

# THRILLING MYSTERY

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BEST  
ACTION  
DETECTIVE  
STORIES

FEATURING  
**FANGS  
OF  
DOOM**

A Complete  
Action Novel  
By E.  
HOFFMANN  
PRICE

**DEATH TO THE  
HIGHEST BIDDER**

A Crime Novelet

By WAYNE ROGERS

**WINGS FOR  
THE DEAD**

A Complete Murder Novelet

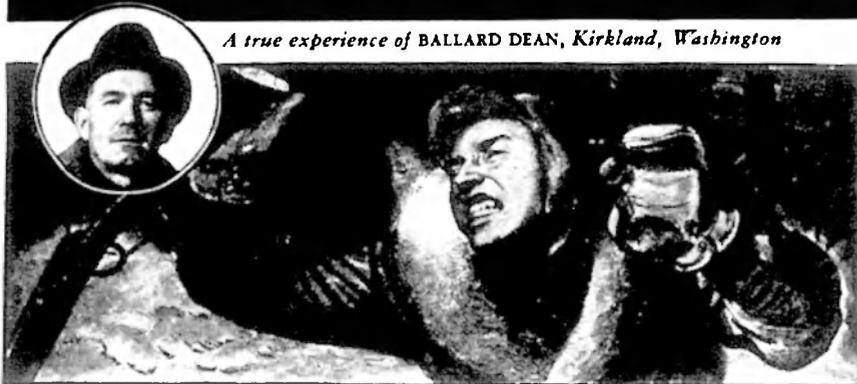
By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION



# "THE JAWS OF DEATH CLAMPED DOWN ON ME!"

A true experience of BALLARD DEAN, Kirkland, Washington



"THE THING sprang out of the earth one bitterly cold evening as I was returning to camp after an all-day deer hunt," writes Mr. Dean. "I suffered excruciating agony, as it bit into my leg. It was a bear trap, illegally set for deer.

"FRANTICALLY, I TRIED TO GET LOOSE as the cold knifed through my clothing. With sinking heart, I found my struggles of no avail. In a few hours, if help could not be summoned, I would freeze to death. Darkness came on as I fought hopelessly with the strong steel jaws.



"THEN I THOUGHT OF MY FLASHLIGHT. There was a chance that other returning hunters might be in the woods. Flashing the bright beam off and on, my efforts were finally rewarded. Thanks to those 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries, two men saw my signal and rescued me from that death trap.

(Signed) Ballard Dean

The word "Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Company, Inc.



**FRESH BATTERIES LAST LONGER... Look for the DATE-LINE**

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation



# Speed Your Way to Success

## by *specialized* Home Study

So you dropped out of school too soon? Well, *cheer up!* Ask any representative group of Executives, Engineers or Educators and most of them will tell you: "You CAN make good through specialized home study... IF you will make the effort and STICK to your course." In fact, you'll find that a number of important men in nearly every locality are former home study students themselves. They KNOW and have PROVED that home study pays.

In 40 years, home study has become an integral part of "the American way" . . . a nationwide educational system especially geared to the needs of wage earners. Today, there are far more home study schools than you perhaps realize—and you may place confidence in the courses of the American School, established over 30 years ago to bring you the advantages of advanced education.

Courses complete in themselves and include basic subjects essential to proper understanding of more advanced portions.

Instruction material and methods simplify and speed up learning.

Tuition fees moderate and fair.

This seal protects you!

Success through Home Training

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- Plumbing and Steam Fitting
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- Accounting and C.P.A.
- Salesmanship

- Retail Merchandising
- Cost Accounting
- Practical Bookkeeping
- Economics of Direct Selling
- Private Secretary
- Diesel Engineering
- Surveying & Topographical Drafting
- Sheet Metal Pattern Drafting
- Electrical Engineering

- Drafting and Design
- Radio and Television
- High School
- Home Economics Courses
- Business Law
- Liberal Arts
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- Shop Management
- Tool Making
- Better Foremanship
- Engine and Boiler Work

Name..... Occupation.....  
 Address..... Age.....  
 City..... State.....

