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DETECTIVE STORIES

THRILLING MYSTERY

FALL 1943

FALL
ISSUE

THRILLING

MYSTERY

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



**MURDER'S
BIRTH
CERTIFICATE**
An Exciting Novelet
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OF THE *Broken*
BROOM

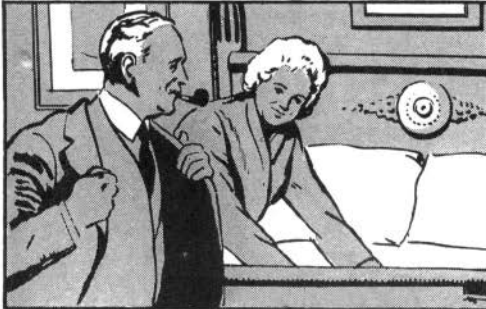
*A Complete
Green Ghost Novel*
By **G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**

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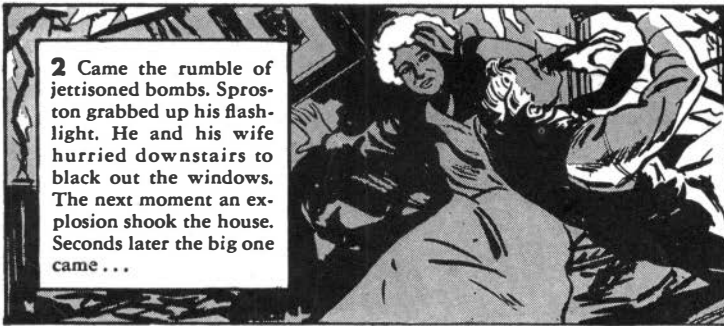
SECONDS LATER THE BIG ONE CAME!



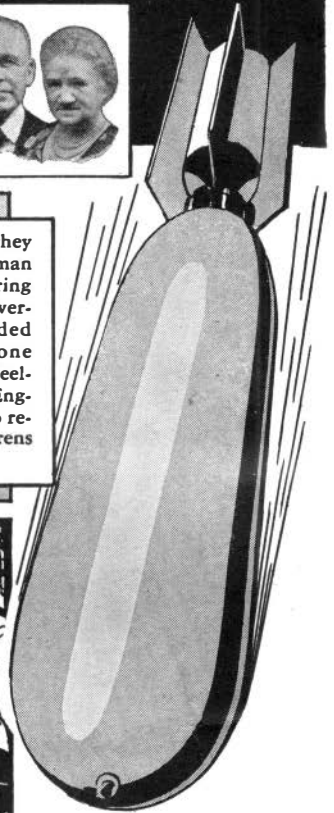
A true experience of Mr. and Mrs. James Sproston, of Cheshire, during the big air blitz over England.



1 Night after night they heard the great German Heinkel bombers roaring directly overhead, Liverpool-bound and loaded with bombs. Then one night Jerry was late. Feeling safe, the elderly English couple prepared to retire. Suddenly the sirens began to shriek...



2 Came the rumble of jettisoned bombs. Sproston grabbed up his flashlight. He and his wife hurried downstairs to black out the windows. The next moment an explosion shook the house. Seconds later the big one came...



3... Half demolished the house and threw its stunned occupants violently to the floor...Some time after, two passing air wardens saw a light shining out of the wreckage. It was the beam from Sproston's faithful flashlight—a beam that directed the rescue of two more victims of the Luftwaffe's ruthlessness.

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City..... State.....
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THRILLING MYSTERY

VOL. XXI, No. 1

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Fall, 1943



A Complete Green Ghost Novel

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It Takes Logic to Turn the Spotlight on a Mystery Killer

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A War Bond Message for All Americans

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28 Years

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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 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 vice-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 crum your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded 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!

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"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-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

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By **CHAKRA**

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THE FAMILY WARNING

A UNITED STATES Army Captain in charge of a transport sailing between Panama and the Solomon Islands came to New York during January, 1943, and related this story under oath.

He brought back bad news to Mrs. Alice Galland, who lived on a farm in New Jersey. It concerned her son, Tom Galland.

Tom was on the transport when it was shelled by a German submarine west of the Galapagos Islands. During the shelling, several soldiers were killed, including Tom Galland. The submarine was chased away.

Tom was the last one to be buried. It was a solemn service. The captain had known the boy's mother and he dreaded having to tell her when he returned to the States. But he wanted to tell her himself.

Such were his thoughts a few minutes after the ceremony as he stood at the bow of his ship. Suddenly one of the men yelled:

"Look, Captain, a pelican on the bridge!"

The captain turned and saw it.

"Catch it," he ordered.

The soldier climbed up to grab it, but then as if by magic, the pelican disappeared. They hadn't seen it fly away.

"Strange," said the captain, "it seemed to fade into the fog."

Thus, in January, as the captain approached the home of Mrs. Galland, he was thinking about the day he had buried Tom and the pelican that had come out of nowhere. He dreaded

the tears that soon would flow from a mother of a soldier who had died for his country.

But as he entered the house, Mrs. Galland looked at him sadly.

"I know what you are going to tell me, Captain. . . . Tom is dead. He died December 14th."

"Then you have been officially informed?" asked the captain.

"No," she answered.

"Then how did you find out?"

"I'll tell you," she said as she pointed to a chair. "The day Tom died, I saw a pelican in the duck pond. The pelican is our family sign. Whenever we see it, we know that a relative has died. I knew it must be Tom."

THE TIGER PHANTOM

EVER since Mrs. Wallace could remember, her son, Albert, had talked of tigers. Frequently he would have nightmares and wake up screaming that a tiger had attacked him.

Mrs. Wallace blamed this obsession on the fact that her grandfather had been a big game hunter who worked for an English lord in India. The grandfather used to tell stories of how he killed tigers.

But as Albert grew up, he never lost his tiger phobia. He was always playing at hunting tigers. He even fixed up his collie dog to look like a tiger, and the two of them would go into the woods and play at hunting big game. (Continued on Page 12)



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offer and money-back guarantee. Hurry! Write today for FREE DETAILS. Nelson Co., 821 S. Wabash, Dept. J-611, Chicago.

MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from Page 8)

Then came the war. Albert tried to enlist. Due to a heart condition, he was rejected. In the course of time he secured a position as an attendant in a zoo. He was assigned to the tiger house. He was fascinated by his job. His mother didn't like it and tried to get him to seek employment elsewhere.

Destiny is a strange thing and finally Fate stepped in and brought a denouement to Albert Wallace's strange interest in tigers. It can be summed up very completely by the following news item which appeared in the newspapers:

"A full grown tiger sprang from its pen at the City Zoo here today during the feeding period and clawed to death a twenty-five year old attendant before it was finally killed. The victim was Albert Wallace."

What strange premonition had followed Albert all his life? Who knows?

THE MISSING FINGER

TOM and Dick Forman, years ago before the days of fingerprinting, used to be known as "the wild twins of Herkimer." They were always getting into trouble. At fourteen they set fire to the schoolhouse. They lived with their Uncle Matt and his old housekeeper Millie.

At seventeen, Tom fought with his uncle and left home. Later it was reported that he had been drowned in the China Sea.

But Dick continued living recklessly. The climax came when he was caught robbing a store and the sheriff shot off Dick's forefinger on his left hand. Dick was arrested, but a week later he escaped and disappeared.

Time passed. The uncle grew old, and then one morning, old Millie found him dead in bed. He had left no will although he was wealthy. His only relative was Dick Forman, a fugitive from justice. The money was held until Dick could be located to claim it—but this would mean that Dick would have to stand trial should he return.

Then one morning the town of Herkimer was astounded. Tom Forman returned and

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claimed the money stating that he hadn't been drowned at all. The authorities knew it was Tom because none of his fingers were missing. It was decided to give Tom at least half of the estate, which was a fortune in itself. Everyone seemed satisfied but old Millie, the housekeeper. She claimed the man was Dick, the thief.

"But Dick had a finger missing," said the old sheriff. "And why are you so sure?"

"Because," she said, "I have seen Tom's ghost. Tom is dead."

The authorities couldn't shake Millie's faith in her ghosts. So the sheriff sent for a famous surgeon from Seattle.

The prodigal twin reluctantly consented to examination. And sure enough, the surgeon proved that a finger from a living man had been grafted on Dick Forman's stump in some expert manner.

Dick Forman finally confessed. In the West Indies he had gotten a renegade doctor to perform the operation, obtaining a finger from a vagrant. Dick had promised the renegade doctor half the fortune. Millie's ghost hadn't lied!

THE HUNGRY LOVER

THIS story is vouched for by the British Society of Psychological Research.

A young girl named Gloria Simon attended a party at the estate of Henry Markson, not far from Winchester, England. During cocktails, Gloria wandered into the dining room where fancy canapés were laid out on the huge table. As she was helping herself, a handsome young man walked in. She looked up at

him and said: "Hello." But he did not answer her—just looked at the table, then strolled out through the rear door.

She satisfied herself that he hadn't heard her, maybe he was slightly deaf. But there was something about him that attracted her strangely. She could fall in love with him, she was certain.

All during the evening, she watched for him, but missed him in the crowd of guests.

But she couldn't get him out of her mind. She longed to meet him some day. And fate was kind, for one afternoon in a London restaurant she was sitting with a friend, when this strange handsome man strolled in.

He sat down at a table in the darkened rear section of the restaurant.

She couldn't restrain herself any longer. She would introduce herself and recall having seen him at the Markson party. He would have to talk to her.

This time he smiled. She invited him over to her table. He said he would come over. So she walked ahead. As she reached her table she turned. He was nowhere in sight. Her girl-friend said she thought he went into the lobby.

This time Gloria was indignant. How dare he slight her again? But maybe she had been too forward for his conservative English training.

But she couldn't dismiss him from her dreams. She was in love with him.

It was still with thoughts of him that she again visited the Marksons. Perhaps she would see him again. Then while looking through some photographs on the Markson

(Continued on Page 94)

WHY GOD PERMITS WAR!

Why does God permit war? Why does He permit cruelty, injustice, pain, starvation, sickness and death?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answers to these questions. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong, can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as world-wide professional recognition. Thirty years ago, he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die, when a strange message came—"They are waiting for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the

guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his twenty-one years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power, which there came to him.

Within ten years, he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading Geographical Societies, for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send the readers of this notice a 9,000-word treatise. It is free. For your free copy, send your name and address to the Institute of Mentalphysics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. F-336, Los Angeles, Calif. Write promptly.



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The Ghost dropped to one knee beside the body.

The Case of **THE BROKEN BROOM**

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

CHAPTER I

The Crying Grave

THE phone rang. Wendal Bishop creaked forward in his rocking chair, sat tensely on its edge. His gray-eyed glance scurried across the room with its antique furniture, its braided rugs, its Dutch-tiled hearth, and its motto samplers. The banjo clock on the chimney piece stood at eight-thirty.

Wendal Bishop stood up. He was a slight man, middle-aged, and of medium height. A worried tightening of facial

muscles made his pale face look almost like a fragile plaster mask. He took hesitant steps into the dining room where the wall phone was, took down the receiver, voiced a timid:

"Yes?"

The voice that came from the receiver was the same that had called him at exactly the same time on the previous evening. It was an indescribable voice—muffled and might have come from the throat of man or woman—and the message it delivered was almost the same as on the night before.

"Mr. Bishop, I was walking by the

A COMPLETE GREEN GHOST NOVEL

A Cry from the Depths of a Grave Calls

graveyard and I heard Anna crying again."

"Wha—what?" Wendal Bishop stammered, though he had heard well enough.

"Anna's crying again," the voice on the phone repeated, and it seemed to Bishop, shivering as his trembling hand sought to hold the receiver steadily to his ear that the voice might well have come from the grave—a hollow, eerie voice. And the low laughter that came in accompaniment was an eerie, chilling burst. "What," said the voice of terror, "do you think this will do to you politically? If you're running for Congress in the fall, don't you think you'd better do something about Anna tonight?"

The connection was broken. Wendal Bishop replaced the receiver slowly, clung to the transmitter bracket for support. His face was drawn, white, as though he had just received a message from the inferno. A whirring, clumsy insect, attracted by the dining room light, whanged against the screen. Bishop sent a startled look toward the window, shivered uncontrollably, then breathed again as he recognized the source of the sound.

He went back through the cluttered living room on tiptoe, though there was no one in the house to disturb. Opening the front door, he went out into the quiet summer evening, drawn, as he well knew, by the beckoning hand of a dead woman.

COTTING Street was almost dark. The town of Wescott was strangely hushed, except for the yelping of Reed Kelmar's hound chained in the Kelmar yard half a block up the street. It sounded like the hound of perdition, barking a warning challenge for the next to die. Himself?

Wendal Bishop walked up the brick sidewalk as he had on the night before—walked two blocks up Cotting Street and one block down Mercer. He passed Doc Halsey's red brick house and, just beyond, the white stones of the cemetery gleamed pallidly white in the dusk.

Even in the daylight that place of dust

and decay and upthrust stones, like pointing fingers of reminders of what he, Wendal Bishop, would also become, was one of weird solitude that seemed a presage of disaster. Now it was all magnified—magnified because of the realization that a voice had spoken—or wept—from beneath the smooth green sod, and because of its lonely, brooding darkling beneath the gray cloudiness of a sullen evening sky.

And that hollow, complaining voice of a weeping woman, coming from the grave—he *had* heard it! Last night he had heard it himself. Drawn inexorably to the eerie spot by the same voice on the telephone, he had listened for what he had been told he would hear. He had! And for one moment of chilling, shuddering terror, a moment when a pale, gibbous moon had thrust itself through a rift of cumulus clouds like a pallid, whitened skull, there had been more. He had thought he had seen the vagueness of a shadowy, ghostly figure—and had turned and fled.

Now, he had to go back again. The call was imperative, had to be answered. He had to go back to that cemetery where Anna was buried, because Anna was crying again. That hollow voice over the telephone had said so, and last night the voice had been right.

Anna was Wendal's Aunt Anna Bishop. Hers were the withered fingers that had fashioned the samplers that hung in Wendal's living room. It had been her house. It all spoke of her, even now—now that her earthly body was moldering beneath the new white headstone. The braided rugs, the old furniture, the banjo clock, even the hearth broom with its splintered handle; all had been hers.

To my nephew, Wendal Bishop, I bequeath my house and all the furnishings within my house, including the broom by the fireplace, and good stout cord to mend its broken handle. May he sweep evil deeds and evil-doers before him.

That passage, from Aunt Anna Bishop's will, remained indelibly impressed on Wendal Bishop's brain. Others in

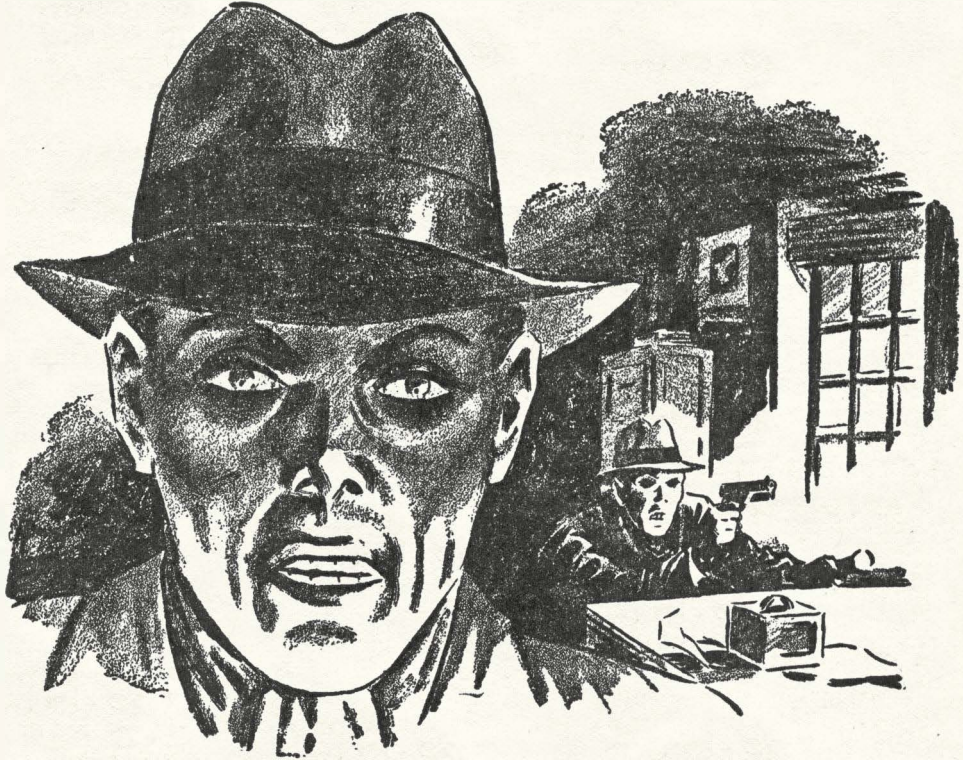
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Wescott knew of that passage, and accepted it as conclusive evidence that Anna Bishop had been mentally unbalanced. Even Wendal Bishop thought her mildly mad until some time after her death. Then he had known her for what she had been—a timid, harmless woman who had lived alone too long. And now, perhaps, she could not rest in her lonely grave, wanting to explain the

grave was a wooden bench as stiff and inhospitable as the haircloth sofa in her living room.

A sort of creeping paralysis came over Wendal Bishop's legs as he approached the grave, for even from a few yards away he could hear the sound he had heard the night before—the heart-broken sobs of a woman! He got his hand on the back of a bench and clung to it like



GEORGE CHANCE

cryptic phrases of her will.

She had lived alone and died alone. A quite ordinary case of pneumonia had been the cause of her death that bitterly cold January two and a half years ago. Wendal Bishop had been in California at the time, had not even been able to return for the funeral. . . .

Bishop passed through the gate of the burial ground and walked along the winding drive. The Bishop plot was near the drive, and beside Aunt Anna's

a drowning man to a life raft. He listened with bated breath to the crying that came up from the earth at his feet, from the tomb.

WENDAL BISHOP had not believed himself a superstitious man. He had been well-educated. He came from a long line of up-state farmers, was one of the "straight-laced Bishops." He believed in God and Satan and in a Hades on earth. But right

to a Baffling Jigsaw of Murder Mystery!

now, as a finger of ice traced its chilly path down his spine, he realized that he had run into something beyond his ken. And more than ever the gouging of his conscience told him that this was his own particular Hades—this reproachful, disillusioned crying from the grave.

"Stop it!" he whispered hoarsely, staring at the unbroken mound of sod that marked Aunt Anna's resting place.

But there was no silencing those sobs. The frigid grip on Bishop's legs was suddenly broken—he thought for a moment he had actually heard a snap—and once more he turned in his tracks and ran for the cemetery entrance, heading for the sanctuary of home.

His head was whirling, spinning, as if he had been served a stunning physical blow. The world—the sane world he thought he knew—was rotating about him crazily. Floating in a phantasmagoria of empty blackness, where nothing was real, nothing except those wailing sounds from the tomb, he thought he could almost smell the sulphuric smoke that surely must accompany what could only be a demonstration of the weird power of the Black Arts.

As Wendal Bishop somehow managed to get back to the brick sidewalk, his whole body was trembling. On tottering legs he fled back to his house—Aunt Anna's house—pushed open the door, closed it tightly behind him, and walked straight to the Dutch-tiled fireplace. His eyes fell upon the broken broom, and again he shuddered, the weeping from the grave ringing in his ears.

May he sweep evil deeds and evil-doers
before him.

Once more that passage from his aunt's will came to haunt him. Eyes staring, he shook his head. He hadn't used the broom for the purpose Aunt Anna had intended, because he had not known how he could, without bringing trouble to himself. Was that why anguished cries broke her last long sleep?

He knelt on the hearth, opened the chimney damper and reached up into the flue to a little soot-covered shelf in the masonry. Trembling fingers moved along the hidden shelf, clutched at something which he removed. It was a gold link bracelet.

Again he put his hand into the flue

and withdrew a red-leather-bound note-book which he opened and hurriedly glanced down a column of dates and figures. He struck a match, brought the flame toward the pages of the note-book, and hesitated.

"No," he whispered tonelessly. "Don't do it. She doesn't really know. How could she know—buried these two and a half years?"

It was a trick, this crying grave! Somebody was trying to start an investigation of his aunt's death, and was doing something uncannily to raise a furore, to suggest that *he* might know something about it, that after all hers had not been a natural death, one by which Wendal Bishop had profited.

His innocence would mean nothing to someone trying to besmirch him, but if that were the case, then all his terror in the cemetery was useless. There needn't be any real reason for the crying from the grave other than to put fear into his soul, to arouse a flurry of talk and speculation. Anything to create a stir, anything to suggest even remotely that there was rotteness in Wendal Bishop himself, which would make for instability in the timbers of Wendal Bishop's political platform.

The match burned his fingers and he dropped it. Time enough after the election to see that justice was done. He could rediscover the secret of the broom at any time after that and no one would be the wiser.

THERE was a sharp rap at the door of the house. Wendal Bishop sent a startled glance toward the front windows. The curtains were drawn. He steadied his trembling hands, carefully replaced the note-book and the gold bracelet on the hidden shelf within the flue. He closed the damper and wiped his hands on a handkerchief.

The handkerchief was soiled even before he wiped soot on it. That was one thing, he reminded himself, which he would have to be more careful about when he got to Washington—to get a clean handkerchief every day. Not having a woman around to remind him of such things, he had become a little careless.

The knocking was repeated on the door. Wendal Bishop raised his voice. "In a minute!"



"No noise, please," he whispered. "No noise, and you may live to break ninety!"

Then he crossed to the door and opened it. A tall, supple woman in brown riding habit and suède leather vest stood just outside. She was about twenty-eight years old, with a striking face, full red lips, and unconfined hair that had more red than brown in it.

Wendal Bishop worked a smile to his lips.

"Well, Rice! So glad to see you. Come right in."

Rice Whitman, Wendal Bishop's half-sister, entered the room. She looked around as she always did, sniffed contemptuously at the age of things. Her riding crop was under her arm and a cigarette dangled from her lips.

"Thank you, dear brother," she said. One of her eyebrows had a sardonic cast. "What took you so long getting to the door? Did I interrupt you in the middle of a prayer?"

Ordinarily, Wendal Bishop would not have laughed at such a remark. Rice Whitman said a great many things at which her half-brother could not properly laugh. But tonight he found himself laughing nervously.

"I was simply pottering around in the kitchen," he said.

"Well, potter over to a chair and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Rice flung herself into a cane-bottom chair and hooked one knee over its arm. She slapped at a polished boot with her whip. Wendal Bishop sat down uneasily on the haircloth sofa.

"I'm getting down to business," she said. "Maybe you've guessed it, but I'm heading for the poorhouse on a streamliner. You know the beastly luck I've had with the stable."

"I know of the money you've lost playing the races, if that's what you mean," he said quietly.

She tossed her head and her blue eyes were like twin flames from a blow-torch.

"I play my own nags. It's gambling, but what do you think politics is? At least, I'm backed by my own money, not by money that some suckers have contributed."

"All of which may be true," he said coldly. "But to what is this leading?"

"I'm not reminding you that we had the same mother," Rice said. "I've never asked anything from you holy Bishops. I'm just sitting here, flicking cigarette ash on your rag rugs, and asking you to

lend me ten thousand dollars. For security, there's my house, my stable, my nags, and eight acres of Greene County hills."

"No," Wendal Bishop said carefully. "I haven't any money like that."

"Oh, no?" Rice's smile became a sly, unpleasant grin. "Listen, brother rat, you see me around in pants so much of the time you don't know me in skirts. You don't know that I followed you to Albany on the train last Tuesday. And I followed you into the bank. You deposited a rather large sum of money."

WENDAL BISHOP felt himself going pale. He had kept that Albany bank account a secret.

"That's for my campaign fund," he said.

"Okay. But you don't need it now."

"I'm not lending you any money." His lips thinned to Puritan severity. "I am not contributing to your extravagance. To lend you money with which to gamble would amount to voluntarily lowering the moral standards of the community—the same community I intend to represent in Washington. How could I look my neighbors in the face if I were to lend you money?"

Rice got out of the chair so violently that she nearly upset it. She lashed her half-brother across the face with her riding whip. He uttered a cry, but immediately got hold of his dignity. He stood up, pointed toward the door.

"Will you please leave this house?"

Rice wheeled, walked to the door where she turned to look at him again.

"I'll find out where you got that money, Wendal Bishop!" she flung at him. "And when I do, maybe I'll keep the matter to myself and maybe I'll spread it all over town—depending on which alternative will hurt you the most."

She slammed out the door, and for a time Wendal Bishop stood there, stroking his hurt cheek tenderly. Then he crossed to the cherrywood secretary, took out paper, pen and ink, and wrote furiously:

Dear Standish:

Two evenings now I have been called to the phone at eight-thirty to receive a message delivered by a voice I am unable to identify. Each time it has been suggested that I visit the grave of my aunt, the late Miss Anna

Bishop, who was buried in the local cemetery two and a half years ago.

On both occasions, I have heard the sound of a woman crying, coming up from the grave of Anna Bishop. If this is trickery, how could it be accomplished, and what possible motive can I attach to it? If it is not trickery, what in heaven's name is it?

I believe you know of my political ambitions and, knowing them, you can probably guess why I do not want to make the matter public and take it to local authorities. Yet there is need for police investigation. Any suggestion that you care to offer me will be deeply appreciated.

Yours truly,
Wendal Bishop.

This letter was posted that same evening to Edward Standish, Police Commissioner of New York City.

Standish found the letter in his mail the following afternoon, and while his close-set eyes puzzled over it and he indulged in his favorite habit of mustache gnawing, he realized that there wasn't a lot he could do for Wendal Bishop. He certainly could not dispatch a New York police officer to the town of Wescott just to put Wendal Bishop's mind at rest. Even if he had not been so considerate of the taxpayers' money, he still knew of no man on the force who knew anything about crying graves.

Standish tossed Bishop's letter into a wire basket marked "Grief," and forgot about it until the following day. That was the day that his friend George Chance telephoned and invited him to lunch.

At the sound of Chance's voice, the commissioner immediately recalled Wendal Bishop's letter. Chance, obviously, was the man to solve Bishop's little mystery. Formerly billed as "The World's Greatest Magician," Chance was the man who could understand why a grave talked if anybody could. And, knowing the method, he probably would have little trouble in identifying Bishop's tormentor.

CHAPTER II

Shallot House

AT TEN o'clock that night, George Chance alighted from the train at the Wescott station platform. He was a long, lean man with red-gold hair, a

finely formed mouth, and blue eyes that laughed even when the rest of his face was serious. He wore a gray-green suit of light-weight tweed and carried a russet leather bag.

He found himself utterly alone on the platform except for a single expressman who pushed a truck away from the loading door of the train. The expressman was good enough to stop the rumble of his truck long enough to listen to Chance's question about where might he find a good hotel.

"Don't know," was the reply. "You come from New York?"

"That's right," Chance acknowledged.

"Then you won't find a good hotel here, Mister. We got a hotel, and if you're bound to stay there, you go around the north side of the station and talk to Miss Billings. She's parked in a Model-T over there, just in case maybe there should be somebody foolish enough to stop at the Shallot House."

Mr. Chance raised one red-gold eyebrow.

"Is the place haunted—I hope?"

"By roaches," the expressman said.

"That's plain and fancy libel you're talking!"

The gruff contralto voice that said that came from the north end of the station building. A woman who was both tall and fat waddled onto the platform. She was wearing a garment which Chance at first mistook for an artist's smock, but on closer inspection he discovered it was—so help him!—a linen duster of the same vintage as touring cars with side curtains.

The woman's broad face wore a grin which appeared to be perpetual, for it did not alter even when she told the expressman that he could mind his own business. She plodded up to Chance with her hand out. Chance, somewhat perturbed, thought that she wanted to shake hands, and transferred his bag into his left hand, from which it was promptly snatched by Miss Billings.

"The Shallot House is a first rate hotel for a town the size of Wescott," she announced. "Eight thousand souls and heaven knows how many heels!"

She turned, tramped back along the platform with a somewhat bewildered magician following her.

The Model-T was just the thing to go with a linen duster. Miss Billings tossed



JOE HARPER

the leather satchel into the front seat. The back door of the touring car came open with a sound that was like the breaking of a banjo string. Chance climbed in, sat down next to a small wooden crate which contained a live Plymouth Rock hen destined for the stew pot.

The doomed hen, the mighty Miss Billings, and the Model-T's incredibly accurate impersonation of a jeep negotiating a mine field, filled George Chance with misgivings. When he did arrive at the Shallot House, though, he was pleasantly surprised to find the hostelry not too bad.

It was a narrow, three-story red brick building on Wescott's Mercer Street. It was sandwiched in between the post-office and Fred Rodehaas' tailor shop. The front portion of the lower floor was given over to lobby and barber shop. The lobby contained one potted palm, some bumpy-looking brown leatherette furniture, and a desk with keyboard and pigeon-holes behind it.

MISS BILLINGS dropped Chance's bag in the middle of the lobby, divested herself of her duster, and emerged from the linen in a dress of lavender silk. Chance watched with great interest, wondering what new rôle Miss Billings was about to assume. The lady waddled to the desk, got behind it.

"Now, sir!" She grinned at him invitingly. Miss Billings, apparently, was also the hotel clerk.

"You wouldn't be the proprietor of this splendid resort, would you?" Chance asked, as he signed his name to the register.

"Nope." Miss Billings pointed with the pen Chance had just put down. "That's Henry Shallot over there . . . You want to walk downstairs to the bath or you want just to walk down the hall? The former's two bucks and the latter is two and a half."

"By all means," Chance said absently.

He was looking toward the front window of the lobby, where, in the shelter of the potted palm, were two men—one a placid, pipe-smoking buddha with a hairless head; the other taller than Chance by four inches, remarkably broad across the shoulders, and with a face that seemed made of the same brown leathery stuff that upholstered the lobby chairs.

"By all means, which?" Miss Billings insisted.

"Which," asked Chance, "is Henry Shallot?"

"The tall one . . . Do you want to walk downstairs to the bath—"

"I'll take the two-fifty room with the short cut," he said.

Henry Shallot came away from his placid companion, over to the desk where Chance stood. When he walked, he flapped a little as though his joints were not quite tight. His leathery countenance, his black pencil-line mustache, his eagle-beaked nose suggested a Bedouin somewhat. He leaned indolently against the desk, gave Chance a thorough going-over with soft brown eyes.

"Miss Billings taking care of you, sir?" he asked pleasantly.

"Quite," Chance said.

