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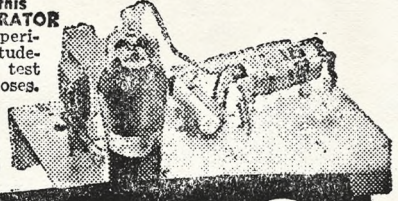
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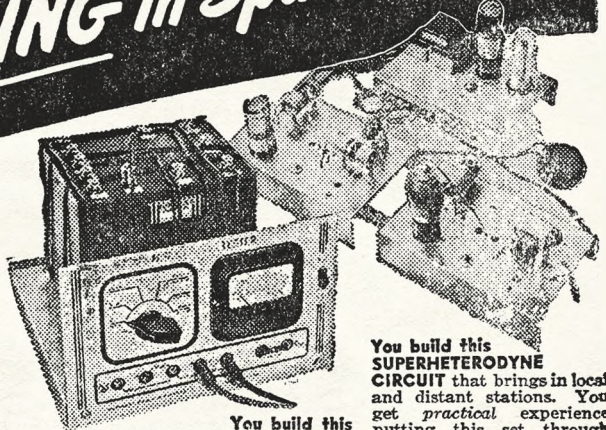


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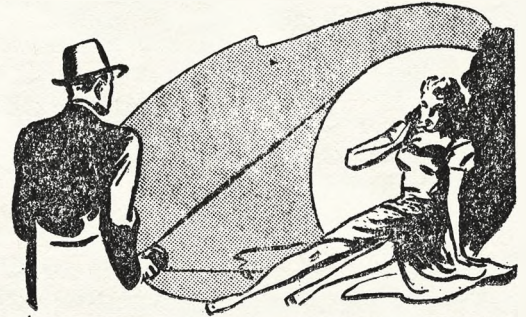
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SUPER-DETECTIVE

NOVEMBER, 1946

Vol. 9

No. 1



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Unusual Novelettes

NO HOLIDAY FOR MURDER.....by Laurence Donovan 8
What developed when those hot slugs smashed into that barber shop was strictly red-handed death business for scrappy semi-pro detective Joe Bunt!

INTERVIEW WITH DEATH.....by Randolph Barr 34
Newshawk Joe Lake discovered his interviewee was deceased—and that the killers had arranged for a splendid headline announcing his own very drastic demise!

Short Stories

MURDER'S MONOGRAM.....by Robert Leslie Bellem 24
In this bizarre case a book had been borrowed overtime from a private library for sinister purposes—and Detective Sharpe knew the penalty would be paid in blood!

DIALOGUE OF DOOM.....by Max Neilson 52
There was a recording of Martin's voice threatening a murder that happened.

BRUSHLESS CREAM.....by Lew Merrill 96
Ace investigator Somervell discovered worse things than bubonic plague in this deadly, fantastic set-up!

LAST TROPHY.....by Harold De Polo 104
Ex-racketeer Max Golan was an artistic collector of guns belonging to men he had killed—but this latest one contained an irony he could not foresee.

Special Crime Features

POST-WAR NARCOTIC PERIL.....by Gerald Doheny 6

A SCHOLAR AND A MURDERER.....by Will Nichols 112

PHONY PHONE TIPS.....by Ellery Watson Calder 125

RANSOM FOR THE DEAD.....by Jeff Williams 126

UNSAFE SAFE OPENERS.....by Joseph MacIntosh 129

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POST-WAR NARCOTIC PERIL

By GERALD DOHENY

NO RETURNING VETERAN has been welcomed back with wider arms to his civilian job than has the experienced agent of the Narcotic Bureau of the Treasury Department. For, as has happened after every war, the dope racket shows signs of booming, and the Bureau is bracing itself for an increasingly sharp struggle in the months ahead.

Main reasons for this dynamite-loaded situation are the general moral breakdown that follows all wars; the wide use in World War II of morphine on the battlefield, where each American combat soldier carried his own little needled tube of the pain-killer; the contact thousands of American troops had with foreign narcotic plague-spots, such as North Africa and India.

All this has led to a new multitude of drug addicts. The underworld is on the march to supply them, and to create new markets. The pre-war dope rings of Europe and Asia, whose shipments to America were reduced to a dribble by wartime conditions, have been stimulated to greater activity than ever to reap a harvest of American dollars. A few weeks ago, alert Treasury operatives seized a European shipment of pure-white heroin in New York harbor, the first that had entered in many years, and they see in this a harbinger of an attempted flood.

Huge amounts of narcotics are being stolen and hijacked in this country today. Recently in New York City, a medical warehouse was robbed of drugs worth \$100,000, and the delivery truck of a large medical-supply concern was hijacked with a haul of \$500,000.

There is a mounting wave of robberies directed against drugstores and doctors' offices. A drug thief seized recently in Manhattan confessed that in a single day he had robbed eight doctors' offices. His procedure was to make the rounds and when he came upon an office bearing a "Doctor Is Out" sign, to pick the lock and take what he wanted.

A favorite means of obtaining narcotics is by counterfeit prescriptions, printed

with a reputable doctor's name and bearing a telephone number which, if called by a pharmacist suspicious of the large amount prescribed, will put him in conversation with the racketeer's confederate who, posing as the doctor, will confirm the prescription with a reasonable explanation for the unusual quantity.

Drugs thus stolen or bought illegally are passed on to addicts for fabulous prices. Sufficient opium for one smoke may bring from \$12 to \$20 in the New York area. Pure heroin fetches \$500 an ounce in underworld markets.

BUT it is common practice to sell the stuff in considerably "cut" forms. Curiously, such dilutions have been known to cure addicts: the diluted doses can gradually taper-off the victim without his knowing it.

A popular drug in the racket is Mexican heroin—known, because of its coffee color, as "cafe-color." A kilo—two and a fifth pounds—costs \$3600. American racketeers will gladly pay this fancy price since by adulteration the amount can be expanded to about 700 ounces, to be sold for \$20 to \$25 an ounce.

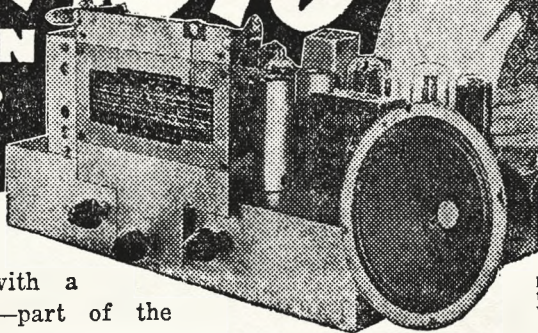
An important element in the narcotic picture is paregoric, which contains two grains of opium in six ounces of solution. Not so many years ago, paregoric was a widely used baby "pacifier", and could be bought almost everywhere without a prescription. Today many states require prescriptions, but many still do not. While not too harmful in doses of a few drops, paregoric in large quantities, either drunk straight or boiled down into a potent slug for injection, is the mainstay of many addicts. A Federal paregoric-control law is badly wanted.

The drug-racket monster is rousing itself to make another great post-war assault—but, armed with new methods of scientific detection and backed by a growing public awareness to the danger, the men of the Treasury's Narcotic Bureau are all set to give it the fight of its life.

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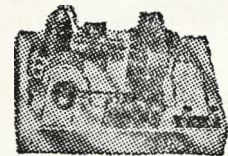
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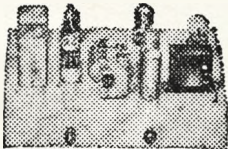
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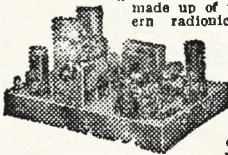
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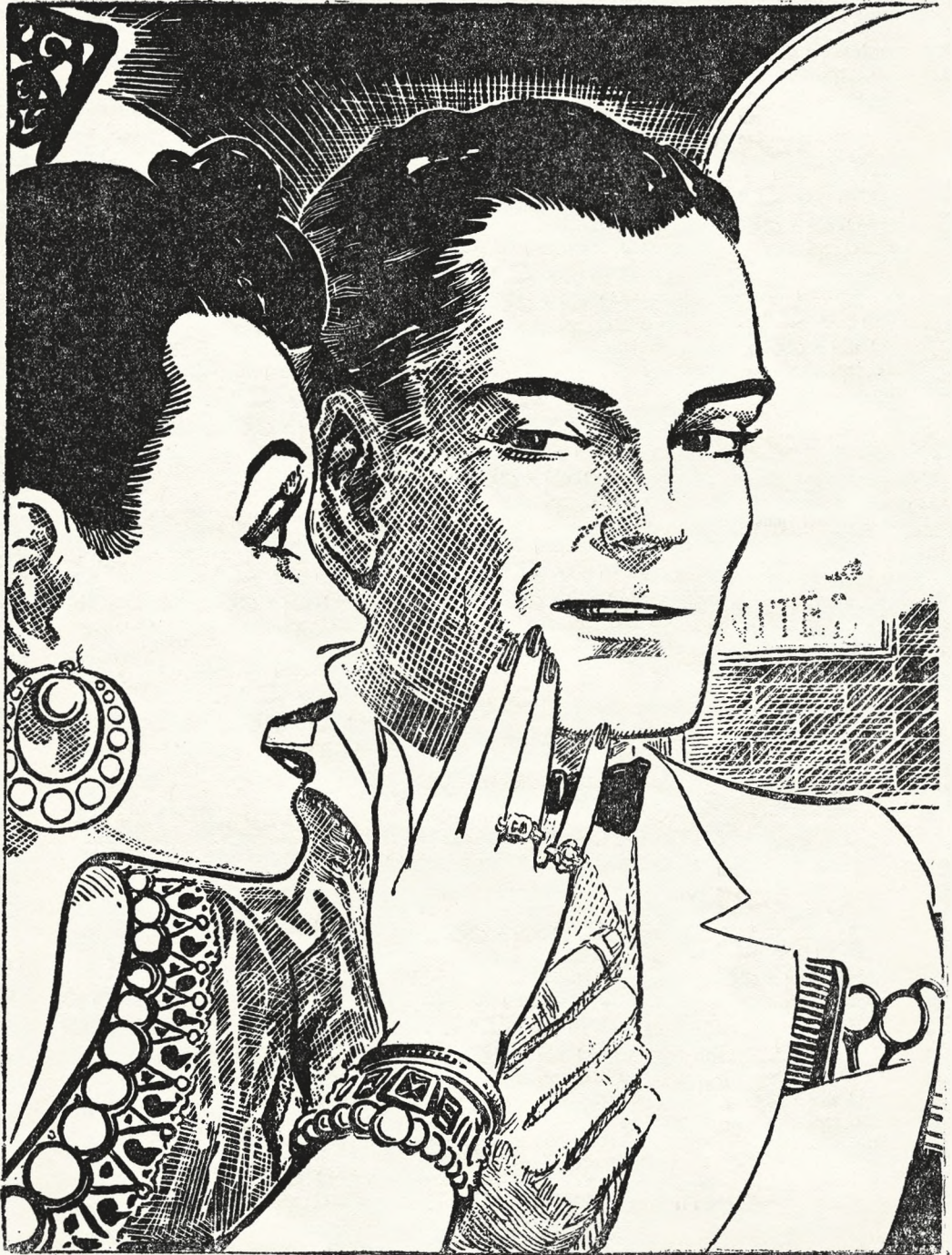
While still a student of National training, I. Wilson, of Vallejo, California, writes: "My pay has jumped from \$52.18 a week to \$72.65, and the end is not in sight. I am proud of my National Course."

Joseph Michel, Jr., Granite City, Illinois, writes: "I am enthused with National training. I am now earning \$225 a month as a radio operator and technician and \$20 a week more in my shop at home."

When answering advertisements please mention SUPER DETECTIVE.

Scrappy Joe Bunt, amateur sleuth, was all set for a holiday with his red-headed gal. But what developed when those hot slugs smashed into that tonsorial parlor was strictly business—with red-handed Death!

Illustrations by Paul H. H. Stone



NO HOLIDAY FOR MURDER

BY LAURENCE DONOVAN

AS the tall, distinguished figure of Howard van Essen reached the door of Joe Bunt's one-chair barber shop, smoky gunfire erupted across the narrow Greenwich Village street. This shooting came from the front and rear windows of a sedan, a black bulk of a car practically unidentifiable in the dirty dusk.

"Fall flat, Mr. van Essen!" warned Joe Bunt, dropping his own mere five-foot, hundred-pound body beside his barber chair. "Those muggs ain't foolin'! That's it! Keep down—though I'm guessin' they are off-aimin' their heaters!"

The dignified Mr. van Essen was flatten-

The fiery language of the red-head was such as to stop traffic.



ed in the doorway. He was collecting floor grime on a topcoat and suit that must have cost him enough dough to have bought out Joe Bunt's shop. His expensive snapbrim hat fell off, exposing a hair trim and coloring ten years too youthful for his thin, aging face.

Joe Bunt's conjecture that the sudden, unexpected gunmen were only throwing a leaden bluff, rather than an intended lethal dosage for Mr. van Essen, was well founded. Joe counted three slugs from each rod but sixty feet from his doorway.

Two slugs cracked the big plate glass window close to the door. Four others chewed splinters from the door frame and furrowed the floor within inches of the recumbent Mr. van Essen.

A woman screamed in the street. An Independent taxi went over the curb, burning rubber to stop behind the gunmen's sedan. Then the black car jumped away with a whining of low gears and the gunning stopped.

Joe Bunt scuttled over and helped Mr. van Essen to his feet. Mr. van Essen's long face was personable in spite of the mouth and eye wrinkles that marked him for sixty or so, and a sallowness of too much living indoors.

Joe saw a red-headed girl running toward his shop from the one-armed, self-help lunchroom at the corner. He heard the wail of a police siren coming into the block the other way.

"Back here, Mr. van Essen!" Joe propelled the late target of wildly shooting gunmen through a doorway into his own bedroom at the rear of the shop. "Keep under cover a few minutes. It'll look like some of my special friends were trying out their heaters on me. Might be Grano's boys, seein' I accidentally busted up a little murder game for them not long ago."

Mr. van Essen was peculiarly calm. His eyes were a bit sunken in bony sockets, but they glinted with purpose as the tall man surveyed Joe Bunt's small, compact figure. Squealing brakes announced the arrival of the police car.

A worried but musical voice sang out, "Joey? Oh, Joey?"

Joe Bunt grinned wryly at Mr. van Essen.

"The girl friend," he said quickly. "Was to leave tonight for a holiday at

her aunt's place in the country. But now I guess—"

"Now you can't," supplied Mr. van Essen. "Here, take this, and I'll explain later. Hurry, before they break in."

He pushed a folded newspaper clipping into Joe Bunt's hand. Joe grunted, palmed the paper, and eased from his backroom just in time to meet red-headed Della Corcoran, cashier from the lunchroom, and booming Jim O'Grady, now captain of the precinct homicide detail.

Joe closed the door of his bedroom as O'Grady's highly suspicious voice sounded off.

"A'right, Joe? What's the answer this time? Didn't you give your word you was goin' on a month's vacation an' let the precinct have a rest? Who was shootin' and why?"

Before Joe could reply, the luscious red-head had her soft arms around his neck.

"Joey!" she sobbed. "You said you weren't going to read any more in that *fishology* book and get yourself in any jam when we've got your vacation all planned."

"Lookit, O'Grady," said Joe, freeing himself from the red-head's clinging arms. "Can I help it if some of the boys had an idea of givin' me a send-off. I ain't so much as looked in on Arch Grano's games at the Green Lantern, an' I ain't had a customer who didn't look on the up-an'-up for weeks. Take notice, O'Grady—they only busted the window an' messed up the door with them slugs."

"I've taken notice!" barked O'Grady. "You wasn't plugged. But who went out that door an' took a powder up the street? Della Corcoran says she saw a man running away."

Joe breathed easier. Doubtless several cautious citizens had hotfooted away from the vicinity of promiscuous shooting. There was something mysterious about the wealthy and distinguished Mr. van Essen that Joe had been trying to figure out during the past three weeks.

Little Joe Bunt had studied assiduously to become a detective. His size had barred him from the force. But big Jim O'Grady had been his staunch friend through a number of tough cases where Joe had come out several laps ahead of the regular cops in solving the occasional murders of the village.

"Nobody went out the door," lied Joe

cheerfully to O'Grady. "I ducked to the back room to get outta the heat. I was cleanin' up shop to take a holiday beginnin' tomorrow. But now—"

The kissable mouth of Della Corcoran changed from a tempting curve to a straight line.

"There isn't any *but now* about it, Joey!" interrupted the redhead. "Mike's drivin' us out to Aunt Hannah's the first thing tomorrow morning. And you and me will do your packing tonight!"

Two of O'Grady's boys reported no dice on outside identification of the lead throwing sedan. In came broad-faced Mike Corcoran, Della's brother. He was the hackie who had jammed his taxi over the curb behind the black sedan.

"H'lo, Joey!" greeted Mike. "Was afraid them hoods had tagged ya! Tried to get a slant at their license, but the plate was all muddled over! They was gone before I could haul my heap offa the sidewalk."

O'GRADY grunted over what he held to be the all-around dumbness of any and all persons witnessing shootings, hold-ups and such violence in the village. He waved his men out and tarried a minute or so with Joe, after starting Della Corcoran back to her lunchroom job and Mike back to his hack.

O'Grady fixed Joe with cold, probing eyes. Then he walked to the rear bedroom door and kicked it open. He swore fervently when he saw a back window drapery blowing gently on the evening wind. The window opened onto a short, open alley and Joe's bedroom was empty.

O'Grady went over and thumbed into a weighty tome on a table beside Joe's cot. "Still studyin' I see, Joe," said the dick.

The big book was entitled *Applied Criminal Psychology and Persuasion*. Because of that book Joe Bunt had become known as the "Mad Barber of Greenwich Village". Likewise the book had got Joe into a lot of trouble that had spread his fame throughout the town.

"Yeah, there's lots of sense in that book, O'Grady," stated Joe. "I've been figurin' on how to pack it on my vacation, or I was—but now I'll have to have the shop patched up first."

"You sure, Joe, all this ain't got somethin

angel named van Essen?" inquired O'Grady caustically. "You've busted a few bad cases on account of the way someone has his hair trimmed. You wouldn't know why a big Park Avenue millionaire has been comin' to your shop every day until he's changed from a dignified old goat with gray hair an' professional sideburns to a kind of a Casanova wolf with short-cut black hair?"

Joe Bunt was a keener psychologist than the author of the big book he always studied. He could read a great deal of a customer's character and intentions from the way he wanted his hair trimmed.

HAIRCUTS TO FIT ANY FACE was the lettered sign on Joe Bunt's 'one-chair shop window. It brought him steady trade from far outside his Greenwich Village neighborhood.

At the moment Joe Bunt had no intention of informing O'Grady of anything he knew about Mr. van Essen.

Thus far, all Joe had deduced from Mr. van Essen's patronage of his shop was that the aging rich man probably was deluding himself into regaining some of his lost youth by playing Romeo to some younger dame who had attracted him.

"I don't butt in on the private life of any customer," said Joe to O'Grady, causing the detective to turn beet-red and almost choke over a cynical laugh.

"That's fine, Joe, just fine," said O'Grady suddenly, looking over the little barber's shoulder toward the street. "Then you wouldn't know that monogrammed job that's stopped here has anything to do with this van Essen? An' you wouldn't know the gorgeous Brunette in the luxury cushions as *the* Carma who's been packin' in the suckers at Arch Grano's Green Lantern?"

"Now that's funny," muttered Joe. "The gold monogram does read *H van E*. And the lady is Carma in person, all right."

Joe was wishing mightily that he had been given time to read the newspaper clipping Mr. van Essen had handed him.

"I'm thinkin' Arch Grano won't be likin' this," growled O'Grady as he eyed the ivory-skinned singer who was looking into Joe Bunt's barber shop. "There's one torch singer they say has got Grano's num-

O'GRADY suddenly changed his tone to utter disgust. A tall, thin young man with a sharp, predatory nose came from the sidewalk into the barber shop doorway.

"Hiya, Joe, an' you too, copper," greeted the new arrival. "Am I correctly informed of a shooting here? And say—?"

The thin young man half turned, as if he had seen the limousine and Carma, the Green Lantern sensation, for the first time.

"If it isn't my good friend, the sweet singer from the South," added the sharp-nosed fellow, bowing toward Carma.

"I don't like the smell of rat!" grunted O'Grady. "An' it seems that Carma's also holding her nose."

The singer had turned her head away and she was touching the chauffeur of the van Essen car on the shoulder. Joe Bunt knew the temptatious blues girl only by sight, but he grinned at O'Grady.

"Some day I'm gonna bust that keyholer's nose just for the helluvit!" exclaimed Joe. "I won't even cut his hair, but he keeps poking around, trying to dig up any dirt I might know."

The "keyholer's" name was Carmichael. He conducted a smelly column in a scandal-mongering weekly published in the Village. For Joe Bunt's money Carmichael was far lower than the hottest mobster infesting Manhattan.

It was Joe's idea, also O'Grady's, that Carmichael drew many grand more pay for what he didn't print in his column than for the rottenness he put into type. Carmichael had a nerve as brassy as his voice.

The cold rebuff by the torch singer produced only a cynical smile as Carmichael turned back to Joe Bunt and O'Grady.

"Carma's rating herself a special paragraph in this week's *Tattler* and she won't like it," said the columnist. "About that shooting, Joe? Meant for you or for some other guy?"

Carmichael flicked a thumb toward van Essen's car. Joe Bunt was set on his toes. He felt his long-held urge to bust the columnist coming to a head. He was on his toes moving and O'Grady, seeming to forget he was the law, was stepping carefully to one side.

Two things stopped Joe Bunt's good intention. He saw the tall, dignified van Essen crossing the street toward his car—and then from up the street a chopper

racketed to rip slugs across van Essen's toes.

O'Grady drew his gun and jolted Carmichael to one side as he landed on the sidewalk, running.

CHAPTER II

Murder Build-Up

JOE BLUNT'S talent for split second thinking and acting more than made up for his lack of size and weight. He saw Jim O'Grady pounding pavement with drawn gun in the direction from which the lurid flashes of a machine gun had appeared.

Mr. van Essen was near his limousine, coming across the narrow street. The Broadway-Park Avenue show backer had not been hit in all that hail of chopper lead. This was food for thought to Joe Bunt.

The thin, rat-nosed Carmichael was still in the barber shop doorway. His eyes had followed O'Grady, then turned toward van Essen and the monogrammed car. Joe Bunt's compact body left the floor with a jump.

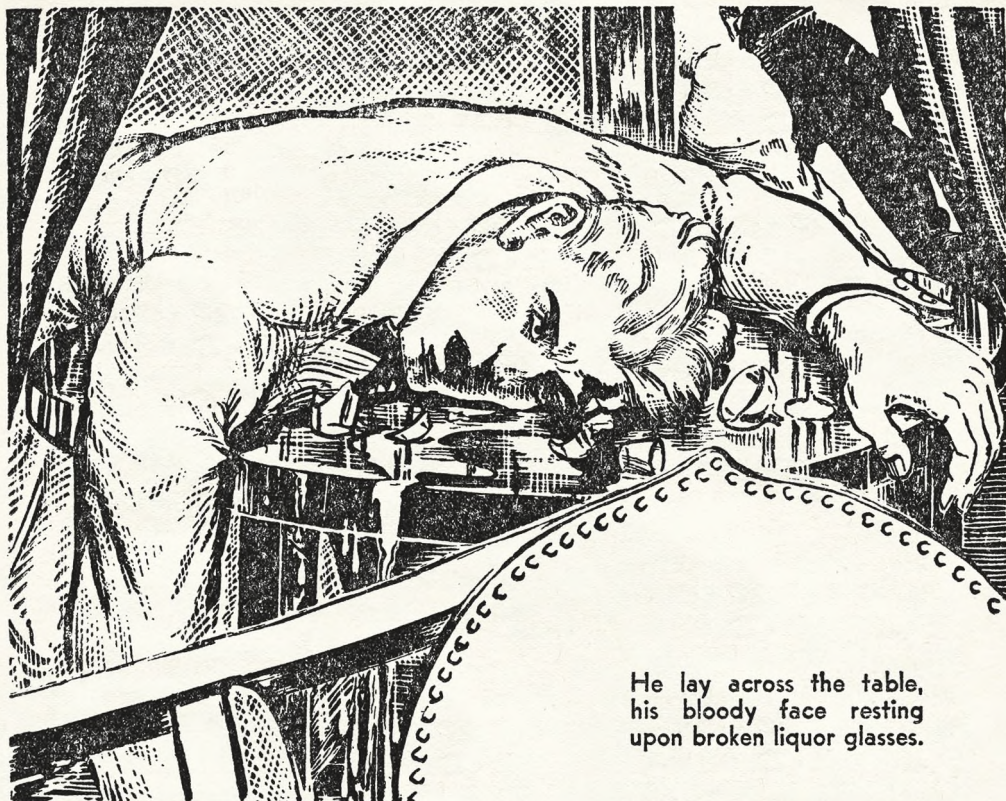
Joe's hardened knuckles cracked the butt of Carmichael's big right ear. The scandal columnist folded in the middle and sat down on the sidewalk. Joe closed his shop door on the snap lock.

Pedestrians were scurrying this way and that. The shining red hair of Della Corcoran blazed like a danger signal as she was again running toward Joe's shop. Van Essen was getting into the rear seat of his limousine alongside the black-haired, ivory-skinned blues singer.

The chauffeur had the long car already moving away. Joe's next action was pure impulse. He had not quite guessed the reason for Mr. van Essen trying to regain an artificial appearance of a more youthful man.

JOE Bunt was too smart to be fooled by the bad aiming of the guns that had apparently been meant to make a corpse of Mr. van Essen. The appearance of Carma in the van Essen car was but the hint of the real motive for the extremely poor shooting of paid hoods.

"Excuse me!" exclaimed Joe, opening the car door on the move, and slipping into



He lay across the table, his bloody face resting upon broken liquor glasses.

the soft seat alongside the dainty blues singer. "I'm wanting only a little ride and maybe a tip-off on what the shooting's all about."

Carma's big eyes were greenish black, almost catlike, as she looked at little Joe. Mr. van Essen fished up a weak smile and nodded.

"This is Joe Bunt and he rescued me from a tough spot, darling," said Mr. van Essen. "Of course you have seen Carma and heard her at the Green Lantern, Joe."

"Sure, I take my girl there," stated Joe, and the singer pulled a little trick of touching his cheek with her hand and turning on a high voltage smile.

"I hope your girl likes me, Joe," said Carma sweetly.

The limousine was at this moment speeding past redheaded Della Corcoran who had halted on the sidewalk, staring. Possibly the explosive redhead didn't even see Mr. van Essen. All that was visible to her prejudiced eyes was the position of little Joe and the man-dazzling singer.

The fiery language of the jealous Della

was such as to stop sidewalk traffic and restore Carmichael, the columnist of a poison typewriter, to cursing consciousness. Joe Bunt cocked an eye to the rear.

He saw Della making for the taxi of her brother Mike and Carmichael running out and following the redhead into the hack. Then van Essen was talking low, with studied calmness.

"We'll drop you when we're out of this, Joe," said van Essen. "But I'm wanting to talk with you after you've read the clipping I handed you. I'll be at my home shortly after midnight."

Mr. van Essen gave Joe a Park Avenue address. Joe nodded, glancing back. Mike Corcoran's taxi was trailing but half a block behind.

"Make a short turn into Charlton Street near the Green Lantern, Mr. van Essen, and I'll be leaving you," said Joe quickly. "Don't stop. I'll take it on the move."

"You'll be at the Green Lantern to hear me sing, Joe?" said Carma in a purring tone. "I go on at ten o'clock."

"Yeah," grunted Joe. "I wouldn't miss it. Goodbye now."

As the big car swerved around the corner Joe snapped open the door and jumped. He was in the concealing shadow of a high stoop when Mike Corcoran's taxi whirled past. Joe saw that Carmichael was no longer in the hack with Della, and he wondered about that.

Joe wasn't dressed for the Green Lantern, although the Village nightery was very informal. He remedied this by a quick visit to a secondhand clothes shop known as Sol's Store.

WHEN Carma, whose singing packed them in, came on at ten o'clock, Joe Bunt occupied a curtained booth on the mezzanine floor. The Green Lantern knew how to accommodate its mixed clientele.

The mezzanine filled with discreetly curtained booths ranged around the lower stamp-size dancing floor where Village wits and half-wits usually had tables to themselves. In the booths were the Park Avenue girls and boys, and from these it was generally known that Arch Grano drew bankrolled customers for floating games.

Grano's gambling setup kept on the move. A few nights the customers were trimmed at games in the same building. Then the whole outfit would be moved, sometimes to a boat in the Hudson or to a nearby country spot.

Joe Bunt's pulse was quickened by more than the tantalizing voice of Carma. He saw Mr. van Essen occupying another mezzanine booth across the dimly lighted room.

"I might have known Della couldn't be shaken," muttered Joe, as he spotted the red-headed Irish girl with her brother Mike at a table near the small stage on the lower floor.

Then Joe's attention was drawn to another curtained booth. Joe uttered an oath. Sharp-nosed Carmichael had just seated a girl where she would be fairly well concealed. And Joe couldn't be mistaken in the identity of the vivid blonde.

"Sunny van Essen," murmured Joe. "The newshounds haven't missed in calling her a wild and glamorous playgirl. But she could be all that and still not be seen in public with a heel like Carmichael."

Joe could also see Arch Grano, looking like some fat and smiling movie comedian.

Grano was standing at the side of the small stage while Carma was giving out with the moaning blues song.

All in all, Joe Bunt had a queer feeling that some evil was being cooked up. The tough but smiling Grano shifted his eyes to take in the mezzanine booths. Joe saw Grano's gaze linger upon Mr. van Essen, then travel along to Carmichael and Mr. van Essen's problem daughter.

Grano summoned a watchful waiter to his side. The waiter vanished behind the stage. Within five minutes after her song, the singing lovely had slipped into the mezzanine booth with Mr. van Essen. A waiter was serving them drinks.

Joe caught Carmichael's gesture and he saw Sunny van Essen appearing long enough to stare at her dignified father and the curvaceous singer.

The orchestra was blaring a tune that had no melody, but which filled the small dance floor. Joe saw Grano walk hurriedly across back of the orchestra.

Half a minute later a man who looked like a waiter stepped into the booth where Mr. van Essen was drinking with the singer. Joe couldn't be sure who jerked the curtains, shutting off his view.

Glancing toward Carmichael's booth, Joe saw that Sunny van Essen and the columnist evidently had departed hastily. Joe kept back but noticed that Della Corcoran was talking fast to brother Mike.

It might have been derived from his ponderous tome on crime psychology, but more likely the instinct had been born in Joe Bunt to sense when murder was being built up. Just why or how, Joe had no means of knowing.

But when there was an abrupt slapping of the booth curtains hiding Mr. van Essen and the singer, and signs of a struggle that could not be heard above the orchestra, Joe got to his feet.

He was moving, but still watching. The swaying booth curtains parted suddenly. Joe could see that the man dressed like a waiter was lying across the table, his arms dangling and his bloody face resting upon broken liquor glasses.

Mr. van Essen and Carma, who O'Grady the cop had said was Arch Grano's present one-and-only, had disappeared from the booth. Before Joe could round the mezzanine a few women were screaming and

Park Avenue occupants of other booths were seizing their chance to fade from the scene.

Joe Bunt was sure it was murder. But he avoided the death booth and looked for Mr. van Essen. The millionaire who had been trying to play young was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTEER III

Fatherly Love

JOE BUNT knew when Della Corcoran spotted him on the mezzanine stairs. There was no mistaking her raging voice and her lurid, descriptive language. Joe could see the redhead pushing her way toward him through the downstairs crowd, now milling about.

Joe retreated hurriedly back up the stairs. He was just in time to collide with a girl and within a second he found his arms filled with a scared and sobbing blues singer.

"It's you, Joe Bunt!" Carma's voice was frantic. "I must get out! Grano sent a man for Mr. van Essen and the man fell across the table. I saw the smoke of a gun back of our booth, but I didn't hear the shot. Someone clamped a hand over my mouth and when I was freed Mr. van Essen was not there. I don't know quite what happened."

"Joey!" cried Della behind him. "So that's it! I'll make this trollop sing a new kind of blues!"

Joe's stomach went empty. The red-headed Della was clutching his shoulder and reaching for the singer's loosened hair. Only the sane intervention of brother Mike prevented a cat fight, as Mike got a grip on Della's arms and held her firmly.

Released from his ticklish position, Joe stepped aside only to be confronted by fat-faced Arch Grano himself, and Grano wasn't smiling. He spoke to Joe with a deadly infection in his smooth voice. But his words were a stunning surprise.

"I never thought I'd call on the Mad Barber to give me a hand," said Grano. "But I'm wantin' Carma out of this. The cops will have the finger hot on me for killing Salton, a waiter I sent with a message to van Essen. I didn't have any part of it, and I was only invitin' van Essen

out to the boat where we've moved to-night's games."

Joe Bunt studied Grano's pale, calm eyes. Mike still had a good grip on Della whose anger was passing.

"Tell me, Grano," demanded Joe, "how come your boys were playing gun tricks with my barber shop and Mr. van Essen earlier tonight? Seemed to me you were only trying to throw a scare into Mr. van Essen."

Grano shook his head and his voice took on a puzzled note of anger.

"Mebbe you won't believe this, Joe Bunt," he said. "But I had no part in the shootings over by your barber shop. I didn't know about them until Jim O'Grady tried to put me on the pan only a little while ago. I'm not wanting to say this and I don't want it to be taken as proof of anything, but Salton, the waiter, was shot in the back of the neck with a small calibre gun such as a dame would be packing. Sunny van Essen was seen going toward the booth where her father and Carma were drinking just before the shooting. Anyway, Joe, I'll show you how to get Carma out of this."

Joe Bunt looked at Della and Mike. He glanced into the big tear-filled eyes of the blues singer. Then he started to shake his head and he said: "I'd like to, Grano, but —"

The unpredictable redhead flared up. "What do you mean, Joey?" snapped Della Corcoran. "You'd like to take care of Carma! We'll take care of her. Come on, honey, let's us get out with Joey and Mike right away."

Joe Bunt almost choked. The red-haired Irish girl had one arm around the trembling figure of the blues singer.

They were in Mike Corcoran's taxi. Arch Grano had showed them a side way out. Coppers were all over the place.

"I'll remember you for this," had been Arch Grano's parting words to Joe Bunt. "Where to, Joe?" asked Mike.

Joe juggled the idea for a moment. Mr. van Essen had said he would be at his home on Park Avenue shortly after midnight. Perhaps he still might be there.

"Cruise around, Mike, and waste some time in the Park," directed Joe. "I may be off but Mr. van Essen could be home. If he has heard of what Grano said about

Sunny van Essen, his daughter, he might take a chance and wait there for her."

There was no response to the buzzer from the luxurious Park Avenue apartment. Then a man in a long overcoat hurried from the elevator. He said: "What is it? I'm Mr. van Essen's man. I was expecting him home."

Two minutes later Joe Bunt knew that neither Mr. van Essen nor his daughter Sunny had returned to the Park Avenue place. Back in the taxi, Joe turned to Carma whose head was on Della's shoulder. Joe had a swift thought. Grano had said he had sent a message to Mr. van Essen telling him of the games on the gambling boat.

"Pull up on the other side, Mike," directed Joe Bunt. "It's not yet midnight. Not much use in watching but we'll stick awhile anyway. Mr. van Essen or Sunny might come back."

Joe turned to Carma, the Green Lantern singer, and touched her shoulder.

"You know a lot more about Mr. van Essen than I do," said Joe. "I've a clipping here from the *Tattler*, the scandal column written by Jay Carmichael. I'll read it."

A certain well known show biggie from Park Avenue and a gorgeous gal who sings the blues, are said to have been picnicing over the weekend out on the Island. Could it be that a big shot of the night club has given the gal the brush-off, or might the Park Avenue biggie be inviting a workout at the hands of hoods who are known to be careless with their heaters?

That was all the clipping contained and Joe had read it to himself several times. It seemed to account for the bombardment of his shop and the very poor shooting at Mr. van Essen earlier this same night. Yet Joe was skeptical. The unexpected attitude of Arch Grano failed to check with the hint given in Carmichael's poison column.

"Have anything you want to say about it, Carma?" inquired Joe gently.

A dry sob came from the girl's throat.

"If that is meant for Mr. van Essen and me, it isn't so," she said in a hard, flat voice. "I have to admit that appearances were bad. I was playing Mr. van Essen because Arch Grano wanted it that way. Van Essen was spending a lot of dough and backing me to win a lot more from Grano's games, which Grano knew."

"Comes down to a case of just another sucker," commented Joe.

"No," replied Carma promptly. "Mr. van Essen loved only one person, his daughter Sunny. She's been having a wild fling and it looked like it was going to wind up with a hasty marriage to this Carmichael rat who attracted her. Mr. van Essen had a quaint idea that if he publicly made a fool of himself, it might jolt Sunny back to her senses. The girl had always counted on her father's position and his dignity to get her out of jams and hold her a place in the set where she really belonged."

Joe saw Della Corcoran tighten her arm around the singer's shoulders and it was Della who cried out: "Joey, then Arch Grano must have been telling the truth. He had nothing to do with the shooting. He's in love with Carma and he was just another guy in trouble, Joey, when he asked you to help him."

CARMA spoke up suddenly, coldly. "I'm thinking that Mr. van Essen is looking for Jay Carmichael. You ought to know this although it will make it look bad for Mr. van Essen if anything happens to Carmichael. Mr. van Essen threatened to kill Jay Carmichael before he would let him marry Sunny and I'm sure Mr. van Essen was carrying a rod intended only for Carmichael."

Joe was thinking fast. From the first there had been something about van Essen that had aroused an inner instinct in Joe Bunt. He had somehow felt the millionaire was not making such a fool of himself as it appeared. But that failed to solve their present tight situation.

From downtown a clock gong boomed out the hour of twelve.

"Ease the hack back to the Village, Mike," said Joe. "The way this stacks up, O'Grady won't let Grano or any of his boys leave the Green Lantern until he has some answers to the killing of Salton, the waiter. The way that dopes out, it could appear that someone was shooting carelessly. That slug might have been intended for either Carmichael or van Essen. The waiter stepped into it and it came from a small calibre rod such as a girl—such as Sunny van Essen might have had in her purse."

Carma had more of a heart than her polished surface indicated.

"It couldn't be that way!" she cried

Della was clutching Joe's shoulder and reaching for the singer's hair.



out. "When a father loved a girl the way van Essen loved his daughter, she couldn't be that bad."

"Right!" exclaimed Joe. "Mike, roll the hack to your place. Keep an eye out for any tail. You and Della take care of

Carma." He looked at Della intently.

"But what are you going to do?" demanded the red-headed Della.

Joe's teeth were set tightly.

"What I have in mind is strictly a one-man job," he said. "Swing over toward

the river. "You say the gambling spot is Grano's yacht, the *Lombard*?"

"It's lying in the lower Hudson," said Carma.

They were not far from the Battery when Joe left Mike's hack as it swung around a sharp corner. Joe had warned Mike to watch out for any tailing car. But for the past hour, a low-slung black sedan had been staying just a block behind Mike's taxi. When Joe Bunt came to the open waterfront, Mike's hack no longer was being tailed but Joe Bunt was.

CHAPTER IV

A Girl And A Gun

JOE BUNT was on the open waterfront above the Battery. The wide and darkened street here was almost a direct feeder for the notorious Bowery district. A watchman near the ferry building had directed Joe to a street end where a small motorboat was known to carry Arch Grano's gambling suckers out to his yacht, the *Lombard*, in the lower Hudson River.

Joe found the boat by spotting a man in it who was lighting a cigarette. At the same moment the strange, wild figure of a girl lurched from the shadows of the riverfront almost into Joe's arms.

Joe would have passed her up as one of the bedraggled women of the district. Then the girl came under a street lamp. Joe saw loosened blonde hair streaming over white shoulders. The girl was wearing a rumpled but expensive evening gown.

Her white face was streaked with tears and she was mumbling in a maudlin voice. She seemed to see Joe and reached out her hands, staggering against him. It was one more weird touch to this tangled night.

The girl was Sunny van Essen. At first Joe believed she might be only drunk. Then her wild words and the foam flecking her red lips discounted that conclusion.

Sunny van Essen had been drugged. Her clawing hands and her incoherent speech could have come from having smoked reefers or she might have been given marihuana or some other potent drug in her drinks. She was clearly out of her mind, unable to use words that made sense.

"I killed him—throwing away my mon-

ey—help me home, Jay—no—I'll kill that damn' singer—help me, I say—"

Joe shook the girl's shoulders vigorously to rouse her. It was wasted effort. Sunny's shoulder-strapped purse banged against Joe's thigh. It contained a hard object and Joe caught and opened it. Within was a new model of a compact .32 automatic. He fished it out carefully by the tip of the barrel.

"Who'd you kill, Miss van Essen?" demanded Joe.

"Miss van Essen?" the girl sneered at her own name. "He was going to marry that singer—don't stop me—I've got to get away—"

This was upsetting Joe's plan. He felt he had to care for Sunny, get her under cover until he could figure this out. Sunny's mad speech indicated she might have shot her own father.

Joe was given no chance to aid the girl. Delayed by the advent of the girl, Joe had failed to see two furtive figures coming upon him from a parked sedan.

"Let 'er go, Joe Bunt!" rasped a hard voice in his ear. "I ain't foolin'! Here, gimme the dame."

A rod was jammed into Joe's stomach and rough hands snatched Sunny van Essen from his grasp. One man kept the rod in Joe's belly while the other gave the girl a shove out into the street. Joe saw Sunny stagger to her knees, get up and start running.