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COMMERCE and Industry are tough taskmasters today—but they are just. The penalties of failure may be heavy—but the rewards of success are rich. If you persist in doing work that anyone else can do—if you carelessly leave yourself open to competition with Machinery that sooner or later may do all the "unthinking" jobs . . . the repetitive tasks—you are slated for final disappointment and bitterness.

To win out, today, you must THINK. You must think ON the job and AWAY from it, and, most important, you must think AHEAD of it. And that takes study.

### Join this "Promotion Parade" of Progress-Minded Men and Women

Of the approximately 2,000,000 men and women enrolled for further education in universities, colleges, institutes of technology and home study institutions, about 37 1/2%—or 750,000—have chosen home study as most practical for their purposes. They want to win Success. You do, too! They have FAITH in themselves. Do you believe in yourself? They have investigated home study—decided that it offers them their way "out and up" . . . out of the low pay, periodically unemployed rank and file . . . up into well paid positions where they enjoy prosperity, security and respect.

Get the facts, yourself. On coupon, check the line of work that MOST interests you . . . mail it PROMPTLY for information and complete details of this offer.

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Without obligation, please send FREE and postpaid, bulletin and details of the Subjects checked.

Thousands Have Made Good through HOME STUDY

• EVERY STORY BRAND-NEW •

# THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XVII, No. 3

November, 1941

Price 10c

*A Complete Crime Mystery Novel*



## FANGS OF DOOM

By E. HOFFMAN PRICE

*Police and Public Are Baffled when a Ghastly Death Stalks through San Francisco's Byways—and the Remarkable Dr. Zeng Tse Lin Takes the Trail of a Grim Chinatown Mystery!* - - - - - 16

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THE TWENTIETH HOLE - - - - - Sam Merwin, Jr. 76

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*Hammerhurst Discovers that a Corpse Has No Use for Money!*

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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

# I JUMPED MY PAY \$35 A WEEK...

*This Free Book Showed Me How* 



A True Story By J. C. V.  
(Name and Address Sent on request)



"I had a low-pay, no future job as a store clerk. I was not satisfied, but read about the opportunities in Radio and how N. R. I. would train me at home for them. I enrolled right away."



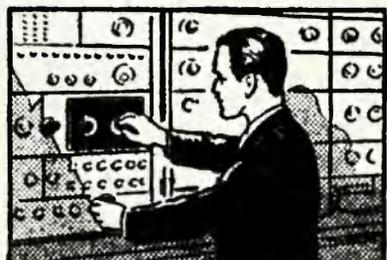
"The Course National Radio Institute gave me was so practical that I was soon ready to make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



"After graduating I got a job as Radio Operator aboard ship, and was able to travel and see many parts of the world with all expenses paid, and a good salary besides."



"Immediately after leaving my ship job, I was made Chief Engineer of a small broadcasting station. Later I held the same job with several other similar stations in the South."



"I'm now Chief Engineer of WDOD, Chattanooga, Tenn. I make \$1,800 a year more than when I started Radio. There are many opportunities for trained Radio Technicians today."

## BE A RADIO TECHNICIAN

### I Will Train You at Home In Spare Time

Many fellows who want better jobs are going to read these words—and do nothing about them. But a few, like J. C. V., who are MEN OF ACTION are going to say "SHOW ME HOW TO BE A SUCCESS IN RADIO!" The rest of my story is for these men. The "do-nothings" can stop here.

### Why Many Radio Technicians Make \$30, \$40, \$50 a Week

Radio is one of the country's busiest industries today. On top of a record demand for Radio sets and equipment for civilian use, the Radio industry is getting millions of dollars in defense orders. The 882 broadcasting stations in the U. S. employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are 50,197,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportuni-

ties to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N. R. I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained.