"Very good. We have a nice dining room. Miss Billings is an excellent cook. If you want any special service, don't hesitate to ask."

Henry Shallot opened a cigarette case with the air of a gentleman taking a pinch of snuff. He stole a look at the register Chance had just signed, nodded sagely.

"I knew the moment you stepped in. You're Mr. Chance, the magician. I saw your performance in Albany some

years ago. Excellent. Excellent, indeed."

Mr. Shallot's cigarette case had the rich gleam of platinum. He tapped his cigarette daintily. Mr. Chance amused him—or tried to—by producing a lighted match from thin air. Mr. Shallot accepted the light without batting an eye.

"You have been mentioned recently in the newspapers for your excellent detective work," Henry Shallot went on. "Do you mind telling me what mysteries you expect to solve here in our quiet little city?"

"Detective? Who's a detective?"

This came from the pipe-smoking buddha in the chair near the palm. He stirred himself from his chair, came half-way down the room, blinked heavily-lidded eyes at Chance.

"Mr. Chance is a detective," Shallot said.

"No, no, not at all," Chance protested.

"After Edwin Q. Markham, I'll wager," the buddha said. "Now there's a rat for you. A million dollars in hard-earned cash, the life-savings of many a poor man gone in a single night." He shook his bald head sadly. "I hope you succeed, Mr. Detective. I do hope you succeed."

THE name of Edwin Q. Markham struck a responsive chord in George Chance's memory. Three years ago, Edwin Markham had been a utilities company executive, and he had disappeared with a large portion of the corporation earnings. Police had followed him from New York up into the Catskills and had then lost all trace of him. Markham's disappearance was one of the unsolved cases on Commissioner Standish's book.

"Now, now, Bishop," Henry Shallot said. "That was three years ago." He added in a whisper to Chance, "Mr. Bishop's memory is not what it should be."

"Bishop?" Chance turned to the buddha. "You're Mr. Wendal Bishop?"

The buddha shook his head. "I'm Mort Bishop, Wendal's uncle. A fine, up-standing man, Wendal Bishop. You should vote for him. Everybody should." He returned to his chair and sat down slowly.

Miss Billings beat daylights out of the push-bell on the hotel desk, and from a door at the rear of the lobby appeared a tired-looking, young-old woman with straggling blond hair and a somewhat soiled face. Miss Billings, whatever else she might have been around the establishment, was not the bell-hop. She turned her perpetual grin on the tired woman and pointed to Chance's back.

"Take him to the back room second floor, Milly. Mr. Chance, the bath is right next door. Practically private, you might say."

Milly picked up the magician's bag and took dragging steps toward the stairway. Chance caught up with her, tried to take the bag away from her, but she clung to the handle doggedly.

"I gotta carry it, Mister—I just gotta!" she wailed, and sent a frantic glance over her shoulder toward Miss Billings.

Chance let her carry the bag, followed her up the steps, down a narrow hall to the room at the back. The room was clean but small, furnished with an iron bed, a battered dresser, and a washstand. Milly put down the bag, handed him the key to the door, and would have gone at once if he hadn't checked her. Smiling that charming, whimsical smile of his, he took from his pocket a dollar bill.

"You see this?"

Milly nodded, watched with lack-luster eyes as he carefully folded the bill, tore it in half, folded it again and tore it in quarters. He formed the torn pieces into a neat packet and pressed it into the maid's palm. Milly shook her head.

"She won't let me have it," she said dismally.

"Who? Miss Billings?"

"Yes. Any time I get a tip, she takes it away from me. You might as well keep it." She handed him back the folded scraps, turned, quietly left the room.

"I," Chance muttered, "will be darned! I am the only person around here who appreciates my talents." He unfolded the little wad of "scraps," and—behold!—the bill was whole and spendable.

He closed the door of his room and locked it. He went to the one window

that opened on a small, weed-grown yard, and quietly removed the screen. He looked out and down. Then he closed the blind tightly.

Next he removed his gray-green tweed suit, snapped out the black silk lining of the coat, and reversed the coat. When he had the pants turned inside out he had a completely new suit made of dead black cloth. The snap-in lining was fastened to the inner tweed surface of the coat, hiding it entirely.

From one of the many secret pockets of the lining he removed a small flat box—his pocket make-up kit. He donned the black suit, covered the visible "V" of white shirt front with a black silk scarf which he fastened with a rather ornate pin. The safety clasp which he fastened to the shaft of the pin was actually a minute electrical plug connected to two tiny wires that led down to a compact flashlight battery in his pocket.

Chance sat down in front of the dresser, opened his pocket make-up kit. He was an expert in the art of make-up, for in the circus where he had spent his early life he had learned many things from circus folk that could not be derived from books or colleges—ventriloquism, knife-throwing, acrobatics, impersonation, and make-up. Now his skilful fingers worked swiftly to accomplish a change that seemed almost miraculous.

He inserted a small wire oval in each nostril, tilting the tip of his nose sharply. Then from his make-up kit came brown eye shadow to deepen the pits of his eyes and to emphasize the hollowness of his cheeks. A set of yellow celluloid shell teeth that looked as though they might have been borrowed from a long-buried skull, went into his mouth and over his own sound teeth.

Deft touches with a lining pencil outlined the hidden bones of his thin face. When he had added a sickly pallor from his powder-box none would have recognized this obscure, sickly-looking man as the genial magician, George Chance.

But there was more to his disguise than had come from his make-up kit. Still another face could be called into being at an instant's notice by means of superb muscular control. His lips could peel back from the hideous teeth,

and a pale greenish light could flood upward from the concealed flashlight bulb in his scarf pin. His whole face could assume a vacuous expression like that of a death's head—and he would be the famed Green Ghost, relentless hunter of criminals.

With the exception of a few intimate friends in New York who frequently aided him in unraveling this or that mystery, none knew that the Green Ghost and George Chance were one. In his campaign against crime he had made so many enemies throughout the underworld that constant danger made it imperative that this dual identity should be his most closely guarded secret.

From the leather satchel he took a black crusher hat which completely hid his red-gold hair. From that same bag came a coil of silken rope, knotted at intervals and equipped with a flat steel hook at one end.

He turned out the light and crossed to the window.

Raising the blind, he pulled both parts of the sash down to the sill, fastened the hook to them. He climbed through the upper half of the window, stood on the sill outside, and let the free end of the rope drop down into the weeds below. Swiftly, and without noise, he descended into the shrouding darkness.

CHAPTER III

Murder

THE Green Ghost reflected whimsically that really to set the town of Wescott on its ear he ought to have stopped the first person he met and asked the way to the nearest graveyard. Instead, he proceeded quietly about the town until he located the cemetery for himself. From there on it was a stone to stone process until he located the grave of Anna Bishop.

The crying grave was not crying now. Except for the distant baying of a hound and the not distant enough singing of a mosquito the night was as silent as a church.

The Green Ghost got down on hands and knees on the grave and, guarding the rays of his flashlight with his hand, he covered every inch of the sod without

discovering anything to excite suspicion. He crawled to the side of the grave where the wooden bench was and continued his search. The bench was bolted to some sort of a buried anchorage and near its base at one end he discovered a crumb of yellow clay.

His light shifted to the bolts in the wood base piece. There were three bolts on this end, while he was quite certain that there were only two at the other end. The central bolt was loose. He could pull it a good two inches up in its hole before the nut on the other side stopped it. Rust on the heads of the two end bolts had recently been scarred away.

The Ghost took small strong pliers from his pocket tool kit and went to work on the bolts. In another minute he had them out of their sockets and found that he could now lift an end of the bench and shove it to one side.

His flashlight beamed down into an opening between two four-by-four-inch piles driven into the earth as an anchorage. Clay between the piles had been dug away, leaving a hole roughly five inches wide, ten inches long, and a foot deep. The depression was empty.

He clicked off his light, moved the end of the bench back in place, but remained on his knees a moment more, listening. The merest of whispers in the grass blades behind him, and he jerked a glance over his shoulder. Grave stones clustered about him, offering innumerable hiding places. He saw no one, but the feeling that hidden eyes were watching him persisted.

He straightened up from beside the bench, stepped into the gravel drive, and proceeded back toward the gate of the cemetery. His heels sounded on the brick walk for a little way, then he stepped into the grass plot in front of a red brick house where a small, illuminated sign proclaimed the home of Dr. Stuart Halsey, M.D.

Running silently across the grass toward the fence that separated the doctor's property from the graveyard, he climbed the iron pickets. Crouching low, he made his way back toward the grave of Anna Bishop. Someone was kneeling at the end of the bench just as the Ghost had knelt a moment before.

A match scratched, flared, and illuminated the face of a young woman with red-brown hair. Except for too large,



MERRY WHITE

too petulant lips, she had nice features.

Twenty feet away, hidden by a granite headstone, the Ghost watched as the woman peered into the empty hole beneath the end of the bench. Then the match went out. The Ghost heard the woman move the bench back into place, saw her straighten and proceed quietly to the gate. Dim night glow revealed that she wore boots and riding breeches.

He waited until she had gone through the gate and into Mercer Street before coming away from his sheltering headstone. Then he followed her like a living shadow. At the corner, she turned into a side street. Two blocks down she entered the door of a small frame house.

The Ghost quickened his steps, went up the same approach walk, and on the porch ventured a brief glimpse at the mail-box in the ray of his flashlight. The card on the box proclaimed this the house of Wendal Bishop.

HIS black-gloved hand closed slowly on the knob of the door. He turned it cautiously, pushed, found that the door opened readily. He put his eye to the crack and peered into the room. The redhead was down on her knees in the center of the living room floor, beside the prone figure of a man, in the act of rifling the man's pockets.

The Ghost pushed into the room. The woman turned and got to her feet with what amounted to the same graceful motion. Her indrawn breath made a small screaming sound through her clenched

white teeth, her eyes were staring, horror-filled.

Even as she stared, the head of the man who had entered came deliberately out of his coat collar like a turtle's from its shell. The dim light that came through a window from a street light outside centered on the face that suddenly seemed to float in the air before the horrified woman's eyes. A green ray of light from somewhere spread an aura around the awful face, and before her very eyes some invisible artist seemed painting a gruesome death's head with cavernous eyes, hollow cheeks, high cheek-bones, and teeth that could grind a soul to powder.

Too terrified to scream, the woman was petrified with fright as that green ray of light illuminated what seemed to be a vapor in which the death's head floated. That fixed, vacant expression which those who had encountered him knew only too well came into the Ghost's eerie face. The wraithlike head seemed to be floating in a cloud of green mist. . . . And from somewhere came his low laugh, the Green Ghost's graveyard laugh, and his apparently disembodied voice said hollowly:

"So you have brought death—and Death has caught up with you."

"No—no!" the woman choked. "You —" She could say no more.

She took sidling steps away from the man on the floor, and toward the fireplace. Then she must have realized that she was walking into a cul-de-sac with no way out unless it was up the chimney. Her eyes darted frantically about. With a sudden lunge she retrieved her riding crop which lay a yard away from the body. And then, with the crop as a weapon, she backed once more.

Ignoring her, the Ghost stalked over to the man on the floor. She could see then that he was a man clad in black, but his embodiment did not lessen her fright. He did not look at her, but at the man over whom she had been bending. He was dead. Blood that poured in a crimson fountain from his death wound pooled darkly about him on the aged boards of the floor and on the hooked rug that had been made by patient hands long ago, where the man's head rested.

The man was slight, middle-aged, and his sandy hair, graying at the temples,

was touseled and matted with blood that had flowed around him from the wound that had taken his life. His whole body slumped grotesquely, as though he had crumpled suddenly on legs too frail to uphold even his slender body, and they had abruptly buckled under him.

The double-O handles of a pair of shears stood upright in his back, and it didn't take three guesses to figure where the imbedded points had struck. Blood that had spurted from his now stilled heart splotched his light-colored sports coat, forming a wide, sticky, darkening spot that was centered by the gruesome shears standing in his back. There was not only blood pooling around the corpse, but blood on the long, slender white hands, and blood on the length of strong white cord which one fist grasped by its approximate center, while the other arm was extended on the floor.

The Ghost dropped on one knee beside the body, and looked at the man's face, and it seemed to him that death had contorted the features into the burlesque of a grin, as if he might have died taunting his killer because he had gone to his death with some secret untold. There was that in the wide-open mouth, remindful of the gaping mouth of a mask. Involuntarily the Ghost shuddered. There was no more gruesome sight on earth, he thought, than a dead face still contorted with taunting laughter.

THE Ghost turned his attention to the scissors that had done the job. They would tell no story, for they were covered and cushioned with black rubber, deeply cross-hatched to provide a non-slip grip and—incidentally—to form a surface that would record practically nothing in the way of fingerprints.

The redhead who had been silently watching, took a sneaking step toward the dining room. The Ghost looked at her, giving her the full benefit of his awesome appearance, said, "Don't," dryly, and stood up.

"What were you doing in the cemetery a few minutes ago?" he demanded in that hollow voice of death.

The woman shook her head, said nothing.

"What did you expect to find in that hole beneath the end of the bench?" he persisted.

She seemed to gather up her courage, with the realization that he must be flesh and blood, and not a phantasm from that burying ground of which he spoke.

"What right have you got, asking me questions?" she said. "What right have you got in this house?"

His chuckle was more ghoulish than mirthful.

"I might ask the same of you."

"It's the house of my brother—my half-brother, Wendal Bishop," she declared.

He indicated the corpse on the floor.

"This is the unlamented half-brother?"

She nodded. "Why should I lament? He was mean, tight-fisted, puritannical."

"And you're not, I presume. Then you'll answer my questions."

"I won't!" She stamped her foot. "Ask anyone in town, but not me." She was rapidly getting her courage back.

"Then I'll draw my own conclusions," he said, grimly accusing. "You killed your half-brother because you wanted something he had. You thought it was concealed beneath that bench in the cemetery. It wasn't. So you came back here to search Bishop's pockets—"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Her face was flushing angrily. "I went to the cemetery because Wendal has been going there nights. I followed him last night. I *thought* I was following him tonight—" She paused, her eyes narrowing. "It was you I saw in the cemetery, not Wendal. You moved the bench and took something out of that hole beneath it."

He laughed again. "We've got each other behind the eight-ball. If there's a melon, we might split it two ways—if there's a melon."

He waited for some response, got none.

"You followed Wendal Bishop to the cemetery last night?" he said. "At eighty-thirty?"

"Yes." She gave him a startled look. "How did you know?"

"I know. Was that the first time you had followed him to Anna Bishop's grave?"

"Yes."

"And did you hear anything?"

A shudder shook the girl's tall, slim body.

"Yes. A woman's voice, crying. It sounded as if it came out of the ground."

"What did Wendal do?"

"Turned around and came home."

"He didn't move the bench as you and I did tonight?"

"He didn't. I was in hopes he'd dig—" She bit her lip.

"Dig for what?"

"Not for what," she said. "Just dig into the grave to see why Aunt Anna isn't resting peacefully. Isn't that what you'd do?"

HE DIDN'T answer. He knelt once more beside the body of Wendal Bishop and began a methodical search of the pockets. He didn't know what the girl had expected to find, but evidently there was something worth looking for.

"What's your name?" he asked. "Miss Bishop?"

She laughed bitterly. "No, thank heaven! Rice Whitman."

He took a ring of keys and a handkerchief from Bishop's trouser's pocket. The handkerchief was soiled; there were black soot smudges on it. If this had been winter, he might have concluded that Wendal Bishop had been firing the furnace and had wiped his hands on his handkerchief. But since it was mid-summer, he immediately associated the soot marks with the open fireplace. Lest Rice Whitman interpret his thoughts, he didn't so much as glance at the fireplace.

"Did Wendal Bishop have money?" he asked.

Rice shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

"You must have known," he contradicted. "You said he was mean and tight-fisted. What was he tight-fisted with—apple seeds?"

She didn't answer. He continued searching Bishop's pockets, removed a wallet which contained a couple of twenty-dollar bills, an identification card, and a withered four-leaf clover.

And then Rice Whitman did exactly what he wanted her to do—made a break for the door. He made an intentionally clumsy effort to catch her ankle, took a blow from her whip that stung through the cloth of his coat sleeve. By the time he reached the door, Rice was running up the street as though the devil were after her.

The Ghost closed the door and moved back to the murdered man. The first thing he did was to remove the length

of white string from the hand of the corpse. It was hard-finished cotton cord a little thicker than chalk line and with a small loop knotted at each end. Examining the cord beneath the light of a lamp revealed waxy black marks on its surface. They were placed with apparent promiscuity all the way along its length.

That meant absolutely nothing to him—which was one reason in his mind why it deserved careful attention. He took a cigarette case from his pocket, pressed a hidden spring which revealed a secret compartment beneath a false lining. The cigarette case was in reality a magician's card box and its false lining was detection-proof. He coiled the two yards of cord into the compartment, snapped the lining back in place and returned the case to his pocket.

Then he went to the fireplace, knelt on the hearth, reached up into the chimney. His fingers bumped the damper, which he opened. He groped around in the sooty flue for a moment, finally employed his flashlight which showed him a single brick off-set from the surface of the masonry and forming a small shelf.

On top of this tiny shelf he found something—a red-leather-covered note-book and a gold link bracelet. Not a woman's bracelet, he decided, unless the woman's wrist was a good deal larger than most. One of the links was an oval plate on which was engraved the initials "E. Q. M."

He opened the note-book, saw on the first page a column of dates and figures. It looked like the record of a monthly payment plan, for on the tenth of every month over a period of a year and a half somebody had paid somebody else the amount of eight hundred dollars.

WITHOUT so much as a warning footstep, the front door of the Bishop house was flung open.

"Get him, Tom!" Rice Whitman's voice cried shrilly. "Grab him, Reed! He killed Wendal!"

The Ghost twisted around, came up from the hearth. He dropped note-book and bracelet and his right hand fell to the hem of his black suit coat.

Two men and Rice Whitman burst into the room. The first man must have been the local representative of law and

order, for a bright badge was pinned onto one wide suspender and he brandished a heavy-caliber revolver in his right hand. He fell back a little at sight of the Ghost's fearful face, but a talk with Rice Whitman must have prepared him, given him courage.

A smooth-acting gimmick that originally had been designed to drop a multiplying billiard ball into the hand of George Chance, now dropped a small black automatic into the waiting fingers of the Green Ghost. That was asking for trouble. The big gun in the hand of the local lawman blared once and a heavy slug struck the automatic even before the Ghost could get his finger through the trigger. The automatic was torn from the Ghost's hand.

"Reach!" the Law shouted. "Or I'll core your apple for you next time! I'm Tom Seeley, the marshal of this town, and the medals I got for shooting aren't just for decoration."

The Ghost stuck up his hands. He was rather inclined to believe the marshal's statement after the demonstration he had just witnessed. Tom Seeley had gray beard stubble, a rum-blossom on the end of his sizable nose, and his shirt was dirty. But there were certainly no flies on his shooting arm.

"All right," the marshal snapped. "Reed Kelmar, I deputize you to frisk him. Could be he packs two of those little automatics."

CHAPTER IV

Ghosts Are Like That

REED KELMAR, who had entered with the marshal and Rice Whitman was a small, jerky little man of thirty-eight or forty. Pinched features and enormous horn-rimmed glasses made his face look something like an enlargement of a tadpole's head.

He chewed gum nervously as he approached the Ghost and his search was somewhat ineffectual. He patted the Ghost's pockets from the outside, discovering nothing that resembled a gun, and completely neglected the Ghost's upraised right arm and coat sleeve which sheathed a keen, slender throwing knife that was at least twice as dangerous as

the automatic that now lay on the hearth.

Kelmar backed away empty-handed, then stooped to recover the red note-book and gold bracelet which the Ghost had dropped.

"All right," Marshal Seeley said again. "You fellows out in back, come on in. I guess he won't try to break through the back door. Seems pretty docile right now."

The Ghost heard the opening of a door at the rear of the house and in another moment a second lawman, followed by the bronzed Henry Shallot and Wendal Bishop's fat uncle Mortimer, trooped into the dining room. Something like a sob escaped placid Mort Bishop as he saw the body of his nephew. But Henry Shallot, the hotel proprietor, seemed no more perturbed by the sight of the dead man than he had been by George Chance's startling production of a lighted match an hour or so before.

The Ghost singled out Rice Whitman standing near the front door.

"Lady," he said, "you can raise an army faster than the Selective Service can."

"Rice didn't send for us," the marshal said. "We was already on the way. Reed Kelmar was in his newspaper office and got a tip on the phone that somebody had killed Wendal Bishop."

"That so?" the Ghost said conversationally. "Now a good newspaper man would have verified the tip, then called the police."

Henry Shallot uttered a short laugh which drew a sharp look from Reed Kelmar's spectacled eyes.

"What are you laughing at?" Kelmar demanded.

The hotel man shrugged. "Nothing. I was just thinking you don't go to press until Friday, so you've got plenty of time."

Kelmar handed the gold bracelet and note-book to Seeley. "I saw the killer drop these when he pulled his gun."

"All right," Seeley said. "Kelmar, you run over and get Doc Halsey. I want a medical opinion first thing. Mort, you see what stabbed your nephew?"

The bald buddha nodded.

"Scissors," he said dismally. "Stabbed with scissors."

"A tailor's shears, if I may be allowed to correct Mr. Bishop," the Ghost said.

"Just so," Seeley agreed. "Look like Fred Rodehaas' shears to me. Might ask him how come. Matthew, you keep a gun on our man. I want a look at this note-book and this gold bauble."

The Ghost found himself confronted with the deputy-marshal's gun, and a moment later Seeley asked about the initials on the gold bracelet. Did anybody know anybody with the initials E. Q. M.?

"Edwin Q. Markham," Mort Bishop wheezed. "Didn't know him and don't want to. He was a utilities executive who made off with a lot of company money. The New York police trailed him as far as Wescott and then lost—"

"Come out of the woods, Uncle Mort!" Rice Whitman interrupted. "That was three years ago."

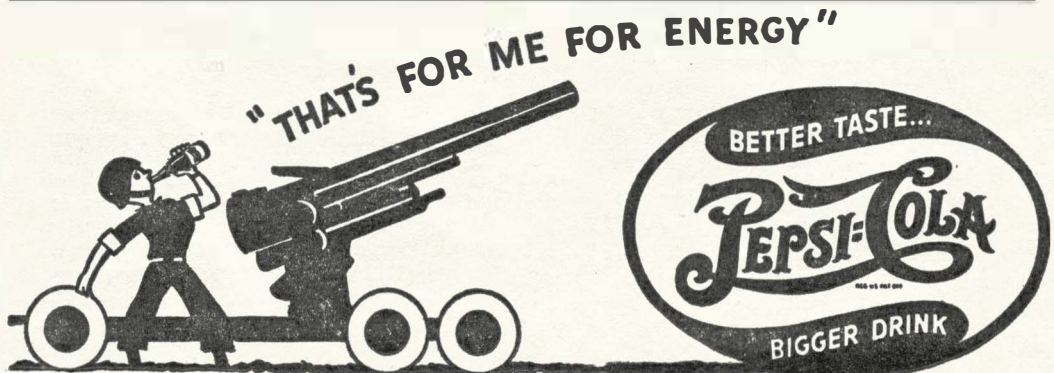
Mort Bishop looked slightly dazed. "That so? Time certainly does fly."

MARSHAL SEELEY elbowed his deputy aside and jabbed a forefinger into the Ghost's lean middle.

"Suppose you tell us what you were doing with that gold bracelet?"

"It's just a little thing I picked up—or rather picked down—from Wendal Bishop's flue," the Ghost said calmly. "There isn't any use telling you, I sup-

[Turn page]



pose, but you've got a good start in the wrong direction. When I entered this house, Wendal Bishop was already the late Mr. Bishop. I discovered that his handkerchief was soiled with soot, got the foolish notion that soot came from chimney flues. Poked around a little bit. And what did I find but the little red book and the bracelet?"

Seeley rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Just who are you, anyway?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. The only thing I seem to be able to remember is a lovely bearded picture of my grandfather which used to hang over our mantel. There was black crepe over the frame."

"So, it's the old amnesia gag, huh?" Seeley thumbed at his deputy. "Matthew, take this man to the city jail and lock him up. We'll see if we can't improve his memory after I get things cleaned up a bit here. And you might pick up Fred Rodehaas and bring him over here. I'd like to know how come his scissors are sticking in Wendal's remains."

The deputy took the Ghost in charge but was closely followed by Seeley on the way out to the marshal's car. The right-hand door of the car had an eyebolt on its inner surface and the Ghost's right wrist was linked to this bolt by means of handcuffs. He was then ordered to get into the car and pull the door shut.

As he did, the Ghost happened to look over Seeley's shoulder to the Bishop house. Rice Whitman was just coming out of the door. She sent a glance toward the police car, then walked swiftly up the street.

Seeley leaned into the car to make sure everything was shipshape before his deputy started out with the prisoner.

"You might stop at the Shallot House on the way back and get that New York detective who's staying there," he suggested to the deputy. "Henry says the man's name is Chance, but you can't make any mistake on account he's the only boarder Henry's got right now."

"What you want him for?" Matthew asked, sliding under the wheel.

"Cuss it all, I don't know anything about murder," Seeley said. "I'm going to need more help than you can give, Matthew."

Had all this not been downright dan-

gerous to the future safety of Mr. Chance, the Ghost might have got quite a kick out of the situation. It was vitally necessary that Chance turn up in Chance's room at the Shallot House when Deputy Marshal Matthew got there.

Had this been New York City, the Ghost would have had a way around such a difficulty. Glenn Saunders, an identical double to George Chance, would simply have stepped into Chance's shoes. But neither Glenn nor Chance's other able aides were available at the moment. The magician-detective had seen no reason for bringing his assistant with him on what at first had seemed a simple ghost-breaking case. Now it was murder, and he was in the thick of it. The Green Ghost would have given a good deal for a helping hand from one of his friends.

He certainly couldn't do much to help himself while handcuffed to the door of the marshal's car. Matthew had scarcely pulled away from the curb before the Ghost's agile fingers were at work in an effort to better his position. His free left hand went to the lapel of his coat, obtained from the lapel lining a small fork of fine steel with two flat tines.

HANDCUFF kings, escape artists—and the Ghost—secreted such instruments in convenient places about their body at all times. The tool was intended to slip into the narrow gap where the jaw of the handcuff fitted into the lock. Pressed sharply through this gap, the tiny tool could raise the dogs that were locked into the jaw teeth and the cuff could be opened.

To cover what his left hand was doing with its mate, the Ghost fed his captor a line of patter in the form of questions.

"Did Wendal Bishop have any money?"

"Maybe," Matthew said. "You know about that better than me. You probably killed him for what he had."

Not much use arguing that point with the man, the Ghost thought.

"What was it Rice Whitman said about me when you and the others met her coming from the Bishop house?" he asked.

"That she dropped in on her brother and found you bending over the body." The Ghost chuckled. "She got the

cart before the horse."

"The way some of Rice's horses have been running lately, a lot of them have carts before 'em and behind 'em, loaded down!"

"Oh? She's a horsewoman?"

"Owns a racing stable."

Matthew had turned the car into Mercer Street. It ran noisily over a manhole, and that was when the Ghost jammed his tiny tool into the handcuffs, forced the dogs, and felt the grip of the jaws relax.

"Had Wendal Bishop any living relatives besides Rice Whitman and Mort Bishop?" he asked.

"Not that I ever heard of."

"And Mort seems a bit foggy in the head."

"He just harps," Matthew said.

"You mean he's a musician?"

"No, he harps on one thing. For days. For years even. Take this business about the missing Edwin Q. Markham. But he's all right in the head. If you think he's queer, you should have known Anna Bishop. *There* was a queer one. She'd ramble around the hills all day alone, looking for herbs. She made pokeberry ink. She herb-doctored herself right into the grave, as a matter of fact. And do you know what she left Wendal Bishop in her will?"

"No."

It became apparent that Matthew's enthusiasm for gossip was making him forget the social barrier between himself and his supposed prisoner.

"She left him a broom with a broken handle. Said it was for him to sweep evil-doers from his path, or something like that. Oh, she was bats, all right."

Matthew braked in front of a squat stone building at the end of the business district. A naked light bulb above the door illuminated a sign identifying the place as the city jail. Matthew turned off his ignition, clicked over the latch of his door.

In getting out of the car, he put his right hand to the steering wheel to steady himself. That was the moment the Ghost had been waiting for. His hands, now free of the cuffs, brought the open bracelets up quickly and across the wheel. One set of steel jaws trapped Matthew's right wrist, while the other clamped over a spoke of the steering wheel.

"Hey!" Matthew yelled. "Hey, you can't do that!"

THE deputy turned, glared into the interior of the car, and was momentarily dumb-struck by the change that had come over the face of his erstwhile prisoner. The Ghost's lips had drawn back in a fixed grin that showed a row of yellow skull teeth. The deep-set eyes stared vacantly, ominously, and a pale, greenish glow of light flooded upward across the face.

And, quietly then, came the gruesome chuckle that identified the Ghost. It was like no other sound on earth, and any man hearing it was little likely to try to analyze it, to realize that it was the product of ventriloquism and a mastery of vocal cords that was beyond any layman's conception. It was a chill sound, a fearsome sound which, once heard, was never forgotten.

"I can't?"

The Ghost's voice seemed to come from the depths of a leaden coffin, the voice of a man who has long been buried and is now resurrected. It was a voice so resoundingly hollow that it must have had Matthew wondering if, after all, there was flesh and blood beneath that black coat, or only a framework of bones. But he made a valiant effort to hang onto his courage, to do the job he had to do.

"No, by golly, you can't!" he declared, his own voice jittery. "You're my prisoner!"

"I am?" The Ghost got out of the car. "Sorry to disappoint you, but ghosts are like that."

CHAPTER V

Radio Mystery

JUST as the Ghost turned to run to the jail a tall, supple figure in brown darted across the street toward the deputy. The Ghost needed only one glance to know that this was Rice Whitman. She had beat him to the vicinity of the jail, and what she was up to was not apparent until a moment later.

Matthew must have had trouble drawing his gun with his left hand, because Rice got it before he did. She left the helpless deputy and chased after the

Ghost who had skirted the left side of the jail and got to the back of the building. There the Ghost stopped. He might as well find out right now what was eating Rice Whitman. She certainly had recovered from her fright of him and now was after trouble of some kind on her own.

Rice came around the corner of the jail on tiptoe and was then and there confronted by the Ghost's grinning skull face. Her gasp was audible, but the deputy-marshal's gun gave her a courage which she might otherwise have lacked. She rammed the muzzle into the Ghost's middle.

"Give!" she ordered. "The piece of string. You must have taken it. It was gone when I came in a second time."