"Lookit!" rapped out Joe. "I know you. You're both Grano's boys, and Grano won't like this. The cops will pick up the girl and she'll have a bench for a bed tonight."

The .32 automatic had been put back into Sunny's purse. Joe didn't have to wait for the girl to be picked up. His captors pulled him down into the shore darkness on steps leading to the moored motorboat. Joe's final view of the street was seeing a white police car stop and a copper intercept the staggering girl.

"Just dandy, the way the boss wanted it!" gloated one of the hoods. "That little gun will turn the trick!"

Joe swung a hard fist and loosened the teeth of one of the hoods, but it wasn't good enough. The other gunman crashed his rod upon Joe's skull and all Joe remembered was the motorboat seeming to come up to meet him. He knew nothing for some little time after that.



A rod was jammed in Joe's stomach and rough hands snatched Sunny van Essen from his grasp.

ARCH GRANO'S yacht, the *Lombard*, was palatial, having been especially fitted out after the end of the world war. Joe aroused to the blinding ache of consciousness as he was carried along a deck

and into a cabin that had been fitted out as a sort of luxurious payoff room and office.

Joe's restored senses became aware of two men lying on the deck, both out cold.

He judged they would be watchmen, probably all the hands on board, waiting for Grano and his boys and his nightly sucker gamblers.

Steel handcuffs were clicked shut on Joe's wrists with his arms behind his back. He was thrown roughly to the floor. It was his cue to play dead for the moment. He could see a fancy gambling layout in a larger cabin beyond an open door.

There were no players. Grano had not appeared and probably could not. The same applied to his dealers and other boys. Joe made out now that there were three men he had long had tagged as being on the Grano payroll.

Could Arch Grano be guilty of a dirty double-cross? Joe decided against that. Grano had been too much wrought up over getting Carma, the singer, out from under the police heat. The first two captors had spoken of the boss.

It came to Joe that a few of Grano's hoods had sold out, which wasn't unusual with gun hands of their ilk. Joe lay quiet as the three men talked among themselves and then went out.

One had said: "The boss wanted to get away and be back uptown before the cops picked up that damn' girl. But this nosy barber has gummed up the works. The boss saw him and he's on his way back out here. The cops won't give Grano a break to reach the yacht tonight."

Joe raised his head slowly, painfully. He had imagined he was alone in the cabin office. He heard the three hoods clumping away along the deck. Joe sat up, testing the handcuffs.

"All hell!" swore Joe suddenly. "So that's it! There was a good reason to turn Sunny van Essen loose for the cops to pick up."

Howard van Essen had been seated at the cabin desk. The Park Avenue show backer now lay forward with his hands spread out. Joe could see the crooked line where blood had welled from a bullet wound in Mr. van Essen's throat and spread in a scarlet blotch over the front of his white shirt.

Joe achieved an acrobatic turn and got to his feet. He went close enough to see that Mr. van Essen had been struck by a small calibre bullet.

Heels pounded the deck. Joe dropped

and rolled back to his original position. He appeared wilted and helpless as a tall, thin man came into the cabin.

"I'll call you fellas if I need you," said the thin young fellow, and it was the brassy voice of Jay Carmichael. "We'll make it a double deal, but I wanted van Essen's body found here as is, and we'll bump Joe Bunt and iron him to the bottom of the Hudson. Bring along some heavy iron and wire."

Joe didn't move a muscle and his eyes were closed to slits. His chances seemed a thousand-to-one against survival. All the hate he had long felt for Jay Carmichael boiled inside him.

CHAPTER V

Shooting Corpse

"THE Mad Barber, huh, who's never missed cracking a murder case!" exclaimed Carmichael rubbing his long nose as he looked down at the helpless Joe Bunt. "You've been keeping a finger on me for months, an' sooner or later you'd have dug up something."

Joe Bunt's nerves were tense, but he didn't permit the quiver of a muscle or eye-lash. Carmichael drove a brutal toe into Joe's ribs, laughing harshly, but he failed to produce any sign of the agony running through Joe's body.

"If you'd kept your damn' nose outta this business," went on Carmichael, "this van Essen would still be alive an' he'd have paid off a lot more than he already has. The cops would keep on suspecting Grano, but van Essen would have been sure his thrill-hunting daughter had killed that waiter at the Green Lantern. It would have been put up to the old fool that Sunny meant to shoot Carma because she believed the singer intended to marry her father and split up her fortune—"

Carmichael was maddened and appeared to be reciting all of this to himself or perhaps he hoped Joe Bunt might be conscious enough to know he was going to die, and he wanted the Mad Barber to understand how he had gummed up a neat extortion plot.

Carmichael's long leg swung again as he cursed and kicked Joe with sickening force under his ribs. Joe had his teeth



Joe's educated feet smashed the third hood in the face

hard set to restrain any movement or evidence he was conscious enough to feel pain. With his wrists handcuffed behind him Joe was but a sitting duck for Carmichael's sadistic brutality.

"Maybe I oughtta bring you around so's you'll know what's happening," muttered Carmichael, finding no satisfaction in his abuse of the little barber who apparently could neither hear nor feel.

Carmichael acted upon his own thought as he listened for the return of the three treacherous Grano hoods with wire and iron to plant Joe Bunt in the oozy mud of the tidal Hudson. The columnist hauled a flask from his hip, unscrewed the cap and bent over Joe with the intention of pouring whiskey into his throat.

Unable to use his hands, Joe had awaited this chance. He had little hope of saving

his life, but at least he could give Jay Carmichael something to remember.

Joe had come up the hard way of the alleys and dead-end streets. He had kept his muscles trained to the strength of steel wire. Now he waited until Carmichael had the flask touching his lips.

Joe shot his feet upward with the force of a mule kick. He had no times for ethics or clean fighting. His heels caught Carmichael in the groin and belly, the power of the kick lifting the poison scandal columnist and hurling him all the way to the desk where van Essen sat with his arms sprawled out.

Jay Carmichael uttered a scream of animal agony. His head slapped the edge of the desk and he went to the floor, writhing with the torture of the pain and the effort to keep his senses.

Joe Bunt followed his kick with a twist that brought him to his feet. He heard the three hoods running toward the cabin.

"That was the boss!" grated a hard voice. "Grano always said Joe Bunt was dynamite! Burn 'im down an' take no chances!"

They were jamming into the cabin doorway. Two rods spewed fire and Joe felt the jolt of a slug, but it failed to knock him off his feet. The first gunman was but two yards or so away when Joe jumped and dived.

Joe's unexpected move carried him under the blazing heaters and his hard head struck the first hood low down in the stomach. Joe fell on his side, kicking out at the legs of another killer.

He was sure that this could end but one way. Yet he became for a few seconds a poor target, being still entangled with the first hood he had knocked down.

One man slammed at Joe's head with his rod and the glancing blow was dizzying. It seemed to Joe that two or three guns exploded together.

On his knees, trying to get up, Joe was stung across the face by burning powder. But strangely one of the hoods jerked up his arms, throwing his rod away, and clutching at his middle before he slid down on his face.

Again guns exploded and Joe was in an aching delirium that made it seem someone was shooting from behind him. A second hood jerked his head back and tumbled on his shoulders out onto the narrow side deck.

Joe acted on instinct. His educated feet smashed the third hood in the face as Joe threw himself to his back.

Joe Bunt had never been nearer to having a waking nightmare. Three thugs, evidently bought out by Jay Carmichael, formed an incredible lifeless huddle in the cabin doorway.

When Joe faced around, he saw Jay Carmichael trying to lift himself from the floor by clinging to the edge of the desk behind which Mr. van Essen was seated. The millionaire's arms still rested upon the desk top, but Mr. van Essen had lifted his head and his right hand held an automatic that was still smoking.

Joe had been so sure that Mr. van Essen was dead that the very sight of the hard-

lined face above the millionaire's bloody throat made it appear that a corpse had suddenly started shooting in time to save Joe's life. Mr. van Essen's face was white, drained of blood, but a grim smile crossed his thin lips.

"Lordy!" grunted Joe. "Mr. van Essen? You ain't dead?"

Mr. van Essen's voice was weak, but he spoke calmly.

"No, Joe. I'm not dead." His hand went to his throat and jaw. "Carmichael also thought I was dead, that he had killed me. I had a wild dream, Joe. Sunny, my daughter, was here and she had lost her senses. Carmichael was demanding a hundred grand, saying Sunny had tried to kill Carma, the singer, and had hit one of the Green Lantern waiters."

Jay Carmichael was regaining consciousness and he started a sudden move. Joe Bunt's right toe clicked Carmichael's chin and he subsided. Joe heard the sirens of police boats near the yacht.

Mr. van Essen stayed erect. Joe guessed the small calibre bullet had struck his jawbone and knocked him out.

"Take it easy, Mr. van Essen," said Joe. "I think I've got this all wrapped up. First, this Carmichael rat was playing up to your daughter, and he had bribed some of Arch Grano's boys to throw a scare into you, thinking you would pay off. That caused the wild shooting at my shop."

Mr. van Essen nodded and his voice was rueful.

"I suppose you thought I was a silly old fool and infatuated with Carma," he said. "I wanted it that way. My daughter has been running wild. I love her, Joe, and she wouldn't listen. She made me think she intended to marry this Carmichael. I had the crazy idea that I could make her come to her senses if I made it appear I was childishly throwing myself and a fortune away over the blues singer.

"I was playing right into Carmichael's hands. He thought I would pay any amount to prevent Sunny being accused of murder. I saw Sunny and Carmichael when that waiter was shot. I made it out of the Green Lantern and I wasn't so sure that Sunny hadn't been shooting at Carma. I was grabbed, knocked out, and the next

I knew I was here on Grano's gambling yacht."

"So, when you realized Sunny had been drugged, you refused to pay off to Carmichael," nodded Joe. "Which came close to costing your life. I suppose Carmichael planted that rod on you after he thought you were dead and—"

"Yes," said Mr. van Essen. "The gun was under my hand when I came to myself and saw you handcuffed and fighting in the cabin doorway."

JIM O'GRADY'S booming voice was the first to sound off as coppers boarded the Grano yacht. Arch Grano was there, but he wasn't in custody.

"You ain't got the sense that's given geese, Joe Bunt!" roared O'Grady. "If Della Corcoran and this swell girl Carma hadn't got to us at the Green Lantern, we might've been a long time finding you."

Big Mike Corcoran rubbed his freckled nose.

"It ain't lookin' like Joey was needin' any coppers on his side," chuckled Mike. "Sis, you'd be smart to take Joey in my hack an' start for Aunt Hannah's without waitin' to pack or nothin'. Maybe if you blindfold the guy he won't run onto another murder before you get him on his vacation."

Mr. van Essen was being attended by the police M. E. The Park Avenue millionaire asked first about his daughter.

"The girl's okay, an' she's in the hospi-

tal," said O'Grady. "She was doped up an' it'll be a day or two before she can understand that the idea she was a killer was planted in her mind. I think, Mr. van Essen, you'll have a quieter and wiser girl."

A copper hauled Jay Carmichael to his feet. Arch Grano stepped over and slapped the columnist hard before he could be stopped. Big Jim O'Grady interfered.

"Easy, Grano," warned O'Grady. "Because of a decent streak you showed tonight, we'll shut our eyes to some things, including this gambling layout. But we won't keep our eyes shut more than twenty-four hours. Get it?"

Grano nodded. Red-headed Della Corcoran had Joe Bunt's arm in a tight grip.

"I'm doing what Mike says, Joey," stated the redhead. "And while you're having a rest out at Aunt Hannah's I'll be burning that *fishology* book."

O'Grady clicked the steel on Jay Carmichael's wrists.

"I don't know that we've evidence enough to burn you, Carmichael, but you won't be writin' a poison column where you'll be vacationing for the next twenty years to life," said the homicide captain. "As for you, Joe Bunt, I'm only hopin' your red-haired girl friend handcuffs you for life and keeps you out of our hair. I'd like to be able to break a nice, peaceable murder case just once without having it all loused up."

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MURDER'S MONOGRAM

YOU WENT up a narrow stairway to the second floor, turned left and walked along a dismal corridor until you came to a door lettered: PERRINE ENTERPRISES. In the dingy outer office of

the two room suite a girl with brassy hair and a tired, faded smile asked which partner you wished to see; and if you said it was John Perrine you wanted, her answer was a coldly factual: "He's dead."

Illustrations
by
Max Plaisted



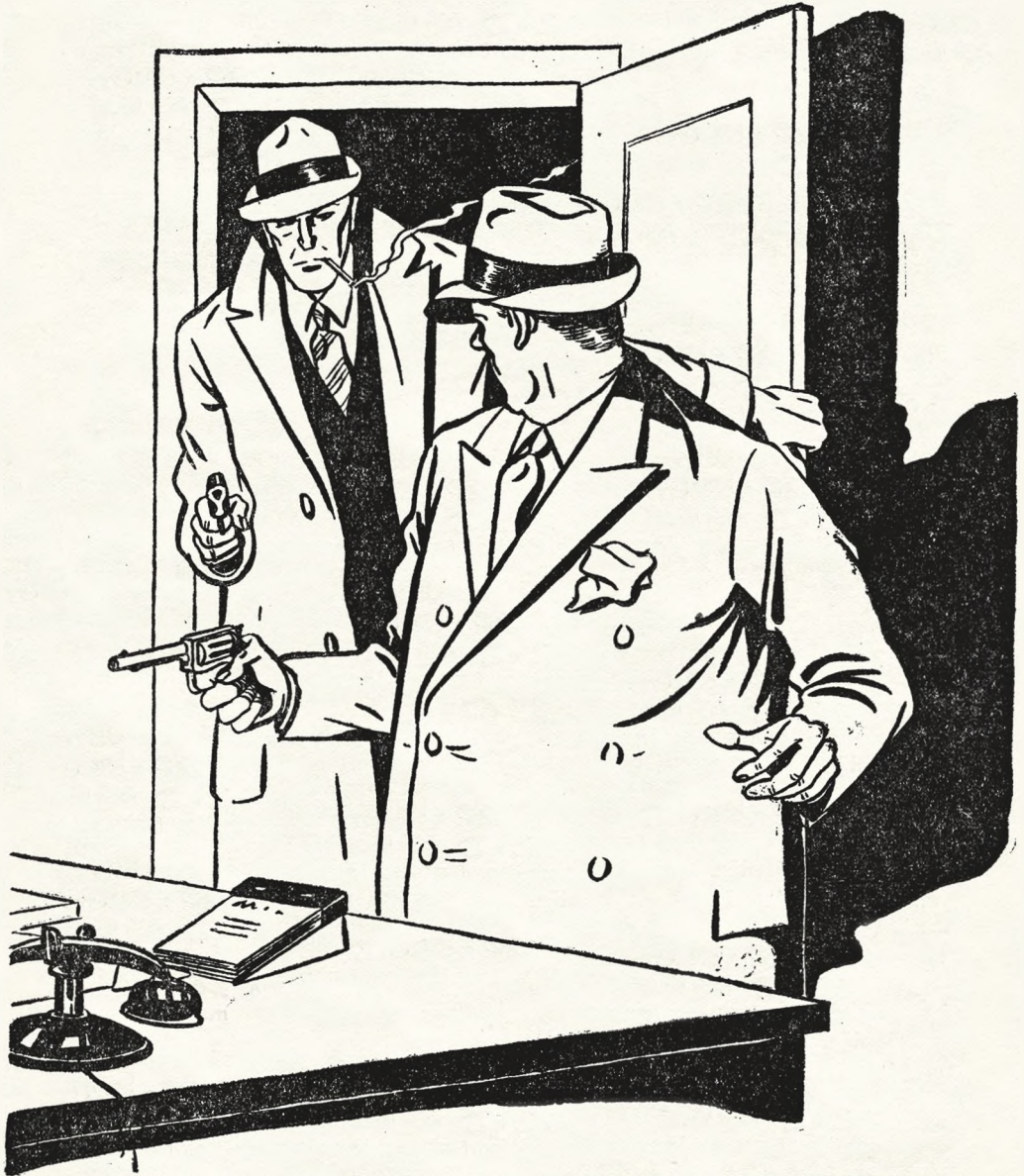
BY
ROBERT
LESLIE
BELLEM

The penalty for keeping a public library book too long is usually paid in pennies. But in this bizarre case, the book was taken from a private library—and Detective Bill Sharpe knew that the penalty would be paid in blood. . . .

Bill Sharpe stiffened when he heard it. "Dead?" he said, blinking at her in the waning afternoon sunlight which trickled through a grimy window. "John Perrine

dead? There must be some mistake. I had a drink with him in the bar downstairs only this morning."

"He died at noon."



"Freeze," the newcomer snarled from the doorway.

"But—"

"He was murdered," the girl said indifferently.

Sharpe took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead with it, though the day was not particularly warm. "Have the police—that is, has anybody been—?"

"Arrested? No, of course not." She didn't amplify this curious remark, nor was her voice particularly interested. The whole topic seemed to bore her. "Maybe you'd like to speak with his partner." She depressed a key on a small desk-box and talked at its general direction. "Mr. Barrington, there's a gentleman out here to interview you. I'll send him in." She waved languidly at Sharpe. "That door over there."

Feeling mildly dazed, he went to the door in question; opened it and stepped into an office even dingier than the outer one. He saw two chairs, a battered oak desk, and a drunkenly leaning mahogany clothes tree on which hung a tan gabardine topcoat whose frayed cuffs drooped despondently. He didn't see anybody named Barrington, though. He didn't see anybody at all.

"Hey," he said doubtfully. "What is this, a gag?"

From behind him a sepulchral voice answered: "No, it's not. I wouldn't move if I were you. You're covered."

Judging from those deep chest tones, the voice belonged to a man at least six feet tall: a man who had concealed himself cleverly back of the opening door and stepped forth when it was swung shut again. Bill Sharpe froze in his tracks, silently furious for having exposed himself to such a shopworn trick. Private detectives were supposed to be smart; to be alert to danger at all times and in all places. But he, Sharpe, had certainly played this one dumb. He decided, sullenly, that he must be slipping.

"Turn around," the sepulchral voice said.

Sharpe obeyed, and his eyes popped in frank astonishment. Barrington wasn't six feet tall. He was a roly-poly little guy, bald as a bullet and girthy as a prize pumpkin at a county fair. Nobody in his right mind would have typed him as a gunsel, but he seemed thoroughly familiar with the .38 he was aiming at Sharpe. Familiar and careless.

The .38 was a Colt with its safety unlatched. "Now see here," Sharpe protested.

Barrington said: "Speak when you're spoken to. There's been a murder and I'm taking no chances. What's your name?"

"Sharpe. William Sharpe."

"Business?"

"I'm a dick."

"Headquarters?"

"Private," Sharpe said sourly.

"Ah. Trying to drum up trade, I presume?"

Sharpe made an angry mouth. "You presume wrong. I was having an eye-opener in the saloon downstairs this morning when a beery character braced me. One of these confidential drunks that insist on being friendly and exchanging business cards. His card said his name was John Perrine, not that I gave a damn. But when he discovered the line of work I was in he said I was just the kind of guy he was looking for and would I please come up to his office about four this afternoon. Okay, it's four this afternoon and I'm in his office and the girl in the other room tells me he's dead. Which is all I know."

"Not quite," the roly-poly Barrington said. "I'll trouble you to hand it to me."

"Hand what to you?"

"What Perrine gave you."

Sharpe didn't quite believe his ears. "What he gave me?" he choked. "What the hell are you talking about? He didn't give me anything."

"Come, come, now." Barrington lifted the Colt until its snout was on a direct line with Sharpe's forehead. "Let's not have any nonsense about this. Was it an envelope Perrine slipped you? Or just a sheet of paper?"

"He didn't slip me anything," Sharpe said.

Barrington frowned severely. "Lying will get you nowhere, my dear fellow. On the other hand, the truth might get you as much as a hundred dollars. I'm feeling magnanimous, you see." He made a grandiloquent gesture with the gun. "Cross me, though, and I'm likely to feel very vindictive indeed."

"But the guy gave me nothing. Nothing at all." Sharpe was indignant—and truthful. He had a perfectly clear recollection of his brief encounter with the beery Per-



Barrington dived for his .38.
Prudence shot him, too.

rine in the saloon downstairs that morning. Perrine had asked him to come up here at four, and that was all. Period.

BARRINGTON, however, refused to believe this. Sepulchrally he explained why. "It so happens that my partner phoned me, shortly after he left you at the bar and three hours before he was killed. He told me he had entrusted a stranger with the . . . shall we say, information? And you, obviously, are the stranger."

"He's a liar," Sharpe said promptly. Then, remembering, he added: "I mean he was a liar."

"Mustn't speak that way of the dead," Barrington's tone was a pious admonishment. "Of course I'll admit Perrine told me he hadn't informed you of the value of what he gave you. He merely passed it to you and asked you to drop in on him at four."

"Inform me hell. He didn't give me anything. He just—"

"I must be impolite and contradict you. I must also warn you that you're sucking in for a hole in your head if you persist in these silly denials. I mean business."

"Nuts to you," Sharpe said, keeping a wary eye on the fat man. Particularly on the fat man's trigger finger.

Barrington's mouth got ugly. "Evidently you're set on joining Perrine on a slab in the morgue. That's rather foolish of you, my dear fellow—considering that the information you're withholding from me can do you no possible good. You don't know what it is and you wouldn't know how to use it even if you guessed. So be reasonable before I lose patience with you."

Sharpe sparred for time. "Who murdered Perrine?"

"That I wouldn't know. Come on, produce."

"How was he killed?"

"With one of these." Barrington brandished his .38. "Deadly things, Colts. You'll be finding that out in another minute unless you come across."

Sharpe said wearily: "I wish I could. Whatever it is you want, I'd let you have it gladly. If I had it."

"If you had it?" The fat man's eyes grew narrow. "You mean you gave it to somebody else? Why, you—"

"I never did have it," Sharpe said

hastily. "For Pete's sake, mister, do you think I'd hold out on you when you've got the drop on me? I'm no hero. Not that kind of hero, anyhow." He was perspiring again. Then he got a sudden inspiration. "Look, why don't you frisk me? Maybe that will convince you."

Barrington seemed sardonically amused. "If you're so willing to be searched, it means you aren't carrying the number on you."

"Number? So that's what it was, a number."

"As if you didn't know." The fat man scowled. "You ditched it before coming here, hey? Hoping to shake me down for a nice piece of change."

"That's not the way of it at all."

"It must be. Well, too bad."

"What do you mean, too bad?" Sharpe asked.

Barrington sounded coldly ferocious. "Too bad for you. I want that number. I'm going to get it. The hard way."

"Killing me won't help," Sharpe pointed out, logically.

"But beating you will." The fat man latched the safety on his automatic. "I'm going to pistol whip you until you talk." He came close to Sharpe, the gun swinging.

For Sharpe, this was a very swell break indeed. Now that the weapon's safety was locked, he knew it wouldn't shoot. Not until the latch was thumbed off again. Meanwhile it was no longer a firearm, it was merely a blunt instrument. He could protect himself against that.

He ducked the first blow and then, still crouching, slugged a jolting fist into Barrington's roly-poly stomach. Barrington hit him on the shoulder with the gun barrel but there wasn't too much steam behind it. Sharpe warded off the next swing and then drove his knuckles into the fat man's face. The face got pretty smeary from its broken nose and pulped mouth. Sharpe struck again, and Barrington fell down. Down, and out.

Sharpe obtained the unconscious man's Colt. Then he saw the girl with the brassy hair and the faded smile standing at the doorway, not smiling now, just looking at him and fluttering her hands in an aimless sort of way. "Oh, dear," she said. "Oh my g-goodness. Just see what you've done."

"I had to," Sharpe said virtuously.

She nodded. Her face and voice were deadpan. "I suppose so. I guess there wasn't anything else you *could* do, was there?"

"No. And I'm getting the heck out of here." He eyed her a bit truculently. "You won't try to stop me, I hope."

"Not at all."

"That's fine." He made for the door.

"I'll go with you," she said colorlessly.

"Hey, now wait."

"There's some things you ought to know. And besides, I'm fed up with this crooked outfit." She fluttered her hands again. "It's no place for a decent girl. Thieves, and murders, and—" she took hold of Sharpe's arm. "Let's go away before he comes to." She meant Barrington, who even now was beginning feebly to stir on the floor. "Hurry."

Bemused and wondering what the devil it was all about, Sharpe let her tug him out of the suite, downstairs and out of the shabby building. His car was at the curb and he helped her into it. Then he drove away, not going anywhere in particular, but just driving. Presently he said: "Okay, toots, give."

"Give?"

"With the inside dope."

"Oh, that. Well, my name isn't Toots, it's Prudence. Prudence Foster." She turned and glanced through the coupe's back window. "Oh, dear. I think we're being followed."

He looked into his rear view mirror. There was a black sedan behind them but he couldn't tell whether or not it was a tail job. "Well, for hell's sake," he said resentfully. "What have I got myself into?"

"Trouble. Book trouble. Rare book trouble."

This made very little sense to Bill Sharpe. He said so.

She told him she thought it was perfectly plain. "Haven't you heard about Hastings' *Immigrants' Guide To California?* It was published in 1846 and it was largely responsible for starting the ill-fated Donner expedition on its overland trip." She sounded like a professor or a librarian giving a lecture.

Sharpe frowned, trying to concentrate on three things at once. First, his driving. Second, the black sedan behind him. And

third, what Prudence Foster was telling him.

HIS memory suddenly meshed. "Say, isn't that the book the newspapers have been yammering about this past week? I mean—"

"That's right," she said soberly. "Single copies are so rare they're worth up to fifty thousand dollars as collectors' items." She sighed. "The trouble is, most of the known copies are owned by a few public and private libraries."

"Including one in our own library right here in town," Sharpe cut in with a certain amount of excitement. "Which disappeared a week ago. The book, I mean, not the library. Mysteriously vanished. Phoooff. Just like that." He clenched his wheel. "Fifty grand into thin air. Ye gods, do you mean Perrine had anything to do with the theft?"

"He had everything to do with it. He was not an honest man. He made arrangements to sell it to a certain wealthy but unscrupulous collector for ten thousand dollars. Cash. On delivery." She still sounded like a lecturer in a classroom.

Sharpe stared at her, astounded, and narrowly missed a pedestrian. "Ten thousand. Well for the love—"

"But John didn't completely trust the man."

"John?"

"Mr. Perrine," she amended, primly, and blushed. "He realized he was dealing with someone as dishonest as he was. Perhaps more dishonest. And a great deal more dangerous. A man who would gladly pay ten thousand dollars for a stolen rare book, but who would even more willingly kill for it, thereby getting what he desired while at the same time saving his money."

Sharpe looked once more into the rear view mirror. The sedan was still behind them. He made some fast turns around intersections, a few of them illegal. Presently he had lost the sedan. This made him feel better. "Let me get it straight, toots. Perrine swiped the book and was going to peddle it for ten G's but was scared the buyer might knock him off and take it for free. Right?"

"Yes. So he devised a plan to protect himself. He, and only he, knew where the book was hidden. If he got killed, the un-

scrupulous collector would never find it."

"A form of insurance," Sharpe commented.

She nodded. "You could call it that. But there was a catch to it. Just suppose Mr. Perrine got murdered in spite of his precautions? Then nobody would ever know where he'd hidden the book. It would be lost, maybe for years. You see, he never fully confided in his partner in crime, Mr. Barrington. He never even confided in me," she tacked on with a touch of bitterness.

Sharpe parked in front of the building where he had his own office. "Let's go upstairs," he suggested. "You can finish telling this over a drink. There's a bottle of rye in my desk."

He steered her to his one man agency quarters, poured two shots into wax paper cups. "Here's hair on your chest—I mean—" For once in his life he felt embarrassment. Prudence Foster was obviously not the sort of girl who would relish hair on her chest.

She drank primly but thirstily, thus forgiving him his blunder. "So John, that is, Mr. Perrine, hit upon the idea of giving it to a total stranger. Not the book; the code which told its hiding place. Thus, if he got killed, the information would still exist. It would come back to Barrington and myself. Well, you were the total stranger to whom he gave the code."

"He did no such damned thing."

She ignored that. "And then, sure enough, he was murdered. I guess he had a premonition. He was shot down as he walked into a cafe for lunch. Shot on a crowded sidewalk, and nobody even got a look at the killer. He staggered three little steps and fell down dead. His hands pushed the pavement and then . . . that was all. The murderer escaped."

"But holy jumping hotcakes, toots, why *should* the murderer escape?" Sharpe demanded in a wrathful voice. "You and Fats Barrington have the deadwood on him."

"On whom?"

"The rich but unscrupulous book collector you mentioned, whatever his name is. It's pretty plain that he's the one who murdered Perrine. Or had him murdered. All you've got to do is finger this character to the coppers. Tell them what you've told me."

Sharpe warded off the next swing and then drove his knuckles into the fat man's face.



She widened her eyes at him and then gave him the faded smile. "That's impossible."

"Why?"

"It would implicate Mr. Barrington and myself in the theft of the book from the library. We're forced to keep quiet about it for self protection. Besides, we couldn't

prove anything."

"An accusation would be enough. Leave the proving to the cops. They're good at it."

"But that would still make Barrington and me accessories to a book theft." Then she brightened. "Of course I never approved of stealing it. That was Perrine's



idea. I protested, but he laughed at me. Still, if I could hand the Hastings books over to the authorities it would clear me, wouldn't it? I mean I'd be on the side of the law and wouldn't have to go to prison. Then I could tell everything I know about the deal." Abruptly her mouth dropped at the corners. "But I can't re-

store the book without your help. You're the one with the code number."

Sharpe was nettled. "Perrine didn't give me any code number. I keep telling you that." He peered at her. "Got any idea about the kind of code it was?"

"Yes. A filing number based on the Congressional Library system."

"You're out of my depth," Sharpe admitted. "Me, I never read books. Just the racing form."

"Well, all library books have a file number. For instance, in our local library the Hastings volume is R-917-H-64-C. All those symbols mean something."

"No!" Sharpe was amazed. "They *do*?"

His levity failed to ruffle her. "The R stands for Restricted or Reserved," she said, "meaning the book can't be taken from the library except under special circumstances. The H stands for Hastings, the author's name. The C is for Californiana, that is, material dealing with California. And the numbers, of course, indicate the stacks, or shelves."

"If the book was on the restricted list, how in hell did your pal Perrine get it out of the library?"

"He never did."

Sharpe poured more rye. "Now I really am confused."

"It's perfectly simple. He left the book in the building. It was the best possible hiding place."

"I don't follow the logic."

"Well, look. First he got permission to examine the Hastings book right there in the library. When nobody was looking, he cut it out of its binding. Then, from the public stacks in the library, he got another book of the same general size and shape, a commonplace book of no particular interest or value. He ripped that one from its covers, too."

"And switched them," Sharpe said, beginning to understand the scheme.

She nodded. "He glued the cheap, valueless book into the Hastings book's covers and returned it to the librarian. It was filed back in the restricted section, nobody suspecting it was only the Hastings cover on substitute insides."

"Then Perrine glued the genuine Hastings into the cheap book's covers and filed it where it belonged. Where the cheap book belonged, I mean. Is that the way of it?"

"Yes. After that he walked out. He, and he alone, knew where he had filed the Hastings in its substitute binding. He had deliberately chosen the covers of an unpopular volume which nobody'd be likely to call for from one year to the next. If you weren't aware of its stack location, the only way you would ever find it would be to go through every book in the library.

Thousands upon thousands of books. Perrine, though, could put his finger on it instantly—because he knew where he'd filed it."

"Pretty clever."

She agreed. "It was the file number of the substitute binding which was the location code. That was what he intended to sell to this unscrupulous collector for ten thousand dollars: the file number. The buyer would then go to the library, borrow that particular cheap book and take it out. Actually he would be taking out a valuable Hastings, which he could have re-bound to suit his own tastes. All right. That code number is what Perrine gave you in the saloon this morning."

"Don't be dizzy, toots. He gave me no such damned thing. Hope to die."

From the office doorway a deep, sepulchral voice said sourly: "You'll get your hope." And Fatso Barrington waddled into the room, girthy as a pumpkin, bald as a bullet, and carrying another Colt .38 auto—the mate to the one which Sharpe had taken away from him not long before. He leered equally at Sharpe and Prudence Foster. "Surprised to see me, kiddies?"

"How the hell did you get here?" Sharpe exploded.

The fat man shrugged. "You had told me your name and occupation, remember? I looked in the phone book. And now you'll either hand me the code number or I'll rip this place apart. After which I'll rip you apart."

"A lot of good that'll do you," Sharpe was morose. "Perrine never gave me what you seem to think I have. However, go ahead and rip it apart if it'll make you feel better."

Barrington started for him, then; but before he took a dozen steps, somebody else walked in through the doorway. "Freeze," this newcomer snarled, brandishing a snub-nosed belly gun. "All of you." The office, Sharpe decided, was certainly becoming infested with trigger-happy characters.

The latest visitor was tall, dark and saturnine. For all his obviously expensive clothes, he wasn't the type you'd care to encounter in an alley after midnight. A cigarette drooped from one side of his mouth, and the way he screwed up his eyes to avoid the smoke from this gave

him an expression that was not only menacing but downright sinister.

Sharpe recognized the man at once. He was Tony Venturi, former bootlegger, one-time speakeasy proprietor, reputed black marketeer, and currently owner of the city's swankiest night club. Venturi regarded Fatso Barrington with a malevolent eye. "Drop the gat, Tubby."

Barrington obeyed. "But—but Mr. Venturi—"

"Can it. I tailed you here from your office for one reason and one reason only. I want the book."

"Oho," Bil Sharpe said softly. "So you're the unscrupulous collector."

VENTURI gave him a dirty look. "Remind me to hunt up unscrupulous in the dictionary, chum. If it means what I think it means, you get lumps." He turned his attention once more to Barrington. "The book, Tubby, the book." Then he added: "That, or my ten G's back."

"Ten G's?" the fat man recoiled.

"Yeah. The ten grand I paid your partner Perrine."

"But—but wh-when did y-you—?"

"When did I make the payoff? This morning, half past eleven—maybe quarter of twelve. Anyhow just a little before he stopped a slug. I guess I'm too trusting. He promised me he'd slip me that Hastings book at four-thirty this afternoon. But at twelve sharp the dirty stinker went and got himself knocked off. A fine thing, I must say," Venturi grumbled.

Barrington glared at Prudence. "Miss Foster, is this true?"

"Is what true?" she fluttered her hands.

"Did Perrine get this man's ten thousand dollars?"

"How should I know?" she sniffed. "I wasn't there. I was in our office when the news came that he'd been k-killed." She looked at Venturi. "Oh dear. Why did you have to do it?"

"Why did I have to do what, lady?"

"Sh-shoot poor Mr. Perrine."

Venturi seemed thunderstruck. "Who, me? I didn't blast him." Gesturing lavishly with his belly-gun, he added: "Why hell, here I was expecting him to sell me a hot book. He had my dough for it. How would I ever expect to get anything out of croaking him?" A swift scowl creased his brow. "Somebody owes me either a

book or ten units. How's about it, Fatso?"

"I wouldn't know about the cash," Barrington said in his deep chest tones. "But the book, now . . ." He darted a malignant eye at Bill Sharpe. "There's the man for that. He's got the information. He can tell you where you can pick up the Hastings."

Sharpe said: "I can like hell."

"Oh, a knuckle-head, hey?" Venturi said, and advanced on him, cocking his weapon. "Well, you won't be the first chump I cooled down, brother." He took aim.

With a fluttery sigh, Prudence Foster opened her handbag and delved into it. Suddenly a report came out of the bag, accompanied by a spiteful blurt of flame. Venturi yipped an oath and dropped his pistol and stared at his bleeding wrist, where the girl's bullet had neatly pinked him.

Simultaneously, Barrington dived for his own .38 Colt. But he never made it. Prudence shot him, too. She was pretty expert with the gun in her purse, it appeared.

Bill Sharpe dived into the action. Stopping, he scooped up the Colt. That made two he had taken from Fats Barrington. One here, and one in Barrington's own office. In the same motion he grabbed Venturi's belly-gun, reflecting that he now had a weapon for each hand and a third which he could carry in his mouth if he wanted to. Maybe that's what was meant by the phrase, armed to the teeth. He reversed the belly-gun and whanged it across Venturi's head. Then he whanged Barrington's bald pate. Barrington and Venturi dropped. Sharpe got handcuffs and locked Venturi's unwounded left wrist to Barrington's right. Barrington was bleeding mightily from a wounded shoulder, but he was too unconscious to care about this.

"Thanks, toots," Sharpe said to Prudence. "Nice shooting. Very nice indeed."

"I had to do something to save your life," she said mildly.

"Yeah," he agreed heartily. "That you did." He looked rueful. "Too bad I've got to be such a damned ingrate." He moved rapidly, snatched away her handbag and tucked it under his arm. "You saved my life sure enough, toots."

"Not toots. Prudence."

"Okay, then, Prudence. So now I have
(Continued on page 117)

Interview With Death

BY RANDOLPH BARR

"LEAVE us go away and make like you had never been called by this *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez*," moaned Charles (Bumps) McCarthy, sweat popping out all over his round, red face. "The senorita wouldn't stay in

Mountain Park by the statue of the Covered Wagon anyway, after she saw this—this—"

But Joe Lake, who had made homicidal history in the columns of the *Portland Telegram*, was padding toward the body

Illustrations by
Jay McArdle



When newshawk Joe Lake got a mysterious call to interview that Bolivian beauty and then found her murdered, he thought it would be smart to hide the body for a time and thus score a scoop. But the killers then arranged for a headline which announced the drastic and sudden demise of Joe himself! . . .



of the woman. The crumpled corpse was picked out by the light beams of the police reporter's coupe, parked only a few yards away.

The shapely figure, partly exposed where

Lacy's machine gun rattled as Joe flung himself toward the flaming weapon.

the cloak and dress had been torn away, lay in a pool of the Oregon drizzle of everlasting August rain. Even at first glance Joe Lake saw that the dark, oval face had been beautiful.

But the slim neck was now bent horribly, lifting the features beseechingly toward the twin lights that the glazed eyes never would see.

Bumps McCarthy, the plump staff photog, renewed his appeal as Joe Lake bent over the dead woman.

"Look, Joe! Maybe the killer that mugged her is lurking out there in the rhododendrons and he won't like for us to be horning in," groaned Bumps. "See! We arrived too soon and he didn't have time to snatch that other earring or that diamond off her right hand. He will see we are only a couple of news-hounds and—"

"In that case, Bumps, you could stick here an' flash a pix," remarked Joe Lake dryly, studying the contours of the corpse and the muddy ground surrounding the shallow pool in which the body lay. "And while you flash the pix, I could hide out and pot the guy with my police thirty-eight if he shows up and gets rough."

Bumps McCarthy swallowed hard. "You really wanting a pix, Joe? Old Ward didn't like the last pix of a corpse I turned in. He said it was too gruesome."

Joe Lake's long, quick fingers explored. He estimated the remaining eardrop as worth twice his year's pay. The other jewel was missing from a torn ear lobe.

"It looks as if the killer was a prowling thief who was interrupted by our car lights," said Joe Lake thoughtfully. "And rings have been ripped off two fingers. Her purse is open and it contains no money, only these other things and her cards. She was hit from behind, then her head was twisted."

"If it looks like that, Joe, leave us hurry up and call the police," put in Bumps McCarthy nervously. "You will not now meet this *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez*, the mystery tycoon of Bolivia, who has never been mugged and who has gone away after she saw—"

"We have kept our appointment with the *Senorita Hernandez*," interrupted Joe Lake, narrowing his gray eyes as he stared at a card from the dead woman's purse. "This card reads *Senorita Carla Dolores Hernandez, President, Hernandez Mining*

Corporation! Apparently, Bumps, we are the first citizens of Portland to meet the famous tycooness of Bolivia, discoverer of what are reputed to be the world's most productive tin mines."

"You mean, Joe, that she is her, the *senorita?*" gasped Bumps. "An' she was killed while she was waiting here to give you the first exclusive interview, an' some wandering thief saw her?"

"I said that was what it looked like, Bumps," replied Joe Lake, his voice taking on a hard edge. "But that is not what it is. *Senorita Hernandez* was dead when she arrived. The ground has not been trampled, so there was no struggle. She was carried and tossed into the rain pool. It was meant that we—"

"No, Joe, no!" Bumps McCarthy cut in, choking on his own sudden panic. "I don't like you looking like that. We can't have an exclusive story. It's only nine o'clock of the evening, and when we call the police the *Morning Oregonian* has twelve hours before the *Telegram* could pick up the yarn on our afternoon edition time. No, Joe, not this time. You can't—"

BUT Joe Lake's mouth was a grim slash. His face was set in the determined lines that Bumps McCarthy recognized all too well.

"We can, and we will," stated Joe Lake. "Look, Bumps. The *Senorita Hernandez* called me as a newspaperman, saying she saw my by-line over a story today. She said she liked my style and she wanted me to write an interview introducing her to Portland, and telling for the first time of still more and richer tin mines which she has not previously announced. So what she wanted, she gets."

"Joe, you won't—I ain't—we can't—there is no way to prevent her body being discovered by night shift factory workers going through the park on their way home," argued Bumps, his plump hands reaching out as if he would push away the idea he knew was in Joe Lake's mind.

"There's a way, Bumps. This isn't what it looks like. We will make it less so. It was meant that I should find the body. I'm a police reporter, not a financial writer. My by-line was over a murder story, and that was why I was called. Not because the *Senorita Hernandez* liked my style, as the voice said over the phone. Get it?"