### Beginners Quickly Learn to Earn \$5, \$10 a Week Extra in Spare Time

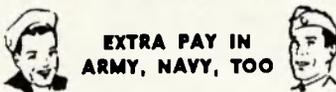
Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a good part-time Radio Technician to make extra money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method

—half working with Radio parts, half studying my lesson texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

### Find Out How I Train You for Good Pay in Radio

Mail the Coupon below. I'll send my 64-page book FREE. It tells about my Course; the types of jobs in the different branches of Radio; shows letters from more than 100 of the men I trained, so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postal.

J. E. SMITH, President,  
Dept. IMO9, National Radio Institute,  
Washington, D. C.



**EXTRA PAY IN  
ARMY, NAVY, TOO**

Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. **IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!**

WANT TO MAKE  
MORE MONEY?  
FIND OUT  
WHAT  
RADIO  
OFFERS



### GOOD FOR *Free* 64-PAGE BOOK

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. IMO9,  
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Send me the FREE 64-page book which helped J. C. V. jump his pay \$35 a week. I want to know about Radio's opportunities. (No salesman will call—write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

# They Never Knew It Was SO EASY To Play

## Thousands Learn Musical Instruments By Amazingly Simple Method.

**No Teacher, No Musical Knowledge  
Required. In a Short Time You  
Start Playing Real Tunes!  
700,000 Now Enrolled**

**T**HINK of the fun YOU are missing! The popularity, friendship, good times! Why? Because you think it's *hard* to learn music. You have an idea that it's a slow, tedious task, with lots of boring drills and exercises.

That's not the twentieth-century way! Surely you've heard the news! How people all over the world have learned to play by a method so simple a child can understand it—so fascinating that it's like playing a game. Imagine! You learn without a teacher—in your spare time at home—at a cost of only a few cents a day! You learn by the famous print-and-picture method—every position, every move before your eyes in big, clear illustrations. You CAN'T go wrong! And best of all, you start playing real tunes almost at once, from the very first lesson.

No needless, old-fashioned "scales" and exercises. No confused, perplexing study. You learn to play by playing. It's thrilling, exciting, inspiring! No wonder hundreds of thousands of people have taken up music this easy way. No wonder enthusiastic letters like those reproduced here pour in from all over the world.

Sound interesting? Well, just name the instrument you'd like to play and we'll prove you CAN! If interested, mail the coupon or write.

**U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
29411 Brunswick Bldg.,  
New York City**



Learned Quickly at Home. I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time. \*H. C. S., Calif.



"That's Gold In Them Thar Hillbilly Songs." Craze for mountain music, "swing" and other popular forms has brought fame and fortune to many who started playing for the fun of it. Thousands have discovered unexpected pleasure and profit in music, thanks to the unique method that makes it amazingly easy to learn.

**Send for FREE Booklet and  
Print and Picture Sample**

See for yourself how this wonderful self-instruction method works. Sit down, in the privacy of your own home, with the interesting illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home." No salesman will call—decide for yourself whether you want to play this easy way. (Instruments supplied at discount when wanted, cash or credit.)



Wouldn't Take \$1,000. "The lessons are so simple," writes \*S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo., "that anyone can understand them. I have learned to play by note in a little more than a month. I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for my course."



Found Accordion Easy. "I've always wanted to play the piano accordion," writes \*H. E. from Canada, "but thought I'd never learn it. Then I read about your lessons. I don't know how to express my satisfaction."



Plays on Radio. I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your Institution for such a wonderful course. \*W. H. S., Alabama.

**U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

**29411 Brunswick Bldg., New York City, N. Y.**

I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument indicated below. Please send me your free booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home" and the free Print & Picture Sample.

Piano Violin Guitar Piano Accordion Plain Accordion Saxophone Cello Hawaiian Guitar	Banjo Mandolin Ukulele Cornet Trumpet Harp Trombone	Flute Piccolo Organ Drums and Traps Modern Elementary Harmony Voice Culture
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Name..... Have You This Instru. ?.....

Address.....

