he meant business. More than one hambo had been put on the secret blacklist and aced out of the galloping snap-

me. "I'm ready to go if you are, sham-us."

I waltzed him out to my waiting jalopy; ferried him to the General Features lot behind Gower Street. Twenty minutes later he was stripped down to satin ring trunks under the bright Kliegs and sun-arcs that bathed the oversized sound stage with brilliance. I watched from the sidelines as the cameras started grinding. Brennan scrambled through the ropes; faced Walt Lorimer for the climax fight scene of Walt's independent opus. A gong clanged. They started throwing punches.

And then raw hell frothed over.

IT BEGAN with a banshee shriek from a she-male bit player in the first row of ringside seats; a scream that wasn't in the scenario. The jane who gave issue to this inhuman outcry was a shapely blonde tomato wear-

ing a sport skirt and a sweater. Under her heavy yellow movie makeup I could see her pan turning seven shades of pale as she opened her kissable yap for another bleat.

I recognized the wren. Her name was Flo Allison and she'd been playing minor screen roles a lot of years. I'd say she was in her middle thirties, at a guess, although her figure had a youthful appearance a college co-ed might have envied. I wasn't interested in her age at the moment, however. I was wondering what had pulled that screech out of her gullet.

Among the other extras and bit players who comprised the audience in the counterfeit boxing arena, two or three more quails began yeeping and some guy let out a harsh, shouted oath. Then the unit's assistant director suddenly bellowed: "Cut! Kill off those lights! Hey, Walt—oh, my God!"

That was when I realized what was happening; and for a single instant I was too flabbergasted to move. Up in the ring, Walt Lorimer didn't answer the assistant director's frantic bleat. He wasn't able to answer. He was being ripped to gory ribbons by Slugger Brennan's gloved dukers in a fracas that was all too genuine. Brennan had pulled the unpardonable sin of making a real fight out of a fake one; and thanks to his experience as a professional boxer, his skill was turning the brawl into a shambles.

Thwack! He drove a left jab to Walt's kisser. Whammo! He lowered the boom on Walt's trumpet with a vicious right cross that mashed the nostrils flat and rendered the nasal bridge into hamburger. Bam! He landed again. Lorimer's puss wasn't handsome any more. It looked like a bowl of chopped strawberries. Two more thudding bashes impacted on his fractured complexion; drove him backward, staggering on his heels. An up-percut ripped the teeth spang out of

his mouth, sprayed them hither and thither. Moaning, Walt lurched and went down.

As he toppled, I regained control over my paralyzed muscles; catapulted forward. The yellow-haired Allison cupcake blipped into the narrow aisle, blocked my progress in an effort to reach the ring ahead of me. I gave her a shove that sent her sprawling. Then I was crowding myself through the ropes of the squared circle. "You lousy double-crossing jerk!" I yowled at the Brennan blister.

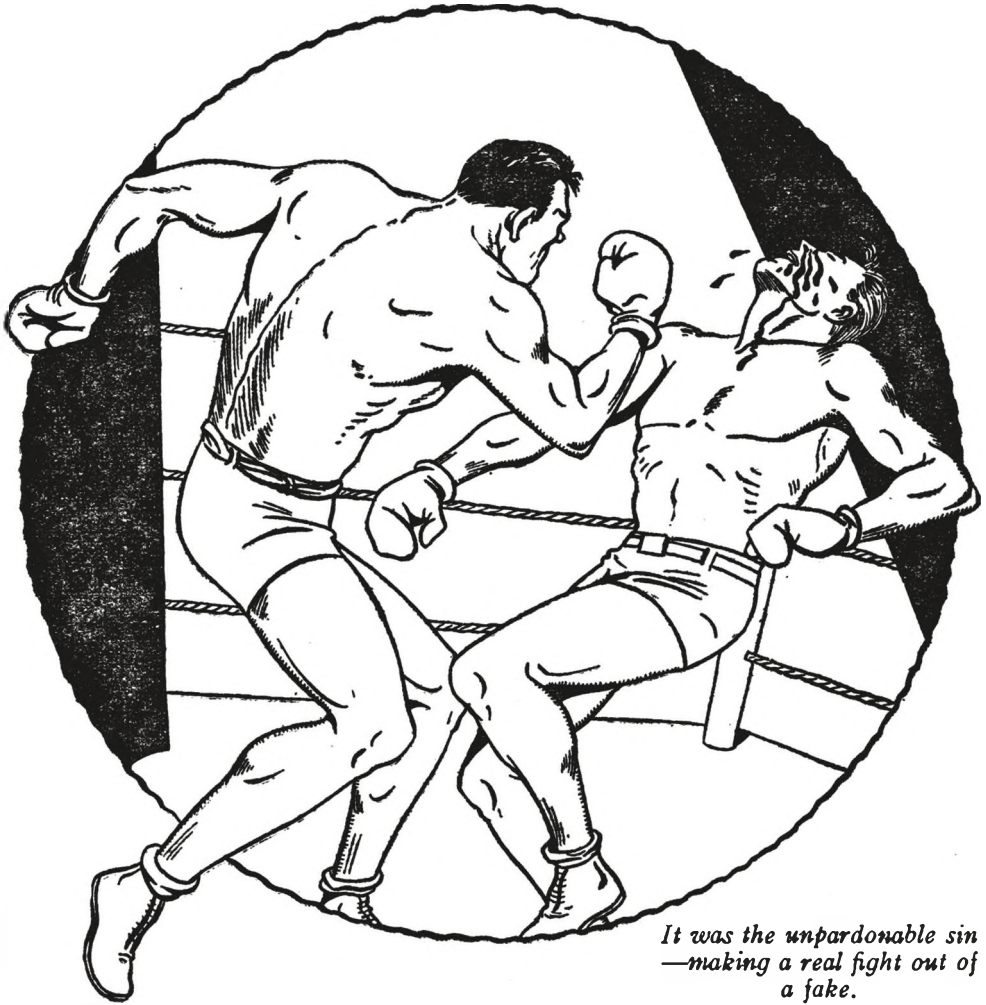
He whirled, hung the inflamed glare on me. "Lay off, flatfoot. Lorimer had it coming. I told you he swiped my sweetie."

I said: "So you not only bankrupted him by spoiling his production, but you've wrecked his future by running his countenance through the grinder past repairing!" Then I lost the final fragments of my temper; swung on the big bruiser.

THIS was a grave mistake on my part. He parried; countered with a smoking corkscrew poke I couldn't duck. I saw it coming and I tried to get out of the way; but stunned amazement slowed my reflexes. The amazement was caused by Brennan's boxing glove. It was lacerated, torn open by savage contact with Lorimer's pan; and where the leather had split apart you could pipe glints of brassy metal through the padded stuffing underneath. The metal looked heavy, jagged.

The truth dawned on me. Slugger had slashed Walt's map to mincemeat with loaded gloves!

Even as I tumbled to the setup, he tagged me on the prow. The impact rocked me, nearly drove my jaw through the studio roof. There was a split second of blinding pain, as if dynamite had exploded inside my think-tank. Then I went down like a chopped tree in a blitz blackout.



*It was the unpardonable sin
—making a real fight out of
a fake.*

I DREAMED I was drowning in a barrel of Vat 69, only somehow it tasted more like rye than Scotch. As consciousness leaked back, I realized somebody was trickling skee into me; and there's only one person in the world who always renders me alcoholic first aid of the rye variety. I blinked my dizzy optics, stared up into the beefy lineaments of my friend Dave Donaldson from the homicide bureau.

His presence on the General Features lot didn't add up to make sense. I waggled my sprained jaw and mumbled: "What are you doing here, chum?"

"Professional business," he growled.

I could understand why somebody might have put in a bleat for the ordinary cops, but Donaldson was strictly a specialist in the investigation of bump-offs. "Professional—?"

"Yeah. Why shouldn't I be on the job when there's been croakery committed?"

I floundered to my haunches, fought against the waves of giddiness that washed over me like surf. "You mean Walt Lorimer kicked the bucket from that beating Brennan handed him."

"No. I mean Lorimer got even by drilling a bullet hole through Bren-

nan's back," Dave said. "He did it while you were still listening to the birdies."

I felt my glimmers popping like squeezed grapes. "What—?" I gurgled groggily. And then, as I staggered upright, I lamped Lorimer himself on the far side of the set. His pan was swathed in bandages and he was surrounded by a complicated assortment of police surgeons, harness bulls, and plainclothes dicks. Handcuffs gleamed on his wrists.

I stumbled toward him. "Hey, Walt!"

"Yes, Hawkshaw?" his voice sounded muffled, toneless through the thick white gauze wrappings that obscured his smashed puss. Then he asked me: "How are you feeling?"

"Never mind me. I'm okay. What about you?"

He lifted a weary shoulder. "They tell me it'll take three or four months of plastic surgery to make me look human again."

"I don't mean that!" I caterwauled. "It's this homicide beef I'm talking about. Lieutenant Donaldson claims—"

"Yes, I know. They're accusing me of killing Slugger Brennan. They say I plugged him in the back."

I rasped: "But you didn't, did you? You're not the sort of chump who'd pull a crazy stunt like that!"

"That's the worst of it," he answered. "I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?"

"Well, Brennan ran to his dressing room after he hung a kayo on you. I ripped off my boxing gloves; followed him. There was a shot fired; I can remember that much in a vague sort of way. But I must have been out of my head; insane for a minute. Everything got hazy, and I can't recall exactly what happened. When I snapped out of it, Slugger was on the floor, dead."

"You were holding a roscoe?"

"No. They haven't found the murder gun. All I know is, a lot of people were grabbing me and pulling me out of Brennan's dressing room and yelling for the cops. . . ."

Somehow his muffled voice sounded evasive; or maybe it was my imagination. But a hunch kept telling me Lorimer wasn't leveling. He seemed to be holding something back; or perhaps fronting for somebody. Sure, he could have been swatted into temporary insanity by Brennan's loaded gloves, and while in that condition he might have bumped the big bruiser. I didn't believe it, though. The story was so pat it smelled fishy.

And yet there wasn't a thing I could do about it. I'd been unconscious at the time of the kill, and evidently there weren't any eye witnesses to testify in Walt's favor. He was in custody and it looked as if he'd stay that way for a while, particularly since he stuck to his contention that he couldn't remember whether he had or hadn't bumped Brennan. In a case like that, the law couldn't do anything except whisk him down to the bastille—which they did, pronto.

IT MUST have been around midnight when a knock sounded on the door of my apartment igloo. I'd been in bed more than an hour and had finally dropped off to uneasy sleep when this rapping roused me off the pillows. I made a light, climbed into a dressing gown, and opened the portal.

My visitor was chubby little Lew Scanlund, chief mogul of Masterpiece Pix. He ankled in, went to my celarette, helped himself to a jolt of Scotch lightning. "Hi, Philo. Feel like earning a fee for some sleuthing?"

I set fire to a gasper. "That's my racket. Whistle the patter and mention the price."

"I'll leave the price to you," he said. "Where Walt Lorimer's con-

cerned, money's no object. You know the jam he's in."

"Yeah. I was there when it happened." I poured a double snort of Vat 69 to match Scanlund's; tossed it down the hatch. "It's an ugly mess."

"It could be worse, maybe. At least I got him released by pulling some wires as soon as I heard about it."

"You sprung him?"

"In a sense, yes. He's in a private hospital now at my expense, getting his face patched. In technical custody, of course; but anyhow not behind bars. My next job is to help him beat this homicidal rap they're trying to pin on him."

I said: "How come? He's not your star any more."

"No, but Masterpiece will welcome him back if he wants to come. Besides, he's a friend of mine—and I don't let my friends down. Especially if I think they're being railroaded."

"You've talked to him?"

"Sure. And in my opinion he's as innocent as you are on this Brennan killing. He claims he doesn't remember anything; but personally I think he's lying."

"That's funny," I said thoughtfully. "I got the same impression myself. As if he might be shielding somebody."

Scanlund nodded. "Precisely. Which is where you come into the picture. The way I look at it, for Walt to be convicted would be a miscarriage of justice. We've got to clear him whether he likes it or not; and I'll foot the bill if you can find some way of getting him out from under."

I crushed out my butt. "That's a large order, Lew. If Walt is really fronting for someone, it's a cinch he won't co-operate with me or give me any angles to work on. And without his help, I wouldn't know where to start an independent investigation."

"Look," the tubby mogul spread his manicured mitts. "I'm not asking you

to put the finger on anybody. Not actually. The way it stands now. Lorimer wouldn't draw the gas chamber in any case. He says his mind went blank. You know what that means?"

"Yeah. They'll probably reduce the charge to manslaughter—an unpremeditated bump while in a blind rage. That would get him a stretch in stir, or maybe the booby hatch. Provided the prosecution can make it stick with a jury."

"There's the point exactly," Scanlund said. "What we need is something to create a reasonable doubt in the jury's minds. Who cares if the real murderer never gets caught? All I want to prove is that somebody else *might* have shot Slugger Brennan. The identity of this somebody doesn't matter. It's up to you to find out how many other people could have had an opportunity to fire that bullet. The more the better. Then a clever lawyer can get Walt an acquittal in short order."

THE trick sounded easy enough, the way Scanlund said it. But after he hauled bunions, I began to have my doubts. I wouldn't get very far by going to everyone who'd been on the sound stage and asking: "Did you go near Brennan's dressing room around the time of the croaking?"

There would be only one answer, straight down the line. Who would be dopey enough to admit such a thing, thereby putting himself in the grease? The whole unit would say *No*; and although some of them might be lying, you couldn't prove it. For a moment the setup looked hopeless.

And then, as I was thrusting my heat into a selection of English tweeds, a sudden hunch nipped me. I whispered: "Flo Allison!" and went bouncing out of my wikiup in a shower of sparks; blammed downstairs to the basement garage and piled into

my jalopy, sent it rocketing up the ramp. Two minutes later I was plowing a furrow through the night, headed for the Allison cupcake's bungalow on Curson Street.

I had a good reason for craving a chat with the yellow-haired tomato. To begin with, the late lamented Brennan bozo had twice made the claim that Walt Lorimer swiped his sweetie; which was why he'd dished Walt a load of lumps with metal-stuffed boxing gloves. When the brutal beating was doled out, Flo Allison had been in a ringside seat; had been the first to scream a protest.

Moreover, she'd attempted to climb into the ring ahead of me, apparently in an effort to save Lorimer from further punishment. I recalled how I'd been forced to shove her out of the aisle. Okay: why had she been so anxious to go to Walt's rescue?

The answer seemed fairly obvious. She hated to see his handsome mush ruined. Which meant she had a personal interest in him; maybe a romantic attachment. Perhaps she was the cookie Walt had swiped from Brennan!

If this theory proved correct, a lot more things clicked into mesh. No she-male enjoys watching the guy she loves get the pastry kicked out of him. In fact, some dames might hanker for revenge after an event of that nature. Possibly the Allison wren was one of these vengeful dolls. Maybe she had trailed Slugger Brennan to his dress-room and slipped him a hot pill, thereby getting even with him for what he'd done to Lorimer.

Granting the truth of this, I began to savvy why Walt was willing to take the rap. He would naturally front for Flo if he knew she had shot Brennan for his sake. The more I thought about it, the more I figured I was on the right track.

But I threw snake-eyes when I reached the blonde quail's wigwam.

It was a modest little stash, dark, deserted looking; nobody answered my ring. And I couldn't find any car in the rear garage, which meant Flo wasn't home.

I COULD have hung around and waited for her, of course; but inactivity always gives me the fantods. I decided to come back later and ask her the questions seething in my grey matter. Meanwhile there was some other checking I could do to keep myself occupied. I slid into my bucket; aimed its radiator toward downtown Hollywood.

In ten minutes I dragged anchor before the apartment court where the Brennan louse had lived. It was one of those U-shaped affairs on a side street, with the open end facing the sidewalk and an untidy strip of devil grass separating the shoddy cottages. Brennan's joint was at the left rear and I made for it like a shadow sliding through black lard; had my ring of master keys out of my pocket before I gained the door.

I tried three keys before I found one that worked the lock. Then I scuttled over the threshold; risked a ray from my pencil flashlight and skulked forward with the hope of finding something that would substantiate the guesses I'd been making. What I wanted was proof that Flo Allison had once been Slugger's doll before she took up with Walt Lorimer; love letters, for instance, or anything of that nature. Armed with such evidence, I would be in a better position to put some pressure on the blonde frill and make her admit her connection with the croaking.

As I moved across the small, shabby living room a floor board suddenly creaked. It wasn't under my own brogans, though; it came from somewhere ahead of me. I doused my flash; froze. A hunch warned me I wasn't alone in the tepee . . .



"Please don't look at that picture," she begged.

On tiptoes I flitted toward the direction of the sound. It was repeated; seemed to come from the other side of a closed door at my left. Under the lower crack of the portal a vagrant ray of light flickered, went out, glowed again.

I reached for the .32 automatic I always carry in a shoulder holster; yanked out the rod and closed my fist around its knurled butt. Then I lunged at the door, smashed it inward, stabbed at the darkness with a beam from my torch. "Burglary!" I snarled.

And I went hurtling full at the crouching cupcake who faced me like a petrified blonde statue. She was none other than Flo Allison; and she looked scared sweatless. A snapshot fluttered out of her mitt and a moaning whimper bubbled from her yawp. "Oh-h-h . . . !"

Then I caromed against her.

She was still garnished in the shark-skin sport skirt and sweater she'd worn on the General Features sound stage, and the impact of my charge sent her reeling off-balance. I barged into her again, tripped her backward. She landed with a bouncing thud, her gams wildly kicking like silken scissors. "Got you, sister!" I growled, and grabbed her wrists.

She struggled for freedom. "You—you're hurting me—"

"I'll mash the everlasting custard out of you if you don't behave," I said. "Quiet before I bunt you across the mush."

She wailed in terror. "Please—let me go! I—you—you mustn't arrest me! I haven't d-done anything!"

"You busted into this shanty, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, but—"

"That's breaking and entering, baby. The California statutes frown on such shenanigans."

SHE choked: "Oh-h-h, p-please—I can explain!"

"Start spilling, then. What were you trying to glom?"

"Nothing. N-nothing at all! I'm no th-thief!"

"Don't feed me that malarkey. You had something in your duke. Something you took off Slugger Brennan's bureau a minute ago. You dropped it just before I smacked you. Now come clean or I'll slap you bowlegged."

"No—!"

"It was a kodak print," I rasped. I kept her pinioned while I hunted for a wall switch and made a light. In the glow of a lamp I spotted the picture she'd dropped.

Before I could dive for it, she fastened herself on me like a fragrant golden-haired leech. "Please—d-don't look at it until you give me a chance to tell you it's innocent. It isn't what it seems to be—"

I said: "If you're trying to bribe me, skip it."

Tears as big as horse chestnuts dribbled out of her peepers, left shiny streaks of brine on her cheeks. "I'm not trying t-to bribe you. I j-just want you to know the truth!"

"Okay. Let's have it."

"That snapshot—it's of Brennan with his arms around m-me. I m-mean—"

"Oho!" I said softly. "Now we're getting places. In other words, the picture proves you used to be Slugger's sweetie, eh? That's just what I was looking for."

"But you're wrong! I was never Slugger Brennan's sweetie. He meant absolutely nothing to me. The only m-man I've ever loved is Walt Lorimer!"

I said: "Every time you open your pretty kisser you put your foot in it, kitten. Sure you love Walt Lorimer. That was why Brennan hated his interiors. Walt took you away from Brennan."

"No!"

"So then Brennan got hunk by

chopping Walt's pan to hamburger, using loaded boxing gloves. Whereupon you—"

She wrapped her arms around me. "Wait!" she pleaded. "You've *got* to listen to me! You mustn't j-jump at conclusions this way. You might even g-get the idea that I shot Brennan because of the way he b-beat Walt to a pulp!"

"That's exactly what I do think," I said.

"But you'd change your m-mind if you would only listen to the truth!"

"What truth?"

She moaned: "I don't know why Brennan smashed Walt's face the way he did. He must have had a reason, yes; but it wasn't on my account. There wasn't any jealousy over me. There *couldn't* have been—because Brennan and I were never anything more than casual friends."

I UNTANGLED myself from her clutch; stooped and picked up the snapshot she'd tried to swipe. "What about this?" I said. "If you and Slugger were merely casual friends, how come this lovey-dovey pose?"

"It was a gag shot; a joke. When Walt first started his independent production, he took the whole cast on a picnic; a sort of get-acquainted party. He had a minicam to make some possible publicity shots. Just for fun, Brennan slipped his arm around me and . . . well, that's how innocent it was. I never thought any more of it."

"Until tonight," I corrected her.

"Y-yes, until tonight. Then I suddenly remembered Brennan had got one of the snapshot prints. I realized what it would mean if the police found it, now that Slugger had been m-murdered."

I said: "Just what did you figure it might mean?"

She made a woeful mouth. "Can't you see? The law would think I used

to be Brennan's g-girl, and Walt had won me away from him. That would explain the b-beating Brennan gave Walt. It might also be twisted around to seem like a m-murder motive. They might say Walt killed him because of jealousy over me, instead of just revenge for the beating. That way, it would look like premeditation; a shooting planned in advance rather than on the spur of the moment in blind rage. Walt might be sent to the gas chamber . . . and I couldn't stand the thought of th-that."

"So you came here to glom the kodak snap that falsely linked you with Slugger Brennan," I said slowly. "You wanted to destroy it so the homicide bureau wouldn't smell out a jealousy angle in the croaking."

"That's right."

Deep inside my tripes a vague instinct told me she was leveling. Her story sounded plausible and there was an earnest sincerity shining in her glimmers. I couldn't be quite positive, though. After all, she was an actress; might be dishing me a phony routine. "Are you sure you aren't just trying to keep your own skirts clear, kiddo?" I said.

"How do you m-mean that?"

I narrowed my optics. "The way you've been talking, you seem to think there's no doubt Walt Lorimer drilled Brennan."

"Is there any doubt?"

"Apparently your main interest is to keep the charge reduced to second degree manslaughter," I ignored her interruption. "A kill committed in vengeful frenzy, rather than a cold-blooded bump-off planned in advance."

She looked bewildered. "Of course that's my main interest. I don't deny it. Walt wouldn't deliberately murder anybody."

I said: "He might protect a murderer, though. Especially if he loved her."

"Are you accusing *me* of—of—?"

"I'm just theorizing," I answered. "Suppose you blew your top when you saw Walt getting his map bashed. Suppose you tailed Brennan to his dressing room and blasted him because he'd ruined the guy you love."

I watched her reaction as I said this. For an instant she opened her yap as if to contradict me. Her shoulders twitched spasmodically. Then she faltered: "If I were to confess a thing like that, would it mean Walt would go f-free?"

"Naturally."

She smiled oddly. "All right. I confess. I'm the one who killed Slugger Brennan. I put a bullet through his ugly skull. But you won't arrest me for it. You won't take me to jail." Then she picked up a heavy glass bottle of perfumed shaving lotion from the bureau; christened me over the conk with it.

The bottle shattered; drenched me in cheap fragrance and sent me sliding down the ways like a launched ship. An ocean of complete blackness took me to its bosom. Confidentially, I sank.

ONCE more I dreamed I was drowning in raw rye whiskey. It was dribbling down my windpipe, choking me. I strangled, coughed, sat up and shoved the flask away from my kisser. Without bothering to look, I said: "Five gets you ten it's Dave Donaldson with the same old brand of rotgut red-eye. Why don't you switch to Scotch for a change, chum?"

Sure enough, Dave was the character leaning over me. There was no sign of Flo Allison or her incriminating snapshot, though. Dave grunted: "Nuts to you, slewfoot. You ought to be thankful you're alive and able to taste whatever I choose to pour down your hatch. You've got a knot on the top of your dandruff the size of a mock orange."

"A mock orange with a pulse," I said. "Give me another nip of that

tiger sweat to deaden the nerves."

He obliged. "Who maced you?" he demanded. "You stink worse than a dime store cologne department."

I drained his flask, handed it back to him empty, grinned at his rueful expression. I said: "Before we go into the subject of who maced me, tell me what *you're* doing here."

"I'll ask you that same question," he growled.

"Look," I said. "We're not getting anywhere at all. Shall we match pennies to see who talks first?"

He cursed me fervently. "Okay, you stubborn jackass. I came here to look around Slugger Brennan's house for any clues I might find—something that might indicate a stronger motive for Walt Lorimer to have bumped the guy. When I walked in, I discovered you stretched out like six bits' worth of dog meat. I revived you with my last drop of bonded tonic. Now it's your turn to sing."

"It's a long story," I said as I staggered to my pins. "I was hunting for clues, too, but I got interrupted. Somebody caressed me with a flagon of bay rum."

"Who?"

"Take it easy a minute," I waved him off. "Let me get myself unscrambled. Tell me something, bub: where was Slugger Brennan shot?"

"In his dressing room. You know that."

"Don't be dopey. I mean where did the slug enter his anatomy?"

"He was plugged in the back. Never had a chance."

I said: "I thought I'd heard someone say that. Which means the jane's confession was a lie."

"What jane? What confession?" Donaldson's puss reddened from scalp to jowls. "Are you holding something back, bigahd?"

"Yeah," I admitted frankly. I had a good reason for keeping Flo Allison's name under cover, the way things stood. I added: "A certain filly

*The bottle shattered, drenching me
in cheap fragrance.*



was in this stash when I arrived. Another clue hunter, just like you and me."

"And she crowned you?"