"I do not want to get it," complained Bumps slowly and with conviction. "I want to go away from this place as of now. Joe, if the *Morning Oregonian* beats us on the yarn, then you won't have to write and become mixed up in this murder."

But Joe Lake was stripping off his raincoat. He bent over quickly and turned the slight figure of the corpse over, as Bumps swore soulfully, mopping his moon-like face and peering furtively at the black shadows of the surrounding shrubbery.

"This time, Joe, I'm not—" Bumps began.

"Open the car trunk, Bumps," said Joe Lake tersely. "The keys are in the ignition. I think we may be watched, so take my gun and don't hesitate to shoot at the first movement."

Joe Lake hefted the woman's corpse in his long, lean arms, and marvelled at the slight weight, hardly more than that of a child. For so small a person, the *Senorita Hernandez* had been swinging much weight in financial circles.

Her reported discovery of the new Bolivian tin mines promised to make America forever independent of all Asiatic sources of the essential material. That being true, Joe Lake had suddenly determined to protect this unexpected "murder scoop" with all that he had.

Bumps McCarthy grumbled and protested through chattering teeth. But he gripped Joe Lake's .38 in sweating fingers and unlocked the trunk of the *Telegram's* official police car.

"Where we goin' and what're we gonna do with her, Joe?" gulped Bumps. "Y'mean we're just gonna ride around an' around, an' not call the cops? Cap Murphy will lock us up for two hundred years, an' old Ward won't lift a finger to help us out."

"We're not riding around much," said Joe Lake, taking the wheel. "We're taking the *Senorita Hernandez* to our rooming house. We will then figure out what is best to do. Possibly we have not been watched, or the killer might have interfered."

"Y'mean we're takin' her up to your room, Joe?" Bumps had a quiver in his voice. "Look, Joe. Mrs. Donnelly ain't gonna like this. Remember, she jumped you only today about you being behind with your rent, and—"

"We are putting the *Senorita Hernandez* in your room, Bumps," stated Joe Lake calmly. "It is nice that you are always paid in advance, so Mrs. Donnelly won't be barging in."

"No—I won't—for gosh sakes, Joe! They'll give me life, I'll lose my job, and Mrs. Donnelly will blacklist me with all the landladies in Portland!"

Joe Lake only smiled grimly, keeping an eye out for a possible trailing car as he drove over the Williamette river bridge and turned into North Portland.

CHAPTER II

Encore To Homicide

WHEN they had arrived at the rooming house, Bumps tried argument once more. "As a friend, Joe, let us don't," he urged unhappily. "Leave us just park the car as is. We will then go in and try to sleep until morning. Then we will go back to Mountain Park before daylight and replace the body by the statue of the Covered Wagon."

Joe did not reply. He was unlocking the car trunk. The tree-darkened street in front of the tall rooming house was deserted in the rain.

"You will take one arm, Bumps," directed Joe. "With my raincoat down to the heels, the *Senorita Hernandez* will look like one of the boys who has taken on too much."

By this time Bumps had arrived at the speechless stage. The rotund photog moved like a robot with shaking hands. The limp figure of the late *Senorita Hernandez* could easily have been a fellow news-hound who had passed out in his cups.

That way, the corpse between them, they entered, and reached the broad stairway to the second floor. Bumps was breathing with a rasping wheeze when they were halfway up.

A door opened on the first floor. The angular and sharp-featured Mrs. Donnelly was revealed by the light. Her nasal twang sliced the silence of the lower hallway.

"An' what do the pair o' ye think ye're doin'? Who is that scalawag ye're draggin' between ye?"

Bumps swallowed audibly, but no words came. Joe Lake laughed lightly and spoke.

"I'm sure glad to see you, Mrs. Donel-

ly," he said as if no financial impasse lay between them. "Y'see, Mrs. Donnelly, we were having a bit of a time with our city editor, celebratin' his having upped my pay. I wouldn't be surprised if I could pay you a month in advance—"

"Ye're too smooth with your glib tongue, Mister Lake!" snapped the landlady, coming toward the stairway. "An' what do ye think ye're gonna do with the filthy drunk?"

"You see, Mrs. Donnelly, I'll be glad to pay you a week extra for permitting our city editor to sleep it off," said Joe Lake quickly. "An' if you'll come up as soon as we put him to bed, I'll take care of that month, and the week, too."

"Well, now, an' if the poor man's sick an' ye'll be quiet an' he's out of here the first thing in the morning—"

Mrs. Donnelly's tone was suddenly modified.

"I'll be right up, Mister Lake, as soon as ye put the poor man to bed."

Inside Bumps McCarthy's room Joe Lake thumbed beads of sweat from his own brow. As Mrs. Donnelly's rap came at the door, he had the corpse covered in a life like manner in Bumps' bed.

Bumps had slumped into a chair, shuddering.

"You will have to let me take a twenty until payday," said Joe Lake. "We cannot be having Mrs. Donnelly getting down upon us."

"I knew it," whispered Bumps hoarsely. "Sure, we can't have Mrs. Donnelly getting sore at you."

Mrs. Donnelly took the twenty and said acidly, "Remember, he gets out the first thing in the morning. I won't have ye disgracin' my house no longer than that."

Joe Lake closed the door softly, having held it open but a few inches.

"Look, Bumps," he said cautiously. "I'm leavin' the car out front for you, just in case. I'm going back to the office and stick with the graveyard shift. Something might happen. But I don't think we were followed, and everything will be all right."

"You're leavin' me alone with her? No. Suppose somethin' does happen? What'll I do? If Mrs. Donnelly, if the police—if the killer—?"

"Take it easy, Bumps, and you can keep my gun," reassured Joe Lake. "If any-

thing happens unexpectedly, you can phone me at the office. You stick right here and don't run out."

He left Bumps McCarthy sitting rigidly in a chair with the gun gripped in his hand.

JOE Lake made but one phone call before reaching the *Telegram* office. The Columbia hotel desk replied.

"Did the *Senorita* Hernandez talk to any newspapermen before retiring tonight?" asked Joe Lake. "We made an effort to reach her and we were told she would not give out an interview before tomorrow."

The room clerk at the Columbia was highly sarcastic.

"You're the *Telegram*, huh? Well, I wouldn't know about the *Senorita* Hernandez. No news reporters were permitted to see her during her short stay here."

"Her short stay?"

"Yeah. The *Senorita* and her party checked out late in the afternoon. She did not take us into her confidence as to where she was moving."

"The *senorita's* party?" questioned Joe Lake.

"Yeah. Her two men secretaries, or so she said. And her sister, Ramona Hernandez, or so she said. And their two maids, or so she said."

It was clear that the clerk of the swanky Columbia hotel was irked by the mysterious goings-on of *Senorita* Hernandez and what he called her party. Joe Lake desired to avoid suspicion, so he did not pursue the matter.

At the *Telegram* office two dozing rewrite men and one copy-reader with a half-empty bottle were evidence that no report of a murder or other big local story had come in. Joe Lake grinned to himself, stretched his long legs on a desk and prepared to grab off a few hours of sleep.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when the phone on the city desk buzzed insistently. A swearing rewrite man called Joe Lake.

"It's that damfool Bumps, an' he sounds like he's crocked," imparted the rewrite man. "Says he's gotta talk to you, Joe. An' what's cookin' to bring you around here anyway? Maybe you got locked outta your room?"

Joe Lake grunted. He picked up the

phone with a sick sensation that all was not well. It wasn't.

"Joe? Joe?" Bumps McCarthy was gasping hoarsely.

Joe Lake slanted an eye over at the corner where the switchboard lovely of the early morning shift had made the phone connection. The girl was Margie Devlin, a slim and desirable Irish trick for whom Joe Lake had cherished a serious yen for many weeks.

Joe called her "Earful" Devlin for the obvious reason that the switchboard girl knew all that passed to the rewrite men when she had the time to listen in. This was one of the times.

"You get the tickets, Bumps?" said Joe Lake carefully, hoping to cover up, and watching the switchboard girl's pretty face.

But Bumps was past the stage of unrehearsed tactfulness.

"Tickets, Joe?" he gulped out. "Look, Joe! It ain't a time to be kidding! They got it—I mean they took the body, Joe!

No, they didn't take her—Joe, look! I got the willies, an' I put the corpse back in the trunk, an' a big car run me off into a ditch an' smashed hell-an'all out of the trunk so's the lid wouldn't open, an' then—"

Joe Lake could see the quick, wide-eyed horror spreading over Earful's vivid face.

The corpse between them. Joe and Bumps went up the rooming house steps.



The girl was staring across the room at him and he had to think fast.

"You been drinkin' some more, Bumps?" rapped out Joe Lake. "When I put you to bed, I thought you'd stay. What kind of a nightmare are you having now?"

"Is this you, Joe?" Bumps sounded as if he were choking to death.

Joe Lake kept an eye upon Earful Devlin. She was a smart girl. Smart enough to know that Joe was stalling. She left his phone connected, took her headset and went over to a corner desk.

"Look, Bumps," said Joe quickly. "Where's the car? An' where are you?"

"Ain't I been trying to tell you?" moaned Bumps. "The car's at the bottom of the Williamette River and—"

"Hold it, Bumps!" snapped Joe Lake. "You said you were run into the ditch an' the corpse was locked in the trunk and it could not be opened. Now you say—"

"Joe, I gotta hurry—listen, if you please. The trunk lid was buckled but the engine was okay. The big car that ran into me went on. I got the coupe out an' I drove into a dead-end street, goin' too fast—"

"Went off the dead end into the river, huh? There you were drowned, the woman's body was lost, and this is your ghost?"

"No, Joe—I am not yet a ghost, but the big car must've tailed me, an' I'm at a corner phone—Joe! There's two spicks an' a dame with a dark face—Joe!"

There was a sound like a shot at the other end of the line.

"Bumps? You still there? What—?"

Bumps McCarthy evidently was not still there. Joe Lake put the phone in its cradle, got up. He heard a muffled gasp.

Earful Devlin was staring at him with wide, stricken eyes. Her pretty face had become a queer shade of grayish green. She forgot to put down the phone she had been holding to her ear at the desk to which she had moved.

Joe Lake swore under his breath. Earful had tricked him. She had plugged in the phone she held on his conversation before she had left the switchboard. She looked at him as if were a red-handed murderer wading in gore."

JOE LAKE was still aware that the case of the mysterious *Senorita Hernandez*

from Bolivia should now go to the police. He could envision the face of Captain Murphy, of homicide, who always had disliked Joe Lake for his rough and ready, and too successful, dealings with little matters of murder.

Earful Devlin was trying to speak. Joe Lake laid his fingers on his lips and walked to her.

"Little gals who want new wrist watches hear nothing, see nothing and say nothing," muttered Joe. "Things are not always what they seem."

"Who—who is—was she?" stammered Earful, her blue eyes big and dark. "Did you—have to—to kill her, Joe?"

"Oh, Allah, give me strength," grunted Joe Lake.

With the eyes of the room upon him, Joe spread his hands. He was saved by the bell. Or rather it was the rattlesnake buzz and the glowing red lights on the switchboard.

Earful Devlin moved her lovely ponies and reached the board like one in a trance. Her voice was like a doll talking.

"Yeah? Yeah? Who? Uhuh! He's here! Mr. Lake! Captain Murphy is on the line!"

Joe Lake pulled in a deep breath. Had the cops been called when Bumps McCarthy's car had crashed in the ditch? Or had a report been made of the car plunging into the river?

Perhaps they had found Bumps. That could have been a shot he had heard over a dial phone. Joe's dry throat caused his voice to rasp.

"Yeah, Cap Murphy?"

"I'm not wantin' to be doin' you any favor, Joe," growled Captain Murphy, of homicide. "Only the boys at the station said you hinted you was meetin' this here Spanish dame from Bolivia tonight, an' she was to spill to you something that was to make you a big scoop. That so, Joe?"

Here it was. Then the cops had got onto Bumps' trail. Likely when the car had been wrecked in the ditch. They must have trailed Bumps and now had the body out of the river.

Joe gave out with the best he could in a pinch.

"Yeah, Murphy, that's so. The *Senorita Hernandez* called me and said she would give me an exclusive story. But when I called the Columbia hotel tonight, she had checked out without leaving an address."

"So?" Joe did not like Cap Murphy's tone. "Sure you hadn't a date to meet the *senorita* somewhere, Joe?"

"Well, yes. But she didn't meet me—"

"Was it Mountain Park where this *senorita* was to meet you, Joe? Maybe by the statue of the Covered Wagon?"

Anything he could say now would be used against him with all of Cap Murphy's long-nurtured dislike. Cap Murphy's knowing this much made it certain that the police had somehow been tipped off to at least part of what had happened in Mountain Park.

"A'right, Murphy! It was Mountain Park, but *Senorita* Hernandez didn't meet me with the story she had wanted me to write. Like I said, I called the Columbia hotel—"

"That'll do, Joe," interrupted the homicide man. "Suppose you hop out here to Mountain Park and we'll go on from there. Maybe the *senorita* didn't meet you, an' maybe she did. Maybe she wouldn't give you a story, an' it made you mad. Maybe that's why she's dead."

"Dead?" Joe tried to simulate surprise.

"As she'll ever be," snarled Cap Murphy. "An maybe you'll say she was disappointed at not meeting you an' took poison. That's why she just dropped dead without a mark on her or maybe she had a heart attack. Get out here, like I said, Joe!"

Joe Lake pronged the phone. He glanced at Earful Devlin. The girl was sitting back in her chair. She had fainted. At long last her persistent listening-in had been amazingly rewarded.

Joe Lake did not want to be present when Earful revived. He grabbed his hat and went out.

"Dropped dead—without a mark on her—now this is getting screwy—her having her skull broken and her neck twisted—being in a car wreck and in the river besides—"

Talking to himself, Joe Lake debated whether he should go to Mountain Park or sneak down to the docks and stow away on some ship about to sail for the other side of the Pacific.

Training and instinct prevailed. Also, there was Bumps McCarthy. Cap Murphy had not mentioned the staff photog. Joe Lake hailed a taxi and said, "Mountain Park, by the statue of the Covered Wagon."

CHAPTER III

Joe Follows-Up

THE *Senorita* Carla Dolores Hernandez was dead again.

Joe Lake shivered as he approached the shapely figure lying in the shallow pool of the rain drizzle near the Covered Wagon statue in Mountain Park. Beefy Cap Murphy glared at him.

"Is this the *Senorita* Hernandez who was to meet you, Joe?" demanded Murphy with sarcastic implication. "And did you or didn't you meet her?"

Joe Lake's breath caught. The dead woman now being examined by Doc Sammons, of the police, had a dark, placid face. She appeared to have been smiling when she had died.

But she was not the same woman whose corpse Joe and Bumps had removed only a few hours before. Her dress was not torn and it was a different garment. Her neck had not been twisted and there was no mark of violence on her smooth black hair.

"Well?" barked Cap Murphy at Joe Lake's delay.

Joe could only counter with, "You have identified her as *Senorita* Hernandez?"

"That's what cards and papers in her purse tell us, Joey," said Murphy almost softly. "I'm waiting for answers."

"I never saw the *Senorita* Hernandez," said Joe Lake, picking his way carefully. "No one but her own party has seen her face in Portland. Or so I was told by the Columbia hotel. She was here on the business of seeking ships to carry ore from her company mines in Bolivia."

"We know why she was here, Joe," snarled Cap Murphy. "If you didn't see the *senorita*, maybe you can tell us why?"

"I was told she had checked out of the Columbia hotel this afternoon," said Joe. "She had called me, saying she liked a story I wrote, and she wanted to give me a line on some new tin mines—"

Joe Lake stopped in the middle of the sentence. He realized that it might not have been *Senorita* Hernandez who had called and made an appointment. Someone had wanted him to find the "*senorita*" dead, apparently murdered for her jewels and money, believing this would insure an immediate report of the crime to the police.

Because he had wanted to keep the exclusive story for his paper, he had spoiled the whole murder plan. So *Senorita Hernandez* had to be murdered all over again, and quickly.

The killer or killers might not have wanted the story of the new mines to reach the American public. Why?

"Yes, about the tin mines, Joe?" coached Cap Murphy caustically.

"Find out who did not want the mine story written, and you'll have the murderer," said Joe Lake quietly. "What does Doc Sammons say caused the *senorita's* death?"

Doc Sammons looked up from the body with a twist to his mouth.

"Perhaps this slight scratch under the left ear is the answer," he said. "I can't tell yet. But it could be a swift poison. It could be *curare*, the deadly stuff they tip their weapons with in South America. An autopsy will tell."

Cap Murphy swore.

"If you are still suspecting me," said Joe, "I know nothing of the use of *curare* or any other similar poison. But I would say you will have to find the others of the *Senorita Hernandez's* party."

"We'll do that checking on our own," said Cap Murphy. "And you will stick around, Joe. Also, don't let us find you in our way when we pick up these Bolivians."

But Joe Lake was paying slight attention. Two reporters of the morning sheet had already phoned in their story. The murder of *Senorita Hernandez* would be a scare-head in an edition within the hour.

"I won't get in your way," said Joe Lake grimly. "I'm writing my own story and my own ticket on this killing. I'll stick around where you can find me, but don't fall over me. Have you checked on the taxis that must have taken the Hernandez party from the Columbia?"

Cap Murphy glared and muttered.

"Maybe you already know about that, too. All the hackies say that party must have left the Columbia hotel in some private car. No cabs were called."

Joe Lake had his own idea now, and it was big—bigger than anything he had ever stumbled upon. In the back of his mind he had shaped the probable motive for this murder, and for the other killing,

about which the police as yet knew nothing.

He could not now tell the police of the other murder. Nor of the mysterious disappearance of Bumps McCarthy. Not if he wanted to keep his freedom.

He had to get into this, but there was not anything into which he could put his teeth. Once again Joe Lake studied the trampled ground about the corpse as the police photogs finished their work and the body was about to be moved.

That brought him to the lines of morbidly curious faces in the two hundred or more persons attracted to the scene. There were many factory workers, among them a few Mexicans employed in a plant above the park.

Then Joe Lake noticed the dark face of a man in a long raincoat, whose hat was new and whose collar was white. This man had been lingering near enough to have heard all of the conversation with Cap Murphy.

As Joe remarked he could be found at the office and started to move away, the dark-faced man also faded back into the crowd. On the taxi ride back downtown, Joe was sure this time that a car was tailing the taxi, but keeping almost a block back on the still nearly empty streets.

"And the minute I put myself in the same position as Bumps when he phoned, it's an even bet I'll be picked up," mused Joe. "It may have to be. If this is what I think it is, the killer knows I don't dare talk about the other murdered *Senorita Hernandez*, and there is even more reason to know that Bumps McCarthy can't talk."

Joe Lake said nothing to the taximan. He saw that a sedan had parked half a block away as he entered the *Telegram* office.

THE financial page editor had not come in. But Joe Lake found what he was looking for. Because of the mysterious visit of *Senorita Hernandez*, there was a short story about her in the market column.

The story had this concluding paragraph:

Hernandez Mining Corporation was quoted at 68 today. The stock is on the active preferred list. If Senorita Hernandez announces other producing mines, as predicted, the stock may be expected to skyrocket. There has been some advance buy-

Joe could see the horror on Earful's face as she listened in.



ing on speculation, but blocks of the stock are scarce.

Joe Lake walked slowly back into the main editorial room. He was greeted by the snappish, cynical voice of one Ulysses Ward, who would have fired his best man instantly if he had called him by his first name. The graying city editor had just arrived.

"Why, there you are, Joe!" growled old Ward, looking over the glasses that always hung from the end of his bulbous nose. "I suppose you have a follow-up yarn on this Hernandez thing? I suppose you already have the solution of the crime? I suppose it is all written and ready for the first edition? I—?"

"I'm working on it," interrupted Joe. "I've just been looking up some data. If the *Oregonian* doesn't have this angle it will be a new story."

"New story, hah?" snapped old Ward. "I suppose you've been up all night thinking about it? I suppose you don't know what's in your addled brain has to be put into words, and they have to be put into type, and—"

"Mr. Ward! There's a call for you!" Joe heard Earful Devlin and he saw she was trying to avoid looking at him.

"I'm not here! I don't want any call! You know I don't talk to anyone outside of the staff before the first edition!"

Old Ward yelled across the room and turned back to Joe.

"But it's a—a woman, Mr. Ward," said Earful. "And she sounds burned up."

Joe Lake had a definite premonition of impending disaster.

"I'll give you a short follow and get busy outside," said Joe hurriedly, starting toward his desk.

"Wait, you!" Joe ignored old Ward's bark and crossed the room. Then it came.

"But Mr. Ward," Joe heard Earful say. "This isn't your wife. She says she's a Mrs. Donnelly."

"Mrs. Donnelly? I don't know any Mrs. Donnelly! Tell her to write a letter—"

"I'll take the call," put in Joe Lake quickly, trying to keep his throat from drying up.

"You'll take what?" shouted old Ward. "Gimme that call, Devlin!"

Joe Lake let his lanky body slump into his desk chair. He wanted to leave at once, but he was rooted to the spot by what Mrs. Donnelly might have found out. Perhaps Bumps had been seen removing the corpse of the first murdered *Senorita Hernandez*.

If that was so, he might have to throw everything into the hands of the police to try and rescue Bumps, if Bumps was still alive enough to be saved!

"Yeah—what?" That was old Ward snorting.

Earful's bright blue eyes were widening again. She was staring at Joe Lake.

Old Ward yelled louder.

"Say that again! You're Mrs. Donnelly? My muddy feet? On your best bedspread? What in the name of heaven are you talking about? What? Who was drunk? Who? In Bumps McCarthy's room?"

Joe eased cautiously from his chair. Old Ward's shouting had become hoarser. Every other word was profane.

"Sue me? You old fool! I ain't been out with—you said Joe Lake, didn't you? Hold the wire, Mrs. Donnelly—just hold the wire for one little minute—just one little minute—!"

Old Ward barged to his feet with terrifying effect. He waddled toward Joe Lake's desk, his glasses dancing on the end of his bulbous nose.

Earful Devlin was scared. She meant to be helpful. Perhaps she thought she could save Joe Lake.

"Oh, Mr. Ward!" called out Earful. "That Mrs. Donnelly is mistaken. There was—I mean it couldn't have been you that put his muddy feet on the bed in Bumps McCarthy's room—I mean at Mrs. Donnelly's. It was the dead woman—so Joe Lake wouldn't have told Mrs. Donnelly it was you—"

Old Ward stopped in mid-waddle, turn-

ing toward the helpful switchboard girl.

Joe Lake chose what might be the lesser of two evils. Down in the block he judged a sedan would still be parked. A killer or the emissary of a killer probably was waiting there.

Up here was old Ward. There was nothing Joe Lake could say in explanation without telling it all. And old Ward would think only of scooping the pants off the *Morning Oregonian*, even if it sent two members of his staff to jail for life.

If Joe told any of it, he would have to write the whole yarn from the beginning. That would mean dooming Bumps McCarthy—if he were still alive.

"And by all that's holy, it might mean another murder," muttered Joe Lake, heedless of old Ward's shouted oaths to stop. "This time it might be the killing of *Senorita Hernandez* again, and I mean the *real Senorita Hernandez*. Up to now I'm the only bait that could possibly save Bumps, perhaps the *senorita* also, and upset the slickest big-time grab for millions this old town has ever seen."

If I can only stay alive to do it, thought Joe Lake.

CHAPTER IV

Joe Joins The Killers

AS he hit the head of the stairs to the street, Joe Lake saw with some relief that he had been given a brief respite. Earful Devlin had obligingly fainted again.

Old Ward was raging, waving one way to have Joe Lake stopped, and the other to have Earful Devlin revived.

Joe's yen for the cheerful little Earful had not lessened. But he had an inward resolve to let heaven wait until such time as he could pin back her lovely, listening ears.

Then as he took the stairs three at a time, he was aware that he was unarmed, having left his thirty-eight in possession of the scared Bumps McCarthy. Not that it would do him any good now, he thought drearily, as he hit the gray, rainy street in front of the office. Anyhow there was but the one dark-skinned man tailing him. Joe felt fully competent at this moment to choke the truth out of the Bolivian with his bare hands.

Yes. That is what he would do. Put himself in position to be picked up, then show this guy a thing or two he hadn't known about a hardboiled police reporter!

None of the staff had made a move to follow him as yet. That fainting habit of Earful Devlin had given him a chance. The morning street was almost deserted. Up on a distant corner a newsie was yelling, "Read all about it! Woman murdered in Mountain Park!"

The Oregonian was out with the story of *Senorita Hernandez*.

Joe Lake peered both ways. He swore with disappointment. He did not see the black sedan he had hoped would still be parked and waiting.

Still none of the *Telegram's* staff had appeared in pursuit of him. Joe Lake grinned as he thought of old Ward sweating over the revival of Earful Devlin, until which time he would be balked in digging further information on the remarkable information she had started to spill.

Joe, believing now that the car that had tailed him was gone, had to think out some other plan. How could he pick up the trail of the Hernandez party, unless some member of that party put the finger on him?

In a very few minutes the *Telegram* staff would be getting as much of the Bumps McCarthy end of the dead woman who had been at the Mrs. Donnelly domicile, as Earful Devlin remembered having heard on the phone. That meant old Ward would rush an edition to the street, and the devil take a police reporter and photographer who had stuck their chins out.

Joe was nearing the first corner, still jittery and trying to think of any possible move he might now make. The play was suddenly taken out of his hands.

The rotund figure coming to meet him was Bumps McCarthy himself. A Bumps McCarthy who seemed to appear from nowhere and to come plodding toward Joe Lake as if his legs were operated by remote control. And, had Joe only known it, they were—but the control was not so remote.

"Bumps?" Joe lengthened his stride. "Boy, howdy! Where'd you come from? Where've you been?"

Bumps' round face was working as if he had ants in his pants and all the ants were biting him.

"Joe—Joe—I gotta do it—" Bumps

pushed out the words with a thick tongue, and Joe saw that Bumps had one eye swollen shut and a bruise across one fat cheek.

"Got to do what?" Joe wondered if Bumps had been through something that had made him a little whacky.

"Gotta—take you with me—Joe! Don't try to get away—and don't make a fight—see, Joe! Over there!"

Over there the black sedan moved at crawling pace. The slim muzzle pushed a few inches through the window had a cutting bead on Bumps McCarthy. Joe Lake could just make out the bulky figure of the driver.

Joe took Bumps' arm, muttered in his ear.

"Okay, fella. C'mon. Where'd they take you?"

Bumps' reply was a husky whisper.

"Up river near falls. Cottage in Milwaukie. Joe, don't—"

"I won't," promised Joe grimly. "You keep buttoned up, no matter what I say."

The muzzle withdrew for the door to open. Two dark-complexioned gents, probably Bolivians, were in the wide rear seat. Joe got in and was squeezed beside Bumps. Two rods were substituted for the chopper and tickled their ribs as the sedan took on speed.

Joe saw that the driver was an American. Anyway, he was light-skinned outside. But he was all mugg inside, one whom Joe had seen around now and then.

The Bolivians had black murder in their dark eyes, but Joe saw they kept looking to the driver as the guy who gave out orders. Joe judged then he had the setup fairly well fixed. This mugg driving was only the tool of another man, a big shot in his own line.

It was well that I had a look at yesterday's financial page, thought Joe. *It gives me a faint idea, but one that has to work. If it doesn't, we may wind up cemented to the bottom of the Willamette.*

The sedan crossed the river, turned eastward toward the suburb of Milwaukie, a section of trim cottages along the river falls. The Bolivians had jabbered in low voices, speaking Spanish. But they could and did speak clear English when Joe made his play.

"Before you guys go too far, believing I haven't spilled anything about the first

senorita's murder and the abduction of the body, there's something you ought to know," said Joe calmly. "You bank on the redhead here and me being in a jam that has kept us buttoned up about the two killings, and you're right. But it won't stay that way."

The dark eyes of the Bolivians flicked from Joe to the driver. The mugg turned his head to look at Joe.

"Nuts!" he said. "You bozos sewed yourself in a sack when you snatched that first corpse. You couldn't sing any and keep your pants out've a cell."

"But, my fine friend, you forget that I'm first of all a reporter," drawled Joe Lake. "As an example, mister, yesterday your big boss unloaded a helluva block of Hernandez Mining shares at the top of sixty-eight. In a few hours your boss expects to have his men buy back those shares and a lot more at half the price."

The driver swore, pulling the sedan to the curb of the quiet street.

"Go on, dumbhead," he grated. "You interest me. And having wised up on that, what could a body snatcher do about it? It's sure you ain't hepped the cops to what's in your car at the dead end of a north Portland street. All you've done is put us to the trouble to repeat the bump-off of *Senorita* Hernandez, knowing you had to keep clammed up."

BUT the mugg's voice became less sure, even as he talked. Joe had counted on that.

"As I said, I'm a reporter," said Joe. "Figuring something might happen, I wrote all of the yarn I had, including the kidnaping of a corpse, just in case I might not be around when the ten o'clock edition hits the street. That yarn is spiked on my desk, marked to go. The city editor will find it when he begins to suspect I'm not coming back in time for the edition, and has a look at my spiked copy as he always does."

The look of doubt in the driver's pale, shallow eyes told Joe he had scored. One of the Bolivians addressed the other.

"I have been a journalist, Concho, and that would be what he would do, so we must make sure."

Before Concho could reply, Joe grinned and put in, "And any rub-out you have planned, as of now, means you'll ball up

the works for your boss, Thorsen, the Portland broker."

"Look, wise guy!" rasped the driver. "You've just signed your ticket by that crack! Thorsen won't—"

The driver clammed then, cursing. Joe said softly, "Then it was Thorsen's office that pushed over the blocks of Hernandez Mining stuff yesterday at sixty-eight."

The driver reached under his arm. Bumps McCarthy lost his head. He lurched forward. One Bolivian conked him with the barrel of his rod, but did not quite put him out.

"You're the dumbhead, mugg," grated Joe to the driver. "If I hadn't seen a chance to take a cut on the payoff, already being in this up to my neck, I wouldn't have walked into your trap. I came looking for your car, knowing it trailed me."

Concho was smart. He said quickly. "What is wrong with that, Lacy?" He addressed the driver. "This journalist is only human. If what he says is true, about having a story ready for the next edition, we have to take some measures to prevent it being published."

Lacy, the mugg, was not too quick on the uptake.

"Whatcha talkin' about, takin' measures? Once we get this wise guy to the cottage, we'll take out his toenails one at a time. We'll get that yarn, if there is one."

"You won't get the yarn, and it would be too late," stated Joe, restraining his rage over the way Bumps had slumped down in the seat. "Give me your word I get a healthy cut, and take me to a phone. I'll get that yarn off the next edition spike for you without anyone in the office knowing about it."

"You think we're screwy—" That was Lacy, the driver.

"That is one measure we can take," interrupted the smarter Concho. "There is a phone we used last night in the rear of the poolroom. We will take him there. Perhaps, Joe Lake, you will inform us how you intend to have the story brought to us?"

The other Bolivian's eyes were watchful, suspicious, but he nodded.

"The *Telegram* operator is my special friend," said Joe, and noticed that Bumps was conscious and gasping. "She is off shift at nine o'clock, a few minutes from

now. She will get the story and bring it here. Otherwise, that yarn will be spread and all your trouble and all the killing will net exactly nothing, for I wrote exactly what the stock sale play would be.”

“I’ll call Thorsen,” said Lacy. “If he says so, it’ll have to be that way. But he won’t.”

Bumps McCarthy was muttering. “Joe—Joe—they’ll grab Earful Devlin—they can finish what they’ve started, but I won’t be a party to—”

Joe hated to do it, but he reached over and gripped Bumps by the throat, appearing to exert more pressure than he did.

“Shut your yap, redhead!” grated Joe. “I’ve been waitin’ years for a chance to cash in on the police job! You can play along or I’ll let them count you out!”

“Buena!” exclaimed Conche, and Joe turned his eyes from the stricken look in Bumps McCarthy’s eyes.

CHAPTER V

Interview With Death

LACY, the mugg, came back from a phone at the rear of the poolroom. There were only two men cleaning up the

place at that hour. Their attitude toward Lacy and the Bolivians offered no chance for a break.

“The boss says go ahead,” growled Lacy. “An’ listen, wise guy, we’re waitin’ for you to make one wrong move. Try it and you get the works here and now.”

Joe Lake saw something that chilled him more than the mere pressure of a rod in



Joe's breath caught. The dead woman was not the one that he and Bumps had removed.

his ribs. One Bolivian had produced a small, sharp dart. The point of it was covered with a dry, gummy substance.

"This will be very quiet, *Senor* Lake," said the Bolivian. "You will speak plainly and slowly. You saw what happened to the second maid—or, as your police say, *Senorita* Hernandez."

"I saw it," admitted Joe. Don't be careless with that sticker."

"The carelessness will be all yours," smiled the Bolivian. The point of the dart gummed with carare sent a shiver down Joe's spine as it touched the back of his neck above the collar line. One prick with that little dart would be enough.

Earful Devlin replied to his dialing.

"Do not ask questions, Miss Devlin," said Joe quickly. "Just listen, sweetheart, and then do as I tell you. There is a story on the noon edition spike on my desk. I do not want old Ward to get it. You will —"

"Joe? What are you talking about? Where are you? Ward has gone crazy—"

At the girl's interruption the dart seemed to Joe to be entering the back of his neck. He cut off Earful Devlin.

"Understand this, baby—I am at number three-five-four, the Falls Boulevard, the third cottage in the block above the falls. You will take the only story on the noon edition spike and bring it to me without telling anyone—not anyone, do you understand?"

Joe realized it was fifty-fifty whether Earful Devlin would scream, faint again or be shocked into silence by his next words.

"And listen, darling. Getting that story to me will give us the money we've been waiting for to be married, understand? If you don't—or if you tell anyone—anyone—I will be killed as soon as the story is on the street."

Joe could hear Earful's rasping breath, her little exclamation of fright. He hurried his final words.

"Don't take a bus, darling. Borrow Hank's car. But don't mention to Hank where you're going. He always lets you take the heap and I won't squawk about it this time. Drive straight out here and make sure no one sees you take the story off my desk and that no one follows you. Got it, sweetheart?"

"Yeah—yeah, Joe! I'm quitting in five minutes! I'll start right away!"

Joe pulled in a long breath. Perhaps he could expect a miracle. At least Earful Devlin had not fainted. And there was no one named *Hank* connected with the *Telegram*. Here was where Joe had been compelled to depend upon Earful's long-time habit of listening in to many calls.

There was but one Hank, and its owner hated the name. Because of that loathing for his own monicker, Joe always called Captain Hank Murphy of homicide by the nickname whenever he wanted to boil the captain to profane anger.

Moreover, there was no story of any kind impaled upon a noon edition spike on Joe's desk. There was no such spike.

Joe's neck muscles were cramped as he closed the phone.

"She is starting right away," he said, looking into the pale, suspicious eyes of Lacy, the mugg.

"*Si*," affirmed Concho, the Bolivian. "I could hear the *senorita* saying that."

Joe took his first long breath as the poisoned dart was removed from touching his skin. The feel of the rod against his side was actually comforting now.

BUMPS McCarthy's one good eye was filled with reproach. The plump photog kept looking at Joe Lake as if he never had seen him before.

They were in the basement of the cottage near the Willamette falls. The steady thunder of the water would drown out all sounds from there, including shots.

Lacy, the mugg, had remained upstairs. He had said he thought Thorsen, the boss, would be along. Joe Lake had an idea that Thorsen, the boss, would be along. Joe Lake had an idea that Thorsen would remain as far away from this cottage as possible.

The two Bolivians were guarding Joe and Bumps. And the one other prisoner—one of the cutest Spanish tricks Joe had ever seen. The type with glossy black hair and contrasting blue eyes—big accusing eyes that kept turning to the Bolivian called Concho. Eyes that talked sorrowfully, that displayed anxiety and disillusionment.

"Make sure the dame don't let out a squawk!" called out Lacy from the stairway into the basement. "She's your woman, Concho! You keep her quiet!"

Joe was trying to piece this together. She was the only woman in the cottage, so far

as he could determine. At first he thought she must be the *Senorita* Carla Dolores Hernandez herself, although on the record it seemed that *Senorita* Hernandez had already been twice murdered.

But Concho said, speaking to the bound woman whose lips had been taped tightly shut, "Everything will be all right, Ramona. If you had been reasonable, we would have let you remain free. But as soon as we have all the money, we will go away. Your brother then can keep the mines, as was intended by Carla before she died."

Carla? Joe Lake's quick mind questioned. Then this prisoner, evidently enough the wife of the crooked Concho, was the sister of *Senorita* Hernandez whose death had been important to the mining stock swindle. She was Ramona—had the *senorita* Carla Hernandez indeed been murdered?

Joe had been on edge, listening. Every nerve was taut, ready for the break that must come. The moment when this cottage beside the roaring falls would have visitors, or a visitor.

For Joe felt sure that either Murphy, of homicide, would head the visitors, or that Earful Devlin had not quite understood him and might come alone as he had apparently instructed her.

Joe risked gaining some information from the Bolivians. Concho held a rod loosely in his hand. The other Bolivian sat close to Bumps McCarthy and toyed with the pointed dart that was never more than inches from Bumps' body.

"So *Senorita* Hernandez really is dead?" said Joe softly. "I am interested to know if she is the one in my car at the bottom of the river."

Ramona's blue eyes were liquid suddenly with tears. She made murmuring sounds behind the tape over her mouth. Concho smiled as if the little matter of the *Senorita* Hernandez dying was something of a joke.

"*Senor* Lake is curious?" said Concho. "Now that you have made yourself one of us, you may be informed that *Senorita* Carla Hernandez died suddenly several days ago in Mexico City, but for our own purposes we kept her death a secret. My wife, Ramona, is the only *Senorita* Hernandez remaining."

"Then it was *Senorita*—I mean, the

senora, your wife, who called to say she would give me a story of the unannounced mines?" questioned Joe. "If so, I am grateful to the *senora* for putting me in the way of being cut in on your clever scheme. But I take it that the brother inherits the mines?"

Concho evidently was greatly pleased with himself.

"That is so, *Senor* Lake," he boasted. "Also the brother has the secret of the new mines that had been known only to *Senorita* Carla and himself. But the brother is away for a month in the interior, and all of this will be finished before he can learn of the *Senorita* Carla's death, supposedly here in your city of Portland."

"Good grief, Joe!" blurted out Bumps. "I don't like to think I ever knew you! Earful Devlin will soon be here! You think you'll be cut in on this blood money, but they'll—"

"Shut up, Bumps!" snapped Joe. "If you had any sense you would take a reasonable amount and we'd call it a day! This way the smart cops will be a long time finding out about that body in the river, if they ever do!"

Bumps groaned. Concho showed his white teeth.

"You are indeed, wise, *Senor* Lake," he said slowly. "Your *compadre* is the fool. Should we do with him as we had to do with the two maids on which we placed the identification of *Senorita* Carla?"

From the stairway came Lacy's hard voice.

"Keep on your toes down there! A car's turning the corner with a girl driving! She's looking at the house numbers!"

JOE LAKE looked into Bumps' burning, accusing eyes. He glanced at the fear-filled face of Ramona whose contempt for him appeared to almost override her terror over the murders that had been, and of what she must know still lay ahead.

Yet Joe Lake had to gamble, take the long chance. He feared now that Earful Devlin had not understood. Lacy had said a car was in the street, driven by a lone girl.

Joe Lake went all the way. He laughed shortly, as if he imagined she had become one of the plotting killers. One of those who would share in the stock swindle, the beating down of the mining shares and

bringing them up again when it became known that a brother of *Senorita Hernandez* had the secret of the new, enormously rich mines.

"Sure, Concho," said Joe lightly. "I never trusted this redhead, and you can't. Get it over with before my girl friend comes in with my story. I wouldn't want her to see him."

"Joe? In the name of—" Bumps' shocked voice was something that cut deep.

Then Concho laughed softly and raised his hand to the other Bolivian, the hand holding the rod that had been carelessly centered on Joe Lake.

"Drop, Bumps! Down! Roll!"

Joe Lake's warning yell ripped from his teeth even as he dived from his toes, projecting his lanky body from his chair and shooting forward in a perfect knee-high tackle.

His shout and movement caught Concho off guard. Bumps had instinctively tried to duck the poisoned dart in the hand of the other Bolivian. Bumps and the Bolivian rolled to the floor together at the instant Joe hit Concho's knees.

Concho screamed out a *diablo*, snapping his rod back and down. Its explosion seemed to Joe Lake to have torn out the back of his skull and furrowed a path down his bent spine. But his fist connected with Concho's shrinking stomach and his hard head went up to smash into Concho's dark face.

Concho fell backward, but the other Bolivian, spilling Spanish oaths, had given Bumps some respite by whirling toward Joe Lake with his poisoned dart. Joe saw the killer coming, saw his descending hand aiming death at his throat.

Joe's long finger trapped the wrist of the hand holding the dart and he landed on the floor with the Bolivian pounding at his face. He clung desperately to his one hold, hearing the bones of the wrist crack.

Concho was up now, groping for the rod that had fallen from his hand. From the stairs rasped the hard voice of Lacy.

"Freeze! Alla yuh! So that's it! An' the boss said to make it clean!"

Joe Lake was on his knees, the poisoned dart transferred to his hand. He had no other weapon. He was spared by Concho when the Bolivian killer turned to face

the slim snout of the chopper Lacy was holding upon the basement.

And Lacy was not wasting time. The machine gun jetted blue, smoky fire and rattled death downward. Concho turned on watery legs to sit down. The other Bolivian was rolling, but he just straightened out and Joe Lake hurled himself across Bumps McCarthy and toward the flaming weapon in Lacy's hand.