"If it's yours," the Ghost replied, "you ought to go to the police about it. This sort of high-handed business never got a girl anywhere. Especially with a ghost."

"No lecture. I want that string. Give, or the gun gives."

His hand went to the pocket of his vest. It was mere suggestion on his part. There was a piece of string there, all right, but not the piece she was looking for. He didn't know the purpose of the cord he had taken from Wendal Bishop's dead fist, but the piece in his vest pocket had a purpose all its own. Now that he had found out what Rice wanted, there was no further use hanging around.

"No, don't dip into that pocket," Rice warned. "I'll get it myself."

She reached into his vest pocket, got hold of the piece of string. It was only about a four-inch length, but she couldn't have known that. She gave the string a jerk, and at the same time the Ghost stepped backward quickly. Something that seemed like a cloud of luminous vapor came out of the Ghost's vest pocket, blossomed out like a small parachute, floated in the summer breeze. It momentarily blotted out the Ghost himself who promptly snapped off the greenish light that illuminated his face and vanished into the darkness.

He didn't wait to enjoy the scare he had given Rice Whitman. If she lingered to investigate the luminous cloud—which was doubtful—she would discover that it was a piece of silk chiffon treated with luminous paint. It had been folded into a neat packet in the Ghost's

pocket and the piece of string Rice had grasped was the "rip-cord" that set it in action.

Fake spirit mediums had made fortunes from such simple productions of ectoplasm. The Ghost had turned the trick to another purpose that night.

Over fences and back lots the Ghost raced until he came into that miserable little weed-grown yard that backed the Shallot House. There he found the dangling rope that was fastened to the window of George Chance's room above, and quickly climbed it hand over hand. When he reached the window, he heard Miss Billings' voice shouting inside the building.

"Milly, see who's at the door, you lazy tramp!"

Apparently someone had helped the deputy-marshal out of his predicament, and probably that bewildered gentleman had come to Shallot House to get "that New York detective" to give him a hand.

ONCE inside the room, the Ghost was quickly transformed into Chance. Chemically treated cleansing tissues rid him of his make-up. He stripped off the black suit, tossed it into a closet, and got into his bathrobe. By the time a knock came at his door, he was lying on the bed and the light was out. He let the knock come again before going to the door to discover big, bronzed Henry Shallot in the hall and Deputy Marshal Matthew with him.

"There's been a murder," Shallot announced.

"Yeah—Wendal Bishop," Matthew said. "Guess we need some expert help. That guy, the Green Ghost, is loose in town and raising merry hob."

Chance said that he would have to dress and that they could wait for him downstairs. He closed the door, went to the window, and pulled up his silk rope which he concealed in his traveling bag. The bag securely locked, he took the black suit out of the closet, reversed it, put the black crusher hat into one of the secret pockets of the lining.

As he dressed, he mentally reviewed the murder, trying to fill the missing pieces into the pattern with the known pieces. The method had been simple and direct—the method of the murder. Possibly the rubber-handled scissors had been used because the non-slip design

of the handles would have offered no kind of a surface to record fingerprints. The killer would scarcely have cared to wear gloves, because the appearance of gloves on a summer night like this would have excited his victim's suspicions.

As for motive—there was always greed. Money, the root of all evil. The little red book recovered from the chimney flue indicated that somebody had paid somebody else a fixed amount of money at regular intervals. Which suggested blackmail. Was E. Q. Markham, the long missing embezzler, the blackmail victim and therefore the killer? The gold bracelet seemed to suggest that, for it had been a man's identification bracelet.

Another possibility—Wendal Bishop had accumulated a small fortune through blackmailing the missing Markham and had been killed by Bishop's possible heirs, which seemed to include Rice Whitman and Mort Bishop.

Where did the piece of string fit in? A big blank there.

What about Anna Bishop's wailing grave? Why had Rice hoped that Wendal Bishop would dig in that grave? Why the hole beneath the end of the bench in the graveyard, and what had been in that hole at one time? Something which had accomplished the trick of the crying sound that seemed to come from the grave?

That was likely. But the opening was too small for a phonograph. A radio—a portable radio—would have fitted into that hole, though.

Why would anyone have pulled the trick of the crying grave in the first place? To get Wendal Bishop to go to the grave and investigate, perhaps to dig into the earth of the grave itself?

Wendal Bishop had not dug, but had asked Commissioner Standish for help. Did that imply that if Wendal had opened the grave something would have happened to Wendal? That seemed to fit. Perhaps the stabbing with the scissors was the second attempt to kill Wendal Bishop. Perhaps the crying grave was the first.

How could digging in a grave be deadly? Well, suppose Anna Bishop's grave was guarded by a grave bomb—one of those crude but efficient tricks designed to defeat the purpose of grave robbers. Chance had not heard of any-

one being buried beneath a grave bomb in a long while. As a matter of fact, it seemed to him that grave bombs were forbidden by law.

George Chance made a face at the ceiling.

"Make a note not to go digging around Aunt Anna Bishop's grave," he muttered. "Might have to be poured out of your shoes."

HENRY SHALLOT was waiting for Chance when the magician got down to the lobby. Evidently Matthew had returned to the Bishop house.

"Do we walk?" Chance asked the hotel proprietor.

The big man yawned, bending his straight black mustache down into a bow.

"I have my car outside. I'll drive you over, Mr. Chance."

Shallot's car proved to be a flashy roadster of expensive make and he covered the short distance between the hotel and Wendal Bishop's house with reckless abandon. Shallot was obviously the dashing blade of Wescott. Not exactly a young blade, but dashing. That is, he'd dash if it didn't require too much physical effort.

Marshal Seeley still held forth over the body of Wendal Bishop while the marshal's deputy sulked in one corner of the room. Mort Bishop was still there, sniffing a little every time his heavy-lidded glance strayed to the body.

Reed Kelmar, local member of the Fourth Estate, had out a notebook and was taking notes for his paper. It would be old news indeed by the time it saw printers' ink. There were two new arrivals—Dr. Stuart Halsey, whose medical opinion had been sought; and Fred Rodehaas, the tailor, whose scissors were unfortunately sticking out of the dead man's back.

George Chance was introduced by Henry Shallot.

Dr. Halsey was important and paunchy, the lower part of his face completely covered with a black beard, suggesting that before he had become overweight he might have played baseball for the House of David.

Fred Rodehaas was blond and middle-aged. He wore a hearing aid back of one ear. The bullet shape of his head indicated that he might have a certain accent,

but this proved to be wrong. There was nothing Teutonic about him except his name and the shape of his head.

Dr. Stuart Halsey came away from the corpse, and in high-sounding medical terms pronounced Wendal Bishop dead from a stab wound.

"And it is of course murder," Halsey went on.

Marshal Seeley carefully removed the shears from the body, using a pair of pliers to avoid spoiling prints which Chance was sure were not there. Seeley thrust the scissors at Fred Rodehaas.

"You admit to it these are your scissors, Fred?"

The tailor did not shrink.

"I admitted it when I first came in here," he replied boldly. "They must have been stolen from my shop early tonight."

"Why didn't you report the theft?" Reed Kelmar asked.

"I didn't know they were stolen," Rodehaas said peevishly. "I didn't work tonight."

Henry Shallot snickered. "I'll bear you out there, Mr. Rodehaas. You were practising on your bull fiddle until nearly nine."

"Which is a no-good alibi," Seeley said, "since Doc says the time of death was later than that—about ten."

"Well, I didn't kill him," the tailor snapped. "As for my reporting the theft of the scissors, it wouldn't have done any good if I had. Look the way you didn't find my radio after it was stolen last week."

"Was your radio stolen, Fred?" Mort Bishop wheezed. "Say, this is the worst crime wave since the New York police came up here hunting Edwin Q. Markham."

"About this radio," Chance put in quietly, "would you mind telling me if it was a portable and what size?"

FRED RODEHAAS used his hands to describe the size of the radio, and Chance thought to himself that such a set would have fit nicely into the hole at the end of the bench beside Anna Bishop's grave.

"Did it happen to have a toggle switch or a knob switch?" he asked.

"Toggle," Rodehaas said. "What's this got to do with anything?"

Chance was now the center of attention and he thought it might not be a bad idea to explain his reason for being in town. He told about Wendal Bishop's letter to Commissioner Standish.

"That's a scurvy trick to play on anyone, and a silly one," Reed Kelmar said. "What's the idea behind it?"

Chance shrugged. "Perhaps someone was trying to get Wendal Bishop to make a quiet and careful investigation of the grave itself, perhaps to the extent of exhuming the body."

CHAPTER VI

Secret of the Grave

SWIFT glances went around the room—Kelmar to Mort Bishop, Mort to Henry Shallot, Henry to Dr. Halsey, Halsey to Fred Rodehaas. Chance and the two lawmen were the only ones excluded from this little game of eyebrow raising in answer to Chance's unexpected remark.

"You think my radio had something to do with it then?" Rodehaas asked. "I'm getting to figure in this too danged prominently—my scissors and my radio."

"Could be it was a phonograph buried in the grave that made the crying sound," Seeley suggested. "Maybe with one of those home-made records of yours, Rodehaas, where you play the bass fiddle. Could sound like somebody crying, I guess."

Rodehaas gave the marshal a dagger glance.

"I've had about enough," he growled. "If you're going to arrest me, go to it, Only cut out the ribbing."

Seeley looked at the murder scissors. "I got to find out some more about these first," he declared. "Finger-prints, you see."

"I suggest," Chance said, "that you send the scissors to the New York police lab. I doubt if those rubber grips will give you much in the way of prints, but a careful test may reveal traces of perspiration salts which, in turn, might tell something about the person who used them."

Seeley thought that was a good idea.

He might even drive down to New York with the scissors himself and get an expert opinion.

"I'd like to ask one question," Chance said. "Did Wendal Bishop inherit anything from his late aunt, Miss Anna Bishop?"

"This house and all the furniture," Mort Bishop said.

"And a broom," Deputy Marshal Matthew put in. "Don't forget the broken broom."

Mort nodded. "The broom. It was sort of a symbol, we figure. Anna always looked on Wendal as a sort of moral crusader. She would have been a moral crusader herself, only she was rather timid and thought woman's place was in the home. That's the broom right over there by the fire."

Mort blinked toward the Dutch-tiled fireplace. Everybody followed his glance. There was no hearth broom there.

"It was there when we came in," Reed Kelmar insisted. "I distinctly remember seeing it there."

"Then, by golly," Matthew declared, "it's that Green Ghost guy. He's snook right in here with all of us standing around and he's took the broom!"

Mr. Chance could have put an end to that particular line of reasoning if he had wanted to. The broom was gone and he knew that the Green Ghost had not taken it. Rice Whitman might have made off with it some way, or perhaps somebody who was in the room now had managed to hide it somewhere to be picked up at a later time.

Chance left the Bishop house while the uproar about the broom was going on. He walked back to the hotel, but instead of entering by the front door, he went behind it and crossed into the back yard of Rodehaas' tailor shop next door. The back door of the shop was locked, but that offered no obstacle to a former escape artist. Chance was inside the tailor's place in less than a minute.

His flashlight showed him a snug three-room bachelor apartment behind the shop. In one corner of the living room was Rodehaas' bull fiddle and in the other a late model expensive radio, phonograph, and recorder outfit. In one compartment of the walnut cabinet he found a choice selection of professional recordings as well as a score or so of

home-made records—six-inch cardboard disks.

CHANCE stacked these home recordings neatly, put a piece of string through the center of the stack, and tied them together. He carried the records with him as he continued his search.

A stairway from the kitchen led him to an attic or loft room above. This room seemed to be a combination workshop and junk room. The only means of ventilation was one skylight, and a number of auto license plates had been tacked over the glass of that, perhaps to keep the summer sun from turning the place into an oven.

At the end of the room, opposite the work-bench, was the accumulation of junk, most of which ought to have been handed over to the scrap metal drive. There was an old sewing machine frame, one fire-dog, parts from tractors and cars, some copper sheeting, boxes of rusty bolts, an oil drum, a broken pitcher, any number of horseshoes, a couple of old radios of the "peanut" tube type—and one radio that was scarcely old enough to accumulate dust. It was a neat portable job with a toggle switch on its front panel, and on turning the radio upside down, Chance discovered bits of clay embedded in the screw-holes of the rubber feet.

Here, undoubtedly, was the radio Rodehaas claimed had been stolen. And perhaps it had. Perhaps it had served its purpose and had been returned by the thief.

But Chance was willing to wager that this small radio had at one time reposed in that hole in the clay beneath the bench beside Anna Bishop's grave. A length of stiff wire attached to the toggle switch and to that loose central bolt in the base of the bench would have enabled whoever had planted the radio to turn the set off and on without unbolting the bench each time.

Chance carried the radio downstairs and put it in the center of a table of the living room. If Rodehaas had been lying about the theft, this would probably give him a few uncomfortable moments.

Then the magician-detective left the tailor's establishment, taking with him Rodehaas' home recordings. With them

under his coat, he entered the deserted lobby of the hotel and climbed to his room. . . .

In the morning George Chance entered the dining room of the Shallot House at eight o'clock, in time to find Henry Shallot putting a saccharine pill in his, Shallot's, coffee.

"With the sugar rationing program in effect, I find that using these pills saves sugar for my guests," Shallot explained.

"That's generous of you," Chance commented as he sat down at the table with the big bronzed man.

"Not particularly. I like to make my guests happy. This hotel has been in my family for three generations. It's something of a hobby with me."

Miss Billings appeared from the kitchen wearing a white apron that was as voluminous as the linen duster she had worn when driving the hotel hack. She went to a big radio-phonograph at one side of the room and asked Mr. Chance if he liked to have music with his meals.

"Bach for breakfast, Debussy for dinner, and Saint-Saens for supper," Shallot said with a laugh.

"If it has to be Bach, I'll take silence, if you don't mind," Chance said. "Besides, I want to talk with Mr. Shallot."

SHALLOT put aside the morning paper which had come in on the New York train and leaned forward attentively. Breakfast was served by the unhappy Milly who spilled the coffee and caught a tongue lashing from the grinning Miss Billings. Milly burst into tears, went back into the kitchen, leaving Miss Billings to serve Chance's breakfast herself.

"Did you ever see a grave bomb?" Chance said, when he and Shallot were alone. "It's a sort of land-mine which was used as a defense against grave robbers in some localities years ago. Dynamite was usually enclosed in a large earthenware jug with some sort of an exploding cap arrangement fitted into the mouth of the jug. The cap was activated by several levers that spread out in all directions and were spring-operated. That is, a spade touching any of the arms or the wires that were sometimes attached between the arms caused the cap to be set off and exploded the dynamite right in the face of the ghoul."

Chance looked up from diagrams he had been drawing on the table cloth and studied Shallot's bronzed face.

"You've heard of grave bombs?"

Shallot nodded. "I helped plant one once," he said, quite as though it was a hill of potatoes he was referring to. "In Anna Bishop's grave. The poor old woman was always afraid that someone would disturb her last sleep, and she made her brother Mort promise he would see to it that her grave was guarded by such a bomb as you describe. Mort came to me for advice. I told him to forget it entirely, that Anna was dead, buried, and wouldn't know about it anyway. But Mort wanted to carry out her every wish."

"So you and Mort fixed up the bomb, reopened the grave, and planted it?"

"Well, there was a bit more to it than that. Neither Mort nor I knew anything about grave bombs, but we figured that Fred Rodehaas could make one for us. He did. It was a rather more efficient contraption than the one you described. Mort, Fred, and I went to the burial ground to plant the bomb one night about a week after Anna Bishop was buried. Grave bombs happen to be against the law, you know, so we were anxious to keep the matter quiet."

"You were successful?"

"Not entirely. Dr. Halsey's house is right next to the cemetery, and that night Reed Kelmar and Rice Whitman were at the doctor's house. Kelmar and Halsey were interested in Rice's race horse stable, though Rice later bought out her partners."

"So Halsey, Reed Kelmar, and Rice Whitman caught you in the act of burying the grave bomb?"

"That's right. Mort appealed to them earnestly not to tell anyone what they were doing and not to call in the law. He convinced them that he was only complying with Anna Bishop's dying wish. So the six of us have kept the secret ever since."

"Wendal Bishop didn't know about it?"

"He didn't," Shallot said. "Dying wish or not, Wendal wouldn't have approved. So nobody told him, and he was out of town at the time."

"Which clearly explains the motive behind the crying grave trick," Chance said. "Somebody was trying to get

Wendal Bishop to blow himself to atoms."

"We decided as much among ourselves last night—Halsey, Kelmar, Rodehaas, Mort Bishop, and I. The stabbing with the scissors was the second attempt on Wendal's life."

Chance nodded. "Which narrows the field of suspects to the six persons who knew about the grave bomb."

Shallot pursed his lips. "That's right. Odd no one mentioned that last night."

"Another thing. How was the body of Wendal Bishop discovered last night?"

"I believe Reed Kelmar said he got a telephone tip while he was working in his office. He was alone at the time, so there isn't any verification."

CHANCE nodded. In all probability, that tip was from the killer himself. The killer had seen Rice enter the Bishop house after the murder—or perhaps it was the Green Ghost the murderer had seen—and had decided that there were a couple of ready-made fall guys.

After breakfast, Chance announced that he was going back to New York for a short time. But he would appreciate it if Shallot would hold his room, inasmuch as he might return that night. This settled, the magician-detective took his traveling bag out of the hotel room and went to the station.

He sent a cryptic telegram to Joe Harper—Joe Harper, the Broadway bum, the prince of chiselers who had years ago discovered George Chance's guest room a good place for a hangover and had resided there ever since. That done, Chance boarded the train and headed home.

His brownstone house on East Fifty-fourth Street looked particularly good to him after the dingy Shallot House. Even better looking was Merry White, that small, starry-eyed brunette who had been the feminine attraction when the Chance magic shows had toured the stages of the world.

His telegram had resulted in the assembling of all of the Green Ghost's aides—Merry, Joe Harper, Tiny Tim Terry, and Chance's double, Glenn Saunders. Long ago Saunders had deliberately shucked his own identity to play his important rôle in the Green Ghost's

investigations.

Tiny Tim, miniature man-about-town, midget friend from Chance's circus days, shook hands with the magician-detective, his babylike features comically serious. Merry had a kiss for her returning hero. Joe Harper had mixed a cooling highball—with Chance's whisky, of course—and Glenn Saunders had a new solid-through-solid trick which he had developed and wanted to show everybody.

Saunders was a magic fiend. In fact, nothing except a craving for knowledge of magic could have induced the man to step out of his own life simply to fill in as Chance's double.

"The trick can wait, Glenn," Chance said. "Everything can wait except that drink, Joe. That train was like an oven on wheels."

Joe Harper, sartorially brilliant in checked suit, rainbow tie, and that nauseatingly green felt hat that he wore winter and summer, extended the glass to Chance who collapsed on the sofa in the living room. The magician pointed to his traveling bag.

"I've a nice collection of choice records in there, Merry. You might dig them out and play them on the phonograph while I tell you what I've been doing."

CHAPTER VII

The Essential Clue

MERRY White got out the home recordings which Chance had borrowed from Rodehaas' apartment, took them to the phonograph, put the first one in place. Everybody listened, and in a second or two the groaning of Rodehaas' bull fiddle was re-created for them.

Tiny Tim held his ears. Merry wrinkled her nose. Glenn Saunders asked if this was really necessary, and Joe Harper decided he needed another drink to endure the torture.

"Just keep playing them," Chance directed Merry. "They weren't labeled, so I couldn't separate the sheep from the goats."

"That's a sheep she's playing now," Saunders said. "A dying sheep."

"It smells from a goat," Joe said, and

slumped into a chair. "George, you can't expect us to take this without protest, and not explain what it's all about."

"George is mixed up in murder again, aren't you, darlin'?" Merry said.

"I am," he admitted. "So is the Green Ghost. That's half the trouble. I had to go ghosting in Westcott, and Glenn wasn't there to prove that George Chance isn't the Green Ghost. Glenn, you've got to go to Wescott and pinch-hit for me while I see if the Ghost can't make sense out of this murder mystery."

"Give with the mystery," Joe Harper said, his beady eyes, like two little black beetles, watching Chance. "We'll probably solve it for you without getting more than arms' length away from your whisky decanter."

While Merry was playing Rodehaas' records, Chance told his friends everything that had happened from the moment he had arrived in Wescott. He even described certain of the Wescott citizens he had met, for the benefit of Glenn Saunders who, as George Chance, would be called upon to have dealings with them.

The piece of string which he had taken from the hand of the dead man was what he could not understand. He couldn't explain it and examination of it had proved nothing. There were the black marks on the string, but that meant nothing to anybody.

"But Rice Whitman wanted it," he concluded.

"She raises horses?" Tim asked.

"Joe's kind of horses," Chance said.

"My kind never win a race," Joe said mournfully.

"That's what I mean, Joe. Rice needs money badly. Maybe bad enough to kill for it."

Merry came away from the phonograph so that she could get in a word above the honking of Rodehaas' bull fiddle record.

"Maybe the string was intended to mend the broken broom, darlin'—the broken broom that Aunt Anna Bishop left to Wendal Bishop."

"Ah, cut it out, Frail!" Tiny Tim crabbed shrilly. "George isn't trying to amuse you."

"I'm not trying to be funny either," Merry said, tossing her head. "It merely occurred to me that if you've got a broom with a broken handle, you wrap

a string around the break."

Chance smiled. "Maybe you've got something there, at that. Got any more of those unfinished bass fiddle symphonies?"

Merry went back to the stack. "Three more."

"Can we stand three more?" Joe Harper asked.

"If George thinks it's important, I guess we can."

GEORGE thought it was important. They listened in silence through another one. Merry put on the next to the last record in the stack, and hardly had the needle found its groove before the sound of a woman sobbing came from the reproducer.

"Ah!" Chance said.

"That, George, is worse than the fiddle," Joe complained.

"That, Joe, is the sound that Wendal Bishop heard when he was standing beside the grave of his buried aunt!" Chance said. "It means we're getting somewhere. And it means you've got a job in Wescott, Joe."

The suggestion of a job was almost frightening to Joe Harper.

"Me? Me, work?"

"Well," Chance said, "not exactly. You simply go from door to door and try to sell wireless record players to people with radios. A wireless record player, Joe, is a record player that you set in one corner of your room remote from your radio—or maybe you even put the record player in another room. You don't connect it with your radio at all, yet the music comes out of the radio loud-speaker."

"Is that so?" Joe said, without any enthusiasm.

"A fine job for Joe," Tiny Tim jeered. "He never progressed beyond the mechanics of a pair of dice."

"All Joe has to do is go from house to house and say that he's arranging for demonstrations for the Super Tooter Wireless Record Player," Chance continued. "That way, he finds out who already has a wireless record player. With Joe's gift of gab, it should be easy."

"What do the rest of us do?" Tim asked.

"Well, Glenn's job is already set out for him. He'll be George Chance who is, fortunately, on the good side of the

Wescott police. He'll get us all the developments from that end of the line. You and Merry—well, I'd like to have you in Wescott in case you're needed. Merry can be interested in buying some antiques."

"Goody!" Merry clapped her hands. "And do I really get to buy 'em?"

"Not to clutter up this place, anyway," Chance said, with a laugh. "And Tim, you can be Merry's little boy in a cute little pair of overalls and a straw hat."

"Nuts!" Tim said, and then added, "But I'll do it."

"Joe and Glenn can go to Wescott by train," Chance continued. "Glenn takes my old room at the hotel. Joe gets a room of his own, naturally, and you've never seen each other before."

"Also naturally," Joe said.

"Merry, if you've got enough coupons for a tank of gas, you and Tim might drive up, just so we don't all descend upon the town in a body."

"Wait a minute," Joe protested. "If I'm going into the wireless record player business, I want to know why."

Chance thought that was fair enough.

"I think I told you a portable radio was buried in a hole under the end of that bench near Anna Bishop's grave. These wireless record players are actually little broadcasting stations. If your neighbor has one, you can tune your radio in on it and hear what records they are playing next door, or half a block away for that matter. I think that's how the crying grave stunt was worked. The record we have just listened to was played on a record player at some house near the graveyard at eight-thirty at night. The buried radio was tuned to the record player frequency, so that the crying sound came from the radio."

Joe nodded. "Only I think eight-thirty is an awful hour for a buried corpse to be going on a crying jag. Why didn't they wait until midnight?"

"That," Chance concluded, "is another thing we've got to figure out. Because the trick must have lost half of its effectiveness by being pulled just at dusk. It's worth thinking about. . . ."

BY FOUR o'clock that afternoon, Joe Harper found himself launched in a new business enterprise—salesman for the mythical Super Tooter Wireless Record Player. Joe Harper had pitched

razor blade hones and two-bit fountain pens in the doors of vacant store buildings in Manhattan, but in a business like that, he thought, the sucker comes right up to you and you don't wear down your dogs chasing him all over town like in this record player racket. Why, this was practically the same as working at a legitimate enterprise, and therefore highly distasteful.

It went like this: Joe would go to one of Wescott's doors, knock, and a lady in an apron would come to the door and glare at him suspiciously. Joe would touch his hat politely—not take it off, of course—and say:

"Lady, I represent the Super Tooter Wireless Record Player Corporation of America, and I would like to place in your home for demonstration, our very latest model. You are under no obligation—"

"I don't want any," madam in the apron would say, sore about it, too. "My beans are burning."

And slam-ho with the door! It was discouraging. Even disillusioning, because you wouldn't think there were that many people in Wescott who were not interested in the finer things in music like Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey. Practically everybody had beans that were conveniently burning. No originality with the alibis, even.

It wasn't until he encountered Mrs. Thomas, the wife of a butcher shop proprietor, that Joe found a sympathetic listener. He got as far as, "You are under no obligation—" and then Mrs. Thomas practically dragged him into the house.

"I've been after Mr. Thomas for two months to buy us one of those things, ever since that night I had acute indigestion and he took me over to Dr. Halsey's house. After I came out of my attack, Dr. and Mrs. Halsey had us sit there a while and listen to an opera on his record player, and the thing I like about it is you don't have to have wires strung all over the house."

"Yes," Joe wedged in. "Now, on our special demonstration plan—"

"I do think I wouldn't have so much indigestion if I could just sit down to some good music after dinner instead of going right out and washing dishes. Don't you?"

"Sure—"

"So I'm going to let you bring your record player right in," Mrs. Thomas said, beaming on Joe. "And if you'll let us try it a while, I'm sure that I can convince Joe to let us have it."

Joe Harper winced. "Joe? Who's Joe?" The lady was all screwed up. Joe wasn't giving away record players.

"Joe is my husband—Joe Thomas, the butcher. Joe's the sweetest man, really, and when I convince him how much it will do for my indigestion, I'm sure he'll buy. So you just bring it in—"

"Listen, lady," Joe Harper cut in. "I am only getting prospects. I'm not a salesman. I'm a—a second vice-president in charge of prospects. All I want—are you willing to try our player in your home? I don't have a player with me right now."

"Oh, shoot!" said Mrs. Thomas. "Not even if I gave you a five-dollar deposit?"

"Well, if you were to go as far as that, I could have one of our players sent down on the train for you tomorrow. I mean up on the train."

MRS. THOMAS excused herself, went into the dining room where there was some secretive goings-on with a sugar bowl. She returned with a wad of one dollar bills which Joe looked at from a distance. He didn't think it would be a good thing to take this easy money, maybe. George Chance was pretty much against grafting.

Joe held his hand up, not out.

"You just keep the five bucks, Mrs. Thomas. We're honest—the Super Tooter Record Player Corporation is—and we figure everybody else is too. I'll send you the player tomorrow and no deposit."

"Well, thanks!"

"Don't mention it." Joe returned to the door. "By the way, you don't know off-hand where this Dr. Halsey lives, do you?"

"Why, everybody knows that! He's the only doctor in town since young Dr. Blade went into the army. He lives right next to the cemetery in a red brick house."

"Croak 'em and plant 'em," Joe said.

"His office is down in town, of course. A little white frame building on the corner of Mercer and Vine Streets."

"Thanks," Joe said, and got out onto the porch. "I'll just check and see if his

record player is in good condition."

He touched his hat again and got away from Mrs. Thomas.

He stopped the door-to-door business after that. Dr. Halsey was one of the Ghost's six suspects, and if he had a record player, some double-checking might put an end to all this walking that Joe Harper was doing.

He went to the door of the doctor's, red brick house, knocked, was coldly met by a rather handsome middle-aged woman in white. She immediately informed him that they had a record player and it was in good condition.

"Sure, I know," Joe said, "but you haven't heard a thing until you've heard the Super Tooter. Suppose I come back some quiet evening about eight-thirty and demonstrate our products right alongside the one you've got."

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Halsey, "but I am not at home at that time of the evening. My husband's office hours are from eight in the evening until nine-thirty, and I act as his receptionist."

Which, in Joe's opinion, explained practically everything. Here was a house right next to the graveyard, unoccupied every evening at eight-thirty, and equipped with a wireless record player. The killer simply sneaked into the doctor's house, put his crying record on the player, and the record was picked up by the radio concealed at Anna Bishop's grave.

Joe's connection with the Super Tooter Wireless Record Player Corporation was promptly terminated.

CHAPTER VIII

Merry Meets Murder

GLENN SAUNDERS, who looked like George Chance, acted like George Chance, and talked like George Chance, sat in the office of the city jail with Marshal Tom Seeley and Deputy Marshal Matthew. It was ten minutes before six o'clock in the evening and Tom Seeley was just back from New York with the pair of scissors that had snipped off the life thread of Wendal Bishop.

"Wonderful things they do down in the New York police lab'atory," Tom

Seeley said. "Wonderful. Met a friend of yours, Mr. Chance—a sour-puss named Dr. Demarest."

"Oh, Demmy's not such a bad sort when you get to know him," Saunders said. "He just spends too much time in the morgue. How did you make out with your tests of the scissor handles?"

"Don't know how I made out," Seeley replied, his brow clouded with a frown. "They found the ordinary salts of perspiration and the only thing that wasn't ordinary was a trace of glucose. I didn't ask questions. Your friend Dr. Demarest sort of rubbed my fur the wrong way and I was hanged if I was going to show my ignorance around him. But I just now looked glucose up in the dictionary and it's what I thought it was anyway—sugar."

Glenn Saunders nodded.

"Does that mean anything to you, Mr. Chance?" Deputy Marshal Matthew put in.

It might have meant something to Mr. Chance, but it meant practically nothing to Glenn Saunders who knew that glucose was a sugar found in honey and probably elsewhere. Why it should be on the handle of a tailor's scissors, he didn't know. He tried to associate glucose with honey and honey with beeswax and beeswax with a tailor. Tailors sometimes waxed thread, didn't they?