"Right. She also confessed bumping Brennan."

Dave exploded like a firecracker with a clipped fuse. "Well, you lousy shystering shamus! Keeping a thing like that a secret from the law! Do you realize that makes you an accessory? Maybe you deliberately let this cookie conk you so she could lam." He reached out, fastened the grab on me. "Come on, wisenheimer. I'm jerking you down to the jug for a little session with a length of rubber hose—you doing the catching."

I SHOOK him off. "Not so fast. I said the cupcake confessed, yes; but the confession was strictly corn. She claimed she scalded Brennan

through the brains, whereas he was actually plugged in the back. That makes her a liar."

"Who was she? Why would she lie herself into a jackpot?"

I said: "She's just a quail trying to do Walt Lorimer a good turn. Let it go at that."

"You refuse to name her even after she bopped you?"

"Yeah. She's already got enough worries without you hounding her."

Dave shrugged elaborately; presented me with a supercilious smirk. "Have it your way, gumshoe. But you're dumping the whole mess right back in Lorimer's lap. As far as I'm concerned, he's still the guilty party—and I don't believe he shot Brennan in the heat of anger. I think he had a hidden motive and I'm going to find out what it was."

"How?" I said.

"Well, I'll start by doing what I came here to do in the first place. Hunt for clues." And he began frisking the wikiup like a cyclone going through a haystack.

I strung along with him, watched him as he pawed through closets and cupboards and drawers. But it looked as if his search was going to draw blank—until he rummaged something out of a desk in the living room. It was a bank book.

I didn't pay much attention to this at first. I was busy with my own thoughts; pondering a problem that kept needling me like a persistent termite. Harking back to what had happened prior to the murder, I wondered why Slugger Brennan had used loaded gloves to smash Walt Lorimer's map. The motive hadn't been jealousy; Flo Allison had convinced me of that much. Then what other reason could Brennan have had for ripping Walt to splinters?

All of a sudden Donaldson gave issue to an astounded yip. He waved Brennan's bank book under my sneezer. "Look at this! Here's a guy that never had more than two hundred clackers to his name at any one time—until last week. Then he deposits five thousand hermans in a single lump."

"The hell you yodel!" I said. I snatched the pass book, piped the entry. "Where do you suppose he got that much geetus?"

Dave looked superior. "When an impoverished hambo gets suddenly taken rich, there's usually one answer. Blackmail."

"Blackmail?" I stared at him.

"Sure. He must have had something on somebody. Walt Lorimer, maybe. He was putting the shakedown bite on Lorimer, see? That's what motivated the mess. So Lorimer refuses to cough up an additional payoff because he can't afford it; he's broke. Brennan gets sore and pounds the stuffing out of him. This drives Lorimer off his

chump. He gets a gat and blasts the guy."

To some extent Donaldson's theory made sense. And yet it didn't quite fit all the facts in the case. I said: "There's one little flaw, Dave."

"Name it."

"When Brennan wrecked Walt's countenance he also bankrupted the guy. Why should he do that to a bozo he was blackmailing? It would put a complete stop to any future shake-down payments; and even Slugger Brennan had brains enough not to ruin the goose that was laying golden eggs."

DAVE rubbed his chin stubble. "Yeah, that's right. It couldn't have been Walt he was blackmailing. Then where did this five grand payoff come from?"

"Not Flo Allison," I answered thoughtfully. "I don't think she—"

"Who is Flo Allison?"

"The doll who was here hunting clues. The one that beaned me with a bottle of lotion."

"Ah. So you finally decided to tell me her name. That's just dandy. And where does she fit the picture?"

I said: "She's in love with Walt Lorimer; wanted to help him out of his jam."

"Did she have any previous connection with Brennan?"

"No," I said. "Or anyhow she denied it when I asked her."

"And you believed what she told you?"

"Yes."

His glims narrowed and gave out sparks. "You dim-witted dope! I see the whole thing now. The Allison frail is in love with Lorimer, but Slugger Brennan knows some dirt about her; something that might wreck her romance. He threatens to expose this dirt unless she pays blackmail."

"Ix-nay," I said. "It's too thin."

"It's thick enough for me! So she gives Brennan all the dough she's got;

five thousand fish. And when it isn't enough, she croaks him at the first opportunity. Then, later tonight, she comes here to his house and steals the shakedown evidence; whatever Brennan had been holding over her head. You catch her in the act and she biffs you unconscious."

I started to give him an argument, but the words stuck crosswise in my gullet for a good reason. There was an open window behind Donaldson, and I caught a fleeting hinge at somebody outside the sill; somebody whose puss was obscured by white silk wrappings. Then I piped a hand clutching a tear-gas gun. The gun sneezed: *Ka-Peesh!* and a streak of grey lanced into the room to burst like a miniature bomb.

I yowled: "What the—!" and plunged at Dave; sent him stumbling backward. "For Pete's sake shut your optics and don't breathe!"

My warning was too late for both of us. Fumes spread into my smeller, got under my eyelids. It was like inhaling red pepper and concentrated essence of onions. I began to strangle and weep like a spanked kid; heard Donaldson coughing up his toenails. He moaned: "Jeepers, my peepers—"

Outside, an automobile motor roared to life; then its thunderous droning receded in the distance. I located Dave's arm, steered him toward the front door by blind instinct. "We've got to get going!" I sobbed.

"Wh-wh—oh, boo-hoo-hoo—where to?"

I wept: "To Flo Allison's igloo. Can you drive?"

"Baw—hic-hic-hic—no!" he bawled as the brine squirted like rain from his lamps. "Give me a—boo-hoo—handkerchief—before I drown!"

I FORCED my own glims wide open, stared into the night as we stumbled from the bungalow. Donaldson's official sedan was parked at the curb in front of my own bucket; and it packed

a lot more speed than mine. "Get in!" I whimpered. "I'll handle the wheel if I have to use your windshield wipers to keep my eyeballs dry. Come on!"

He sank into the front seat, crying his lungs out. "You can't drive if you're—oh-h-h, baw—hic-hic-hic—if you're in the same condition I'm in. You'll—boo-hoo-hoo—wreck us!"

Perhaps he was right, but I had to run the risk. I kicked the starter, shifted gears, sent the sedan arrowing forward. The way my orbs were watering, it was like piloting a submarine through a storm at sea. As I rounded the next corner, a pedestrian screamed shrilly and hurled himself up a palm tree like a monkey reaching for coconuts. He was lucky I didn't knock the tree down and take it with me.

Ten tearful minutes later I sensed Curson Street where the Allison blonde lived. "How are your glimmers now, Dave?"

"A little better. They're just leaking quarts instead of gallons." He held his handkerchief out the window, tried to wring it dry. "Why?"

"Because this is the end of the line," I said. "Drag out your roscoe and come along. Here's hoping we're in time to stop another croaking."

"Wh-what—?"

I hauled him to the sidewalk. "Quiet! I think this is the payoff!" And we shambled to Flo Allison's front porch. Even as I tested the lock, a shriek sounded inside.

There was no time for master keys. I gathered my tonnage, hit the portal a terrific lick, smashed it inward in a shower of toothpicks. Then, dabbing at my peepers with one hand and clenching a rod in the other, I surged over the threshold.

The yellow-haired Allison cupcake was crouched in a far corner of the living room, cringing away from a guy with a gun. The guy's map was swathed in a white silk muffler, but I tabbed him from his pudgy dimensions

(Continued on page 98)

Women Are Hell-Cats

NO LESS an authority than J. Edgar Hoover has more than once voiced in print the opinion that women, when they turn to crime, are more dangerous than men.

When they go wrong, they are merciless, ruthless. Crime-fighting agencies have come up against the super-women of this type. Look at Ma Karpis, says the F. B. I. Her sons were common-place until their mother nagged and drove them into becoming the outstanding gangsters of the day when such outlaws flourished. She fought with the Karpis boys, dying in a final battle with the authorities, her machine gun in her hands.

Remember Machine-gun Kelly? He was only a small-time hold-up man until friend wife worked him up to the role of leading man in the kidnaping. Domineering Katherine had all that it takes for a successful criminal career.

More and more women, reported the F. B. I. recently are murderers than men. Here are examples of some outstanding hell-cats, truly both feminine and vicious as they only can be.

THAT section of California between Sacramento and San Francisco had for some time been undergoing an epidemic of hold-ups. Successful ones, too. And all carried out in the same unique fashion, which, to the observant police in both towns, meant that they were the work of one gang.

Now most criminals once they have developed a pattern, stick to it. Official records note these peculiarities. Often, the method known, the police go looking for the man who has specialized in just that routine.

In this crime wave the victim was approached by a young man while a second loitered nearby, apparently having no connection with the first. Suddenly the first one, with a wrestling hold, held his victim powerless while the second searched him.

A car, engine running, was waiting in the background. The job over, the car drove up, picked up the two young men and was off.

But what caught the ear of the authorities was the unfailing detail that in this machine was a woman who, at the moment the hold-up was taking place, stood up the better to see, yelled instructions, and was undoubtedly the guiding spirit.

Police files had no record of a woman-led gang. Evidently this group had come to California recently. It was making no contacts with criminal circles; stool pigeons knew no more than the police. But the latter were positive that this female gangster was no amateur. Her methods, her dominating leadership all bespoke practice and experience.

Filling stations soon became the target of this gang. And now for the first time the police were getting more detailed description of its members.

The trigger man had something the matter with his eyes; one eye centered on his victim, the other seemed out of control. Two other men did the robbing. All three were very young. And despite the success that followed their efforts, seemed inexperienced.

And there was always in the background the car, with a woman the better to keep a watchful eye on the proceedings, standing up in it, shouting directions, and finally calling the young men back to the machine.

The woman, according to those who had glimpsed her, was of middle height, slim. Her voice was in turn shrill, then hoarse. Her orders were obeyed implicitly. Even the man who crouched over the wheel waited for her to give the word before he started. She cursed them all impartially. One of the victims had seen her whack the trigger man over the head, the next moment snatching his gun from him. And the latter, without a protest in

word or act, had meekly scrambled to his place in the car.

No such woman-ridden gang had ever operated in California before. Nor did neighboring states have any record of these five, four men bossed by a dominating female.

This gang was becoming bolder and bolder. Now they were stealing cars. If they came across a man alone in a car on a deserted stretch, their large black machine would cut across the road, blocking the way. One of the youths would hop out. A few minutes later, with a gun prodding him, the owner of the stalled car would get out, and ruefully watch the two autos disappear, at the wheel of his machine an experienced driver.

Obviously this gang knew how to get rid of stolen cars. Not in California, for nary a trace of them was found. But driven to another state, their identity changed with a new coat of paint and other marks obliterated, they were disposed of through second-hand dealers who specialized in this line.

Not until April 8th, 1940 did this gang come to murder.

Leland S. Cash, manager of the Fat Barbecue roadstand at Lincoln Way and La Playa was closing up shortly after midnight when a black sedan drew up a short distance up the road. As was his custom he was taking a few parcels of butter, eggs, and other eatables to his machine. Beatrice Cash, his wife, was closing up in the kitchen when she heard a gun fired. She ran to the front, to see her husband writhing on the ground, the packages scattered, and two men running toward a black sedan in which a woman stood up, screaming at the men.

Cash died the next day at Park Emergency Hospital.

It was obvious the hold-up men had thought those small wrapped packages he carried to the car on leaving were the day's receipts. They were not. The money was locked in the

safe to which Cash and the day manager had keys.

It was puzzling at first to reason out why the two hold-up men had shot Cash who was unarmed and certainly had put up no fight. But this mystery was cleared up by Mrs. Cash.

"My husband was quite deaf," she told Police Homicide Inspector Harry Husted. "He wore a hearing plate controlled by an electrical switch. It was probably off when the bandit ordered him to throw up his hands. He didn't hear. So he must have put his hand in his pocket to turn on the switch. The hold-up man, thinking he was reaching for his gun, had fired."

BOTH Sacramento and San Francisco police were hunting for the Cash killers. They had only the vaguest description from Beatrice Cash and a .38 slug as a clue to the murder weapon. Hoping that this gun might turn up, Lieutenant Michael Mitchel of the Homicide Detail sent word to all police chiefs and sheriffs throughout California and nearby states asking that all .38 guns taken from suspects be forwarded to him in order that bullets fired from these weapons be compared with the slug held in the Cash case.

Police were now covering the roads between Sacramento and San Francisco, alone, in machines, hoping to come up with the gang over which the slim, dark-haired woman ruled. But the gang was laying low, evidently. For nary a glimpse was there of this crew of young men and their female boss.

On the 14th of April a young man, nervous, his hands twirling a shabby cap, walked into the station of the State Highway Patrol near Grass Valley, some distance north of Colfax.

"I want to tell you about a stolen car," the youth began. "It's a black DeSoto sedan, number 58A930. They're driving east on the Lincoln Highway."

Captain Joseph Blake picked up a list of cars recently stolen and still unrecovered. Sure enough, the DeSoto was there; it belonged to a San Francisco woman and had been stolen from in front of her home the night of April 9th.

"They're killers, those people," stammered the youth.

"Who are you?" interrupted Blake, "and what do you know of these people?" as he turned to the teletype machine to send word to Truckee and other towns along the Lincoln Highway.

"My name is Albert Ives. I was hitch-hiking and they picked me up," answered the pimply youth. "There was a woman and an older man and a young fellow in the car. They were headed for Detroit. They were talking about a stick-up and other things" and the youth hesitated. "I heard the woman say they'd better get rid of me. And I was scared they meant to kill me—like they had some one else they were taking about."

So the young boy, he was only eighteen, had given them the slip. When the car stopped near Colfax at a filling station, the youth had gotten out, saying he wanted a drink. Then he had slipped out a rear door and before the others noticed, had succeeded in thumbing a ride in a car going west.

Captain Blake was eyeing the young man. There was no doubt he was in mortal fear of his erstwhile companions. But his story didn't ring true. Why should these people fear him? They could so easily drop him along the road and make their getaway. There was more back of his story than he was telling.

The youth now turned to go.

"Wait," called out Captain Blake. "That car will be held up at Truckee. And I'm taking you along with me. We'll meet your friends there."

Now the youth became hysterical. He begged Blake to let him go.

"They'll shoot me sure if they see me with you," he screamed. "I tell you they're killers."

But Blake insisted and shoved him toward his car. He couldn't tell why but he had a hunch Ives' story was fishy. There was something he was holding back.

The black sedan had already been stopped at Truckee by Officer Arthur Barrett when Blake arrived there.

"They told me they were headed for Detroit to get work in the automobile factories there," Barret reported. "The woman's name is Spinelli, the man in the rear is Mike Simeone, the young fellow driving says he's from San Francisco and his name is Hawkins."

The older couple protested they didn't know the car was stolen. "We met this Hawkins in San Francisco and paid him to take us along to Detroit today," they told Blake. "When he stopped for us, this other fellow was with him," and they pointed to Ives.

"That's the truth," Hawkins admitted. "I never saw them until yesterday. That fellow Ives is a liar."

And this Hawkins made no bones about the DeSoto sedan being stolen; he and Ives were auto thieves, he said. In fact, he had served two terms at the Preston School of Industry for auto theft.

With Hawkins admitting his guilt and giving the couple a clean bill, it was decided to let them go. They would take a bus, they said. But Captain Blake took both Ives and Hawkins to the county jail at Nevada City.

On his return to his station, Captain Blake put in a call to the San Francisco police to report the recovery of the stolen DeSoto sedan. He described the two youths involved, one eighteen, the other twenty-three. He mentioned the man and woman traveling with them. . . . and the evident fear of Ives for the other members of the party.

MAKE that fellow talk," suggested Highway Patrol Investigator Harry Hendricks. "And I'm going to send out a call to try to pick up that couple."

Word soon came in that busses headed east on which the man and woman might have got passage carried no such couple. Instead the highway patrol learned that they had loitered in Truckee, on the highway, until a car driven by a young girl came along. Some one had seen them hail her as if they knew her well and in the machine, they had headed for Reno.

The Reno police were immediately contacted and after a few hours located the couple and the young girl in a Salvation Army shelter.

"I forget to tell that officer my daughter was following us in another car. And she picked us up in Truckee," apologized Mrs. Spinelli.

That was a strange oversight, mused Reno. And their interest soared when they found that the car driven by "Gypsy" Spinelli was another stolen car for which a search was already being made!

In the meantime Captain Blake was having a talk with Ives.

"Come clean, why don't you, Ives?" he suggested to the white-faced youth. "What have these people on you? And what are you holding back on them?"

"You won't let them near me?" begged the youth.

Finally assured he would be protected, Ives took a deep breath.

"She made us kill Bob Sherrard because she was afraid he'd squeal," began Ives.

Bit by bit he told his story. Mrs. Spinelli, the Duchess, was the head of their gang which had consisted of Bob Sherrard, Gordon Hawkins, Mike Simeone and himself.

"She kept the guns. We had to turn over all the money we got to her. She sent Mike out to case the jobs. She

bossed every one. And when Bob began talking he was sorry we had to kill that Cash fellow, the Duchess told Hawkins and me we'd have to get rid of him."

Blake's ears twitched at the mention of Cash's name. But he made no sign. Better not to interrupt, he decided. And he held out his packet of cigarettes to prattling Ives.

"You did finally get rid of Sherrard," he commented.

Ives gulped. "Yes," said Ives. It had taken time. First the Duchess said they would go on a picnic on the Sacramento River and Gypsy was to coax Sherrard to go in swimming. Then one of the boys was to follow them into the water and hold Sherrard under until he was drowned. That would make his death look natural.

But Sherrard for some reason had refused to go in swimming.

Then the Duchess had taken Ives aside and told him she was going to suggest target practice for the boys. And he, Ives, was to shoot Sherrard. That would make his death look like an accident.

Sherrard wasn't interested. He had shown his suspicions. And though the Duchess had kidded him and the others had argued with him, Sherrard, by now nervous and edgy, had again refused to cooperate.

But the Duchess was determined to get rid of Sherrard. And after a long whispered conversation with Mike Simeone on the return trip had turned to Ives.

"Why don't you and Sherrard walk along for a while? Go ahead of us and get some frankfurters at that stand we'll pass soon and we'll pick you up."

She didn't want the car to stop at the frankfurter stand, she explained.

"Mike would run down Sherrard on the road, she whispered to me," explained Ives.

(Continued on page 109)

KILLER'S INSTINCT

By HAROLD LEE GRACE

EDDIE WALLER wriggled his big shoulders deeper into the over-stuffed chair, rolled the cigar to the other side of his square mouth, and wondered if he could reach



*Eddie dived like a fullback
and caught his man in the
middle.*

The man crumpled before Eddie's very face though there was no sign of a knife or a gun—no mark on his body. What was the invisible death that had struck him down?



the scotch and soda without getting up. In the next room on his right he could hear Jackson humming as he dressed.

Waller grinned with the right corner of his mouth and let smoke trickle out. He liked this job, taking care of a fellow who thought somebody might want to hurt him. This job was a crip. An apartment on the fifth floor. No fire escape. A girl or two coming in now and then. Jackson was dressing for one now. Forty years old with dye in his hair to keep it black and not washed up yet.

Waller puffed out a white cloud of smoke, put the cigar on an ashtray,

and decided he'd have to get up to reach the whiskey. He was throwing in the soda when Jackson appeared on the door of the bedroom. He was tall, slim, with bright black eyes and a weak chin. He wore the trousers of a dress suit, no shirt, and was pushing a comb carefully through his thinning hair. He looked at Waller and said, "You might mix me one."

Waller said "Okay." He picked up the glass he had already mixed, took one step toward Jackson, stopped. He said, "What the devil?"

Jackson was still in the doorway. There was a dazed, questioning look on his face and he was swaying slight-

ly. The comb skidded from his fingers and made a ringing sound when it struck the floor. He looked at it, pitched forward, struck flat on his face, over on his back, arms outspread, and didn't move.

Waller's movements were almost casual, but fast. He reached back, set the glass on the table with his left hand, scooped the gun from under his coat with his right. He took two big steps, jumped the body on the floor, and went through the door into the bedroom, twisting to the left as he went in. The gun was hard against his right hip.

A low, wide bed against the right wall. Three open windows on the opposite side of the room and a cool autumn wind shaking gently at the curtains. The open door to the bath on the left. A bookcase and table. Nothing else.

WALLER made the windows in two jumps. Five stories below automobile lights were passing. Above him the window-pocketed wall of the building showed three more floors. There was no building directly across the street. Waller spun, went in the bathroom, twisting as he entered. There was a bottle of hair tonic, a safety razor, a tube of shaving cream, and a box of talcum powder above the lavatory. There was no person.

Back in the bedroom Waller stood flat footed, big shoulders leaning slightly forward, bleak gray eyes moving about the room. There was no exit from here to the hall. Big lines corded the length of Waller's long jaw. His eyes were almost closed when he stepped back to Jackson's side and knelt. He slid his left hand beneath the undershirt, felt for the heart. The man was dead.

Waller rolled the corpse over and a muscle twitched at the right corner of his mouth. There was not a mark on the body.

Waller got to his feet, slid the gun back into its shoulder holster. The right corner of his mouth kept twitching, and his big fists were clenched at his sides. There was a chance that the man had suffered with a weak heart, died accidentally. But instinct developed through years of dealing with crime told Eddie Waller this was murder. The man he was supposed to protect had been killed. Nothing had ever happened to one of his clients before. Waller was proud of that record. He'd gone through hell to build it. He wasn't one of these deductive sleuths. He had big fists and a fast gun and he used them. Now what had started as a crip job of protection had turned into murder. If he wanted to be able to face the cops and the other private dicks in the town he had to settle this matter himself. If the cops unraveled it before he did, they'd laugh him out of town. If nobody settled it, his reputation would still be shot.

Eddie Waller moved his big, loose jointed body toward the phone. The cops had to be notified. He called, gave the address, and hung up. From the table he picked up the whiskey and soda he'd poured, gulped it, sat down. Thinking wasn't his best bet, but he had to do it now. Three deep lines ran from the bridge of his nose up across his forehead and with one finger he scratched at the brown hair that was beginning to get gray-tipped.

Jackson had been murdered. He didn't doubt that. And it had to be poison. No one could have got in that room without passing where Waller sat. No other doors opened on the hall and a person can't crawl into a fifth floor window that has no fire escape.

But when had Jackson got the poison? He and Waller had eaten here in the apartment, served by Nihi Vasiloff, Jackson's valet and laboratory assistant. That was two hours ago. If Jackson had eaten the poison then,

he'd have noticed it in less than two hours. And why should Vasiloff want to kill the man he worked for? A white Russian, stranded in this country, he'd taken the job of valet. When Jackson found the man was a trained chemist, he'd boosted his pay. The two frequently worked together in the small laboratory that joined the apartment.

Waller reached out, picked up the dead cigar and crammed it between his teeth. There were men who had good reasons for killing Jackson. Jackson and Pete Perry, his partner, had practically completed a new smelting process which would be worth millions to them. It would also mean the loss of millions to the established steel magnates. Andrew Mason had tried to buy the process, and had failed. He was a millionaire many times over now, but the process would ruin him. He hadn't threatened, but Jackson had been nervous.

There was Nick Rodino, labor agitator. Rodino had sworn the thing would never be perfected. His threats had made Jackson hire Waller's protection. But Rodino was working with certain agitators for strikes in war factories in Detroit—or was supposed to be.

WALLER swung out of the chair, poured himself another drink. He was thinking that Jackson's death would leave Perry the entire invention.

Waller and Jackson had been at Perry's country home for the past three days, had returned this morning. Perry had laughed off the threats. He'd tried to laugh off Waller also. The two men had taken a dislike for each other the moment they met.

Waller gulped the whiskey, went to the telephone and asked for long distance. If Pete Perry wasn't at his country home. . . . After a two minute wait the operator told him that Perry

was not at home. Would any one else do?

Waller said, "Maybe. Get me the local sheriff."

In answer to his question the sheriff said, "Yep. I jest seen Mistur Perry lessin ten minutes ago. He was taking the train to the city and we chawed the fat while he waited."

Waller said, "Thanks," and slammed the receiver on the hook. That was one idea shot to hell. He started toward the whiskey, stopped spraddle-legged when the doorbell made harsh noise, and said, "Come in."

The door swung open. Inspector Dougherty came in. He was a lean, tall man with a face burned to the color of his brown suit and as full of wrinkles. His eyes were as dull as his unpolished shoes. He looked at Waller, said, "Hello Eddie," and walked to the body. After him came the fingerprint man, the photographer, Macy and Dickens of the homicide squad, and a young assistant medical examiner.

While the photographer went to work Dougherty stepped back to Waller's side. He said, "What're you doing here?"

Waller turned faded gray eyes on the Inspector. His face was expressionless, his voice flat, but his hands were clinched hard and the right corner of his mouth was twitching when he said, "I had a job here. Protection." He was in for a panning now and he knew it. The reputation he'd built was shot. But it wouldn't do any good to hold out on the law. He'd always played fair with them, and he would now. If they beat him to the crook it would be because they were better at their jobs; at least it would be the hot seat for somebody.

Dougherty grinned widely, "You did a good job of protecting. Tell me about it."

Waller told him. The photographer

had finished with his work and the assistant medical examiner was kneeling beside the corpse when the hall door swung open. A man came in, walking fast. Abruptly he stopped. His black eyes flashed around the room, went wide and startled. The thin hands twitched at his side, then went up and pushed nervously through dark hair.

The man started backing toward the door and Inspector Dougherty said, "Come in. It's a party!"