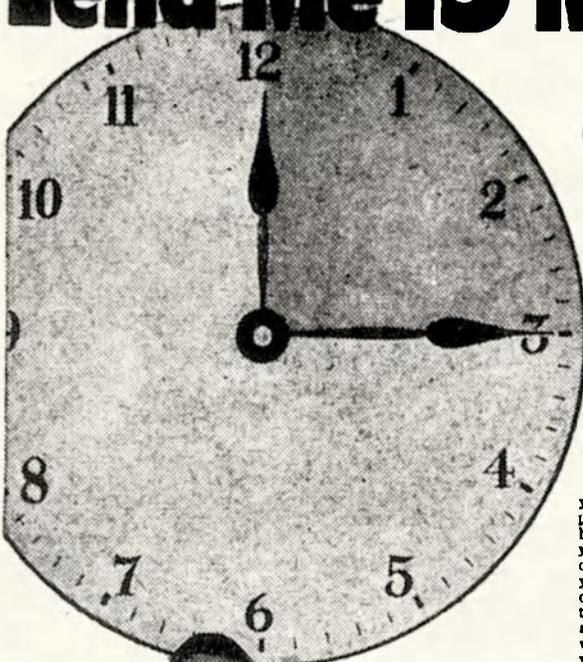
City..... State.....

Check here for Booklet "A" if under 16 years of age.

\*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional models

# Lend Me 15 Minutes A Day

*..and I'll prove  
I can make you  
a NEW MAN*



*Charles Atlas*



Actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

America's Greatest "Builder of Men"

Among all the physical instructors and "conditioners of men" ONLY ONE NAME STANDS OUT. That name is Charles Atlas!

In every part of the country Charles Atlas is recognized as "America's Greatest Builder of Men." Almost two million men have written to him. Thousands upon thousands have put their physical development into his hands!

And now that the call is for men capable of helping America meet and conquer any national emergency, many thousands of others (even those already in their country's Army and Navy) are calling upon Charles Atlas to build the kind of men America vitally needs.

Here's PROOF Right Here!

"Results come so fast by your method that it seems just as if some magician put on the pounds of solid muscle just where you want them."  
—W. L., Missouri

"Feel like a million dollars and have a 44" normal chest -A 2" GAIN IN 4 DAYS"  
—L. A. S., Illinois

"My doctor thinks your course is fine. In 15 days have put two inches on my chest and 3/4 inch on my neck."  
—B. L., Oregon

"My muscles are bulging out and I feel like a new man. My chest measures 38 in., an increase of 5 in., and my neck increased 2 in."  
—G. M., Ohio

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them.

I don't care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double quick time! 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 cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that there's not 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!

## I Was a 97-lb. Weakling

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-pound weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all corners! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of

other men in only 15 minutes a day? The answer is "Dynamic Tension," the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

## What 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you need the help I can give you—the help that has already worked such wonders for other fellows, everywhere?

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home, I'm ready to prove that "Dynamic Tension" can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened you inside, I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

## FREE THIS FAMOUS BOOK THAT TELLS YOU JUST HOW TO GET A BODY THAT MEN RESPECT AND WOMEN ADMIRE

Almost two million men have sent for and read my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It tells you exactly what "Dynamic Tension" can do. And it's packed with pictures that SHOW you what it does. Results it has produced for other men. RESULTS I want to prove it can get for YOU! If you are satisfied to take a back seat and be pushed around by other fellows week-in, week-out, you don't want this book. But if you want to learn how you can actually become a NEW MAN, right in the privacy of your own home and in only 15 minutes a day, then man!—get this coupon into the mail to me as fast as your legs can get to the letterbox! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-L, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

## MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 77-L,  
115 East 23rd St., New York City

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

Name .....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State .....



# A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE  
A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly  
"Sent Out" by Business Men  
Now Done by Themselves  
at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

New member changes in taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention so do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

Not a "Gadget"—  
Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business men as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by leaders of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of having the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings  
You Can Show

You will save an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for \$11 which formerly could have cost them over \$200. A building supply corporation pays our man \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

## EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Profits Typical of  
the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$3.83 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning an even larger percentage.