"I'll have to think that over before I can give you any sort of an answer, Matthew," he said, after this surprising series of mental deductions that led exactly nowhere. "Right now, I'd like to know something about wills. Let's start with Anna Bishop's will. I believe that Wendal Bishop inherited Anna's house and a hearth broom with a broken handle. It's the last bequest that gets me."

"Anna Bishop was bats," Matthew said.

"It was a darned queer bequest," Seeley admitted. "I remember just how that part of her will read, I've heard it so often from Mort and Wendal: 'To my nephew, Wendal Bishop, I bequeath my house and all the furnishings within my house, including the broom by the fireplace and a good stout cord to mend its broken handle. May he sweep evil deeds and evil-doers before him.'"

"Anna Bishop didn't have any money that wasn't accounted for in the settlement of the estate?" asked Saunders.

"What I'm driving at—the broom couldn't have been a clue to a cache of hoarded gold or anything like that?"

Seeley shook his head slowly, after a moment's thought.

"Don't think so. Don't see where Anna Bishop would have got much gold to hoard."

"Now, what about Wendal Bishop's will?"

"I saw his lawyer today while Tom was in New York," Matthew said, "and I got the low-down on that. Wendal Bishop left everything he had to Mort Bishop and to Fred Rodehaas. Cut Rice Whitman out entirely, and whatever money or property Wendal had is divided between his uncle and Fred Rodehaas. Wendal and Fred were mighty close friends, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see Rice contest the will."

GLENN SAUNDERS raised one blond eyebrow even as Chance might have done under the circumstances.

"Any idea how much Wendal's estate will amount to?"

"Maybe ten thousand," the lawyer said. "Not more than that anyway, but I guess murders have been pulled for less."

Shortly after, Glenn Saunders left the jail and returned to Shallot House. He went directly to the room which George Chance had occupied, sat down in the one chair, and waited patiently for nightfall. He had glimpsed Merry White and Tiny Tim in the hotel lobby—Tim in blue overalls, a candy sucker in his mouth instead of a cigar—and he knew that they had taken a room near to the one he now occupied.

As dusk deepened into darkness, Saunders went to his traveling bag—really Chance's bag—dug into it, and produced the silken rope which Chance had used the night before and which he would doubtless use again. Glenn took the rope to the window where he attached it to the sash, and dropped it down to the ground. Then he pulled the window shade.

It was only a few moments after that before he heard a quiet knock at the door of the room. He opened the door for Merry White, Tiny Tim, and Joe Harper. Tim was playing with a yo-yo, and it continued to hold its fascination for him, but as soon as he was within the

room, he discarded his sucker in favor of a large black cigar.

"Where's George?" Merry whispered anxiously.

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before there came a scratching at the window blind.

"Speak of the devil," Glenn Saunders said.

He went to the light switch, turned it off. Joe Harper raised the window shade, and the lean figure of the Ghost climbed into the room. The blind was pulled again and the light turned on. Then there were whispered questions directed at the Ghost.

"I've been hunting the broken broom," he told them. "So far, no luck at all. Joe, how's the record player business?"

"The town doctor's not in the market," Joe said. "He's got one. His house is next to the cemetery, and furthermore he and his ball'n-chain aren't at home eight-thirty in the evening. Which is why Aunt Anna Bishop's grave picked eight-thirty as the time for howling."

"You mean," Merry said, "that somebody sneaked into the doctor's house and used his record player?"

"Sure," Joe said.

"Or," the Green Ghost supplemented, "the doctor used it himself, had the record player turned on and off by an electric timer, chose the hour of eight-thirty because it offered him an alibi."

Joe had to admit he hadn't thought of that.

The Green Ghost turned to Glenn Saunders.

"What have you got to offer?"

"Not a whole lot, I'm afraid," the double said. "I was curious about the broom business, and after a talk with Marshal Seeley, I found out that Merry was right."

"Hurray for me!" Merry said. "What was I right about?"

"About the possibility of the cord being used to mend the broken broom handle. That was mentioned in Anna Bishop's will. She left the broken broom and some stout cord to mend the handle with. I'm wondering whether Anna was mad or whether there was method in her madness."

"There was method, I think," the Ghost said thoughtfully. "Anything else, Glenn?"

"Nothing except that the New York

crime lab found traces of glucose on the handles of the scissors that killed Wendal Bishop."

"Ah!"

THE Ghost took a quick turn around the room, his chin in his hand. Tiny Tim commented that he looked like some starved Hamlet doing the "To be, or not to be" lines. The Ghost stopped, turned to Tim, pointed a finger at the midget.

"You and Merry get over to Dr. Halsey's office before he closes. Merry, you fake an ailment. Tim, you go through the doctor's files. I want the medical records of Rice Whitman, Mort Bishop, Henry Shallot, Reed Kelmar, and Fred Rodehaas."

"You mean I'm to swipe 'em?" Tim asked.

"That's the idea. Merry holds the doctor's attention some way and you get into his files. I don't know the situation over at Halsey's office, but the two of you can cook up something. Anyway, I want those records. And while you're doing that, I'll have another look for the broken broom."

"That's the essential clue, is it—the broom?" Glenn asked.

The Ghost shook his head. "I don't think so. If there has to be an essential clue, it's probably the glucose on the scissors."

Dr. Stuart Halsey's office was a white frame building at the corner of Mercer and Vine Streets. By walking fast, Merry was able to get there just as the doctor and his wife were closing up for the night.

"Dr. Halsey!" Merry hailed the bearded man as he turned on his doorstep to lock the door.

Halsey looked in her direction. Merry ran up the approach walk toward the office. She smiled charmingly at Mrs. Halsey and at the black-bearded doctor. She said she hoped she wasn't too late.

"Too late for what, my girl?" Halsey asked gruffly. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I would like you to look at my throat," Merry said. "It's dreadfully sore."

"Stuart," Mrs. Halsey said, "I think I'll run on, if you don't mind. I'll drop in on Mrs. Thomas and you can pick me up when you're finished." She smiled at Merry. "I hope Dr. Halsey can give

you speedy relief, my dear."

"I'm sure he'll do that," Merry said, and followed Halsey back into the office.

The doctor turned on lights as he went, passing through reception room into the office, turning off the office into consultation room, then one door back into a small, white surgery. He took off his suit coat, rolled up his sleeves.

"You're a stranger in town, aren't you?"

"Uh-huh," Merry said. "I just stopped over for a few days to pick up some antiques. That is, if I can find anything I like around here at the right price."

The bearded doctor chuckled. "It's too bad my wife has gone. You would have had a great time talking antiques with her." He motioned Merry into a straight chair, adjusted a light so that it would shine where he wanted it. "Now, let's have a look at that throat." He frowned professionally. "I don't like sore throats in summer."

Merry opened her mouth and Dr. Halsey employed a tongue depressor. He scowled a good deal, grunted, and finally permitted her to close her mouth.

"No sign of inflammation. You have tonsils—I suppose you know that. They're not enlarged at all, but it's possible they are giving you trouble. I'd have them out, if I were you."

Merry shook her head. "I don't dare."

"Nonsense! It's a simple operation."

"Oh, I'm not scared of the operation. I'm afraid it'll ruin my voice. I'm a singer, you see."

MERRY sang a couple of lines from a popular song then and there, because her keen ears had detected something which the doctor had missed—a light, quiet step in the room outside. Tiny Tim, of course. They had agreed that Tim would sneak into the office, hide, and permit himself to be locked in when Merry and the doctor went out.

Merry stopped singing and almost immediately somebody in one of the outer rooms stumbled over something. Merry frantically broke into song again.

"Pardon me, a moment," Dr. Halsey said, puzzled and disturbed. "I think I heard someone come in."

Merry caught his arm. "Listen, I'll do 'Manhattan Serenade.'"

"No thanks," Dr. Halsey said.

He pulled away from her, went out the door. Merry sat still and scared for a moment. Then she sprang to her feet, called after him.

"Dr. Halsey, you mustn't—"

The crash of a shot prevented Merry from stepping through that open door. The sound of a heavy body falling to the floor made her go through the door anyway. It came to her in a sudden rush that the prowling footsteps she had heard were not those of Tiny Tim Terry. Tim wouldn't have killed a fly if he could avoid it.

She stepped through the door, turned frightened eyes down at the floor. Dr. Stuart Halsey lay on the floor of his consultation room. She lifted her gaze, stared through gray gunsmoke, saw a man standing near the door of the consultation room.

As her eyes met those of the killer, the man's hand raised to the light switch and flicked off the light. Then he lunged swiftly. The muzzle of the murder weapon rammed into Merry's side.

"Don't scream!"

She couldn't have screamed. Her tongue was frozen against the roof of her mouth. The killer's gun moved around to the small of her back and pressed.

"Step forward," the killer said. "Straight across the consultation room. Don't try anything."

Merry did as she was told. She walked until she couldn't walk any more because the doctor's record cabinet was directly in front of her. She sniffed at the darkness and above the smell of cordite was the odor of gasoline.

An arm extended past her right side. A drawer in the cabinet was opened. The smell of gasoline was stronger now. A flicking sound in front of her, and a lighter sparked. She knew then what the killer was up to. The Ghost had wanted certain medical records in Dr. Halsey's possession. Well, the killer wanted them too—wanted them destroyed.

The lighter flamed. A gasoline-soaked rag across the open drawer of the cabinet whooshed into flame. The killer jerked Merry back, twisted her around, headed her for the front door.

"Keep walking. Not too fast, but hurry. Dr. Halsey's car is right out in front. Fortunate for me that Mrs.

Halsey saw you visit the doctor this evening, isn't it?"

Merry, who could see the shape of things to come, thought for a moment that she would faint. The murderer was planning to frame her for Dr. Halsey's murder! And when the police did find her, would her lips be able to deny their accusations?

"Tim!" she thought. "Where in the world is Tim?"

TIM TERRY, as a matter of fact, was a few precious minutes late. He was just coming up Vine Street when the murderer was shoving Merry into Dr. Halsey's car. In spite of the gloom, Tim recognized Merry, and there was enough illumination somewhere within the block to strike a bright, steely reflection from the gun in the hand of the man behind her.

Tim immediately broke into a run. His short legs had not the slightest chance of taking him to the corner before the car started. And even if he got there, what could he do? It was at such times as these that Tiny Tim would have willingly given up half of his life not to have been born a midget.

He was a good seventy-five feet from the corner when the car left the curb. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shrilled Merry's name. Not that that was any good either.

Tim cursed himself as he looked helplessly after the red tail lamps of the car. And then he wheeled and pelted up Mercer Street to the Shallot House. There he could find Glenn or possibly Joe Harper. If only it was not too late!

CHAPTER IX

Message of the Broom

UNDER the cover of darkness, the Green Ghost entered the house of the late Mr. Wendal Bishop and the even later Miss Anna Bishop. He was looking for a broken broom.

It was entirely possible that on the night before Rice Whitman had seized the opportunity to secrete the broom somewhere on the premises with the idea of picking it up later. Rice wanted the piece of string that the Ghost had

taken from the hand of the murdered man, and, according to Anna Bishop's strange bequest, the stout cord and the broom with the broken handle went together.

He wondered if Rice Whitman knew the secret of the broom. If she did she was one up on the Green Ghost. It might be a clue to hidden riches which Rice seemed to need so badly. Or it might be something quite different. Anna Bishop had evidently been a peculiar old lady, from all accounts, and the broom and cord might be practically anything, including just a symbol of cleanliness which she had intended to pass on to her politically-minded nephew to remind him that honesty was the best policy or something.

Under the light of his flashlight, the living room of the Bishop house became a place where no one could have successfully hidden a hearth broom—unless, perhaps, it had been thrust up the chimney. The Ghost once more examined the flue, but failed to find the broom.

He went into the dining room, crouched in front of the old china closet, opened the doors at the bottom, and immediately switched out his flashlight. It was perhaps only a prowling dog looking for an open garbage bucket, but he had distinctly heard something moving outside the kitchen door.

He walked into the kitchen in the dark, looked out the window that was over the sink, and saw a shadowy figure move around the back steps. The Green Ghost went to the back door and carefully—carefully—slid open the bolt. He hoped to heaven the door didn't squeak, but he had to risk that.

He pulled the door open. It did not squeak. He slipped out onto the steps, looked to the left where the shadowy figure was bending over—

Of course! The rain barrel! How easily Rice might have tied a weight of some sort to the broom and dropped it into the rain barrel.

A single springing stride from the top step took him up behind the person at the rain barrel. His slim fingers went to the sleeve of his black coat, pulled his slender throwing knife from its sheath. His left arm went out, looped around Rice Whitman just as she lifted some-

thing from the waters of the rain barrel. His right hand carried the knife to the back of her neck.

"No noise, please," he whispered. "No noise and you may live to break ninety."

He felt Rice Whitman's body stiffen. His left hand caught hold of the wet handle of the broom, pulled it away from her.

"Now," he said, "we both go into the house. And quietly, Miss Whitman."

"You can't do this!" Rice whispered. "The broom's not yours."

"No. Nor yours. Up the steps and into the kitchen. Don't get the notion you can break away. As you love life, don't!"

She didn't try anything. She walked up the back steps and through the kitchen door into the darkness. He stood by the light switch, told her to pull the blinds down. And when she had done that, he turned on the light. The redhead stared wide-eyed at his thin, pale face.

YOU again," she snapped. "Me again. Wouldn't you just know?"

He laughed quietly, mocking her. Then he waved her into a chair and turned his attention to the hearth broom. Rice had fastened a flat-iron to the cane end of the broom.

The Ghost put his knife down within easy reach on top of the stove, and reached for a tea towel. He wiped the hickory handle of the broom as best he could. Wiping was rather difficult because of the split in the handle and because the towel caught on two nails at either end of the split. Rice watched him closely.

"If there's any money in this," she said, "how about splitting it fifty-fifty."

"If there's any money in this," he said dryly, "you can have it all, Miss Whitman."

He put the broom down, reached into his pocket, and took out that trick cigarette case of his. His nimble fingers found the secret catch that opened the false lining, and he took out the length of white cord that he had first seen in the hands of the dead man.

"If this is what you wanted, Miss Whitman," he asked, "why didn't you take it from dead Wendal Bishop's hand

last night?"

"I didn't know that was what I wanted," Rice said. "Not at the time. All I knew was that Wendal was getting money from somewhere, and it occurred to me later that the broom and the cord might have been the key to some hidden wealth."

"You were looking for hidden wealth in the cemetery, too?"

"Yes. That hole at the end of the bench."

He nodded. "Mr. Rodehaas' radio once reposed in that hole near Anna Bishop's grave. It was responsible for picking up the sound of a woman crying which was played on a record on the wireless record player in Dr. Halsey's house. The whole idea was to get Wendal Bishop to poke around his aunt's grave until he struck the grave bomb, which I think you know about. Wendal Bishop had to die because he was blackmailing somebody."

"Blackmail? That sniffing Puritan had the nerve to blackmail somebody?"

The Ghost nodded. "I think that was the source of Wendal Bishop's money. Shall we proceed with the experiment?"

He took the hearth broom in his left hand and one looped end of the cord in the other. He scowled at the cord a moment, twisted it around in his fingers, looking for the first of the black marks on its surface.

He held this black mark flat against the surface of the broom handle, put the loop over the nail at the lower end of the split in the handle. Then he began winding the cord around the handle, keeping each turn close together.

As the compact spiral of cord grew, it became apparent that the black marks were minute portions of letters that had been written in wax pencil.

"Your Aunt Anna was rather an ingenious woman, wasn't she?" the Ghost commented. "You see, she wound this cord over the break in the handle, wrote some sort of a message on the cord, then unwrapped it. The message was intended for Wendal Bishop's eyes alone. That's why the broken broom was mentioned in her will and why it was emphasized that she was leaving the cord to mend the break. Simple, isn't it? You just carry out those seemingly insane instructions, and you get quite a sane message."

"And Wendal figured that out himself?" Rice asked.

"I believe so. But he discovered blackmail evidence in the message. He certainly didn't use the information as his aunt would have had him use it. Wendal figured it out, but the killer didn't. And evidently Wendal never enlightened the killer as to where he got his information."

THE Ghost had completed the winding process which now completely mended the break in the broom handle. He hooked the loop at the free end of the cord over the second nail, showed the broom to Rice Whitman. On the cylinder of white that was the spiral round cord, was written:

I saw a murderer conceal body behind Veil of Tears 6/30/38. M's car plates 685-437.

"That must be the murderer's car license plates," the Ghost said. "And I saw a three-year-old license plate with that number on it last night in Fred Rodehaas' attic."

"It wouldn't be Fred's plates," Rice said. "He never owned a car in his life."

"Probably Rodehaas simply picked it up out of the trash. He's got a collection of junk in that attic that must include something from everybody in town . . . But what or where is this 'Veil of Tears?' I've heard of a 'Vale of Tears,' but this—"

"It's a waterfall," Rice said. "Just a little waterfall about five miles out from town." She got quickly to her feet and some of the color was coming back into her attractive face. This Green Ghost wasn't such a bad person after all. "I've got my car down at the end of the block. Why don't we go out there now?"

"Thanks," he said. "Why not?" Though I've a pretty good idea what we'll find. Haven't you?"

* * * *

"Stop right here and pull off the road into the bushes."

Merry White was at the wheel of Dr. Halsey's car, and when the killer she had surprised issued this order, there was nothing she could do but obey. The killer had kept one hand lightly on her right shoulder all the way from town, and the end of his gun he kept against her side with his other hand. Merry

actually felt as though the gun muzzle might have worn a hole in her side, simply from being there throughout these endless minutes.

Merry had a faint hope. On driving away from Halsey's office, she had heard the shrill voice of Tiny Tim calling her name. Exactly where Tim had been at the time, she did not know, but she had an idea that Tim had witnessed her capture.

Acting on the killer's instructions, she now had the car well hidden in the weeds and underbrush along the road. It would be a good time to make a break for it, she thought. But dared she risk it? She undoubtedly would have risked it, except for that same faint hope—that somehow Tim had warned George Chance soon enough for George to be able to come to her rescue.

Much depended upon Merry's being able to estimate the span of life which the killer had allotted her. If help did not come before that final moment of her existence, she *would* make some sort of a break. She simply didn't intend to go out without a struggle.

"Get out of the car," the murderer ordered, and his hand slid down her shoulder, caught her by the wrist.

He slid along the seat and under the wheel, kept hold of her as she got out, then followed her to the ground. Again the muzzle of his gun bored into her.

"Walk."

She laughed, a little hysterically.

"Walk?" she repeated. "You don't expect me to fly off on a pair of wings, do you?"

"Not now," he said ominously. "But soon."

WITH the killer always behind her, always holding onto her, Merry was pushed and guided through the thicket. There were mosquitoes and other things that Merry ordinarily would have thought horrid, but the most loathsome being of the night was this murderer who walked with her.

Somewhere up ahead, she could hear the sound of splashing water. All around were wooded hills, reaching up, blocking off the sky. One feeble little star winked at her through a break in the foliage, and she thought the star was a sort of omen for the good. Its winking was a bit whimsical, as George Chance

was whimsical. It was a sort of long distance message, telling her that everything was going to be all right.

That was what she kept in her mind, anyway. That was what she would hang onto, right up to the last second—"Everything is going to be all right."

The splashing was louder now. These hills were filled with racing streams, she knew. People came up here for fishing. People came up here for vacations, probably. It seemed funny to her—people going on vacations. Right now, she would have liked to go back to New York for a vacation, back to the hottest section of the lower East Side where dirty urchins played ball in the street, where washings hung from fire-escapes. And it was funny to think that those people of the slums were probably wishing for a nice cool mountain stream right now.

Merry had a nice cool mountain stream, right at her feet. She faced it now on a ledge of rock a foot or so above the surface of the water. To her left, not more than two yards away, was a waterfall. It couldn't have been much higher than nine feet, but it was a constantly flowing sheet of water that ruffled the surface of the pool as it fell and whipped up foam like stiffly beaten egg white. It was a pretty little waterfall, and—

It came to her suddenly that this was it—this was the last sweet minute of her life. She gave one swift upward glance to catch the wink of that star of hope, and it was gone. Instead, she saw the killer's gun arm swing up above his head.

It was now or never!

CHAPTER X

The Thing in the Water

DESPERATELY Merry twisted herself out of the grasp of the killer and plunged backward into the water. The chill stream closed over her head. That crashing sound above the splash from the falls must be the murderer's gun shooting at her. She was away from him for the moment, but even before she could realize a split second of exultation, she found that her plunge had carried her directly beneath the falls.

Merry struck out wildly with arms and legs. She had always been a pretty good swimmer, but it was different with somebody taking pot-shots at you. The weight of the water pouring down upon her forced her under. She had lost all sense of direction. To breathe was to drown; not to breathe was to die.

Her head broke the surface and she expected then that the murderer's bullets would find the center of her forehead. But a strange calm had come over her surroundings. She was in total blackness that was like death itself, and the surface of the water was calm. The roar of the little falls seemed distant.

She looked upward, looking for the winking star. There was no light. No light? She thought for a moment that a tiny, blinding ray of light had shot like an arrow from behind her. She must be seeing stars, she thought. She must have struck her head.

She paddled through the quiet, watery darkness until she reached a ledge of rock. Her hands went up, groping. Her wet fingers felt of something, lingered, her memory groping backwards to associate that shape with something she had seen. And then it came to her, and she uttered a small, horrified cry. Her groping hand had closed upon a fleshless face—a human skull!

"Merry! Where the devil—"

That voice!

"Darlin'!" she cried weakly, and somehow clung to the ledge of rock where the old bones rested.

Again that needle ray of light shot out and spotted her. And then there were quick, sure footsteps on the ledge of rock. Wet hands reached down to her wet arms. Lean, strong arms drew her from the water.

"Darlin', darlin'!" Merry sobbed. "You're here!"

She sought his face with her lips and, kissing him, knew that he was the Green Ghost now and not George Chance. Not that it made any difference . . . "I love the old Green Ghost. But not those horrible bones."

"Markham's bones," the Green Ghost whispered. "This is Edwin Markham's tomb. Markham, remember?"

"The utilities company vice-president who ran away with all that money?" Merry gasped.

"Right! Killed by the same man who got Wendal Bishop. Aunt Anna Bishop must have seen the killer stowing the body here, back of the falls. She was too timid to do anything about it herself, but before she died five or six months later, she left a message for Wendal, written on that piece of cord that was to be wrapped around the broom."

"And Wendal was blackmailing the murderer," Merry said, "instead of turning him into the cops, and . . . Oh, darlin' he's out there!"

"Who's out where?"

"The killer. Out in front. I suppose you wouldn't call it 'front,' but I mean beyond the falls. On the other side. He tried to kill me because I saw him kill Dr. Halsey. And he's got a gun!"

"Shsh! Not so loud. Did he shoot at you?"

"Uh-huh. I dived into the water, and he shot."

"I thought I heard something a moment ago that sounded like a shot. That falling water makes such a racket—" He chopped his sentence off. "Wait here, Merry. Crouch down and wait. He won't dare run the risk of not knowing whether you're alive or dead. Get down on the ledge."

"With those bones?" she gasped.

"You can go back farther in the cave. Just don't make a sound or raise a finger until I tell you to. We'll get that murderer yet!"

OUTSIDE the cave, the killer stared into the churning water before the falls. There was, he knew, a big chance that he had missed the girl with that bullet he had fired. If he had hit her, certainly he would have seen her body come tumbling downstream.

Still staring at the water, he moved nearer the falls along the rock ledge, and then went into a crouch. There was just that chance that she was on the other side of the falls in the cave, waiting for him to go. And that was a chance he could not take.

It had been his intention to knock her out with a gun blow, then hold her under the water until she was dead. With the gun that had killed Dr. Halsey beside her, it would have appeared to investigators as though she had killed Halsey and then had fallen into this stream in

making her get-away.

The killer knew perfectly well that he would never have another moment of peace until he found the girl—this witness who could send him to the chair. Alive or dead, he had to find her. He stood near the falls, then dived from the rock ledge and through the screen of pouring water that shut off the mouth of the cave. In the blackness beyond he swam a little way in to where he knew the water was more shallow. Then he stood up, the water level with his arm-pits, and his right hand went for his gun while his left pulled a flashlight from his pocket.

He was about to turn on his flashlight when he heard a laugh. It was a mirthless laugh that mocked, a laugh that echoed hollowly around the cavern and seemed to come at him from all sides at once.

The killer did not light his torch. He stood there in the water and trembled. The laughter had stopped, but now, seeming to come from behind him, there was a voice.

"This is the dead-end, Murderer," the voice said, and then went off into peals of rollicking, satanic laughter. "This is the dead-end—where you get off. This is where Edwin Markham got off, too. Remember?"

The murderer turned, thrashing water. And the voice was *still* behind him.

"Wendal Bishop knew, didn't he?" it mocked. "Just Wendal and you knew that ugly little secret. Wendal found Markham's tomb, didn't he, and a gold bracelet you had forgotten to remove from the corpse? But you're not afraid of Wendal Bishop now, are you, Murderer? Wendal's dead. You killed him."

Again the laughter, and again the frightened, bewildered murderer thrashed about in the water.

"You tried to kill Wendal by means of the grave bomb in Anna Bishop's grave, didn't you? That would have been so, so subtle—if it had worked. You used Rodehaas' radio and you used one of Rodehaas' record blanks to make your crying record. And you used Dr. Halsey's record player to make the buried radio cry. And when it came to the second murder attempt, you used Rodehaas' shears. You never really used anything of your own, Murderer, except

your brain and your sweat.

"You know about the sweat, don't you? About the traces of glucose that your perspiration left on the scissor's handles. You didn't think about that until after the job was done. And then you knew we'd found out through Dr. Halsey, once we had detected the traces of glucose."

"Curse you!" the murderer said hoarsely. "Where the blue blazes are you?"

LAUGHTER then, and for an instant, the murderer saw something in the water in front of him. It was a grinning death's head just below the surface of the water, and the skull-like features were bathed in unholy, greenish light. The killer snapped a shot at it, but the face in the water was gone before he had pulled the trigger.

"Where are you?" the murderer cried.

"Why, right behind you, Murderer," said the voice of the Green Ghost. "But don't turn around. Feel the point of my knife?"

The killer felt the knife point at the back of his neck. He felt a hand close on his shoulder, then creep around in front of his throat.

"Drop the gun, Murderer, or the knife goes right on through!"

The killer's gun splashed into the water. The Green Ghost drew his knife away from the killer's neck, struck one swift blow with the hasp of the knife to a point at the base of the killer's brain. It was a knockout, and the murderer's first direct step toward the chair.

"Okay, Merry!" the Ghost sang out as he pulled the unconscious man through the water and to the rock ledge. "I believe we've got Mr. Henry Shallot right where we want him."

He got up on the ledge, pulling his captive after him. Merry joined him as soon as he had turned the beam of his light on the bronzed face of the hotel owner.

"I still don't get that stuff about glucose and his sweat," she said.

"There is usually a trace of glucose in the perspiration of anyone suffering from diabetes," the Ghost explained. "The case simply resolved itself into a question of which of our six suspects had diabetes. Dr. Halsey's records would

have shown us that. Lacking the records, we have the bronze color of Shallot's skin, which is also an indication of a diabetic.

"And then I caught him putting saccharine in his coffee instead of sugar. Diabetics aren't permitted to eat sugar, you know. Shallot tried to get out of that by saying that he was using saccharine because of the sugar shortage, but he didn't strike me as the sort of person who would be that thoughtful, or patriotic, for that matter.

"Another thing that gave me a faint hint of a clue, was that crying record which he used to hoax Wendal Bishop in the first murder attempt. Milly, the maid at the Shallot House, cries if you give her a good, stern glance. I think Shallot waited until Miss Billings scolded Milly into a good cry, then recorded her sobs on his own phonograph in the dining room.

"For two or three dollars, you can get a recording device that enables you to cut your own records on any electric phonograph. And while I had never heard the real Anna Bishop cry, I had heard Milly, and thought the record sounded a lot like her."

"And he got the record blank right next door at the tailor's place?"

THE Green Ghost nodded.

"Yes. That skylight in Rodehaas' attic made entrance from the hotel next door easy. Rodehaas probably doesn't wear his hearing aid when he's in bed, so there wouldn't be much chance of him hearing a burglar. Of course, the record and radio were both returned to Rodehaas' after they were no longer useful to Shallot. And it was Shallot who told me about the grave bomb, hoping, no doubt, that I'd follow the mystery of the crying grave to Rodehaas and grab the tailor as the killer.

"All you have to do, Merry, is testify you saw Shallot kill Dr. Halsey. The broken broom and its cryptic message can be brought into court, indicating that Anna Bishop saw Shallot dispose of the body of the missing Markham. Shallot apparently recognized Markham when Markham was on the lam with the utility company money. And, of course, Shallot killed Markham to get that million bucks Markham had appropriated."

"But Anna Bishop didn't leave that

secret message just so Wendal could blackmail Shallot, did she?"

"No. I think Anna wanted to see that justice was done, even if she was afraid to confront Shallot with the crime herself. The blackmail idea was Wendal's, though I think at the last he must have regretted it. I found him with the cord in his dead hand, you know. Perhaps he was going to 'discover' his aunt's message all over again, and hand it to the police. Maybe the crying grave worked on his conscience."

The Ghost pointed his flashlight back toward the falling water.

"You'll have to go get the Law, Merry. You can ride back with Rice Whitman. She's parked a little way up the road."

"Waiting for you?"

He grinned in the darkness.

"Waiting for me. But I'm breaking the date. Don't rub it in to her, will you?"

"No."

"And I'll stay here with Shallot until the Law takes over," he promised.

Then, because it was as dark in here as the Tunnels of Love on Coney Island, he kissed her. And there was nothing ghostly about the kiss.

GEORGE CHANCE SOLVES THE MYSTERY OF
A BOXING CHAMP'S MURDER IN

The Case of **THE EVIL EYE**

A Gripping Complete Green Ghost Novelet

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

COMING NEXT ISSUE

This blade is sure one for the book—
It helps you keep that well-groomed look!
Gives lots more shaves—with ease and speed
Say, Thin Gillette's the one you need!



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Easy Way To Get Even
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1. WASH FACE thoroughly with hot water and soap to soften beard and eliminate accumulated grit that dulls shaving edges.



2. APPLY LATHER or Brushless Shaving Cream while face is wet. If lather is used, dip your brush in water frequently.



3. TWO EDGES double blade life. Marks indicated above identify edges, enabling you to give both equal use and get extra shaves.



4. CLEAN BLADE in razor by loosening handle, then rinsing in hot water and shaking. Wiping the blade is likely to damage the edges.