The man said, "What—what's happened?" His eyes focused on Jackson's motionless body and his dark face paled.

Dougherty said bleakly, "Maybe you could tell us."

Waller said, "That's Nihi Vasiloff, the valet. He served us dinner."

The M. E. was standing up now, coming back toward the group at the table.

One of the homicide men moved widdershins fashion along the wall until he was blocking the door behind Vasiloff, and the Inspector turned toward the young doctor. He asked, "Well?"

"Have to make an autopsy. Poison, probably. It was almost instantaneous and doesn't look like heart trouble. If you'll have him sent down to the morgue I'll tell you more in the morning."

Dougherty said, "Thanks," and the M. E. left. The Inspector went back to the body.

Waller stood flatfooted, hands deep in his pockets, eyes on the Russian. Vasiloff was in his thirties. His features were sharp, handsome, but weak.

His eyes were twitching about the room, and his fingers kept jerking. The Inspector was on his hands and knees beside the body. Out of the corner of his mouth he said, "Macy, you get the Detroit cops on the phone. Have 'em check on Nick Rodino." Without turning to Waller he asked,

"That's the fellow's name made the threats?"

Waller said, "Yeah." The doorbell jangled softly.

A HOMICIDE man had his back to the door. He spun and opened it in one movement. The girl struck him full in the chest as she ran into the room. She was pretty, and one wisp of her long black hair fell loose across her right cheek. Her face was flushed, her full mouth half open. She had evidently been running.

She staggered back a half step from the detective. "Oh!" she gasped. "I—I wanted to see Mr. Jackson."

The detective said, "Come in, sister, and look at 'im." He moved to one side. The girl's wide eyes swept over the room. She saw the half dressed body of Jackson and a short cry gurgled in her throat. She swayed backward, her eyes closed, then braced herself. Waller could see the lines of her face hardening as she fought down fear and trembling nerves. Then she was coming into the room, moving slowly, her eyes full on Nihi Vasiloff. For the first time Wallace noticed the resemblance between the two.

The girl stopped close against the Russian. A sudden fear had leaped into Vasiloff's eyes, and he tried to back away but the table was behind him. The girl's hands were small and white when she raised them to his chest. "Why—why did you? I tried to get here in time, tried to stop you. Oh, Nihi." She put her head on his chest and began to cry softly.

Vasiloff caught her shoulders and pushed her away. Everyone else in the room had frozen into immobility, listening. Waller was a yard to the left of the girl, hands deep in his pockets, bleak gray eyes expressionless.

There was a note of hysteria in the Russian's voice. "I didn't kill him! He was dead when I got here! They

all know he was dead when I got here. I don't know how he died!"

Waller took one loose-jointed step forward. His left hand went out, slid under the back of Vasiloff's coat, came out holding a .32 Colt. At the first

touch Vasiloff made a snarling sound and half whirled. Waller tossed the gun to Inspector Dougherty.

At dinner Jackson had talked about the girl who was coming to the apartment tonight, Waller remembered. Vasiloff had been in the room at the time, but Jackson hadn't mentioned any names. Jackson's reputation where pretty women were concerned was not very good. Waller looked at the girl. Yeah, she was the kind Jackson would pick.

Tears had made little tracks through the rouge on her cheeks. She clung to the Russian's coat, looking up

Light spilled through the doorway, silhouetting the man with the gun.



at him. "You—you did not kill him?"

Vasiloff shook her, jerked his hands away from her shoulders. "I told you I did not kill him." Neither he nor the girl spoke with an accent, but both pronounced each word with the precise enunciation of one to whom the language is perfectly familiar, but not native.

Waller said, "Maybe you didn't kill him, but you meant to. He had ideas about your sister. You heard him talking about her at dinner."

The girl made a sharp catching sound in her throat and went backward one step. A deep blush stained her face, but she kept her head high, eyes defiant.

CHAPTER TWO

A Killer Pays a Visit

NIHI VASILOFF cursed and took a half step toward Waller. The detective said, "Well?" and Vasiloff stopped. He was breathing heavily, mouth working.

Inspector Dougherty said, "What about it?"

Vasiloff turned sharply. His voice was high, shrill. "Yes, I meant to kill him. I went to Katina's after dinner and made her tell me all about it. But when I got back here he was dead. I didn't kill him, but this man was with him!" He whirled and stabbed a lean finger at Waller.

Dougherty said, "He died about 7:10 or 7:15. Where were you?"

"I—I was buying a gun. At a pawn shop on Twelfth Street."

"What's the name?"

"Abe Makinski."

Dougherty said, "Check it, Macy." The homicide man went to the phone again.

"The death was almost instantaneous," the Inspector said, more to himself than to his assistant. He turned and went into the next room.

Vasiloff's alibi proved good. When the photographer and fingerprint men were through with their work, Dougherty had the body removed. He said to Waller, "You'll want to stay around where I can find you, Eddie."

Waller nodded, but the muscles at the right corner of his mouth were twitching. He knew what Dougherty meant. He'd been the only man with Jackson when he died. If the cops could dig up some motive for him wanting to knock off his employer, they could hang this murder on him. And they wouldn't hesitate. The papers were howling for more effectiveness. Dougherty would get somebody for this, and Waller looked like the easiest man. He said, "I'll be right here."

Dougherty turned to Vasiloff. "And you?"

The Russian's thin lips were pulled tight. "I will be here. There's a small experimental laboratory in the next room and I want to look at the food I served at dinner."

The Inspector asked Katina Vasiloff her address and other routine questions. Then he left with his men. For a moment Waller looked at the two Russians. Abruptly the girl turned and went back out of the room without a word. Vasiloff went toward the kitchen and the small lab beyond it.

Eddie Waller dug a cigarette from his pocket, lighted it. The police had taken all of Jackson's cigars, drunk the whiskey. In the morning Dougherty would have the examiner's report on the cause of death. Once he determined positively it was murder he'd probably toss Eddie Waller behind bars. Waller's big fists clenched and his shoulders pushed far forward.

THE door swung open and Pete Perry, a small handbag carried daintily in his gloved right hand, stepped inside. He was a small man,

blond, with a hatchet face and a high forehead. He dropped the handbag and said to Waller, "Well, Watch Dog, where's your master?"

Waller's fingers stiffened. Perry, he knew, was a genius in his work, but his record wasn't too honest. He wouldn't be the man to grieve over Jackson's death, but the Inspector had checked Waller's phone call. Perry had been thirty miles away at the time of death.

Waller said, "Jackson's dead."

"Dead!" Perry's blue eyes opened wide. For a moment he stood surprised, unmoving. "Dead? How?" And suddenly there was fear in his thin face.

Perry's face drained of color while the detective talked and his thin lips twitched. "If—it—it was Nick Rodino that killed him, then I'll . . ."

Waller said, "I thought you weren't worried."

Perry stiffened. He said through clenched teeth, "I'm not afraid. You did a lot of good, protecting Jackson. If Rodino . . ."

"If Rodino's not in Detroit the cops will pick him up soon. But this doesn't look like Rodino's work."

Perry took a half step forward, "you mean Andrew Mason? He knows this process will cost him millions, but . . ."

The telephone jangled sharply. Eddie Waller picked it from a small table near the curtained window. He said, "Hello. Yeah, this is Waller."

The voice said, "Listen. If you wanta find out about this Jackson killin' hop a cab down to Tenth Street and First. Be there in fifteen minutes." The phone clicked sharply on the other end.

Waller's lips were a thin line across blunt teeth as he fingered the hook. "This is police," he snapped. "Trace that phone call. Quick."

There was a half minute wait, then the operator's voice said defensively,

"The call came from a dial phone; it can't be traced."

Eddie Waller shook his big head slowly. He hadn't expected to trace that call. A man who could pull a murder like this wasn't going to get caught over a telephone.

The detective turned, moving casually but fast. "I'm leaving," he said to Perry.

"Good. I'll feel safer with you gone."

Waller's face did not change. "You planning on staying here?"

"I'm going in here and go to bed."

Waller nodded, walked to the door, then turned to face Perry. With back to the door he picked the key from the lock, said, "Pleasant dreams," and went out.

On the sidewalk he hailed a cab. "Straight ahead," he told the driver. When he had gone four blocks and was certain he was not being tailed, he stopped the cab, paid the driver.

From a corner drug store he dialed a number, waited until he heard a man answer. Waller said, "Listen, Britton. Old man Jackson was knocked off tonight. I got a call telling me to come to the corner of First and Tenth, on the sidewalk, and somebody would drop the lowdown. You get over there and see what happens. Get anything you can and pay what you have to for it. I've got something else to do. Call me at Jackson's." He snapped the receiver back on the hook and went out. Earl Britton, his assistant, wasn't so hot, but he could stand on a corner and listen to anything a stoolie had to say.

WALKING with long, heavy steps, big shoulders pushed forward, eyes granite hard, Waller went one block beyond Jackson's apartment, circled and came in, through the rear. He went up in the service elevator. When he got out on the fifth floor his big knuckled fingers were wrapped

hard around the butt of the .45 revolver. He cat footed down the hall toward Jackson's apartment.

Outside the door he crouched for twenty seconds, ear against the keyhole. There was no sound from beyond.

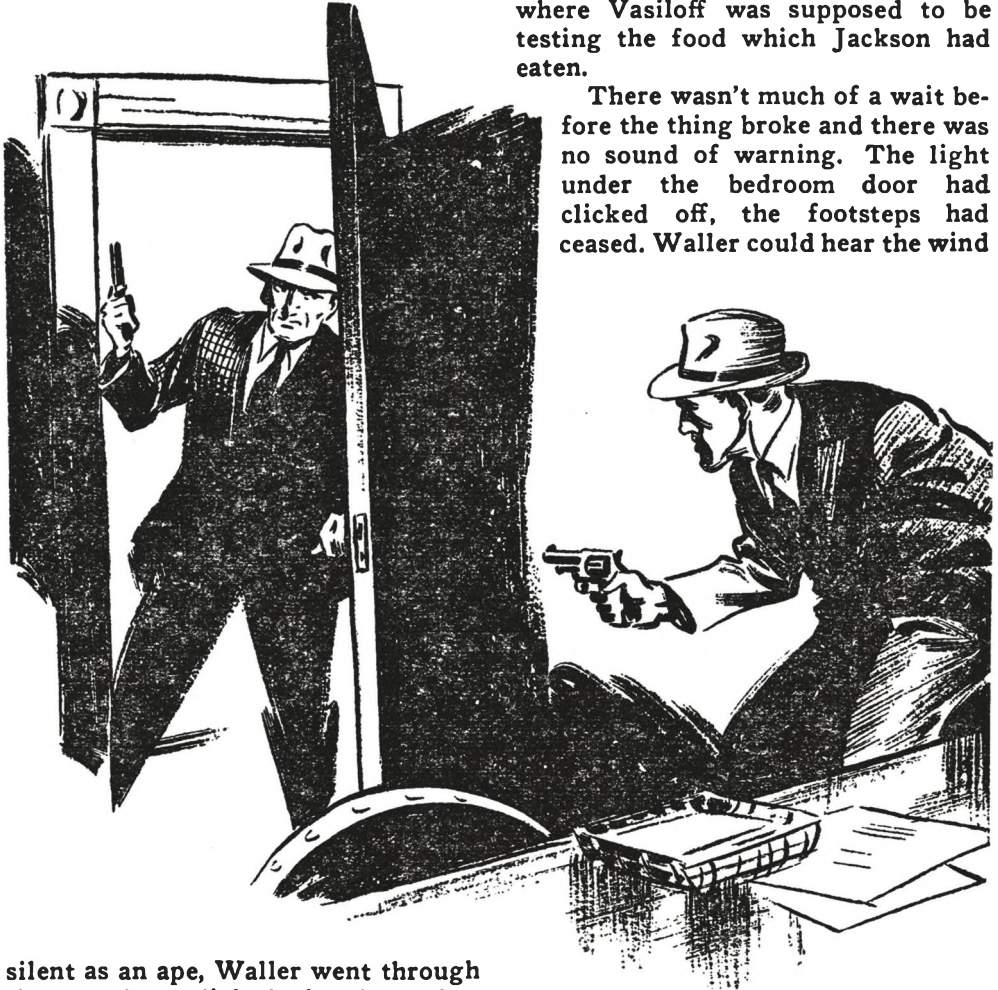
Still crouching so that his knees were almost on the floor, gun chest high, he caught the knob with his left hand, twisted. The door swung open less than a foot. Crouched and

the lab, Waller knew, no light or sound would reach this room.

Beneath the door of the bedroom on the right was a yellow streak. Waller waited, listening to the sound of footsteps paddling about. Perry going to bed, probably.

Waller cat footed three steps to the right of the door, crouched on his heels, country fashion. From here he could see the bedroom door, the hall door, and the one leading back to where Vasiloff was supposed to be testing the food which Jackson had eaten.

There wasn't much of a wait before the thing broke and there was no sound of warning. The light under the bedroom door had clicked off, the footsteps had ceased. Waller could hear the wind



silent as an ape, Waller went through the opening, clicked the door shut behind him.

The room was dark. No sound came from the kitchen and the laboratory to indicate that Nihi Vasiloff was still there. Even if the Russian were in

tugging gently at the curtains beyond the telephone. From the street below came the distant bleat of an automobile horn. At the same instant the hall door swung open silently. A man skid-

ded into the room, his figure blocked dark against the hall light.

Waller swung his gun, still squatting low against the floor. He said, as the door went shut, "Throw 'em high and keep 'em there!"

The door banged shut and the room was pitch dark. The gunfire was a finger of red and yellow, flicking twice in the darkness. The reports thundered in the room and Waller felt the wind from the bullets flick the top of his head. Still crouching, he dived headlong.

He took two steps backward to the wall. Nothing must go wrong now.

His shoulder struck the gunman below the knees and both men came down with a crash. The gun blasted again and Waller heard the smack of the bullet striking the wall. He swung his own gun hard, heard it crack on the man's wrist. An automatic made a solid thud as it hit the floor.

A fist smacked Waller's shoulder, then his head. The man beneath him



was writhing, jerking up his knees. One knee caught Waller on the hip, a little too far over for the groin. The detective's left hand groped, touched skin, hair. He whipped up his gun, swung it. The barrel made a dull crack. The man below him jerked, and went still.

Eddie Waller was getting to his feet when the bedroom door snapped open. "All right. Don't move! I'll shoot." Light spilled through the doorway into the living room, silhouetting the form of Pete Perry hunched over a small automatic.

Waller said, "If you're fixing to shoot somebody, don't stand there in the light. They might decide to shoot you." He groped beside the door, found the electric light, cut it on.

As the light flared through the room Waller saw Nihi Vasiloff in the narrow hallway leading to the kitchen, dark eyes big in his pale face. "What—what has happened?" the Russian asked.

Waller turned to look at the unconscious man on the floor. He was a short man, but compact and powerful. He had pig eyes, a thick-lipped mouth, a narrow forehead below thin brown hair. Waller said. "Well, I'll be darned!"

Perry, still clutching his gun, had come into the room. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Lugi Carosi. Officially he's never killed anybody—yet. But a lot of men have paid him to knock somebody off, and none of 'em have ever been disappointed with his work."

CHAPTER THREE

Hired Killer

THE man on the floor was regaining consciousness. He groaned, rolled slightly, blinked his eyes. Perry was staring from him to the detective. "But how—how did you

catch him? What did he come here for?"

Waller said, "Maybe to finish what he started with Jackson." He leaned over, picked Carosi's gun from the floor, tossed it to a sofa at the right of the door. Carosi's eyes were open now and beginning to focus. Waller's left hand went down, caught the gunman's collar, jerked him upright.

Carosi ran stubby fingers over the side of his head. They came away blood stained. Waller began to shake him, gently. He said, "What's the reason for your call, Carosi?"

The gunman shook his head and his eyes cleared, but he didn't answer. Waller repeated the question, softly. As he spoke the gun in his right hand came higher, into Carosi's line of vision.

"Gumshoe work." The gunman spit the words out, flapped his thick lips shut.

Eddie Waller's voice was soft, but his eyes were flint hard and the fingers in Carosi's collar pushed big knuckles into the gunman's throat. "I come here to rob," he said again.

Waller slashed with the gun. The blow looked easy, but it made a thudding noise on Carosi's cheek. The sight ripped a shallow trench in the flesh and blood began to trickle. Waller said, "Think again. I'm on the spot for that first killing. If I'm going to the chair for murder I want to get in one last good turn." The gun sprung out, ready to strike again.

Carosi tried to jerk backward, but the fingers tightened on his collar. His fat lips were trembling and the corners of his eyes quivered as he watched the gun. Then his lips pushed hard together.

Waller was swinging back the gun when the phone rang. Perry answered, said, "For you, Waller."

For a moment the detective kept his fingers tight on Carosi's collar. His face was bleak, expressionless. He

said, "You get one minute to think it over. If I don't get the truth then . . ." Pete Perry still gripped his small automatic and Waller turned to him, said, "Watch this guy."

Over the wire Britton's deep, slow voice complained, "I been waiting here a half hour and nobody's shown up. What you want me to do now?"

"Go home. I met the fellow up here."

Britton said something about running all over the city for nothing, and hung up.

Even as Waller forked the phone he heard Carosi moving, heard Vasiloff's shrill cry of warning. Waller spun, froze half way. "Hold it!" Carosi was snarling. "Both of you drop them guns!"

Waller cursed softly. He counted on Carosi solving this matter. His reputation, his life, hung on finding the man that had killed Jackson. Now he'd let the gunman slip through his fingers. And Lugi Carosi wasn't the man to hesitate at murder. Waller heard Perry's gun thud on the floor. He let his own slide from his fingers, faced about.

Perry had evidently turned his head, given Carosi a chance to leap for his automatic. Now, as the gunman covered the three men near the right wall, his lips were curled in a sneer. He said, "So you're goin' work on me, huh?" His short fingers went up and touched the place where the gun had ripped his cheek. Murder flamed in his pig eyes.

EDDIE WALLER was looking at death and he knew it. The muscles in his back and shoulders were rigid, his fingers claw-like at his side. But his face was blank, his gray eyes as expressionless as granite. He said, "Yeah. I wanted to find who paid you to kill Jackson."

Carosi made a snarling sound. He came forward, the gun held close to

his belly, his ape-like left arm swinging, shoulders forward. "Work on me, huh!" He swung his left fist.

Waller barely moved, but the blow missed his chin by a hair. He said flatly, "Your timing's rotten."

The gunman was breathing heavily and saliva showed at the corners of his mouth. He was insane with hatred now, likely to do anything. Shoot a man down in cold blood. He said, "You'll stand still and take it—or a bullet in the guts."

Waller said, "Okay." There would be no dodging. He waited, face blank, arms rigid. Carosi edged closer, moving flat footed, shoulders hunched over the automatic. Waller said, "If I had my gun I'd rip your other cheek."

The idea seemed to take root in Carosi's mind. Waller saw the light flame in the pig eyes. Carosi swung the gun back to strike.

Waller's left hand moved like a whip lash striking. Even as Carosi saw the movement and jerked his gun, the hand struck his wrist, stopped it. Waller's right foot shot in, his right fist came up.

The gunman tried to jump away, snatching Waller forward so that the blow landed glancing. On the hardwood floor Waller's heels skidded. He and Carosi went down in a tangle of arms and legs and Waller's head hit the floor with a thump. Carosi's gun went skidding from his hand.

The room seemed to spin and the light to shiver before Waller's eyes. He saw Pete Perry make a wild dive for the gun he had dropped a moment before, fumble it in anxiety. He tried to hold Carosi, but his fingers felt stiff and wouldn't clinch. Perry shouted as the door slammed and Carosi's steps hammered down the hallway. Waller was fighting to his knees when Perry, gun in hand, leaped toward the door. The two slammed together and went down again.

When they untangled and got the door open Carosi had vanished.

Eddie Waller put his .45 back into its shoulder holster. Perry, his face drawn and pale, gripped his own gun in one hand, Carosi's in the other. The Russian was standing back against the wall, long fingers nervous at his side. Waller said, "Well, we did a fine job of that." He looked at Vasiloff. "You do any better?"

Vasiloff said, "No. There is no poison in the food. I am going to look over some of Mr. Jackson's personal objects."

Waller said, "Okay." He looked at his watch. It was 11:55. Nearly five hours since the murder. He'd have about eight hours more, maybe not that many, before the law determined that Jackson was murdered and came down on him. If he was going to do anything he had to do it quickly.

Waller said, "I've got a call to pay. I'll see you later." He turned and went out of the door.

From the corner drug store he telephoned Britton, told him to come over and watch Jackson's home, check on everyone who went in and out. From police headquarters he learned that Nick Rodino, the labor agitator, had been found in Detroit.

Of course, Rodino might have hired someone to do the murder. Carosi perhaps. Then there was Andrew Mason, multi-millionaire. To him this process meant near ruin.

ANDREW MASON sat behind a great rosewood desk in the study of his home on Ocean Drive. Tall, thin, body; thin lips, thin nostrils; a wide forehead below thin iron gray hair. When Waller was shown into his office he looked up, but did not speak.

Eddie Waller could feel the pulse hammering over his right ear. He was taking a long jump now, taking it mainly on guess work. If anything

went wrong with his plan the best he could hope for was ten years for robbery. A man had to take chances when his life hung by a few hours. But Andrew Mason was not a man to bluff easily. His fortune could buy life and death throughout the nation.

Waller kept his face blank, his movements casual. He walked across the office after shutting the door behind him, dropped carelessly into a chair opposite Mason. He lit a cigarette, waited for the steel magnate to speak first.

Mason said, "The servant told me you represent the police and insisted on seeing me."

Waller let the smoke drift from his mouth. He said, "I don't exactly represent the police, but I was hired by Mr. T. M. Jackson. I was with him when he died. And I was present when Carosi came to kill Perry."

He paused, and his eyes seemed to be gazing into space but he saw the sudden whitening of Mason's fingernails as he gripped the desk top.

Mason's voice was steady when he said, "I don't know what you are talking about. I know Mr. Jackson and Mr. Perry, but I don't know the other man. You mean that this—this what's his name?—killed both Perry and Jackson?"

Waller said, "No. You only pay half the amount. He didn't get Perry."

Mason's body came forward in his chair. His voice snapped, "What are you talking about? Are you . . . ?"

"I'm telling you what Carosi told me. I knew it anyway because nobody else had money enough to pay Carosi's price. You hired him to kill both . . ."

The steel magnate came to his feet, face livid. "By Heaven! I'll have you . . ." His voice clicked off when Waller's right hand went under his coat, came out holding his gun.

Mason dropped back into his chair, his face a pasty gray except for two spots of color high on his cheeks. His



"Take it easy! It's going to be all right," he told her.

voice was husky. "You know what'll happen if you're caught here with that gun. I'll swear you held me up in my home. That's robbery. Nobody will take your word against mine."

THE phone jangled and Waller's big fist reached it before Mason could move. He snapped at Mason, "Sit still and keep quiet." His left hand lifted the receiver. His voice was sharp, as nearly that of Mason as he could make it, when he said, "All right." He listened a moment, snapped, "Get on over here, quick! Don't argue with the servants but come straight to my study." He hung up.

Mason was leaning over the table, thin nostrils quivering. "You'll pay. You'll get robbery if not . . ."

Eddie Waller smiled for the first time in hours. He said, "I figured all that out before I came here. But it's going to be different now. That was Carosi on the phone. He's just across the street, will be here in a couple of minutes. I'm calling the police now. And when they come, and find the two of you together, it should be proof enough. Anyway Carosi won't let them tie that murder on him without squealing. I've got witnesses that he tried to get Perry."

He reached for the phone. At the same moment footsteps clicked in the hall outside.

Waller slithered out of his chair, took two fast steps backward and against the wall. He couldn't afford to let anything go wrong now. He had to get Carosi in here, the door shut, without anyone else knowing what was happening. If the servants became alarmed, and phoned the police before he did, nobody would believe the story he told. If Mason called his bluff and went for his gun before the police arrived, he'd be done for. Shooting Mason or Carosi would be murder. He had to keep things going his way.

The hall door swung open. Carosi

was framed between the sills. At the same moment Waller saw Mason's hand flick down, jerk open a drawer. The detective leaped toward the door, jerked Carosi inside.

Mason's hand came out of the drawer. The snub automatic flung a grotesque shadow as the steel magnate swung it toward Waller. The gun roared.

CHAPTER FOUR

Death Comes Again

WALLER twisted and ducked as the gun swung toward him. His right hand, still holding the gun, flicked down the wall, clicking the light switch. His left jerked Carosi in front of him. He felt the gunman stagger as the bullet struck him.

Mason's gun roared again. The bullet spanked the wall to the left of the open door. Outside a servant screamed. Carosi's right hand was diving for his coat from instinct, maybe he had another gun. Waller swung his own gun hard against Carosi's wrist. The gunman cursed, high and shrill. Mason was shouting, "Robbers! Robbers!"

Whirling like a dervish, Waller went through the open door into the hall. A servant was blocking the way ahead of him, but before Waller's bull-like rush, gun clubbed, the man jumped aside. Behind him he heard Mason shout again, steps pound.

He reached the front door, crashed into it, drove it open. Something whacked the door beside his face and a flying splinter slashed his cheek. Then he heard the boom of the gun.

He went across the lawn and street, down an alley, running hard. When he came out on Parkway Boulevard he skidded to a walk, hailed a cab. Leaning back against the cushions he sucked in deep breaths.