It was no good. Joe Lake saw that Lacy's mocking smile was all killing lust. A lust that held Lacy's trigger finger, as he lowered the chopper muzzle to Joe's face, waiting until he was close enough to blast off his head.

The chopper flamed, or Joe Lake thought it did. The stairway of the cottage was filled with the reverberation of the explosions. Joe could not understand why Lacy spread out his hands and performed a flying eagle dive that hurled his weight upon him.

Then Joe's face smashed into the cement floor. He had a vague glimpse of *Senorita Ramona* still bound to the chair. He had an idea that Bumps McCarthy was shouting, but that was all mixed up with the roar of the river falls that blacked out his senses.

"WE had half a dozen men crossing lots, and we were hidden in the car driven by Miss Devlin," said Captain Hank Murphy. "She is one smart girl, too smart for a dumb, lawless news-snoop. You know, Lake, you're gonna be in jail so long they'll throw the key away."

Joe Lake tried to shake the fogged ache out of his head. He saw that Bumps McCarthy was beginning to smile again with what face he had clear of bruises.

"Yeah, I know," stated Joe Lake resignedly, glancing at old Ulysses Ward, the city editor, who had accompanied the cops in person. "What was Hernandez Mining quoted when the market opened in New York this morning?"

"That's another thing—" Cap Murphy began.

"Hernandez Mining opened at thirty, Joe, but you haven't said who is behind this bloody stock manipulation," old Ward broke in, his shrewd eyes narrowed. "We've tried to get it out of this *Senora Ramona*, but she is suffering with shock and can't talk. We have to know right

away—for the extra edition, Joe.”

“So Bumps and I are gonna be in jail a long time,” sighed Joe, disregarding old Ward’s question. “That makes it too bad. Identification of the real brains instigating these murders will have to wait.”

“Joe!” snapped old Ward. “They can tie you up with being an accessory after the fact in that first murder of the maid whose body you abducted. I could use the influence of the *Telegram*, but seeing you are stubborn about telling everything, I’ll have to wash our hands of it all.”

Joe Lake appeared to be studying the ceiling of the cottage living room.

“As soon as the man behind all of this gets the news of what has happened to Lacy and the Bolivians, he will give orders to buy up all possible Hernandez Mining at thirty,” said Joe softly. “Then when the news comes out of the brother who knows all about the rich, new tin mines the stock will likely go away up past its original sixty-eight. It may hit a hundred, quite a killing.”

“Look, Joe Lake,” thundered Captain Murphy. “We can make it easier for you an’ Bumps. We might even make so it looks as if you was in on this with the police.”

Joe grinned. “I’d have told you, anyway,” he said. “Grab Thorsen, the broker. *Senora Ramona* was not in on the killing of the maids. She was under her husband’s influence.”

“Yeah—yeah!” exclaimed old Ward, a gleam in his eyes. “It’s a great yarn—great! I’ll get on the phone and order the extra!”

“Just a minute,” commanded Captain Murphy. “You’ll hold up the extra until

we have Thorsen. I’ll phone right away.”

Old Ward and Murphy glared at each other.

“Look,” suggested Joe Lake. “There’s only one phone. Why don’t you both use it together?”

Old Ward and Cap Murphy muttered, and Murphy’s face turned redder than normal.

“Okay,” assented old Ward. “Come on, Murphy.”

Joe Lake winked at Earful Devlin who had been bathing his head.

The voice of old Ward floated in from the phone in the cottage hallway.

“Yeah, put through my order to buy all the Hernandez Mining stock to be had at thirty—yeah—keep buying up to forty—and make a notation that any profit or loss is to be split fifty-fifty between Captain Hank Murphy and me—yeah—I’m holding up an extra edition until I hear from you—when that edition hits the street, Hernandez Mining will probably climb right back to sixty-eight where it closed last night, maybe to a hundred—”

Joe Lake snuggled one long arm around the cuddlesome Earful Devlin.

“There goes the body-snatching case against Bumps an’ me,” grinned Joe. “An’ when I demand a third of what those two evaders of the law make out of that stock rise, Earful, I think we’ll have enough to maybe buy us one of these cottages up here by the falls.”

Earful Devlin’s wide, blue eyes grew wider, staring at Joe.

“But Joe,” she murmured sweetly. “It doesn’t seem quite right for us to do that.”

“Darling, there’s nothing quite right in this hardboiled world,” said Joe Lake.

**FOR THE READER WITH
DISCRIMINATING TASTE
THE SPEED MAGAZINES
ARE THE TOPS!**

Dialogue of Doom

Script writer Slim Martin could not deny that it was his voice that was speaking terrible threats on that recording of Actor Carleton's murder. His girl still had faith in Slim, but her desperate move to help seemed only to have brought about his execution at shadowy hands swifter than those of Justice. . . .

"THIS had to happen sooner or later! You've worked and schemed to destroy me and it has come to the moment for which I've waited, of which I have dreamed: you have trapped yourself and it's inevitable that one of us must die! . . . Ah! Your face is a picture of

fear and your eyes reflect your terror—of death!"

The finality of long delayed vengeance was in the terrible voice, with the cynical certainty of the speaker that it was not he who was to die. The one to whom the speech was addressed held to a silence that

As Steve telephoned the police, Clovis suddenly noticed the paper in the dead man's hand.



BY MAX NEILSON

might have been inspired by fright, by the awe of death itself.

"Yes—I will begin to live when you are dead—my pleasure from killing you will stay with me for a long lifetime. . . ."

The inflection given the words were such as might be heard over the radio during the evening hour for kiddies. This, indeed, was a voice that could bring cold chills to a couple of million youngsters and cause fathers who were reading the evening newspapers to curse the day that murderous atrocities had replaced the radio time that had once been given to comics.

"I should kill you quickly!" went on the dramatic speech of Jan Carleton, as he paused to survey his facial expression and his tall figure in one of the several mirrors of Script Studio B. "In thousands of homes my voice is being heard—the voice of The Hawk—ha!"

Jan Carleton swore under his breath, with words scarcely meant for the ears of his juvenile listeners. He couldn't decide how he should make himself up for a movie in which he was soon to be featured.

Should he—the widely publicized Hawk of the radio—make up as Laughton, Robinson, or Beery—or become a Cooper, Gable, or Wayne? Jan Carleton fancied himself capable of portraying any of these, with perhaps something of a Barrymore smoothness for good measure.

Jan Carleton resumed his pacing of the long room. His self-rehearsal underwent an abrupt change, as if he had suddenly been confronted by an unexpected intruder.

"So? It's you! I've been wanting to talk to you about the break you've wanted to make—and about your attentions to—we'll mention no names—but this is a showdown—"

The long room where Jan Carleton had been pacing was flanked by two other smaller rooms, both in darkness. The star radio actor halted abruptly, as if he had just become aware of a change in his lines—the speech of the radio Hawk.

"Now that's damned funny," muttered Jan Carleton, turning to take in all of



the room in which he had been rehearsing. "What the devil—"

The actor hadn't noticed that as he turned, his long, well-shouldered back was but a few feet from the dark doorway of one of the other studio rooms. Probably he never did notice it.

A knife with an eight-inch blade was driven into his back with such force as to slide it between his ribs and into his heart. Jan Carleton could not then have been aware that knuckled fists driven by hate hammered at his face, flattening his classical nose and smashing out several of his even white teeth in those few brief seconds when he was folding at the knees,

Illustrations by Paul H. H. Stone

falling forward with a rasping groan that could not have been heard outside the corridor door of Studio B.

Strangely, for no apparent reason except the lust to vent his inexplicable anger upon the man already dead, the fast-moving killer ripped Jan Carleton's shirt collar loose.

In startling contrast to the murderous rage with which he had so ruthlessly struck down Jan Carleton, the killer calmly but quickly used a strip of the dead man's own shirt to carefully wipe off any fingerprints that might have been on the knife shaft.

THE room from which the cold-blooded murderer had emerged to strike down Jan Carleton was still darkened. It was one of the three rooms of Script Studio B, situated on the tenth floor of a building two blocks south of Sid Grauman's famous Chinese Theater.

The killer heard the slight grating of a key in the lock. The murderer became a shifting shadow, fading back into the darkness from which he had come.

Light from the outside corridor showed through as the new arrival pushed the door open and apparently halted, one hand groping for the inside light switch. His hand failed to reach the button.

A heavy ashtray struck the newcomer over one ear. He was hit the second time from a direction that knocked him away from the door and it was closed quickly.

Staggering, striking out with his fists at the other figure in the darkness, the surprised newcomer swung around to where he could see the body of Jan Carleton, the actor, lying beyond the doorway of the lighted rehearsal room.

"What the hell an' all—" was clipping from the newcomer's set teeth when his mouth was smashed and his words stopped. A harder blow on the skull dropped him limply to the floor. In all it had been less than five minutes from the time that Jim Carleton had died until another younger and lighter man was lying close beside him. During this time there had been a slight whirring sound that would have passed unnoticed by any person not especially listening for it.

Again a corridor door opened, cautiously this time. Then there remained only the very dead Actor Carleton and the sense-

less man beside him inside the luxuriously fitted Script Studio B.

EIGHT o'clock is practically the middle of the working day among Hollywood script writers. Clovis Manton walked lightly along the tenth floor corridor. She was unhurried, being at least ten minutes early for the script transcribing job she had promised Slim Martin she would do this evening.

She noticed there was no light in either of the small script rooms, both of which had doors opening on the corridor. But there was a crack of illumination under the door of the longer rehearsal room. Clovis hummed to herself as she used her own private key on the rehearsal room door. She always felt light of heart when she knew she was to spend an hour or two with the always smiling Slim Martin.

Clovis herself was a contradiction of the widely spread report that gentlemen preferred blondes. She was dark and small and vivacious. She was assembled properly as would have been any one of ten thousand brunettes who might have been used to glorify some of the movie sets.

She pushed her own key into the lock and swung open the door of the rehearsal room. Her white teeth clenched into the back of her hand.

She stood just inside the door for a long half minute, virtually frozen with terror. Jan Carleton, the radio voice of *The Hawk*, now a candidate for a highly romantic mystery movie, would come under the lens of but one type of camera. The camera would be carried by the Homicide detail.

"No—! Oh, no!" gasped Clovis. "Not Slim! It couldn't be!"

She walked on stiff legs toward what she then believed to be two dead men. Slim Martin lay in such position that it seemed he must have been the killer who had plunged a cheap souvenir knife deep into the back of Actor Carleton.

Clovis saw at a glance that Slim's hands were bloody. Her breath caught.

Steps were coming along the corridor outside. Clovis Manton's next act might have been inspired by purest reflex action—but behind it lay the fact that she was to have married Slim Martin within the month. The clumping steps outside sounded closer to the door.

Clovis snatched her cobwebby handkerchief from a pin at her breast, knelt down and rubbed furiously at the handle of the knife in Carleton's back although the very touch of it caused snowflakes to fall down the back of her neck. She saw there was blood on the knife handle and there was blood on Slim Martin's hands.

Clovis was in despair when she discovered the blood had so dried that her handkerchief would not erase it. It was then she became conscious that Slim Martin was breathing with the irregular sounds of a man who might have been choked.

She thrust the small handkerchief into the bosom of her blouse and straightened just as she heard a door opening.

A light flicked on in the script room and flooded the little scene. The heavy voice of Steve Sanders—who, with his scrip-writing team-mate Slim Martin, had been largely responsible for Actor Carleton's success—made a gulping sound before he spoke.

"Gaw-a-mighty, it's Carleton and Slim!" exclaimed the other script writer. "What happened, Clovis?"

The girl only found whispered speech. "I don't know, Steve. I just came in."

She was hoping desperately that the dried blood on the knife handle would not retain Slim Martin's fingerprints. Steve Sanders walked over and his voice shook.

"There goes everything," he said flatly. "The best pal a guy ever had and our chance to hit the big time. What in the devil could have caused it, Clovis?"

The girl's sweetly curved mouth was white. She knew one thing could have caused it. She was to have been married to Slim Martin. Jan Carleton took his women where he found them and Clovis Manton was one of those he had tried but failed to take.

Slim Martin had been good-natured up to a certain point. Thereafter he had become intensely jealous of the actor and had openly threatened to "get the mug" if he didn't stay away from Clovis.

"Looking at the defunct Jan Carleton now, Clovis failed to consider calmly that thousands of men have threatened others with the same general fate for the benefit of their girl friends.

The dark eyes of Clovis were widely spaced and took in most details. Steve Sanders had gone to the phone near the door when the girl noticed the piece of torn

paper clutched in the dead hand of Jan Carleton.

Clovis shuddered but loosened the dead man's fingers. She had only seconds to note this was a torn bit of script with but a few words, the opening of an actor's lines upon it.

These registered upon the girl's mind because she was highly trained in script work. Incomplete as they were the words made little sense.

*This had to happen—
to destroy me and—
of which I have dreamed—
evitable that one of us must die—*

The girl judged instantly this must be a part of the finale of the next radio show of The Hawk. But the remainder of the script had evidently been torn hurriedly from the dead man's hand. Why?

Steve was calling the police.

Another man clumped hastily into the rehearsal room. Howard Leroy appeared to be a mousey man even to his wisp of a mustache that resembled a rodent's whiskers. But he had been the understudy to Jan Carleton on the radio because his resonant, powerful voice was in sharp contradiction to his physical appearance.

Clovis and Steve Sanders confronted Leroy. The understudy tried to cover his tiny mustache with his lower lip and his whole body was shaking. His voice was still deep but his words jumped.

"Tell me—Steve! Clovis! This in the new show? Trying for realism, huh? That can't be—merciful powers! It is blood! Jan! Jan Carleton! Come out of it! Why'n't you tell me—?"

The mousey Leroy moved as if to take the knife from Carleton's back, but Steve Sanders interposed his bulky body and swept Leroy back with an easy movement of one powerful arm.

"You dumb fool!" grated Steve. "Don't you know murder when you see it?"

"M-m-murder?" Howard Leroy leaned against the wall. His thin legs appeared about to collapse. Steve Sanders' mouth was grim, making his broad face seem all the heavier.

"It might be best if you'd wait in the other room, Clovis," he said to the girl. "The cops will be here in minutes and they don't work with kid gloves. Wait a minute."

Slim Martin was moving, moaning.

Clovis hurried into the lavatory and returned with a soaking towel. She bathed Slim Martin's face and he showed signs of returning to the world.

The corridor door opened again. Clovis and Steve might have thought the police were arriving, except that the tall man slammed the door wide and surveyed the room with narrowed, sardonic eyes.

THIS new and unexpected arrival had but a narrow space of swarthy skin that served him as a forehead between his black hair and eyebrows. Anger accented the words issuing from his thick lips.

"A doorman said I'd find this Jan Carleton up here! I want him—an' WQB might as well be lookin' for a new Hawk! Where'd he get the idea any other guy's girl friend would fall for his slick line? Where'll I find Carleton? Talk up, an' fast!"

Steve Sanders uttered a sharp oath. Clovis stared at the man. As they were standing then, Steve, Clovis and Leroy were between the belligerent visitor and the body of Carleton.

"Well?" intoned the gorilla harshly. "I asked a question! You all know me! I'm Climber Davis, an' I always get answers!"

Seeing that Climber Davis was reputed to control most of the Skidroad's crooked games and owned the Mexican vote up in the L. A. plaza precinct, Steve Sanders did know him. He also knew that Climber was indeed one to get answers.

Perhaps Clovis Manton didn't know of it, but Jan Carleton had been seen around the nighteries with Carla Perez, a singer and muscle wiggler from South America. It had been known, too, that Carla Perez had been the current sweetie of tough Climber Davis.

Climber now had one hand across his vest, fingers convenient to a possible armpit rod. He took one stride forward and halted. Steve merely stepped to one side and gestured.

"So! By all hell!" Climber was furious. "Some other mugg tagged him first, huh? That lets me out, but I ain't happy about it—"

"Nope, it don't let you out an' you needn't be unhappy!"

Lieutenant Pearson of the Hollywood homicide detail who spoke—not one to have

Climber Davis shove him around. With him now entered the picture and print boys, the M. E., and some others of the homicide squad.

"This is where I just came in, Pearson, so I'll remove myself, seeing I don't know what lucky guy had the privilege of pushin' that shiv into Carleton's back!" exclaimed Climber Davis.

"Your mistake, Climber!" snapped Pearson. "It was me who just came in. No one leaves until we've defrosted the works and found out where the heat belongs."

Slim Martin was sitting up and Clovis was beside him. Pearson was only thirty seconds in identifying everyone and fixing his fish-colored eyes upon Slim Martin. The homicide man knew them all—for Hollywood, the suburb of L. A., was his own small town, and its weird deaths kept him supplied with continuous headaches.

"Looks like you an' Carleton mauled each other plenty, before you laid him out and then lost your head an' used that cheap shiv!" stated Pearson, probing at Slim Martin. "With that dried blood, it'll show. Print the knife boys, and Martin's fingers."

"No—no, lieutenant!" protested Clovis. "Slim wouldn't have killed anyone—he wasn't the kind—he hadn't any reason to do it—"

Pearson permitted his cold eyes to rove up from the girl's trim ankles over the curves to her vivid face.

"Huh!" grunted Pearson. "You wouldn't be one this Casanova Carleton would overlook, and you'd be plenty of reason."

"That's jumpin' at an easy out, copper," put in Steve Sanders. "Guess it looks bad for Martin, but when we found them Martin had been conked cold. That makes it like someone else happened in and grabbed a chance to kill Carleton and put the rap on Martin."

Pearson said, "That sort of makes sense, Sanders."

Pearson was a copper with a brain. Five minutes later he had tagged all of those present.

Howard Leroy, understudy, would move into a top radio spot, at least temporarily, with the death of Carleton. Leroy claimed he admired the dead actor and was his friend. He was the only one there to make such a claim.

Steve Sanders? He stated without reserve that he hated Carleton, or had, and that he had been trying to break a five-year contract that had two years to run. Sanders said he could have doubled his script writing pay with the end of the war, but Jan Carleton had been stubborn.

Climber Davis? The underworld club owner freely admitted he had come there to give Carleton the beating of his life

if he didn't stay away from the Perez lovely with the wiggly figure.

Clovis Manton had discovered the body. Under Pearson's probing and skillful questions she had revealed that Carleton had made a play for her, and that Slim Martin had been burned up over it.

Slim Martin? It might not have seemed to any other homicide man that he had to look farther. Jealousy of Clovis Manton was added to the statement that Slim Martin also was being held to a low-price contract against his will. And—

"Okay, boys?" said Pearson, rubbing his blunt chin. "How do the prints stack up?"

"Not so good," admitted a print man. "That knife handle was marked with fin-

The mobster burned at Carleton's attentions to his girl.



gers, but the dried blood had been given a rubbing that makes it tough to pick them out."

PEARSON'S voice had a steel edge as he turned to Clovis Manton.

"You were first here, Miss Manton," said Pearson dryly. "I can't hold it against you too much, but I'll have a look at the hanky you've tucked into your blouse. It's great to have a girl who'll go all the way out for you, but the law comes first."

Clovis was trembling as Pearson held the once dainty handkerchief which showed where it had been soiled by scrubbing at dried blood on the knife handle.

"Yes, I did that!" the girl cried out. "I'd do it again! But it's because I know Slim Martin wouldn't kill anyone! He—"

"It was quite a scrap," interrupted Pearson. "How about it, Martin? Just how did it happen? Does that knife belong to you? How come you passed out after you stabbed Carleton?"

"The knife's mine," admitted Martin, his forehead furrowed. "I tell you I walked into that dark side room and I was knocked down. I don't know what happened then."

"It's a screwy setup," muttered Pearson. "But it looks like you're it, unless there's some way to show that you were framed."

Steve Sanders spoke up suddenly.

"Listen, copper, I've got an idea. Carleton never rehearsed without turning on the dictagraph in the other room, so he could listen afterward and find out how he was doing. The rehearsal room has mikes all over it, connecting with the recording machine."

Clovis Manton grew faint. If the dictagraph had been recording voices and sounds, shutting off automatically at the end of the wax record, then Slim Martin wouldn't have a chance, if he had really killed Jan Carleton in a burst of anger following what appeared to be a brutal fight.

Pearson and the others from Homicide trailed into the small script room off the rehearsal hall.

"First dam' time I've ever run into this one," grunted Pearson. "They've knocked them off in a lot of queer ways in Hollywood but I never before run on

to a murder victim who may have left a spoken record of his killing."

Clovis realized that her shapely legs were trembling as she walked beside Pearson into the smaller room and watched Steve Sanders tinker with the recording machine. Clovis had transcribed hundreds of thousands of words in radio script from that same machine.

She knew that fine wires connected with concealed mikes in every part of the rehearsal room. That was mostly so that the ego of a radio voice could have the satisfaction of hearing himself talk.

Sanders had a broad, honest-appearing face. There seemed to be suffering and doubt in his eyes, as if he regretted what might become convicting evidence that his fellow script writer was ticketed for the gas chamber.

In her own way, Clovis was as keen-witted as the head of the homicide squad. She appreciated Pearson's sympathy and his passing up the matter of her having blurred fingerprints on a knife in such a manner as to make her guilty of removing what might be murder evidence. Clovis guessed that even a tough copper could be human underneath.

Steve Sanders lifted the recording needle and set it at the beginning. There was only the faintest sound of the little motor, then words appeared to rain into the room.

All the time, Clovis had fingers gripped upon a lower fold of her blouse. Pearson had retrieved the incriminating handkerchief. But Clovis still had the corner of what had been the script held by the dead Jan Carleton. That in itself was the loyal girl evidence that Slim Martin was not the killer. It would be incredible to imagine that Martin had seized that script, concealed it, then laid himself out apparently cold after a vicious battle. . . . Now the words began to come. Clovis believed that she was as cold outwardly as she would ever be after she was dead.

The first words were unmistakably in the voice of Slim Martin, clear and young.

"I've told you that some day you would go too far and that your so-called magnetic influence would fail. Human or otherwise, retribution comes to every living thing on earth—

"I'd rather die and take you with me than live and know that your foul

person still has the power to destroy, to ruin and to wreck other lives—

“That brings us to the time and, win or lose, you will never leave this place alive—”

Steve Sanders muttered an oath. Even Pearson, the homicide man, stood with clenched hands. Slim Martin’s lean, young face was the color of clay. He was staring at the machine and he appeared to be moving his lips in an effort to speak but no words came.

The merciless recording went on—

“You expected it then. And why shouldn’t you? I’m only one of many and to me it’s a small sacrifice to die if I can only make sure first that I am taking you with me—”

“Stop it! Stop it!” cried out Clovis. “There is something wrong. Slim wouldn’t—”

Pearson locked one arm around the girl’s shoulders and clamped a hard hand over her mouth but he spoke gently.

“Quiet, Miss Manton,” he said. “I’m only a cop but it is better to live with and grieve over the truth than to blind yourself to something that would make all of your life a future hell.”

The record went on. This time it was the unctuous voice of the late Jan Carleton.

“What a fool you are! How often do you suppose I’ve listened to that same futile threat? No matter what you have in mind, it will never work out—”

Again the voice of Slim Martin cracked out with angry emphasis and a note of mockery.

“You’ve beaten everything but death—”

The voice of Slim Martin almost merged with that of Jan Carleton.

“So? I’ve been wanting to talk to you about the break you wanted to make—”

“And about your attentions to—we will mention no names—This is a showdown—!”

Never could there have been a deeper or more solemn silence upon such a group as was gathered around the small but terribly accusing dictagraph. No more voices came but there was a sound as if feet had suddenly shuffled on the floor. Then it was as if a blow had been struck.

One blow and then another as if knuck-

led fists were hammering at a face. There was the fearsome sound as of a body falling forward and then a rasping groan.

For a long half minute a hush held over the little script room. Pearson, the homicide man, had dropped his arm from the shoulders of Clovis Manton. There was no mercy in Pearson’s face.

“That ties it up, boys!” he said. “Put them on Martin. Sorry, Miss Manton—”

Pearson turned. Clovis Manton was not standing where she had been. The bruised and battered Slim Martin seemed to bring his fist all the way up from the level of his knee. He caught the copper guarding him squarely on the point of the chin.

The script room door leading to the corridor was directly behind him. It opened and closed in the space of time a man would take to breathe. But two figures had slipped through the space.

Pearson shouted a profane command, hurling himself at the door. He tore it open but he was delayed for a space of seconds by the onrush of nearly everyone in the room toward that same door. When Pearson had heeled a couple of shins and jammed himself through the door he had finally opened, Clovis Manton was nowhere to be seen in the brightly-lighted outside corridor. Slim Martin had also disappeared.

“THIS ties me up, but good!” exclaimed Slim Martin, as Clovis Manton kept a tight grip on his sleeve. “I don’t know what kind of a screwy hunch you’re following, Clovis, but this makes me as guilty as a guy who tosses a bomb into a parade crowd.”

“Keep quiet, Slim,” admonished the girl, “and hurry.”

They crossed Wilshire Boulevard going northward toward the slant of the Glendale hills.

“It’s crazy,” said Slim Martin. “When Pearson catches up with me, it will be all over but putting the little cyanide crystals in the pail of water in the gas chamber. Why are we heading this way?”

“Because,” stated Clovis firmly, “a rehearsal speech of Jan Carleton was not on that record we heard. I’ve scraps of it that he was holding after the script was torn from his hand. Slim, when did you spill anything like what that record showed up?”

“I don’t exactly know,” stated Slim.

"It sounds like part of a script Steve Sanders and I were rehearsing only last week. It's always recorded so we can listen back and take the bugs out of it."

"I thought so," said the girl grimly. "Is there a back stairway up the Socona Apartment building to the third floor?"

"Yeah," gritted Slim. "But what good is that doing us? Come to think of it, Howard Leroy, the understudy, has a suite up there, and—by Holy, Climber Davis has the whole front of that floor for Carla Perez! Come on, Clovis! If I'm going to be a fugitive, I should be lamming out of L. A."

The girl's grip tightened on his arm.

"You know about Leroy and the Perez shaker because you've been up there, Slim?"

"Why, yes," admitted Slim. "That's where Steve and I try out most of our scripts. Steve has an apartment in the back."

"You have a key?" asked Clovis breathlessly.

"Sure. How would you suppose I'd get in when Steve wasn't there?"

"That Lieutenant Pearson is as smart as half a dozen whips," stated Clovis. "But the last place he will be looking for you, will be in Steve's apartment."

"I still don't get it," protested Slim.

They let themselves into darkened rooms. There was one large room, a bedroom and a bath. A big desk with a recording machine was set in the middle of the large room. Slim caught his breath as Clovis deliberately switched on the light.

"Dig into that trash basket, Slim. I'm taking the desk."

Slim lifted his head from the trash basket, muttering. He spilled handfuls of broken wax records back into the basket.

"What the hell?" he exclaimed. "I don't get it."

"But I've got it," intoned the girl, sorting three or four typewritten sheets in her hands and taking a torn scrap of script from the bosom of her blouse. "Funny, Slim, Jan Carleton never missed a trick on listening to his own rehearsals but I've proof here that all of his spoken rehearsal tonight was not on the record that was played for the police and us."

"What do you mean?"

Slim stared at the girl as she stepped over to the recording machine beside Steve

Sanders' desk, clicking the switch of its motor.

"Listen."

Slim heard his own voice and then he spoke abruptly: "Why, that's part of a script Steve and I were going over a week ago. I'm beginning to see the light why I was knocked out when I walked in on Jan Carleton tonight. The record that was played has been made up of parts of my voice and just such speech from Jan Carleton as would fit in with—"

They had become so absorbed in the incriminating speech coming from Steve's own recording machine, that they had not noticed the slow opening of the door, the swift movement of a skulking figure and then—the crashing descent of a weapon upon the back of Clovis Manton's head. The girl fell across the desk, sinking into a sleeping blackness.

Slim whirled but he was not in time. A short, punching fist snapped his head back and teetered him on his heels. It was followed by the sideswiping blow of an automatic's metal barrel. Slim was fading out, not quite unconscious but incapable of fighting back.

While he was still aware of what was happening, Slim played it smart. He closed his eyes and he was apparently inert as he was dragged over beside the gas heater which was unlighted. Then he heard a guttural, gloating laugh.

There was the hissing of the natural gas which supplied Hollywood. It had an odor, but this was artificial, brought about by many tragedies resulting from natural gas having no odor of its own.

Slim forced himself to lie still. The gas hissed out, but no light was struck.

"That'll do it," spoke a harsh voice. "I guess, Slim, you had an idea that Jan Carleton was the only other man in love with Clovis. You're pretty dumb, Slim."

A chunky figure was retreating. As through a red haze Slim Martin saw the broad, grinning face of Steve Sanders. Slim tried to hold his breath, to resist breathing in the gas. Then he got his nose close to the floor.

In this position Slim knew he could breathe for some time, as the gas was lighter than air and would fill the upper space of the room first.

"The pilot light in the kitchen won't leave much of a killer fleeing the police,

and it will look like suicide," said Steve Sanders viciously. "I'm taking Clovis with me. She'll never know what really happened. Then she'll either play ball with me or her pretty mouth will be closed for keeps."

Through slitted eyes Slim saw Steve's powerful arms lift the slight figure of the girl. Still Slim waited. Steve still clutched his gun in one hand and Slim was in poor position for an attack.

Steve was walking toward the outer doorway carrying the girl. The room was fast filling with the deadly, explosive gas.

A voice spoke from the suddenly opening door.

"This is the first time I've ever liked being a copper. But when I shoot to kill, Sanders, it is a moment of glory I'll keep in my dreams."

LIEUTENANT Pearson, of homicide, tall and implacable, stood there, his .38 already drawn. For seconds it looked like a standoff. Steve had the girl's body partly shielding him and his own gun was aimed.

"Unless you want to blow all of us to the devil, you'll give an order for me to walk out of here with Clovis Manton," spoke the cold voice of Steve. "We could shoot it out. But we won't. Smell that gas, copper. One flash of powder and we'll go up."

Pearson swore bitterly. No doubt he would have chanced shooting, but there was the girl. The homicide cop knew nothing of the truth, but he did know that Steve Sanders held all the cards.

Pearson moved as if to step to one side. Then he hurled his gun at Steve's head and jumped forward. Slim Martin chilled when the flying gun missed its mark and glanced off of Clovis Manton's knotted hair.

But Pearson was one cop who accepted the odds as they were. He dived at Steve's knees. That desperate move of the homicide man caused Steve to bend and try a kick which slammed into Pearson's face.

Slim Martin's jump was something not inspired by conscious thought. Perhaps

his hate for his double-crossing script pal was electrical in its force.

Pearson said; "For crime's sake don't kill him—"

And it was Pearson who loosened Slim Martin's hands from the throat of Steve Sanders after Steve's face had turned purple.

Clovis Manton placed the torn corner of script in Pearson's hand.

"These are the beginning of lines that would have been on the record we heard at the studio if we had really been hearing Jan Carleton's rehearsal," the girl explained. "Because they were missing, I knew the record that would have held Slim for murder was some kind of a patchwork, and that it had been operated by the killer himself, catching just a little of Carleton's speech and adding it to parts of a script that Slim had read for its effect."

Pearson shook a puzzled head.

"You see," said Clovis, "Steve deliberately wrote incriminating language into what Slim believed was to be part of a coming broadcast of *The Hawk*. We found broken records and copies of the script here in Steve's room where he had built up the murder record on his own machine."

Steve Sanders was slowly returning to consciousness. Copper's steel held his wrists.

As for Clovis, Slim Martin's arms were around her. Pearson's angular face was not in the least softened by his hard smile.

"I'm thinking of quitting this Hollywood homicide detail," stated Pearson. "I'm gonna try to land a job somewhere as a country sheriff where murders are committed sensibly with shotguns and—"

A young homicide copper came through the doorway.

"There's a call from Beverly Hills, lieutenant," announced the copper. "They've found a movie extra drowned in a star's swimming pool—only there hasn't been any water in the pool for weeks. The M. E. is already up there and he says the girl died of drowning, anyway."

"See what I mean," groaned Lieutenant Pearson.



TRAIL TO TRAGEDY

BY RAY
CUMMINGS

A Short Novel
Complete in
This Issue

Anne gripped the weapon by
the muzzle, floundering for-
ward through the snow.



Illustrations by
Clinton Balmer

DRAKE and his wife were on their honeymoon. They were ending it with a week at the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec, expecting to be back in New York in time for Christmas. Why they invited me to join them for a weekend I can't imagine. But they did, and I was selfish enough to accept. I was still somewhat below my normal health after

having tangled with some shrapnel over in Germany; I had written Drake about it and he thought I'd enjoy the little Quebec outing with him and Anne. Certainly I agreed with him.

I arrived in Quebec late Friday afternoon. Drake met me at the station down in the main Lower City. He got us a taxi and we started for the Chateau. It was an



When Bob Royce was invited by his detective pal Drake to join him and his gay young bride on their honeymoon, pleasure was soon to be mixed with murderous business!

afternoon of crisp, brilliant sunshine. The taxi, with chains on its tires, plowed along the narrow, snowy streets. Snow was piled everywhere; not the sort of snow you see in New York, but hard, brittle, mostly clean blue-white, glittering in the sunshine, snow like that is a pleasure. Our breath steamed in a white cloud. I suppose the temperature was about zero, but you'd hardly know it.

Quebec was new to me, as it was to Drake and Anne. An extraordinarily quaint, ancient-looking little city. We were on a crowded little street, hardly wide enough for three cars abreast. It was lined here with small, square red-brick houses, many of them with tiny shops at the street level. Then we emerged into a broader avenue with trolley tracks, and with picturesque sleighs mingling with the autos.

Drake was looking like a million dollars. He's a big, handsome fellow, in his late thirties, which is some ten years older than myself. You'd call him distinguished-looking with his crop of wavy black hair turning a little prematurely gray at the temples. His face is rugged, his body powerful, but there's an easy, lithe grace about him that hides it.

Usually there's a sort of quiet grimness on Drake's face. But there wasn't now. His eyes sparkled, his voice bubbled like an enthusiastic boy as he pointed out the quaint sights to me. Honeymooning with Anne certainly agreed with him.

"How's Anne?" I said. "You're certainly looking swell, Alan."

"Never had more fun. Anne's just fine, Bob. She'd have come down to meet you—" he grinned,—“but she's nuts about skating, you know. We didn't realize how late it was, and I just had time to toss my skates at her and rush for a taxi."

Anne is my cousin. I'm Bob Royce. This was my last recuperating holiday before getting my old job back with a New York importing concern. That's all you need know about me. Drake's business is more important, and a million times more glamorous.

I was reminded of that now. Drake drew a folded newspaper from his pocket and opened it. His grin faded into a lugubrious frown.

"Take a look, Bob."

IT WAS the English edition of one of the local Quebec papers. He pointed to a three-column headline on the first page. FAMOUS AMERICAN DETECTIVE HONEYMOONING AT CHATEAU

Mr. and Mrs. Alan J. Drake arrived at the Chateau Frontenac last Tuesday. . . .

The item went on to explain, in very popular vein indeed, how Drake was noted throughout the United States for his tracking of criminals. It mentioned his early years with the New York Police Department, then his connection with the FBI; and that now, with his reputation so great, he was going into business for himself—though of course the police could never get along without him and would naturally call upon him whenever there was any dire emergency.

It was certainly written in glowing terms. Glibly it mentioned how Drake had been prominent in solving many famous kidnaping cases, as though he were a sort of specialist in that line. Reading it, you got the distinct idea that whenever Drake's name was mentioned, all the criminals—and especially those who had ever had anything to do with kidnaping—would turn green and shudder and probably decide forever to give up their evil ways.

I raised my eyebrows as I read it, with Drake silently frowning at me.

"Very nice," I said.

"Hah!" was all he could retort.

"Does you proud, Alan. You sure gave them a nice interview—"

"Interview hell!" he exploded. "I haven't seen any reporters. I wouldn't—"

"Then how did they get it?"

"Anne," he said.

"Anne gave them that?"

"She sure did. She admits it. Look, that's day before yesterday's paper—she did it the day after we got here."

"Oh," I said.

"I bawled her out," Drake said. He shrugged hopelessly, and now he was grinning. "But you know how Anne is. She took it, but I wouldn't say she was exactly contrite. You know how Anne is."

"I know," I said.

Anne pretends to be one of those clinging vine types. She's small and slim, with pale, golden hair. The hair is bobbed and fluffy, so that her face is like a cameo with a waving, lacey golden rim. She likes the aspect of being helpless, scatterbrained.

But she isn't. Under the demure, pouting femininity, she has a will of her own, and she can be self-reliant when it's necessary.

I could imagine her being bawled out by Drake over this newspaper thing; looking dumb and wide-eyed with surprise at the idea she'd done something wrong; kissing him until his frown faded—and then doing the same thing over again if the idea happened to occur to her.

"But she's very mad about that last paragraph," Drake said.

"The newspaper article ended with a lot of high-flown description of the "charming, beautiful little Mrs. Drake."

"The reporter evidently tacked that on as his own idea after interviewing her," Drake said. "She's very mad about it. . . There's the Chateau, Bob."

Our taxi had laboriously climbed a couple of hilly streets and now we were in the Upper City. At Drake's gesture, I saw the famous hotel looming above a little line of nearby rooftops; and then presently we were at its courtyard entrance. I'd heard, naturally, quite a lot about the Chateau Frontenac, especially with all that publicity of the Roosevelt-Churchill war conference in the Citadel here; but I must say the reality surpasses anything I had imagined. The hotel itself stands at the end, on the brink of a long, ridge-like promontory. The building, constructed in a big quadrangle with an inner courtyard, looks like an old feudal fortress-castle. We saw it now with its tower a great gray-brown blob against the purple twilight sky. Lights were winking on in its windows, and as we came closer I could see the sheen of colored lights on the snow beside it.

"I've engaged your room," Drake said. "We'll send your bags up, and then we'll go see Anne. I imagine she's still on the skating rink."

I registered, and we gave the boy my two suitcases. Then Drake led me outside. It was like stepping suddenly into a winter playground fairyland. The Dufferin Terrace—probably the most famous board-walk in the world—runs for a quarter mile or so beside the hotel. It was piled with snow, strung with colored lights, and crowded with gay, laughing merry-makers. I suppose there might have been a thousand American tourists here for this week-end.

Beyond the terrace, just over its outer rail, there was a sheer drop down the cliff to where the flat roof-tops of the tiny front Lower City were blurred in the twilight. Just a few acres of jumbled, tangled little streets down there; and beyond them the docks and the blue-gray and white sweep of the ice-filled St. Lawrence River, with the cliffs of Levis just visible in the dimness of the opposite bank.

"Quite a scene, isn't it?" Drake said.

I nodded, standing a moment gazing around us. Down past the end of the terrace, the almost level top of the promontory rose to ground still higher than here at the hotel. The old Citadel loomed up there, a gray-white mound of snow-ramp, with the dark masonry of its upper ramparts etched against the sky, more than half the height of the big hotel tower. From part-way up the Citadel snow-ramp, a giant toboggan slide had been built. Several lanes wide, with arches of colored lights at intervals, it came down to the terrace. As we stood there, long toboggans whizzed past us at express-train speed, to end their journeys in the pile of loose snow at the front end of the terrace.

Drake drew me away. "Here's the rink, Bob."

The small outdoor skating rink was beside the hotel. It was fairly crowded with skaters, and groups of people were watching. The rink glowed with the pastel colors of the lights.

Then I saw Anne. She's quite a skater; it has been her hobby for years. She wasn't showing off particularly, just skating around alone; but I noticed that many of the people were watching her. In competition with most of those tourists, it wasn't surprising that she attracted attention. And she wasn't dressed in the gaudy style of many of the other women visitors. Some of them wore very fancy skating costumes, in the picturesque *habitant* style—costumes fashioned just to be sold to them by the Quebec shops. Anne wore an ordinary dark woolen suit, with a white scarf and white knitted hat.

And that, in the gaily-dressed crowd, made Anne even more conspicuous. I mention all this, for we had very good cause, later, to recall it.

THEN Anne saw us, came skating over to us. Like Drake, she was radiant.

She kissed me, and stood looking me over.

"It's fine to see you again, Bob! After all you've been through—but I must say you look all right."

"I am," I said. "And you're beautiful, Anne. More beautiful than ever."

She was clinging to Drake, and she gazed up at him adoringly.

"I read your little piece in the paper," I said. "Very nice, Anne."

She pouted. "Oh, that. The reporter had no right to put that stuff about me in it. I told him—" Hastily she changed the subject. "Come on, let's have cocktails upstairs, and then we'll go down to dinner. Must be about time for it—I'm famished."

I don't exactly believe in premonitions, and certainly I don't think I'm psychic. But as we left the rink, went into the nearby doorway and waited a moment for Anne to change her shoes, I noticed an old man who had been standing beside the rink. He had seemed to be watching Anne with admiration. I remembered having glanced at him when Drake and I first met Anne. He was a bearded, shabby old fellow, evidently a French-Canadian. He stood bent, leaning on a cane. Then inside the hotel, while Anne was changing from her skating shoes, in the room where the skates and the skis and such were rented, I saw that old man again. For just an instant he came to the terrace doorway, peered in, and then was gone again.

Something impelled me to go to the window and look out at the terrace. For a moment I saw him hobbling along out there. A girl passed by him—a girl in a drab mackinaw jacket with a red knitted cap. It seemed that they spoke to each other swiftly, then separated and wandered away.

I forgot the thing in a moment. Certainly there seemed no occasion to mention it to Drake and Anne. We went upstairs, and took a lobby elevator up to their suite in the tower. In the elevator I was puzzled again—and vaguely startled. The elevator had half a dozen people in it, and one of them was a small girl in a mackinaw and with a red knitted cap. I didn't see her face. Drake called our floor; she got off at the same floor ahead of us and turned left down the broad, carpeted corridor.