The cop's nightstick went into action

SUSPICION

By ALLAN K. ECHOLS

Tony Planned a Perfect Crime, but Forgot One Thing — Himself!

SO FAR as Tony could see, the job had been perfect. He had spent the most of the two weeks since his release from the big house casing the joint. It was a tiny jewelry shop in the middle of a block of stores which closed at dark these winter nights.

He had timed the job perfectly. Uncle Ben, Tony had observed, sat at his watch repair desk until exactly nine o'clock before locking his store and going to his bachelor quarters at the rear of the narrow building. He had selected a good time, for tonight it was bitter cold, and the wind drove a blinding snow before it. Nobody was out in this weather who could stay inside.

Tony watched the big sidewalk clock down the street until it said it was almost nine. Then he went inside, and when old Uncle Benny got up to wait on him, he looked into the barrel of Tony's gun.

"This is a stickup," Tony said, and it was.

Tony rifled the cash register quickly, then drove the old man before him into the rear of his quarters. It didn't take Tony's brutal beating long to make Uncle Benny open up his safe. Tony's hands dug wrist deep in jewelry, which he shoved into his pockets.

And then, to make identification impossible, Tony shot the old man squarely through the head, and killed him instantly.

Tony got out of the place without leaving a clue as to his identity. He stepped out onto the sidewalk, and there was not another person out in the entire block. He hadn't been seen by a soul now living. Tony was a careful man since doing that last hitch. There wouldn't be any more years in stir for him. He had brains.

Tony pulled up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his hat down over his eyes to shield his face from the driving snow, and walked down the block. At the corner where there was a lighted cigar store, he turned onto the side street.

As he turned the corner, a uniformed cop, standing in the shelter of the cigar store door looked at him. Tony caught his breath, guarded against his impulse to run, and kept on walking.

Tony walked fifty feet, then took a quick look back. The cop was watching him. Again being careful to keep from running, Tony walked a little farther.

He could not keep from looking back again. This time, his heart pounded heavily. The cop was following him now. There was no doubt about it.

Tony wanted to break into a run, but his good sense told him that would be suicide. The cop could shoot him down the minute he saw this admission of guilt. Instead, Tony had to use some of that smart mind he had. He decided quickly.

BLUFF! That was the answer. After all, what did the cop have on him? It was probably his guilty conscience which had made him think the cop was following him. Maybe the cop was just going down to the signal box at the next corner, or something. Maybe he was just walking his beat as he had to do.

The thing for Tony to do was to avoid acting suspiciously. He had on good clothes, and there was no reason why the cop should suspect him of anything. He had carefully wrapped a towel around the gun when he killed the old watch maker. There wasn't any thing to be afraid of.

He came to a quick decision as he approached a plain brick apartment house. Here was a chance to show what his brains could do.

He walked into the place just as casually as any other tenant might do. He glanced at the name and bell plates just inside the storm door, and rang the bell of apartment three on the second floor. The name on the bell plate was "Webster." Then, without waiting, he went in and walked up the rear stairs.

As he looked back, he saw the cop turning into the apartment house!

Now he knew the cop was suspicious of him, and he had to do something desperate. He moved up the stairs faster, and headed for the apartment whose bell he had rung. He had heard an answering click, and he knew that it was occupied.

He tapped insistently on the door of apartment three, and a youngish woman in a dressing gown opened the door. As she saw the stranger push himself in, she cried:

"Oh, I thought it was—"

Tony's gun covered her, and he spoke in a low, commanding voice:

"Don't make a sound or I'll put a bullet through you. See?"

"But—"

"Listen to me, and remember I'll kill you if you make a false move. If anybody comes here and makes any inquiries, I'm your husband, see? And I've been here all evening, reading the papers."

He slipped off his overcoat and jacket. Then, in his vest and shirt sleeves, he motioned to the woman to put his coat and hat into the cupboard in the hall. He followed her with his gun covering her.

As she hid his things, the bell rang.

Tony froze, and the woman looked at him inquiringly. Tony put the gun in his right-hand pants pocket. "Open the door," he whispered, "and remember what I said. I'm your husband and I've been here all evening."

Then Tony slid back, picked up an evening paper and sat down in an easy chair under a reading lamp. He lit a cigarette and puffed it.

The woman had opened the hall door, and the policeman stood framed in it. He looked across the living room at Tony for a long moment, then walked into the room, closing the door behind him.

Tony sat with his paper in his lap concealing his gun.

The cop stood before him. "Who are you?" he demanded.

Tony looked at him easily. "Didn't you see my name on the door? I'm John Webster."

"Webster, huh? Do you live here?"

"What does it look like?"

"How long have you lived here?"

Tony showed just the right touch of anger. "Listen here, officer. What's the meaning of this? Hasn't a man got a right to sit in his own home without having to explain things to a policeman? I don't understand this."

"Well, excuse me," the cop said. "Maybe you're right. So, what were you doing on Main Street a few minutes ago? Where had you been?"

Tony laughed. "Mister, you must be drinking on duty. I haven't been out of this apartment since I came from the office. 'Tain't a fit night out for man or beast."

"I didn't see you come in here just ahead of me?"

Tony shook his head. "Ask my wife, if you don't believe me." He nodded to the woman, and the cop looked at her, his eyes arched inquiringly.

"That's right, officer," the woman said. She glanced at the newspaper in Tony's lap, and there was a touch of fear in her face, but it instantly vanished. "That's right. My husband has been here ever since five-thirty this afternoon."

THE newspaper had shifted slightly over Tony's hand as she spoke, but as she lied for him, the paper settled back down. There was relief on the woman's face.

The officer looked questioningly at the

woman, and back at Tony. He was clearly puzzled, Tony saw. His game was working.

The officer scratched his chin. Tony looked him over. He still had his overcoat on and it was buttoned up. Tony felt safe. He had the cop covered, and the cop couldn't have gotten to his gun quickly even if things had gone wrong. But they hadn't gone wrong. This woman had come through with her story, all right.

He'd have to stay and talk to her a while after it was over. Someone who would cover a man like that wouldn't be bad to know.

The cop walked across the room to the window beside Tony's chair, shoved the dainty lace curtains aside with his nightstick, and peered out.

"Is there a fire escape outside this window?" he asked. "Maybe the man hid up on the roof."

"You can go look for him, if you want to," Tony said. He picked up a second cigarette and held a match to it. And while the match was lighting the cigarette, the cop's night stick suddenly whistled through the air and caught Tony on the skull. He slid to the floor and lay still.

When he regained consciousness, he was sitting in the chair. His gun was not in his hand, but a pair of handcuffs was on his wrists. His overcoat and coat were laid out on the divan, and the jewelry he had stolen was in a pile on a console table.

The cop did not have his overcoat on, nor his uniform coat, but was in his shirt sleeves. The woman was in the act of dropping the telephone on its cradle

when Tony was first able to notice anything.

"What did they say, Mary?" the cop asked.

"They said the officer on this beat had reported a murder and robbery at Uncle Benny's Jewelry store around the corner. The Homicide Squad is on the way here now."

The woman went up to the cop, put her arms around his neck and kissed him, ignoring their prisoner.

"Honey, you're wonderful," she said. "To think that your first day on the force you've caught a murderer. How in the world did you ever suspect him, darling?"

"I didn't. I had just stepped out of the cigar store where I had gone for a pack of cigarettes, and had come out and started home. This guy was walking ahead of me. But honest, honey, I didn't suspect him at all until you let me in and I saw him sitting there. But when it reaches the point where I can't leave my comfortable home and wife to go down to the corner for a pack of cigarettes without coming back and finding a stranger sitting in my chair, reading my paper, and claiming my name and my wife—well, even a flatfoot like your husband can figure that one out."

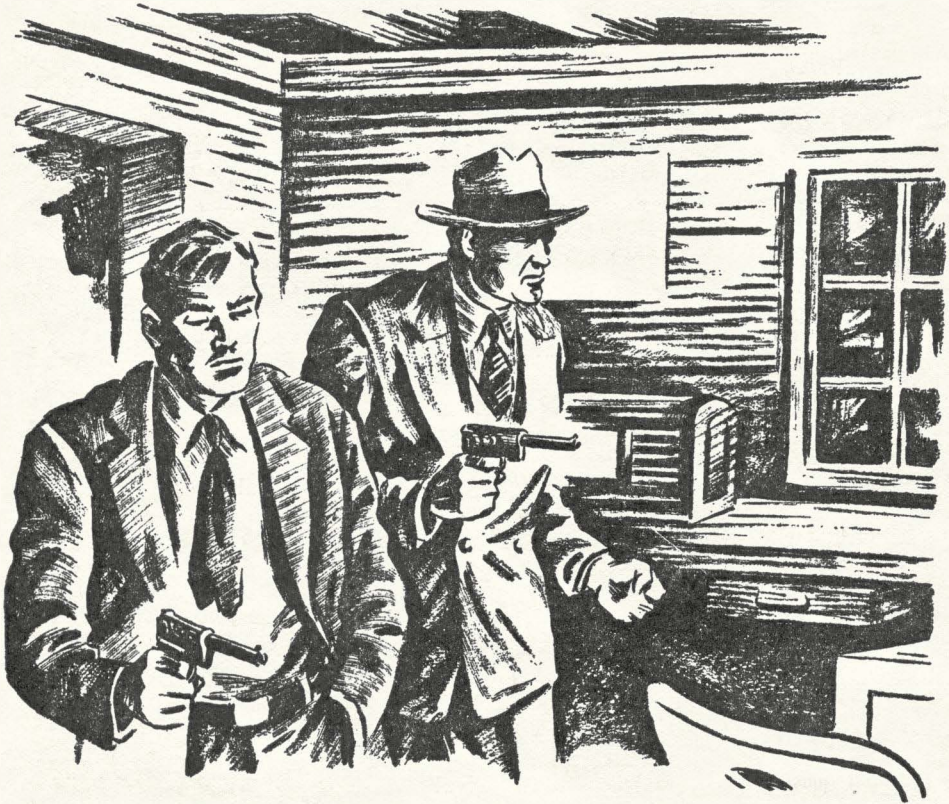
Tony squirmed in his chair.

"By rights, you didn't have no business followin' me," he snapped. "I wasn't actin' suspicious."

"I wasn't following you. I had my head buried in my overcoat all the way from the cigar store. I didn't even know you were alive till I saw you sitting in my chair. Mister, your own sense of guilt was what caught you!"

Next Issue's Novel: DEAD MAN'S HAND, by William Campbell Gault





MURDER'S BIRTH CERTIFICATE

By DALE CLARK

A Fatal Shot in a Racketeer's Office Signals the Start of a Wild Murder Chase That Leads Government Agent Dan Sheridan to a Showdown in the Shipyards Amid Aircraft Carrier Hulls!

CHAPTER I

Citizenship—for Sale

AL NEEDHAM was sitting in Jared Holum's office complaining about the shiftless methods of recording births which had prevailed at the time when he had been born.

"The country needs ships," Al Needham mused, "and the shipyards need riveters. I'm a crackerjack riveter, Mr. Holum. So all that's standing between me and a job is a little piece of paper."

He meant a birth certificate, the proof of American citizenship which is re-

quired of all applicants for defense jobs.

Needham was a gaunt, leathery, bronzed man in a painfully fitted Sunday suit. His work-hardened hands dangled out of uncomfortable, starched cuffs, and his black string necktie seemed determined to crawl around and hide under his left ear.

"I reckon," the riveter murmured with grim humor, "I should have had more sense than being born in the Indian Territory, before any records were kept."

Jared Holum failed to appreciate the humor. To him, that remark sounded just plain dumb. Holum was the serious, sleek, smooth-shaven and manicured

*A Gripping Complete
Crime Action
Novelet*



In cold rage Gus lashed Sheridan across the face with the Luger

type. He was adroit and self-assured, and he underrated the awkward Al Needham.

This riveter, so Holum's sharpshooting brain decided, was a poor, dull-witted oaf. This was because Jared Holum had never seen Needham in his working clothes—holding a stuttering Tommy-gun tool to the steel rib of a skyscraper thirty or forty stories above street level.

Had he ever seen that, he would have realized that the riveter was about as awkward and dull-witted as a Rocky Mountain Big-Horn. But he had not, so he moved in confidently to the kill.

"I have good news for you," stated Jared Holum surprisingly. "You weren't born in Oklahoma, or the Indian Territory as you call it. Your birthplace was actually across the line, in Texas."

AL NEEDHAM looked at him in vast surprise.

"Texas?" he gulped.

Holum nodded. "Yes. My investigation proves your mother was visiting your Aunt Ellen at the time."

Several seconds ticked away, while the riveter's blue stare fixed incredulously on the well-dressed, smiling man behind the office desk.

"But I haven't any Aunt Ellen."

Jared Holum continued smiling. He was going too fast, not taking the time for his usual build-up. His office door announced birth certificate investigations as a specialty, and it was a special branch of law which Holum knew thoroughly.

He had in stock a supply of adroit questions which could disclose the gaps in anyone's family history in five or so minutes. Armed with that knowledge, Holum could be extremely convincing—especially when his client wanted a birth certificate, and therefore wanted to be convinced.

He knew Al Needham wanted the certificate, had to have it to get a job, and overconfidence made him breezy.

"She wasn't your aunt, really," he declared easily. "She was your mother's second or third cousin. And since she died years ago, it's natural enough you never happened to hear the name mentioned."

"But I never had any folks in Texas at all," muttered the riveter. "Our kin

were back in Illinois."

Holum shrugged at the fellow's stupidity. "But every one has relatives he doesn't know about, Needham. Don't you ever read the papers? Surely you've heard of people inheriting fortunes from distant aunts and uncles they never even dreamed existed."

Al Needham moistened his lips doubtfully. True enough, he had read of such cases in the newspapers. But then again, a thing like that must be pretty unusual or it would not be considered news.

"I don't know," he hesitated. "It sounds as if you must be mixed up with some other family by the same name."

HOLUM chuckled richly. "No mistake at all. You're Albert John Needham, aren't you? Of course you are. And you were born at West Ox Bend, Texas. Your birth was properly recorded, too, although it took quite a bit of investigation to dig up the facts. Look here, man."

And Holum slid an oblong of official stationery across the desk, a properly made out form, with a county seal attached.

Needham stared. Half of his mind struggled to believe; the other half insisted this was all wrong, screwy somewhere. One of his work-hardened hands gestured toward the birth certificate and then, swiftly, Holum's soft, manicured nails whisked the paper away.

"Cash in advance," Holum warned. "I told you that when you were in last week, didn't I?"

"Yeah. You said your fee would be ten dollars."

"That's my fee," Holum stressed. "That's what I charge for ordinary investigations, when matters can be cleared up by correspondence. Yours was a special case. I had to employ a detective agency in Texas to run down the facts. Their charge was fifty dollars, and seems reasonable at that."

Al Needham leaned forward in his chair and peered intently at Holum's well-fleshed, bland face. The riveter's eyes narrowed, and their blue became a polished steel hue.

"So you're boosting the ante to sixty bucks now?"

"What are you kicking about?" Holum hardened disagreeably. "It's your ticket to the shipyards, isn't it? You couldn't

get a certificate without my help. You ought to be willing to chip in a few days' pay in return for a steady job. Plenty of other men would jump at the chance, I can tell you."

Needham settled back, thoughtful. "I guess that's right." He fumbled for his wallet. "Well, make out the receipt."

"What do you want with a receipt?"

"I'm going to take this off my income tax. It's a legitimate business expense, ain't it?" The riveter's thumb and forefinger counted out bills. "You haven't got any reason for not giving a receipt, have you?"

"No," Holum said shortly, writing one. "Here you are. Forty, fifty, sixty, right. Here's your certificate."

He was smiling again, with the money in his hand. "I hope you'll recommend me to any of your friends who are in similar difficulty."

"It's the same writing!" Al Needham exclaimed.

"What?"

Needham came up out of his chair. "The writing on the certificate and on this receipt. My name's identically the same on both of 'em. You hard-shelled crook, you forged that birth certificate right here in this office."

THE riveter moved toward the other, and suddenly he was not an awkward oaf in badly fitted clothes. Holum was seeing the other Al Needham—the steel-muscled figure that could move with such careless ease over the ribs of skyscrapers and suspension bridges. What he saw terrified Holum.

"No," quaked the plump man, slipping out of his seat and retreating fearfully from Needham's reaching, grappling hook of a hand. In his imagination, he already felt those tremendous fingers squeezing his throat to a pulp. "Stop! I'll give back the money."

The riveter's hand stopped—on the desk phone. "Don't worry. I'm only going to call the cops."

Holum lurched closer, drawn by a greater fear. "The police? You fool, you can't do that. You'll never get a job that way."

"No?" growled Needham. "Then I don't want it, mister. It ain't just my money, it's your whole rotten racket I don't like. The nerve of a punk like

you offering American citizenship for sale."

Holum's hand whipped open a desk drawer, jerked up.

"Drop that gun!" shouted the riveter, lunging forward.

The bellow of a shot thundered across the office.

HIGH up on Jared Holum's wall a ribbon fluttered at the metal grill-work that masked a ventilating air duct. The interior of that duct was of black metal, reflecting no light. Against its dark surface there hung an insignificant object, a cartridge of plastic whose core was wound with approximately a mile-length of ultra-fine wire.

The cartridge had been absorbing every word that was spoken in the office.

In the form of frequency modulations, the spoken words traveled along a wire suspended in the air shaft, finally reaching the roof. Thence, almost invisibly, connection was made to another roof, and so down into the office which was an F.B.I. stake-out.

It was all sufficiently legal—no phone wires were employed or tampered with; it was not a wire tap.

In the stake-out room, a recording device was writing the words into wax, while a clean-cut operative listened attentively at the head-set cut-in. The recorder functioned only when Dan Sheridan flipped its switch, but Sheridan wore the earphones at all times when in this room.

Within grasp of his hand rested a pair of binoculars, easily capable of providing a fly's-eye view of Jared Holum's desk. The stake-out room was directly opposite Holum's office, but at the moment the binoculars were useless: Holum had the Venetian blinds drawn at his window.

A smile played across Sheridan's lips as he listened to Al Needham's angered denunciation. By incredible luck, the F.B.I. was getting results the first day—the installation had been made only last night.

True, Needham would have called the police, anyway. But the recording contained the inconvertible evidence to clinch the case.

"Drop that gun!" Sheridan heard Needham shout. And then—the shot.

Dan Sheridan froze. He was alone,

and he was not supposed to leave the stake-out. But he was not supposed to let a crook like Holum get away with murder, either.

A grunt, scuffling sounds, heavy breathing came through the ear phones. So—that first shot hadn't been fatal. Needham was a man who could put up a fight, even with a bullet in him.

Dan Sheridan might get there before Holum succeeded in breaking free and firing a second shot into the wounded riveter.

He tossed aside the head-set and plunged for the door. It was down the corridor, down four flights of stairs to the street foyer, and then into the next building.

"Up!" he raved to the elevator attendant, shoving a Government badge under the man's nose.

It could not have been over a minute and a half, ninety seconds, when Dan Sheridan hurtled through the door that said:

JARED HOLUM
BIRTH CERTIFICATE
INVESTIGATIONS

He stopped in eye-shocked amazement.

There, back of the desk, sprawled Jared Holum, shot through the temple, with blood pathing down his pallid features.

And no sign of Al Needham at all!

CHAPTER II

Tricks with Ropes

HAD Needham fled in panic, after killing Holum in a struggle over the gun that lay beside the body?

Dan Sheridan's gray eyes moved with trained man-hunter efficiency over the scene. Holum's office was not large. The man had employed no secretary, possibly because he could not have trusted a girl with the secret of his nefarious traffic in forged birth certificates.

Sheridan's scrutiny started on the wall back of the dead man, scanning every square inch of it before moving on around the room. He studied the four walls, the Venetian blind hung windows, the two doors. One of these doors let

out into the corridor, the other gave access to a tiny washroom. Sheridan peered speculatively at the ceiling with its drop light fixture, then switched his attention to the carpeted floor. Finally, he examined the office desk and metal filing cabinet.

The G-man's brows were knitted in grim perplexity. Nowhere had he been able to discover a bullet hole.

But what had become of the first shot, the one that had crashed through the head-set into Sheridan's eardrums? It could not have smashed into Holum's brain, surely! Holum's death had been instantaneous. To assume he had been killed by the first shot left no explanation of the explosive grunt, the sounds of struggle, and the heavy breathing which followed.

Perhaps, Sheridan mused, Al Needham had carried that leaden pellet away with him—inside of him? The riveter was unaware of the concealed microphone and the wax recording. Wounded, dismayed at having killed Holum in the subsequent struggle, he might have feared the police would not believe his story. The police might figure the forged certificate was a put-up deal in which both men were equally guilty, that the fight was merely a squabble over the financial arrangements.

Sheridan's lithe figure dropped on one knee beside the body. His gray stare focused on the fatal wound. His lips tightened.

There was no powder burn, no zone of "tattooing" on Holum's pallid skin.

That looked as if the shot had not been fired in close, hand-to-hand combat at all. The G-man covered his fingers with his handkerchief and gingerly picked up the gun. He sniffed it and caught only the faintly oily scent at the muzzle. This whole case was falling into pieces like a dropped jigsaw puzzle or pied printer's type, Sheridan reflected.

There was no odor of burnt powder.

Sheridan clicked out the weapon's cylinder. The chambers were fully loaded. Holum's gun had not been fired! "Scrambled gee-whillicuns!" ejaculated Sheridan—a remark that fairly crackled in the deathly still office.

It was not the first lethal puzzle in his career. The G-man's native shrewdness had been whetted by training in the F.B.I. crime school, and reinforced by experience that began back in the days

when America's enemies were merely public ones, not international.

As he stared from the unfired gun to the dead Holum, a startling solution flashed into Dan Sheridan's brain. He replaced the gun in exactly its former position, then skirted around the desk to the phone.

NOW he was standing where Al Needham had been when Holum whipped the weapon out of the drawer. Had Needham plunged clear around to the other side of the desk in order to slam a shot into Holum's left temple? If so, why?

Sheridan refused to believe that. The solution must be that neither of the two men had fired that shot, after all.

Still protecting his hand with the handkerchief, he reached for the phone.

"Stop id," a voice barked. "Ged 'em up!"

Sheridan's lightning head movement provided a glimpse that warned him to obey quickly. The man in the doorway was pushing a Luger pistol straight at the G-man, and the tiniest quiver of his curled forefinger would bring death from its tapered barrel.

But it was not physical fear that made Sheridan obey, either. The special agent knew the gunfighter's trick of spinning sideward, narrowing the target of his body by half as he went for his own gun. He might have pulled that trick, gambling on the fifty-fifty chance of making the Luger miss.

If it did not miss, of course, Sheridan would die—and his knowledge would die with him. He did not want that to happen. Not while there was still a chance of transcribing that knowledge onto the wax record in the stake-out room.

He had left the recording device in operation, and the wax cylinder was good for several minutes yet. . . .

Sheridan's gray eyes gleamed at the man in the doorway. The fellow was built like a beer barrel on short stilts, with a cannonball head on practically no neck at all. The blunt cut of his coat lapels had never come out of any American tailoring shop. The trim of the yellow mustache was definitely European. He was very fat. He looked like a Hollywood comic type, except for his eyes.

His eyes bulged out of unwinking unpleasantly white lids. They were glis-

tening, saurian eyes that were not human; that seemed to belong on a mud bank beside some jungle river.

They were blood-greedy, murderously cruel.

Sheridan had faced killers before, ranging from the hired assassins of the underworld to hop-crazed "junkies." But his stomach muscles tightened involuntarily and a tingle crawled the length of his spine as he met the fat man's diabolically cold stare.

He forced a grin, though.

"Hello, short, squat, and crocodile-eyed," Sheridan voiced with pretended nonchalance. "Come out from behind the yellow coffee-strainer. I know you. You're the liquidator who erased Holum with the Luger, huh?"

He felt better, now that he'd hurled that description into the stake-out dictograph. It would be a lead for the field office force to work on when they discovered Dan Sheridan had gone A.W. O.L.

Crocodile Eyes padded sinisterly closer.

"Shud up," he warned. The Luger was dead level with Sheridan's bottom-most vest button, while sausage fingers explored the G-man's frame for a weapon.

Keep it slangy, pounded through Sheridan's mind. Crocodile Eyes was no master of the English language, to judge by his Teutonic accent. Hence, slang would probably be utter Greek to him. It ought to be possible to convey a lot of information without letting the fellow catch on.

THE fact that Holum's gun had not been fired, for instance.

"Maybe you're wondering where I dug up the angle," the G-man persisted. "Well, I heard the persuader—and then, when I barged in here, the guy was from lead poisoning but his equalizer hadn't been in the play. From that I Sherlocked—"

"So?" interrupted Crocodile Eyes. He had found Sheridan's shoulder-holstered Colt, and he was shrewd enough to surmise that an ordinary John Citizen blundering onto a murder would not be wearing a gun in a professional, armpit rig. "So, you are a bolissenmen?"

Sheridan watched the Colt vanish into the fat man's side pocket.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" he rejoined. "Well. I'll tell you this much.

CHAPTER III

Meet the Gauleiter

my five-foot-four and two-hundred-pound friend. I'm cop enough to know Al Needham didn't chalk up the score here. He was shanghaied, I'll bet, the same way you're scheming to take me for a one-way ride. You gave him the bum's rush, then returned here to park your rod in such a way it'd look as if Holum simply did the Dutch."

"Come on," Crocodile Eyes ordered shortly. "Ged ahead of me. Forwards—march!"

"Sure," Sheridan agreed. "I'll come. I know, maybe you'll put a bullet into my back the minute spilling my blood won't spoil this suicide set-up. But on the other hand, maybe you're worried enough to take me to your Mr. Big. I might find out more about this Ratzi nest—"

That was all for the dictaphone. He was being herded into the corridor with the Luger's snout nudging menacingly into his spine.

It was just as well he had not made a play in Holum's office. For now two men closed in, linked arms with Sheridan. They had been posted outside the door, fists plunged to the guns in their pockets, ready either to rush to the fat man's rescue or to simply stand guard over the hallway.

"Lefd," growled Crocodile Eyes. "Frade elevator."

Arms pinioned at each side, Sheridan was propelled into the freight elevator. A coil of clothesline lay there, and as Crocodile Eyes took the controls his companions started tying the G-man.

They did it Jap-fashion. They withed Sheridan's elbows behind him, then whipped an end of cord in front of the Federal agent's face and jammed it between his teeth, after which the cord was yanked around over his other shoulder and again knotted to his elbows. He could not struggle to free himself without wearing the corners of his mouth bloody.

The elevator had stopped at the basement level before the pair finished.

"Come on," reiterated Crocodile Eyes.

They rushed Sheridan up a flight of steps, to a light delivery truck parked at the freight entrance.

Inside the paneled interior of the truck slumped another man—a thin, gray-faced man in a badly fitted Sunday suit, his black string necktie awry.

The G-man eyed the man curiously.

DAN SHERIDAN did not try to talk to his companion in distress. In the first place, Crocodile Eyes was squatted there watching the prisoners. In the second place, the G-man was quietly busy trying to trace the truck's route.

He had been flung face down on the floorboards so he could not see anything, besides having to take a merciless beating as the vehicle jolted along. But he could count the street car track crossings and could tell when the machine rounded a corner.

They were being taken down into the harbor area, he decided, into the warehouse district which was not so far from the shipyards. Now it was a cobblestoned alley, one that inflicted a really fierce beating. His lips were rilling blood from the sawing of the clothesline when, mercifully, the truck pulled up an incline to a stop inside a building.

Crocodile Eyes stuck out his foot, driving the heel against the Federal agent's cheekbone.

"Ged up, you *schweinhund!*"

Sheridan started to roll over, then was saved the trouble as the truck door opened and hands seized his ankles. He was hauled out and dumped feet first onto the concrete of a truck ramp. His captors, burly men with the stolid faces of Teutons trained to military obedience, again gripped his arms and started him up the ramp.

"Ged up, *dummkopf!*" Sheridan heard growled behind him. It was followed by the sodden impact of leather on flesh, and a gasp of pain.

One of the Teutons stepped ahead, pushed open a door.

"*Heil Hitler!*" he cried, thrusting up his hand in an automaton gesture.

"*Heil Hitler!*" The response was a throaty feminine one.

The room was furnished like most offices in the warehouse district, with battered oak rolltop desk and chairs. Its windows were cloudy with grime, perhaps purposely, so no one could look in from outside. The one departure from the usual was the framed photograph of *Der Fuehrer* above the desk.

A plump blonde with too red lips was perched on the desk, swinging her slippers, keeping time with a radio that was giving out with "Johnny Doughboy."

"*Heil Hitler!*" Crocodile Eyes pushed his prisoner into the room. "Where iss *Gauleiter Kessel?*"

"*Heil Hitler!*" rejoined the blonde around her cigarette. "He's out. Back soon."

"And you, *Fraulein* Ebart," grated the fat Nazi. "Remoof dot cigarette when pronouncing our sacred *Fuehrer's* name."

"Okay, Gus, okay," yawned the blond *Fraulein*.

Gus's crocodile eye alighted on the radio. With a Prussian oath, his arm pawed out and wrenched its dial to silence.

"Johnny Doughboy!" he growled in his comic opera accent. "Dot iss no music for Choiman ears. *Gauleiter Kessel* would be furious."

"Why don't you wipe the lipstick off her face, too?" Dan Sheridan gritted through the reddened clothesline which tortured his mouth at every word. "That make-up of hers is un-German as blazes, ain't it?"

THE blonde glared.

"But anyway, she's the blond Aryan type," the G-man added. "That's more than can be said for your little brown ape, Adolf."

The fat Gus froze, as if he could not believe his ears. Then in cold, saurian rage he whipped out the Luger and deliberately lashed Sheridan across the face.

The G-man folded himself to the floor, deliberately feigning unconsciousness.

"You yellow rat," panted the thin man in the Sunday suit, straining at his bonds.

The crocodile eyes slitted venomously, but the brute contented himself with barking an order, this one in German. The storm trooper pair swung forward. One pushed the man in the Sunday suit through a doorway, while the second dragged Dan Sheridan along.

"Now, *Fraulein*," the crocodile-eyed man was demanding, "berhaps you can dell me, what iss a persuader?"

The door slammed, shut off the rest. The two captives were alone, in some sort of stockroom piled high with shipping boxes.

"Needham!" the G-ace breathed softly. "Al Needham!"

Blue eyes widened in the other's gray features. He dropped to his knees, staring at Sheridan. "Yeah? But who are you?"