Every time he thought he had something tangible the thing blew up on him.

If Mason chose to report what had happened to the police, they would pick him up now certainly. Waller grinned crookedly. It wasn't likely Mason would give any names unless Carosi were badly wounded. He'd let the gunman escape, then report a couple of thieves.

Mason had hired Carosi. But how had he killed Jackson? And—Waller leaned forward and gave the driver an address on East 74th Street, the address Katina Vasiloff had given the police. There was just a chance. . . .

A LIGHT showed in the transom above the door and the muffled sound of voices came through. For a half minute Waller kept his ear pressed against the door, but the words were indistinct. He stepped back, pushed the bell.

Katina Vasiloff was wearing a red wrapper pulled around her over red silk pajamas. Her brother might be a valet, but she wore expensive clothes, Waller noted. Her dark hair was loose about her face.

When she saw the detective her eyes went wide. "What—what—?"

"Just a few questions," Waller said.

He stepped past her into the room, stopped. Pete Perry was standing near the far wall. He looked at Waller, said, "Hello, Bloodhound."

Waller said, "A little late to be dating, isn't it?"

Anger showed in Perry's eyes. "That's what you would think. I came here to question Miss Vasiloff. You and the police didn't seem to bother about her. The elevator boy at Jackson's told me she and T. M. had been quarreling for the past week."

Waller said, "Yeah. When did you learn that?"

The girl came toward Waller with a rush. "You do not think I killed him.

I loved him. We quarreled, but I love him."

Perry said, "She wasn't here when I came. Said she had been over to Jackson's to see her brother."

The girl turned on him wrathfully. "You think I lie!"

Perry's eyes were still fastened on the detective. He said, "After you left I talked to the elevator boy. Vasiloff was with me. He heard the boy say Miss Vasiloff threatened to kill Jackson."

Waller's eyes were narrow, bleak. "And has he found *what* killed Jackson?"

"Not when I left."

The girl was tugging at Waller's coat and her black eyes were wide with fear. "I did not kill him!" she said again in her odd, precise tone. "And Nihi did not kill him. He meant to kill him, but if he had he would have told you."

Waller said, "All right, but maybe he's found out how somebody did. The police probably know, but I'd rather not call them. Got a phone?" She pointed to it near the door and he dialed Jackson's number.

A minute later he heard the click of the receiver being lifted, heard Nihi Vasiloff saying, "T. M. Jac—"

The report of the shot thundered at Waller's ear drum, shook through his head.

"All right! All right!" Waller almost shouted the words. "Vasiloff!" Over his own cries Waller had heard the dull boom of the receiver striking the desk, the thud of a falling body. Then silence.

"What—what has happened?" The girl was jerking at him with her small hands. "Mother of God! What has happened to Nihi?"

Waller put the telephone back on the table. He caught the girl's shoulders in his big hands, held them steady. "Take it easy. I'll go over

(Continued on page 99)



THE MURDER DOLL

SUE BRADFORD was a shock to Doyle's soul. Even the newspaper headlines of her recent escapades had not quite prepared him for this. For Doyle had known Sue Bradford two years before.

It seemed impossible that this hard, brittle woman, carelessly dressed with too much display of her white shoulders, could be the gentle, almost timid child wife of John Bradford. Doyle had been a neighbor of the Bradfords for months.

She had then and she had now the kind of face and figure that could be devastating. Only two years ago, her wide blue eyes had been expectant. She had been telling all of her Summer lake neighbors of the new nursery John Bradford was having built onto their little cottage.

Doyle had known Sue Bradford for years, but when he saw her now, he was shocked. She was hard, now—and the only human thing about her seemed to be the toy doll she carried with her. . . .



Doyle pivoted on his toes, slugged the one with the blackjack.

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

"A funny one," grumbled Doyle under his breath now. "Yeah, funny as a graveyard full of ghosts."

He was looking at the only human thing about Sue Bradford at this moment, except for her gigolo. It was a little toy doll, disarrayed and shapeless, lying on the booth table beside her whisky straight.

Doyle wished he had not let John Bradford talk him into making this a last assignment before closing his one-man agency for the duration. Even the five C's that would help out his sister couldn't salve his conscience.

"What can I do for her?" he muttered. "Not a thing. All the dough John Bradford is willing to spend will make no difference. I don't like to make any man think about some things, but I wish Bradford could see that doll."

Doyle tried to miss the grinding discordance of the juke box. For it was to an East Side tavern that he had tailed Sue Bradford and the dressed up punk acting as her escort, and drinking on her money. They had started at a bar uptown hours before, gradually drifting to a lower cafe society. . . .

Doyle had remained undiscovered, he was sure. He must be cautious, wait, and find out, as John Bradford desired, what, if anything, might be done for Sue? The gesture of John Bradford was unexpected.

Bradford had suddenly obtained an out-of-state divorce from Sue a little more than a year before. There was a new Mrs. John Bradford now. It may have been only coincidental that she was an heiress to several millions of a war plant fortune.

The newspapers had given full account of the brawls in which Sue Bradford had engaged, from Broadway to the Village. Doyle had tonight watched Sue pass up two of the better class night spots uptown. Tonight, however, there had not so far been any eruption of her widely publicized temperament.

Except for her once expectant eyes turning harder and more glassy, the girl seemed impervious to the effect of the hard liquor she had been drinking for hours. She had been drinking even before Doyle had picked up her trail at the uptown bar.

It seemed that the glossy-haired monkey with her might have stopped in at some penny arcade. For the doll she carried was nice and new, and had stared at Sue with long-lashed blue eyes when she had first set it on the bar at the Astor.

"She can certainly hold her liquor," said Doyle softly. "But unless I don't know my women, a volcano has been building up for hours."

HE HAD the feeling then that something was about to happen. For his own purpose Doyle did not want that. He had hoped that the hand-out punk with her would be dropped. Sitting close to them now in the noisy tavern, Doyle had become oddly aware that Sue Bradford was quiet, too quiet.

He heard her tell the punk twice to shut up, she wanted to think. The punk did not appear to be bearing his liquor as calmly as the girl. He was restless, wanted to move on from this tavern.

"I said, shut up!" repeated Sue, Doyle reading her lips. "I want to think. I've got to think."

At two A. M. the occupants of the noisy tavern were such that Doyle half wished he had worn his .38. One pair of well dressed men, with the faces of alley hoodlums, sat in a booth

opposite Sue Bradford and her escort.

It struck Doyle these hoods were paying too much attention to the girl. She was recklessly wearing several good stones on her fingers and in her ears. She was careless of her display of money as she dug into her purse for her lipstick.

A folded paper, evidently a newspaper clipping, slipped to the table as Sue ordered more drinks. Sue made her curved mouth a crooked red slash with the lipstick. She took the whisky straight when it came and tossed it down without batting one glassy eye.

Doyle heard her escort grumbling then.

"Why don't you just forget that dame?" Doyle heard him say. "Next thing you'll start screaming. I'm getting out if you do."

The words came to Doyle in an interval of juke box silence. More than ever he wished he had refused John Bradford's fee. He was beginning to lose even the vision of the blue-eyed, expectant child wife Sue Bradford had been two years before.

Looking at her now, Doyle was convinced that all of her soul had changed. This hard, brittle, beautiful creature had buried that other Sue Bradford. Nothing under heaven could ever bring her back.

Then Sue picked up the newspaper clipping and spread it on the table. She plucked at the tawdry doll and arranged it beside the paper. Her face was like a mask of white clay, made almost hideous by the newly applied lipstick and her hardened, glassy eyes.

Doyle acted upon impulse. He was fairly sure he knew, but he wanted to see "the dame" referred to by Sue's escort, if the picture was there. Doyle arose casually, intending to pass slowly by the booth where the girl was seated.

He came close enough to see the newspaper picture printed weeks before of the new Mrs. John Bradford

who had been Millicent Layford, the heiress. Being nearer, for just a second or two, Sue's profile seemed to recreate the girl who had often waited on his porch at the lake two years before for John Bradford to return from the city.

Doyle paused in spite of himself. Perhaps it might be as well to speak to Sue, for she would surely identify him as he passed. His intention was not carried out.

Sue's head flashed about quickly. Her glassy eyes stared for perhaps five seconds as Doyle started to speak. Then she screamed. And she seized the full whisky glass before her, flinging it squarely into Doyle's face.

"You—Tom Doyle! You're one of his dirty spies!"

The words ground from between her teeth, as Doyle, half blinded by the unexpected bath of liquor stepped back. He had a hunch then that had kept him alive and unhurt many times.

He pivoted just in time to see one of the hoodlums from the opposite booth starting to swing with a sap in his hand.

"The doll don't want you, see!" snarled the hood.

THERE seemed no sense to such sudden chivalry. Doyle balanced on his toes, let the sap whistle past one ear, and clipped the hood neatly in the stomach and on the jaw before he could recover. The hood staggered back, but did not go down. Doyle was getting his back to a booth, setting himself for what might come.

To his surprise, the second hood seized the other's arm. Doyle heard his harsh voice as Sue Bradford screamed again behind him, calling him a name that certainly never would have been uttered by the Sue Bradford he had known.

"You cheap dope! He's a dick! You want-a mess up the works! Get goin'!"

He gave his fellow hood a rough

shove toward the street. Both men went on out as the tavern bouncer, known as Eddie, towered above Doyle by inches and addressed himself to Sue Bradford's escort.

"Okay, Lanny!" snapped Eddie. "Drag the dame out, before I clout both of you! Either that or she shuts her trap!"

Doyle received his second surprise. Sue Bradford was stuffing the newspaper clipping into her purse. As if the scream were something that could be turned on and off at will, she spoke quietly.

"Sorry, Eddie. We'll have one more round and then we'll go."

Her glassy eyes seemed so out of focus that Doyle wondered how she could even recognize him, but she did.

"Please go away, Tom Doyle," she said, her voice still low. "I want to be let alone."

Doyle nodded. One eye was badly blistered by the liquor. Eddie said come on back and wash it out or it would cause trouble. Doyle followed Eddie to the washroom.

He was there but a couple of minutes, sluicing the pain from his eye.

"She's one heller, that dame with Lanny Gault," said Eddie sympathetically. "I've told him to stop bringing her here."

Doyle tipped the bouncer and asked, "You know this Lanny Gault then?"

"Bar fly," said Eddie briefly. "Believe it or not, he chisels his lunches here. Been around with the dame a week or so now."

It classified Gault with Doyle as unimportant. He emerged just in time to see Sue Bradford and the punk called Gault calling a taxicab. It seemed to him that Sue had at last been hit by the liquor. She was leaning heavily on Gault's arm as they entered the taxi.

"A sweet mess I'll make trying to straighten her out," muttered Doyle. "But I can at least get a line on where

she's staying before I hand John Bradford back his five C's."

He swung a taxi at the corner and told him to follow the other cab. He thought perhaps the pair of hoods might have had an eye upon Sue's jewels and money. If they tried, he could be at hand, anyway.

But the taxi carrying Sue and Gault went north to Queens bridge without the hoods showing. It went on over the bridge. Doyle imagined he was wasting time, but he stayed with it.

THERE had been many reports of the amount of money that Sue Bradford had salvaged from her father's lost fortune just before the war broke. Enemies of John Bradford said that he divorced Sue soon after it became known her father's money had been nearly wiped out.

Doyle did not know about that. John Bradford had appeared to be prospering himself. He was said to have made a half million of his own on negotiating war contracts. Doyle had neither liked nor disliked Bradford particularly.

But then when he had been his neighbor at the lake, Bradford had been idolized by Sue. Apparently the feeling was mutual between them.

"You never know what's between any man and woman," said Doyle musingly, as he told his cab driver to drop back. Sue Bradford's cab turned off Queen's Boulevard into one of the circular streets of Forest Hills.

He was a little surprised that Sue should be living out in this quiet residence district. Especially when her cab stopped a block ahead, near some of the swankiest residences of that exclusive section.

"Wait here, buddy, I'll be right back," said Doyle, slipping the hackie a ten.

By keeping in the shadows of the dimmed-out street, he was close enough to see the punk called Lanny

Gault half carry Sue to the doorway of the largest of the houses, one set in half a block of its own grounds.

Doyle was unable to see whether someone met Sue at the door. But Lanny Gault returned immediately to his taxicab. As the cab moved away, Doyle walked slowly toward the entrance to the residence where Sue had disappeared.

An arched gateway was set up over the motor lane into the grounds. Doyle saw that but two lights were burning in the residence. One was downstairs, and the other in an upstairs room.

He stood there a moment, judging he had wasted a night, spoiled a memory he would have liked to keep, and he might as well decide quickly whether to try further along Bradford's idea of getting Sue Bradford on a straighter path. He must at least wait until she was sober.

From the residence came a clear, shrill scream. It came but once, and with it there was a single cracking shot. Doyle realized as he heard it that the gun must be of small calibre, might even have a silencer, for at three in the morning there was not sound enough to possibly disturb the nearest neighbor, half a block away.

Doyle ran toward the residence entrance. And it was here that his heart pounded harder. There was a newly placed name plate under a little light on the front gallery.

Doyle swore, pushing at the door as the knob turned in his hand.

The name plate was that of JOHN BRADFORD.

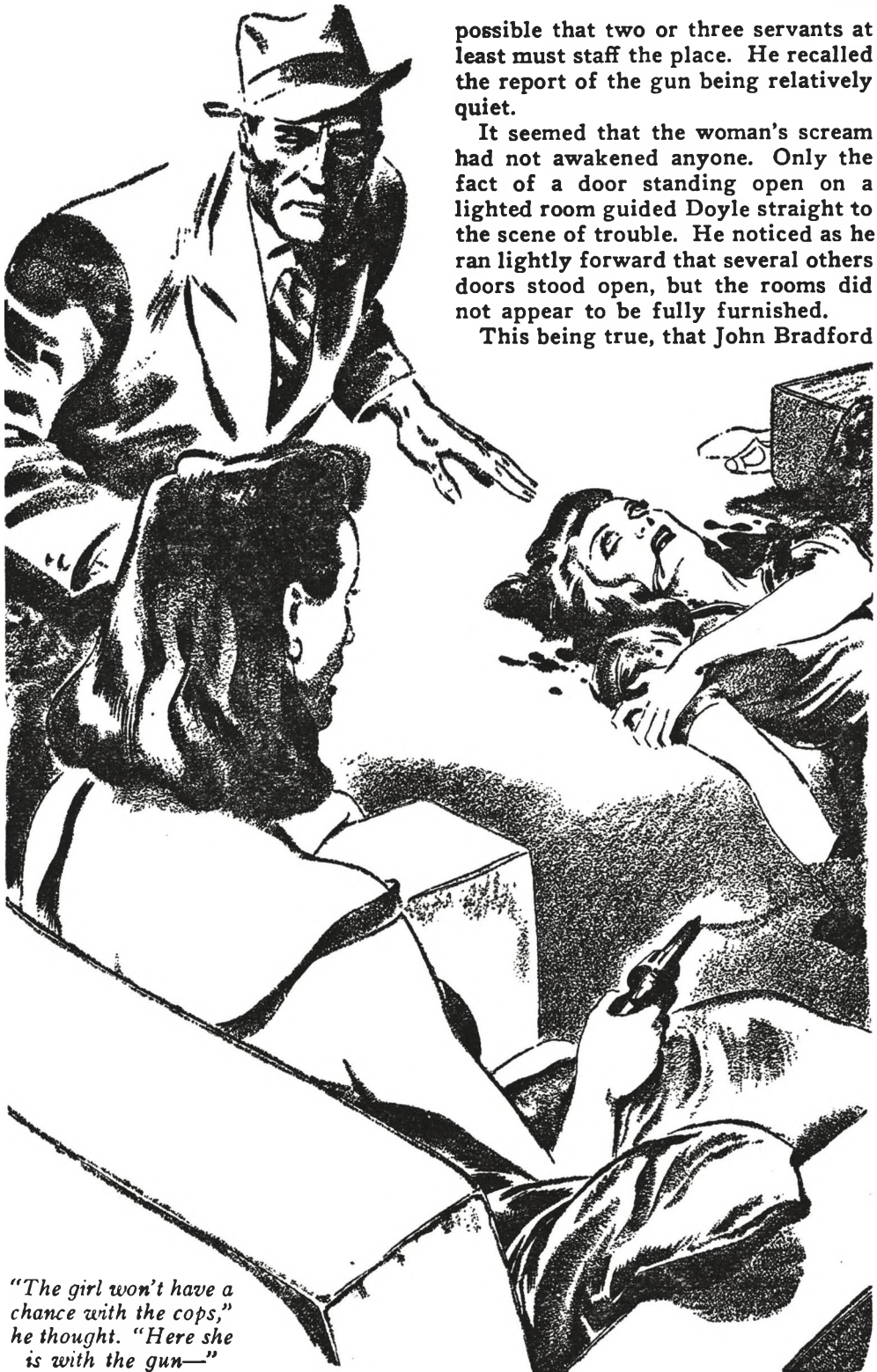
DOYLE was more cautious because he was unarmed. The lower hallway of the John Bradford residence was somewhat ghostly. Some furniture apparently had just been moved in but not unpacked.

Listening, Doyle heard no sound of anyone moving about. He judged it

possible that two or three servants at least must staff the place. He recalled the report of the gun being relatively quiet.

It seemed that the woman's scream had not awakened anyone. Only the fact of a door standing open on a lighted room guided Doyle straight to the scene of trouble. He noticed as he ran lightly forward that several others doors stood open, but the rooms did not appear to be fully furnished.

This being true, that John Bradford



"The girl won't have a chance with the cops," he thought. "Here she is with the gun—"

evidently was just taking up residence with his new bride, the former Millicent Layford, Doyle questioned how or why Sue Bradford had come straight here?

It seemed answered with devastating impact. The Bradfords had taken up residence in a home while it was being furnished. Or at least Mrs. John Bradford, the second, was here.

Rather the body of Mrs. John Bradford lay on a deep rug in a completely furnished bedroom. Around her were evidences of her arrival and recent unpacking. That there had been a maid or other person helping appeared evident, but Doyle swiftly judged one or more servants might have retired or even have fled from the house, and might now be spreading an alarm.

The bluish hole in Mrs. Bradford's left temple was still bleeding slightly. Her sightless eyes stared at the ceiling. Her hands gripped into the rug as the result of her quick, dying agony.

Sue Bradford was sitting in a big chair beside a center table. She was facing the body, looking down at the woman whose picture she had on a newspaper clipping in her purse. In Sue's hand was an automatic of the unusually small .25-calibre size.

But the murder bullet had been fired at close range. It had produced almost instant death.

Doyle walked straight toward the girl. He saw her eyes open, and shining glassily. Her lower jaw had dropped. With her red slash of a mouth she was not a pretty sight.

Still there was silence through the house. Sitting up, Sue was for the moment as completely out as the dead woman. Doyle shuddered. He bent close to catch her breath.

"If there has been chloral hydrate or some other micky, it will help," he half whispered. There was but the odor of stale liquor.

At that moment, he thought he

heard a door creak softly downstairs. Doyle knelt beside Sue Bradford, his hand touching but not taking the small gun she held loosely in her slim, white fingers.

But that one sound was all he heard. Doyle's mouth went grim.

"The minute the cops are tipped off, the girl won't have a chance," he whispered. "She has that newspaper clipping. She has the gun. She has the motive."

He paused. The gun had been fired but once. That meant Sue who had to be carried into the house, had to get upstairs that quickly and, in her stupor, shoot accurately enough to inflict a death wound.

Doyle got down beside the corpse. There were no powder marks about the wound. That added to the miracle of a drunken girl in a daze shooting to kill at a distance of several feet at least.

Still not another sound broke the quietude of the dimmed-out suburb. This to Doyle was the uncanny part of all this. But he had the sense of knowing it could be but minutes until police cars would be screaming into the street. Someone must have heard either the shot or the woman's scream.

Tom Doyle had never been faced by a tougher problem. Sue Bradford was as surely on the spot as it was true that Mrs. John Bradford, the second, had died within the past five minutes.

It was not a question over which he dared puzzle either.

"Lanny Gault is in the clear," said Doyle musingly. "He brought the girl to the door. The hackie waited until he returned. Then someone must have been inside waiting, and Mrs. Bradford was already a prisoner."

DOYLE made a quick search for marks of rough treatment, but there were none. Suddenly it came to him. It was seeing the little, disheveled doll with the painted eyes stick-

ing out of Sue Bradford's purse that put a new light upon the whole situation.

"No time to examine it now, and no time for anything else but to lam fast," grated Doyle. "Well, the agency was closing for the duration, anyway. This will keep it closed."

He took the girl's purse and placed it inside his coat. Sue's shapely figure was light. As if, thought Doyle, she were still the child bride who waited for John Bradford out at the lake. He had her over one shoulder.

Holding her with his left arm, he gripped the small murder gun in his right hand. He would not have given a plugged dime for his chance of getting out of the house without being shot, until he thought of the possible necessity of others to have an alibi about this time.

Nevertheless, his neck was icy as he reached the lower hallway. His eyes darted to all sides. He expected to be halted any moment. But there was no sound until he was crossing the front gallery of the house.

He heard a car coming. A taxicab came into the block. Doyle slipped into the shrubbery to one side, but kept moving cautiously toward the street. He had been given one break. The taxicab had come to the Bradford residence from the opposite direction from that Doyle himself had come.

So his own parked taxicab would not have been seen. Doyle could not resist the temptation to watch from the shelter of the bushes. He heard the hearty voice of big John Bradford before he saw him. Another man, evidently a servant, got out of the taxicab.

There was considerable luggage.

"Come on, hackie, and help us into the house," requested Bradford. "I see the lights are on, so Millie must have got here a little earlier than she expected. Did you see her, Parsons?"

"Yes, sir," said the man. "Remem-

ber, I told you. She was in Grand Central, but I did not have a chance to speak to her. Freda was with her."

Doyle judged that Freda must be Mrs. Bradford's maid. If Freda had been here, then perhaps it might have been she who had slipped out of a door. But Doyle was waiting for no more.

Just about the time he had hotfooted it through the bushes and come out near his taxicab, John Bradford must have been discovering that his heiress wife had been murdered.

The hackie was Irish and middle-aged.

"Nope, I ain't mixin' up in no police business," he declared.

Doyle made his decision. He had a C note in his hand.

"In a few weeks your tires will be gone, if they haven't taken away your gas," he said. "For this hundred how much can you forget?"

"I could forget I ever was a hackie for that much, you givin' your word you ain't aidin' or abettin' a crime," said the hackie.

"I give you my word, my name, address, and I'll tell you my reasons on the way to town," said Doyle. "But watch your driving."

Doyle almost literally held his breath until the taxi was out of Forest Hills and mixing with other traffic on Queens Boulevard. Then he heard the first siren song of the murder on a radio car when they were less than a block from the street by which they had left Forest Hills.

"TOM? Tom Doyle? You? What's happened to me? And where am I? Tom? For Pete's sake get me an eye-opener! What a hangover!"

Sue Bradford lifted her slim figure to a sitting position. She had been lying on a chaise longue. Her blue eyes widened and despite being red-rimmed, Doyle could still feel their loveliness.

Doyle was picking out just where to begin. He was in his sister's cottage in Sunnyside. He was sure that neither the police nor anyone connected with John Bradford knew his sister or her address.

And his sister had chosen this time to be up in the country.

Sue Bradford suddenly laughed hysterically. But there as something like panic in her voice.

"They said this would happen to me if I didn't ease up," she said. "And of all those who have tried, it had to be you, Tom Doyle. I don't even remember being with you. Now that's what I call a pickup. It's the one way I've said I wouldn't go. I should feel like killing you for getting me this way, but I've had it coming. How about that drink?"

Tom Doyle brought the drink before he started to set the girl straight. He thought he might as well let her have it.

"You slept in here," he said, his face reddening. "I have a bed in the other room. And you happen to be wanted for murder, the shooting of Mrs. John Bradford. That's why you're here."

Slow bewildered horror twisted the girl's face.

Instead of denying it, Sue whispered hoarsely through whitening lips, "I did that? Sometimes I thought I might do it—but you say I did—and you know that I did, Tom?"

"As nearly as any man could know on circumstantial evidence, Sue. Tell me, child, where did you get this doll?"

He produced the cheap image with the painted blue eyes.

"I had that, Tom? Why—?"

The brittleness was gone from the girl's face and the hardness from her staring blue eyes. For a fleeting instant there was that expectant, innocent joy that had been there when she had waited for John Bradford at the

lake, and they had been building a nursery.

It was too much for Tom Doyle. He stepped over and put an arm about the girl's shoulders. Perhaps it was reaction. Possibly she had felt no friendly touch for a long time.

Anyway, she was suddenly clinging to Tom Doyle, kissing him.

"That's what it all turned out to be, Tom," she whispered. "A baby with painted eyes that never saw the light. I must have partly lost my mind, Tom. But I didn't think John would—"

He could tell that hangover hysteria was upon her again. Her mouth opened to scream. He stopped the scream with one hand.

The things she was saying as he freed her mouth seemed to prove she was out of her mind.

"John had the right to divorce me, I guess—"

Doyle managed to hold her, but her hoarse voice kept on.

"John stopped loving me when we had no need for the nursery—he was cruel—I hated him—Tom Doyle—believe me—I thought of you often—too much—of how I used to sit on the edge of your porch, waiting—then John married that—that ugly woman for her fortune—Tom, listen to me—you brought me here—how I don't know—don't let me go—never let me go again—"

Once more the soft arms were about his neck. Doyle was attempting to free himself. The heavy voice of John Bradford spoke behind him, and the tone was not pleasant.