Drake and Anne were both talking to me at once as they opened the door of their suite.

"Wait'll you see the view we've got," Anne was saying. "It's gorgeous."

We went inside. As I entered, I glanced back down the corridor. It seemed as though the girl were lingering there at the farther end, and as I looked back she moved past an angle and vanished.

It was somehow as though we were being watched, as though something sinister were here, closing in on us.

CHAPTER II

The Dim Hands Clutch

I WOULD certainly have felt idiotic, mentioning such thoughts to Anne and Drake in the midst of our gayety. Yet, shortly after dinner, there came another incident even more peculiar.

We had our evening meal in the luxurious little grill, with the colored lights of the end of the terrace outside its windows.

Then after dinner they took me on one of the toboggans. The three of us rode that one little curved-end board, Drake in front, Anne in the middle, with me clinging on the rear. I understand you go about forty miles an hour. It seemed like eighty.

We rode the toboggan until we were out of breath and tired. "Now let's skate some more," Anne said. "Or maybe, Bob, if your ankle still hurts you—"

That shrapnel hadn't done my right leg any good; the ankle still bothered me so that I limped a little. "I'll watch," I said.

Drake himself is a pretty fair skater. He and Anne evidently had practiced a lot in the last few days; they skated beautifully together. For a while I stood and watched them. Inactivity was chilly business in that temperature, which was under zero now; and presently Anne considerately suggested that Drake join me in the coffee shop and warm me up.

"I'll skate a while longer," she told us. "I'll join you later and we'll go up to the Jacques Cartier room and dance."

"I'd say there's plenty to do here," I commented.

"She'll run you ragged if you let her," Drake said.

Then he and I were sipping coffee in the picturesque little coffee shop. It's down at the terrace level, in front, with its doors and windows opening directly out

to where the toboggan slide goes past. We were, I suppose, not over three hundred feet from where Anne was skating on the rink at the side.

We were chatting about Drake's future plans, and my own when I'd be back in my old job—which I hoped would now be better, but which I feared would be worse. Suddenly we were aware of a figure by our little table, and a voice said:

"Mr. Drake? You are Alan Drake, the detective, are you not?"

It was a young man with a beaver hat in his hand and a heavy overcoat hanging in the crook of his arm.

"I am," Drake said. He smiled faintly. "What can I do for you?"

"Why—er—I saw your name in the paper. I—someone pointed you out to me, and so I thought—"

"Yes?" Drake said.

"I wanted to make your acquaintance. The celebrated American detective . . ." I could see Drake wince at that. The hesitant young man went on: "It's an honor to meet you, sir. I mean, I'd like to talk with you for a minute or two. May I—may I sit down?"

Drake nodded. I drew a chair from a neighboring table and the young man took it diffidently. He seemed hardly more than a boy, perhaps eighteen or nineteen. He was rather a handsome fellow, with wavy black hair and dark eyes, well dressed in a dark business suit. He was smaller than myself or Drake, and slim but athletic looking. He spoke English with a cultured, careful intonation, but as though French were native to him.

"So you read that about me," Drake said. I could see he hoped this boy would be brief. Being a celebrity giving an interview to one of his fans wasn't exactly in Drake's line.

"Yes, I did. It was mos' interesting, so I wanted to meet you—"

"Thanks," Drake said. "What's your name, young man? You live here in Quebec?"

"The name, it is Jacques Juneau," he said. "I live—I am here in Quebec only for a little while. I am come from Montreal, though mostly I have lived in Trois Rivieres."

"I see," Drake said. There was an awkward silence, as though this earnest young fan were at a loss how to keep the con-



The shabby old fellow seemed to be watching Anne with admiration.

versation going. But I misjudged him on that. He suddenly drew in his breath and said softly:

"By what I read, you are experienced in kidnaping cases, Mr. Drake? You've known many criminals—down there in the States, I mean—who commit that kind of crime?"

"I suppose so," Drake admitted.

I grinned at Drake. "That's right," I said. "That's what the paper explained, didn't it? Kidnaping—that's his specialty."

Drake gave me a dirty look for ribbing him. But the youth didn't smile. His face was solemnly earnest. And then, for the first time, I really noticed his dark eyes. They were intense, glowing as they gazed, not at Drake but through him as it focused on something far away, far beyond the walls of this little coffee shop in the Chateau Frontenac.

"I see," he said. "Well, what I really came to ask you, Mr. Drake—could you tell me about some of those American

criminals? Some that have not been caught, I mean."

"Tell you about them?" Drake echoed.

"I mean—do they perhaps ever come up here to Canada?"

"Why, maybe," Drake said lamely. "I don't know that I ever heard of—"

I thought I ought to help him out again. "I guess they would," I said, "if they saw a job up here they thought they could pull off successfully."

That young fellow hardly looked at me. He was gazing intently at Drake. I could see now that he was uneasy. He nodded at my words, and then flashed a furtive look around us. Drake noticed it; he shot me a questioning glance.

"I see," young Juneau said. "I wanted to ask you something else, Mr. Drake. If you, for instance, happened to get mixed up in a kidnaping affair—I do not mean professionally—"

"You mean, if I were the victim?" Drake murmured.

"If—if someone you loved very much were abducted—what would you do, tell the police? I mean, if you were—if you got a ransom note that warned you not to dare tell the police—"

"What would I do?" Drake echoed. "Well, that would depend—"

Certainly there was something queer about this young fellow. I could see that Drake was thinking it. The youth was obviously uneasy, perhaps even frightened. Underneath his earnest, boyish manner—that awe a youthful fan generally has when talking to a celebrity he admires—I could see that he seemed tense. And he was gazing around as though fearful he were being watched. Was it that? Or was he expecting, waiting, to see someone? I suddenly had the queer thought that he was stalling along, keeping us occupied. . . .

Drake suddenly shoved back his chair. "Get our check, Bob. . . Well, it was nice to meet you, Mr. Juneau—"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Drake." He seemed disappointed. "I mean, perhaps some other time—"

"Yes, surely," Drake said. "I'm afraid we'll have to go now."

"Yes, of course." The youth stood up courteously beside us. "There really are some things that I would like to ask you." He lowered his voice as though to exclude

me. "Important things—some other time maybe?"

"Why, yes," Drake said. "Look me up sometime."

"Thanks, I will. Tomorrow, maybe." He bowed a little from the waist in true Latin fashion, smiled faintly, and with a murmured "Goodnight" to me, turned away. My gaze followed him as he threaded between the crowded tables and went out the door into the lower corridor of the hotel. It seemed to me that as he reached there, he was walking unusually swiftly.

"Well," Drake said. "That was queer."

THERE wasn't much that we could say about it that seemed to make sense. But somehow the way that boy had wanted to know what Drake knew about specific criminals from the States who might be operating in Canada—that seemed odd, to say nothing of the rest of his talk, and most especially his weird manner.

"Come on," Drake said. "Let's get back to Anne. I should think she'd be tired of skating by now."

With our check paid, we put on our overcoats and hats and went out to the terrace, heading for the little rink.

"She's got us lined up to dance in the Jacques Cartier room," Drake said. "Will your game ankle stand for that, Bob?"

"It'll have to," I said. "She's the boss, isn't she?"

"Sure is," Drake agreed.

The rink, in mid-evening, was pretty well crowded. We stood for a moment, but didn't see Anne. Then it was obvious that she wasn't here, not skating nor anywhere around the edges of the rink.

"Maybe she went inside to get us, and we missed her," I suggested.

We stopped in the ski room, to see if she was changing from her skating shoes. She wasn't there. She and Drake had the same little locker. He opened it. Her skating shoes were in it; her other pair was gone.

"We've missed her," Drake said. "Come on, let's look around."

She wasn't in the coffee shop. We took a look out on the terrace. "Maybe she misunderstood us—maybe she thinks she's to meet us up in the Jacques Cartier room," Drake said.

"Women are like that," I said. "They get things mixed."

We were hurrying now. I recall I was queerly tense inside, with a cold feeling of dread that I tried to tell myself was silly. After all, it was the simplest thing in the world to miss a person in a crowded place like this. . . We went up through the main lobby, along the little corridor of shops, looking into each of them, then through the big blue and gold salon and into the tavern-like Jacques Cartier room. A number of couples were dancing. Others were seated at the tables. But there was no sign of Anne.

"She might have gone upstairs for a moment," I suggested.

We 'phoned up, but there was no answer.

"She's probably looking around the coffee shop and terrace," I said. "In all that crowd, it's easy enough to miss her."

We searched for another ten minutes or so, and then went up to Drake's suite. It seemed possible that she might not have been here when we 'phoned, but be here now.

The corridor was empty. Drake unlocked the door, opened it. Dimness confronted us; the rooms were unlighted.

"Not here," I murmured. "But—"

A muttered exclamation from Drake checked me. He was stooping. A white square of folded paper lay on the floor at our feet, just over the threshold as though it had been shoved through the crack under the door. Drake picked it up. Silently I switched on a light.

"Bob—it's—"

He stood reading it.

Bob—it's—" The words choked in his throat. "Bob—this is a ransom note—they've got her, Bob—"

The damnable little square of paper with its scrawled words trembled in his fingers. He stood numbly gazing at me, his face ashen.

CHAPTER III

Shadow Rendezvous

I HAD never been on a case with Drake, but I had several times seen him in his office at work. Always he had seemed calm, analytical—the efficient sleuth with clear brain coolly weighing and balancing probabilities. The problem always was detached from him. A thing to stimulate his wits;

a barrier to be overcome with careful planning—and then with decisive action.

But he wasn't like that now. The woman he loved was in danger. Anne's life or death, this time, was the pawn in the struggle he was facing. Suddenly, instead of being a sleuth, he was just a panic-stricken husband, victim of the cruelest of all crimes. . . .

And the thing struck at me. My devotion to Anne, my cold horror at what might have happened to her, mingled with a helpless feeling as I saw Drake standing there numbed, trembling. I felt as helpless, as confused as Drake looked. It's queer how a sudden shock of panic can take away one's ability to think. Everything seemed suddenly so urgent, as though within a matter of seconds Anne would be killed if we didn't do something about it. Unreasoning panic affects you that way. You want violent action; you want to run, somewhere, anywhere. I felt now as though we should dash instantly from these silent, horribly empty little rooms—dash out into the snowy night and search for Anne—find her—kill whoever had her. . . .

The ringing of the telephone on the desk in the living room was a startling clang breaking in on my chaos of thoughts. I had been reaching for the little square of paper Drake was clutching; I turned, started for the phone, but Drake shoved past me.

"I'll get it, Bob."

I leaned down close over him as he lifted the receiver. Would it be Anne? I prayed that it would be her. It was a girl's voice. I was so close I could hear the words.

"Mr. Drake?"

"Yes."

"A call for you, Mr. Drake. One moment, please."

It was a girl operator at the hotel switchboard. An outside call for Drake? If only it would be Anne!

The tense silence that followed seemed interminable. Then the operator came again.

"Mr. Drake? Sorry, the party must have hung up."

Drake's anxiety made him explode with anger. Why hadn't they been more careful? Had the person left any message?

Another silence. No, there had been no message. There were several girls at the big switchboard, but finally Drake located

the one who had first received the call. She had had to delay about a minute before ringing the room. Then the girl beside her rang it, and by the time Drake answered, the impatient outside caller had disconnected.

"Was it a man or a woman?" Drake demanded.

It was a man. The girl remembered that he had spoken English, but whether with an accent or not she couldn't say.

Were Anne's abductors already trying to connect with us? Or had the call been, not to talk to us but merely to find out if we were up here? For a moment Drake and I stared at each other wordless. He had dropped the scrawled square of paper to the desk. I picked it up.

THE words were awkwardly scrawled in lead pencil, evidently in disguised handwriting. It was a sheet of the hotel stationery, which we knew could easily be obtained at the desks in the writing room.

Well you big punk so now I got you. Don't worry your wife ain't hurt yet but she will be should you make even a move at the police and we have ways of finding that out don't take any chances on that. If you want your wife back safe get a few G's together and sit tight till you hear from me soon on how you can personally deliver. And believe me you big punk this is a pleasure. It won't be long now.

I read it again, then laid it on the desk and stared at Drake.

"Alan, what are we going to do?"

"I—don't know," he muttered. Then he jumped up, savagely striding across the room and back. His face was flushed, and his eyes blazed with anger. I could see he was fighting for self-control. This time, more than all others, he wanted to summon all those qualities of calm, cool, detached efficiency which always before had made him so successful. He must be a detective, not a panic-stricken husband.

The grim anger on his face and in his eyes perked me up. "Shall we give this note to the Quebec police?" I suggested. "She hasn't been gone more than an hour at most. She—"

"No, we damn sure won't!" He gave me a twisted smile. "I've seen other people in my position, Bob. You know, I always had a sort of sneaking feeling it was

sort of selfish of them, paying money to reward criminals."

"But very human," I observed.

"Human? You can't be anything else—you can't think of anything else! I realize it now. You just want to pay out your money and beg them—"

He choked back his words. And suddenly he seemed to have full control of himself. His fingers were steady as he picked up the cursed little note and carefully re-read it again. Then he folded it and put it into his pocket.

"Notice anything queer about that wording, Bob?"

I said it just seemed typically illiterate to me.

"That fellow's motive isn't altogether to get money out of me," Drake said. "He begins, '*Well you big punk so now I got you.*' He's got me! I'm the one he wants to hurt. And he finishes, '*Believe me this is a pleasure.*' Striking at me, through Anne that's a pleasure he particularly relishes."

"You mean, for revenge?" I said.

"Sounds that way, doesn't it?" Drake sat grimly pondering. "Some enemy—someone who wants revenge for what I did to him." Drake was talking softly to himself.

"The note twice calls you a *big punk*," I suggested. "Can you remember anybody who—?"

Drake said suddenly. "You've hit it, Bob! There was a fellow named Martin three or four years ago—I remember him jumping up in court, calling me a *big punk* when I testified against him. It isn't much to go on, could be a coincidence, but . . ."

"What about Martin? A kidnaping case?"

"And murder," Drake said. "He's in the pen, for life—just escaped the chair by the skin of his teeth. Muggs Martin—I remember now. Weird looking brute with a heavy under-jaw, gave him a gorilla look—that's why they called him Muggs. I remember him damn well."

"But he's in the pen," I said.

Drake reached for the 'phone. He was the old Drake now. There was a snap to him. He called long distance, put in a call for the warden of the penitentiary where Muggs Martin was confined. Then he slammed up the receiver.

"Seems to me, Bob," he said, "that that fellow Martin had some Canadian relative.

A brother or half-brother, a cousin or something—could have been that he was up here in Quebec. Yes, I think he was—”

“And Martin has put that Quebec fellow up to the idea of revenge on you?”

“Possibly.” Drake smiled a thin, grim smile. “But with Martin in the pen on a life sentence, our theories are pretty weak, aren’t they?”

While we waited for the call to be put through so that Drake could get more details on Muggs Martin’s Quebec connections, if any, I told Drake of those vague little incidents before dinner: the bent, bearded old man who had seemed to be watching Anne while she skated. And the girl in the mackinaw and red knitted cap with whom he had so furtively spoken.

“It didn’t seem to mean anything then,” I said lamely.

Drake nodded. “Of course. But it seems to mean something now. Did the girl look like a French-Canadian?”

“Yes, I think so.” Then I told him how the same girl had appeared in the elevator when we went upstairs just before dinner. “And I remember now,” I added, “she didn’t call any floor. Just stood there. And Alan, when you called our floor, she got out at it, ahead of us, and went down the corridor. But I saw her there, seeming to watch us as we went into your rooms.”

“Watching us in order to get the room number,” he said. “It’s beginning to hook together, Bob.”

Drake had reached for the phone again, calling the Quebec police. It startled me.

“You’re not going to tell them—?”

“Tell them nothing!” And then he told them merely who he was, and that he was tentatively interested in information on a young man named Jacques Juneau. Drake described him. “Said he was originally from Three Rivers.”

The Quebec police didn’t think they could be very helpful. Juneau was quite a common name. There were hundreds of them in the area, and maybe dozens with the first name of Jacques.

“Thanks,” Drake said. “Well, it isn’t too important anyway.”

He clicked up the receiver—and at once it rang with the Long Distance connection. From there the news was electrifying: Muggs Martin had escaped nearly three weeks ago!

“This is a ransom note, Bob!” cried Drake.



DRAKE held his voice level. “Oh, I see.” He laughed briefly. “I’ve been on my honeymoon, Warden, and haven’t paid much attention to the papers lately or I’d have read of it. . . Well, I sure hope you get him.”

They talked for a few minutes more. It was known, the warden said, that Martin had a cousin named Peter Lake, who formerly had lived in Quebec City. Lake had a minor police record, so the Quebec police had been able to furnish details. Lake was twenty-six. Six-feet-one; a hundred and fifty pounds. American father, French-Canadian mother. The Quebec police, at the request of the American authorities, had tried to locate Lake, but there was no trace of him. The record also showed that Lake, about two years ago, had married a French-Canadian girl named Collette. Both Lake and the girl were bilinguals—spoke English and French almost equally well.

"The girl in the mackinaw and red cap!" I exclaimed when Drake had hung up. "And Peter Lake—could that be the fellow who met us in the coffee shop?"

"Lake is twenty-six. That fellow looked about eighteen."

"Unless we were mistaken. He could look young and be much older."

But however that might be, there was certainly too much now merely to be a series of coincidences. We pieced the probabilities together: Martin had escaped, fled up here to Quebec, and was hiding with Lake and Lake's young wife, Collette. They had seen that write-up of Drake and Anne. Drake, upon whom Martin wanted revenge, was here on his honeymoon with his beautiful young bride. A perfect chance for revenge, and money. . . .

Drake was striding back and forth across the room again. There wasn't anything I could figure to do but stay here and wait, keeping the agonizing vigil you hear about so often in kidnapping cases.

"They'll come after me, of course," Drake was saying savagely. "Five thousand, that note mentions. Modest enough."

"Probably figure since you're so far away from home," I said, "you'd have trouble getting any large amount."

"And even five thousand, Bob—I couldn't get that—not tonight. Not without explaining the thing to the hotel management. And even then—"

The ringing of our telephone interrupted him. He leaped for it. "Hello—yes, yes, I'm Alan Drake. What is it?"

"I have a message for you." It was the hotel operator. "It seemed important, Mr. Drake, so instead of putting it into your box, I thought I had better call you at once."

"What—what is it?" Drake demanded.

The girl operator was specific this time; the trouble Drake had caused over the former call made her alert. A man had called—just now—from outside. He seemed to be the same one who had called before. He seemed very hurried.

"He didn't want me to try to locate you," the girl said. "Just wanted to give me the message for you."

Drake seized a pencil that lay on his desk and scribbled down the message as she read it off to him. We stared at the message.

Alan Drake; Come to Rue St. Clair, outside, not inside. At once, urgent.

There was no signature. The operator had said that the caller had hung up while she was asking him for it.

Drake leaped from his chair at the desk and seized his overcoat. "Rue St. Clair. Come on, Bob."

We were both wearing the conventional galoshes that hooked above our ankles. We tucked our trouser bottoms down into them, put on our overcoats and hats. Drake had brought two .38's with him, and a little ammunition. He got them out of his trunk, loaded them, and handed me one.

WE were down in the lobby within three or four minutes. An attendant told us the location of the Rue St. Clair. It was quite near—one of those tiny, crooked little streets only a couple of blocks long, down in the front Lower City. From the terrace rail you could almost look down on it.

For a moment or two we stood at a corner of the rail near the front end of the terrace. It was now about nine-thirty in the evening. The terrace glowed with its prismatic colors; it was crowded with merry-makers, with the toboggans whizzing by at intervals, ending with shrieks of laughter from the riders as they plunged into the smother of soft snow and came to a stop.

Up on the terrace, around the hotel and the little skating rink, everything was characteristic of gracious living, of wealth and luxury. Then I gazed down at the dim little jumble of rooftops a hundred feet or so below us. It was like a different world down there, a world that to us now seemed horribly sinister.

"Shall we take the elevator car?" I asked.

A little cable car operated in a steep shaft from the terrace down to the lower level.

Drake shook his head. "We'll walk," he said. "We can make it in ten minutes or so."

It seemed quite possible that we were still being watched. It was Drake's idea, if we could get down there secretly, to look the neighborhood over before we made our presence known. He knew the way down. He led us past the Champlain monument at the front end of the hotel and onto a

wide, curving street which in a long sweep descended the front hill.

It was a dark night; heavy, leaden clouds were now overhead, filled with the threat of more snow. The steep crescent hill was lined with houses. There was little traffic, and only a few pedestrians. We went a block or so. Once we stopped in a shadowed doorway. No one seemed observing us.

Part way down the hill we came to a cross street. It was nothing but a long, steep flight of steps, with houses solid on either side. I could see that it led directly down into the Lower City. But Drake ducked swiftly past it.

"They'd expect us to come down that way," he said. "That way, or in the elevator car."

We followed the big curving hill down to the dock level, with the houses thinning out and the street lights getting sparser. Then we turned, circled back, and in another few minutes were in the little front Lower City. The narrow, crooked streets were dim and silent, white with snow. The snow was piled against the house walls. The little windows, some of them red-yellow with shafts of light streaming out, were snow-piled and frosted. The board signs over the tiny shops were all in French.

Drake drew me up against a dim wall. "Over there is the Rue St. Clair," he said softly.

Silently we stood peering. It was a narrow, snow-piled street lined with small wooden and brick three-story houses. It seemed to be only two blocks long, ending in a small open square. The houses were detached one from the other, flat-roofed, with balconies at the second-floor level overhanging the street. Wooden staircases ran up the outsides, giving access to the upper floors without going inside.

"Which is Number Five, can you see?" I murmured.

Drake shook his head. "We'll have to go closer."

The little street was completely deserted. A few windows were lighted, most of them apparently in the tiny shops at the sidewalk level.

Drake drew a deep breath. "Come on, let's chance it."

Slowly we moved forward into the empty little street.

CHAPTER IV

Into The Shadows

"NUMBER FIVE'S at the other end," Drake said softly. He drew me into the space between two of the houses. "That's better. We can circle around. We ought to be able to see Number Five from across that little square."

We crossed along one edge of the square until we were almost at the entrance to the Rue St. Clair.

"Think we're being watched?" I said softly.

"Look," I said softly, "that's Number Five—third house over there."

We could see its number over the door. It was a small, shabby, detached little building of three stories. Unlike most of the others it had no balconies and no outside staircase. The upper windows were all dark; the street level was a small shop—by its sign, a candy and pastry shop. There was a tiny show window, dimly lighted, with wares on display. The entrance door, half glass with a faded pink curtain, was illumined by the interior light behind it.

"Well," Drake murmured. "We're outside Number Five, but there doesn't seem to be anybody here to meet us."

It was snowing now, big soft flakes that filtered silently down in the still night air. For another minute we stood peering along the edge of the square into the deserted little Rue St. Clair. Then suddenly I could see Drake tense, and he gripped my arm.

"Bob, look! There on the staircase—the end house!"

The corner house, which must have been Number Two Rue St. Clair, was only about fifty feet from us. An outside wooden staircase, piled solid with snow, went up its side with landings at its second and third floor balconies. It was in shadowed darkness, with the falling snow a white misty curtain now. But through it, dimly, we could make out a figure crouching there in the snow of the stairs. It was just a dark blob.

"A man, watching the street!" I whispered.

It seemed so. We shifted a little closer along the edge of the square until we could see him better. It was a man in a

dark overcoat and a round fur hat. He was splotted white with the falling snow, as though he had been there for some time. Was it a corpse, lying there? The idea struck me, but then we saw him move,

silently shifting his position.

And now a little shaft of street light struck on him. It was Jacques Juneau, the boy who had talked to us in the coffee shop, keeping us occupied at the very moment



Drake tumbled him backward over the rail

that Anne must have been lured away from the rink and abducted! From where we were standing, his back was partly to us. He was facing the Rue St. Clair, ap-

parently watching it, with the little candy shop of Number Five diagonally across the street from him.

Drake and I were in a doorway. "You stay here," he whispered.

"What are you going to do?"

"Go get him! Believe me, I've got a few things I want to ask that boy!"



I stood tense, watching as Drake moved like a shadow in the falling snow. He followed the line of houses at the side of the square. Then I saw what he was planning. The back of the staircase on which the boy was crouching had a littered back yard partly under it. A group of garbage barrels stood there.

For a moment I couldn't see Drake. Then his figure appeared as, like a cat, he jumped from the barrels, gripped the low staircase rail and swung over it. There was very little noise. I was darting forward now to get into the dark yard. There was a low, muffled cry of startled terror from young Juneau. I saw him rise up as Drake jumped him. A knife was in his hand, but Drake grabbed him by the wrist.

I had reached the garbage barrels with the rail of the staircase over me. Drake evidently saw me. He called a soft, tense warning. For an instant he and Juneau were struggling at the low rail. Then Drake tumbled the boy backward over it.

"Grab him, Bob!"

He fell into the snow beside the barrels, and I jumped on him before he could get up. He was still clutching the knife, a long, thin-bladed affair like a stiletto. I wrenched it from him and cuffed him in the face.

"Shut up!" I muttered at him. "One yell and it's your last!"

He didn't attempt to yell, and the fight seemed to have gone out of him. He cowered under me as I sprawled on him.

Then Drake came vaulting down over the rail and landed beside us. "Good work, Bob! Hang onto him! Quiet, now!"

We were in darkness here, with the litter of barrels beside us and the staircase slanting partly over us, which is why Drake had tumbled the boy down here. For a minute or two we crouched, silently listening. But there had been no alarm.

"You—it is you, Mr. Drake!" the boy murmured.

Then Drake relaxed. "I guess we're all right, Bob," he said softly. "Nobody seems to have heard us."

The snow was falling much more heavily now. There was the soft clapping of a horse's hoofs and the creaking of a little cart. It crossed the square and went down one of the other streets. A couple of pedestrians passed diagonally across the square and went into a house on its opposite side.

Then again there was only the silent whiteness.

"Okay," Drake murmured. "I guess we're secluded enough here." He turned and gripped the huddled young Juneau by the shoulders. "Now then, there are quite a few things I want to say to you!"

"Mr. Drake, you—you came? I been trying to get you. I 'phoned—"

"So you're the one sent us that message?" I put in. "Five Rue St. Clair, outside, not inside! Well, here we are!"

"Mr. Drake, I been trying to get you. I 'phoned once before. The girl said—"

"We know what she said," Drake interposed impatiently.

"Yes, well, I wanted to get you right away. I left here only twice, just long enough to 'phone."

"You're a slick guy, aren't you?" I cut in. "You talk a lot, but you don't say much. That's what you did to us in the coffee shop!"

"Okay, you sent us a message to come here," Drake said. "We're here. You better talk straight, Juneau, if you know what's good for you."

"Good for me? But Mr. Drake, I only thought I ought to tell—"

I smacked that young squirt across the jaw with the back of my hand. I couldn't help it. This stalling talk got my goat. Young Juneau drew back from me, with his hand up to his jaw. But there was nothing cowardly about him. His dark eyes glared at me.

"You will try that once too much!" he muttered. "You think I will let you do that, and not—"

"Take it easy, Bob," Drake said.

"I should tell you both to go to hell," young Juneau put in. "Attacking me, when I was only trying to—!"

"You're nuts," I said. "Or you're as slick as they come!"

"Wait," Drake interposed.

"—trying to do you a favor!" our prisoner finished.

That made Drake and me stare. "A favor?" Drake echoed.

He gulped. "I thought so. I was puzzled, it startled me when I saw Mrs. Drake come down here. Surely not my affair, but I just thought you ought to know. . . ."

I admit that all I could do was gape with astonishment. Young Juneau wasn't

talking like a criminal. He wasn't stalling us, and he didn't seem to be particularly afraid of us now. His face had been pale, but now it was flushed. His manner was earnest, somewhat apologetic, very much as it had been in the coffee shop.

Drake was gripping him by the shoulders again. "You saw my wife down here?"

"Why yes, that is what I am trying to tell you. And I have been watching Number Five over there. I only left here just those two times, to 'phone you."

"You knew my wife had been kidnaped?"

"Kidnaped?" It was young Juneau's turn to gape with astonishment. "She—she was—"

He certainly acted as though it was all news to him. And somehow I was beginning to believe him.

"You saw Mrs. Drake? Where?" Drake demanded.

"She—well I saw her first up on the terrace. It was not long after I left you in the coffee shop. She came out of the ski room. Then I saw her join a girl, down by the end of the terrace."

"A girl in a mackinaw and red cap!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, she was dressed like that. I knew that girl. I—I had been looking for her. She is named Collette."

"Collette!" I echoed.

"Wait, Bob!" Drake interposed. "Let him tell us."

"I was sort of puzzled, Mr. Drake. Your wife—surely I did not expect anything like this. She and this Collette—they went down the terrace, past the Champlain monument where it was dark, and then a man joined them. I did not dare get very close, but when I saw that man, I thought—I thought—"

Young Juneau's voice stammered and broke. And then I noticed his eyes again—that smouldering intensity. I knew what it was now, a burning hatred. He gulped and went on:

"That man—I never knew his name—I—I have been looking for him. I've got to find him—that's all I've been living for—just to—to find him."

We crouched there in the snow, in the darkness under the staircase, tensely listening to young Juneau's strange story—to this youth who actually had witnessed

Anne's abduction without knowing what he was seeing.

"That man," he was saying again with his tense, quivering voice, "I never knew who he was, or how to find him. He is a murderer! That—that's why I came to you, Mr. Drake. I had an idea he was an American. I thought maybe you would know something about him. I was afraid to tell you about—about myself. I guess I was going to, if I talked with you again tomorrow."

"Mrs. Drake, the girl Collette, and this man," Drake cut in tensely, "they met at the monument. Then what did they do?"

Young Juneau, puzzled that the wife of this American detective would secretly meet this man and girl, had followed them. They had hurried down the hill, down the little street of steps. He had not dared get close to them, but from the top of the street of steps, he had seen them enter the Rue St. Clair; and then from the bottom of the steps, had seen them go into the little candy shop. He had waited a while, watching, but they had not come out.

"Then I thought you ought to know about this, Mr. Drake," young Juneau was saying earnestly.

"And they're still in there," Drake murmured. His revolver was in his hand. He turned, staring at the little shop across the street. It was still lighted with its interior glow against the pink shade; and as before, all the windows upstairs were dark.

Drake had gotten to his feet. I have never seen a man look so grim and tense. He took a step forward.

"You going over?" I said softly. "Or to get the police—?"

"No!" young Juneau burst out. "That is what I did! It is no good—that is what made them kill my sister!"

"Your sister?"

Drake crouched down again with us.

In a burst Jacques told us the rest of it. His name wasn't Juneau, it was Desoniers. He and his sister Fernande—orphans—had come to Quebec from Trois Rivieres. Both had gotten jobs. One day, about three months ago, they had gone into the little candy shop at 5 Rue St. Clair to make a purchase. The girl, Collette, had waited on them. Jacques' sister had taken a fancy to her. They had gone there several times.

"And I remember once," Jacques was saying, "I saw a man there in the shop. I remember how he looked at Fernande—my sister was very pretty, very sweet, you see? And that man, he seemed at home in the shop, he was in a chair with his feet on the stove-rail—when he looked at her that way, then I would not let Fernande go back there again."

"Is that man," I put in, "half French, half American, by any chance? Tall fellow, about twenty-six, hundred and fifty pounds?"

Jacques nodded. "Yes, he was like that. And very handsome, with a swagger of insolence."

Collette's husband, Peter Lake! "And that's the fellow who went in there tonight with Collette and my wife?" Drake exploded.

Jacques was fairly sure of it. Continuing his story, he related how he hadn't let his sister go back to the shop. And then, one night about a month ago, Fernande had vanished. Like Anne, she had been lured away—and Jacques had found a ransom note, and had rushed with it to the police.

"I got all our savings together," he was saying. "It was not much, but it was the best I could do."

He had paid the ransom according to directions, up in the lonely Lac St. Joseph forests, north of Quebec. He had had just a glimpse then, of Peter Lake. Then the police, who were there lurking with Jacques, had closed in. But, in a gun-battle, Lake had escaped.

"And Fernande, she never did come home," Jacques went on. "And then—then about a few days later, her body was found in the woods. Her poor body—beaten, strangled—"

His voice broke. He just sat staring with his burning eyes. "Go on," Drake said gently. "Then what?"

The police afterwards had seemed to do very little. The shop at 5 Rue St. Clair, to the police, seemed to have no connection with the murder of Fernande Desoniers. It was owned by a man named Pequot. He admitted that a girl named Collette used to work for him, but she had quit her job and was long since gone. She had had a young man friend who came once or twice. Pequot knew nothing more than that.

And now young Jacques could think of nothing but finding this man who had killed his sister. "She was all I had," he murmured. "All—and now she is gone. I just want to get my hands on him—that's all—just—get my hands on him!"

I stared at the silent, pondering Drake. Anne perhaps was still over there in that dark house. We could get the police, have them rush the place like bulls in a china shop. To precipitate Anne's murder? This boy crouching here with us had tried that system.

As though a spring had suddenly uncoiled within Drake, he snapped to his feet. "You two wait here," he murmured.

Jacques and I stared at each other. "I will go with you," Jacques said. "Please —"

"Wait here," Drake repeated.

We watched silently, as his tall figure crossed the little snow-piled street. The heavily falling flakes made him seem blurred, shrouded in a white curtain. We saw him pause at the lighted door of the candy shop for just an instant—then he opened the door, went in, and the door silently swung closed on him.

CHAPTER V

The House of the Enemy

FIVE minutes went by. Ten minutes. It seemed an eternity as the time silently dragged on and Jacques and I waited by the litter of barrels under the outside staircase, peering at the little shop diagonally across the street . . . Half an hour . . . Throughout it all I had tensely expected—Heaven knows what. A burst of shots? It seemed at last as though almost anything would be better than this dragging, empty silence. I had told Jacques now what we knew of these abductors.

"You got a gun, Jacques?"

"No, no—jus' my knife. Where is it?"

I handed it to him and he gripped it as he crouched beside me. "He does not come out," he whispered. "What you are going to do?"

"I—I don't know. Wait a while longer—"

Another ten minutes or so passed. I felt a damnable, shuddering feeling of helplessness. And of responsibility. I could

In the eerie light I saw
Jacques' knife flash.



make a wrong move, and both Drake and Anne would be killed. . . If they hadn't been already. . . .

Another five minutes went by. "Maybe if we just looked into the window on our way past," I whispered, "we could see into the shop?"

"I do not think so."

"Or see through that pink curtain of

the door? Drake may just be questioning the proprietor all this time. He—"

I stopped, startled, and Jacques' hand gripped my arm. "Look!"

The light in the little shop was suddenly extinguished. The whole house now was dark. The shop had closed for the night. Almost all of them now along the street had closed. The Rue St. Clair was darker

than ever, somnolent with just that silent white veiling of the falling snow quivering in movement.

"From the cliff behind the house we might see into some of the upper windows," Jacques suggested.

At least, it was an idea. "Come on, we'll try it," I said.

The houses on one side of the square backed against the cliff. We got behind them, and crouched again among snow-piled rocks with the precipitous rise behind us.

"Careful!" I warned. "You could get a nasty fall here."

It was precarious climbing. We went about twenty feet up the cliff and then began picking our way along it toward the back of the houses that faced on the Rue St. Clair. The falling flakes were a shroud upon us. I could just make out Jacques ahead of me; and down at the bottom of the cliff, the dark shapes of the houses. There were little backyards behind them, with low back fences at the base of the cliff.

In a moment more Jacques stopped and waited for me to join him. "That's Number Five," he pointed.

We were directly behind it. The ragged cliff jutted out here, so that the backyard of Number Five was somewhat shorter than its neighbors. Its dark second-floor windows were hardly more than thirty feet out from us, and we were almost level with them.

It was a disappointment. We could see nothing but the dark rectangles of curtained windows, four of them, all blank. And the ones above and below were lightless as well. Not a light, not a sound, not a sign that anyone was in there.

"No dice," I whispered. "Let's try getting down into the yard. Might see into the back windows—what would it be, a kitchen?"

"I guess so. I have a small flashlight, if we dare to use it."

WE cautiously picked our way down to the bottom of the cliff. There was a little gate in the fence.

A thought struck me. "Jacques, has that fellow Pequot got a dog? Ever see one around the shop?"

"No. I think not."

We were opening the gate when I no-

ticed an object lying between the fence and the bottom of the cliff, something dark which the falling snow had already partly whitened. I went and picked it up. It was a woman's woolen knitted cap with a fringed tassel on it. It looked familiar.

Jacques' flashlight was one of those tiny affairs with only a pencil ray of illumination. We shielded it from the line of houses and turned it on the cap for just a second. Both of us gave low exclamations. It was a deep red color.

"Collette's!" Jacques said.

"You saw her wearing it tonight?"

"Yes. I remember it."

How had Collette happened to drop her cap out here by the back fence? I shook the snow from it, wadded it into a ball, and thrust it into my pocket. Jacques, and then Drake and I with him, had been watching only the front of the house. We wouldn't have seen the girl as she came out through the back yard, and then made her way outside the fence along the cliff bottom. That would lead down the length of the Rue St. Clair to the descending cross street. Collette might have realized that the house was being watched, and made her getaway. . . . It was all just speculation. I whispered it to Jacques. We bent down, used his tiny flash again. Neither of us was at all skilled in woodcraft, but it did seem as though there were a trail here along the fence—scuffed footprints already buried by the soft fleecy of the falling flakes.

Then in a moment more we were in the yard, across it and crouching under one of its dark back windows. So far as we could hear, there was no sound inside. The shade of the window here was up halfway. I peered in between the parted curtains. It seemed that I could make out a small table with a white cloth over it, and chairs around it. A little dining room. We took a chance and darted our flash into the adjoining window. It showed a kitchen, not neat and clean as I had understood the French-Canadian kitchen invariably was kept. This one had a litter of food, and dirty dishes piled in the sink and on the table. The kitchen stove showed a glow of red, and a kettle of water was boiling on it.

"I'm going inside," I whispered suddenly. "Lend me your knife. There ought to be a way of getting one of these win-

dows open." Yes, perhaps somehow. . . .

We found one, down at the ground level, partly buried by snow. It was small, horizontally oblong. It yielded to the prodding of Jacques' knife. Our flashlight showed it to be up near the ceiling of the cellar. We wedged through it, dropped down, and stood tense, panting in the cellar darkness.

There was still no alarm. "There are the stairs," Jacques whispered.

Cautiously we mounted the steep little flight, opened a door and were in the warmth of the kitchen. From here the silence of the house was more obvious than ever; there was just our breathing, and the singing hiss of the kettle. Then we prowled the other lower rooms, the dark empty dining room, a small parlor with linoleum on its floor; and we took a look past a curtain into the dark and silent little shop.

From a small hallway behind the shop, steep narrow stairs led upward. No interior light showed, nothing but the faint glow through the windows from outside. I moved ahead of Jacques and, revolver in hand, went slowly up the stairs.

There were three bedrooms on the second floor, all dark and silent. I flashed my light into two of them. The beds were dismantled; the furniture was shoved against the walls and covered with cloths. Evidently the rooms were not in use.

The bed in the third room was neatly made. I darted the flash around. "Nothing here, Jacques," I whispered.

Then the tiny white circle of illumination showed us a garment lying on the floor. I picked it up. It was a drab gray mackinaw jacket.

"Collette's!" I whispered.

Jacques' hand touched me in the darkness. "Look!" he whispered. "A dress!"

But not a dress belonging to Collette. "Anne's dress," I muttered to Jacques. "The one she was wearing tonight!"

Silently we stared at each other. Then I tossed the dress to a chair, and with Jacques behind me, slowly mounted to the third floor. My heart was pounding with what we might find next in this apparently deserted house. But the third floor yielded nothing. There were two dark bedrooms which seemed not to have been occupied for some time, with chairs piled neatly on the beds. A small bathroom, quite

like one which we had seen on the floor below.

An empty house? It was as though we must have dreamed that Anne and Collette and some other man who probably was Peter Lake, had come in here; that Drake had come in here; and that hardly more than half an hour ago, the light in the little shop had been extinguished by whom-ever was attending it.

Would we find the bodies of Anne and Drake hidden somewhere here? We had not looked the house over carefully enough, to be sure, but perhaps in some closet. . . .

My gruesome thoughts were stricken away. Jacques and I stood rigid, transfixed. Somewhere in the silence of the house there had been a little thump, and the creaking of a board. We held our breath, straining to listen. It came again.

"Over us!" Jacques whispered.

"Is there an attic up there?"

"Maybe."

Noiselessly we moved out into the upper third floor hall. There didn't seem to be any stairs leading upward. But something was moving overhead. There was a crunch, a faint grinding sound as though something heavy were being moved; and then a creak again, like a loose board under a footstep. Jacques was darting our tiny flash around the hallway. And suddenly he tripped over a loose patch of linoleum on the floor.

Again there was heavy, unbroken silence. I was standing close beside Jacques. We had no warning except just a little rustle in the darkness behind us. It made me turn. By the reflected sheen of the tiny light-beam, I saw an alcove in a crook of the hallway. A ladder—

There was a blob of man's figure at the top of the ladder where it gave access through a trap-like opening into the attic.

"Jacques—" I shouted. "Look out!"

Jacques had the flashlight in one hand, and his knife in the other. I was fumbling for the revolver in my pocket. But too late! In that same second the man leaped from the ladder and came hurtling down upon us.