"Quiet, man. Can you turn around? By lying back to back, maybe I can untie you." Sheridan whispered again after they had struggled into position. "What happened, Needham?"

"Holum pulled a gun on me. Somebody jumped me from behind as the shot rang out. Next thing I knew, they had me down in the basement."

Awkwardly, Sheridan's fingers grappled with his companion's knots.

"I don't know if I can make it," the G-man muttered. "Listen, Al. I'm a Federal agent. We've been suspecting Holum of running a phony birth certificate racket. There's a dictaphone mike planted in that office. I spilled plenty into it. Another special agent is coming to the stake-out at four o'clock. He'll find my wax recording there."

"I fed a good description of Gus into the mike. The guy's a fanatic Nazi. Chances are, he's on file in our F.B.I. records. It won't take the field office long to trace him."

Sheridan's sinewy fingers kept clawing at the loosening knots.

"The ropes are giving," he gasped. "We'll make a break for it, Al. But those birds are armed and if they get the drop on you again, just keep your mouth shut. They'll tear you to pieces with their Gestapo tortures, but you keep mum! They won't kill you, not while they think there's a chance of forcing some information out of you. Just stick it out, remembering every minute after four brings rescue that much closer—"

The thin, gray-faced man spat the loosened clothesline out of his mouth, rolled over, and climbed to his feet. He stared hotly down at Dan Sheridan.

"Thanks, *Herr* Federal officer," he snarled. "But you underrate us. I am not Al Needham. I am *Gauleiter Kessel*. It was necessary for one of us to exchange clothes with Needham, and I came nearest to his size."

"Great scrambled blazes!" swore the G-man.

MANIFESTLY *Gauleiter Kessel* was enjoying the situation.

"We also had a dictaphone planted in

Holum's office," he confided in gloating tones.

"He wasn't one of your mob, then?"

"Ach, no. That gold-greedy *schwein*? He was merely a democratic parasite, the kind of cheap crook who would betray his country for a ten-dollar bill." The arch-Nazi shrugged. "*Herr* Holum was merely a useful tool, through whom we were able to place loyal Bund members in your American shipyards. It was an excellent arrangement for us, since hundreds of Defense workers procured birth certificates through Jared Holum. It would be a job of weeks to sift out the fraudulent cases and find the half dozen of our men."

Sheridan's brain raced at these disclosures.

"Yet you killed Holum?"

"He was too greedy, too grasping," explained the *Gauleiter* coldly. "He was bound to blunder, trying to shake down the wrong man. When he bungled with Needham his usefulness to us had ended."

Sheridan grasped the idea, but played dumb. "It doesn't make sense. Why didn't you just kill Al Needham?"

"*Herr* Needham will be taken care of, also."

The G-man struggled.

"But you don't even know where the stake-out room is," he persisted.

"We are familiar with the methods of the F.B.I. The room will be next door, in the neighboring building, where you could watch *Herr* Holum's windows." The *Gauleiter's* expression was grim with hard, Hun efficiency. "Long before four o'clock, that dictaphone record will be destroyed, and replaced with another. It is a simple matter, I assure you. Needham will say what is required—Gus knows how to make men talk. Your *dummkopf* Department of Justice will learn that Needham was the dangerous foreign spy."

"You're nuts. They won't fall for that."

"They'll have to believe their own dictograph recording," Kessel insisted stubbornly. "It'll sound as if Needham tried to bribe Holum. Holum refused, so Needham shot him. I've listened to Holum's voice often enough to be able to fake his part, so that's all taken care of. We'll also fake the sound of you rushing into that office, followed by a strug-

gle which will indicate Needham got the best of you. Then, when your body is found, the hunt will concentrate on him!"

Sheridan stared. "The only way you can make that stick is to kill Needham, too."

"War involves killing, doesn't it?" said the Nazi with a shrug.

"It needn't involve the murder of innocent civilians like Needham, you blood-thirsty savage."

The *Gauleiter* sneered. "Bah. You Americans are like the Poles and Czechs. You're cry-babies. You have no stomach when it comes to facing our brave German firing squads."

Kessel flung open the door, and snapped out the Nazi salute as he crossed the threshold into the presence of his Fuehrer's photograph.

CHAPTER IV

She Sold Out

SLOWLY Dan Sheridan pulled himself to his feet. Every movement was agony, inflicted on his chafed and bleeding lips. Only by standing perfectly straight with his head flung back could he relieve the torment of the rope.

He wondered how much time was left. It depended on how long it took the Ratzki killers to locate the F.B.I. stake-out, room, switch a fresh cylinder onto the recording device, and compel poor Needham to rehearse the phony murder setup.

They might rush the job in thirty minutes, or it might use up more than an hour. Then they would return, and Sheridan knew his death would not be an easy one. Kessel had boasted that he knew the F.B.I.'s methods, but as a matter of fact, the G-men had been knocking over too many of these spy rings for the Third Reich's comfort. The swastika-worshipping brutes would try to worm a lot of F.B.I. information out of Sheridan, using torture as their tool.

The Federal agent's gray stare veered rapidly about the stockroom. Its only windows were tiny ones, set almost at the ceiling level. They could be reached only by piling boxes, something a man could not do without the use of his arms.

The only door led out into the office, guarded by the blond *Fraulein* and perhaps one or both of the storm troopers as well.

Sheridan stumbled to one of the larger boxes. It was not easy, but he managed to press closely to its metal-banded corner. He was trying to snag the clothesline there, at the point where it stretched tautly from his chin to his shoulder.

At last he succeeded. The next move was to force his weight backwards. It was brutal punishment, lancing painfully through his numbed arms, almost dislocating his shoulders. But his sinewy torso gave an agonizing inch, and a violent head jerk rasped his mouth free from the clothesline.

The upper loop of the rope now dangled loosely on his shoulders. His elbows were still firmly trussed behind him.

He fought with desperate strength, knowing that he could not possibly burst his bonds. The only hope was to gain slack by pulling the knots still tighter. He needed a bare half-inch of leeway, and whole minutes dragged by while he battled to gain it.

The clothesline was back in his mouth, and the elbow knots were deceptively different when Sheridan lurched and reeled through the doorway into the office.

The blonde heard him fumbling with the knob, and she was ready—with a Luger aimed at the opening as he swayed there.

She could have riddled him with lead, and probably she would have if she had not noted the clothesline was still in place.

"Quick!" Sheridan chewed around the rope. "Untie me!"

She stared at him.

"Untie you? Are you crazy?"

The Federal man breathed hard. "No. Neither are you, *Fraulein*. You're not a dumb fanatic like Gus and his goose-stepping S.S. men. You don't believe in any of that Heil Hitler hooley, do you?"

The blond's eyes were level, steely.

"What makes you so sure, Fed?"

SHERIDAN shifted clumsily, came a little closer. "Your cigarette—lipstick—remember what I said?"

"Maybe all that's an act," she retorted. "When in Rome, you know."

"It wasn't an act. I watched you when I called Adolf Schickelgruber a brown ape. Gus blew his top. Kessel blew his, too, but he managed to cover up by pretending to be sore at Gus."

The G-man continued to stare at her. "You didn't bother to cover up, because you had nothing to hide. To you, Hitler's just a rotten paper-hanger."

Fraulein Ebart shrugged a pair of smooth shoulders. "So what? It's a racket with me. Sure, it is. I get paid, and paid well in good American dollars. That merely means I'm smart, like Goering and the rest of the big shots. They take theirs in gold, too, not in iron crosses."

"And if someone offered you more gold?"

"Don't make me laugh, Fed. The American Government isn't hiring anyone to go straight."

"The Government pays rewards, sister."

The blonde hesitated, toyed with the idea. "Uh-uh. I'd never be able to collect. And if I did, I don't think I'd live to spend it."

Sheridan was close to her now. His little game had fulfilled its purpose.

"You're right," he mumbled. "Gus is wise to you. He knows you're just a greedy little tramp, like Holum. If I broke loose, he'd think you sold out. You wouldn't live, any more than Holum did."

"But you're not going to break loose," the *Fraulein* scoffed.

"No, I'm not. I already—" Sheridan's sinewy arms swept aside the loose clothesline—"already have!"

The Luger roared, spat vicious flame. But the special agent's fingers wrenched the barrel aside.

Sheridan stepped back, a grimly humorous grin on his battered lips.

"Nice shooting, *Fraulein*," he approved. The bullet had drilled a neat hole into the photograph, squarely between the paper-hanger's eyes.

Fraulein Ebart clutched the desk for support, her breath coming rapidly in a tumult of fear. "You—you're going to turn me in?"

The G-man grinned. "That might not be necessary. I'm on the loose, you see. As I said before, your Ratzji friends will think you sold them out."

The *Fraulein's* face was the color of a

freshly peeled potato. The lipstick on her affrighted mouth looked ghastly now.

"You wouldn't," she insisted. "You couldn't!"

"It'd be the easiest way out," Dan Sheridan answered slowly. "Kessel would have his brave German firing squad go to work on you, and then we could pick up the whole malignant crew of them for murder. It'd save us the trouble and time it takes to work up a legal case."

"No, you're bluffing. You Americans don't do such things."

"But you don't like the American way of life," Dan Sheridan retorted. "You prefer the Berlin model. Death without trial. Hostages lined up against a wall and shot in the back—fifty innocent people at a time. That's what you've been trying to import into this country, *Fraulein*, so you ought to have the first taste of it."

"You couldn't do it—not to a woman," she pleaded desperately.

FOR a moment Sheridan eyed her.

"I'm not going to," the G-man growled. "I'm going to forget all about you, and get busy saving Al Needham's life. It'll be up to you to instill the American sense of fair play and decency into Kessel and Gus when they find you've let me escape. Maybe you can persuade them it isn't nice to shoot women down in cold blood."

He had almost reached the door when the *Fraulein's* nerve broke. "No—wait! Take me along."

"To jail?"

"It's the only safe place for me," she shivered. "Besides, I'll make a deal with you. I'll turn Government witness. I'll tell you why they want Nazi workmen in the shipyards."

Sheridan kept the elation out of his gray, piercing stare.

"Maybe you can't tell me anything I don't already know, sister," he said.

She gasped. "Yes, I can. There's a big, ten-thousand-ton liner in the drydock—being converted into an aircraft carrier. What if I told you they've been smuggling thermite into the engine rooms? That boat's going to burn, and the drydock will go with it."

Sheridan's being thrilled with the hot realization she was telling the truth.

The "flat-top" job in the drydock was the shipyard's most precious possession, the logical goal the Axis wreckers would want to reach.

"Go on," he said grimly. "How much have they smuggled aboard?"

But the blonde *Fraulein's* mouth had become a pink, shrieking oval. Even before she got the shriek out, though, the G-man saw the peril. Eerie jets of whitish smoke vapors were jetting from cleverly concealed wall and ceiling vents.

"Gas!" the girl screamed.

Frantic terror galvanized her opulent figure. She dashed toward the door.

Dan Sheridan tried to stop her. "No! Not that way—"

But she was past him, fighting free with crazed strength as he tried to block the way. He had grabbed her shoulder, but the frail blouse material tore and she dashed on, heedless. She yanked open the door—

Gun thunder shook the place. *Fraulein* Ebart toppled in the doorway, her screams halted as if a wet towel had been slammed between her teeth. But it was not a towel, it was her life blood that gushed from her mouth as she fell.

Through the stinging, blinding vapors Sheridan glimpsed a crouching, masked figure outside.

The G-man whipped up the Luger but the trigger did not respond.

The weapon was jammed!

CHAPTER V

Bullets for Saboteurs

LIKE a flash Dan Sheridan whirled and ran. Behind him the gun thundered again, but the shot was a miss as he bolted into the thickening fumes.

He crashed back into the stock-room. It, too, was blanketed with the strangling smoke. The set-up was a tear gas trap, designed so for defense against a surprise raid. The trick would give the Nazis time to destroy their secret records, wearing masks, while the invaders were driven outside.

But the masks were not kept in the office or the stockroom. The *Fraulein's* flight proved that. The masks were

concealed in the warehouse, and in a matter of seconds the protected killers would be sifting in here in search of a blinded, weeping Dan Sheridan.

The Federal agent shot one glance at the dozen foot high, narrow windows. He did not even break his flying stride. With a terrific impetus of pounding legs he leaped to the top of the nearest packing-box, and hurtled himself onward in a mad dive which taxed every elastic fiber of his sinewy being. His outflung hands didn't feel the lacerating glass through which they smashed. His fingers caught the sash, clung on.

For an instant his knees drummed against the wall as he hung there. Then a desperate lunge brought him up, butting head and shoulders through the shattered pane.

Sweet, fresh air laved his face and smarting eyes. He knew the necessity of not rubbing those eyes, of facing the wind bodily instead. He could see, now, that he was sprawled on a narrow, soot-grimed ledge at a twenty-foot height over a dead-end alley.

The Luger had been in his hand when he smacked into the window glass. He had been forced to drop it when he clutched the sash.

One of the storm trooper twins came dashing into the alley, bellowing a choked expletive as he spotted the pistol lying on the cobble stones. He made the mistake of diving for it.

Sheridan dropped twenty feet onto the Nazi's spine. The man whooshed out his breath and flattened like a squashed spider.

The G-ace bounded up. He scooped a gun from the limp fingers, another automatic.

He reached the big alley doors just as a second Nazi sprinted into the alley. This one wore a Hun-type gas mask, proof that the gassed office, stockroom and all likely places would be searched.

Sheridan saw the convulsive rolling eyeballs inside the mask as they met head-on.

The G-man's weapon spoke.

Arms outflung, the storm trooper grabbed at the warehouse wall as he went down. Impact with the brick raked the mask from his face.

What was he saying? The loose, rubber-gray lips lurched out one word as the man died.

"Mutter," it sounded like.

Mother? Dan Sheridan could not be sure. But he could not help wondering how many of the gray hordes had died on the battlefields of Russia with that name on their lips—instead of *Heil Hitler!*

HOW long before the decimated, dying millions of Third Reich soldiers would remember that they were their mother's sons, not the spawn of the mad Munichman who could lead them only to death?

When they remembered their mothers and wives and sisters—their German homes and religion—then the Austrian paperhanger's foul, mad dream of world conquest would blow up like a soap bubble. When they saw the truth as this dying storm trooper had seemed finally to see it, all their vain hopes would fade.

But the thought was far back in Sheridan's mind. It did not stop the onward plunge which sent him past the dead Nazi into the warehouse.

He went in too fast, not crediting the *Gauleiter* with his own brand of speed. But the *Gauleiter* was there, crouched just inside the door. Sheridan caught just a glimpse of the gray face, and turned on a dime.

Flame blossomed out, and the slug felt like a hot poker thrust against the G-man's sleeve. If he had not turned on the dime, the shot would have snapped his spine in two.

Sheridan's weapon smashed into the goggle-eyed, gray pulp that was the *Gauleiter's* astounded face. The blow flattened the man's features into a bloody ruin. Yet Sheridan hit him again—twice—before he fell.

In less than thirty seconds, he had put three of the brutes out of action.

Deadly as any raiding Commando, the G-man spun around in search of the fourth—the crocodile-eyed Gus. Sheridan's breath whistled in his throat as his gray stare raked the warehouse's concrete ramp.

The silence was queer, oppressive. And it was wrong. It did not fit with the crocodile-eyed man's fanatic Nazism. This was no time for stalling. They had to stop Dan Sheridan now, before he raced to a phone and had the warehouse surrounded with police and Federal men.

Then—why didn't Gus start something?

The G-ace took three steps before he figured it out.

The delivery truck was not around although they must have used it to bring Needham here. If Sheridan was right, that truck had come—and gone. . . .

The answer shocked him like the touch of a live wire. The Nazi mob had returned in time to hear *Fraulein* Ebart's final words. But they could not be sure how much she had talked before they arrived there. For all they knew, she might already have spilled a lot of names and facts.

That was why only three of them had remained behind. The fourth—the arch-fanatic of the lot—leaped into the truck on another errand—a sinister one, Sheridan believed.

Dan Sheridan spun around in his tracks and sprinted from the building. His pounding shoe leather echoed on the cobble stones of the alley. A freight van was rolling along the street and he crash-landed on its running board, and shoved his gun into the driver's face.

"The shipyards! Gate Four! Drive like blazes."

A LOT of trucks use Gate Four. Each had to stop and present credentials to the uniformed guard officer. There was a waiting line, and Gus hadn't waited, he had slammed the delivery truck to the curb.

Sheridan raced along the line, skidded to a stop in front of the gate cop.

"The guy from that truck—you passed him through afoot?"

"You mean Dock Inspector Crowder?"

"Inspector, bosh! The man's a Nazi agent. And you're hearing it from the F.B.I."

Sheridan's hand, smeared with blood and soot-grime, yanked at his coat lapel and exposed a glimpse of Department of Justice gold engraving.

The cop choked up.

"Wait'll I close the gate."

Dan Sheridan was running again. The drydock lay straight ahead, a city block sized expanse of defense activity. They were forging battle plates onto the ex-liner, rebuilding her topside with a football field of a landing deck and installing the massive elevators which would hoist the fighting aircraft from the ten thou-

sand ton ship's belly.

Sheridan dived through a battery of cranes and cables. He grabbed a giant wire strand, ran with it, and swung himself out into a catwalk.

"Gus!" he shouted.

He had not been dead sure. It was hard to pick one man out of a hundred, when the man's back was turned. The yell did it. A squat figure broke its hurrying step, and whirled to reveal a fat face full of puzzled inquiry.

"Gus!"

That could not be the name he used here. The crocodile eyes burned at Sheridan across seventy feet of wire-rigged catwalk.

It was funny. It was like an old, silent movie. For just now, a riveting hammer opened up with a burst from the elevator installation. In its ear-filling din, the sound of the pistol shots passed absolutely unnoticed.

There were just the two winks of flame in the sunlight as the G-man and the Nazi faced each other. Then, for no apparent reason, the crocodile eyes glazed and the evil face relaxed behind its yellow mustache.

For a moment, the Nazi's fat hand clung to the catwalk's rigging. After that, he slid off the walk and out of sight. There was a crumpled shape smeared between the chocking blocks at the dock's bottom—no more.

The riveting hammer finished its lusty steel-throated song. Overhead, a crane arm swung lazily against the blue sky. A thousand workmen, intent on their own tasks, had not even looked up.

The dying Nazi had not succeeded in stopping work on the big flat-top for even the tiny instant it took a bullet to enter his heart. The work went on as if he had never lived at all.

And that, Dan Sheridan thought grimly, was as it should be.

A COUPLE of hours later the engine room work crew had been rounded up. Examination of lunch basket thermos bottles, under F.B.I. microscopes, found traces of thermite powder in four. Those men were under arrest. A trained, Navy squad of bomb experts was removing the thermite which had been packed away in the generators, awaiting the flick of Gus's fat thumb on a control switch.

"Which winds it all up," murmured the field office Chief. "And a sweet job you made of it, Dan."

"I'm not quite through," said Sheridan. "There's still Al Needham."

"But he's safe. You found him roped and gagged in that delivery truck, didn't you tell me?"

Dan Sheridan nodded.

"Yeah. Outside of Gate Four. The job is to get him *inside*, slapping rivets into that carrier. Somehow, we must dig that guy up a birth certificate."

"What's the matter with the one Holum gave him?"

"It's a phony!"

"I don't mean the forged piece of paper," the Chief said. "I mean the chance Holum gave him to stand up on his hind legs and expose the racket. When Al Needham reached for that phone to turn the crook in, he proved his Americanism in the finest way a man could. To ask him for written proof after that would be a needless insult, wouldn't it?"



Drake Garrett finds a corpse in his closet—and runs a frantic chase with death until he uncovers a sinister secret of Nazi sabotage and murder in

DEAD MAN'S HAND

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

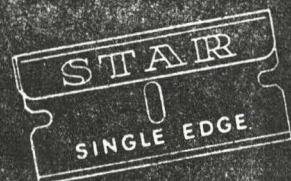
NEXT ISSUE'S SMASHING MYSTERY NOVEL

MY! THIS
SUBWAY STRAP
IS SMOOTH!

LADY, THAT'S MY
FACE! I SHAVE WITH
STAR BLADES!



4 for 10¢





Yanezek's swinging gun was a terrific club as he battled the Nazis

LITTLE HANGMAN

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

Because Seven Innocent Slavs Died Each Dawn on the Nazi Scaffold, Yanezek, Courageous Guerrilla Fighter Came Out of Hiding to Surrender — and Destroy His Peoples' Oppressors!

SEVEN more bodies swung on the scaffold this morning. Three were men. Three were women. The seventh was very small.

Yanezek dropped on his knees in the dry, crunching snow. He made quickly the sign of repose for the dead. As quickly he uttered a curse, a native damnation from the mountaineer Slovenians for the invader.

"Especially to burn forever the soul

of the Little Hangman," said Yanezek in his own tongue. "Five mornings now there have been seven. They die for me, Yanezek Lodamic. It is enough."

Yanezek flattened on the snow. The white sheep's wool of a loose jacket, and the green of the tightly buckled trousers made him a part of the earth. He swung his binoculars slowly, taking in every detail of what had once been the peaceful, lovely village of Drazhgoshe.

Only a few of the less than one hundred houses remained unburned. But the solid walls of the church still stood.

Yanezek repeated his curse slowly, religiously. He had come this morning all the way across Lake Bohin on his swift skis. He had not been alone then. But here, half a mile above Drazhgoshe Yanezek was unaccompanied.

"Beasts of the devil!" he raged suddenly in his throat.

Before the stone church in which the invading Nazis had quartered their commanding colonel and his staff, two women were laboriously dragging a slain calf over the snow. One woman stumbled and fell. A Nazi guard prodded her with his bayonet. She attempted to rise, but seized the rifle to ease its terrible point from her side.

Yanezek heard the clear, quick crack of the weapon. The girl sprawled down again beside the killed calf. Her companion pulled frantically at the rope alone. On that clear air the harsh, guttural laughter of some dozen Nazis floated upward to Yanezek.

With the instinct of the trained guerrilla Yanezek's mittened hands snatched up the high-powered rifle that had been an elephant gun. With its telescopic sights that heavy-calibre weapon would kill at any range up to which Yanezek's keen eyes could see.

It was not the sudden blur of tears in Yanezek's eyes that withheld the swift dispatch of the Nazi who had just committed such useless murder. Yanezek had known that girl who was no more important to the Nazi soul than the slaughtered calf being pulled along.

"*Zbogom,*" muttered Yanezek, which means good-by.

He lay quite still for many minutes. He was watching the icy trail coming along the Ratole Mountain pass. The Nazi murderer could have been executed swiftly.

"But this morning it must not be, not yet," said Yanezek, which in English means simply Johnny.

YANEZEK with his mountain-blue eyes was too young as yet to be called Yanez, or John. It seemed that only yesterday he had been a child playing in the narrow streets of Drazhgoshe. He had been still a child that day the Nazis had deliberately laid down an

artillery barrage from the nearest town, only five kilometers away.

Afterward, Yanezek had been driven with scores of other children and women into the hills where many had frozen to death. Yanezek was of that unbeatable breed who became guerrillas. His deadly, long range rifle had been the gift of an American to his father, Yanez Lodamic.

When he was starving, and when his fingers froze to its steel, the little Yanezek held onto that killing gun.

Months had slipped away. But those dark memories lingered in his mind and his bitter hate for those butchers who had placed his father, Yanez, in the parish courtyard one morning with thirty other able-bodied Jugo-Slav men, never left him.

Even now, looking down at the partly wrecked stone church, at the seven symbols of the Little Hangman strung on the crude scaffold, again Yanezek could see how his father and the others had bent like straws before the slowly shifting nozzle of a Nazi machine-gun.

After that the mother of Yanezek had gone with others, driven out of the village with younger women. And even young Yanezek had learned what that meant.

Now this morning, just as the threat of the Little Hangman had been conveyed to the guerrillas, another seven—men, women and a child—swung by their necks. That was the price, the word had gone out, for the life of none other than Yanezek himself.

For, Yanezek's terrible gun had taken heavy toll from incredible heights, from unscalable cliffs, from a dozen sides of the once peaceful village of Drazhgoshe.

Yanezek must be surrendered. That was the ultimatum. It came from the one called the Little Hangman. This Commandant Krause who fancied himself a counterpart of Der Fuehrer, here in this shambles of a Slovenian village.

The Little Hangman who was said to strut and pull at a tiny mustache, but whose yellow soul had caused him to hedge himself in from danger as carefully as might Der Fuehrer himself.

Even now, Yanezek knew that Commandant Krause, the Little Hangman, was safely comfortable and well fed within the solid stone walls of the old church.

More than a hundred Nazis guarded all the approaches to the village. Yanezek had evaded two outer sentries to reach this point of vantage whence he could watch the pass. To one side of him the hill broke down abruptly, slanting at a forty-five degree angle toward that pass.

As on other mornings, Yanezek might have taken fast toll of the Nazi guards, perhaps two or three, or like another morning, seven. That was why seven bodies of the innocent swung from the scaffold, because of the last seven Nazis young Yanezek had claimed.

Yanezek scrutinized the bleak, snowy surface of the hill above him. He estimated the time in seconds it might take to ski at lightning speed down the hard crusted snow to the pass.

"If only there were some other way," murmured Yanezek softly. "If Nala would not insist that she herself is the guerrilla, and that if I do not come back she will not want to live!"

His keen, blue eyes in the binoculars again counted over every guard, every machine-gun, every small pillbox from which death might be expected to come.

If only once the Little Hangman would forget—just this once—and walk in the snow outside the church! Then what Nala insisted they must do would not have to be.

The dim mountain sun was near the noon slant in the frost-blighted air. Yanezek lifted his head, listening intently.

"They should be coming soon," he said softly. "Coming to take me—" he laughed harshly—"to the Little Hangman. That is the only way so that seven more, and such a small one, shall not swing in the morning of tomorrow."

THREE was soft movement in the snow not far above Yanezek. Lifting his head warily he saw a familiar face that was as white as the snow itself, and as pure.

The beautiful lines of the face were broken only by wisps of yellow curls that protruded from under the girl's white sheepskin hood.

"Nala," said Yanezek softly. "I said it must not be."

The girl's voice was only a whisper. "That which already has begun cannot now be stopped, Yanezek. See. I

waited until the time had come, so that you must think only of them and not of me—of them and of the Little Hangman."

Yanezek's eyes whipped around at Nala's words. The detail of Nazis was marching into the pass at the base of that fast, sliding hill.

It was up Ratole Mountain pass they came each week from the nearest town where the Germans were billeted to exchange with a few of the other Nazis who had been here in Drazhgoshe the longest.

"I will think only of the Little Hangman," said Yanezek, his eyes steadily upon Nala's white face. "What is my life that seven should be murdered each day. I, Yanezek, am coming to give myself up, Little Hangman."

With no more emotion and no more formality than that, Yanezek, the terrible, small guerrilla leaped suddenly erect. He was on his skis now. He slipped off his right mitten for sureness and gripped the deadly high-calibre gun.

Yanezek fired his first shot as he catapulted over the edge of the snow-glazed slide. The leader of the arriving guards threw up his hands and fell. Yanezek was like a flying angel of vengeance. He levered the deadly gun and triggered it again. The smoke of death blossomed from Nazi rifles.

Yanezek's second shot missed. One of his skis turned clumsily. He could hear the frightened cry of Nala. She was bending low, slipping like a glimmer of light down the fast snow glaze.

Falling, Yanezek still managed to fire once more. Then Yanezek was a helpless, rolling figure. Nazi lead plugged the snowy surface around him.

But when Yanezek was plunging the last few feet, he contrived to regain his balance. He swung his heavy gun, knocking down the nearest man. Some six Nazis were still on their feet. One Nazi called out.

"It is Yanezek! Commandant Krause will make the great award! Take him as he is!"

It was not easy, taking him as he was. Yanezek's swinging gun was a terrific club as he battled the Nazis. But no living man could have triumphed over such odds. Yanezek went down.

His brain became a turmoil of pain and

fading senses. A Nazi kicked him in the stomach. He was half conscious of the other Nazis were rushing down from the village.

His arms were twisted behind him. A guard slapped a leather belt about his elbows to hold him. In the back of his mind was but one thought that overcame his pain.

Another seven innocents would not be hanged from the scaffold tomorrow. Then he heard Nala's voice. Two guards held her. She was screaming. Yanezek never before had known that Nala could use such words.

Then there was an interruption. An officer of the village guard, with several other guards following him, was there talking.

Yanezek heard his speech in German, which he understood.

"He is Yanezek! Fine is the work! We will take him!"

But one of the newly arrived relief guards had other ideas.

"I am *Leutnant* Suttgart," he said. "I see he is this Yanezek. I will personally take him to Commandant Krause. Stand back!"

There was no denying that *Leutnant* Suttgart had earned the right to deliver the terrible little guerrilla. From one swollen eye Yanezek could see Suttgart's pale eyes dwelling upon the sweet face of Nala.

Yanezek kicked Suttgart in the belly. The Nazi fell down groaning. That earned Yanezek another beating in the snow. The village officer turned at the call of a voice from the stone church.

The Little Hangman was too cautious to emerge into full view. He was in the narrow, high doorway.

"Bring the guerrilla to me!" he called out. "And the *fraulein*. It is so long since we have had any but old women and the ugly ones!"

DESPITE his strapped arms, Yanezek started a fight all over again with his feet. He broke the village officer's kneecap with an unexpected kick. For that he was knocked down and beaten again.

If the Little Hangman had not intervened Yanezek might have been killed then and there. But the raging Colonel Krause stopped the beating and Yanezek was again pulled to his feet. With Nala

screaming behind him, he was shoved toward the church. Only five of the newly arrived Nazi guards remained now.

Their present leader saluted and announced he was *Leutnant* Grosse. The small face of the Little Hangman glowed with a kind of exultant anticipation.

"This Yanezek will be given a hanging with ceremony. But this *fraulein*—bring them into the church! You have earned a reward, *Leutnant* Grosse! The dull ones here have set many traps, but all have failed!"

Tortured by pain, his body aching all over, Yanezek stared with anguished eyes at the seven strung to the scaffold. Especially that small one. He decided his life held little value when compared to these seven who had died for him.

Then he was pushed down onto a stone bench inside the church. He grimaced when he saw a table spread with roasted meats.

The Little Hangman strode up and down twisting his mustache. His little, pale eyes held an unholy light.

The five newly arrived guards were lined up for his commendation. Nala had subsided on one of the stone benches. Her frantic brown eyes watched Yanezek.

"Why is it you have so easily come to us?" demanded the Little Hangman. "Is it that you are crazy, or is it that too many will have to die?"

Yanezek did not speak. He looked at the ring of grinning, malicious faces about him.