"Too bad I came alone, because I didn't believe you'd helped her escape, you double crossing heel! Don't make any sudden move, Doyle, or so help me I'll let you have it!"

SUE gave a little scream. Doyle turned slowly, looking at the red-rimmed eyes, the grimly set mouth of John Bradford. He also glanced at



She beat him about the head as he tried to rise.

the heavy automatic held steadily at Bradford's side.

"I wouldn't stand a chance, Bradford, telling you the truth," he said quietly. "So how did you know to come here?"

"If it matters, Doyle, before I call the police, you were trailed. I had a phone call this morning giving me this address. Until I saw into this room and found the door conveniently un-

locked, I thought perhaps my wife's murderer was trying to divert possible suspicion by pinning it on you. But now—"

Doyle was thinking how clever John Bradford really had been. Now he held all the cards. He swore silently at himself for keeping the murder gun. The little .25 lay in plain sight on the dresser.

"But now you're all set," said Doyle

steadily. "What was a somewhat clumsy frame for murder, now is made airtight. Anyway, Bradford, you had to find Sue quickly, within forty-eight hours, or part of the evidence would have failed, wouldn't it? The gun test on Sue's hands will show the shooting today. A couple of days and it will be useless."

Doyle's hands were held carefully apart. He glanced at the ragged, little doll beside the gun.

"You'll probably want to destroy that doll—"

Bradford's hard eyes darted to the gun and the doll. Sue screamed as Doyle dived low for Bradford's knees. He was so quick he caught the gun, forcing his hand against the man's body and slamming his free left fist to Bradford's exposed chin.

"Tom—you can't do this." Sue's voice was miraculously low and calm. "I see now you will be involved in what to me isn't even a memory. Tom, I'll go myself to the police."

But Doyle was trussing up Bradford's wrists and ankles. He applied an effective gag and was thankful the big closet in the room was well ventilated.

"Come on, Sue," he directed. "We're moving. You're innocent. Before I'm through, it will be John Bradford explaining. There's his wife's fortune you know."

The girl protested. Then she became as docile as a child. Something seemed to have snapped the hysteria. She was still pale from the hangover, but Doyle fixed that up quickly.

Before they left the cottage, he scanned the big headline story of the murder of Mrs. Bradford. He had guessed correctly. Bradford had made no suggestion to the police about Sue, or it had been kept under cover.

"He didn't dare let himself in for that," judged Doyle. "It might have proved that he expected you to be at his house last night. Perhaps a little

doll can be used as bait to get the real killer. In the meantime, you must promise to stay in the hotel where I take you."

"I'll do anything you say, Tom," she pledged. "Only I'm sorry for John. Tom, he couldn't have done that? He was cruel sometimes, but not that way. I don't love him any more, Tom. But I still believe in him."

Her blue eyes were warmer now. Doyle turned away.

ACCORDING to the news story, Doyle had no possible witness. But it was mentioned that Mrs. Bradford had been married three times. Freda Lieber, her maid who had been with her for ten years, had told the police of two children by the former marriages who had not been mentioned in the stories of John Bradford's wedding.

It also stated: "Freda, the maid, would have been with Mrs. Bradford, but she was called to her mother's home in Brooklyn suddenly, her mother being seriously ill. Freda is suffering with shock, declaring that Mrs. Bradford had been the kindest woman in the world."

The story added that: "Under questioning, Freda reluctantly admitted that the dead woman and John Bradford had quarreled violently several times. Freda stated the cause was the former Mrs. Sue Bradford whose escapades had angered Mrs. Bradford number two."

Accepting Sue's promise that she would stay at the hotel, Doyle put the little doll and the murder gun in his pocket. Half an hour later he got out of a taxicab before a Flatbush apartment house. It was a walkup, and the Liebers occupied a second floor apartment.

Just as he started up the stairs, Doyle's quick eye caught the figure of a man slipping along the shadows of

the poorly lighted lower hallway, but Doyle was unable to make out his face, and the man disappeared.

Freda Lieber was big and blonde, and red-eyed from weeping. Her mother lay in bed in an adjoining room.

"You are another one from the police?" said Freda, her hands shaking visibly. "I do not want to talk. But if anything I know can find the murderer of Mrs. Bradford, I do not care."

Doyle nodded. He did not say he was from the police. With the maid's story and the evidence of the little doll it appeared he might be able to show up John Bradford for what he was.

"Why didn't Mr. Bradford come home with Mrs. Bradford last night?" he questioned.

"He phoned he had some kind of business meeting," said Freda. "But he told Mrs. Bradford to be sure and go on home before midnight, as he would come out there later."

"Anything else you might remember, Freda? Was Mrs. Bradford afraid of her husband?"

"No, oh, no," said Freda. "She was too much in love with him. But he did tell her that they might soon not be annoyed again by his former wife. He said he had hired a detective to try and straighten her out, and if he could not, it might be necessary to try and have something done to put her in an institution."

Doyle chanced a long shot.

"Was any mention ever made of Sue Bradford making threats, or have you any reason to believe Mrs. Bradford might have been killed by her husband's first wife?"

"I think that would not be so," said Freda emphatically. Then she added, "But about one o'clock last night this Sue was drinking somewhere, and she called on the telephone and called Mrs. Bradford names."

"You are sure it was about one o'clock, Freda?"

"Yes, for we had just come in, and I had set the clock by my watch in Mrs. Bradford's room. It was five minutes of one when the call came on the phone."

At this moment Doyle was sure another door had opened just a crack. He could see no one, but he was certain the door had moved slightly and that the knob had turned.

"Freda, I saw Sue Bradford last night," he said. "In fact, I'm the detective John Bradford hired. Funny thing. she was in a tavern with a no-good punk around one o'clock. They left suddenly, and she left evidence she might not be quite sane. This little doll she picked up somewhere—"

DOYLE pulled the much abused doll from his coat pocket. As he did, he permitted the .25 calibre murder gun to catch on the doll's dress and it fell to the floor. He recovered the weapon instantly, and he swung to one side as he did.

"You fool! I told you not to talk and—"

Doyle dropped, rolling, as the rod blasted from the door that swung open. A slug parted his hair, so close it dizzied him. But he had already triggered the little .25.

With a wild oath Lanny Gault lost his rod from smashed fingers. Doyle dived at his wavering figure, smashing rights and lefts. Lanny Gault lost limp, but a chair broke over Doyle's head.

Already half stunned, he went down. The husky Freda beat him about the face as he tried to rise. A middle-aged woman with a hard face, her wrapper covering her, did not seem too ill to appear, clutching a kitchen carving knife in one hand.

The old woman was screaming.

"You are both fools! I told you it

(Continued on page 105)

By
WALTON
GREY

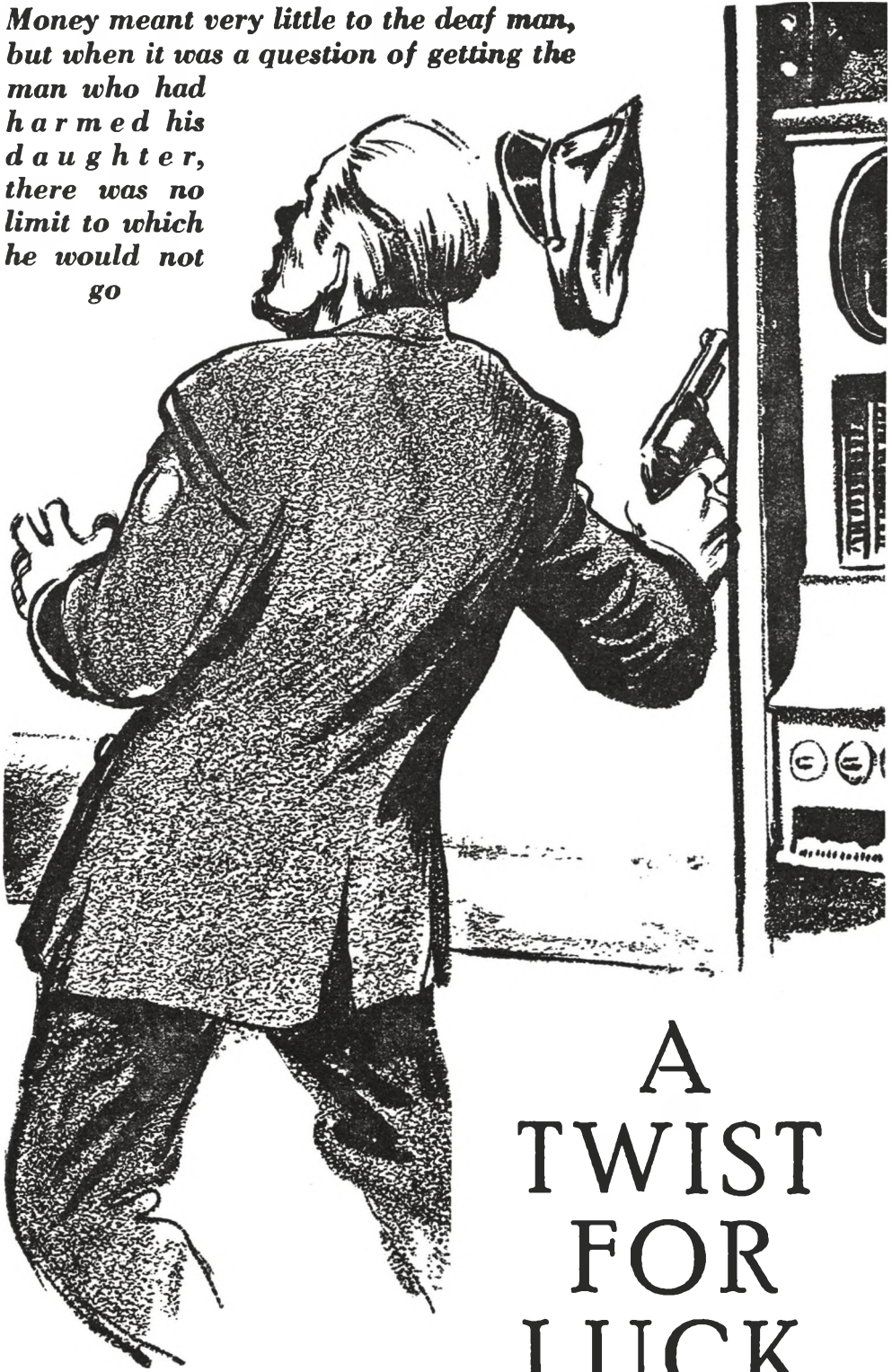


*Holding the girl as a shield, he
fired point-blank at the cop.*

NEAR Times Square a small man crossed the street against the lights. He paid no attention to traffic; a beautiful limousine breezed past him at inches, and a speeding maroon cab, alleying alongside, beamed down murderously on the little man, horn going. The policeman stationed

at the intersection yelled angrily. A number of hands reached out from the curb and pulled the little man to safety as the cab driver, swearing bitterly, slewed his machine out into the wake of the limousine. The little man didn't turn his head until he reached the curbing, where the cop grabbed him.

*Money meant very little to the deaf man,
but when it was a question of getting the
man who had harmed his
daughter,
there was no
limit to which
he would not
go*



A TWIST FOR LUCK

Two other men darted through traffic, but merged with the crowd on the curb without being accosted.

"What's the matter with you?" the cop demanded. "Can't you see? Can't you hear?"

The diminutive offender blinked through deeply tinted glasses. "I am sorry that I cannot hear you," he stated imperturbably. The corners of his thin mouth twitched a little. "It happens that I am stone deaf. Do you mind writing it down for me?" He held out a pad of blank paper, a gold pencil.

"Writing what down?" the cop flared.

"I cannot hear you," the little man insisted patiently. "Do you mind writing down what it is that you wish to tell me?"

"Oh, my God!" The cop's voice was thick with disgust. A bystander snickered. The cop lifted his fists belligerently, glared. He looked down at the pad which the little man still offered, pushed it aside contemptuously. The other two offenders had made off.

The little man shrugged, tucked away his pad. He had violated traffic rules in order to discover something. Having discovered it, he stepped into a corner store and bought a handful of rather good panatela cigars. Two men entered the store as he paid for the cigars, the two who had dashed across the street after him. Without looking at them directly, the little man turned into a telephone booth near the door. He dialed carefully, so that the two strangers could see what number he fingered out.

When one is stone deaf, it is something of a trick to make a telephone call. While the little man dialed his number, he rubbed the third finger of his left hand briskly on the lapel of his coat. The third finger is the most sensitive finger, and the left hand is more sensitive than the right. He then picked up the receiver from the shelf,

where he had placed it temporarily, and let his friction-sensitized finger rest in the hole of the earphone. In this fashion a deaf man hears a telephone conversation through his fingertip—just as a blind man reads by passing his fingers over a page typed in braille.

The number which the little man called was that of Dan Humbel, a detective.

"Hello," said the little man in a level voice. "I want to speak to Mr. Humbel."

AT the other end of the line Dan Humbel flipped back the cover of his call book and picked up a pencil. Humbel was a stocky man about thirty-three or -four years old; his face was built on the square, and his eyes were wide and deep, with a slight narrowness that gave his face a calculating expression. His trunk was the powerful variety that swiftly acquires a bulge if its owner allows himself to get out of trim. Humbel had no paunch. His voice, as he spoke into the mouthpiece, was hard but not nasal,—

"Hulo. Who's calling, please?"

"It is Mario Occi," said the thin, level voice. Occi spelled out his name slowly, and Humbel wrote it down on the pad, with the address which followed. Occi, Occi,—thought Humbel; the name rang vaguely familiar. Occi went on, "It is because I have a case which I want you to take. It is a case with shooting. Do you care?"

The query was so gravely naive that Humbel grinned.

"I don't mind shooting," said the detective, "though it's out of my line just now. What sort of case have you, Mr. Occi?"

"Now, it is a case of kidnaping," Occi explained carefully. "It is my daughter Francesca, nineteen years old, who has been kidnaped. I must pay these men thirty thousand dollars

tonight. That is the ransom for my daughter Francesca."

Occi's voice, though he gave no inflection to his words whatever, sounded vindictive. Humbel squinted thoughtfully. Deaf men speak in one of two ways. The voice is either out of control entirely, changing in pitch with every word, or it stays on one note and never leaves that note. Occi's voice was keyed to one note so rigidly that it was not always easy to tell whether he had finished speaking or not. His voice had the quality of an open violin string plucked continuously. Humbel decided that Mario Occi was pretty deaf, and made a good guess at how the little Italian was holding up his end of the conversation. A fingertip on the receiver disc.

"Well, Mr. Occi," said Humbel, "you'd better take your trouble to the police. A private detective gets plenty of heat on a kidnap dodge. I might lose my license."

"Ah," Occi mourned. "Pardon me, but I think this case will amuse you. There is a man named Joseph Sovilla who has bought a gun from me. He is one of the kidnapers, I find. Now, I can—"

"Five cents, please," the operator's voice broke in.

"Reverse the charges, operator," Humbel commanded; he held the telephone tighter. "Did you say Joie Sovilla was mixed up in this deal, Mr. Occi?"

"The very man. As I say, Joseph Sovilla bought a gun from me a short while ago. He is what you call the master mind of this case. I have found that out."

"Yes, he's a smart lad," Humbel gruded. "How the devil did you get anything like that on him? You say he bought a gun from you and then grabbed off your daughter? Not much; Joie isn't that crazy!"

"Pardon me," Occi's odd, mechanical voice bored on, "but for the third

time,—yes; Joseph Sovilla bought the gun. It was, as you say, so that he could get the lay of the land. It is my profession to be a gunsmith. Later, this Sovilla kidnaped my daughter Francesca. I must pay the ransom tonight, as you say, or else."

"I'll string along with you, Mr. Occi," Humbel decided. "I want that Sovilla boy, want him bad. What time?"

"Could it be eight o'clock?"

"Eight she is."

"Very well, then," Occi sounded along on his unvarying note. "Now, there are two men—"

"Five cents, please." The singsong of the operator.

"Reverse the charges, operator!" snapped Humbel. "What was that about two men, Mr. Occi?"

"These two men who followed me into the store where I am calling you. They saw me dial your number. If they call you, perhaps you would recognize their voices. Do you mind trying?"

"Not in the least; it was a good idea. You'll see me at eight, Mr. Occi."

Humbel disconnected, made a notation on his pad. He was a neat man, having found that people place greater trust in a detective whose office is in absolute order. Good business.

IN the middle of his desk lay a sheaf of documents, including several photostatic enlargements of handwriting. The bundle was ready to be turned over to experts if necessary. The entire file happened to be an ambitious but unwary maiden's claim on the estate of a wealthy manufacturer of dry goods, lately deceased. The file was complete with marriage license, deed, and love letters couched in the most intimate and damaging terms. Humbel had proved that the job was the work of a known forger now doing time in Sing Sing. He glanced through his report to the

manufacturer's daughters and sole heirs, grinned as he signed the report, and consigned the whole sheaf to a drawer. The statement covering his services he could fill in later. That job he knew he had done well. He locked the drawer.

Joie Sovilla, now. Humbel's eyes glinted. He rubbed his hard palms together and let his jaw muscles bulge. There was a score to settle; the mark of one of Sovilla's bullets was on Humbel's throat.

The telephone rang. Humbel rose, half smiling, and selected the better of his two hats from a small closet. He returned to the desk. Setting the hat on his head with care and thought, he gandered pleasantly at his small, triangular quarters while he listened to the telephone. He liked his neat office, but there wasn't room here for a secretary, if things went well. . . . When the phone jangled for the fifth time, he lazily picked it up.

A man can feel menace in a telephone conversation before a word is spoken. Humbel felt it.

"Uh,—hello?" he drawled.

"This is the rental agent," a raised voice lied. "We have two inquiries on your premises, Mr.—ah. . . . Well, we think you can sub-lease for more than you pay. A very substantial rental. Now, are you interested in sub-leasing, Mr.—?"

Humbel tried to keep his snort of disbelief inaudible. Fat chance! This cubby-hole of his wasn't good for much of anything, though he paid plenty for it. The rental agent's voice was queerly familiar, but he couldn't recognize it.

"Ah you sure you have the right pahy?" he inquired casually. "There ah so many othah vacant apahments heah that I don't quite see. . . ." he trailed off vacuously. Hell, this wasn't an apartment at all. It was an office, with a single room adjoining that could be used for a bedroom.

"Isn't this Chelsea 2- 4507?" A sharp demand.

"Quite!" Humbel grinned harder than ever. Whoever this fellow was, he wasn't smart at finding out names. The man's voice got tight as he became angrier.

"Then you ought to consider this proposition, Mr. . . . Our agent's commission is quite reasonable, and we shall be glad to assist you in finding a new apartment, perhaps better than the one you now occupy. Let me see, your name is Mr.—?"

"I'm veddy sorry," Humbel apologized with his fake drawl, "but it must be a mistake. Teddibly sorry." He hung up, scowling. Stalemate. The caller had not identified Humbel, and Humbel had not been able to recognize the disguised voice. It mocked an echo in his brain somewhere, barely eluded him.

The detective snapped out the lights, stood in the half gloom for a moment. Yes, he had forgotten something.

He prowled a desk drawer, slipped his automatic home in a strong, light harness below his left armpit. He didn't wear the gun in his office because its pressure against his body made him sweat. He closed the door briskly then, and turned out of the building toward the Sheridan Square subway station. He stepped into a coffee-pot on the way, ordered a handsome little blue-plate dinner which he consumed in twelve minutes flat. While he ate, his mind dwelt on Mario Occi, the man with the resonant, rigid voice. He wondered how Occi had gotten the dope on a very smart boy like Sovilla. The case promised to be queer.

HUMBEL was a devout newspaper addict. He had the type of mind which dwells on odd facts until the facts are part of memory. He read with implacable industry, training

himself to associate names and dates with items that interested him.

Now, Occi was an Italian. His precise English hinted strongly at some



His face terrible with wrath, he slapped her face hard.

sort of technical knowledge. The name itself was curt, short as the bark of a gun. That was it!

Humbel sighed, sipped his scalding coffee reflectively. Mario Occi, several months before, had sold his patent on a motor-driven, high-speed machine gun to the war department. He had perfected other devices and made improvements which had been brought up by the small-arms manufacturers. Well-to-do, he had been an American citizen for over fourteen years. One grown daughter. Widower. He was a slight man, spoke English with grave precision, wore dark glasses over piercing eyes because he was afflicted with photophobia was natural compensation for Mr. Occi's deafness, suffered in his early

years through the hazards of his trade.

The item had appeared in the *Times*. It was a short item; Humbel remembered it in detail because it was fairly

recent, and because it had the suggestive, queer slant that was right down his alley.

He slapped a half dollar on the counter and spun off his stool. Outside the door an elephantine man butted him intentionally with a huge stomach. Detective Fred Ridley. Another detective, Owens, smoked a cigar in a Ford sedan parked at the curb. Ridley laid a soft, fat hand on Hubel's chest, found the gun.

"Howdy, Richard?" piped Ridley. "What you carry that rosco around for, I don't know. I bet it hasn't been warm since you left the department."

"Richard my foot!" Humbel frowned. "I resent that, Ridley. A dick is a dick, whether he carries a shield or not. I like to be my own boss, see? And there's money in the bank."

"Nickels and dimes!" chirped Ridley. "Well, it makes me no never mind, Dan. What you got?"

"A juicy little snatch."

"Kidnaping?" Ridley's voice squealed. "Huh! Presently uncle Samuel will turn the heat on one Daniel Humbel, a very feeble-minded private Richard."

"Not this time, Blubber-gut," Humbel retorted. "This one smells rank with extortion. It's got Joie Sure-shot Sovilla in it."

"Too bad for you! Say, how's about Owens riding you up to where you want to go? No? Well, I hope Joie shoots the pants off of you—we could book him then," Ridley peeped.

Humbel left the subway at the Fiftieth Street stop and walked east. Far over in the east Fifties, a block from Occi's he slowed to a stalking pace. He was a few minutes early. As he strolled, he ruffed his coat collar and buried his chin in the folds of the lapels. His face was thrown into complete shadow. He could dart probing glances into the shabby doorways across the street and let his eyes flick-

er over passing figures without seeming to turn his head.

He turned aside before a number in the three hundreds, mounted the stoop without any change in pace. By some freak of air current, a voice sounded in his ears when he was three steps from the top.

"Come in on all fours. Quick!" It was Occi's voice, crackling and sibilant. The door banked in. Humbel dived across the top step; he spidered through the doorway on palms and toes and flattened himself on a clean, thick but musty carpet.

The door clapped shut at once; a single club-like knock sounded on it. A hole appeared where Humbel's hips would have been. Humbel grunted with delayed alarm as he made out the bouquet of splinters fringing the hole. He observed a man crammed into the corner of the vestibule.

"Mr. Occi?" inquired Humbel from the floor.

"And you are Mr. Humbel," Occi nodded, approvingly. "That was quick. I thought you would brain yourself on the door before I got it open." His stare, even through his dark blue glasses, was penetrating in the extreme. Humbel moved to his feet, brushed. "But if I were a detective," continued the gunsmith, "and you were the criminal, you would be just as easy to catch as these kidnapers I give you."

"What?" Humbel spoke with astonishment.

"Do you remember what you said, walking up the street?"

"Why, I didn't say a word. I was just trying to spot those two shadows you told me about."

"Yes, but then you moved your lips without realizing that you did so. You were saying, 'Why does a man with thirty G's live in a scrap-pile like this?' Did you not say so?"

"Why, I—" Humbel blushed for the first time in twelve years. He stat-

ered. "You're not a ventriloquist as well as a lip-reader, are you?" he inquired. "Your voice sounded right in my ear."

Occi shook his head and smiled, showing small, well-scrubbed teeth. "I spoke to you through the slot for letters. Because you could not see me, possibly your imagination played you a trick. But imagination is good. Well, come with me."

HUMBEL gazed at the closed door. Behind it, across the street, must be a man who had fired at him. That matter called for some kind of attention. Bullets, apparently, meant little to the nervy little gunsmith. Later Humbel intended to hunt for that slug in the rear of the hall and see whether it matched another slug he kept in his office desk. One that had passed through his body.

He followed Occi into his workshop. A strong smell of machinery hung in the air. Oil on hot metal. Occi said, "The man who shot at you is with another man in a basement pit across the street. He fired at you with a forty-five caliber automatic equipped with a silencer." That was all, just a calm statement of fact.

Humbel fingered a white scar on his throat. Once in the service, flame jetting from an alley . . . Sovilla, he was sure of that, ambushed in fog and dark. The bullet had passed around his neck under the skin without touching any vital spot, and had issued from the back of his neck. A freak shot. The bullet holes were not even puckered.

The main room where Humbel stood with Occi housed all the gunsmith's apparatus. Ranged along the walls were barrel moulds, crucibles, an improved power lathe with a nest of chucks. Rows of graduated drills sticking up like steel, fluted candles. Wooden patterns. Screw machines. Honeycomb trays filled with screws

and small parts. All the apparatus, in fact, that might be needed for machining and finishing any weapon up to the size of a machine gun. A lifetime at the trade had furnished the shop with all manner of tools, but what hypnotized Humbel was the rack of gleaming weapons, decoratively arrayed in their glass case against the rear wall. In this prodigious case stood or hung everything from a six-barreled brass derringer to a tripod-mounted collapsible machine gun.

"Great guns!" Humbel ejaculated. "Fancy armory you have here, Mr. Occi!"