CHAPTER VI

Road To Doom

THE impact of the man's heavy body flung me backward and down, with him

on top of me. It knocked the breath out of me, knocked me so dizzy that for an instant I was aware only that I was lying on my back with the man sprawling on me. His fingers were fumbling for my throat; they clutched it, squeezing it as his arms raised me up a little then smashed my head against the floor. Dimly I was aware that my hand was caught in my overcoat pocket, futilely clutching the gun.

I might have passed out in another moment with that grip squeezing my windpipe, cutting off my breath. I was squirming, kicking, twisting on the floor, but the solid bulk of my grim, silent antagonist pinned me down. And then Jacques, who had been momentarily frozen with surprise, went into action. With a muttered cry, he came like a pouncing puma, landing on the man's bent back. I saw Jacques' knife stab. It grazed my antagonist's thick shoulder and all but slashed into my face.

Then I felt the grip relaxing from my throat. My head was whirling; the dimness of the hallway seemed filled with a million sparks of colored lights. But I was vaguely aware of gulping in the blessed air so that the spots were fading and the roaring in my ears was easing up. In that darkness, that wildly stabbing knife of Jacques' was as much a menace to me as the man on top of me. Then like a bear the man reared up, tumbling Jacques' slight body backward off him.

I staggered to my feet, dizzily swaying. The burly man was on his feet and Jacques was rushing him. Their bodies locked together, swayed as they fought, both of them now cursing in French. Then they fell, rolled, first one on top, then the other. In the eerie light I saw Jacques' knife flash, but the man had him by the wrist.

It all had happened in a few seconds as I stood panting, with my head clearing and the gun in my hand now. But I did not dare fire it. That dim vision of the rolling, fighting figures on the floor, barely visible in the faint light, gave me no target. Then they were on the stairs, tumbling down with crashing thumps mingled with their shouts, and curses and thudding blows.

That boy Jacques quite evidently hadn't been at his best when Drake had tackled him and tumbled him over the rail into the snow. I guess he had recognized Drake and pulled his punches. But he wasn't

pulling any now, he was fighting this huge adversary ilke a little wildcat.

I was dashing down the stairs now, after them. Then I saw that near the bottom the man was lying with his body bent back over the rail, and Jacques was over him, with the knife poised at his throat. I found my voice:

"Don't kill him, Jacques! We need him. We—"

"I'm not—killing him!" Jacques panted. "You had enough? You damned—"

Then I had reached them. Quite evidently the man had had enough. He mumbled, and he was docile as I hauled him out of the broken stair-rail and shoved him down into the second floor hall. His face was bleeding; his eyes rolled wildly and he mumbled in French.

Jacques found a hall light and switched it on.

"Who is he, Jacques? Ever seen him before?"

"I have, damn sure! He's Pequot!"

"Henri Pequot," the man said sullenly. "How is it you dare to—"

"Shut up!" I said. "You'll get plenty of chance to talk in a minute. See if you can find a chunk of rope, Jacques. We'll tie him up."

Jacques' clothes were torn. His wavy black hair was tousled, plastered wet and dank on his sweating forehead. There wasn't any blood on his face, but his left eye was puffing up with a luxurious shiner.

He grinned. "Rope? I will see."

I SHOVED Pequot into the little bedroom where Colette's mackinaw lay on the floor and Anne's dress near it. Then in a moment Jacques appeared. He had a few short strips of rawhide and a length of clothesline.

"Found them downstairs," he said. "Does he talk?"

"He will," I said grimly. "Don't worry about that. Come on, you—put your hands behind your back!"

We discarded the rawhide and trussed him up with the length of clothesline, crossing his wrists and tying them behind him, winding him into a bundle with his ankles lashed together. Then we flung him on the bed.

"Okay," I said. "Now let's have it. There were quite a few people here in this house tonight. Where did they go?"

He stared sullenly. He was a squat, solid man of about forty, smooth-shaven, with heavy jowls.

"You won't talk?" I said.

"Yes, I will talk!" he retorted. "You



"One wrong move and you'll get a bullet in your back," growled Drake.

dare to break into my house where I live, to seek to rob me and you attack me—!"

"That's what you figure you'll tell the police?" I said.

"That I tell to anybody. The truth!"

"Well, you'll sure get a chance to tell the police," I said. "Not now, but in the morning."

"Since my wife die I am here alone, in my own house with my little shop. I never see either of you before, and you break in here—"

"That's a damn lie!" Jacques put in. "You remember me, Pequot. Me and— and my sister, Fernande—remember? You are trying to tell me there never was a girl named Collette working in the shop with you?"

The fellow evidently had it all figured out, just the way he'd tell it to the police. But he wasn't too good an actor.

"Collette?" he echoed. "*Mais oui*, of course. There was a girl Collette, she work for me. But she is gone. In these weeks I have not seen her. I do not know—"

Jacques gripped me, waving his knife. "He lies! Everything he says it is a damn lie! You let me persuade him? Jus' a little scratch on his cheek with this knife!"

"Wait," I said. "Look here, Pequot, you got away with that line of talk once with the police, but you can't do it again. Collette, and a fellow maybe named Peter Lake were here tonight."

"Lake? But no—"

But we could see it startled him that we knew the name, Peter Lake.

"And they brought Mrs. Drake, the wife of an American detective, with them," I said.

"What you say it does not make sense—"

"Oh, doesn't it?" I snatched up Collette's mackinaw and Anne's dress. "Well, how about these?"

That got him. In all the excitement he had evidently forgotten that they were here. He began stammering in French. That brought Jacques into it. I'm not much on French. "Talk English," I told our prisoner.

"They were here like you say," Pequot said sullenly. "But I was in the shop. I do not know what they did. But then Collette and the little Mrs. Drake, they dressed in the clothing of boys—"

That at least, seemed to have a ring of truth.

"And then they left," I said. "By the back way? Along by the back fence out there?"

"Yes," he agreed.

"Mr. and Mrs. Drake," I said, "prisoners at the point of a gun."

He tried to look blank, but it was only defiant sullenness. "You don't fool us," I said, "you knew perfectly well what was going on. Look here, Pequot—"

"You lie to us any more and I'll stick this knife into you, and I mean it!" Jacques cut in.

"They left," I said. "How many of them? The two prisoners—and Collette, and her husband Peter Lake—sure, we know he's her husband."

THAT startled him. "Those four," I added. "And who else? There was an-

other man?"

"No," he said.

"A fellow named Martin," I persisted. "Muggs Martin, they call him in the States. Lake's cousin. And he's just escaped from an American jail. About three weeks ago. He came up here, and you've been hiding him! You see, we know all about it, Pequot."

"I do not know," he said sullenly. "*Mon Dieu*, you put the words into my mouth—"

"They left here—did they have a car?" I kept on.

"I heard them say, 'a car down there on the hill!'"

"And where were they going?" I held my breath; nothing much mattered but the answer to that.

"That I do not know. I do not remember that they said—"

It isn't too easy to hit a fellow who is lying bound and helpless, but I managed it—a hefty cuff across his mouth with the back of my hand. "Maybe that'll help refresh your memory."

He only glowered at me. Wherever the hideout to which Drake and Anne had now been taken, it seemed fairly certain that this fellow would know of it. I turned to Jacques.

"Go to it," I said. "Try your luck with him."

That was a pleasure to the seething Jacques. He leaped at the bed, waving his knife. "Now, you damned dirty swine, you had better talk—and the truth! Where did they go?"

Fear came to Pequot's sullen face.

He gasped, "I tell you now! It is to the Lac St. Joseph they go! A little house in the forest up there."

"Go ahead, make it more plain," Jacques rasped. "From the platform, the railroad station at this end, which way up the lake?"

"Near the east shore it is," Pequot said. "You can see it, the little house, one mile up, and where the ground is higher, back from the lake."

"Know where that would be?" I put in. Jacques swung toward me. "I do. It is—it is not far from where I went with the money for—for Fernande!"

"And you have a car?"

He had one. "Last summer I got it," he said. "For Fernande. We drove it here from Trois Rivières. Jus' a little car, not

much good. But Fernande, she loved driving with me. Through these hills—so beautiful—”

That faraway look in his eyes was there again, the glowing intensity that I had noticed when we first met him in the coffee shop. His love for his murdered sister—his one thought, to have revenge—to get his knife into that fellow Peter Lake. . . .

“Okay,” I said. “We’ll get your car now, Jacques. Come on!”

We flung a blanket over Pequot. “Sleep well,” I said. “We’ll come and get you in the morning, or tell the police to look you up.”

“Will he call out, do you think?” Jacques suggested. “And bring the neighbors in, maybe?”

“I doubt it. He’d have too much explaining to do.” But just so he wouldn’t be tempted, we gagged him. I switched off the room light.

Jacques’ car was in a garage he had rented, only a few blocks from here. We were starting downstairs, when suddenly it occurred to me to wonder what Pequot had been doing up in the attic.

We went back upstairs and climbed the ladder into the attic. A flashlight which Pequot had been using was on the attic floor. Its beam disclosed an old trunk with its lid up. There were in it other garments which had been discarded by Anne and Collette—a silk blouse; a woman’s plaid woolen skirt; Anne’s fur jacket, and a scarf which I remembered Anne had been wearing. Drake’s dark felt hat was here and his wallet, which I think had had considerable cash in it. There was also a handkerchief, knotted about with Anne’s jewelry and Drake’s watch and tie pin.

Pequot quite evidently had been hiding all the things which could have incriminated him. In his haste, gathering it up, he had overlooked Collette’s mackinaw and Anne’s dress in the bedroom downstairs.

That idea made me suddenly remember Collette’s knitted cap which we had found out in the snow, near the gate of the house next door. Collette and Anne, Pequot had told us, were disguised as boys. And since the red cap with its fringed tassel was obviously feminine, Collette wouldn’t wear it now.

Then why would she have taken it outside with her, dropping it out there by the fence? I had wadded the little cap into a

ball and shoved it into my pocket. I drew it out; and as I unrolled it, a little white oblong fluttered to the floor—a slip of paper which had been inside the hat.

“What in the devil—” Jacques murmured.

I stooped for it; held our flashlight on it. Words were scrawled on it, words written with the thin sharp point of a pencil with greenish lead. A green leadpencil! My mind leaped back. Drake had had such a pencil; its oddness had made me remark on it—a tiny wooden pencil with hard green lead sharpened to a fine point. He carried it in the looped tiny straps at the side of a small memorandum book.

And this slip of paper was torn from that little book! Certainly it seemed so. Breathlessly Jacques and I read the scrawled words:

Please notify Robert Royce, Chateau Frontenac, immediately. Very important. Tell him Montmorency, high ground south of top of falls. Old stone house in woods—very important—urgent—

The hastily scrawled words trailed off as though Drake had been interrupted while writing. . . . That little slip of paper, dropped by Drake in the snow outside, would have been buried, never found. So he had seized the opportunity of putting it into the red cap, and dropped the cap out there by the next door gate, hoping it would attract attention and be found tomorrow morning.

“Montmorency!” Jacques exclaimed. “Up by the falls—old house in the woods! That must be where they’ve gone! Not Lac St. Joseph, but up by Montmorency falls! That damned Pequot, lying to us! Why, I’ll—”

I can imagine he would have dashed down into the third floor bedroom and it would have been just too bad for Pequot. But there was certainly nothing to be gained by that.

“Let him alone,” I said. “Let him think he’s sent us up to Lake St. Joseph.”

I drew the muttering, wrathful boy downstairs. “Sleep well,” I called out as we passed the dark room where the bound and gagged Pequot was lying. “See you in the morning.”

We went out of the house by the kitchen door. It was still snowing heavily. A wind had sprung up now. It tossed the snow in swirling eddies between the houses and

the ragged cliff. I stared upward, high up to the rail of the terrace. It was still bathed in the sparkling sheen of colored lights, gay merrymakers up there on their holiday, none of them with the least thought of the grim, tense things that could be happening down here so close beneath them. . . .

"You know the way to Montmorency, Jacques?"

"Yes, of course. We—Fernande and I— we often would drive up there. It is not very far, on the river road, about half way to St. Anne de Beaupre."

WE were heading along outside the line of back fences, close at the bottom of the cliff. We passed a small cross-street which started here at the cliff, went another block and emerged into a larger street that descended to the docks. Then presently we were at the tumbledown, shedlike building where Jacques' car was housed. No one seemed to notice us taking it out. There was a small empty lot here, trackless with the new fallen snow, and most of the nearby houses and shops were dark and silent. The docks were dark. The ice-choked river beyond them was a dark blur of white.

Jacques' car was a small, decrepit coupe, but it was equipped for winter use, with chains on all its tires, and enough fuel. We backed it out and started away, down along the dark line of docks until we struck the main river road, heading northeast.

That was a wild ride. In this storm, and at this hour of night, there was no traffic, even in the little river settlements through which we passed. Of a summer afternoon it would have been no trip at all, those few miles. But the wind had risen, the falling flakes were thicker than ever. With the great St. Lawrence on our right, in the open stretches the wind was a howling blast upon us.

"Think we'll make it, Jacques?"

"We will make it," he said grimly. "Five miles more, that is all."

The old car wheezed, and roared as Jacques plunged it through the drifts of loose snow which the wind was piling on the road. There were times when the road itself was a trackless white waste with only Jacques' instinct to keep us on it. And there was a moment when the northeast wind, rising to new fury from a stretch

of the open river, seemed as though it would overturn us.

Then the little road turned away from the river and wound upward, ascending toward the falls where the small Montmorency river came down out of the hills and tumbled over a brink into the St. Lawrence. The houses were sparse along here on the upperplateau. There were trackless white fields with their fences almost buried, and occasionally little patches of woodland.

"This road goes over a bridge of the Montmorency a little way above the falls," Jacques said. "There is a hotel over there."

"But Drake's message said, on this side the falls."

"Yes. I will find a place now where we can turn off."

"We'll hide the car somewhere and look around on foot," I said. "Try and locate the house—and then we'll see what we are going to do."

"I know what I am going to do," he murmured grimly.

I gripped his shoulder. "You'll do what I tell you, Jacques! Understand? We could get Drake and Anne killed—and ourselves too. We've got to know first what we're up against and then plan something . . ."

He swung the car to the right off the road onto what seemed a little side road, judging by the half buried line of fences. Then we ploughed laboriously into a patch of woods. The tall trees were dark and gaunt; the smaller evergreens drooped heavy with snow. The underbrush was a tangled, brittle mass of ice that glistened in our headlights.

We came to a panting stop. With the lights off and the engine quiet, the wild loneliness of the night closed around us. We left the car and started ploughing forward on foot in the white smother. An hour ago perhaps, that other car from the Rue St. Clair must have come up this way. But its trail would be gone now, just as ours soon would be, blotted out by the falling flakes and the loose snow that the wind was tossing around. I turned presently to look behind us. Our car already was invisible.

Jacques gestured ahead of us, to the left. "The falls are over that way. In the summer you can hear them, the roar, all around here."

An old stone house, near the top of the falls, in woods. . . It should be somewhere near here. . . .”

Suddenly Jacques and I stopped in our tracks. From off to the right, ahead of us in the distant snowy murk, there was a stab of yellow-red flame. Then another, with the muffled crack of gun-shots reaching us a split second later.

And then faint, blurred in the storm, came the shrill, piercing scream of a woman.

CHAPTER VII

Ambush!

I MUST go back now and tell what had been happening to Drake—as I afterward was able to piece the story together. He had left Jacques and me crouching in the snow under an angle of the outside staircase, across the street from 5 Rue St. Clair. With his hand in his overcoat pocket gripping his gun, he stood for just a moment at the door of the little shop. Then he turned its knob and opened it.

A bell tinkled as he entered. It was a dim little place with linoleum on its floor, a stove in the corner, shelves on its walls and a small showcase of candies and pasteries. It was unoccupied—but as the bell tinkled, a faded drape that shrouded a doorway at the back of the shop, was drawn aside. A burly thick set man of about forty with an apron tied around his middle came in.

“*Bon soir*, M’sieu’— what can I do for you?”

“Monsieur Pequot?” Drake said.

“*Mais oui*, that is my name.”

“I haven’t come to buy anything,” Drake said. Cold and alert, with his hand still in his pocket, Drake stood in the center of the shop. “As a matter of fact, my business isn’t with you.”

The man raised his bushy eyebrows. “*Non?* Your business—?”

“With someone else here,” Drake flicked his gaze to the portiered doorway and back to Pequot’s stolid face. “With a friend of yours—a relative perhaps. He’s an American, like myself. Or half American, at least. A young fellow named Peter Lake.”

The man by the counter spread his hands with a gesture. “Lake? But there is no

one here, M’sieu’. Since my poor wife she died, I am living here alone.”

Pequot was giving Drake the same line which he later tried on Jacques and me. But Drake only smiled thinly.

“He came in a little while ago,” Drake said evenly. “With a girl named Collette—and with my wife. I suggest you call them downstairs.”

“But M’sieu’, I tell to you—” Pequot stopped, with terror on his face as Drake’s gun leaped out and leveled at him.

And Drake growled: “Keep quiet, then! Understand? Stay where you are and put your hands up!”

Pequot obeyed. He stood stiffly as Drake backed slowly to the front door of the shop and slid its bolt.

“We’ll go upstairs and see who’s there,” Drake murmured. “You lead me. One wrong move and you get a bullet in your back. Get started, now—and go slowly.”

They moved toward the curtain. “Wait!” Drake commanded softly. He reached and ran his left hand over the docile Pequot. The fellow was unarmed.

“Okay,” Drake said. “Now pull that curtain aside a little. But stand where you are!”

Pequot did it, but all Drake could see was a section of dim hallway. Then Drake raised his voice so that it would carry in past the curtain.

“If anyone hears me, I want you to know I’ve got a gun in Pequot’s back. If you want him killed, go ahead and jump me! We’re coming upstairs.”

There was in Drake’s mind the desperation of the thought that Anne was here, that he must get to her. And certainly he did not bargain on the recklessness of these murderers who cared little for Pequot’s life where their own were concerned. . . . At his low command, Pequot shifted the curtain aside and stepped past it, with Drake close after him.

Drake had no warning except a swish of air. He tried to turn, and in that second he saw a figure on each side of him. Something hit his hand that held the gun as he tried to swing it toward one of these adversaries. And at the same instant something heavy crashed on his head.

The dark little hallway seemed to burst into roaring light, then soundless darkness as Drake went down with all his senses

sliding away into the abyss of unconsciousness. . . .

HUMBLY, dimly Drake felt himself coming back. He was lying on linoleum covered floor with a vast roaring in his ears and all his body bathed in cold sweat. He lay stunned, trying to remember what had happened to him. He could see vaguely that he was in a dark little room with its furniture stacked against the wall. His head ached and throbbed. He put a hand to it; blood was matting his hair from a scalp wound.

But his strength was coming back to him. He stirred, managed to get up dizzily on one elbow. And as the roaring in his ears lessened he was aware of the murmur of voices. The door of the room was ajar. It seemed that three men were outside. He recognized the voice of Pequot. And there was what seemed a younger voice which he thought might be Peter Lake.

Pequot was saying, "Is he dead? What I do with the body? This is mos' bad, Peter—"

"Well he ain't dead yet, so quit worryin'." That was quite evidently Peter Lake.

Pequot was frightened. He went off into a flood of French. It brought an ironic, taunting report from Lake, also in French. And suddenly the third voice growled:

"Talk English, damn you! That cursed Canuck stuff—I told you to quit it!" It was a heavy, growling voice that somehow sounded familiar to Drake. And then he placed it: Muggs Martin!

"Okay," Lake said. "He's worryin' about havin' the body of the dick left here with him."

"The dick ain't dead! Why get excited?"

"Well, we better get out of here an' damn quick," Lake said. "Like I told you, I spotted just the place. Up Montmorency way—ain't nobody been in it since maybe last summer. In the winter nobody'd know we were there, if we're careful—"

Lake described the place in more detail.

"A few days is all we'll need to pull this job," Martin agreed. "Or we can shift from this Montmorency place if it don't work out. Then we'll light out for the coast. Except for that damn girl you got yourself tied up with, everything looks clear."

"I can handle Collette. She nabbed the

Drake woman pretty smooth, didn't she?"

Martin agreed that she had. By what they said now, Drake gathered that Collette had accosted Anne at the skating rink, told her that Drake had been hurt, at the end of the terrace by the monument, had slipped and fallen. Hurriedly Anne had changed her shoes, followed Collette. Then by the dark monument Lake had joined them. With a gun on Anne they had taken her down into the Lower City. . . .

Now they were getting out of here. Drake's sudden appearance had frightened and puzzled them. They seemed to have no idea that Jacques and I were watching the Rue St. Clair.

"Damnfool boner you pulled with that Desoniers dame," Martin was saying. "Get yourself in for a murder rap. You should have hid the body where it wouldn't get found. I told you never to go in for nothing without me."

"You were in stir, for always," Lake said.

"Yeah?" Martin chuckled. "Well, now I'm here. An' if things go right we'll get more than the chicken-feed you got from Jacques Desoniers! An' another thing, Pete, this Collette of yours—"

"She does what I tell her. Damn handy, ain't she? She pulled about this same stunt with Fernande Desoniers. She does what I tell her."

"Up to a point!" Martin said. "Women—I wouldn't trust 'em!"

"I told her I didn't kill that Fernande dame. I said she slipped and fell off a rock into a ravine when I was taking her to where I could turn her loose."

"An' Collette believed that?" Martin chuckled. "The hell she did! . . . Well, I ain't sayin' any more about that Desoniers dame, but you watch your step with this Drake woman."

"I can handle Collette—she does what I tell her," Lake insisted.

"You should all get out from here, quick now," Pequot put in anxiously. "That man Drake, he was come here mos' fast. The police, they come here after that Desoniers business. I handle them then. That I can do again, if you are gone. An' you stay gone, because this is no place for you."

It was unquestionably very sound advice. Martin raised his voice: "Hey, you dames—you ready in there? Make it fast, we're gettin' out of here."

Collette answered him. "We are jus' ready."

IT was then Drake got the idea of perhaps being able to send a message to me, telling me where they had gone. He had been fumbling in his clothes, discovered that he had been searched. His wallet, watch and tiepin were gone. But they hadn't bothered with the little memorandum book with its green leadpencil in his vest pocket. Lying there on the floor he hastily scrawled the note, tore out the page and shoved it into his pocket, just in time to hide it from Martin who suddenly strode into the room.

Drake lay quiet, gazing up as though still dazed. Martin came and stood over him, prodding him contemptuously with his foot.

"Well, you big punk—believe me, this is a pleasure!"

Drake moved a little, with a hand ruefully feeling at the back of his head. He stared up at the burly Martin. It wasn't exactly the Martin whom Drake remembered, though his voice was the same. He had grown a beard, though it was still scrubby

with only the three weeks of growth since his escape. It was dyed a dirty gray, and fairly well disguised his gorilla-like jaw.

It was Martin whom I had seen on the terrace, watching Anne as she skated—that old man as I had thought him then, in shabby overcoat and battered hat, bent over, leaning on his cane. . . .

"Why—" Drake muttered. "Why, it's —"

"Your old friend Martin, remember? Sure, Muggs Martin—in the pen for life, thanks to you!"

Drake said, "Hello, Martin! I might have guessed it was you—well, you've got me!"

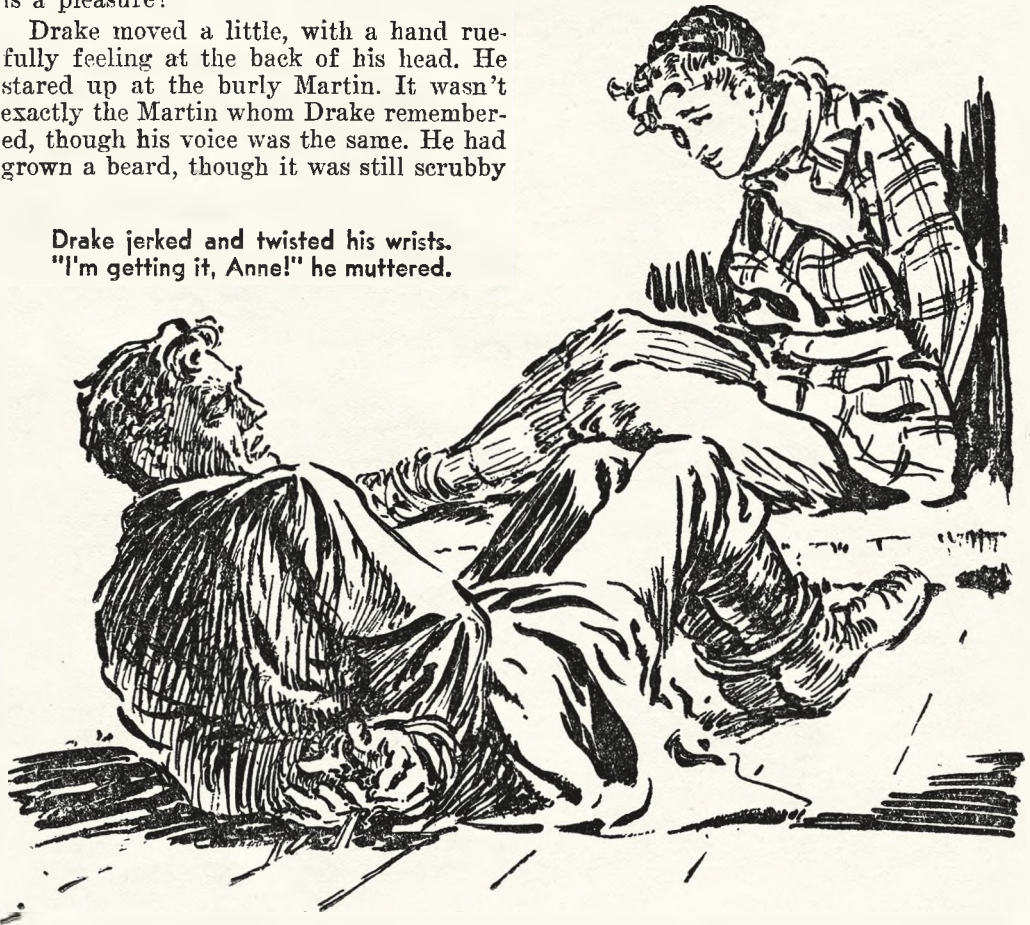
"Like I said I would. Remember?"

"Okay," Drake agreed. He got up on one elbow. "So you've got me."

"An' your wife," Martin said.

"Yes. My—my wife. What's the pro-

Drake jerked and twisted his wrists. "I'm getting it, Anne!" he muttered.



gram now, Martin? I got that note you left in my room. I thought you wanted a good chunk of ransom money."

"That was the idea an' it still is," Martin agreed. "But you got here too soon."

Drake managed a chuckle. "Quite a novelty! The victim doesn't wait to get the ransom money, he just comes anyhow."

It didn't sound funny to Martin. "How in the hell did you—"

"Easy," Drake said. "I happened to be looking over the terrace rail—you can see right down here from there."

That might be true on a summer afternoon, but certainly not on a night like this, Martin skipped it.

"What about that young fellow who was with you," he said. "What's his name?"

"Bob Royce."

"He know you came down here?"

"No, but I wish he did."

"Because if he did, it'd be just too bad for you. An' your wife. Settin' the bulls on us—"

"He won't do that," Drake said emphatically.

"How you know he won't?"

"I told him not to."

"Well, we're gettin' out of here anyway," Martin said. "You able to walk?"

"Sure, I guess so." Laboriously, pretending far more dizziness than he felt, Drake staggered to his feet. But whatever vague thought he might have had, that there might be a possibility of getting Ann and himself out of here, the chance was gone now. Martin stood with a revolver leveled at him.

"That fellow Royce," Martin said, "we'll contact him tomorrow."

"Okay," Drake agreed.

"He got any money?"

"No, I don't think so. Not much."

"But he can get some, can't he? His money or yours. He damn better had."

"Well," Drake said, "we're up here in Canada—we don't live here, you know, and don't carry our bank around with us."

"Don't be funny," Martin retorted. "I got your checkbook out your pocket a while ago. You'll write a few, an' Royce can get 'em cashed. At the hotel, an' he can wire or 'phone New York."

"He'll try," Drake agreed.

"Ten or twenty grand wired up from

New York, eh?" Martin said. "I'll be reasonable, let you off easy."

"Thanks," Drake said dryly.

Pequot appeared. "You should get out from here now," he warned. "The shop she has the door locked. But I mus' put out the light, an' you should get out from here, all of you."

"Correct," Martin agreed. He prodded Drake with the muzzle of his revolver. "Get going, you big punk. An' if you or your wife try anything funny—"

"We won't," Drake said. Then he saw Anne and Collette, both of them slim, boyish little figures. In heavy woolen trousers, sweaters, mackinaws and with their tresses tucked up into men's woolen caps, in the dimness of a car at night they would look like two half-grown native boys. Drake's overcoat collar was buttoned up under his chin, and a man's fur hat was given him.

"Okay," Martin said. He shoved Anne and Drake toward the stairs. "We're going quiet, see? Out the back way, along the cliff. An' one shout from you, either of you, s'elp me—"

"We're not fools," Drake said. He gripped Anne by the arm as they went down the stairs. "You all right? When you were gone, it was so horribly frightening—"

She was pale, tight-lipped, but the pressure of her trembling arm tried to reassure him. "Yes I'm all right, Alan. But I was so afraid they had killed you!"

"Just keep steady," he whispered. "Don't lose your nerve, Anne. I—I don't think they'll harm us, if I can get them some money."

There was a cold shudder within Drake as he said it, because he wasn't at all sure of it.

"I won't lose my nerve," Anne whispered. "I'll do just what you tell me, Alan."

"Good girl." He bent closer to her. "I'll be watching—if there's any possible chance of us breaking away from them—"

"Yes, I know."

As they passed through the dim little dining room behind the shop, Drake had an opportunity furtively to seize Collette's red knitted cap which was lying discarded there. He stuffed the scrawled message to me into it; and out by the fence as they passed the gate of the dark house next door, no one noticed him in the snowy darkness as he dropped it.

Then at the end of the line of houses, Lake had a car standing; they climbed into it. With Lake driving, Collette beside him and Martin, gun in hand, wedged into the little rear seat with Drake and Anne, they swung down past the dark line of docks, struck the little river road and headed northward into the snowstorm.

CHAPTER VIII

Vengeance Pays Off

IT WASN'T as tough a ride as Jacques and I had afterward over the same route. The road wasn't as deep with the new-fallen snow, and the wind wasn't as high. But it was bad enough; and then at last Drake saw that they were approaching their destination. No one had stopped them; there was no pursuit, as Martin and Lake seemed to have feared. In a patch of woods they hid the car, then Drake and Anne were tumbled out and shoved forward, with Lake leading the party.

The stone house, as Drake first saw it, was just a dark, square form in the woods. Huge naked trees crowded close against it. As they approached, Drake could see it was two-storied, flat-roofed—an ancient affair which could have been here since the old days of the French and Indians, and Montcalm and Wolfe. But quite evidently, perhaps even the previous summer, it had been occupied. The solid, square windows were shuttered. There were curtains draping some of them; and a trellis with ivy on one side wall.

"Stay here," Lake said. "I'll open the door." They were standing by the solid, iron-bound front door. He grinned. "I got in a window a few nights ago an' looked the place over. Not bad, for a camp for us. I cached some food inside."

He went in the window, and presently the door opened as he swung it to admit them. Martin, with his gun still poking into Drake, stood peering around. It was a big lower room with a few tattered rugs and cheap modern furniture. There was a giant open fireplace, and near it a huge cook-stove of ancient vintage, piled now with oid pots and pans. And on the floor were some groceries which the thoughtful Lake had provided.

"The pump is froze," Lake said. "We can melt snow."

"We'll freeze in here!" Martin said.

"It's better than the pen, ain't it?" Lake retorted. "What you want, the Ritz?"

Lake built a fire in the cookstove. They decided that was safe enough at night; the little smoke from the chimney couldn't possibly be seen in this storm, but in the morning they would have to extinguish the fire.

The place began to warm up. With the window shutters closed, Lake found lamps which still had oil in them, and lighted them. And then Martin decided he had had enough of sitting with his gun leveled at his prisoners.

"We'll tie you up for the night," he said. "Upstairs. Get going."

Drake's heart sank as he and Anne were shoved up the old stone staircase. "We'll freeze up here, Martin," Drake protested. "You said—"

He pushed them into a room. "Wouldn't that be too bad?" he said. "Okay, punk—we'll leave the door open and some heat'll come up. You'll live through it."

Lake produced some strips of rawhide which he had brought from the house on the Rue St. Clair. With ankles bound and wrists crossed and bound behind them, Anne and Drake were shoved down onto a mattress which lay on the floor in a corner of the room where furniture was piled.

"There you are," Martin said. "All tucked away for the night—an' not another word out of you! . . . Come on, Pete, let's go down and dope this thing out."

THEY left the door of the room open. For a time Anne and Drake lay huddled in the darkness listening to the sounds from downstairs. The voices of the two men and Collette were an indistinguishable murmur. Drake could hear them moving around the room where Collette seemed to be getting supper for them.

"Not too cold, Anne dear?" Drake murmured.

"No, I—I guess not. Oh Alan—"

"I should never have married you," Drake muttered bitterly. "Being a detective's wife is no damn good! Right off the bat I get you into a mess like this!"

"Never mind, darling!" She forced a

Lake drew a revolver.
Two shots rang out.



smile. "I'd still want to be your wife if —if you were a trapeze artist!"

"If we could get loose," he whispered, "I could get hold of that knot at your wrists with my teeth . . ."

"Then chew hard, my sweet, and don't spare the inlays."

They could roll and hitch themselves around a little. But the rawhide at Anne's wrists withstood all Drake's efforts to

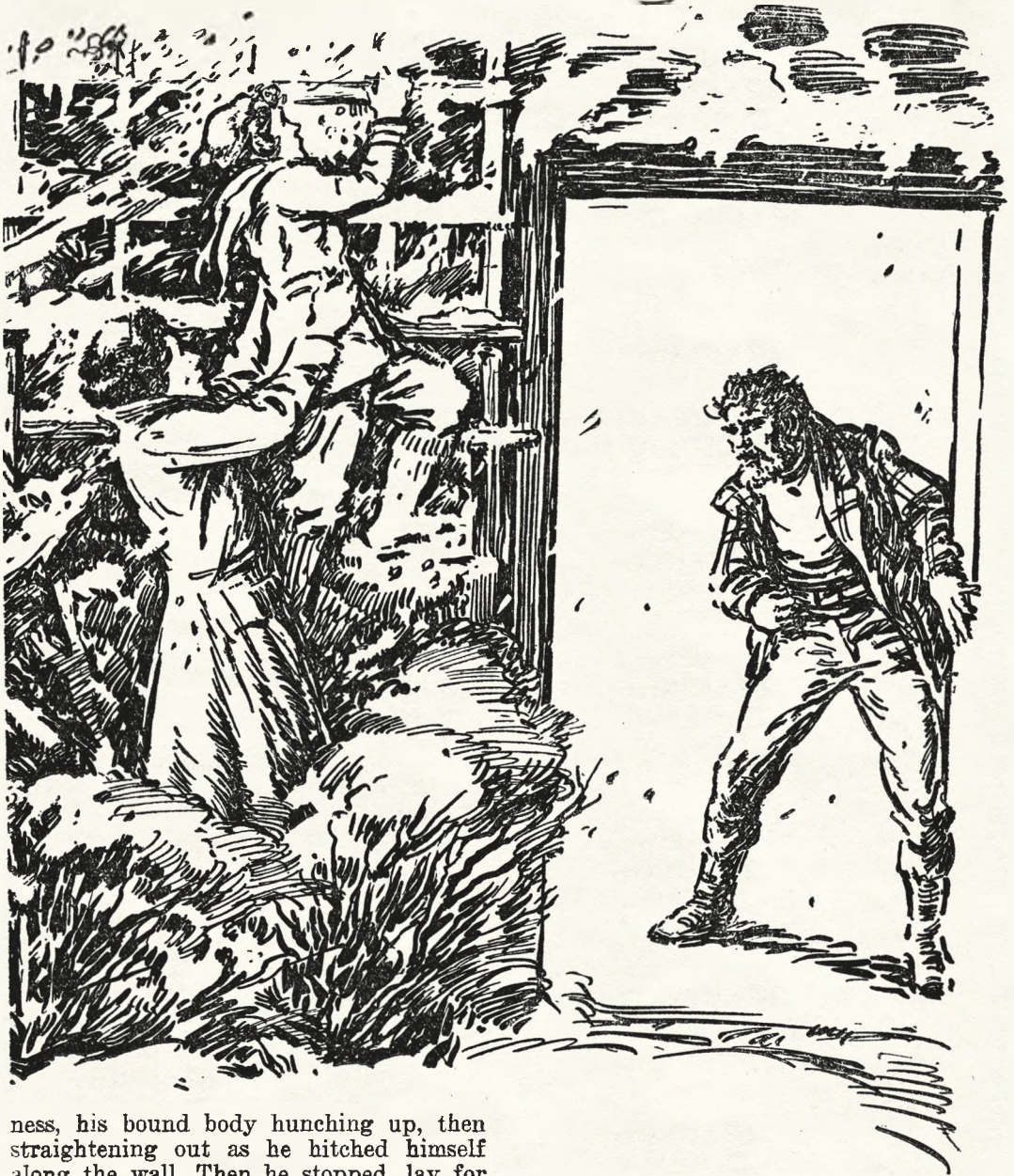
loosen it with his teeth.

"Won't work," he muttered. "I must get the damned things sharpened!" Then suddenly he rolled off the mattress, began hitching himself slowly across the floor.

"Alan, what are you trying to do now?" she whispered.

"Quiet!" he warned. "Just got an idea —if only it'll work. . . ."

Vaguely she could see him in the dark-



ness, his bound body hunching up, then straightening out as he hitched himself along the wall. Then he stopped, lay for an instant awkwardly twisting himself. Anne thought she heard him give a low mutter as though from pain.

"Alan! Alan dear, you all right?"

"Yes, of course." Laboriously he hitched himself back to her. He was panting. "If it will work, Anne—we could get out that window."

"It's twenty feet to the ground—maybe more. And I forgot my parachute."

"But there's a big trellis on this side

the house. I saw it as we came in. If it comes near enough to this window—"

"—an' I tell to you that you are one damn beeg liar!" It was Collette's voice, shrill, strident, floating up the stairs from the room underneath.

"Shut up, you little—" Lake's contemptuous epithet was obscene.

"Cut it out!" Martin growled. "You two damn fools—"

"He try to tell to me he had no interes' in that Fernande woman," the girl cried hysterically. "An' now it is this new one! I am the beeg fool when I do what he tell me because I love him!"

"You do what you're told, because you know I'll break your damn neck if you don't!" Lake retorted gallantly. "Shut your trap!"

"I will not! You are murderer an' worse. An' you too, Martin—you kill jus' for money. Two murderers that is what I get because I love this Peter Lake!"

"Aw, shut up!" Martin growled. "You damn women talk too much."

"I'm getting it!" Drake muttered suddenly to Anne. The angry men's voices, and the voice of the shrill hysterical girl, still floated up the stairs. But Drake hardly heeded them. He was jerking and twisting his wrists. Then at last one of them came loose. He lay breathing hard, but he held out his free hand to Anne. She gasped. His hand and wrist were covered with blood.

"Alan!"

"It's okay. Nails in that board over there on the floor—I scratched my hand with them."

The blood, running down to his wrist, had soaked the rawhide. And wet rawhide stretches, shrinking back again when it dries. Drake's pulls and twists had stretched it now so that he was able to free one of his hands. Then in a moment he had the other one loose, had untied his ankles and freed Anne.

"Quick now!" he whispered. "That fight downstairs helps us—they won't hear any little noise we might make."

They went to the window, raised it. Drake saw that the lattice of the trellis came up to within a foot or so of the sill.

"Think you can make it, Anne?"

"Yes. I'll try—"

"I'll go first."

He slid out of the window feet first. His feet touched the top of the trellis, tested it, found it firm. Then he was climbing down.

"Now! Come after me, Anne. I'll steady you."

They were part way down the trellis, Drake with his feet perhaps not over six feet above the ground, when suddenly he was aware that the front door of the house had opened. It was around the front cor-

ner of the building. He could not see it, but the stream of light from it out on the snow was visible. And wild angry voices reached him.

Lake's voice: "You think you'd dare tell the police! Why—why you cursed little—! You wouldn't dare!"

And Collette's voice: "You take your hands from me! You—you are killers an' worse, both of you!"

There was the sound of a scuffle, a blow, and a cry of pain and hysterical anger from Collette. Then at the house corner the figure of Lake appeared in the light from the doorway. He was dragging Collette, cuffing her, and she was screaming. She broke away, tried to run, with him after her. He caught her, tried to hold her as she fought him, clawing at him.

And then abruptly he saw the figures of Drake and Anne clinging to the trellis. He let out a startled yelp.

It had all happened so quickly that Drake had no time to do anything except cling to the trellis with one hand and with the other try to steady Anne, who was close above him. He was aware that Lake had drawn a revolver, was leveling it. Two shots rang out. But Collette had snatched at his arm and the bullets went wild, thudding against the stone wall of the house to one side of Drake.

Collette's wild clutch knocked the gun from Lake's hand. It fell into the snow. With a maddened oath he turned on her in frenzy, his blows beating her down to her knees. She gave a last despairing scream and sank unconscious.

A roar from Martin inside the house sounded. He flung up one of the side windows, peered out. "You fools, what the hell!" Then he vaulted out of the window. He did not see Drake so close over him—Drake let go of Anne and leaped backward off the trellis. His dropping body collided with the burly Martin. They fell together in the snow, clutching at each other, rolling, fighting in the snow beside the house.