Nala's sheepskin coat was partly ripped from her upper body. Her pale face was despondent in the dim light coming from one of the stained glass windows. The doorway of the church showed the press of Nazi guards with fixed bayonets. They were ostensibly there to look out for the Little Hangman.

The Little Hangman's face wore a smile of sleek contemptuous mirth. His small hands curled as if he were thinking with his fingers.

"You shall have the honor of dying slowly, so that all of the village of Drazhgoshe may see. I shall keep her myself, the *fraulein*, who has so crazily followed you."

Yanezek glanced at the recesses near

the narrow windows. In three, he saw the guarding machine-guns. To his nostrils, came the smell of roasting meats, which he had not tasted for days.

The Little Hangman, his lips curling under his mustache, stepped forward and put his hands upon the shoulders of Nala.

Yanezek wrenched his arms loose from the binding straps. He snapped out a terse command. The five Nazis who had him in charge, moved like figures of light toward the three machine-guns at the windows.

It was so astounding that the Little Hangman appeared to be utterly paralyzed. Yanezek's voice rang out.

"The time has come! Not again will the seven die!"

The soldiers at the door started to bring down their rifles. They were too late. The captors of Yanezek threw their rifles around. They blistered the door with bullets.

Faces faded. Screaming Nazis fell on their stomachs. Yanezek, bruised and torn, threw himself upon the Little Hangman. His clawing hands choked the Little Hangman's throat. Hot lead tore across Yanezek's head and shoulders. He staggered from the impact. He went down on his hands. But he dragged the Little Hangman along.

RISING as if in a fog-red mountain mist, he pulled Krause to his feet, then pushed him toward the doorway. There was a momentary pause. Guerrillas in the Nazi uniforms went into action.

Then the building shook with the rattle of a machine-gun. All that had been in the doorway, became a bloody mass. Outside, Yanezek knew there were almost two hundred of the "butcher" invaders.

He went to his knees, throwing the Nazi commandant behind him. He lunged for the Nazis holding Nala. His fists, already bloody, swung into faces that he had never seen before.

Nala fell in a crumpled heap. Then Yanezek was behind one of the big machine-guns. He lifted the heavy gun as though it had no weight. He sent its red roar of death out of the doorway.

Outside, he heard the excited shouts. Through the doorway came the speedy

fire of rifles. He dropped to one of the stone benches, hastily pulling Nala with him.

Nala's voice whispered huskily. "Now Yanezek? It is the end! We can't get out!"

Yanezek laughed wildly. Guns blasted through one window of the church. He felt the withering breeze of bullets crease his face. He thrust Nala deeper down behind the stone bench. He let go with another burst of machine-gun fire.

Suddenly the shooting ceased. The stained glass window was no more. Gathering Nala into the protection of his arm, Yanezek turned. He handed her the machine-gun. Then he bent down and gripped the uniform collar of the Little Hangman.

He dragged him mercilessly back toward the church altar. He had no idea other than that it was there that he must make his stand.

A deadly silence clamped down upon the church. He realized that some two hundred Nazi guards were gathering outside for the death blow. Quietly he spoke to Nala.

"Stay as you are," he said. "Hold this gun to his throat."

From under his sheepskin coat he drew a Luger pistol. He thrust it into Nala's hand.

Five men in Nazi uniforms manned the guns and looked at Yanezek. One man said:

"This is your surrender."

"This is my surrender," said Yanezek. "We shall all die. Perhaps—"

The church rocked with the explosion of a grenade. One wall caved in. The Little Hangman lifted his small face and shouted. Yanezek thrust a bloody fist into his mouth. He was thinking of the seven dead victims, one a small one.

Into the door of the church stormed a file of guards shooting. Their streams of lead clipped the stone benches of the old church.

Somehow, at this moment Yanezek could see his father, Yanez, standing with those others, against the wall.

Again in his child's heart was the agonizing memory of how they had bent like wheat straws before the wind of that German machine-gun. He lifted the Nazi gun to the top of a stone pew.

YANEZEK'S hands were torn and bleeding, but they were not weak. Again the church shook to the rattling fire of a Nazi .50 calibre. The doorway emptied once more.

He saw blood trace a scarlet thread across the forehead of Nala. It was a terrible mark, accentuated by those yellow curls.

Yanezek rose. His left hand gripped the collar of the Little Hangman. In his right hand he bore now the deadly elephant gun.

He started walking toward the church door, down the aisle, where for generations Slovenes had worshipped. He held the Little Hangman before him. He heard his cringing plea to be spared. Yanezek moved his hand only to slap the Little Hangman's head to one side.

Outside there was death. At least one hundred and fifty Nazis were waiting. He had not the ghost of a chance. They reached the high narrow church door, then Yanezek sent the Little Hangman tumbling before him on his hands and knees, with a kick in the back. He lifted his elephant gun.

From a dozen points of vantage, Nazis were concentrating upon that church door. Across Yanezek's shoulder whoomed the blistering fire of Nazi guns. He glanced back to see that his five Slav captors in their green uniforms were shooting. Then with Nala close behind him, Yanezek was out in the open.

He felt the bite of a bullet that nicked his side. He heard Nala cry out. There was more blood on her face. He pulled the Little Hangman into position before him and started walking.

In that narrow street in which he had played as a child, went Yanezek. His five Nazi captors in their green uniforms turned a withering fire upon that parish courtyard where his father had died.

In the middle of the Drazhgoshe square, was a depression, hollowed out for the barbecuing of heavy meats. Yanezek pushed the Little Hangman into this. He pulled Nala after them, looking at her face, watching her brown eyes. She smiled at him.

"You have so surrendered, Yanezek," she said and her eyes closed in sleep.

Beside him five green-clad Slavs, two armed with light machine-guns, were blasting away at every Nazi in sight.

From one of the houses came a stream of machine-gun bullets. It cut through their brief shelter.

But the Nazi behind that machine-gun had left a too white face into view. The old elephant gun shook in Yanezek's hands. The white face was blotted out. There were no more bullets. Yanezek kissed Nala's cold lips.

Yanezek lifted his head. Everything was quiet now. The village of Drazhgoshe was a dead town. He saw the seven figures swinging by their throats on the crude scaffold. One was such a small one.

Yanezek wondered if ever again he would hear a child laugh. He wondered if ever again he would laugh. He spoke slowly, softly, to the five men in Nazi uniform.

"Did I hurt Vilmar badly? I shot for his shoulder.

One of the men smiled a little and chuckled.

"You have become a great hunter, Yanezek," he said. "Vilmar was only pricked across his arm. He did a good job, on time. As for Jolann, your kick in his stomach was much worse. We trapped that relief detail in the hills, killed the dirty Nazis and took their uniforms as we had planned.

"Those stupid village guards didn't know the difference. Our fight with you when you were captured fooled them all!"

The noonday sun was directly overhead. In that bright light Yanezek could see a ghastly thing.

SEVEN small shadows there were. The mountain breeze was light. The shadows swayed across the snow.

Beside him, Nala lay with her eyes closed. The Little Hangman was struggling to his feet.

"Please! Give me a chance! I have done only what was ordered by Der Fuehrer. I will not so easily give up my life! Look Yanezek, I have gold. I have thousands hidden. You will take that and let me go."

"You have so much of death," growled Yanezek. "You have those there swinging by the ropes. You would have had more. Come, we will go up the hill . . ."

Five Slavs in Nazi uniforms marched with Yanezek. In his arms Yanezek car-

ried Nala. Ahead of them walked the cringing little beast who no longer could seem to lift his head in importance.

They came to the glazed slide. Another man in a Nazi uniform, with his shoulder reddened by blood, smiled at Yanezek. They spoke quietly.

"Thanks, Yanezek," he said. "Good shooting. I knew you could do it."

His shoulder had been torn by a bullet from the elephant gun.

Another man walked a little lamely, his hands claspng his stomach.

"Glory, Yanezek," he said. "Must one so kick another man in his stomach?"

Yanezek smiled grimly. They went on up the hill.

The village of Drazhgoske was quiet now except for the peering faces of women and a few little children. They saw that strange procession. Seven

Nazi-clad men and Yanezek carrying Nala in his arms. Ahead of them walked the Little Hangman. They followed the rough hewn path toward the summit of the ridge.

* * * * *

They point to the mountain pine today. From its arms still hang the threads of a rotted rope, the remnants of a dreadful memory.

Back in the hills, young Yanezek polishes the elephant gun. Nala sometimes comes and kisses his cheeks softly. There is a white scar extending from her left temple down to her right eye. It seems to make her only more beautiful.

Somewhere under the snow, at the bottom of that glazed slide, where even through the summers there is no melting of the ice, is the grave of the Little Hangman.



Dan Fowler, ace of the F. B. I., battles to blow the lid off a grim racket that threatens the Nation's war effort in MEN OF TREASON, a gripping complete mystery novel by C. K. M. SCANLON featured in the Fall issue of G-MEN DETECTIVE—Only 10c!

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Nathan's right hand shot out and closed like a vise on Malone's arm

HAVE A CIGAR!

By LANSING STEBBINS

*Rings Malone, Daring Jewel Thief, Was Fond of Cigars
Until He Was Suddenly Caught Smoking a Hot One!*

IT WAS fairly easy for a smooth-tongued crook like "Rings" Malone to crash Mrs. Thomas K. Witherspoon's War Bond party. Achieving the object of his visit, however, was something else again.

That object was the removal of Mrs. W's famous black-pearl-and-diamond earrings from her shell-like ears—an operation that presented certain difficulties even to such an experienced and light-fingered thief as the suave and impeccable Rings.

Rings always regretted the necessity for violence, but sometimes there was no alternative. And the earrings—one, a large and perfect diamond, the other an equally large and perfect black pearl—were definitely worth the risk and violation of principle.

He had gone about the distasteful task swiftly and efficiently. The jewels were now in Rings' possession. With his nail file he pried the stones loose from their identical platinum settings and buried the settings in the earth of a big potted plant in the library window.

Rings next took two big black cigars from a silver case in his pocket. They

were very special cigars, constructed especially for the purpose Rings had in mind. There was a cavity in each into which the black pearl and the diamond snugly fitted.

The cigars were back in the case and the case back in Rings' pocket before the fair Mrs. Witherspoon, lying limp and disheveled on the big divan near the fireplace, stirred and moaned. Silently, Rings Malone left the room and hurried to mingle with the rest of the Witherspoon guests.

The alarm would soon be out, he knew, and he would be searched—probably before any of the other guests. On his way in he had spotted his old friend Detective Captain Sam Nathan, uncomfortable and sad in white tie and tails, keeping a watchful, if jaundiced eye on the assembled elite in the Witherspoon ballroom.

RINGS smiled to himself as he lighted the half-smoked stub of another of those big black cigars. The stub had been in his mouth through the brief interlude with his hostess, a fact people who knew Rings thought that a cigar was part of b

He was never seen without one. And his habit of blowing perfect smoke rings without taking the weed from his lips, had earned him his nickname.

Tall, good-looking, immaculate in perfectly-fitting evening clothes, Malone moved slowly across the crowded floor as the music stopped. More than one pair of feminine eyes followed him admiringly or dropped in confusion when they met his bold and smiling gaze. Although no one here knew him, he had such a distinguished appearance that they thought they should know him.

Sam Nathan scowled at Rings as the handsome crook came up to him. For years the detective had been trying to get the goods on Malone, but always had failed to catch him with any tangible evidence of crime. Sam was as morally certain that Rings was a thief as he was that a week has seven days, but he'd never been able to prove it.

Lately, he'd even given up running Malone in "on suspicion." He'd decided to wait till he was sure. He still squirmed at the memory of the dressing down the Commissioner had given him the last time he'd failed to make a charge stick against Rings.

"Well, well," drawled Malone, stopping beside the detective, "if it isn't my old friend, Captain Nathan. How are you, fat, forty and fit—to be tied?"

Nathan eyed him angrily. Rings blew a perfect smoke ring into the detective's face and grinned easily.

"I thought you'd show up here," Nathan growled. "Probably even got a perfectly genuine invitation in your pocket, too, ain't you?"

"Certainly, Captain," Rings answered. "Want to see it?"

His hand went to his inside pocket and he paused expectantly, his keen eyes glinting with humor.

"Naw," said Sam, disgustedly. "You're too smart to come without one, and it'd be easy enough for you to get one printed. But you watch your step, cheap crook. If there's any trouble here to-night, you'll be the first—"

A piercing feminine scream caught Nathan with his mouth open. It stayed that way for a second as he stared with bulging eyes at the now grave-faced jewel thief. Then his square jaw snapped shut and his blue eyes narrowed. His right hand shot out and closed like a vise

on Rings Malone's arm.

"Come on!" he gritted. "You *may* be in the clear on this, but you may not. And I'm takin' no chances."

Protesting faintly, Rings let the detective usher him across the crowded floor toward the library. Inwardly he was laughing. Nathan would suspect him. In fact, Nathan would *know* that Rings was guilty. But just let him try to prove anything on him.

Mrs. Witherspon met them at the library door. She was thirty-five and still beautiful, but now her face was pale beneath her rouge and her honey-colored hair hung in disarray about her white shoulders. Her blue eyes were wide and staring. Both her hands were pressed to her ears, as if searching for the jewels that were no longer there.

Other plainclothes men had appeared by this time. All doors were guarded. Sam Nathan kept his grip on Rings' arm as he listened to Mrs. Witherspon's halting words.

"My—my earrings," she stammered. "They're g-gone. Sanders called me to the phone. When I reached it, there was no one on the line. I hung up and then—then s-someone grabbed me from behind and—"

"We'll get him, ma'am," Nathan gritted. He turned to another officer. "Don't let anybody out. Find out if anyone's left in the last ten minutes. Round up all the guests. Men and women separate. Send to headquarters for a couple of matrons. Everybody here's goin' to be searched, whether they like it or not." He glared at Rings. "We'll start on you, wise guy. Somethin' tells me you've overplayed this hand."

Rings Malone shrugged and ground out the butt of his cigar in a nearby ashtray.

"Certainly, Captain," he said calmly. "I have nothing to conceal. Shall we begin?"

THE rest of the guests, and the hostess, were herded out of the library, and Nathan closed the door. He nodded at a plainclothes man who stood nearby.

"Frisk him," he ordered. "And don't spare his feelings, neither."

Rings smiled and drew the big silver case from his pocket. He snapped it

open and reached for one of the big black cigars it contained. Instantly, Captain Nathan's hand shot out.

"Lemme see that!" he barked, and jerked the case out of Rings' hand.

He was in too much of a hurry, however and he fumbled the open case, juggled it for a second, then dropped it on the floor. The two big cigars spilled out on the rug.

For the first time Malone's icy calm fluttered. His heart seemed to stand still, but he forced himself to show nothing of his feelings as he grinned at the detective.

"Surely you don't mind if I smoke during the ordeal, do you, Captain?" he asked, and bent to pick up the fallen cigars. "I'd offer you one," he added as he straightened up again, "but I seem to remember that you don't smoke. Right?"

He bit the end off one of the cigars—he was almost sure it was the one with the diamond in it, although he'd become a bit confused when they fell to the floor—and clamped it between his teeth. He held the other in his hand while the other detective came up behind and began frisking him.

Sam Nathan scowled, staring at the extra cigar.

"Naw," he said, "I don't smoke. But my old man's laid up with rheumatism and can't do nothin' else but smoke. So if you don't mind I'll take it along as a present from you to him."

So saying, the big detective plucked the cigar from Rings' fingers and stowed it away in his vest pocket.

With an effort Rings kept his fingers from trembling as he lighted the cigar between his lips. This was a complication he hadn't foreseen. Somehow, he would have to get that cigar back before Sam's father, a retired cop, lighted it and let it burn down to the fabulous black pearl it contained.

And that would be no easy job. Sam Nathan's first assignment as a detective had been on the pickpocket squad. He knew all the tricks. But Rings thought he knew a few too—a few that Sam had never heard of.

His opportunity came when all the guests had been searched. The party was definitely broken up, and a crowd of men were besieging Nathan with requests that, since they had been cleared

by the search, they be allowed to leave. Malone was in that crowd, grateful for the jostling that crushed him up against Sam and gave him the opportunity he was waiting for.

A few minutes later, after a warning of "we'll be keeping our eye on you, so watch your step" from Nathan, Rings was threading his way toward the coat room. On his way a uniformed butler with a tray of cigars and cigarettes, offered him a smoke. He saw that the cigars were his own brand, but he shook his head and kept on.

Despite the dimout and gas rationing, he found a cab when he emerged. The driver was a villainous-looking man who seemed to have something of interest always in the rear-view mirror. So restraining his impatience, Rings made no attempt to open his two trick cigars while still riding in the cab.

But in the privacy of his own little one-room apartment, he hurriedly threw his hat and coat onto the divan and took the long cold cigar butt from his mouth.

WITH fingers that were suddenly trembling, he broke it open. And then he went cold and stiff, as a hard, dull, useless-looking hunk of material dropped out into his cupped hand. Slowly, and from the very depths of his being, was wrung a curse.

That coal-like pebble was all that was left of the black pearl. The heat from the burning tobacco—he had smoked the cigar past the halfway mark—had reduced it to a worthless clinker. Curse that unpredictable Nathan!

But then he shrugged. A black pearl might have been hard to get away with anyway. He still had the diamond, and that was something. More than something.

Swiftly he drew out the second cigar and ripped it open.

For ten seconds he stood staring at the shredded bits of tobacco. Frantically he picked them apart, got down on his hands and knees and searched the floor, turned all his pockets inside out . . . There was no diamond!

Wildly he flung around, sweat pouring from him. And then suddenly he remembered the butler who had been passing cigars as he left the party. They had been his brand. And he remembered that Sam was picking up cigars for his

father. He'd probably taken at least one from the butler.

The sickening truth bore in on Rings. He had lifted the wrong cigar from Nathan's pocket! The detective had the diamond—was bound to discover it!

With frantic haste he climbed back into his overcoat. He wasn't sure what he was going to do but he had to get that cigar back before Nathan's father had a chance to smoke it and learn its secret.

He regretted violence. There was usually some other way, but this time . . .

His hand was on the door knob when heavy footsteps sounded in the hall outside. A knock thundered on his door. He opened it and smiled weakly up into Sam Nathan's grim face.

"Thought you'd slip sometime, Rings," the policeman said. "When a big-time

crook like you takes the trouble to pick my pocket of one of his own cigars, I got to thinkin', and looked at the one you missed. Yeah, I found the diamond. What happened to the pearl?"

Knowing he was lost, Rings summoned a feeble grin and gestured toward the ashtray. Sam trudged over to the table and looked at the smoke-blackened pebble that had been a priceless pearl. It was his turn to grin.

"The insurance company will pay for that," he chuckled. "And they may double it when they know that Rings Malone is stowed away in the Big House. Come on, wise guy!" He fumbled in his pocket. "Have a cigar, Rings?"

And Detective Captain Sam Nathan chuckled comfortably at his own on quip.

Next Issue's Calendar of Mystery



GEOERGE CHANCE and Merry White went through the jammed lobby of New York's famous Sports Palace and fought their way to their seats where they were to sit to watch the lightweight champion, Tony Rex, put away the contender for his crown, one Benny Akers. It should have been a pleasant occasion, but it wasn't. Something chill and evil and uncomfortable—some presage-

ment of doom overhung things at the huge sports arena, and Merry White was afraid.

For Police Commissioner Standish had received a crazy note from the fight manager of the champion which had come through the mail. The message simply read:

Evil Eye Will Hex Tony Rex into Sheol Tonight

That was all. But it proved to be the starting point for one of the most amazing cases in the amazing career of George Chance, magician-detective extraordinary and—upon occasion—the renowned and redoubtable Green Ghost.

THE CASE OF THE EVIL EYE, complete novelet in next issue of **THRILLING MYSTERY** by G. T. Fleming-Roberts, will bring you all the answers to this problem,

along with plenty of thrills and chills before you reach the end of the eerie trail.

There will also be an exciting complete novel in our next issue, called **DEAD MAN'S HAND**, by William Campbell Gault. This is a powerful story of a behest which reaches from beyond the grave and which brings deadly peril and suspense into the lives of several people.

DEAD MAN'S HAND is one of the most powerful stories we have ever given you—it's packed with thrills, action and surprises from start to finish. You'll be amazed at the troubles the hero, Drake Garrett, gets into—and out of—as he fights a murder frame that leads him to the heart of a grim mystery of Nazi sabotage. It's a grand yarn—one of the best novels of the year—and we're proud to present it to you! You'll enjoy every bit of it.

On top of all this, there will be a sparkling assortment of gripping and thrilling short stories, while Chakra will have recorded several new and heretofore untold true and well-authenticated stories of the weird and supernatural.

If you enjoy the unusual stories and features you find in **THRILLING MYSTERY**, won't you drop us a few lines and tell us? The editors always welcome suggestions and criticism as well as praise. So if you have any comment to offer, just pass it right along.

Address all communications to The Editor, **THRILLING MYSTERY**, 11 East 39th Street, New York, N. Y. Meanwhile, happy reading!

—THE EDITOR.



The Best
BARGAIN
in **HISTORY**
By
**ROBERT P.
TRISTRAM COFFIN**

Famous American Poet

BUY the War Bonds of the United States of America.

They are a good bargain. They are about the best bargain in history.

If we, the people of the United States of America, do not win this war being fought with our blood and bonds, there will not be any more United States of America. There will not be any United States of the World. There will be no liberty left, no ballot-box left, no chance for any individual to say what he believes the right is, for the next nine hundred years—the next nine thousand years. Instead there will be a nightmare of a human race lowered to the bare subsistence level of a hill of ants or a hive of bees.

In that state, universal slavery will be the one institution that will be sure to last. All the workers and all the rulers will be equal slaves to one idea—the perpetuation of the mere will to live, with no chance ever for anything but the physical business of working, eating,

sleeping, and begetting new slaves for the system. It will be life reduced to the machine.

In that state, children will become informers and slayers of their parents. Parents will be reduced to spawners of new serfs. The family will cease to exist. All churches will disappear. The young will be regimented and conditioned from the womb. The old will be put out of the way by the state to make room for new feeders that can spawn.

There will be no news except that dictated by slave-drivers with hands varnished red with blood. Truth will be something ancient as the Sphinx. Honor and courage will become names empty and archaic as Ur and Babylon. The long uphill climb of the human race will end. Civilization will stop.

But if our bonds and our blood win this war, then Magna Charta will still be in our history books. The Mayflower will be a real ship and not one sailing in a

(Concluded on page 96)

A WAR BOND MESSAGE FOR ALL AMERICANS!



Britton knelt beside the motionless form. "Guess he's dead, all right!"

THE NIGHT WAS DARK

By J. LANE LINKLATER

When Murder Stalks a Small Town, It Takes Logic to Turn the Spotlight on a Killer Who Shrouds His Deeds with Mystery!

THE fierce, prolonged, ululating blast of the siren at the fire house not a hundred yards away tore into Ed Britton's sleep. He sat up in bed and listened with foreboding.

An ordinary fire alarm would be just a couple of short blasts. Yes, this was the signal for a blackout!

Ed got up in the dark and hurriedly dressed his slight wiry, prematurely bent figure. As an auxiliary po-

liceman, he had a duty. He peered at the illuminated dial of his alarm clock. Almost exactly three o'clock.

Out on the street, he shivered. Maybe this wasn't dangerous, but it was mighty uncomfortable. Freezing temperature.

Well, he had a section of four blocks to patrol. He started walking. He should be seeing Walt Collins soon. Walt was the air raid warden covering the block beyond.

Yes, there came Walt now. Ed Britton could see Collins' cumbersome bulk, swathed in a long coat, waddling toward him.

It was good to see Collins. It would have been good to see anybody.

They met at the intersection.

"How's it look, Walt?" asked Ed Britton.

"Okay, so far," said Collins. "There was a light in a window in Hocking's place. Back window, though. I figured I'd let it go for now. Guess Hocking had to get up for something. Anyhow, it don't show much."

Britton nodded. "Sure." He stared off into the dark distance. "Guess it ain't much anyhow. Probably unidentified planes off the coast."

"Sure."

Both shuffled along on chilled feet, unwilling to part. It was a dark night, with shifting clouds overhead. Doubtful if there would be anything touching this town of Dansing. They were thirty miles inland. It was a surprise bombing attack on the coast towns the authorities were afraid of. But towns like Dansing had to keep dark and on the alert, too, since inland lights might be guiding posts for enemy planes.

"Well, see you soon," Ed Britton muttered.

Walt Collins grunted and went on. Britton continued on his way. They covered the same territory, but went in opposite directions. They would meet again over on Drake Street.

BBRITTON felt bewildered. If there were actual bombing, he would have his hands full, but this way all he could do was watch for loiterers and such like. He tried to remember what he had been told at the auxiliary police school, but the cold numbed his head as well as his feet.

He stopped opposite Rufus Hocking's house.

That light that Collins mentioned, back there in a rear window, was still burning. A shade was drawn, but it was not a blackout shade, and the light was clearly visible.

That light should be doused.

Ed Britton frowned. Someone should go in and tell Hocking. It

was really Collins' job, though. But Britton knew that Collins was not on good terms with Hocking. For that matter, neither was Britton—hadn't been for many years.

So Ed Britton trudged on. He met no one.

Of course, people were supposed to stay in during a blackout, and they certainly were doing it.

He met Collins again on the corner of Fourth and Drake and told about the light in Hocking's window.

"Yeah, we should tell him," Collins agreed uneasily. "But, say, Ed, you do it for me, huh?"

"Me?" said Britton.

"Sure. I'm sick. I should be in bed. But if I take something I guess I can keep a-going. So I'll go home and come out again soon."

"Well, okay," said Britton.

Walt Collins hurried away, toward his own place. Britton returned to Hocking's house. The light was still burning.

Britton stepped up to the stone walk that ran back to the house and alongside it. Rufus Hocking's house was the biggest in town. Hocking himself was the biggest man in town, financially.

It was black dark along here. The boughs of pepperberry trees hung low and whisked against the back of Britton's neck.

Presently he was standing under the window beyond which the light hit the shade and made a sheet of yellow.

"Blackout!" Britton yelled hoarsely. "Lights out!"

The words hit the window and struck back at him. There was no response. Britton was freezing from the waist down, but sweat broke out on his face. This was the first time in years he had tried to speak to Rufus Hocking.

He reached up and tapped briskly on the window.

"Blackout!" he yelled again. "All lights out!"

No answer came, no sound.

Ed Britton considered. He was no air raid warden, just an auxiliary policeman. Perhaps he was exceeding his authority. Then, abruptly, his jaw stiffened. Heck, he was just letting

himself be scared—scared of Rufus Hocking!

He walked around the rear corner of the house and tried the porch door. It gave. He walked in deliberately, through the back screened porch to the kitchen.

Rufus Hocking was in the kitchen.

Hocking was crumpled on the floor. The tight-featured cynical face with which Ed Britton had been familiar for many years was pressed against the linoleum. The knife in Hocking's back was a small carving knife. The handle was a rough-finished bone, crinkly and curved.

Britton knelt beside the motionless form. Presently he muttered:

"Guess he's dead, all right."

A stifled gasp brought his head up.

STANDING in the doorway leading to the dining room was a girl. The wide, staring eyes were filled with horror. One hand clutched a blue silk negligee about her youthful figure.

"Sorry, Lucy," Britton said helplessly.

So Lucy was an orphan now, he thought. Her mother had been dead five years. Lucy was a beauty. Her mother, too, had been a beauty.

Lucy came forward slowly.

"What happened?" she whispered

"Don't know," Ed Britton said. He got up. "It's a blackout, you know."

He remembered, then, the light that shone through the window. There were two tables in the kitchen, and one of them had dark-colored oilcloth over it loosely. Britton picked it up, draped it over the window.

"That'll do," he said. "Well, Walt saw the light in this window and told me. He was sick and asked me to tend to it. I came back to investigate. Couldn't raise anyone by yelling, so I walked in." He moved his hands outward. "That's all."

Lucy was down on one knee.

"Poor dad!" she said. She seemed to be more shocked than saddened. She looked up and said with sudden energy: "Better get a doctor."

Britton knew that wasn't any use. But he went through to the hall and used the phone. He called Doc Can-

dlar. Then he called Police Headquarters. Chief Jack Pettis was there.

"I'm in Hocking's house, Jack," Britton told him.

He always called the chief by his first name. Everybody in Dansing called everybody else by the first name. The only exception had been Rufus Hocking, and he was dead.

"Hocking is dead," Britton said. "Murdered."

He dropped the phone and turned away. The house, except for the kitchen, was in darkness. Britton used his flashlight. He walked around on the ground floor from room to room. He didn't know the house, since it had been built after Hocking had married Lucy's mother.

Presently, on his way along the hallway toward the kitchen, Ed Britton stopped. He thought he heard a rustling sound in the black hallway behind him.

Startled, he said aloud: "Who's that?"

No one answered. There was no more noise. Britton sent the rays of his flash down the hall. There was no one in sight.

He got back to the kitchen just as Chief Jack Pettis, big in his tan uniform, arrived at the back door. Lucy was letting him in. He had a younger officer, "Buck" Brady, with him. And a minute later Doc Candler arrived.

"Well, Ed?" the chief asked.

Britton told him all he knew.

The chief spoke to Doc Candler, who was kneeling by the body.

"Be careful about that knife, Doc," he said. "Don't touch the handle at all. Maybe the killer didn't leave prints, but it's important anyway."

"That's right," put in Britton. "The knife-handle is likely important!"

The chief squinted curiously at Britton.

"Okay, Ed," he said. "You better get out on the street again."

Britton went out. It was still cold. Up on the next corner he met Walt Collins again.

"How you feel now, Walt?" Britton said.

"A little better," said Collins. "Did you see about Hocking's light?"

Ed Collins told him.

"Good glory!" Collins said. "So Hocking is gone! Well, no one will be sorry—except for Lucy."

"It'll be hard on Lucy," Britton said, "for now. But maybe in the long run she'll be better off."

HE SAID it bitterly. There were many years of bitterness in his heart. Rufus Hocking had married Ed Britton's girl. Twenty years ago. Family pressure had got her to marry Hocking. Since then Hocking had gone up.

But Ed Britton had not gone anywhere at all. Oh, he had managed to get along all right, one way or another. He had worked for the town, mostly; on the streets, in the park.

But he had drawn no comfort from the fact that Lucy's mother had been miserable every day of her life with Hocking.

Britton had watched Lucy grow up, then, day by day, year by year. Lucy had always had a friendly little smile for him. He remembered the time—years ago, now—when Lucy, on her way to school, had taken him by the hand. He had been working then as crossing guard, and he had never forgotten the feel of her hand in his as they had crossed the street.