"Most of those are curios," Occi stated. "Until recently I depended for my living on making types of guns for museums. It was a good living. Now and then I could sell an entire case like that on a single order. It shows how the pocket gun has developed from its earliest form. The dueling pistols are very fine," he finished with pride.

"This one, now," he went on, taking from the case what appeared to be just a walking stick, "is the model which I sold to Joseph Sovilla. It is a dangerous firearm. It is, in reality, an automatic rifle loading from a clip. Caliber twenty-five. Seven shots in the clip. It is a small caliber, but it will kill a man at a great distance. Observe the trigger-action."

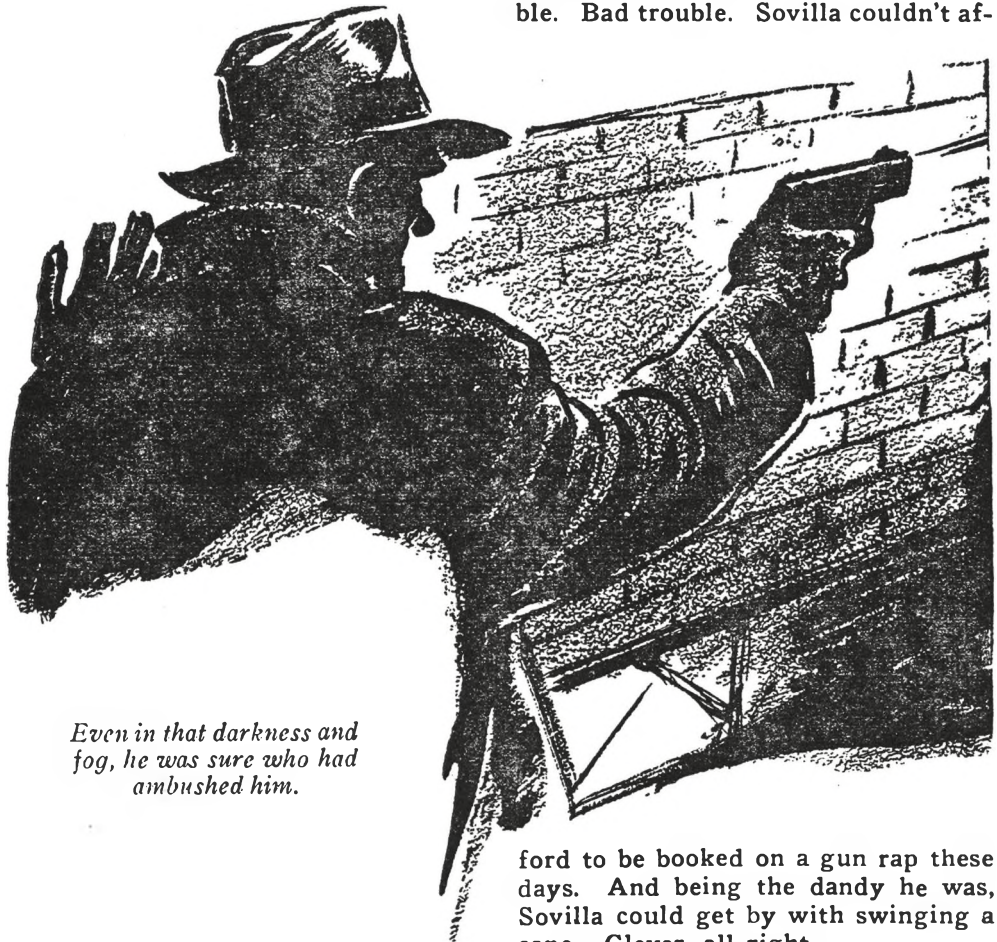
Gooseflesh lifted the hair on Humbel's forearms. Beautiful gun! One of the men he had to meet tonight would be armed with a weapon of this order. The rifle, disguised as a cane, was entirely slim and exquisitely formed. It was light in the hand, responsive. The barrel was sheathed in thin wood and bound with silver bands at four-inch intervals. The muzzle was fitted with a neat silver dust-protector that slipped free with a half-turn. The stock, of course, was hammerless; the trigger was little more than a button, a rivet-head.

Humbel tried that button. A faint *click*. The thing was so perfect it made Humbel shiver; the action was as sheer as pressing a piano key. And this treacherous beauty held a clip of seven shells in its innocent gumwood butt.

"Sovilla?" Humbel prompted grimly, returning the rifle. He had all the information he needed on the mobster

every time he was brought to trial. He was clever enough to do his own shooting, invariably, and he never talked.

CLEVER of him too, thought Humbel, to resort to carrying this rifle-stick when there was so much heat on men lugging weapons. Under the new laws and the heartfelt desire of the police to muss up all crooks, mere possession of a lethal weapon meant trouble. Bad trouble. Sovilla couldn't af-



Even in that darkness and fog, he was sure who had ambushed him.

himself, of course. Sovilla called himself the manager of a west side night club named the White Cockatoo. He was, indeed. He was, also, a black-mailer and a murderer, and the White Cockatoo was his headquarters.

Joie had never done time. Evidence disappeared, evidence was lacking

ford to be booked on a gun rap these days. And being the dandy he was, Sovilla could get by with swinging a cane. Clever, all right.

"Sovilla came in to buy a gun from me," Occi was saying. "The moment I saw him, it entered my mind that he was crooked."

"A wrong gee," Humbel agreed, thinking of Sovilla's beady brown eyes set on a slant, and his cruel mouth. "A very wrong gee."



"This cane rifle, an invention of mine, he wanted to buy. He collected guns, he said. He was a liar. He was spying me out. When he offered me a thousand dollars to make him a similar gun, I knew he was crooked. Finally I agreed to make this gun for twelve hundred dollars."

"Whew!"

"Yes, whew! So I made the gun, finishing it two weeks ago." Occi went to the window, peered, came back slowly. "He came here often. Each

time, as you say, he gave my daughter Francesca the works."

"Just like him. Joie has a way with the dolls," said Humbel.

"He pumped her about me. One day I am watching him through the front window when Francesca meets him outside. He could fall for her, he said,—she must come to the White Cockatoo with him, he would get her a position dancing. Specialties, he called it. Specialties! Francesca can dance, and she listened to him, that rat. Well, she has no mother and I could never manage her."

"Reading their lips, were you?"

"Exactly. I am sorry that I can do

it sometimes, for what I see men say on the streets. Some of these men that live among us are wild beasts. But one day Francesca is not here, and then I get this letter." Occi showed Humbel a typewritten note. The note read: "Your brat has been kidnaped. Don't worry about her, she's safe. So far. It costs you thirty thousand dollars to get her back. We will tell you how to pay this ransom in the next communication. We warn you not to tell the police. If you do, we will know. Then you'll never hear from us again nor see your kid alive."

At the bottom of the page was an arrow, drawn in ink. It pointed to a triangular cut in the edge of the paper.

It was a hole such as is made by a punch on the border of a common meal ticket. Sovilla had probably borrowed such a punch from any waiter in the café of the White Cockatoo.

The second note was similarly punched for identification. When placed together, the holes of the two notes jibed. Both sheets had been punched at the same time, making hijacking by any other gang impossible. This device is in common use among kidnapers, is well known to the public now through being used in the cause célèbre of the century.

This second note ran: "Be in the Pennsylvania subway station on the Seventh Avenue line at nine o'clock sharp. Downtown side. Have thirty thousand in old, unmarked twenties wrapped in brown paper, heavily tied. You will be watched. Wait at the Thirty-fourth Street turnstile until the downtown local pulls into the station. Walk south swiftly on the platform. When the local comes to a stop, place the package against the wall and board the subway. Get off at Twenty-eighth Street and go home. If you follow our directions and do not cross us, you will find your kid safe home when you get there. This is the last

communication you will receive from us."

"That's a fancy way of delivering a ransom," Humbel commented.

"So I hired you," Occi stated in his dead-level voice, "because I could not be in two places at the same time. Otherwise I would stay in the subway station and shoot at these men, these wild dogs."

"Are you hiring me to do your killing for you?" Humbel put it very bluntly.

Occi stared hard at the detective, his deep black eyes burning. "They do not intend to return my daughter to me!" he clipped.

"Extortion." Humbel nodded gravely. "Sovilla is too smart to monkey with a straight snatch. You wouldn't go to the police in any case, as long as Francesca is taking part in this rotten deal, would you? Pride? I don't blame you."

"I care nothing for the money." Occi's face was bitter. "All I desire now is satisfaction. Yet, if I did go to the police, I know what would happen. I have watched them talk."

OCCI gestured. He advanced to a slit in the shuttered windows. From this point of vantage one could see across the street, but the men over there in the pit were not in position either to see into the room or make out anyone at the window. The single slit in the shutter was too razor-thin to give Humbel and Occi away. They cast no shadows. Humbel squinted hard at the two figures. Street illumination fell dimly on them. One of them shifted his position; Humbel started.

"Ah! You recognize them!" Occi exclaimed.

"The chunky fellow on the right!" Humbel snapped. "His name is Sam Bowman. He used to be in my detail. He got kicked out for taking bribes."

"No doubt you are right," said Occi.

"The other scoundrel calls him 'Sam'. They think I do not know anything about them. Who the kidnapers are. Ah, but they are mistaken; I see everything they say. They are great talkers!

"This Bowman calls his friend 'Bennie'. Would you know of him, too? They are both of them scoundrels."

"Wrong gees, all of them," said Humbel. "Bennie might be Captain Bennie Richards. He used to do smuggling jobs for Sovilla, but I've never seen him. He answers the description pretty well."

What a break this was going to be for Dan Humbel! This was a clever gang, but Joie Sovilla had put his foot in deep at last. Trapped by a chance in a million, that was Joie. The chance that Mario Occi had compensated for his deafness by learning to read lips. Those sensitive, far-sighted eyes of his could pick up intelligence at distances beyond the reach of the keenest ears in the world. The two hoods down there, blind to their danger...

"Just before you came," Occi crackled, "this Bowman said to the other, 'Wouldn't the fool burn if he knew his own doll was putting the squeeze on him!' He said, 'She thinks Joie is going to split with her, and the sucker thinks he's going to get her back tonight. And they're both wrong!'

"He laughs, like a crazy man. He is wicked, and it shows in his face when he drools, 'Any doll with swell pins like hers stays in circulation till we're all through with her.' But later he says, 'Well, if the old fool don't kick through with the wad, we got to anchor the doll out in the channel with the other ones. That would be too bad.' So you see, my friend, that is the kind of men they are. They are rats. They are crawling with vileness."

"Dead wrong gees," muttered Humbel. A river census! Bodies anchored to the bottom with an old piece of

chain, perhaps, swaying, being devoured by the crabs. Sovilla owned a boat.

"Are they talking now?" Humbel asked. "Can you see what they're talking about?"

Occi rested his fingertips on the window sill and peered intently through the slit. "They are talking still about you," he reported. "It is Captain Bennie scolding Sam. He threatens to 'stir him up.' It is because Sam fired at you without being sure who you were. 'Maybe he lives there,' says Bennie. 'The hell he does, gunsel!' says Sam. 'I know that guy. He's Dan Humbel—used to be a city dick. He put the finger on me for taking bribes when I was on the city payroll, the rat. Damn it, if you didn't knock my arm up, I'd a gotten him where he sits.'"

"What else?" Humbel asked hungrily.

"Bennie is shaking his head. He says, 'You was taking a chance, sucker. Next time you do that on a job with me, I beat your face off.' Sam is making a noise at his friend with his mouth, what is called the bird. Bennie says, 'Smart guy, huh? Swell! If this guy comes out with Occi—if this is the guy that queered you, go ahead and burn him down. But not until! Understand?' Sam says, 'Nuts!' Bennie says, 'Maybe the heat is on us already. That guy sure must know he was shot at. Damn you, I should kick your teeth in!'

Occi turned back to Humbel again. "Those are brutal men," he warned. "Perhaps you will be killed tonight."

"How about you?" asked the detective. "Going through with it?"

Occi nodded at a brown paper package on a workbench near the door. It was securely tied with manila cord.

"They'll hijack you on the way," suggested Humbel. "These fellows think it's screwy to play square. They're poison."

"No-o-o," Occi decided. "I don't think so. Joseph Sovilla put those men there for a reason. They are 'protecting' me until I pay the ransom. Sam was saying, 'Look here, Bennie, let's boost the sucker and take it on the lam.'"

"Bennie told him, 'You know what happens to guys that cross Joie Sovilla? Bait! You must be nuts. The boss is picking up this bundle himself.' You see, they are afraid of Sovilla."

"That's right. Sovilla would cut the ears off his brother if he had even a fair reason. He's a rat."

OCCI glanced at his watch, peered through the slit for the last time. He hesitated, scowling, as though he saw something formed by the killers' lips that he didn't understand. At the door he said to Humbel,

"I go first. They say, 'That fool better get going. Joie is on the way with the doll by this time. He's using her for a screen.' A screen is what, Mr. Humbel?"

Humbel shook his head.

"Then the case is in your hands from now on," Occi concluded. "Perhaps you had better not try to help."

"I cannot blame you for not wishing to put your life in danger."

The door closed on Occi and the ransom. From the window Humbel saw Sam Bowman slip a hand under his coat. The hoods waited, hesitating between the doorway of the house and Occi, who was now some distance down the street in search of a cab. Then Bennie Richards struck Sam's shoulder disgustedly and sneered. Humbel couldn't read lips, but he could guess that Richards made some caustic remark on Sam's eyesight. Humbel considered himself given up. The hoods stepped from the pit into a car standing nearby with an idling motor. They coasted up the street and vanished in pursuit of the cab Occi had hailed at the corner.

Humbel tugged down his coat, sprinted down the hall and out the front door. He got a cab that had just discharged a fare.

"Seventh Avenue, Thirty-third Street!" Humbel snapped. The driver horseshoed, began to hit up a good clip of his own accord. The detective decided to tip the driver well.

Occi would tell the driver of his own cab to take it easy. It would get Humbel to the subway station first. At Thirty-third, Humbel gave the driver a two dollar bill and told him to keep the change. The driver stared at the bill under the light, and snapped it. Two's are unlucky. He was still snapping it when Humbel was hastening down the subway stairs.

This was the east, or uptown side. He got a good position in front of the turnstiles and fished out a handful of pennies. Half concealed behind a slot machine cleated to one of the girder uprights, he bought gum. Spearmint dropped down the slide stick by stick and went into his pocket. No one paid him any attention.

Rows of the big girders partially obscured vision across the station; he began to see the ingenuity of Sovilla's scheme. First, there were many exits from this huge station. Emerging, a man could lose himself instantly in the crowds up above. Or go to a room in one of the hotels in the district, taken for no reason but this convenience. One of the hotels had an entrance in the station itself.

Then, too, Sovilla had a detective working for him, a man who would tumble to any trap set by the police since he had once been a city man himself. Worse, the shooting from this side was poor. Humbel would have to fire through a forest of steel girders. There was danger of ricochet. The pick-up man would be a broken target at best. Yet Humbel couldn't wait on the downtown side and take a chance on being recognized by Bowman. The

tion like an avalanche of scrap iron. It made a sound like none other in the world, a smashing, battering, ear-splitting uproar that makes the marrow jitter in one's bones.



Above the thunder of the train was the louder thunder of the unsilenced gun.

whole scheme would collapse. Thinking fiercely of these things, he unwrapped a stick of gum and snapped his jaws on it.

A half minute past nine by his watch. An uptown express had arrived and blocked his view across the tracks entirely. Humbel jittered. The express jerked, roared off uptown. Then the downtown local burst into the sta-

The Penn station has a central platform down its length, from either side of which one can board express trains. On the sides, forming deep ledges with the walls, run platforms for the local trains. This arrangement makes two sets of double track, divided by the center table. To cross these tracks on foot was unthinkable. Humbel wished he had tried the central plat-

form now, where his own chances might have been better. Too late.

The local slowed sharply. Walking swiftly behind it on the far platform, coming down from the Thirty-fourth Street turnstiles, came Occi. He looked straight ahead and carried the ransom package by the cord.

HUMBEL breathed fast through his nose. He moved up the platform a few feet. The local stopped when Occi was still a few feet behind it, and Humbel knew that the little Italian had cheated on his quick steps. Walking the way Occi did, a man could easily make the second car of the train before it stopped.

Occi dropped the package against the wall. He gandered squarely across the tracks at Humbel, but gave no sign of recognition. Humbel formed the words 'Come back!' with his lips, and thought he saw Occi smile. Then the gunsmith had boarded the last car of the train. It would land him at Twenty-eighth Street.

The local pulled out with an increasing, crashing roar. It disclosed a dapper man wearing gray spats and a derby, who walked up the platform swinging a cane. A smartly outfitted young woman stepped along with him. He spoke to her. She turned toward the ransom bundle uncertainly. Her black satin skirt snapped at her trim ankles as she ran back the way she had come. Half striking at her with the cane, the dandy hurriedly picked up the ransom with his left hand.

Humbel recognized Joie Sovilla, all dressed up for a killing. The girl would be Francesca, the "screen" Bennie Richards spoke of. Sovilla had expected her to pick up the ransom herself.

Humbel's automatic leaped out. Simultaneously with the crash of the explosion, Sovilla dropped the ransom and spun. Sovilla didn't need to draw. He managed to force the dust-protector

from the cane with his shattered hand, threw up the cane to fire.

Humbel's shot drew a uniformed cop from the upper turnstiles. Sovilla shot a glance at the charging cop, kicked the ransom backward with his foot. In the lightning interval Humbel's gun spoke again. The shot was joined by a triple burst from Sovilla's smaller caliber weapon. All three shots missed the detective. But Humbel's shot took the mobster in the side. Sovilla's curse of pain sounded high and sharp across the station. He pressed his ruined hand to his side and crouched back in the turnstile passage. His lips had drawn back in a smile of pain, a cornered rat's grin.

The cop drew his service gun as he came barging down the platform. He raised it to fire. Humbel saw Sam Bowman scramble forward, shielding himself behind the body of the struggling girl. He fired at the cop and dropped him. On both sides of the station subway patrons fought their way through the turnstiles or dived for the stairs. The wise ones sprawled themselves on the dirty concrete platforms.

Before Humbel fired again, he heard three distinct shots fired at himself. The hot breath of one of these shots bit into his cheek, but he was not hit. Humbel snorted and took slow, careful aim. He remembered hearing, crazily, that Joie Sovilla had cut his teeth on a gun butt and was a dead shot.

Standing opposite each other, the mobster and the detective might have been two duelists having it out to a logical finish. Sovilla had fired at a fair target six times without a score. His seventh and last shot would be a bull's-eye. Occi's beautiful gun wouldn't fail the gangster again. Humbel's flesh crawled with the anticipation of that leaden slug ripping into his body—he fired. At the same instant, Sovilla's last bullet smacked the tile behind Humbel. It missed him

clean by four inches, ricocheted to the edge of the platform where it rested, flattened, like a phony quarter. Terrible shooting, for an old hand like Sovilla.

To one side Francesca, fighting like a wildcat, was going down in a struggle with Bowman. As Humbel feared, just then another train crashed into Penn station and hid everything. His last view was of Sovilla poised crookedly with Occi's sleek rifle, and Bowman's automatic streaking up for a finishing blow on Francesca's head. The detective strained to see through the windows clipping past him, but could not even tell the result of his own last shot. He groaned, damning himself for a weakling. To his shame, he had been unable to force himself to shoot down that mobster with intent to kill. Stalemate.

ABOVE the thunder of the stopping train a louder thunder opened up, echoing wildly in the long station. It was the loud voice of an unsilenced forty-five. The train stopped short. As the doors slammed open, the light figure of an agile old man popped out like an avenging fury. It was Occi, a smoking automatic in his fist. He had come back, waited at the windows of the train for a chance to shoot. His eyes glittered with fierce joy as he recognized Humbel.

"Ah!" he barked. "You are unhurt! We must get across the station before any of those fools open the ransom. Come!"

Humbel and Occi raced for the stairs, charged through the tunnel under the tracks. It was a shambles on the other side. A great deal of blood pooled on the concrete; that last bullet of Humbel's had nicked Sovilla's heart. Humbel flattened his hand on the dead dandy's chest. He said, "His ticker has stopped beating," as though he didn't believe it, that he had killed a man. He looked at Bowman. The

burst from Occi's automatic had nearly torn Bowman's head off.

A fat hand fell on Humbel's shoulder like a club. He turned. It was Ridley, panting a little. The silent Owens was behind him.

"Well, Richard," piped Ridley, "I see where you have squeegeed public enemies number sixteen and seventeen. I suppose you did it in self defense, I hope. Huh?"

"No such luck, Blubber-gut," Humbel retorted, forcing the mockery. "My friend here resented Mr. Sovilla's attentions to his daughter and hired me to rub the lad out. By trade, I am a professional killer. Mr. Ridley, meet Mr. Occi."

"How do?" Ridley stared Occi up and down. "You must have something sweet in that package, friend, the way you hold it. Gimme!"

"I am afraid that not," Occi warned. "It is a bomb which will go off as soon as one cuts the cord. A very strong bomb, too."

Ridley yanked back his hand as though he had burned it. He took a respectful step to the rear. Occi smiled at Humbel.

"So long as I would not get her back anyhow," he said, and left the sentence unfinished. Then he spat out, "They would take all my savings! And then do what they would with Francesca, anyhow! They do not play what you call the square. Ah! Those two! They talk together and tell me all I want to know. Fools! This bomb is all the ransom they get from me!"

A girl struggled through the quickening jam along the platform. It was a lovely kid with the dandiest eyes Humbel had ever seen. Occi sighted her and stiffened.

"Francesca!" he clipped out between his teeth. The girl stepped forward laggingly, her head bowed before the fierceness of his expression. A very handsome young doll. Gleam-

(Continued on page 107)

Liberty's Gibbet

IT IS practically impossible to estimate the number of persons who have viewed the Statue of Liberty, either by passing it or taking the excursion boat to Bedloe Island, but never has Bedloe had so vast nor as carnival a crowd as there was to witness the hanging of Albert Hicks.

Hicks, a waterfront character, convicted of the killing of two men aboard the sloop *E. A. Johnson* on March 16, 1860, was the first man to die on the old Bedloe Island gibbet.

Throughout his defense Hicks claimed he had been shanghaied by Captain George Burr, of the *E. A. Johnson*, and, to save himself, had been forced to axe-murder the skipper and a member of the crew, Smith Watts. He claimed to have then made his escape, by dinghy, back to the mainland of Manhattan.

Because of the sensational discovery of the unmanned sloop with two members dead and a third missing, two miles off Staten Island, the newspapers had a field day while police sought, and eventually found, Hicks. He was located in Providence, Rhode Island, and had in his possession a watch inscribed to Captain Burr. The jury convicted him in less than ten minutes.

But the bizarre aspects of the case were only starting. Hicks, rugged and handsome, had caught the public's fancy due to the sympathetic daily reports of the press. For a few days, after he had been convicted, he had public sentiment with him. He managed to intensify it by calling the warden of the Tombs and making a complete confession.

After that, his days had all the earmarks of a Circus Maximus. Persons wishing to view him in the Tombs were charged five cents a head. And the grisly gapers were legion. P. T. Barnum, recognizing the pulling power of Hicks, had a wax figure made

of the murderer for display in his emporium of the bizarre and grotesque.

The day of Hicks' execution, July 13, 1860, should still provide students of mob psychology with plenty of material. It was more like a carnival than an execution.

Just before nine o'clock that morning, United States Marshal Isaiah Rynders took Hicks into custody for the trip to Bedloe. Hicks was smiling and happy. He was to be one of the first men to die on the gallows, and the executioner would be the famed Little Joe Atkinson, who had built a new gallows for so distinguished a guest. The marshal was attired in frock coat and plug hat, carrying a heavy sword and his staff of office.

As the death convoy emerged from the Tombs, a crowd of about 1,500 was on hand together with a band which broke into a funeral dirge. Hicks smiled his thanks. Men, women, and children, anxious to get a look at the famous man, stormed the death carriage in which Hicks was riding.

WHEN the party, on the steamer *Red Jacket*, slipped from the Canal Street berth for the trip, they found the bay choked with boats. Steamboats, rowboats, dinghies, barges, and oyster boats were aswarm with the curious, dressed in their Sunday best. Large excursion boats were loaded to the gunwales with paying customers. Barges with awnings especially erected to keep out the heat of the sun, did a sea-office business selling chairs and beer.

First to depart from the *Red Jacket* were Rynders' own officers, followed by twenty physicians, reporters, aldermen, and their friends. Hicks and Rynders were the last to set foot on Bedloe. A mighty cheer went up as the prisoner came into view.

Hicks ascended the hill to the gallows, unaided. He kept his eyes on

the ground and, for the first time, did not seem to be seeking adulation. He seemed unconscious of the grotesque scene of people in fancy clothes and colored flags flying on the ships. Troops from Governor's Island were stationed around the gallows but, at a signal from the commanding officer, moved away.

Hicks died easily. It was a tribute to the art of Little Joe Atkinson, who, throughout his lengthy career as hang-

man for the State of New York, had never had trouble with a hanging.

The body was placed aboard a tug, landed at the Custom House dock, and was buried in Calvary Cemetery. To the newspapermen who had brought him public acclaim, Hicks' story was now closed.

But they were wrong; within twenty-four hours, Hicks' name was back in the headlines. Ghouls stole the body. It was never recovered.