Then Anne dropped from the trellis. The two figures struggled on the ground, first with Drake on top and then Martin. She staggered at them. Drake saw her.

"Keep away!" he gasped. "Run, Anne! Run—get away from here!"

Then she saw that the burly Martin had

Drake pinned down, was sprawled on him, choking him.

Dimly Anne was aware that there were shouts off in the snowy woods. It was Jacques and I coming on the run. But Anne was thinking only of Alan who was squirming, lunging, flailing with futile fists as the burly Martin pinned him, pummeling his face.

"Run!" Alan gasped to her again.

Then Anne suddenly saw a little dark object at her feet, half buried in the snow. She stooped, snatched it up. It was the revolver which Collette had knocked from Lake.

CLUTCHING the revolver, Anne stood waving it with no idea how to shoot it. Her head was whirling, her heart wildly pounding in her throat. Vaguely she knew that Lake was coming at her. But Lake must have heard our distant shouts, perhaps seen the little blobs of Jacques and me as we came on a run. He may have thought it was oncoming police. Whatever his thoughts, he certainly saw Anne waving the gun. He stopped in his tracks, then ducked back around a corner of the house.

Anne ran at Martin and Drake. For a second, as her finger fumbled at the trigger, doubtless Drake was in as much danger of being killed as Martin was. But Anne realized it. She gripped the weapon by the muzzle, floundered forward through the snow. Then she was standing close over Martin's bent head. The heavy butt of the gun crashed down, full on Martin's skull. He slumped forward; and then Drake was out from under him, rising up.

"Oh, Alan—" She gave him a little twisted smile; then the gun dropped from her fingers, her knees buckled as she fainted, wilting limply down into the snow at his feet.

Jacques and I were not close enough to see any of that. We could just make out the tiny figures beside the house, with the shaft of light from its open front door slanting out into the snowy darkness. Then Jacques clutched at me as we ran.

"Look! Look there!"

It was the running figure of a man. He slanted diagonally past us. For an instant he went through the shaft of light from the house doorway.

"That's him!" Jacques gasped. "Him—at last!"



Jacques and Lake were at the rail, stabbing, struggling.

It was Lake making his getaway. Jacques and I took after him. I fired a shot at him, but it was futile, he was much too far away.

"Don't do that!" Jacques gasped. "He is for me—you let him alone!"

I could not see the boy's face as we ran, but the grim, quivering intensity of his voice was unmistakable. His revenge was at hand—the thing he had dreamed of, lived for, all these weeks since the murder of his sister.

It was perhaps a ten-minute chase. There were times when we could not see the wildly running figure as it plunged through the icy underbrush in the murk and blur of the heavy snowfall. Then we came out into the open and picked up the trail.

"You stay back!" Jacques gasped. "This is for me!"

Jacques had his knife; I clutched my revolver. It seemed that I could hear falling water now. It grew louder as we ran. Ahead of us I could make out the brink of the great St. Lawrence valley, and to

(Continued on page 119)

BRUSHLESS CREAM

Ace investigator Adam Somervell never used a shaving brush. And thereby, when he went to look into that fantastic bubonic plague case, he got the closest shave of his life. . . .

ADAM SOMERVELL, thirty and growing stout, came into his office in the Investigation Department of the Life Insurance Company, and slumped into his swivel chair, mopping his forehead. It had been a hot ride in from Oakville, the suburb where he lived, and a little marital dispute about the coffee had not conducted to Adam's happiness.

"I suppose old Rufus will have one of his fool investigations for me," he soliloquized; and, before the last word had left his mouth, old Rufus, head of the depart-

Adam kept on ducking and Alice kept on firing.



BY LEW MERRILL

ment, came in, flourishing a sheaf of papers.

"Morning, Somervell. Well, I've got a real fancy investigation for you today," he said. "Been inoculated?"

"Inoculated? Yeah, smallpox, typhoid, hay fever—"

"Mixing up inoculation with vaccination, aren't you?"

"For your benefit, Mr. Rufus," said



Illustrations
by
Newton Alfred

Adam suavely, "I seldom trouble to be orthodox in discussing medical matters with the laity."

"Laity, huh?" snorted old Rufus. "New name you've coined for me? Well, take it easy, Somervell. Ever been inoculated against bubonic plague?"

"Good Lord, no!" ejaculated Adam, sitting up in his chair. "Plague? You mean the Asiatic plague?"

"That's right," said Rufus. "I've got a nice little job for you, Somervell. I'm sending you into quarantine against plague to investigate a very suspicious death. You're a bacteriological expert, Somervell. You'll have the time of your life looking into this case. And you'll be safe enough, unless you happen to be bitten by a flea that's just been dining off a plague-infested rat."

A fresh exudation of perspiration dampened Adam's forehead. "You're joking, Mr. Rufus," he said faintly.

"No, my boy, I'm dead serious. It's the case of Paul Remsen, the shipping man, who died last night of plague, leaving about thirty million dollars. That doesn't concern us. What does concern us is that he was insured for a quarter of a million, in favor of his widow."

"Where did he die?" gasped Adam. "India?"

"No, in Mattapan, New York. The authorities are keeping the cause of death a secret, but they've quarantined the house and the guests. We want to find out how Remsen came to die of plague. But look into your files, Somervell. I took the liberty of running through them. They're interesting, Somervell."

"I know they are. I advised against the granting of that policy."

"I don't remember that, Somervell. But, anyway, that's not the issue. Unless it can be proved that the widow murdered Remsen, the company's due to pay through the nose. Just pull out those files, Somervell, and we'll go into the matter."

Adam took down his files. In various pigeon-holes he kept the private records of all persons insured for more than twenty-five thousand dollars. These records were comprehensive. They included all sorts of data, gathered from all sorts of sources. The company was proud of the fact that it sent off its checks within forty-eight hours of death, but it kept a close

watch on its insurees.

"Remsen, Paul," said Adam. "Here we are. I've looked into the case quite a number of times, waiting to see how soon Mrs. Remsen would become a widow again."

"He was her third husband," said old Rufus. "The first was Ogden Rouse, the millionaire. Died of what the doctors called dermatitis—inflammation of the skin."

"Dermatitis covers a multitude of skins," said Adam.

"Second husband, Leopold Curtis, millionaire textile man. The widow picked millionaires. Died of pustular dermatitis. What does that mean?"

"It may mean anything," said Adam, "but I'd say it meant that the local board of health was hiding something. Yes, I remember this note: 'suspicion of bubonic plague.'"

"Well, they've come out in the open," said Rufus. "This Paul Remsen, the third husband, was certified a victim of plague, and a quarantine has been established. Go on, Somervell, dig up the dirt."

The sheet from which Adam read was a compilation from various sources. "Mrs. Remsen's father was a railroad contractor in India. Helped build the Burma & Assam Railroad. He took his wife and family out with him. Mrs. Remsen—or Alice Goode, as she was then—became the heroine of an unsavory episode involving Prince Janjit Singh, ruler of a small principality. It's a long story, Mr. Rufus."

"I know. I've read it. He wanted to marry her. Supposed to have strangled his principal wife to make a place for her. The wife laid a curse on her successor—death to every man who became her husband or lover."

"That's right," said Adam. "I don't know why we granted the late Paul Remsen insurance."

"That's outside our province. He died of plague, and he's hung us up for a quarter of a million. You're going up to investigate."

Adam uttered a profane word.

"There's an Indian butler the woman's been employing these past fifteen years, a relic of her Indian days. Watch out for that fellow. He'll probably try to inoculate you with plague if the woman gets suspicious of you."

"He'll have to hire the rat and the flea," said Adam.

"Ah! Well, that's your business. The point is, here's a house party quarantined for plague at Mattapan, and the authorities are keeping it dark because of business. Mattapan draws a lot of income from the tourist trade. Somervell, just go up there and find out how Mrs. Remsen got the flea to bite the rat, and then to bite her husband. That's the way the plague's spread, isn't it?"

"That's the way," said Adam. "I'm a family man, Mr. Rufus, and a prospective parent. I don't feel justified in taking these chances on five thousand a year. If it were six, now—"

Old Rufus poked a bony finger into his ribs. "You know how much we appreciate your services, Somervell," he said. "Get the goods on Alice Remsen, and nothing will be too good for you."

"I've heard smething like that before," said Adam sourly.

IN the closet off his office Adam kept two bags. One was an overnight bag, containing a pair of pajamas, shaving kit, hairbrushes. This was because any call upon his services was apt to be sudden, precluding his return to Oakville to pack. Besides, Margaret always made things difficult for him. She had an obsession that these trips of his were actually connected with that other woman.

The other suitcase contained what Adam called his traveling laboratory, and into this he had compressed practically everything that might be needed in a scientific way. There was a fingerprint outfit, with aluminum dust and chemist's gray powder, a microscope, a midget spectroscope, a fluoroscope, with methylene blue and sulphuric acid for bacteriological stains.

Packed, Adam said: "When's the next train for this place, Mattapan?"

Old Rufus was fussing over the timetable. "You can just make it, if you hurry," he said. "Somervell, I know we can break this case. The 10:54 will get you to Mattapan at 5:05. All the rest is up to you."

"How will I crash the gates if there's a quarantine?" asked Adam.

"I don't know, Somervell. But, once in, you'll have a heck of a time getting out."

"I'm beginning to see all that. Will you call up my wife and tell her I've been sent on an important mission?"

"Say, listen, Somervell, the last time I did that she hollered blue murder."

"Yeh, but you're going to do it again, or here's where I resign," said Adam.

Old Rufus glowered at him. "All right," he said. "You're the white-headed boy in this outfit. I'll do it. But meanwhile, get busy, Somervell. You've only just time enough to catch that train."

MATTAPAN was a small station on the route to Montreal, and only two trains a day stopped there. Adam got off in a primitive countryside, with a few cottages, and half a dozen stores facing the tracks. A battered old taxi was apparently waiting for passengers, but Adam was the only one.

"Take me to the Remsen house?" he asked.

The driver grinned. "Sure can, but I ain't taking you back," he said. "They're quarantined."

"So I heard. Plague, isn't it?"

"A-si-a-tic plague. That Injun princess put the curse on her husbands. She's got a black man—Cherry, we call him—who carries the germs around for her. Taxi, sir?"

This last address was to a smallish, alert-looking man who had come from the platform.

"Yes, I'm going to the Remsen place," he said, looking curiously at Adam. "Who are you?" he asked bluntly.

"Insurance representative."

"Well, you can get in, but you can't get out. The place is quarantined against bubonic plague."

"I'll take my chance," said Adam. "You in the same boat?"

"No, I'm the board of health. I come and go as I please."

"Supposing you were to pick up a flea?"

"That would be too bad for me and the community," returned the other.

"This gent is Dr. Stevens," put in the taxi driver.

"I'm Adam Somervell. Get going, driver."

The taxi started. Adam, leaning back beside his companion, asked: "Kind of queer case, isn't it?"

"Well, we certainly didn't expect an outbreak of bubonic plague in Mattapan."

"How d'you account for it?"

"Mrs. Remsen has an Indian butler. He

must have been harboring plague fleas ever since his leaving India. Those Asiatics are pretty filthy, Mr. Somervell."

"Kind of far-fetched, isn't it? You know this Mrs. Remsen's history?"

"I know that story about how the Rajah's wife laid a curse on her boy-friends. She's had plenty, believe me."

"How about the dead man?" asked Adam.

"We buried him as quick as we could. Can't have a body like that above the ground."

Adam said: "Remsen was her third husband. The first one, Ogden Rouse, died of a skin disease. She collected insurance on him. Second, Leopold Curtis, died of ditto, probably bubonic plague. She got a quarter million on him. Who certified that Remsen died of plague?"

"I certified him," said Stevens. "I made myself highly unpopular with the community, but there was nothing else to be done."

"Found the plague bacillus?"

"It wasn't necessary, Somervell. The symptoms were obvious. I'm no bacteriologist, and I didn't think it necessary to delay the burial. You know these bugs?"

"Well, it's a sort of hobby of mine. That woman picks millionaires. Anything attractive about her?"

Stevens slapped Adam's thigh. "Boy, wait till you see that redhead. If I wasn't a married man with three kids of my own, I'd take a chance with that Indian butler. But she's got a new boy friend."

"Mind telling me his name?"

"Not in the least, since it's known all over town. He's Leslie Crothers, some kind of a bum actor, ten years younger than her. He's quarantined up at the house. Somervell, you've got into a crazy set-up."

"I see it. But she can't have all these husbands dying of plague. You've got to have rats and fleas, and it just doesn't work out, Stevens."

"Well, Somervell, you'll find it's that butler, Cherry. He's got some fleas, and he turns them loose whenever that woman feels a hankering after a new husband. I don't know how he does it, but there you are! And she's crazy. She's got an altar to the memory of her brother, who was killed in Japan, in the first world war."

The taxi-driver looked back. "I'll say

she's crazy," he joined in. "Here's where I let you off, gents. I'm a married man, and I ain't taking no plague back into my home."

They got out beside the stone walls of an enclosure. Through the trees, the house could be seen in the distance. "What's all this?" asked Adam, indicating a wired space in which a number of animals were standing.

"Deer park. Indian deer. One of her hobbies. Now, Somervell, you're sure you want me to take you in? You'll have to stay till I pronounce the premises clean of infection."

"I'll stay. But how do you keep them here? Force of State police?"

"Not necessary. They can't get away by rail, and we've blocked the roads and got their license numbers. If anybody wants to break the quarantine, he'll have a devil of a lot of walking to do, brother."

THERE was a milling crowd of more than a dozen guests in the hall of the Remsen house. They wanted to get away, and they were importunate. Stevens said: "Sorry, folks, but the State's clamped down on you till you're all pronounced free of the plague. You can't get away without being picked up; don't try it."

"Oh, who's the good-looking man?" cried a luscious, red-haired woman. "You've brought God's gift to woman, Dr. Stevens."

"This gentleman," said Stevens, "is Mr. Somervell, from the insurance company."

Alice Remsen giggled. "Does the poor man know that he's quarantined?" she asked.

"I'm not worrying about the quarantine, Mrs. Remsen," said Adam. "It's all in my line of business."

She clapped him on the arm. "We'll try to make you happy while you're here," she said. "Leslie, meet Mr. Somervell."

Leslie Crothers extended a limp hand. He was a blonde, washed-out-looking young man, with dark circles around his prominent blue eyes.

Mrs. Remsen called: "Cherival!" A coal-black butler in a loose garment and a turban came forward.

"Find a room for Mr. Somervell, and take care of him." She added several words of what was presumably Hindostani. Adam saw the butler's eyelid flicker. He followed



Stevens grasped Mrs. Remsen by the arm that held the knife.

him up the staircase, into a room on one side of a long corridor, where the man set down his bags.

"I'd like to know just how you managed to infect Mr. Remsen with the plague," said Adam.

He could see that the man understood his words, but the only result was a haughty stare. Cheriwal wasn't even going

to waste any English on him.

He departed, and Adam stood looking out of the window into the dying day. The herd of deer was busy devouring its evening rations—all except one creature, that was evidently sick, and stood with drooping head. Adam watched it reflectively, then turned away. He set his portable laboratory in the bathroom that adjoined

his bedroom, and put out his safety razor and his tube of brushless shaving-cream. He washed up, and went downstairs.

Dinner was being served, and it was evident that Alice Remsen's menage was Bohemian in the extreme. Most of the guests, men and women, were wandering up and down, decidedly under the influence of liquor, and seizing helpings handed out by Cheriwal, who presided at the buffet table.

Fortified by two or three drinks, Adam was feeling rather good when Alice Remsen broke in upon a desultory conversation he had been having with a very tipsy brunette.

"I suppose that you think this terrible, when my poor husband has been dead only two days," she said. "But you see, our marriage was one in name only. Poor Paul and I were never really compatible. And I don't like these people here. I wish they'd go. They're Paul's guests, not mine."

Adam, feeling his liquor, said: "Madam, don't mention it. I'm here only as a formality, to ascertain how your husband died of plague."

"Come with me!"

Up the stairs, a sharp turn into a boudoir, with a bedroom beyond it, and a niche with a light burning, and diffusing the scent of incense.

Above the light, the photograph of a very American-looking young officer.

"My brother. He died in Japan, in the first world-war. We were like twin souls. No man has ever been so near to me as Clifford.

"My father took us both out to India when he was engaged to build the Burma & Assam Railroad. There was a prince named Janjit Singh. He became infatuated with me. I wasn't responsible for all the lies and infamy that were circulated about me."

"No, of course not," said Adam.

"My butler, Cheriwal, saved my life from him, when he was desperate one night, threatening me with a pistol. That's why I have kept the old man in my employment. And because my three husbands died of a skin disease they pretend that old Cheriwal has inoculated them with plague. Isn't it a dreadful situation, Mr. Somervell?"

"Well, I wouldn't call it nice," said Adam.

"You see, Mr. Somervell, I'm not used to all this trouble and suspicion. You see how preposterous it is to suppose I could have killed my husbands with plague germs. I'd rather pay fifty thousand dollars to some nice young man to stop this persecution. And—and I'm quite capable of showing my gratitude, Mr. Somervell."

Alice Remsen certainly looked that, as she bent toward Adam. There came a flash of memory. That quarrel about the coffee with Margaret. He'd simply asked her whether it was dated, and she'd gone all up in the air. There was something brutally unreasonable about Margaret at times. And he'd always been such a proper husband. Never looked at another woman.

And here was Alice Remsen, smiling at him, with her red hair like a cloud about her face.

"I know we understand each other," said Alice, smiling.

THERE were two sick deer in the enclosure. One of them was in an advanced stage of whatever disease had infected it. It couldn't be plague. Deer didn't get the plague. But all those symptoms were those of plague in the human. Adam took a specimen for examination from one of the exudations about the mouth, and went back into the house.

The guests were whooping it up. With the imposition of the quarantine they seemed to have thrown off all restraint. There were a number of animated scenes in various parts of the big living-room, and one of them was between Alice Remsen and Leslie Crothers. It looked as if the playboy was getting the brush-off, and Adam's judgment was confirmed when he saw Alice's hand slash across Leslie's face.

Cheriwal, the butler, interrupted Adam's speculations with a tray of cocktails. Adam looked into the wise, bearded face.

"How do you preserve those fleas?" he asked.

"Sah?"

"Those plague fleas that Mrs. Remsen uses to kill her successive husbands. How do you preserve them over the years?"

"I do not understand, sah. Your ratiocination is completely unintelligible, sah."

Adam gulped his drink. So that was that. The woman felt completely secure, and Cheriwal was in the game up to his ears. That drink was potent, added to

what Adam had had before. He sat back, watching the dissolving scenes. Couples were dancing to the soft music of the radio, quarreling, making up. It was a devil of a situation, and—they were all quarantined.

"I believe I have to congratulate you, Mr. Somervell?"

That was Leslie Crothers, the playboy, at his side. Adam said: "On what?"

Crothers dug him in the ribs. "Don't play innocent, Somervell. Just make hay while the sun shines. It's all one to me. Only, steer clear of the shaving brush. I'm telling you that because you look like a good sort of guy."

"Shaving brush?"

"Yeah." Leslie was half-cocked. "She dropped a hint to me. She never does things by halves. Anything to get back at that red-headed devil. So long, Somervell."

Leslie went staggering across the room. Adam saw him making up to a receptive blonde. He was alone again.

Not quite alone. He had had two more cocktails, and here was Alice Remsen sitting beside him. Her hand was on his own. "We've got to get out of this, Mr. Somervell. Oh, how I hate this rowdy crowd."

"What did you invite them for?"

"Cocktail, sah?" Black Cheriwal was at Adam's side, the tray invitingly extended. Mechanically Adam took his glass, tossed it off, and almost at once felt its stimulus begin to permeate his system. There was something more than alcohol in that glass.

"I don't know. Poor Paul liked company. I'd like to be alone—alone with you."

Adam gazed with swimming eyes at her.

"I'd pay fifty thousand dollars to any nice young man who would free me from all this," said Alice.

A telephone in the hall began to buzz. She left him, and went out. And Adam heard his name spoken in the brassy telephone language.

Alice hadn't intended to hand him the receiver, he could tell. But he took it from her. The speaker was his wife. "Is that you, Adam, darling?"

"Yes, Margaret."

"Mr. Rufus told me where you were. I'm so unhappy, Adam. I was so mean to you about that coffee."

"Darling, that was the swellest coffee I've ever drunk."

"But it wasn't dated, darling, because they're not putting out dated coffee any more, and I didn't have the nerve to admit it. Darling, whom are you with?"

"Oh, just a sort of party. I'll be back soon."

"Is she blonde or brunette, darling?"

"I don't know what you mean. My hostess? She's got gray hairs and wrinkles."

"Thank God for the wrinkles, darling," said Margaret, and there followed a click.

"Who's that woman?" Alice Remsen's red hair was close to Adam's cheek. "Your wife?"

"Yes, and the loveliest little woman in the world," said Adam.

"Oh! Re-ally?" sneered Alice. "One-woman man, are you, Mr. Somervell?"

"And how!" said Adam thickly, feeling that last cocktail percolate his veins and arteries and ducts.

"Dear me, I seem to be out on a limb," murmured Alice. She looked around. Three unattached guests made a bee-line for her.

WITH the condenser, the dark ground illumination showed the culture clearly. Adam pored through his microscope, trying to rid his brain of the fumes of the cocktail. He looked about him. He had set out his portable laboratory in the bathroom. The door of the little cabinet was open, and he saw his safety razor and his tube of brushless shaving cream. But there was something else that hadn't been there when he put out his things, and which he never used.

It was a shaving-brush. Suddenly into his mind there flashed Crothers' warning.

It was after midnight, and the sounds below had subsided into a sort of gentle tumult, interspersed with an occasional derisive laugh, or the sound of somebody being knocked down. Adam was staggered by the culture. It was so plain, and it wasn't bubonic plague at all.

Then he looked at the shaving-brush. Adam always used a brushless cream. He thought shaving-brushes were unsanitary.

He picked it up very gingerly. It was an ordinary well-used shaving-brush. He clipped the tips of a couple of bristles into

(Continued on page 121)

LAST TROPHY

Ex-racketeer Max Golan was an artistic collector—of guns that had belonged to the men he had killed. Now he was adding the final trophy—the gun that once had blazed in the hand of his arch rival. To Max it seemed a triumph over sentimentality. It was, but in a deadly way Max could never have foreseen . . .

MAX GOLAN, after glancing at the sensational headlines on the first page of the evening tabloid his secretary had placed before him on his massive desk, didn't bother to read the rest of the story. He didn't have to. He knew all about it. Knew the definite answer to the various surmises the account doubtlessly went into as to the identity of the murderer of the slain man.

The headlines shouted:

**JOHNNY MAGENTA BURIED
IN SOLID SILVER CASKET
OVER \$200,000 SPENT ON
FUNERAL OF RACKETEER**

Max knew all about it. He had killed Johnny Magenta.

His eyes left the headlines and lingered, somewhat gloatingly, on an automatic that lay on the desk before him—close to the ornate silver pen-and-ink set presented to him by the neighborhood political club of



Illustrations by
Paul H. H. Stone

**BY
HAROLD
DE POLO**



the proper party. He had been proud of that set when he had received it, although in the last few years he had come to realize it was a trifle fancy, a trifle gaudy. But the weapon was not gaudy, most assuredly. It was even a little crude, showing, indeed, a few minute signs of handcraft instead of modern machine work. But of all the things he had ever owned it was to him the most precious, the most desirable.

"I came to perform the last rites," said Max soothingly.

It was a Q. Carlo gun, the only one in existence, and it had belonged to Johnny Magenta.

He put out his hand to pick it up again—slowly, as all rare objects should be reached for—and fondled it with almost feminine softness as his fingers closed over the black walnut butt. He thought, dreamily, of the loving skill the maker must have put into the fashioning of those two graceful pieces of dark wooden hand-grips, of the more concentrated care which the famous old gunsmith must have bestowed on every infinitesimal piece of mechanism that had gone into completing the finished project. Q. Carlo, it was told, had said that this was to be the masterpiece of his life. Too bad he couldn't have lived to improve on this type of gun—or at least to have turned out a few more specimens—and won unquestioned recognition as the finest maker of automatic pistols, as well as small-bore target rifles, in the entire world.

But Max Golan found himself smiling, when he thought of that. Chuckling, in fact, shortly and audibly. Had this happened, he reminded himself, the prize he was holding wouldn't—well, it wouldn't have any more value, except for the manner in which it had come into his possession, than any cheap mail-order catalogue gun, you might say. No, it was splendid that everything had turned out as it had. The gun would *not*, otherwise, be the only Q. Carlo automatic pistol in the entire world.

"You sure liquidated him, boss," said his secretary, with a nice balance of admiration and deference.

Max Golan turned in his chair and looked at the young man, in a faultlessly fitting blue serge suit and subdued tie, whose alert brown eyes and well-groomed face and hair gave him the appearance of a confidential employee to an important business executive:

"'Liquidated,' Howard?" Max asked with his odd, cold smile that could invariably cause the recipient to feel an uncomfortable tingle along the spine. "You've been reading too much modern magazine fiction. 'Killed'—'murdered'—whichever you prefer. Remember, too—"

"Excuse—"

"Remember that the word 'boss'—or 'chief', for that matter—isn't acceptable. Mr. Golan, please!"

"Yes, sir. I didn't mean—"

But Max Golan had put the weapon down and was holding up a hand. A hand that peremptorily commanded attention as much as did his smile. His pale gray eyes in his pale gray face, surmounted by his thin, silver-flecked hair brushed sleekly away and down from a meticulous part in the center, showed ironic reprimand. He brushed slim, delicate fingers over the lapel of his light gray flannel suit (the tailor had been an artist); felt the collar of his gray linen shirt, a shade darker than his coat; caressed the knot of his even deeper tie. Then, for a second or two, he stretched out a foot and glanced at the heavy silk socks, perfectly matching his cravat, that hugged his ankles without a wrinkle. He finished, before addressing his secretary, by tapping the toe of his custom-made shoe on the floor. He spoke quietly:

"I did not search among my numerous followers—ah, gangsters, gunmen, if you will—when I entered this real estate field and desired a secretary. I wanted one with a different background, and yet a man who might be able to—oh, to understudy *my* former background. That is why I chose you. You had possibilities. You had graduated from an adequate New York law school, and you had served for several years in the office of my former attorney. A useful and unscrupulous and diabolically clever man, Gus Bernstein, but not one for my present needs as president of the Acme Realty Corporation. Nevertheless, I wanted someone with me who would understand—the past. That, I repeat, is why I chose you, Howard. That is why, to cite one instance, I took you to my own tailor. You were—well, a bit inclined to favor the flare Gus had for loudness . . . But enough. I am certain you understand. We do not use 'liquidate' when we mean *kill* or *murder*; we do not use 'boss'—or 'chief', of which you have occasionally been guilty—when we mean Mr. Golan."

"Thank you, sir. I'll remember."

"Thank you, Howard," said Mr. Golan. "Now, I think I would like to be left in peace to further reminisce about this—*mentem*. No telephone calls or visitors, please."

MAX GOLAN, when by himself, didn't **LE** even glance at the cherished automatic about which he had expressed a wish to

ruminate. Instead, his eyes strayed to a long, glass-fronted cabinet that took up one complete side of the wall in the large pent-house office—in the towering apartment building that he owned—overlooking the East River.

There seemed to be a score of weapons—revolvers, automatics, pistols not so up-to-date, two Tommy guns—hung from hooks and resting against the purple velvet lining. There were, to be exact, just seventeen of them, including the Tommy pair. He had counted them many times. He was quite definite about the number.

Each firearm—Howard would perhaps have called them 'rods' or 'gats' or even 'roscoes', unless or until corrected—represented the life of a man that he had killed. The Q. Carlo automatic of Johnny Magenta, for which he intended having a special cabinet designed, would be the eighteenth.

The eighteenth and last.

It had taken him a long, long time to get Johnny. There had been rivalry between them ever since they had been born close to fifty years ago in the old Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. They had belonged to different churches, to different sandlot ball teams, to different gangs. Both had been promoted, so to speak, from these same juvenile gangs, Johnny winding up in Chicago and he himself staying in New York as a member of the then-notorious Hudson Dusters, down in Greenwich Village.

He remembered—could still see with the third-dimensional acute clearness of a stereoptical print—the first time he had met Johnny later on. It had been in a Broadway night club, during the early Prohibition era, and Johnny had boasted of the "swell guy" he was working for in the beer racket. Johnny had proudly shown him, in the washroom, a gun he carried in an armpit holster. It had been a Luger, and Johnny had said it had belonged to a war veteran he had killed who had belonged to the Capone outfit. The 'chief' had told him to keep it as a souvenir of his first fracas. The 'chief' was a 'swell guy' and was willing to give you his shirt, as were you to him.

Johnny Magenta! Always a sentimentalist, Max Golan reminded himself as he allowed the rest of that washroom interview to fade out. That, in fact, was what

had virtually been the cause of Johnny's death.

There was one thing that did not fade from the memory of the president of the Acme Realty Corporation. This was that Johnny, by showing him that Luger pistol, had started him on the hobby that had become a passion, a veritable obsession: collecting guns. Collecting them, solely, from men he had killed. The type or trade name of the weapon, in the beginning, hadn't mattered, as long as it was from a man who had drawn it on him and been beaten on the pull of the trigger and the accurate placing of the bullet.

He thought now, with a smile, of the glow of vanity he had enjoyed when he had shot it out with Legs McGuire—yes, it had been Legs—and had taken his first Luger. Big Andy of the Dusters had been so tickled that he'd sent one of the boys to Chi, knowing how Max felt, to tell Johnny who'd pulled the trick. Not that he, Max, hadn't had this special recognition coming to him, though. He'd done plenty for Big Andy. Max never had been and never was going to be the sap sentimentalist that Johnny Magenta had been. Nothing doing!

He found that he had to compose himself, as he viewed the array of trophies in the cabinet. Youthful memories sometimes got away with a man.

He concentrated on the second souvenir that met his eye, a .38 Police Special revolver. He'd killed a cop, down on South Street over by the docks, to get that one. So, for the next hour or more, he examined from his seat in his comfortable desk chair the trophies he had won. He and Johnny, the one working in the Chicago area and the other in the New York zone, had gone on for year after year in their rivalry of collecting the guns of the men they had killed. A better hobby, Max thought with a shrug, than stamps, or jewels, or pictures. It was so simple to have them all on display for easy viewing.

Both of them, finally, had become the biggest racketeers in their respective sections of the country. Max had been in everything—everything. It confused him, now, to think of all the angles he had played, nor was there need of it. Enough to know that he had been the biggest man in the business in the U. S. A. Far bigger than Johnny! But Johnny, somehow, had

managed to keep pace with him in their gun collections, and both had been scrupulously fair in sending correct reports of their latest acquisitions to the other by emissaries under what had amounted to a flag of truce. That is, Johnny had kept pace with him in the various *makes* of weapons, but not in the number. Johnny, until his death, had killed twelve men as against his own seventeen. Johnny had been exasperating in having an equal amount of different makes despite his lesser amount of killings.

Then this Q. Carlo specimen had come along.

IT had been luck—blind, bull luck—that had allowed Johnny to procure this rare specimen. As Max understood the story, as clearly as he could get it after much and elaborate investigation, the automatic had belonged to a fabulously wealthy Chicago department-store merchant who was reputed to have had one of the finest collections of all sorts of firearms in the world. There had been a labor dispute—some strike in his chain of stores—and Johnny had called to see him, by appointment, one evening at his home. The man had been looking at the Carlo gun, which he had loaded and which he had picked up at a fantastic price at auction, widely heralded in the newspapers. Anyway, he had not seen fit to agree to Johnny's terms and had lost his head to the extent of levelling his weapon in anger. That was the story, as far as could be learned.

In any event, Johnny had become the new owner of that gun.

Max had thought and planned and worked hard, to get the chance to get that gun for himself. It had been common gossip, in what the newspapers called the underworld, that Johnny Magenta always carried it with him, still in that armpit holster he favored. Rumor had it that he never parted with it, night or day, never had it far from his person. That was just like a sentimentalist, Max thought. Lucky for him, though, that Johnny *had* been one. Had been stupidly sentimental—primarily about women. Always about women. He, Max Golan, had definitely not been. Max, in fact, had rigidly had nothing at all to do with women.

And now he had the Q. Carlo gun.

It was the last one, as he had reminded

himself dozens and dozens of times since he had procured it, that he would ever add to his collection. He had had no right, conscientiously, to get it now. He had given up the rackets—all of them—close to two years ago. His money—and his holdings would total close to three million dollars—was all in sound, solid, conservative New York real estate. Apartment, office, factory buildings. All of it was owned outright, free from any hint of mortgage, and in the keen business man he had chosen to assist him in the managing of his enterprises, he was satisfied that he had an exceptionally able person. He was, in other words, fixed for life, and at just under fifty years old.

Three million. He had come a long way, had Max Golan, he thought once more with a chuckle. His father had been an immigrant German toymaker from Nuremberg, coming to America with his wife and son when Max had been no more than an infant in arms. His father had not particularly prospered, being a methodical man—with something of the artist in him, perhaps—who had been content to set up a little one-room workshop so that he might go on making his beloved toys by hand and eke out a living that kept a roof over their heads, sufficient modest clothes on their backs, enough plain wholesome food in their stomachs. It was so much better than the old country, Max's father had frequently said. What would his mother and father have thought now, had they been alive?

Max had earned it, though, if only by the very force, the dogged determination, of his mind. He had mapped out his career early in life, convinced that there was plenty of room at the top—at the absolute top—for a man who took the rackets calmly and seriously. He had. He had been able to dispense with all emotion, not allowing his heart to ever govern any of his actions, putting the slightest vestige of sentiment away from him. He had double-crossed when necessary, killed when necessary, without a qualm. He had, furthermore, kept himself aloof from the usual recreations of the racketeer. He had not gambled; he had not drunk beyond a cocktail or two at a time; he had, religiously, kept away from women. He had, instead, done his utmost to improve his brain. He had read widely; seen the best plays and

attended the best operas; taught himself something about pictures. He had learned how to associate with people in the so-called better walks of life, and he had discovered the asset of dressing well and quietly.

But he had, above all else, wisely refused to become entangled with women, no matter how his normal passions had occasionally been on the point of causing him to succumb.

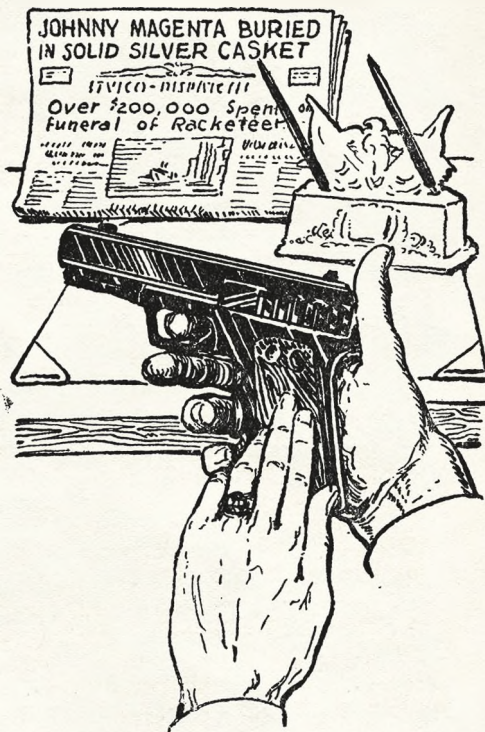
That was what had killed Johnny Magenta. Women.

Max's slim fingers—the facile fingers inherited from his toy-making father, possibly—reached out again and closed over the Q. Carlo gun. As he studied it, lovingly, he reassured himself how utterly complete life had finally become. . . . Poor Johnny. It could have been complete for him, too—well, longer than it had, anyway—if he had not been a fool about a woman, if he had not taken this last trip from Chicago to see a former flame who was reputed to be dying of tuberculosis and had begged, Max understood, to be with Johnny for even a few minutes just once more before she died. The sap! He had already been giving her, for years, a decent-sized monthly check. Enough to keep her in comfort, with a couple of servants, on that small but secluded estate he'd bought her up in Westchester. The poor sap. . . .

The secretary came in then, without knocking. He looked flustered and apologetic. So was his voice:

"I'm terribly sorry to bother you, Mr. Golan, sir. Cherry Monterey has been calling all evening. She says she *has* to speak to you."

"Cherry, eh?" That was the girl, the former world-famous Follies beauty, that



Max fondled his trophy with almost feminine softness.

Johnny had gone to see. "What does she want, Howard?"

"Nuts," said the secretary, reverting to a word Mr. Golan might not have liked. "She says she's so crazy with grief she's got to see and talk with someone here in New York that knew Johnny when he was a kid. She says she wants to see *you*."

"Tell her to go to hell," said Max Golan, also reverting to language he had not been recently accustomed to using.

**TOPS
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QUALITY!**



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THE retired racketeer, when alone once more, shook his head in ironic amusement. Another sentimentalist, another sap. The poor girl must have loved Johnny all right. Max understood, on unimpeachable authority, that Johnny had set up a trust fund for her that would equal the monthly allotment he had made her. That income, for life, should certainly have satisfied her, but she wanted to see and talk with someone who'd known Johnny when he'd been a kid. She probably meant it, too, to make it worse.

Well . . .

Again Mr. Golan's thoughts, and the few words he explosively muttered, were not in conformity with his present mode of behavior. Some of the words, indeed, were excessively obscene.

But he curtailed his mental ranting, abruptly, over another sap sentimentalist. Maybe you couldn't blame the girl—she must be way over forty, now. Women were funny that way. Well, so were men. Hell, so was the human race. Still, he shouldn't kick at Cherry having had a yen to want to see Magenta. That was why he'd gotten Johnny; that was why he now had the Carlo gun.

He'd played it fair with his boyhood pal, as he prided himself he always had with any prospective opponent. He'd never shot a man in the back; he'd never had him planted for the kill. He'd always given warning; he'd always given everyone a chance to draw. He'd sent word to Johnny, when he'd known he was at Cherry's, that he'd be waiting for him when he got outside. Johnny had been game and accepted the challenge, he had to admit. So had a lot of other guys, when you came right down to it.

Max, as always, had had the bulge. Not an unfair one. Max had always had that rare something, indescribable and possessed by perhaps one individual in a million, that goes to make a champion billiard player, or exceptional jockey, or deft fishing-rod manipulator. Something in the hands, in the fingers, that Max had with a gun. He could get to it quickly, shoot it quicker, kill with it quicker—well, at least quicker than any man he had ever met.

He had shot quicker than Johnny, anyway.

With a sigh, and rather suddenly, Max Golan placed the gun down on the desk. He had neglected, he noticed at once, to select a spot for it. The triumph of it all, as he thought of Johnny, was all at once a trifle tempered with regret. Now that he had the gun—the world-famous piece of Q. Carlo genius—he realized that there would be nothing left to wish for, to fight for. He did not desire to collect any more weapons. On that he was unalterably decided.

But poor Magenta. He couldn't collect any more; couldn't even enjoy the collection he'd made. Johnny, it came to him for the first time, must have enjoyed his guns as much as he himself did, must have added to them with the same fierce love, must have been as proud of that Carlo specimen as Max was now. Johnny, he also confessed, had also fought as cleanly and as squarely to get them. Johnny had never shot a man in the back, either, he knew on good authority.

Max Golan, for a good two or three hours, sat there in his office and thought. Thought, thought, thought. His mind always came back to one irrevocable fact. He had killed more men than Johnny Magenta had, and he had an exact amount of different makes of guns. This Q. Carlo automatic was the one and only item that could have changed the balance of the two collections. The man who had owned it—who had temporarily held that balance—was dead. He, Max Golan, was alive, and should be alive for many, many more years.

Old folk stories of ancient German knights, told him by his mother and father, came back to Max Golan. Stories that he had read in history and biography and fiction, too, returned to his memory. He threw these off with a toss of his head, almost savagely, as he told himself that this gesture he intended making was his idea—*his own idea*. A duellist, a warrior, should be buried with the weapon—with the sword or the shield or the bow or the axe—with which he had died in combat.

Johnny Magenta would be buried that way.

As he got up from his desk, alertly, and took the Q. Carlo pistol and stuck it in his right hand coat pocket—where he had always carried his guns—he reminded him-

self that his task would not be difficult. Johnny, although recently of Chicago in the State of Illinois, had not been able to escape sentimentalism even in death. He had been interred in a cemetery in lower Westchester, according to his own express wish, by the side of his mother and father.

Max Golan could get there by car, leisurely, in something less than an hour.

He rang for Howard.

"Yes, sir?"

"Get one of the cars. Never mind the chauffeur. You'll do the driving."

"Which car, sir?"

"Make it that long black limousine. It looks more like a hearse," said his employer with a touch of humor that pleased him. "By the way. Bring along some sort of a shovel or spade."

THIS slightly macabre sense of humor, as Howard stopped the big limousine at the grilled iron gates of the cemetery, brought a smile to Max Golan's lips. Unquestionably it was the proverbial "dark and stormy night" for such an undertaking. Ominous clouds were rolling low across the obscured moon, and the wind in the trees had a somewhat dismal whine to it.

"Wait for me here, Howard," he said, stepping out of the car with a short spade in one hand and the Carlo gun in the other.

"Yes, sir."

He knew just where the Magenta burial plot was, and he walked along the curving paths that led to it. As he approached the

railed enclosure, in which Johnny and his mother and father had been laid to their final rest, his sharp eye detected a reclining form sprawled over the new sod of the most recent grave.

It looked like a woman.

It was.

"What do you want? Can't I come here and be with my Johnny alone, now that he's dead?" a sobbing voice asked as the figure sat up.

"I—I came to perform the last rites, Miss Monterey," said Max soothingly.