This Business Has  
Nothing to Do With  
House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need of pressing on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail so get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—that is a necessity but does not have any price ceiling to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that pays more on every individual sale than many men make in a week and is available in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, go to reach with us at once for the rights to your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it comes out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, see the coupon below—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. Right

P. E. ARMSTRONG, President  
Dept. 4047M, Mobile, Ala.

**RUSH FOR EXCLUSIVE  
TERRITORY PROPOSITION**

P. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4047M, Mobile, Ala.  
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

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Street or Route.....  
Box No.....  
City.....  
State.....

# Why Trained Accountants Command

[ —and how ambitious men are qualifying  
by the La Salle Problem Method ]

# High Salaries

**G**ET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes and interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures where-with he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.

## Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of

LaSalle accountancy students.\* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at \$30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income several times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning \$200 a month—moved up quickly to \$3000, to \$5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted around \$10,000 a year.

## And What It Means to You

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. You will be given whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping

you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you.

If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home-study training—you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient payment plan.

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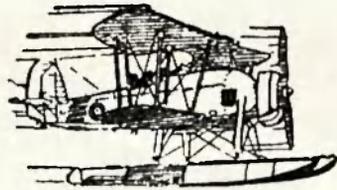
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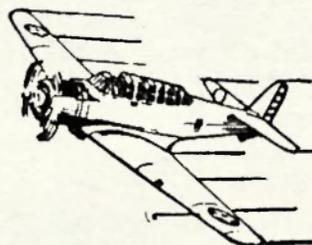
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## CHAPTER I

### *The Mysterious Dr. Zeng*

**D**OCTOR Zeng Tse Lin looked as if he had nowhere to go, with all night to get there; yet he was actually in a hurry, and most of San Francisco's Chinatown seemed to know why.

"Doctor Zeng's looking for that man, Chow, again," shop keepers

whispered. "Why doesn't he fire the one-legged fool?"

But no matter how many times his servant frittered away afternoon and evening sitting through a second and third showing of a western serial at the New China Theater, Doctor Zeng always forgave Lai Hu Chow. For the old reprobate was the one living link that connected Zeng with the mysteriously murdered parents he hoped some day to avenge.

**WARNING!** The Threefold Sign of Heaven and Earth should not be made in the presence of persons who might be members of a Chinese secret society; embarrassing and dangerous complications could result. You are warned against using, even in the modified form here presented, the passwords of the SOCIETY OF THE WHITE LOTUS, an organization which is also known as the TRIAD SOCIETY, the SOCIETY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, and the HUNG SOCIETY.



A silken scarf cut off her protests. One man held her about the ankles, another held her wrists (Chap. III)

Zeng, scarcely breaking his long stride, managed to avoid colliding with two slant-eyed girls who darted out of a traffic jam around the corner of the Chinatown telephone exchange.

Their sleek hair was marcelled; their gay chatter had not a trace of Chinese inflection. These young ladies were the most modern of modern. They affected a condescending contempt.

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# The Remarkable Dr. Zeng Tse Lin Takes

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for things Chinese, yet they paused for a long look at the tall young man who was so freakish as to wear a pork pie cap, quilted silk jacket, long gray tunic, and felt-soled shoes.

"Doctor Zeng's awfully handsome, even if he is old-fashioned," said the first.

The other sighed. "I bet he'd look swell in a double-breasted pin stripe."

The two telephone girls would have been amazed could they have known that lovely occidental Anne Carter was saying the same thing to her father, Captain Brian Carter, recently retired from the San Francisco police force. It was because of Anne and her father that Doctor Zeng was hurrying out in search of his peg-legged servant. Guests for dinner, and no food — not even the servant!

There were two movie houses in Chinatown, which gave Doctor Zeng's deductive powers a severe test. Chow had seen both the day before. Now, after having spent the early afternoon honing his favorite hatchet to a razor edge, he was gone. And Zeng was seeking him.

**A**N old man who sold candied kumquats and li-chi nuts at a corner stand clasped both hands, bowed, and spoke. "I hope you have eaten, Doctor Zeng."