The Gab Brigade

YOU can see them in most any town these days and nights, particularly the defence centers. "They" are the pitchmen, those loquacious gents whose gifts of gab can move a stone mountain, or sell merchandise that a disappointed manufacturer has decided is a dead loss. On pay-days at the defence plants you'll find them plying their trade at busy corners, the lucky ones from the back of a truck, the unlucky ones, who can get neither gas nor car, selling from their tripods and keisters.

Pitchmen are not new. They started growing simultaneously with the country, selling snake-oil and home remedies at first, then branching out into every new product that struck their fancy. Today, there are an esti-

mated group of 100,000 pitchmen doing a gross annual business of millions of dollars.

Today's generation of pitchmen are a far cry from the earlier genus as portrayed so aptly on stage and screen by the late Berton Churchill. They are well dressed and sharp, not so flamboyant now as previously when they affected the old "Kentucky Colonel" routine of broad white hat, flowery tie, Prince Albert coat and mustache and goatee.

Pitchmen are generally divided into three classes; one, the "high pitch," who works from the back of a truck or car, and stands above the crowd; two, the "low pitch," a man who works with a tripe (a tripod board on which his wares are spread) and a

keister (the bag in which he carries his wares); and lastly, the black sheep of pitchmen called the "jam artist."

This latter gent is the one who gives pitching a bad name. He works with assistants, labeled by the trade "shills." These shills, with uncanny accuracy, know when a crowd is in buying mood. If, for example, the pitchman is selling cheap watches with no works, the shills are first to step forward and buy one. A crowd, thus led, usually steps in and buys, unaware that after the pitch is over the jam artist is going to meet his confederates and redeem the watches. Such tactics make it difficult for honest pitchmen to work in territories once worked by the jam artist.

For pitchmen are basically honest. They give you something for your money, be it fountain pens, apple peelers, Chinese lily bulbs, or handkerchiefs. *They* paid money for the article, too, buying it from novelty houses dealing in such "slum." It's just that the margin of profit for the pitchman is sometimes more than 150 per cent!

The days when pitchmen like Colonel Stratton of the old Southern colonel school, made and pitched his own stuff, seem to have passed.

Colonel Stratton had a tongue as silvered as his hair. One of his favorite pitches was the "Rameses Thutmose Ptolemy," and no matter how many times he pulled it on the colored population of various southern towns, he always had a sell-out.

It was a simple product to manufacture: Five cents worth of lima beans, a ten cent bottle of cheap, highly scented toilet water which was later poured over the beans until they reeked to high heaven, and a hundred small white envelopes. These envelopes were labeled in a fine Spencerian script, the Colonel's Sunday writing, with the words: "Rameses Thutmose Ptolemy."

He was then ready to knock on the

doors of the town's sepian suckers. His philosophy? His pitch?

"The colored population of this town has a definite yen for sweet smells. I bring them enlightenment. Smells can be grown! Why buy ready made perfume at high prices when your own can be made at low prices!"

The Colonel never failed.

BUT pitchmen today prefer to buy their products manufactured by someone else. Many a popular doll or toy or household gadget first was introduced to the public through the medium of the pitch. Some manufacturers of these items, uncertain what buying reaction will be, actually have hired pitchmen to bring them before the public. Other manufacturers, worried about an article which is sticking to the shelves, call in pitchmen and have them organize sales crews and demonstrators to show the article on the street or plug it in window or department store aisles.

Despite their seeming success, though, a great many pitchmen reach old age broke. The tragedy of the case is that, had the pitchman wanted to devote his time to real salesmanship for responsible organizations, he might have reached old age comfortably fixed. Business men and heads of sales organizations unanimously agree that very few salesmen have the magnetic charm and personality of the pitchman. Furthermore, few salesmen have the consummate art of the pitchman in "turning a joint" which means turning from talk to cash-collecting at just the precise psychological moment.

But a pitchman, as his name implies, is nomadic. He wants the power to pitch his tent where *he*, not a sales manager, decides; to furl it when *he*, and not a boss tells him to.

Does anybody want to buy a genuine razor sharpener made from trunk fibre board?

WELL ENOUGH ALONE

[Continued from page 17]

If a good, healthy seed of suspicion were planted in the girl's mind, Van Slyke would find himself holding the bag after all his labors. Now he'd have to extend himself and marry her, job or no job. The kid was very quick on the trigger, the cold-blooded kind that can act, unless he was absolutely innocent. But innocent people often got scared faster than guilty. The law-abiding citizen is the one who suffers from the meemies when cops are around. Maybe it was the girl. Maybe they were in cahoots.

Cyanide is obtainable. It is used in photography, in industry variously, and as a reagent. Cassel himself had handled it in organic chemistry at the university. In the Administration Building at the university he found that Van Slyke had taken a minor in chemistry, and thus had access to the poison in the stockroom. He was a brilliant student and had graduated with honors three years before.

In the Chemistry Building he talked with the Dean. It was impossible to determine whether any of the stock of KCN was missing. The merest amount would be required for purposes of poisoning. As an advanced student Van Slyke naturally would not be supervised like a dumb freshman. He might have snatched a sample and had it for quite a while.

CASSEL dug up a yearbook in the Journalism Building, and cut out from it a photograph of Van Slyke. He showed this scrap of slick paper to the proprietor of Yves & Co., Dental Supplies, 1099 Farmington Avenue, and the Mr. Chandler recognized a customer.

"Why, yes," Chandler said at once. "Very handsome young fellow. He was in several times. Excuse me."

A pink old lady next to Cassel at the counter had opened an envelope and dumped a handful of rings and pins from which the settings had been pried. One after another Chandler touched the items with a file, then touched the mark with a glass stopper from a bottle in a row of acids in a wooden block. He weighed the little pile on scales, figuring the differing karatage, and paid her into a trembling hand.

When he turned back quizzically, Cassel asked, "Can you tell accurately just as quick as that?"

"When you've been doing it thirty years or so, you usually can." He smiled.

"What about twenty dollar gold-pieces?"

Chandler's eyes narrowed. "We don't buy those. Want to look in the junkpile?"

"No. What do you do—just empty the stuff into an oven?"

Chandler nodded. "Goes through a series of crucibles. After all, we're refiners. We separate the gold from the copper, from the platinum, from the silver, from the mercury. . . . We de-alloy it. See. . . ."

He indicated the display of products in a glass case, containing the various forms of metal used in dental surgery. The bright rectangles of metal were in pennyweights, at varying prices per pennyweight accordingly as the platinum content varied. There were glass bottles of bright yellow virgin gold foil in balls like hunks of pollen, and in rods, for the type of dry cavity where the filling is pounded in scrap by scrap agonizingly instead of casting an inlay.

"You wouldn't know if you were buying melted-up gold coin?"

"I wouldn't be looking for it, cer-

tainly. No. All I do is determine the gold content of an article and pay the scrap price. That means taking into account the cost of refining and leaving margin for profit. We people pay more than the government."

"When was this young fellow in here last?"

"Not for a while. Of course, I don't remember exactly, but I'd say he dropped in those few times early in Spring. April was the last time he was here, I guess."

"He didn't bring jewelry, just slugs."

"That's right. But that isn't at all unusual," said Chandler defensively. "Dentists frequently bring in slugs melted up from old fillings. Gold is gold, and we'd be sticking our necks out if we asked questions. Once I had a hell of a time with an old bum. I couldn't imagine what he had, and was just going to refuse to buy his stuff until he told me what it was. It was a wooden box lined with heavy paper, and it was filled with ashes that weighed a ton. Just ashes you could stir like soup."

"He was janitor in that big publishing house downtown. For years he'd been collecting the oily waste they use to wipe off the spines of books stamped in gold leaf, and burning it to recover the gold. I paid around two thousand dollars for the box of ashes."

"He was smart. Thanks, and I'm glad to have met you."

"What's this young fellow done?"

"Not anything yet. Good afternoon."

HE CALLED headquarters.

Men had gone down to Tollden, but there was no report. Suddenly Cassel thought of the two bottles he had left on Dad's kitchen table, and he knew what would happen to them. He hopped into his car and headed south.

He recognized the license number of the car parked alongside the house, Detective Horrigan's. There were two

men in the house, in the kitchen, cozily resting their elbows on the kitchen table, and half of one of his bottles of whiskey was down the hatch already. The crossed legs of both men had hit the floor and they were sitting paralyzed. Horrigan said, "Cripes. If you was bald and had a stomach, you'd be the chief's twin."

"Sorry I startled you fellows," said Cassel acidly.

"That's all right. Have a drink?"

Cassel looked at Horrigan's sunburn-red face. "Why, yes, thank you. This is pretty good stuff. Where'd you get it?"

"Picked it up on the way down. Didn't see why not, if we had a long stretch to do here. Dirty weather, isn't it?"

"You mean you picked it up off that table," Cassel said. "In case you guys are interested, that whiskey's mine. I brought it down this morning. You picked it up!"

Horrigan stamped both feet as he got up straight. "All right, it's your liquor. We know what kind of liquor you drink, so when we see that brand we know it belongs to you and not anybody else. What are we supposed to do, pay you for the couple of slugs we had?"

"Forget it. Keep your shirt on," Cassel directed, thinking Horrigan would be just stupid enough to start swinging. "Help yourself. Have you done any looking around at all?"

"Gone through the whole place," Horrigan said earnestly, switching to a tone of apology and sitting down again. "There's not a thing. Everything's been wiped clean."

"Did you try the knobs of the highboy up in the bedroom? Try the sink here?"

The fingerprint man, Wald, said, "I dusted everything, and I don't miss anything. There are smudges on the knobs of that highboy, but nothing I can use. Somebody wiped, or used gloves that wiped off even the Old

Man's prints. We thought we might as well bend an elbow before going back."

The telephone rang, and Wald got up, being nearest.

"Hey—" Cassel started, meaning to explain that the phone shouldn't be answered unless it was Dad's ring, whatever the ring happened to be. This was a rural system.

Horrigan interrupted, "If you want me to pay for the whiskey, all right. Just say so. We just found it here, and—"

"It's for you," said Wald at the phone, indicating Cassel.

He took the receiver and pushed the mouthpiece up higher, and said, "Hello."

It was the coroner, Dr. Harlan Bean.

He said impatiently, "I've called you a half dozen times. I thought you were going to stay there."

"I had to go back to the city. What did you find?"

"Well, I'd say that there was hyperemia—that's congested blood vessels back of the teeth, back of the front teeth under the tongue. But that's not it."

"You mean it's not cyanide?"

"That's what caused the hyperemia, but it's something else. Baumgartner has a badly fractured skull. Nasty, even if it doesn't show. If he was walking around after he had cyanide in his stomach, it might be the blow on the head that killed him. I don't know, and nobody could. Maybe it was the cyanide, maybe the crack on the head, maybe both together."

"What was used to hit him on the head?"

"Something like a baseball bat. Something round and heavy. I guess it's what you fellows call a blunt instrument."

CASSEL, Wald, and Horrigan searched the place for a blunt instrument which a murderer might have pitched away after the crime.

They looked at the ax and the block, and examined the sticks in the pile of cordwood stacked against the back of the house. They went into the fringes of the dripping woods, and they found nothing.

Cassel remained when Wald and Horrigan went back to the city with the contents of one bottle inside them. Unlimbering himself from a chair in the kitchen finally, he went out into the drizzle and marked out the place where he had found Dad's body. On his way into the house he picked up an oak stick from the pile of cordwood.

From the kitchen of the house he ascended to the storeroom, and then made his way up a heavy, planksided ladder of steps to the narrow attic. He let himself out through a trapdoor onto the shingled roof, skidding on the wet wood as he descended on all fours backwards to the gutter.

The gutter was strong. With his heels in it he inched along, getting his pants wet on the shingles, until he was looking down from the right place.

Sticking out from the back of the house was a hung-on item of architecture, a slant-shingled, closet-deep projection which Cassel knew was a china closet in the dining room inside.

He sighted the spot where he had found Dad, hung the stick of oak cordwood between thumb and forefinger, let it drop. It went down straight, wacked the slanting shingles below, and bounced outward. It hit the ground with a thump in the spot where Dad's body had fallen.

"I'll be damned," said Cassel. He turned and scrambled, skidding, up the roof to the trapdoor, and returned inside.

The heavy snow, the thaw, the huge icicles forming below the roof as the weather turned cold even if the sun was burning. A big one had broken off, bounced from the little roof, and cracked Dad Baumgartner squarely on the head. At least, it was a possibility.

An icicle thick as a baseball bat, falling, rebounding, and smashing down on Dad's gray head.

Cassel drove back to the city, and circled through the suburbs to park at Van Slyke's again.

"Here's the way it is," said Cassel, when they were seated in the living room. "I'm only showing you something, and then you can decide for yourself. You can do as you please.

"Look at this now." Cassel went to a table and pressed the smooth wood with his thumb. "Look at it."

There was a nice, clear spot, a good fingerprint.

Cassel wiped it off with his handkerchief, looked at it and breathed on it. Moisture condensed, and he pointed to the elliptical form in the middle.

"There it is," he said. "That's what's called a latent print. It comes out clean with chemicals. We've got your prints from the highboy in Baumgartner's bedroom, even though you wiped them off. You took the gold from that chest. You melted it up in the lab at the U, and sold it to Yves & Co. And you got the cyanide at the U in chemistry."

Van Slyke looked incredulous.

"Here's the picture," said Cassel, showing the one which he had cut from the yearbook. "The man at the liquor store recognized you, and Chandler over at Yves'. And Eleanor Wilde isn't going to marry you."

"Oh, no?"

"No. What do you want to do?"

"This is crazy. I'll go along with you and maybe you'll be sorry."

"Maybe I'll be sorry. Let's see."

They went to the door. Cassel had a hand laid on his arm and he was pulled down, getting a fist in his mouth at the same time; he sat down, grabbing with his arms as he licked and tasted blood. He snared Van Slyke's ankles and lifted, and he hit the floor with a crash, but his head didn't hit.

Cassel got a foot under the chin that all but broke his neck. He hit out, in nightfall, and hit out again in the darkness. Both got up at the same time, swinging. Cassel didn't have his gun, because he was on vacation. He hit again, and hoped this kid wasn't as strong as he looked.

He got up from the floor, and Van Slyke was lying there.

Cassel muttered, feeling his jaw, and used the phone.

If only the damned fool had left well enough alone. Old Dad Baumgartner would of walked out and gotten brained by an icicle, if Van Slyke had only known.

There was all the circumstantial evidence. The problematical visit. Cassel felt mad about it.

It rained and rained, day after day, and you couldn't go hunting mushrooms in the rain. The rains lasted. On a clear day Cassel went down to Tollden, and he looked through the woods. Deep in, he found mushrooms. Morels. It was in June.

He looked, and he was sad. He found patches of mushrooms, and they were rotting on the stems. He said, "Too late, too late. . . ." Farther on he said, "Ah, damn it. Too late."

**The Red Cross
Needs Your Help.
Don't Neglect It!**

ESCAPE TO THE SOUTH

[Continued from page 25]

girl said, "I had rather go to prison than back home. I won't go back. I won't."

"Maybe we can work it out," he said. "At least, I don't think any of Toronsi's heirs are likely to try taking you to court."

The taxi let them out on a street of private homes. "The people here don't come in until late," she said.

The room was neat and small. She took a bag out of the closet and handed it to him and he opened it upon the floor. "There was just the thousand dollars, all in small bills," she said. "Why do you think there should be more?"

"Because there's been somebody besides me looking for you. All I can figure is some member of Toronsi's gang, and I can't see one of them going to this trouble for a thousand dollars."

"You are right," the man said. He was standing just inside the doorway, a lean dark man with a scar along his left cheek and in his right hand a .45 calibre automatic. "The bills, all the big ones, are sewed inside the lining." The scar on his cheek twitched, and the pupils of his eyes, contracted to pinpoints, had a crazy glow. He said, "Rip 'em out for me, copper."

On his hands and knees Ed Mahan began to tear slowly at the bag's lining. Beyond him the girl stood like a statue. The man in the doorway was crouched a little above his gun.

"Copper?" Ed Mahan said. "So you spotted me?"

"A week ago. Since then I been letting you do the looking, while I followed you."

Ed Mahan said, "I think the other members of Toronsi's numbers racket will like to hear about the guy who double crossed them."

"Maybe," the man said. "But they won't hear nothing. When I leave here, there won't be nobody to tell them about it."

The girl said, "You mean—?"

"What do you think, sister?"

Still on his knees, Ed Mahan turned his head to look at her. *I was going to give her a break, he thought. She was going to have a chance with life. Now. . .* There was a pain around his heart as he looked at her, and though he had been in tight places before he had never felt anything like this.

And then all at once he knew what had happened in these last two months, what had gone wrong with this thing that should have been a routine case. *Damnit, he thought, I'm in love with her! And I had to see her to know it.*

The man in the doorway said, "Okay, pal, if you don't want to tear out that lining. . ." His finger started to tighten on the trigger.

Ed Mahan said, "The lining's out." He never heard himself say it, and neither did anyone else. As he spoke he was turning, flinging a double handful of bills at the scarfaced man, the bills fluttering out in a green wave as he dived at the gunman's knees. He heard the crash of the gun, once, twice, the sounds blending together. He didn't know whether a bullet had struck him or not, but he had his arms around the scarfaced man and they went down with a crash. The gun skidded from the other man's grasp and Mahan backhanded it into a corner. Then he got his knees under him and his hands on the scarfaced man's throat, and after that it was easy.

They rode down to headquarters on the back seat of a patrol car, and, because she was still frightened and

trembling a little, Mahan had an excuse for putting his arm around her. The curves of her shoulders, he thought, was just as he had imagined it would be, soft and yet firm, and altogether pleasant. He said, "It's going to be all right. Don't you worry, Miss Huston," and then he laughed.

He said, "I'll explain it to you later."

He couldn't tell her now that it had struck him as funny that he should be calling by her last name the girl he planned to marry. And he didn't doubt that he would marry her much more than he had doubted that eventually sets his mind to a thing and works ally he would find her. If a man really at it, Ed Mahan thought, the odds are all in his favor.

SHOOTING SCHEDULE

[Continued from page 41]

and hairless conk. "*Freeze, Lew Scanlund!*" I barked. "You've done enough killing for one session!"

The tubby little mogul of Masterpiece Pix whirled on his heel, tried to snap a shot at me. Dave Donaldson beat him to the trigger by three seconds. Dave's service .38 yammered: *Ka-Chow!* and Scanlund doubled over, hugging his elly-bay. "You . . . you . . ." he whined like a trapped animal.

THEN Flo Allison swayed toward me. "He f-forced me to sign a written confession that I had murdered Slugger Brennan! He was g-going to kill me and m-make it look like suicide. . . ."

I said: "Yeah. That's how I figured it."

Scanlund heaved spasmodically. "How . . . did you?"

"Easy," I said. "Don't waste your breath asking questions. You haven't got any breath to waste. I partially recognized you when you fired a tear gas slug through the window of Brennan's stash a while ago. But even before that, I was practically hep to the score."

"Damn . . . your soul. . . ."

I said: "Somebody croaked Slugger Brennan, but I was pretty sure Walt Lorimer wasn't guilty. He seemed to

be fronting for a second party. That party was Flo Allison, here. He thought *she* was the one who'd killed Brennan. If he had any such notion, it meant he was innocent himself.

"Then Flo confessed the murder. But she lied; which meant she was really in the clear. I began asking myself who else could have had a motive for the Brennan bump. I also wondered why Brennan had used loaded boxing gloves on Lorimer's map. The answer came to me when I saw where Slugger had recently deposited five grand in his bank account."

"How . . . did that . . . tell you anything?"

I said: "He must have been paid five thousand skins to do a certain job. What job? Why, beating Walt Lorimer to a pulp. *And you were the only person who might gain by paying for such a transaction!*"

"Lorimer had quit your Masterpiece studio to strike out for himself. You wanted him back; he was a box office gold mine. So you hired Brennan to wreck Walt's map. That also ruined his new independent production; bankrupted him. You knew he would be forced to come back to Masterpiece Pix; and you were anxious to have

him back because he represented copious profits to you."

"Why . . . would I want . . . an actor with . . . a wrecked face?"

"It wasn't wrecked beyond repair. You planned to pay for the plastic surgery that would make the guy as good as new. Meanwhile, though, you had to cream the man who had helped you on the deal—Slugger Brennan. He was your only accomplice, and he knew too much. So as soon as he accomplished the job you paid him to do, you sneaked into his dressing room and plugged him.

"Unfortunately, this backfired right in your teeth. Walt Lorimer was accused of the kill. If they ever convicted him, your entire scheme was knocked into a cocked hat. That's why you hired me to clear him. As you yourself said, you didn't care if the real murderer went free as long as Walt was released. Well, the real murderer isn't going free—because you're it."

"Get . . . me a doctor. . . . quick."

I said: "Okay. But there's just one more thing you ought to know. You shouldn't have sneaked over to Brennan's cottage and eavesdropped when Dave and I were frisking the joint. You were worried for fear we might find something incriminating; I realize that. But we might never have nabbed you if you'd stayed away. Instead, you overheard me mentioning Miss Allison. You decided to make her the fall guy with a written confession and a fake suicide. And that was your downfall."

He writhed on the floor. And then, before we could phone for a sawbones, he passed to his ancestors.

The Allison cookie moaned: "I want to go to Walt at the hospital. M-may I?"

"Sure," Donaldson said. "Go ahead. We'll stick around and sweep up the remainders." Which, presently, we did.

KILLER'S INSTINCT

[Continued from page 61]

now. You stay here. I'll let you know." He nodded for Perry to follow him out.

Once in the hall the two men pounded down the steps, raced to the sidewalk. A cab was half way up the block but swung in when Waller shouted. The two men sprinted for it.

WHEN the cab slished toward the curb before Jackson's apartment Waller dropped money on the seat beside the driver, hit the walk before the cab stopped. He stood flatfooted, whistled three shrill notes twice over. Leaping from the car Perry jarred into him, then raced past and into the building.

Waller whistled again. From direct-

ly across the street a man was running toward him. Waller met him half way. It was Earl Britton, his assistant.

Britton said, "You'll wake the neighborhood."

"Who's been in and out since you came over?"

"That guy Perry that came with you left here about thirty minutes ago. There were two or three other fellows and a whole party once. Looked like folks who lived here. Nobody I knew."

"I'm going and find out," Waller said. "You stay here."

"Did a girl—a good looking black-headed one, about five feet five with long legs—come in?"

"Yeah. Just about five minutes after

Perry went out. She wasn't there but a few minutes, then left. What's happened?"

The elevator boy's eyes were round and white in his black face. "What—how come you and Mistur Perry in such a panic, sur?"

Waller said, "Who's been in that apartment since I left?"

"There ain't no strange folks been there that I knows of. That Russian gal's all I seen go in."

The door of the apartment was open. Just inside Pete Perry stood flatfooted, face pale, eyes staring. Waller walked past him to the body that huddled on the floor beside the telephone desk.

Nihi Vasiloff lay on his back, his right arm wide spread, left arm bent at the elbow so that his hand gripped his coat over the left breast. The fingertips were dug deep into the coat and blood had seeped up between the fingers almost to the knuckles. Waller did not have to touch him to know he was dead. Vasiloff's left leg went straight under the telephone table almost to the wall. The right leg was bent at the knee. On the table lay the overturned telephone. There were little scratches on the receiver.

The negro elevator boy was standing in the doorway, his liver-colored lips seeming to shake all over his face. He said, "Lawd Gawd! I bet he dead."

Waller did not touch the body or the telephone. He turned and went into the laboratory at the rear of the apartment, but the test tubes and bunsen burners meant nothing to him.

He said aloud, "If everything was out of place, I couldn't tell it." He went back through the kitchen and living room into the bedroom beyond. Perry and the elevator boy followed him.

THE bedroom showed signs of a terrific struggle. The covering was ripped from the bed, a chair was over-

turned. Toilet articles were scattered over the floor of the bathroom amid the purple stain from a broken bottle of hair tonic and a thick sprinkling of talcum powder.

Waller turned to the negro. "Did you hear a fight or anything going on in here? Was Miss Vasiloff—that's the Russian—quarreling with her brother?"

The boy said, "You can't hear nothin' onct them doors is shut. If the ceiling fall in, wouldn't nobody know it but the folks fell with it."

Waller nodded. That explained why no one had investigated the shots which Carosi had fired at him earlier.

Perry said, "Hadn't we better call the police?"

"Okay. And call Miss Vasiloff. She'll have to know. But go down stairs to do it. Leave this phone like it is. The Inspector will want to see things." He turned to the elevator boy, "And you bring a mop and clean up this mess as soon as the police get a look at it." He nodded toward the stained bathroom floor.

Perry rode down with the elevator boy. Waller went back into the living room, dropped into an overstuffed chair. Well, Inspector Dougherty would have trouble tying *this* killing on him—or would he? It would be tough if he had to prove where he had been from the time he left this house until he turned up at the home of Katina Vasiloff. To say he had been to Mason's home and have his work there traced would tie the whole thing more tightly around his neck.

Two murders under his nose tonight. The best he could hope for was to lose his reputation, be laughed out of town. And after the ads. he'd run about never losing a client! Waller's blunt teeth grated as he clamped them together. Something was going to burst and soon—and it was likely to be his own gut.

When the police came they stomped

through the apartment, looked happy. Waller told of Carosi's visit, explained that he'd left the house to look for the gunman, but omitted the trip to Mason's. Perry backed him up and the homicide men seemed to think finding Carosi would settle the whole thing. Dougherty phoned, had a dragnet thrown out for the gunman.