But Hocking himself had seen that incident, and from that day on Lucy had taken a different route to school.

Yes, Ed Britton had hated Rufus Hocking. Enough to kill him. But he hadn't killed him.

Then he heard Walt Collins saying: "Wonder who did it? The state kills a man just as dead for killing a devil as for killing a saint."

"Just as dead," Britton agreed wearily. "Well, see you later."

He plodded on through the still night. He wondered about Collins.

Walt Collins had not been friendly with Rufus Collins, either. There had been a dispute over a real estate contract. And plenty of grumbling over other things. For one thing Hocking's fine big house was only a stone's throw from Collins' old small one. Around the corner and half-way down the next block, but the corner of Hocking's back garden was against the corner of Collins' back yard.

Hocking had never liked that. And it had not helped matters that Collins had insisted on keeping a dozen chickens in a shed in that adjoining corner.

Rounding the corner of Fourth and Drake, Ed Britton saw two men hurrying back toward the Hocking house. One of them was one of Captain Pettis's men. The other was young Jim Glover.

Jim Glover! So right away they'd gone and got Jim!

Well, now, that was bad. Jim Glover and Lucy had gone through school together. And everybody knew they wanted to go through life together. Hocking had been bitterly opposed to that!

Young Glover was in uniform. He was home on leave, for a few days. But being in uniform wouldn't help him—if murder were proved against him.

For a little while Ed Britton stood on the curb and gaped. Jim Glover! A fine lad, Jim. Could he have killed Hocking? Well, Hocking might have driven even him into desperation frantic enough to kill.

But a knife in the back! No, not Jim Glover.

Presently Britton pulled himself together and started walking again, briskly. He walked around his blocks, then pulled up sharply at the Hocking house. He walked along the walk, opened the kitchen door and pushed in.

He almost bowled over a short plump man with smooth pink cheeks.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lighter," he said. The man smiled dolefully. "That's all right, Ed," he said. Frank Lighter was always polite. "They just got me over here. It's frightful."

Yes, it should be frightful to Frank Lighter. He was a man of about forty, and he was supposed to be the only man living whom Rufus Hocking had trusted and liked. He had been Hocking's right-hand man for a number of years.

Frank had been at Hocking's elbow, ready to carry out his wishes. He even lived close, in a small cottage at the far rear of Hocking's back garden.

CONSIDERATELY, Lighter stepped aside to let Ed Britton into the kitchen.

Captain Pettis and a couple of officers were there. And Lucy. And Jim Glover.

Walt Collins was there, too.

Walt was looking at Jim Glover and saying sheepishly:

"Sorry, but I had to tell the truth."

"Well, Jim?" Captain Pettis said.

Jim Glover looked at Lucy, distress streaking his boyish face with faint lines. Lucy's pretty brown eyes were wide with dismay.

Jim said nothing.

"It's just like I say," Collins went on. "Them chickens made a racket and woke me up. I looked at the clock, like you will when you get woke up, and it was ten to three. I was afraid something had got in with the chickens and went out to see. That's when I seen Jim here. He had just come around the corner. It looked like he was coming from here."

"How about it, Jim?" Pettis said. "Was you here?"

Britton, standing against the door, watched anxiously. Lucy and Jim were staring at each other. Then, suddenly, Lucy's mouth tightened.

"We should tell the truth, Jim," she said.

He thought a moment. "I guess you're right," he said then. "Sure, I was here. But I never saw Mr. Hocking. I—I . . . Well—"

"I'll tell them," offered Lucy hurriedly. "I guess you all know about Jim and me. Well, Dad was against Jim. He forbade me seeing him. He kept a watch on me, too, to see that we didn't see each other. But yesterday I got word to Jim that I would be out here on the back porch at midnight. I knew Dad would be in bed and asleep by then.

"Well, Jim came and we were together, quietly, for a long time—only it seemed very short." There was a trace of trembling on Lucy's lips. "You see, he—Jim will be gone for a long time! I just couldn't bear to let him go without seeing him!"

"Sure," Chief Pettis said gruffly. "What time did he leave here?"

"I don't know exactly. He looked

at his watch and it was nearly twenty to three. But it took a few minutes to say good-by."

Pettis looked worried. Ed Britton knew the chief wasn't anxious to fasten it on Jim, but he had to go where the evidence led him.

"That makes Walt's story about right," the chief said. "And Hocking was killed a few minutes later!" He peered at Lucy. "Now, after you said good night, of course you went upstairs to bed. Did you actually see Jim leave the house?"

"Well, not exactly. He—he hated to leave me. He stood on the other side of the screen door there, just looking at me. I couldn't stand it! I just turned and ran upstairs."

"So Hocking could have heard something down here and come down and found Jim here," Pettis mused. "Then there could've been a fight—"

"No!" cried Lucy. "Oh, no!"

"But you wasn't here to see?" Pettis said.

"No. But I just know Jim wouldn't—"

"That ain't good enough," Pettis said.

ED BRITTON took Frank Lighter by the arm and drew him back out on the screened porch.

"You live right close here—over there at the back of the garden," he said. "Do you know anything?"

"Not a thing," Lighter said dolefully. "I went to bed at ten o'clock. I knew nothing until they called me a few minutes ago."

"But you know Hocking's affairs better than anybody. Ain't you got an idea who might've done it?"

Lighter smiled. "No. Many people were unfriendly to Mr. Hocking. He often said I was the only one who understood him."

That didn't hit Britton just right.

"People understood him, all right," he said sharply. "It didn't take brains to understand he was foxy and mean and dirty. Didn't the air raid warning wake you up?"

"Yes, indeed. When I heard it, I thought of getting out of bed. But I'm not in the Civilian Defense, and I recalled that the order was for all

who had no business outside to stay indoors."

"That's right," agreed Britton.

"I see you don't like to see Jim Glover accused of this," Lighter said. "Well, neither do I. If I can help, let me know."

THE offer of help was rather handsome of Lighter, Ed Britton thought. Especially since Lighter knew that Jim Glover had always disliked him.

Britton returned to the kitchen. At the moment, there was silence. Britton looked across at Collins.

"Say, Walt," he said, "you say your chickens raising a rumpus brought you out of the house, which was when you saw Jim. Well, what was the matter with the chickens?"

Collins' brow furrowed. "I dunno. There was sure a lot of clacking, but by the time I got out there they had all quieted down and I couldn't see nothing wrong at all."

Chief Pettis looked annoyed. "Walt," he said, "you'd better go on out. Back to your beat. You, too, Ed."

Walt Collins walked out the back door. Britton thought a moment, and then said:

"Sure. I'll go out the front way."

Nobody stopped him and he crossed the kitchen, walked along the hall toward the front door. There he turned and trod softly up the stairway to the upper floor. He opened doors and poked his flash into each discreetly, until he came to one which was obviously Hocking's bedroom.

Silently, Britton roamed around the room. It was like Hocking himself—more of an office than a bedroom. Besides the bed, there was a desk, and files, and a telephone. This was Hocking's business center as much as it had been his sleeping quarters.

The telephone was on a long cord, and could be moved across the room. Now it was on a small stand near the head of the bed.

Britton turned his light on it. The bell was also near the head of the bed, fastened to the woodwork strip on the wall. The bell was covered by a coat that hung over it, and Britton would

not have noticed it except for the cord.

Queer about that, he thought. That coat certainly would deaden the sound of the bell's ringing. Probably it couldn't be heard at all much beyond the door of the room.

Britton slipped back out to the hall, glanced along its length. Yes, Lucy's room was down at the other end.

There was a commotion out front of the house. Britton hurried and looked out of the hall window overlooking the street. Well, they were taking Jim Glover away—taking him to the police station, of course. And Hocking's body was being shoved into an ambulance.

Ed Britton slowly descended the stairs and went out the front door. Under a tree there was Lucy Hocking. She was sobbing gently. Timidly Britton touched her.

"Better go in, Lucy," he said gently. "It's mighty cold out."

She straightened up, nodded, turned and ran in. Britton stood there, thinking deeply.

Well, it was as Walt Collins had said. *Someone* had certainly killed Rufus Hocking, and the law would be just as hard on a good man who had killed a mean one as on a mean man who had killed a good one.

Collins himself came ambling from the rear of the house. He joined Britton and together they walked around the corner.

"I'm going to get my wife to take Lucy over to our house," Collins said. "No good the girl spending the night alone."

Britton agreed. Collins' wife was a pleasant, comforting sort of woman and would be good company for Lucy on a night like this.

"They'll lock the Hocking house up, eh?" said Britton.

"Sure," said Collins. "The chief is locking the house and he's leaving Buck Brady in there to watch things."

When they came to Collins' little house, Walt Collins went in. Britton crossed the street and stood behind a tree. He waited until he had seen Collins' wife come out, walk around the corner, and then come back with Lucy. After the two women had gone

in, Collins emerged again and went on with his patrolling. Ed Britton saw him vanish into Drake Street.

QUICKLY, Britton crossed the street and opened Collins' garden gate. This was familiar territory, and he had no trouble finding his way across the garden toward the chicken coop.

Here he went carefully. A little thing might excite those chickens. Close to the shed, he heard the low confused murmur of slightly aroused chickens. He reduced his progress to noiselessness.

Well, here it was. Just an ordinary lean-to chicken shed, one end of it being cut off as a roosting place.

Britton avoided the wired front, which faced the Collins' house. He trudged slowly around the side and the back.

His light here did not annoy the chickens. He examined the boarded back. Yes, here was a place where something had happened. A dented, splintered board. Done recently, judging by the freshness of the splinters.

Britton searched around on the ground. Smooth, clean-raked soil. Footprints were there, but they were his own, just made. It was doubtful if Collins had had occasion to come around to the back of the shed since he had raked around here last.

Just Ed Britton's own footprints. Those of no one else.

But here were two jagged rocks. Sizable ones, weighing a couple of pounds each. They were lying a few feet apart.

Some kind of quartz, these rocks. Streaks of color in them. A small piece had been chipped off one of them. Rough-surfaced and dusty and splintery. Britton knew at once where they had come from. Walt Collins had half a dozen of these rocks edging a small strip of garden further along the fence.

Quietly, Ed Britton returned to the street and hurried back to the Hocking house. He saw no one. Carefully, then, he walked along by the side of the house toward the back. He crossed the large back garden. Here, against

the high back fence, sheltered by a large tree, was the small cottage in which Frank Lighter lived.

The cottage was dark and silent. Britton tapped on the door. In a moment the door opened.

"Come in, Ed," Lighter said.

Lighter's kitchen was well blacked out, so they could sit in the kitchen comfortably. The oven was lighted for heat.

"I couldn't go back to sleep," Lighter explained. "Not after what happened. I made some coffee. Have a cup?"

Britton watched Lighter pour coffee in a cup for him. Lighter was in slippers and bathrobe. His smooth rounded cheeks were as pink as ever. He somehow reminded Ed Britton of a baby pig.

Lighter's hands interested Britton, too. If Lighter had ever done anything rough with them, those hands certainly showed no signs of it. They were plump and clean and quite unmarked. The fingers were like two rows of little pig sausages.

"I got an idea about this murder," Britton said.

Lighter warmed his hands against the side of his coffee cup. He squinted at Britton.

"Something that might clear Jim?"

"Yes, sir. But it might get someone else in bad."

"Ah! Who?"

"Walt Collins!"

Lighter's eyes opened a little wider.

"Walt? That's bad. I always liked Walt."

"Oh, Walt's all right in a way," conceded Britton. "But he's kinda hard to get along with. He had plenty trouble with Hocking."

"I know. But what have you got?"

"After I found Hocking in the kitchen, I took a turn around the house. I heard someone, but whoever it was got away."

"You think it was Walt?"

"It might have been. Now, if it was, what was he doing? I figure he was looking for something—maybe papers on an old deal he and Hocking fought about. So I looked around Hocking's bedroom, too. I noticed some papers—envelopes and stuff—that had fallen

back of a filing case. Or maybe old Hocking put 'em there himself. I didn't tell anyone about that."

LIGHTER took a dainty sip of coffee.

"You think Walt was looking for some papers?"

"Might have been. Maybe those were the papers and he didn't find 'em."

"Possibly." Lighter nodded. "But what did you want me to do?"

"If Walt wants those papers," Britton said, "he'll try to get another chance at 'em. He can't get in the house now, because it's locked up, and he wouldn't be any good at breaking in. Now, tomorrow morning the police will want to go over Hocking's personal stuff, in his bedroom. They'll have you there, because you know about it. And I got a hunch Walt will try to horn in."

Lighter smiled. "So you want me to watch what Walt does?"

"That's it. Watch to see what he does."

Lighter wagged his head.

"It sounds a little unlikely to me," he said. "But you can depend on me."

Ed Britton got up. It sounded pretty weak to him, too, but it was the best he could do.

"Well, thanks," he said warmly.

Britton stepped briskly as he walked through the back yard again. He stopped briefly and stared at the rear of the house. Buck Brady would be there, making himself comfortable in the kitchen. Britton walked on.

He stopped again near the front corner. He was directly under a window.

No, Walt Collins wouldn't try to break into the house. Collins was pretty big and clumsy. Anyway, he probably wouldn't ever think of it. Britton himself had never thought of breaking into a house before now.

But he wouldn't be clumsy at it. Years as an odd-job man had given him skill around doors and windows.

The window was a low one, and fairly large. Britton took out a stout pocket-knife and went to work on it. Within five minutes he was in the house.

Inside, it was total blackout; a chill, ghostly blackness. Britton lis-

[Turn Page]



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tened intently. He could hear, presently, a faint *clink-clink*. That would be Buck Brady, in the kitchen, setting a cup down in a saucer.

Moving stealthily, Britton reached the corridor, drifted toward the front, ascended the stairs to the second floor.

He crept back to Hocking's bedroom. The door was locked.

Britton crossed the hall to another door. It was not locked. He entered, flashed his light quickly. Obviously a spare room.

He kept the door open an inch, stood close to it, and waited. He waited about half an hour.

Then came the faintest rustle of sound back toward the head of the stairs, and the vague gathering of substance that took on human shape as it drew nearer, slowly.

The man stopped at the door of Hocking's bedroom. A key clicked smoothly. There was a change in the shadows across the hall, and Britton knew the door had opened and the man had slipped in.

Ed Britton moved across the hall. He pushed on the door, softly. A flashlight glowed, over near the filing cases. The man behind the light was invisible.

Abruptly, the light was held rigid. Then it swung quickly and dashed its blinding rays full in Ed Britton's face.

"Ah," said a voice. "Stand quite still, Ed!"

BBRITTON stood still, except that he brought his own light up and its gleam reddened the plump face of Frank Lighter.

"I thought it was you, Lighter," Britton said slowly. "You killed Hocking. I got to thinking it'd be queer if the man who killed Hocking turned out to be the only man in the world he trusted. Not so queer, either. A man like Hocking always picks on the wrong man to trust."

Lighter smiled placidly. "What reason could I have—"

"Reason enough. For one thing, a fellow like you usually hates his benefactor, and hides his hate behind a smile. For another, you maybe saw a chance for yourself. You know all about Hocking's affairs, and no one

else does. With Hocking out of the way, you'd be in control. You'd make yourself rich! For still another, you might even get a chance at Lucy—especially if Jim was out of the way! And it's likely, too, that you'd already done some crooked work, and Hocking was on the point of finding it out. That was why you had to go through his things here after you killed him."

"So you think it was me you heard when you—"

"I do. You thought you had plenty of time after killing Hocking. The murder wouldn't have been found at all until morning, if it hadn't been for the blackout, which called attention to the light in the kitchen."

Lighter was silent. He held his flashlight in his left hand. He moved his right hand into the path of the light.

"You see that, Ed?" he said quietly. Britton saw the revolver. "Yes," he said.

Lighter chuckled. "I could use it quite safely, Ed."

"You'd bring Buck Brady up here."

"To be sure. But stop and think, Ed. You have nothing on me—absolutely nothing. It's you who are in a bad spot."

"Me, eh?"

"Certainly. Remember, you were at odds with Hocking for many years, on account of his marriage. Everyone knows about that."

"But I didn't—"

"Perhaps not. But consider, Ed. You say the air raid warden asked you to see about the light in the kitchen window. It was not your business, but you did so. You found Hocking in the kitchen, perhaps fixing something for himself. You told him to put out his light. Of course, being Rufus Hocking, he refused, and ordered you out. You quarreled. You saw the carving knife, and in a fit of anger you killed him. A minute or two later Lucy appeared at the kitchen door, and naturally you told her you'd just found him that way!"

Ed Britton was silent. It was a plausible idea, all right.

"And now you're here," Lighter went on. "And I'm here. And I can say that you came to me with a crazy story about Walt Collins! That made me suspicious of you. I decided to

watch you. Now, you obviously broke into the house—probably through a window—and that in itself is suspicious. I had a key to the front door, so I came in the house to see what you were up to. I found you here. You threatened me, attacked me—and I had to shoot you to protect myself!” Lighter smiled broadly. “Simple, isn’t it?”

Ed Britton nodded. Yes, Lighter had done some fast thinking.

And Lighter was going to shoot him. There was no doubt about that. Britton could see the intense, purposeful glint in Lighter’s eyes.

“Ed, drop your flashlight,” Lighter said in a low voice.

Britton was holding the flash so that its rays bathed Lighter in a bloody glow. And Lighter was holding *his* flash so that it dazzled Britton. Flash in one hand, gun in the other. And Lighter was wearing tight kid gloves.

RAPIDLY, Ed Britton hurled his flash at the spot where he had last seen Lighter’s left shoulder. Lighter squealed in sharp pain, and Britton knew he had aimed well. He flung himself forward, struck Lighter in his plump middle, and together they went down. Britton’s head

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struck the filing case and he was almost stunned.

Lighter struggled desperately. He still gripped his gun. Dazed, Britton held on to Lighter's arms, but he was weakening, and he knew that Lighter was bringing that gun around to point at his middle.

Then, abruptly, someone had switched on a light. Buck Brady was standing over them.

And in a minute both Ed and Lighter were on their feet.

"Thank heaven you got here in time," Lighter was saying pleasantly to Buck. "This man was about to commit a second murder!"

And Ed Britton listened while Lighter glibly told his tale. It sounded convincing, the way Lighter told it.

Presently Buck Brady said:

"Well, Ed, I'm awful sorry, but I guess you and me had better get down to Headquarters."

Britton was feeling a little stronger.

"I'll go," he said, "if you take Lighter along, too."

"But he ain't done nothing," said

Brady.

"He killed Hocking! And he tried to kill me!"

"This fellow is trying to protect himself by smearing me," snapped Lighter. "But listen to his yarn if you want to."

"Talk," Buck Brady told Britton.

So Britton told him what he had already told Lighter.

"You see?" Lighter said smoothly, when Britton had finished. "Just a wild yarn. Not a scrap of evidence."

Buck Brady frowned dubiously. "That's right, Ed," he said. "No evidence at all. A wild story. No, I guess you and me—"

"Wait!" Britton stepped up to Lighter briskly. He took Lighter's wrists in his grip and held tight. "Here's the evidence!"

Lighter laughed. "Where?"

"Your gloves!" said Ed. He turned to Buck. "Be mighty careful about these gloves, Buck. They'll convict this rat of murder!"

"I guess you're nuts, all right, Ed," Brady said sadly.

"Now listen," said Britton. "Walt Collins said his chickens made a

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racket and got him out of bed. It was while he was seeing about that that he saw Jim leaving here. So maybe someone wanted him to see Jim! Maybe someone planned that he should see Jim!"

"How?"

"It's easy to rouse a bunch of chickens at night. Now, over by the chicken shed are a couple of rocks. Those rocks came from the edge of Walt's garden, just the other side of the fence. There are only a few of those rocks, and there ain't any more in this part of town. Walt got those rocks special, for decoration. So someone in Hocking's back yard could reach through and pick up a couple of rocks and chuck 'em at the chicken shed. That would drive the chickens wild."

"This man's crazy!" jibed Lighter.

BUCK BRADY, puzzled, grooved his brow.

"I don't get you, Ed."

"Figure it this way," Britton said.

"Old Hocking was afraid Lucy would try to see Jim. So he arranged with Lighter to keep watch on the house. And if Lighter was to see them two youngsters meeting there, he was to phone Hocking—Hocking's phone being right by his bed.

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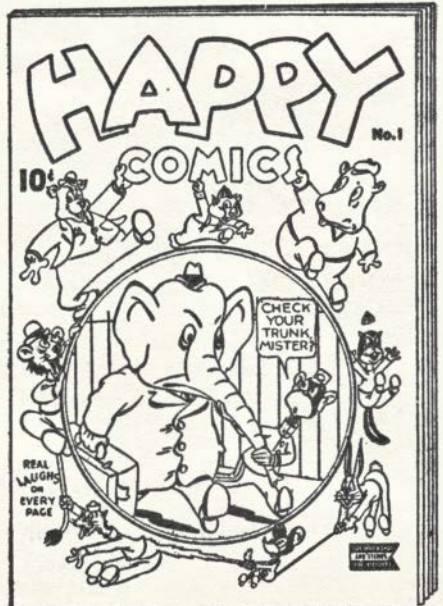
"All right. Jimmie *does* call and meet Lucy on the back porch. Lighter sees them. But he waits until just as Jim leaves, then goes out and hurls those rocks at Walt's chicken coop. That makes it pretty sure that Walt will see Jim going away. Then Lighter goes back in his cottage and phones Hocking. Hocking gets up and goes down, headed for the back porch. By this time Lighter is over in the kitchen, with that carving knife in his hand. And as Hocking switches on the kitchen light—*s/am*, there goes the knife in his back!"

"The man's a fool!" muttered Lighter.

"You still ain't producing any evidence," Brady pointed out.

Ed Britton grinned. "When Lighter hurled them rocks, I'll bet he had these gloves on, because I noticed there wasn't a scratch on his hands. And when he grabbed that knife, he was also wearing the gloves. Then, when he was searching up here, he kept the gloves on. And now he's here again—because I gave him a crazy story that made him think there might be something here he ought to look for right away. And he's got the gloves on again!"

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"So he's still wearing gloves," said Brady. "But what—"

"Those rocks," said Ed, "were a kind of quartz. They would sure leave rock dust and splinters in the gloves. And when Lighter grabbed that knife hard and tight not five minutes later, there'd be rock dust and splinters imbedded in that crinkly knife handle! The rocks over there in Walt's yard, the knife down at Headquarters—and the gloves right here on Lighter's hands!" Britton was gripping Lighter's wrists hard. "There's the tie-up! It's a small thing—but he can't get away from it!"

For a moment the silence was as cutting as the cold.

"Well, if it's like you say, Ed," Buck Brady said then, "he sure couldn't get away from it! Not at all!"

The pink had gone from Lighter's cheeks.

"I tell you this man is insane!" he yelled.

Brady eyed him thoughtfully. "Maybe so," he said. "But we'll all go down to Headquarters. . . ."

The first faint glimmer of dawn was seeping into the night's retreating darkness as Ed Britton left Walt Collins' house an hour later. With him was Lucy. Britton had been telling Lucy how it happened.

"And it checked out that way!" he said exultantly. "Yes, sir. Just like I figured. So now they got that snake Lighter locked up. And if we hurry we'll get to the jail just in time to meet Jim coming out."

"I think you're just wonderful, Ed," Lucy said warmly.

They paused on the curb before crossing the street. The fire siren broke the early morning quiet with a sudden fiendish howl, and Lucy shuddered violently.

Ed Britton chuckled. "Don't let that racket worry you. Didn't you know there's been a blackout? That was just the all-clear!"

"That's right," Lucy said in a subdued voice. "Just the all-clear!"

And as they crossed the street, she put her hand in his.

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MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from Page 13)

mantel, Gloria saw a picture of her strange lover.

Showing it to Mrs. Markson, she said: "Who is this man?"

"Why that was Richard Donberry . . ."

"Was Richard Donberry . . . what do you mean?" asked Gloria.

"Why, Richard met a tragic fate five years ago. Didn't you read about it? He fell into an abandoned pit in the huge forest of his estate. But they found him too late—he had died of starvation."

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John Goadby was a sailing ship captain. Mrs. Goadby for years had sailed with her husband in the South Atlantic.

For thirty years they had sailed together, Bess being a pretty good skipper herself. But one morning as the ship was nearing Cape Horn, John Goadby was stricken. That evening they buried him at sea. His last words had been—"Bess, be careful passing the Horn—the rocks."

The next day a savage storm came up. The boat wasn't far from the dangerous rocks that all the seamen were afraid of. While they trusted Skipper Bess, they wished Skipper John were alive to get them past the dangerous waters.

All hands were on deck. Bess was at the wheel. The wind howled—the spray covered the vessel. Visibility ahead was zero. The first mate stood at the bow looking ahead to warn the skipper of any danger.



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Suddenly the mate's voice came through the wind: "North by northeast—north by northeast . . ."

Bess Goadby steered accordingly. And lucky she did, for the boat seemed to pass through two dangerous reefs as if by a miracle. Had it hit either of them, the vessel would have been wrecked.

The storm soon abated. Bess thanked the first mate. He said nothing, but called the men to his cabin. Then he said to them:

"You heard the skipper thank me for that order. I didn't give it—which one of you did?"

A few minutes later, the first mate spoke to Bess Goadby:

"I have a confession to make. It wasn't I who gave the order that saved us."

"Well," said Bess, "who did? Let me thank him personally."

Then the first mate shook his head. "None of the men did, Skipper Bess—I thought I was crazy until they all told me they had seen the same thing I did. It was Skipper John . . . he was standing behind you . . . I thought I recognized his voice in the wind."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra: Is there any library in the United States that contains all the books ever written on psychic phenomena and also has a good collection of spirit photographs?—*Tom McClary.*

Dear Mr. McClary: Yes—the Psychic Observer Library at Lily Dale, N. Y. Ralph G. Pressing is the director.

Dear Chakra: If a ghost is supposed to be
[Turn page]

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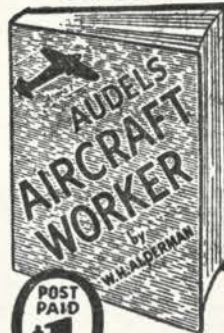
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able to materialize in human form, could that body be destroyed by bullets?—*Helen Beacon.*

Dear Miss Beacon: There is no case on record where a so-called spirit manifestation has ever been examined physiologically. They have been photographed, however and seem to have substance, according to those people who have touched them.

Dear Chakra: Who is supposed to be the outstanding spirit medium of the male sex, as far as reputation among investigators is concerned?—*Mel Powers.*

Dear Mr. Powers: Arthur Ford, New York City. Others are Chester Grady of California, and Fred Decker of Long Island, N. Y.

Dear Chakra: If telepathy were possible, what good could it accomplish other than making people uncomfortable and making snoopers happy?—*Will Gordon.*

Dear Mr. Gordon: The Psychic Center of New York City, advises soldiers and sailors, in case of being lost like Rickenbacker, to concentrate on some loved one back home, willing that person to know the location of the missing soldier. Such an accomplishment would be most constructive.

Dear Chakra: Will you answer me truthfully, Chakra—have you ever seen a ghost?—*Millie Zotov.*

Dear Miss Zotov: The answer is "yes."

—CHAKRA.

THE BEST BARGAIN IN HISTORY

(Concluded from page 79)

fairy tale to some impossible land of the Fountain of Youth. The farmers of Lexington will not be jinns in some old tale like the Arabian Nights. The Declaration of Independence will still be a legal document. Lincoln will not be a strange myth. The Emancipation Proclamation will still be a milestone on the road of history.

Men with earth on their hands will still come in from small farms to vote freely to put a new ruler, sprung from their own furrows, at the head of a state. Working men in overalls will go where they please to build their houses and bridges. Teachers will let their pupils decide what books they will believe in. There will be church spires still on the horizon. There will be libraries with all the books of the past preserved, and none of them will be burnt at the command of slave-masters.

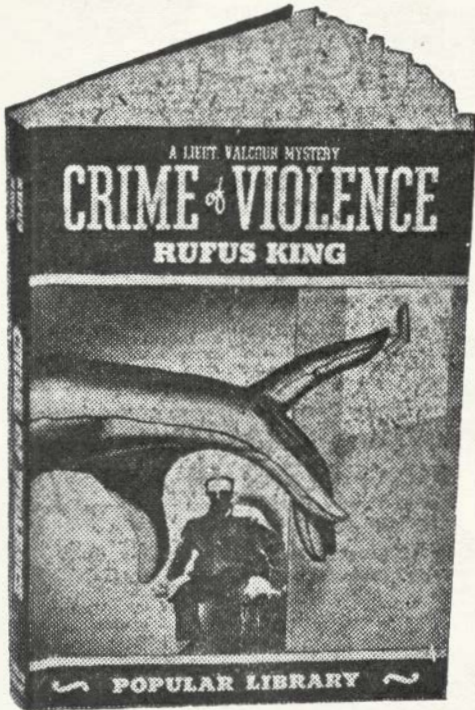
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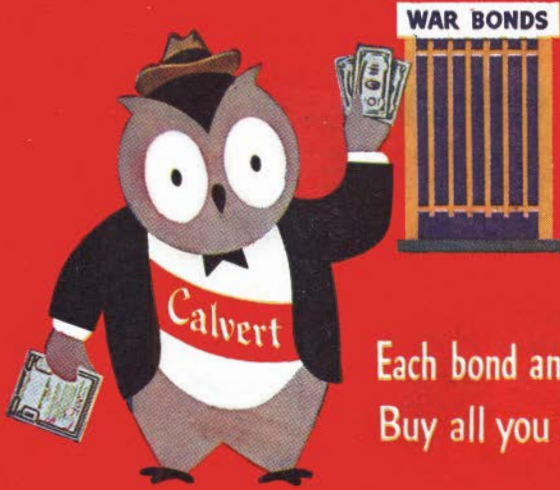
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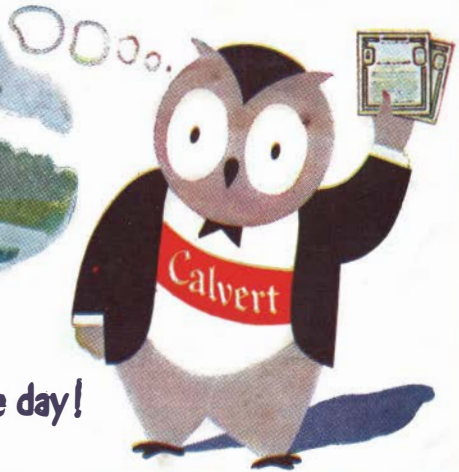
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