"Oh! . . . You're—you're Max Golan!"

He shifted the Q. Carlo gun to his left hand, with which he held the spade, and removed his gray felt hat. Gallantly, he placed it over his heart and bowed, low and from the hips:

"Yes. I come to pay final homage to Johnny. He would like—"

But Cherry Monterey, with the speed and accuracy of an infuriated panther intent on the kill and the kill only, had launched her taut-nerved and racked body at the man she must have conclusively deemed to be the murderer of Johnny Magenta.

As he started to step back, to flash his right hand to the automatic, her unerring fingers closed over the butt of it. In them, there was the phenomenal strength of a maniac. She twisted the weapon, jabbed the barrel of it against his left side, and managed to squeeze the trigger.

With the muffled report, Max Golan slumped forward silently, shot through the heart by the last trophy collected by—a sentimentalist.

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A SCHOLAR AND A MURDERER

By WILL NICHOLS

THE villagers of Dryden, New York, had something new to talk about the summer of 1842 when that curious-looking twenty-three-year-old youth, powerful, stocky, and heavily bearded, appeared in their midst as a common laborer on the local canal. The extraordinary feature about him that caused startled attention was his huge head, the largest that anybody in the village had even seen, in which was set, with striking width between, a pair of alert and luminous eyes.

Doubtless they would have found him even more fascinating had they known that the youth was destined to become renowned as one of the intellectual and criminal marvels of his time.

His name, he said, was Edward Ruloff, but beyond this he would say practically nothing of himself and his origin. Then, as he became acquainted about the village, it was soon evident that he was a person of exceptional culture. He spoke a number of languages, knew medicine and the law, and could reel off the Latin names of the flora and fauna of the vicinity. Among his accomplishments was a penmanship of such flowing precision that it appeared to be copperplate. It seemed strange indeed that so educated and attractive a young man should have hired out to work with pick and shovel, but Edward Ruloff never proffered any explanations to ease the curiosity of the village.

Soon however, his talents found more appropriate use. There was a small private school in Dryden that needed a teacher, and Ruloff applied for and was given the job.

His was certainly a split personality.

The young pupils found him wonderfully interesting. In teaching English, instead of using the old dry methods, he would make things exciting by tracing words to their Greek and Latin beginnings, and by comparing the alphabet with the Chinese and prehistoric cave writings. In Physiology, he would take his students on long walks, pointing out medicinal herbs.

In one of his classes was a pretty sixteen-year-old named Harriet Schutt, the daughter of an old and respected family. They began to be seen often together and in the fall of 1843 they announced they were to be married.

Despite Ruloff's high standing in the village as a popular and cultivated man, the girl's brothers, William and Edward, protested. They wanted to know more about the professor's past. At this he seemed deeply insulted, stating indignantly that his great learning should indicate plainly his fine character.

Though the dissatisfied brothers still fought against the match, Harriet Schutt and Edward Ruloff were married December 21, 1843. He then quit the school and became a botanical physician, professing to cure almost all ailments by use of medicinal herbs. This sort of "natural healing" had just come into great popular favor in America. Dr. Ruloff, in a time of extremely lax medical laws when the qualifications of doctors were not looked into too closely, soon had a flourishing practice and the couple moved to the larger field of Lansing, near Lake Cayuga.

BUT his domestic affairs went unhappily. Mrs. Ruloff soon found that her husband had his moody, arrogant, ill-tempered side. Indeed, he once struck her over the head with a heavy pestle, and he was given to cursing her imaginatively. But the poor girl, through pride, said nothing of this to her family:

Brother-in-law William, who had become somewhat reconciled to the marriage, called in Ruloff to treat his sick wife and baby. They promptly died. The doctor sadly told his wife that both had been beyond all help.

Mrs. Ruloff bore a daughter in April, 1845. Her husband seemed to take little joy in this. In fact, his cruelty increased. His mother-in-law, who witnessed several outbursts when she came to visit at the time of the birth, protested, and one of



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the brothers warned Ruloff to improve his ways.

On June 24 the doctor borrowed a horse and wagon from a Lansing neighbor named Robertson, explaining that an uncle of his wife had come the night before and had taken her and the baby off for a visit to Mott's Corners, a village several miles away. The uncle, in order to make room for his visitors, had left a heavy box of household goods at the Ruloff house. Now the doctor wished to transfer the box back to the uncle and return with his wife and child.

Robertson helped Ruloff hoist the box into the wagon and the doctor drove away.

The next evening he returned to Lansing. The neighbor was surprised to see through the window that he still had the box with him, which he lifted easily and carried into the house. He then returned the horse and wagon. The horse, Robertson noted, showed no signs of making the trip.

Late the next day, Ruloff came over and told Robertson goodbye—he and his wife and child were going off for a visit "between the lakes."

But such a trip was never made. Instead, the doctor went alone to Ithaca, where lived several other of his wife's brothers and sisters. Here the Schutts doubted his tale that his wife and baby had gone to visit a "Mr. N. Dupuy" at Madison, Ohio, without Harriet's first letting them know anything about so long a journey. To allay suspicion, the doctor took pen and paper and wrote and mailed a loving letter addressed to his wife at Madison.

This quieted doubts for a couple of days—until Ruloff suddenly disappeared. Brother-in-law Ephriam then learned that no "N. Dupuy" or any Mrs. Ruloff had ever been heard of in the small town of Madison. Within a few days, police had arrested the doctor in a Cleveland hotel and he had been returned in shackles to Ithaca to be tried for his wife's murder.

But though Lake Cayuga was dragged twice, no *corpus delicti* could be found. The Thompkins County prosecutor decided the evidence would not sustain a murder charge, so another indictment, for abduction, was brought against Ruloff. He was convicted and, in January 1846, was sent to Auburn prison to serve ten years.

In Auburn he worked skillfully in the carpet factory, conducted a prison school,

and wrote and studied endlessly in his book-filled cell. To the regret of both inmates and authorities, who had well liked the brilliantly impressive scholar and teacher, Ruloff was released in January 1856, at the age of thirty-seven—and was at once rearrested by the sheriff of Thompkins county.

For in the ten years Ruloff had been behind bars, the prosecutor had put together pieces of evidence about the trip the doctor had taken with the large box. While circumstantial, the evidence, it was felt, would prove potent in a county where any jury would be composed of persons already convinced of Ruloff's guilt.

THIS time, he was tried for the murder of his baby daughter—which hadn't come into the earlier trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

The slippery Ruloff now obtained a stay of judgment pending appeal to the state court of appeals, composing the petition himself. While awaiting the decision, he was held without bail in jail, where he taught French and Latin to Albert Jarvis, the eighteen-year-old son of the deputy sheriff. And on the night of May 5, 1857, Albert Jarvis drove up to the jail in a buggy and a few minutes later drove off again and into the country with his instructor.

Two months after his escape, Ruloff, under the alias of Professor James Nelson, called on the president of Allegheny College, in Meadville, Pennsylvania, seeking a position. There was none open, but the greatly impressed president gave "Professor Nelson," whom he had exhaustively examined in classical subjects, a glowing letter to a college in the South.

But Ruloff had no funds to get there. So he undertook to steal a number of watches from a store in a nearby town. From this the police got on his trail and three months later he was captured in New York and taken, once again, to the Ithaca jail.

By now the court of appeals had got around to acting on his petition. In December, 1858, it ruled unanimously that his conviction for murdering his daughter was, since no body had been found, out of order. The resultant attempt of the enraged citizenry to lynch him was thwarted by removing him to Auburn, and the au-

thorities doggedly cast about for other charges to bring against him.

It was recalled that fourteen years before, the wife and baby of his brother-in-law had died after Ruloff had treated them. The bodies were exhumed and showed traces of copper poisoning. However, the prosecution did not consider that it had enough evidence for a trial on this. When the Pennsylvania authorities were unable to build a strong enough case about the stolen watches, Ruloff was set free.

But not for long. After being involved in robberies of a store and a bank, Ruloff was sentenced to two and a half years in Sing Sing for burglary.

In Sing Sing, he became friends with another convict named Dexter. They were released in 1864 at the same time and then, joined by Albert Jarvis, the deputy sheriff's son who had engineered Ruloff's Ithaca escape, they formed a partnership for crime.

The trio went to live in Brooklyn with Dexter's family. The man's fantastic career, between the years 1864-1870, was to reach its grim climax.

The other members of the Dexter family knew Ruloff as Professor E. C. Howard, a language teacher, and soon were reverently allowing him largely to run the household. As Professor Howard, he held English classes two days a week in an office over in Hoboken. In Manhattan, he rented quarters with a respectable family at 170 Third Avenue where, as Professor Edward Leurio, master of twenty-eight languages and dialects, he set to work to devise a universal language that, he was convinced, would be everywhere adopted.

To keep himself in funds for this undertaking, he directed the criminal activities of Dexter and Jarvis—over whom he seemed to have exercised a strange and absolute authority.

Except for the two days a week he gave to his English classes and the Sundays he spent with the Dexters, autocratically running their affairs, most of his time he devoted working like a man possessed on his universal language, in a room piled high with books and manuscripts. Often he would work all night.

In July, 1869, "Professor Leurio" gave a long talk on his Universal Method before the annual meeting of the American Philological Association at Poughkeepsie and

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requested that the association sponsor the publication of his vast work. To his towering indignation, it was decided that this was not "within the scope of the association."

The professor announced loftily to Dexter and Jarvis that he would publish it himself. Though this would take considerable money, he felt certain it could be raised with a little application.

SO Rulloff redoubled his efforts in finding suitably profitable places for his assistants to rob. In August, 1870, he somehow heard that a shipment of fine silks had just been delivered to a shop in Binghamton.

On the night of August 21, Dexter and Jarvis entered the shop and began to pile up their loot. Unfortunately for their plan, two clerks were sleeping in the shop. Aroused, the clerks rushed at the intruders and were overpowering them when Rulloff, who had been on guard in front of the shop, entered and shot one of the clerks dead. He then deliberately took aim and shot the other clerk, and left hurriedly with his confederates, leaving the silks.

The second clerk had been only seriously wounded and managed to stagger three blocks to the police, to whom he was able to give good descriptions of the robbers.

Though the criminals had escaped, they had left behind a pair of patent-leather shoes and a flowered carpeting, empty but for a newspaper clipping.

Two days later the bodies of two men were found in a nearby river. The surviving clerk identified them as two of the burglars. Items in their pockets gave their names as Dexter and Jarvis.

Next day, a posse came upon Rulloff in the local woods. The patent-leather shoes were found to be his, and at the Brooklyn address taken from Dexter's pocket, the police learned that the large-headed, bearded Rulloff was known there as Professor Howard, who spent a good deal of his time with a Professor Leurio in Manhattan. In Professor Leurio's room was discovered a newspaper into which the carpetbag clipping fitted neatly.

Rulloff's trial for the murder of the clerk began at Binghamton on January 5, 1871. He was convicted, sentenced to hang.

Again he won a stay of judgment pending appeal for a new trial. While the de-

cision was awaited, he rebusied himself on his Universal Language. The newspapers took up the "Educated Murderer" in a big way and published many long articles on his phenomenally wide knowledge. Overnight he became an international sensation. Petitions were even sent to the governor for a pardon of the erudite rascal. The governor instead appointed a sanity commission to examine the prisoner. He was found sane.

The court rejected his appeal and his execution was set for May 17, 1871. Rulloff then confessed that he had indeed killed his wife and daughter in 1845. His superior intellect and free spirit having become bored and irritated by the trammels of domesticity, he had beaten his loved ones to death with an iron pipe; wrapped the bodies in heavy steel wire; placed them in a chest; and then had driven to Lake Cayuga. There he had stolen a rowboat, rowed out, and dropped the bodies overboard. On the journey back to Lansing, he had, all charm and fascinating conversation, given a lift to a twittering party of schoolchildren.

He also confessed to poisoning the wife and baby of his brother-in-law. "I wanted him to suffer," he explained, "for his opposition to my marriage to his sister."

And now were revealed facts about his hitherto shadowy early life. His real name was Edward Howard Rulloffson. He was born in 1819, the son of a respectable couple of Dutch ancestry, in the backwoods of New Brunswick, Canada. He had no formal schooling until twelve years of age, but his mother had taught him much.

After some years at school, and a few odd jobs, he became a clerk in a St. John's lawyer's office. A number of burglaries occurred in town—one of the victims being Rulloffson's employer. One day the youth came to work absent-mindedly dressed in a suit stolen from the employer's house.

He admitted the theft and for it served two years in jail. Released at twenty-two, he disappeared from the province, to bob up again as Rulloff, the canal laborer, in Dryden in 1842.

On the 17th of May, 1871, Edward Howard Rulloffson, having spent his last hours boasting of his learning and uttering "revolting blasphemies," was hanged.

His "Universal Language," as a matter of fact, wasn't much good anyhow.

MURDER'S MONOGRAM

(Continued from page 33)

to turn you in."

"Turn me in?" she widened her eyes at him. "What for?"

"Murder," he said.

"But I haven't killed these men. I only winged them."

"You killed Perrine, though."

The eyes weren't widened, now. They were slitted. "How do you make that out?"

"Guesswork," he admitted. "But based on fairly accurate conclusions. When you first talked to me about Perrine's death, you described it pretty graphically. You said he was shot as he went into a cafe for lunch. Shot on a crowded sidewalk and nobody caught a look at the killer. You said he staggered three little steps and fell down and his hands pushed the pavement, and then he died. But just now you told Barrington you weren't there when it happened. I wondered, then, how you could have drawn such a good verbal picture of the death scene. Lies, toots, lies. Excuse me, I mean Prudence."

"Is that all?" she fluffed her brassy hair.

He shrugged. "Then there's your accurate shooting through the handbag." He opened the purse and pulled out an automatic. "I'll bet this gun matches up with the slug that killed Perrine. Would you care to lay a little wager, To—Prudence?"

"Smart apple," she said sourly.

"Me? Thanks." He delved further into the handbag. "And hell's bells, what have we here? A pack of banknotes. Nice crisp C's and thousands and five hundred. Hum-m. Ten grand."

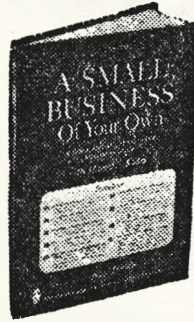
"You dirty heel!" her voice got shrill.

He said: "You must've met Perrine shortly after he took this payoff from Tony Venturi. Perrine was pretty thick with you, wasn't he? Anyhow you've called him John several times, and you complained because he hadn't confided in you as to the hiding place of the stolen Hastings book. Even *you*, was the way you put it. I take that to mean you and Perrine were very chummy indeed. How'm I doing?"

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"You stink."

"It's the rye. Anyhow, the way I see it, Perrine slipped you the ten G's he had just got from Venturi, and maybe asked you to deposit for him. Or at least hold it for him. Instead, you blasted him with your pocketbook gun right there on the sidewalk, then went back to your office. What was the idea, toots? Just the cash, or a personal reason?"

"Both," she said wearily. "He promised to marry me and backed out."

"Well, I guess that clears everything up. Except the whereabouts of the stolen book." Sharpe got more handcuffs from his desk and applied them to her. Then, unexpectedly, he uttered a resounding oath. "Well damn my time, *now* I know!"

"You know what?"

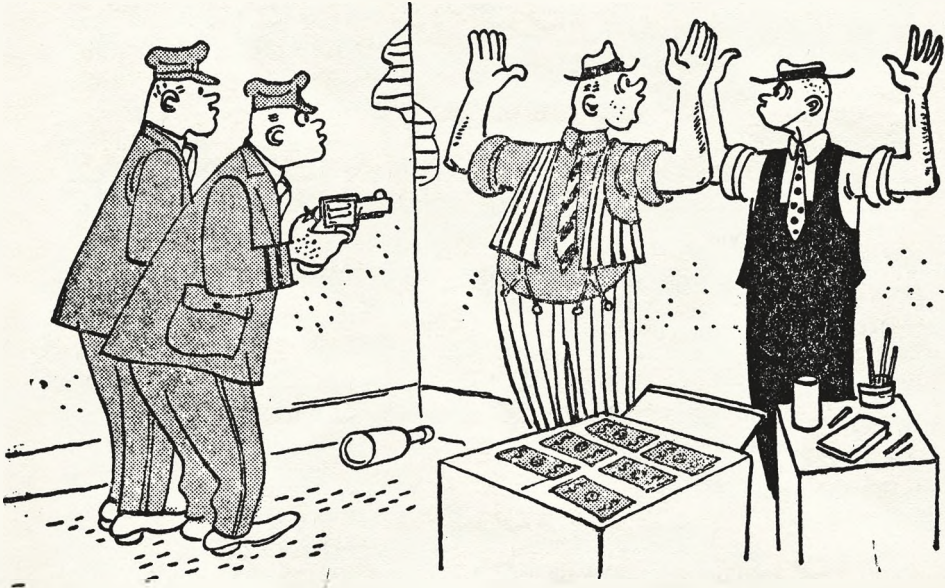
He got out his billfold. "Perrine really did give me something. Something so obvious I forgot all about it. Psychology, you know. Like in Poe's story of the purloined letter that everybdy was looking for but couldn't find because it was right in front of their silly noses."

"I thought all you read was the racing form," she sniffed.

HE laughed at her. "Score one for you. But look. When I latched onto Perrine in the saloon we exchanged business cards. Get it? *We exchanged cards.* I gave him one of mine *and he gave me one of his.*" Sharpe produced Perrine's card and turned it over. "Here we are. Some penciled numbers. U-633-B-40-M. All I have to do is ask for that in the library and I'll have the Hastings."

People were running into his office now, neighbors drawn by the recent gunfire, and among them a cop from the beat. Sharpe's eyes were very happy indeed. He would get no reward for apprehending Prudence Foster for the murder of John Perrine. There would be no cash emolument for handing in Fatso Barrington, the partner of a book thief. Arresting Tony Venturi, a would-be purchaser of stolen goods, would bring him nothing more substantial than a newspaper headline or two. He would even have to give up Venturi's ten thousand dollars.

But he remembered the local library was offering a fat reward for the recovery of Hastings' *Immigrants' Guide to California.* And he was just the guy to collect it.



"I'd have gotten away with it except that I put my girl's picture on the bills instead of George Washington's picture!"

TRAIL TO TRAGEDY

(Continued from page 95)

the left of us a little river with trees lining it. Then the trail led us suddenly to the top of a descending wooden staircase.

"He went down here!" Jacques gasped. "You stay back—"

I gazed down, appalled. It was a horribly precarious, precipitous flight of wooden stairs balanced on stilts down the icy cliff. The stairs were piled with snow and ice. The great abyss of the St. Lawrence was beyond them, and to the left there was the icy veiling of the half-frozen falls of the Montmorency. A little rustic pergola was at the bottom of the staircase. It hung out over the abyss of the falls.

Lake was down there. I saw him slide, half falling down the last of the steps until down on the little lookout platform he stood at bay, his back to its rail.

I fired again, the report almost lost in the great empty abyss and the roar of the falls. Then Jacques, frenzied, leaped at me.

"I tol' you—no!" A sudden sweep of his arm knocked the gun out of my hand. It fell whirling into the abyss. And then wildly he shoved me backward.

He was gone before I could stop him. Then a second or two later I saw him as he plunged down the staircase, clutching his knife. And there was a knife in Lake's hand as he stood down there with his back against the rail and the abyss of the falls under him.

"Jacques!" I shouted. "Come back—you fool!"

He slipped, slid a dozen steps and picked himself up, plunging on down.

I started after him far below me. Down on the little icy platform, Jacques and Lake were locked desperately. They were at the wooden rail, stabbing, struggling. Their shouts came floating faintly up.

For an instant, clutching each other at the rail, they hung poised. Then the rail cracked and they went over.

"Jacques!" It was my despairing shout of horror as I plunged half way down the staircase. For just a second I could

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see the falling bodies. And then there was nothing but the purple-white murk of the abyss and the roar of the giant falls. . . .

DRAKE and I are still at the Chateau Frontenac where I have been writing this. Anne wants to stay and do what she can to keep Collette's sentence from being too severe. Right or wrong, Anne's womanly sympathy goes out to that young, inexperienced girl so dominated by her love for the handsome, villainous Lake.

Anne's blow only knocked Martin out, and the American authorities have taken him back. Whatever chance of parole he might ever have had is, of course, gone now. And Pequot is in the Quebec jail, where he belongs. . . .

The Chateau Frontenac is certainly a wonderful place to live—especially, it seems to me, at the winter season. I came upon Anne and Drake this afternoon. They were on one of the leather window seats

in the little oak-panelled, turret-like lounge. From the windows there you look down upon the end of the terrace, and the curving street that descends into the Lower City. And beyond it, to the northeast, there is a great open sweep of the blue-white, ice-filled St. Lawrence, out to where it divides around the Isle of Orleans. And beyond that the snowy rising terraces of the Laurentians.

Drake and Anne did not see me for a moment as I approached them. They were gazing down at the gay throng of people on the terrace. Brilliant winter sunshine was sparkling on everything out there now. I heard Drake say:

"Certainly a beautiful place. Gayety—romance—and just look what happened to you, Anne! Being a detective's wife is simply no good!"

Her hand went to his on the leather seat beside them. "Seems pretty good to me, Alan," she said. "I wouldn't change it."



"It's such a nice day, let's allow him to get away and see if we can catch him again. . . ."

BRUSHLESS CREAM

(Continued from page 103)

his agar medium, and waited.

That waiting was terrific. Those germs took half-an-hour to multiply. Half-an-hour to go through the process of fission, and become twice as many germs. Another half-hour to reproduce themselves again. After that, of course, the colony increased by leaps and bounds.

Adam was poring over his agar through his microscope when he had the sensation of being himself under observation. He looked sharply around. A brilliant black eye was focused on him through the exterior of the window.

Distorted by the light of the bath-room, that eye seemed to be enormously dilated. It seemed to fill the window. As Adam swerved, it vanished. But only one person could have possessed an eye as black as that, and that was the butler, Cheriwal.

Half-an-hour passed. A tiny colony of germs had established itself in the agar. They were short rods, and they came out beautifully with the Ziehl-Neelsen method with 0.5 per cent sulphuric acid methylene blue.

Adam had nothing more to worry about. He'd solved his problem. Incidentally, he knew that the giraffe is the only mammal without a voice, and he had never before heard the cry of an Indian deer *in extremis*.

Cheriwal had been quicker than Adam had supposed, thanks to the half-hour with the bacteria. He had slaughtered the animal, and had the grave dug. He had got the body into the grave, but he hadn't got much dirt over it when Adam appeared.

The man was as smart as a whip; he'd understood everything.

He looked up, and leered. He came crawling forward, and, from his attitude, it was pretty evident that he had some lethal weapon in his right hand. Adam's blood ran cold. He had never been a fighting man. He had never even carried a revolver. He disliked desperate situations, and he knew this was a desperate one.

A woman screamed in the lighted house behind him, and there was the sound of



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another man hitting the floor. It was quite a party that was being staged.

The butler crouched, watching Adam, who still couldn't see for certain that there was a knife in his hand. But he had every instinct for flight, if he could summon his trembling limbs to act for him.

And then suddenly a figure sprang between them, and two arms twined themselves about Adam's neck.

"Mr. Somervell, don't be foolish. I know you understand. Yes, it's the Ranees' curse. It's followed me through my life, it's killed every man I've ever loved. We can break it, you and I. You understand —"

The woman was desperate. But Adam's plight was just as desperate as hers, for he could see the gun in her hand.

"I can't wait, and I can't talk nonsense. Seventy-five thousand dollars if you'll play ball with me, and it's yes or no."

And Adam heard a queer, constricted little voice out of his throat answering, in language that he'd certainly never employed in his life before:

"You can go to hell, you dirty murderer. I've got you just where I wanted you, and you're going to pay!"

And the same personality that had proclaimed that extraordinary speech, said to Adam: "Duck!"

Adam ducked just in time as the slug seared his cheek. He kept on ducking, and Alice Remsen kept on firing, without seeming to realize the necessity of lowering her aim. She was quite frantic, and Adam was getting madder and madder. When the pause came, after the revolver was empty, he straightened himself, and slugged her.

Which seemed to be what all the guests were doing to one another.

Adam stood over the body of the woman he had knocked down, and terror gripped him. What had happened was contrary to all the code of Adam's upbringing. What would Margaret have to say, if ever she knew about it?

Alice Remsen looked up with a new respect in her blue eyes. She beckoned to Adam to bend over her. "A hundred thousand," she whispered.

A hand fell upon Adam's shoulder. Leslie Crothers was standing beside him. "Did you use that shaving-brush?" he asked.

"You see, one gives himself little nicks, even without drawing blood. I guess you're wise."

"I'm wise," said Adam, "and I've got to get back to see how my fourth generation of bacillus is getting along with the difficult job of propagation. Meanwhile—" He looked about him rather helplessly.

All the guests had gathered in the yard, presumably attracted by the sound of the revolver discharges. One man stepped out from among them—Stevens.

Adam said: "I want you to take this woman in, Stevens. Charge—murder of three husbands, but we won't bother about the first two. She killed Remsen with anthrax germs. The butler, Cheriwal, is an accessory. Then there's Leslie Crothers, who knew all about it, and tipped me off because she'd soured on him."

"Prove it, you fool!" screamed Alice Remsen.

Stevens shook his head. "I dunno, Somervell," he said. "Remsen died of bubonic plague. It's kind of a hard proposition you're putting up to me."

"Hold her, that's all!"

Stevens grabbed Mrs. Remsen by the arm and snatched away the knife in her hand. He stared at Adam as he advanced with the shaving-brush in his hand.

"Here's the evidence—all here," said Adam. "Enough to convict her, and I hope it will."

"But it won't," screamed the woman. "Don't you suppose that I've been ready for this a long time?" She staggered up, held out one wrist with a scratch on it. "Now do your darndest."

Adam said to the stupefied spectators: "That's about all. She played a long and losing game." To Stevens: "You won't have any trouble picking up that black butler. But I don't know what part Mr. Crothers has been playing."

LESLIE CROTHERS said: "I'll tell everything I know. She hinted to me about the way she disposed of her husbands. I believed in her loyalty, until to-night."

"No aspersions on the lady, Mr. Crothers," said Adam. "She'll be lucky if she doesn't have to face the law."

The Remsen woman, swaying on her knees, said: "You don't have to worry about that. That strain of anthrax is a

hundred per cent fatal. Cheriwal and I cultivated it and cultivated it. We couldn't afford to take chances."

"In which case," said Adam, "I presume you'd rather die in your bed, madam, than out here on the grass?"

Leslie Crothers bent over her, weeping. She raised her hand and slapped him across the face. "If you want to know whom I loved, it was the Prince," she mumbled. "I never had much use for any of you."

The playboy got on his feet again, looking around him in a dazed way. Adam said: "Let's get Mrs. Remsen into her bed. The rest is up to you, Dr. Stevens."

Stevens picked up the woman, and Adam and he carried her through the gaping crowd up to her room. The sense of disaster had already spread through the house. A frightened maid was impelled to assist.

Stevens said: "Do you want to make any ante-mortem statement, Mrs. Remsen?"

"I guess I've let myself out pretty well, haven't I?"

Stevens said: "I don't know much about anthrax, but I know it's only fifty per cent fatal."

"Not with that strain we cultivated."

"Now look, Mrs. Remsen, anything you may say will count against you, but I'm willing to forget everything you've said up to date. Do you mean that's a fatal strain?"

"I tried to make it so. Remsen was such a bore. And the others, too. You can't get beyond the plain facts of life and death, can you? I'd like you to save poor Cheriwal. He's a loyal person."

Stevens said: "If you don't live, Mrs. Remsen, I don't believe there will be much evidence against him."

"That's good enough for me. You see, I never cared for anyone except the Prince, but Cheriwal is a faithful servant."

She lay back, and closed her eyes. Neither Adam nor Stevens knew much about anthrax poisoning, except that death was mercifully swift. In the adjoining room, listening to the slow termination of the party below, Stevens said: "What's this about anthrax, Somervell?"

"Well, you see," said Adam, "that stuff about bubonic plague was based on the tradition of a curse laid upon Mrs. Rem-

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sen's lovers by the Princess. Of course, that was baloney. Alice Remsen was trading on the fact that her brother died of anthrax, contracted from a Japanese shaving-brush. I've got the germs growing very vigorously in a culture in my bathroom.

"There were a lot of those cases in the first World War. Alice Remsen probably killed her first husband with anthrax. She was foolish enough to tell Leslie Crothers, and he gave me the tip-off.

"The Government sent her back her brother's effects, including the shaving-brush. That's how she started the Indian deer. She wanted to get rid of her first husband, Ogden Rouse, and incidentally collect his life insurance. That shaving-brush had several billion anthrax germs. But they wouldn't live forever on a shaving-brush. So Mrs. Remsen inoculated some of her pet deer. There you have it, Stevens. The culture was transferred alternatively from the deer to the shaving-brush. So it was easy to infect her husbands, keeping up the pretence of bubonic plague, which produces the same symptoms.

"It just happens I use a brushless cream, and that saved me. But my cultures ought to be thriving now, Stevens. It requires only half-an-hour for a complete new generation to develop. Come in and see them. They look grand in the methylene blue stain. You can call off the quarantine."

"No way of saving Mrs. Remsen, Somervell?"

"I'd say it might be as well not to try, Stevens."

THE culture was propagating. Adam said: "Those rods, you see—typical anthrax culture. It was a devilish scheme, a deliberately hatched murder game, lasting

probably for years. I don't think we need waste much time over Mrs. Remsen."

The telephone was ringing incessantly. Servants and guests were racing more or less aimlessly about the house. Adam said: "I want to get home. I've done my job, and I think I've saved my company a wad of money, although there might be litigation. That's not my—What's this?"

A man was scrambling into the bedroom. He was Cheriwal, his turban gone, a look of devilish gloating on his face. He held out one bare arm, on which was a red puncture.

"Well," said Adam, "that's up to you. Subcutaneous injection, was it? I don't know as much about that particular culture as you do, but I'd advise you to get medical attention as quick as possible."

Stevens shrugged his shoulders. Cheriwal stared at the two men, and emitted a long, dolorous howl. He swayed out of the room. From the next room came the jabber of voices, and then the howl again.

Cheriwal was keening the death watch over himself and his mistress.

Adam said: "Yep, I want to get out of here as quick as I can, Stevens. I guess you won't hold that quarantine against me."

"I'll drive you back," said Stevens. "There's a train in about an hour."

They pushed through the frantic, milling mob of guests. The telephone in the hall was ringing ceaselessly, but no one was attending to it. Adam stopped, with a premonition. He lifted the receiver.

"Long distance calling Mr. Somervell."

"That's me," said Adam.

"Did you say wrinkles or twinkles, darling?" came a voice.

"Wrinkles," said Adam firmly, and jammed the receiver back.

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PHONY PHONE TIPS

By

ELLERY WATSON CALDER

IF YOU receive a telephone call purporting to be from a famous jockey, who asks you to place a large wager on a horse he is going to ride that day at a nearby race track—look out! You may be the prospective victim of a new-fangled swindle.

Four men were recently arrested in New York on grand-larceny charges and arraigned in felony court as the aftermath of an exposure of the tipster racket in question—a racket which is said to have already bilked gullible bettors of more than a hundred thousand dollars.

The swindle was perpetrated on any number of dupes, none of whom, of course, will ever get a dime back out of the sums they lost to the bunco artists. According to police reports, the scheme was first brought to light through the cooperation of Ferril Zurfelt and George Woolf, two of the country's foremost jockeys, who discovered that their names were being fraudulently used by a tipster mob engaged in chiseling money from horse-players.

This mob, the police say, would first select a potential easy mark and then telephone him. The bunco artist would pretend to be a noted jockey, and his spiel would be to this effect: "I'm growing a little old for fast company and putting on weight. That means I'm about through as a jockey, see? Today, though, I'm riding a long shot—a sure winner. I know it's a sure thing because this particular race is fixed. It's in the bag. Now if you'll bet big money on my horse you'll win several thousand dollars—and all I want for the tip is half your winnings."

If the victim proved gullible enough he would make the stipulated wager—and usually lose, for the so-called "inside tip" was strictly malarkey. If, on the other hand, the long-shot horse did happen to win the race, the bettor would make a clean-up—whereupon the touts would send an emissary around to collect half the "take."

So beware of strangers who telephone!

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RANSOM FOR THE DEAD

By JEFF WILLIAMS

IN the quarter-century immediately following the end of the Civil War, New York City was a paradise for criminals, who, under the beneficent hands-off policy of one of the most corrupt city administrations in history, had only to conduct their callings with a minimum of discretion and a regularity of payments to the politicians and police in order to break the law almost at will.

An underworld profession that flourished in the hands of several highly organized gangs was that of grave-robbery. The ghouls usually operated on the modest resting places of paupers and Negroes, doing a brisk trade in cadavers with doctors and medical students. Little was done about it by the demoralized police until, in 1878, the body of Alexander T. Stewart, a widely known millionaire merchant, was stolen from the family vault and held for ransom, creating one of the greatest public stirs the metropolis has ever witnessed.

Alexander T. Stewart, a small, thin man with reddish hair and notably cold gray eyes, had started his career as an obscure shopkeeper, but through extraordinary energy and ruthless business acumen rose to be the most prominent merchant prince of his time. At the apex of his career, he owned a huge store covering the block on Broadway between Ninth and Tenth Streets that today is one wing of Wanamaker's. He managed to undersell all competitors, and it is said that many of his clerks were former rivals whom he had ruined. His rule was never to trust anybody—he sold only for cash—and when he died in 1876 he was practically without friends, but had a fortune of \$30,000,000 and all the influence such staggering wealth bestows.

His body was scarcely cold in its grave at St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery at Second Avenue and Tenth Street (then a fine neighborhood) when rumors spread that grave-robbers were planning to steal the corpse for ransom. However, though several underworld characters were found hanging about the graveyard during the next few weeks, no attempt was made to disturb the grave until October 8, 1878, when the sexton found that someone had

lifted the name slab. But the vault, which also contained four other bodies, had not been entered.

Henry Hilton, the attorney who was handling the estate for the widow (there were no children), had the locks changed on the graveyard gates and, as camouflage for any future ghouls, had the name slab moved and sunk into the turf ten feet away from the real grave. As a further precaution, a watchman was hired to check the graveyard once an hour during the night.

But when nothing more untoward had happened by November 3, 1878, Hilton felt that danger no longer threatened and the watchman was let go.

And the dawn of November 7 revealed that the body had been stolen in the night.

The ghouls had bypassed the false name slab and had gone directly into the Stewart vault, which was constructed of brick and covered with three feet of earth. The lid of the outer cedar chest had been unscrewed, the lead coffin containing the casket cut through, the casket forced open, and the hundred-pound, unembalmed body of the merchant spirited away. The silver knobs and the name plate of the chest were taken and also a triangular piece of the velvet lining. The ghouls left behind a new coal shovel and a lantern. Tracks near one of the cemetery gates showed that they had driven off with their ghastly loot in a wagon.

NEXT morning, the newspapers announced that the estate attorney, Hilton, had offered a reward of \$25,000 for the apprehension of the ghouls and the return of the body. The crime was a sensation throughout the country. Over a hundred known criminals were made to produce alibis for their whereabouts on the night of the crime, and the authorities gave the ghouls to understand that this was no ordinary grave-snatching for which political or police protection could be expected.

The police soon traced the shovel and lantern to their points of purchase, but there the trail ended. For months amateur and professional detectives searched for

the body in carts, outhouses, barns and woods, with resultant rumors periodically electrifying the newspapers. Armed guards were posted in cemeteries throughout New York City.

And then, the January following the crime, General Patrick H. Jones, a prominent lawyer, came to police superintendent Walling, who had taken personal charge of the case, bearing two of the silver handles and the knobs of the rifled chest, a small piece of the velvet lining, and a triangular piece of paper. These items, he said, he had just received in a package expressed from Canada. He had also received several letters signed "Henry G. Romaine," which requested that he act as go-between for the return of the body, for which the writer demanded a cash ransom of \$250,000. The General was instructed to use the personal columns of the New York *Herald* in conducting the negotiations.

One of the letters stated that the body had been taken to Canada and buried, and described the corpse as being in excellent condition and easily recognizable. As proof that the writer was really the ghoul, the letter pointed out that the triangular piece of paper he had sent was exactly the size of the piece of velvet torn from the casket lining and that the strip of velvet was of the same material as that used in the lining.

On instructions from the estate attorney, Hilton, and Superintendent Walling, General Jones inserted a personal in the *Herald* on February 5, saying he was ready to negotiate. Within a week, there came a reply from Romaine, postmarked Boston, offering to return the body under these conditions: The body would be delivered to General Jones and Hilton, none other to be present, at a point within twenty-five miles of Montreal, upon payment of \$200,000. The ransom money was to remain in the general's hands until Hilton was satisfied, and then turned over to Romaine's representative.

Hilton indignantly declined these terms and stated he would not negotiate further. But in the middle of March, after Romaine had unsuccessfully requested General Jones to approach the widow directly in the matter, Hilton made an offer of \$25,000. Romaine refused, "respectfully but firmly."

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THINGS were thus deadlocked for over a year. And then the distraught Mrs. Stewart decided to act for herself, and instructed General Jones to make an offer of \$100,000 to Romaine. The general suggested a payment of \$20,000—and this was immediately accepted by Romaine, who gave the following instructions:

A lone messenger, with the ransom in cash in a canvas bag, was to leave New York City in a one-horse wagon on an appointed night at ten o'clock, thence to proceed into Westchester County, Connecticut, and drive along a certain little-used country road. Here the messenger would be met and instructed further.

On the night designated, a relative of the widow, who had volunteered to act as messenger, left the city as directed and soon was slowly driving along that lonely Connecticut road. He felt several times he was being observed, and at three in the morning a masked rider suddenly emerged from the woods and ordered him to turn his wagon into a nearby lane.

After a mile, there loomed up ahead a buggy drawn across the lane. As he approached, two more masked men climbed down from it, one of them carrying a heavy gunnysack.

After the ghouls had established their identity by producing a triangle of velvet, the messenger handed over the \$20,000. The gunnysack, which contained Stewart's bones, was thereupon unceremoniously heaved into the wagon. The ghouls then drove away to the north in their buggy and the messenger with his grisly cargo sped back to the city.

There the bones were turned over to an undertaker to be packed in a trunk, and the next night were transported in a special freight car to a waiting coffin in the burial vault of the Garden City Cathedral at Garden City, Long Island.

For many years, the vault was guarded by a hidden device which, if touched, would set off alarm bells in the Cathedral tower. But, at last report, the bones of Alexander T. Stewart are still at peace.



"I'm sorry I didn't stay home, boys, and spend a more exciting evening with Speed Detective Magazine!"

UNSAFE SAFE-OPENERS!

By
Joseph MacIntosh

IN THIS AGE of specialized services, it is not surprising to learn that burglars, having stolen a safe, may now have their safe-cracking done for them by locksmiths engaged exclusively in that business.

The existence of this service has been revealed by District Attorney George M. Fanelli of Connecticut's Westchester County. He mentioned the matter in connection with the questioning of an alleged key figure of the Matinee Mob. This outfit is suspected of burglaries in three states, usually executed in the afternoon when their victims are out, loot from which has run into hundred of thousands of dollars.

The D. A. holds that the locksmith ring has possession of a missing safe that contained \$20,000 in jewels and cash, which the suspect and a confederate are accused of having hauled away from the New Rochelle estate of Mrs. Ernest Whittnelbel, widow of a wealthy and internationally famed chemist.

Modern burglary-resistant safes are extremely tough and are time-consuming nuts for the most expert operatives to crack—and anyhow, according to District Attorney Fanelli's contemptuous belief, few present-day thieves have anything like the talent of the old-time cracksmen. Responding to a brisk demand, a ring of locksmiths has sprung up in the East that, for regular fees or percentages of the contents, makes a business of opening stolen safes brought to them by these unskilled petermen.

Jimmy Valentine used to sandpaper his fingers, press a sensitive ear to the safe door, and do his own opening. Degenerate modern counterparts would doubtless just as soon do their own laundry.

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Policy pays for loss of time due to sickness, a regular monthly income for as long as 3 months, up to

\$100.00 PER MO.

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The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
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Ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent by mail for 10 Days Free Examination. NO cost! NO obligation! NO salesman will call! See this policy and judge for yourself. It's the protection you need and should have at a price you can afford. Just mail coupon below! But do it today. Tomorrow might be too late!



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The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.

787-C Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebraska

SEND without cost or obligation your extra-liberal "Gold Seal" \$1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 Days' Free Inspection.

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Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?



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<p>5 inches of new Muscle</p> <p>"My arms increased 1 1/2", chest 2 1/2", forearm 7/8". — S., W., Va.</p>	<p>What a difference!</p> <p>"Have put 3 1/2" on chest (normal) and 2 1/2" expanded." — F., S., N. Y.</p>
<p>Here's what ATLAS did for ME!</p> <p>John Jacobs BEFORE</p> <p>John Jacobs AFTER</p>	<p>For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS</p> <p>"Am sending snapshot showing wonderful pro- gress." — W., G., N. J.</p> <p>GAINED 29 POUNDS</p> <p>"When I started, weighed only 143. Now 170." — T., K., N. Y.</p>

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Most Perfectly
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in international
contest—in com-
petition with ALL
men who would
consent to appear
against him.

This is a real
photo of Charles
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Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE** and **OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blonded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new beautiful suit of muscle!

What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skiny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool

with. When you have learned to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension!" you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real solid **MUSCLE.**

My method—"Dynamic Tension!"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension!" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to **BUILD MUSCLE** and **VITALITY.**

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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."

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