Waller asked what the autopsy on Jackson had shown.

Dougherty turned his lean, wrinkled face toward the private dick. "Not a thing," he said. "No poison in his stomach. They're sure he was killed by something, but they don't know what. Or how." He turned toward the body on the floor, opened his mouth and shut it again. "There won't be any autopsy on this one. It's plain enough what got *him*."

When the photographer had finished his work the elevator boy cleaned the mess from the bath, went out. The police prowled a while longer. Dougherty's face was blank and wrinkled as his suit, but Waller knew that Dougherty was not satisfied. The Inspector had won his job by years of efficient service. He knew this killing couldn't be hung on Carosi too easily. And the first one . . . Waller was the only man on whom they could tie that killing.

Outside in the hall one of the homicide squad was ringing for the elevator when the Inspector said, "Eddie, maybe you better come down to headquarters with us."

Waller's bleak face did not change, but he knew Dougherty's meaning. They'd dig up his every move during the past few days, dig into Jackson's past. Somewhere they'd find a hook to tie a motive on. After that it'd be simple to prove that Waller killed Jackson. Waller said flatly, "I get you, Inspector. You charging me with murder?"

"No-o." Dougherty drawled the word. "Not yet."

In the hall a homicide man was cursing the elevator boy for being so slow.

AND then the thing broke like an egg. Waller, hands clenched at his side, square jaw set, was staring into the wrinkled face of the Inspector. Both men heard the whir of the rising elevator, the babel of voices. The elevator doors jarred open. A man said, "Look what we found."

One of the homicide men whistled sharply. Another said, "Three tonight!"

Waller and Dougherty spun, leaped for the door. Waller went through it first, took four long steps down the hall to the elevator. Before he reached it he saw two radio patrolmen step out. Between them, his hands cuffed in front of him, was Lugi Carosi. There was a bloody tear on the left sleeve of his coat. But the two homicide men were not watching Carosi. They were staring at something on the floor of the lift.

Waller pushed through the little circle, stopped. His lips pulled back across blunt teeth and his eyes were thin slits.

On the floor of the elevator, arms outflung, face up, was the elevator boy. His mouth was half open, his eyes wide and staring. He looked strangely as Jackson had looked, lying there.

Dougherty went past Waller, knelt beside the negro and said without touching him, "Dead as prohibition, and not a mark on him." He stood up, looked at the radio patrolmen, said, "Well, say something."

One of the men was big with large, awkward hands, a square, dull face. He said, "Well, we—we heard about Carosi and picked him up coming out of a doctor's office on 47th Street. Somebody punched a bullet in his left arm, but he ain't hurt. Then, we brought him here, and when we went to get on the elevator this guy was

lying there just like he is now. We ain't touched him."

Doughtery left the fingerprint man, the photographer, and the assistant M. E. with the dead negro, sent the patrolmen walking down to their car. Followed by the two homicide men he herded Waller and Carosi back into the apartment where Perry waited. Doughtery shut the door, fumbled for the key until he saw it was missing. He came into the center of the room where Waller and the gunman stood. The homicide men stopped near the door. At the entrance of the bedroom Pete Perry stood watching.

Doughtery said, "One of you two guys knows more about this than he's saying. But he's about to talk. Nobody's leaving this room until we know what's what."

Carosi made a gesture with his cuffed wrists. "Maybe you gonna tell me I killed the nigger while I was ridin' round with them two flat-feet."

Waller's granite eyes were squinted, his brain racing. Carosi couldn't have killed the negro, but who could? The police and he and Perry had seen the boy leave. No one had gone out of the room after that. Someone might have slipped into the building, killed the boy, and slipped out again. But how had they killed him, and why?

Part of the answer came easily. The negro had been killed in the same way that Jackson had been killed— And it was the elevator boy who had reported the quarrel between Katina Vasiloff and Jackson.

Pete Perry, his right shoulder leaning against the door sill, said, "Inspector, when you searched the apartment the first time, how much money did you find?"

Doughtery moved his wrinkled face without turning his body. For a moment he looked at Perry, then said, "None in the apartment. Fifty bucks on Jackson."

Perry said, "When he was at my

home yesterday—with Mr. Waller—" Perry sneered the words, "he had ten thousand dollars in his pocket. He was planning to buy a small, experimental steel furnace to be used in perfecting our process. I suggest that you find that ten thousand."

One of the homicide men at the door whistled softly. Doughtery moved his face back toward Waller and there was a glint in his eye now. Waller's face had not changed, but he could feel the blood pounding over his right temple. There was the motive the police wanted. The murder was his now, and he'd play hell getting out of it. He wondered if Jackson had actually carried that money. If so, he'd told Waller nothing about it. But if he had . . .

Doughtery said quietly, too quietly, "Well, Eddie, what did your client do with the ten?"

Waller shook his head without answering. The game was up now. He'd never run down a murderer while locked in jail. And with the case shut on him the police would look no farther.

Doughtery said, "You want to tell me about it, Eddie?"

Waller said, "You—and Mr. Perry—are telling me. While you are about it, tell me how I killed the elevator boy. And how I killed Vasiloff. And what the hell Carosi was doing here."

Doughtery was licking his lips now. "I don't know how you killed 'em. But the M. E.'ll find that. We'll knock out of Carosi what he was doing here."

"That still leaves Vasiloff," Waller said. "Perry and the girl heard the shot. How'd I get him? Or did I?"

Pete Perry took one step into the room. "I think I can explain that, Inspector. Waller didn't kill the Russian. Carosi was hired to kill both Jackson and me. He came here while I was gone and had a fight with Vasiloff. When the phone rang Vasiloff

grabbed it up, meaning to yell for help. Carosi shot him. Now if you can get Carosi to tell who hired him . . ."

The squat Italian's eyes were blazing. "I ain't killed nobody!" he shouted. "I never heard of this Vasiloff guy. I don't even know when he got shot or nothin' about him."

Doughtery turned toward Perry, looked at him a moment, said, "Thanks. Now I think I'll take these guys down to headquarters and talk to them separate."

Eddie Waller's big jaw was set in a hard line. He said, "Before you go you better find out how Carosi got between Vasiloff and that wall when he shot him. That telephone's on a short cord and there's a table between it and the wall, but Vasiloff was shot in the chest."

Doughtery said, "Yeah. But I don't know he was facing the wall when he was shot."

Waller took a deep breath. The idea had just come to him, and it had to be right. He said, "And how did those powder burns get on the bottom of that curtain by the phone?"

Doughtery's eyes began to widen. "What powder burns?"

"I haven't seen 'em myself," Waller said. "But they'll be here." He stepped to the table where the telephone sat, pulled up the bottom of the curtain which was normally hidden by the table. There were faint black spots on the russet cloth.

Doughtery looked at them and said, "Well, I'll be—!"

"And look at these," Waller said. He picked up the telephone, put one big finger against the tiny scratches on the receiver.

The Inspector said, "You look."

Waller said, "The guy that killed Vasiloff wasn't here when the killing took place. He'd fastened a gun in this window sill," he paused to push the curtain aside to show the wide sill,

"tied a wire from the trigger to the telephone receiver. He folded the curtains around the gun muzzle so it wouldn't be seen, then went off to telephone Vasiloff."

Perry had stepped back near the bedroom door. He said, "And who telephoned him?"

Waller said, "I did the telephoning, but I didn't fasten the gun."

Doughtery's lips were working softly in and out like those of a toothless person chewing. He asked, "And who fastened the gun there?"

Waller said, "The same person that poisoned Jackson. The Russian was trying to find what had killed Jackson. He must have found out—or been about to. This stopped him."

Perry said, "You mean Vasiloff's sister? She came here while I was gone. But how about Jackson? How'd she get him?"

Waller turned slowly. Doughtery was a step away to the right. Near the door two homicide men gaped. Perry was near the entrance of the bedroom on the left. Carosi stood in the center of the room. Waller said, "She didn't kill Jackson, Mr. Perry. You killed them both."

Perry's body tensed, half crouching. Then he laughed and went lax. "I reckon I poisoned him when I was thirty miles away." He leaned his shoulder against the door, hand on his hip.

Waller said, "Yeah, you got him from thirty miles away. We were at your place yesterday. You knew how Jackson took care of his hair, always putting tonic on it. You put the poison in the tonic. He rubbed it into his scalp and it killed him. He was combing his hair when he died. I don't know but one poison that will do it. Tetro ethyl lead will and it takes a chemist to make it. There may be others, but—" His voice cut short.

Perry's hand had disappeared from his hip for one flickering instant.

Then it appeared again, and with it the snub nosed automatic which Carosi had carried earlier.

His shoulders were hunched forward, lips pulled back in a snarl. The movement had taken every man in the room by surprise, held them motionless. Doughtery's hand stopped halfway to his chest. The two homicide men waited, poised, their guns still under buttoned coats. But there was a grin on Eddie Waller's broad face. He said pleasantly, "Don't you want to know what killed the elevator boy?"

Perry did not answer. His gun was covering every man in the room. He said out of the corner of his mouth to the homicide men, "All right. Get away from that door. And keep your hands in view."

The grin was spreading on Waller's face and he kept chatting. "Before you left here you broke the hair tonic to do away with the evidence and make it look like there'd been a struggle. That's what started me thinking, because there weren't any marks on Vasiloff. When the elevator boy was cleaning up he must have scratched his hand on a bit of glass, then got some of that stuff on him. Just a little in the blood, and it's cur-

tains. It was him dying that put me on to the poison trick."

Perry was sliding along the far wall, facing the room, his left hand groping behind him for the door knob. He took one more step to the left, and reached it. The step put Carosi directly between Waller and Perry.

Eddie Waller went forward like a fullback, body low, legs driving. His right shoulder caught Carosi square in the back, hurled him at Perry. The gun roared and Carosi's body jerked in the air. Waller's shoulder was still in the small of Carosi's back when the two men crashed into Perry, slamming him furiously against the door and the three men went down in a tangle.

When Waller got to his feet Carosi was moaning, both cuffed hands pressed against his left shoulder. Perry was still. A homicide man had scooped up the gun that had fallen from Perry's fingers.

Doughtery looked from one of the men on the floor to the other, turned his wrinkled, brown face toward Waller. "Carosi got that bullet high in his shoulder."

Waller said, "I wish he'd got it in his guts. That's why I pulled the act. The men you left in the hall would have stopped Perry anyhow."

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THE MURDER DOLL

[Continued from page 73]

wouldn't work! Lanny never had no sense, an' you hadn't either or you'd never married him! Lettin' him talk you into thinkin' you could get away with it! If you'd only waited, John Bradford would have done something, and you'd have got the fifty thousand, but you had to be in too big a hurry!"

Freda screamed back names at the other woman and told her to shut up. Doyle was nearly out and the older woman was circling behind him with the kitchen knife.

He could see Lanny Gault getting up, crawling toward his gun on the floor. Doyle had to use the fittle gun then, not too regretfully snapping slugs at the knees of both women. They fell screaming.

But Doyle was too late. Cursing him, Lany Gault had the rod in his unwounded hand.

"One smart dick, but not quite smart enough to keep your nose clean," boasted Lanny, seeing his advantage as Doyle clicked the .25 on an empty firing chamber. "You're washed up, and we'll take the doll. A wise guy, huh? You figure out why Sue Bradford had that doll. But she goes up just the same. I've got a hackie to testify where she went, and I'll soon find out where you've left her, because she has to circulate to get booze. See!"

Lanny Gault's hair was combed back to show his low forehead and his weak face. He was enjoying himself. Doyle knew he would kill. He knew now that it had been Freda Lieber, the maid, who had taken Sue into the Bradford home, killed Mrs. Bradford, and set the stage to frame the girl.

The older woman had supplied the

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motive. Doubtless, Mrs. Bradford, being worth several millions, had told the maid she was leaving her \$50,000 for her long and faithful service. Perhaps with John Bradford's marriage, the picture had changed.

John Bradford was not the type to see fifty grand go to a maid if he could prevent it. But the frame of Sue had failed when Doyle had taken her away. All that Freda or Lanny Gault could do was tail him, which had been done.

With the girl gone from the scene, Freda had made a quick shift in her plan, attempting to divert suspicion to John Bradford. Now the game had changed again. John Bradford had been phoned where to find Sue. The girl would be accused.

In five seconds all this flashed through Doyle's mind. He was on the floor, half stunned, utterly helpless to prevent Lanny Gault from sending a death slug into his body. He could see the punk's loose lips working and his eyes glittering.

Doyle shook his head and closed his eyes.

A GUN thundered. Doyle heard a second explosion. A slug cracked part of the chair that Freda had broken over his head.

Doyle saw Lanny Gault drop his rod and lie down slowly, limply. Freda and the older woman were swearing and groaning over their wounded legs.

"Tom! Tom! I killed him—I had to do it, Tom—"

White-faced Sue Bradford was in the doorway. She collapsed as she spoke. Doyle tore himself from his half stupor. His hand gripped the gun he had taken from John Bradford and had left at the hotel.

He wiped all prints but his own from the gun. The police came bursting in. Doyle had Freda's whole story.

"So she had her husband, Lanny Gault, play Sue Bradford for the mur-

der frame?" said Doyle. "I knew that Sue couldn't have shot Mrs. Bradford. She was in too much of a stupor. But I was also sure her hand would convict her on a nitrate test.

"The little doll told me that, and Lanny knew it, for he engineered the idea. He had Sue Bradford shooting at pistol targets in a penny arcade yesterday, and she won the little doll. He wasn't smart enough to think about what the doll might tell, the reason why her hand was flecked with powder."

"Freda trapped herself when she said Sue phoned, threatening Mrs. Bradford at one o'clock. Sue was in a tavern from twelve-thirty until two o'clock and did not use the telephone."

JOHN Bradford had raged and calmed down. They were back in the cottage of Doyle's sister.

"What else could I suspect?" said Bradford.

"The same goes two ways," said Doyle. "I was convinced you had hired me in the murder frame to provide a possible neutral witness. I had a couple of hoods spotted as the real killers, but it was Freda."

Doyle was looking into Sue Bradford's blue eyes. Every bit of the wildness had left them now. Doyle thought she seemed the same as two years ago. Only the expectancy and the hope in her eyes now were for him and not for John Bradford.

Doyle produced four C notes. He went over to his desk and wrote out a check for another hundred. John Bradford stared at him when he put them into his hand.

"But you're earned it, Doyle," protested Bradford.

"Never mind it, Brad. I'd rather have this all free and clear," he said. "I think Sue will stay with my sister for awhile. I am due to go any day. All the pay I want is knowing there's someone waiting, as Sue once waited

for you on my lake porch, Brad."

"I guess there's nothing I can say, Doyle," said Bradford slowly. "Except that I think you're the only winner out of my own mistakes and this crime. You see, my wife's millions are so tied up for her kids and the estate, I couldn't realize a dollar through her death. I just wanted you to know that so you and Sue can keep the record clear."

"We'll keep the record clear, Brad," smiled Doyle.

A TWIST FOR LUCK

[Continued from page 89]

ing black hair, olive skin with a flush of rose in it showing under a fragile veil. Humbel liked her, and was pleased to see her scared. It showed she had stuff.

"Yes, father!" she gasped. His face terrible with wrath and injured pride, Occi advanced and slapped her smooth cheek hard with his free palm. Francesca's red mouth quivered. Tearfully, she blinked large eyes as handsome as black pansies. She looked down, said in a low voice, in Italian, "I am intact, father. They did not harm me."

"There is a nunnery in Sicily," Occi proceeded inexorably, "the nunnery of St. Cecilia. Do you know of it?"

"Yes, father!"

"Those who take the veil in that place can never marry. They are through with life forever; the holy sisters insure it. Do you wish to enter the convent of St. Cecilia, Francesca?"

"No, father!"

BEHIND Occi's back Ridley whispered to Humbel, "That his daughter? What's he spilling to that swell doll?"

"Damned if I know, Ridley," re-

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turned Humbel. "That's first class Italian. But he's scared the living daylight out of her. Look at her shake!"

"Say, Ridley; this thing is open and shut. Extortion, and so on. You know how Sovilla worked. Here's the tip: Captain Bennie Richards is in on this, and probably the rest of the gang at the White Cockatoo. Raid it and get promoted."

"I'll do that little thing."

"And look. Suppose we run down to the station and get this over with fast, and quietly. It isn't news. What do you say?"

"Sure thing, pal. I should queer a promotion," Ridley piped, grinning. He signaled Owens, began to butt his big stomach through the crowd. Francesca had taken her father's arm, and Humbel saw that the corners of Occi's mouth smiled. It looked as though he had forgiven her. Good.

On the way to the station Humbel thought of something phenomenal, inexplicable. In the back seat he leaned across Francesca, now close in Occi's embrace, and spoke so that the gunsmith could see what he said.

"Pardon me, Mr. Occi, but you know,—that dandy gun you sold Sovilla must have been defective. He fired at me point blank seven times and missed me every time. Joie was a dead shot. A trick gunman. It was certainly lucky for me!"

"A defective gun?" Occi was unabashed. "Well, I told you that I knew

Joseph Sovilla was a crooked man. So when I rifled the barrel of his gun, I made that crooked also. At the muzzle, I cut the rifling sharp and only rifled it on one side. He didn't find out."

"Sorry, but I don't follow."

"Well, then,—the rifling of a gun is what makes the bullet travel in a straight line or plane. In the trajectory. You know that. Now, if the rifling is not true, if one gives it a twist, it is like a pitcher throwing a curve ball. Yes? The man in the batter's box—that is you—thinks he is going to get brained. He ducks. On the contrary, the baseball misses him by a foot or two anyhow."

"Well, I'll be! Then that gun wouldn't shoot straight?"

"Impossible. The long barrel makes a gun good for long-range shooting. If that was what Sovilla wanted, I would spoil it for him. So I gave the rifling a good twist. Then it could not shoot straight," said Occi, as emphatically as his inflexible voice would permit. "At thirty feet, perhaps. You would be killed. At forty feet, the bullet would be an inch off the mark, because the rifling kicks the gun sideways. You would be badly injured with a marksman like Joseph Sovilla.

"At fifty and sixty feet, the best marksman in the world would miss you entirely. Ha! My friend, it was a lucky thing that you waited on the far side of that subway station!"



WOMEN ARE HELL-CATS

[Continued from page 45]

Ives hadn't been too pleased at the plan. What was to prevent Mike from running him down too? And when Sherrard refused to get out of the machine, Ives had suddenly announced he wasn't getting out either.

The Duchess had given him a dirty look. But you couldn't balk the Duchess, once her mind was made up.

That night at the Sacramento Hotel the Duchess gave Sherrard a Mickey Finn. Together the three men, Simeone, Hawkins and Ives had managed to get him down to their car with the Duchess following.

"I don't trust you men," she had sneered. "You're too soft. I'm going to see you do what I say."

When the car got to the Freeport Bridge, the Duchess ordered Mike who was driving to stop.

The Duchess had her gun in her handbag. But she decided a shooting would mean bloodshed; the car might have tell-tale stains. And she took out a hammer she had brought along and said she'd show us the right places to hit a man so he'd pass out quickly, went on Ives.

And the Duchess to illustrate her lesson had struck the unconscious Sherrard back of the ear and on the side of the forehead repeatedly.

Then Hawkins and Ives, at the Duchess' order, dragged Sherrard out of the car and hoisted his body over the parapet of the bridge and listened to it splash into the river below.

"And that's that," said the Duchess as they clambered back into the car. "That s. . o. . b. . won't squeal now."

Sherrard had been killed only three days earlier. And ever since the Duchess had been eyeing Ives. He had become fearful. He wanted to

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leave the gang but the Duchess kept a watch on him. Then it had been decided the gang should leave San Francisco for a while.

"It was while we were riding that I knew the Duchess meant to kill me like she had killed Sherrard," went on Ives to the fascinated Blake. "She made me sit in front. Then she called to Hawkins, 'Can't you find some nice woods to drive through? I like trees. Take a detour.'"

Never before had the Duchess professed any love for scenery. Ives was certain once on a lonely road she would take the gun she always carried in her handbag, shoot him and dump the body in some deserted place. So he had made an excuse to get out at the filling station and fled.

"I'd rather be in jail than with her," he added.

Here, at last, was the gang that had been terrorizing the highway between Sacramento and San Francisco! What of the Duchess and her mobsters? What of her past?

Sacramento's District Attorney Otis D. Babcock had first opportunity to question the gang. Alone, each one blamed the deaths of Cash and Sherrard on the others. But it was obvious, no matter whose hand had done the actual killing, it was the Duchess, bony, small-framed, vital and domineering, who had engineered the jobs.

The Duchess was fairly well known in Detroit. A certain Tony Spinelli, highjacker, gangster, was credited to her as husband. He was a member of the "Red Cap Gang". His end was never very definitely established. Some say he had gone to Mexico for a bank hold-up and been shot there. Others said he had been shot in Detroit. Anyway, it was agreed he had met a violent death as have so many of his confreres.

The Duchess, left with six children, tried to muscle in with her husband's gang. But these men knew her. She already was showing those domi-

neering qualities. She wasn't satisfied to take orders, to play a minor part in their activities. The Duchess wanted to run things. She tried to take over in the same fashion some women run their homes. No arguments, no consultations; she was the chief.

But Detroit mobsters turned a cold shoulder to her ambitions. And finally she decided to migrate to California and head her own gang.

The Duchess was in her fifties now. Mike Simeone, active in the white slave market circles, came with her. Perhaps she propositioned others. But the only co-workers she could order around were youngsters like Sherrard, Hawkins and Ives, in or barely out of their teens.

She had ruled as an autocrat. It was she who did the planning. Simeone cased the jobs she picked out. Ives was the trigger man. Sherrard and Hawkins filled in. She alone had the guns—when the occasion called for gun work, she handed over the weapon to Ives. Money was handed over to her—she doled it out. Not one of the others ever rebelled. Even Simeone, in his thirties and by now her common-law husband, took orders from her as meekly as did the boys.

She had practically taught them all they knew. According to Police Lieutenant Michael Mitchell of San Francisco, Mrs. Spinelli had once been a female wrestler—hence her knowledge of wrestling holds which were used to hold victims while they were being frisked. She was also a knife thrower and a very good one. In her apartment on Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, were found several pieces of steel sharpened into knives.

"What did you use these for?" the Duchess was asked.

"Ever hear of stabbing a person to death through the ear," answered the woman.

You could stick a piece of steel right into the brain through the ear,

she explained. Death was practically instantaneous. Your victim didn't know what happened to him. He didn't have time to yell. It was a good way to handle a man in a crowd.

"Have you ever used it to kill anyone?"

The Duchess smiled. "I was going to stick a long hairpin," and she nodded to the steel piece, "into Ives' ear but he got away," she answered.

One of the steel pieces was shaped like an arrow. Asked what she could do with this, the Duchess became sulky.

"Figure it out for yourself," she snapped.

Had she planned to use it as a boomerang? To kill some one at a distance?

There was no gainsaying the Duchess was no dumbbell when it came to murder.

The Sacramento County Grand Jury indicted the Duchess and the three men for the first degree murder of Sherrard. On May 29th, 1940, a jury of seven men and five women brought in a verdict of guilty with no recommendation for leniency.

A little later another jury found Ives insane and he went to an institution; the others fought strenuously to avoid the death penalty. But their efforts were not successful. Someone and Hawkins went first into San Quentin's gas chamber. In the Fall of 1942, her lawyers having exhausted every means to get a commutation of the death sentence with their plea that California's execution of the Duchess would be the first of any woman in that state, the Duchess also paid the penalty.

Such monsters, held California, of either sex, were better off dead.

And the Duchess, ruthless, vicious, remorseless, passed away, gasping, clutching, sinking into a final sleep, a more painless death than she had meted out to her victims.

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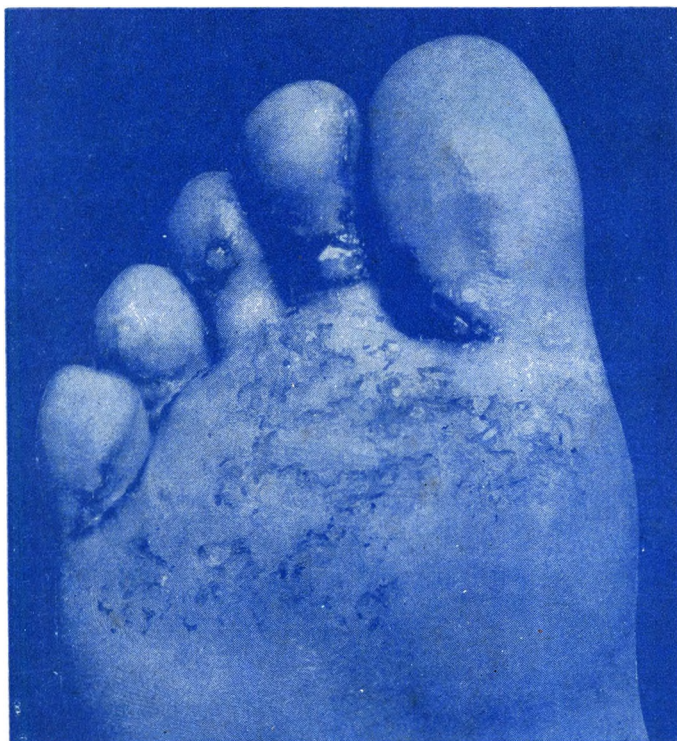
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