Zeng Tse Lin had no time for ceremony, but he made a courtly bow, and answered. "May your shadow increase, Honorable Hong. I trust your pious and learned father is well?"

In spite of being a full-blooded white American, Doctor Zeng Tse Lin — as he was known in Chinatown — was the most ceremonious person in the entire Chinese colony of San Francisco's some thirty thousand inhabitants. At times, however, his patience was sadly tried.

Finally the Honorable Hong said, "If I am not mistaken, your servant is waiting for you at the New Shanghai Theater. He passed by early this afternoon with a basket of groceries, a bottle of *ng ka pay*, and a very fierce expression."

Zeng hurried on, turning down the steep slope toward the theater. He smiled whimsically as he murmured to himself, "There are tigers in the western mountains and there are tigers in the eastern mountains. When Chow is in the Gobi, he steals too many horses. When he is in town, he steals too many hours for the movies."

Zeng just reached the theater in time to hear a hoarse voice roaring in Mongolian. Then he caught the squeal and chatter of the delighted Chinese crowd that was gathering. A basket erupted out of the tangle and a roast duck skated over the cobblestones, then sharks fins, and seaweed, and chunks of ginger root.

Two burly cops now ploughed into view. They had blue uniforms and red faces; and their hands were full. Four men would have been comfortably busy giving Lai Hu Chow the bum's rush. The huge Mongol belled and suddenly went limp, sagging to the tiles. That threw the cops off balance, physically and mentally. They thought Chow had passed out. "Sure, and how do we carry this big ox?" one grunted. "Clancy, do yez put in a riot call!"

The supposedly helpless Mongol seemed to explode. His wooden leg booted the relaxing Clancy to the curbing. As he bounded upright, the other cop's truncheon cracked down. The blow was wasted on Chow's bullet head; it did not break his even rhythm. He tripped the cop, made an amazing leap to the middle of the street, and sprinted along the slippery cobblestones.

Clancy recovered enough to draw his service .38. "Halt!" he yelled. "Stop or —"

Then he lowered the weapon. The street was packed with cackling spectators, and the Mongol maniac was ducking out of sight beyond a passing truck. "What is the trouble, Officer?" Doctor Zeng asked.

And then the other cop struggled erect, shouting, "Where's the murdering devil?"

# the Trail of a Grim Chinatown Mystery!

The two angry policemen charged up the hill, blowing their whistles. "What did the big man do?" Zeng asked a chestnut peddler.

"He was throwing knives and hatchets at the screen. We thought this was fun until the police came to arrest him. That was more amusing."

As far as Chinatown knew, Doctor Zeng was a wealthy merchant from Peiping. Few had entered the living quarters on the second floor of the building, and none but Captain Brian Carter and a handful of federal agents had ever seen the laboratory on the top floor.



No doubt that Chow had been disappointed when his first hurled weapon failed to make the moving target stop; but Zeng was not sure that this had been merely a test of skill at throwing knives and hatchets. He hurried back to Grant Avenue, toward the big art store whose gilded sign read, ALMOND BLOSSOM HALL OF FRATERNAL ASSOCIATION.

Doctor Zeng stepped down the alley that separated the ALMOND BLOSSOM HALL from the adjoining WILLOW GARDEN OF MUTUAL PROFIT. Darkness had scarcely hidden him when there was a soft hissing. A cloud of vapor surrounded him. Then came a metallic rustling, and seemingly solid brick swung back on silent hinges.

When the vapors thinned, Doctor Zeng was in one of his secret elevators. If anyone had been spying no eye could have penetrated the opaque fumes or noted which bay of the wall had opened to admit him.

**I**N the second floor, the elevator silently stopped. The grilled door folded back so noiselessly that the blond girl who paced up and down the antique palace carpet did not realize the owner of the house had returned.

Anne Carter's lovely face was tense as she twisted a handkerchief.

Zeng stepped silently from behind the embroidered screen that masked the elevator. As he crossed the persimmon red and tawny buff of the rug border, he spoke pleasantly.

"Good evening, Anne. Will you accept my apologies without boring details? I am sorry."

The girl started. "Oh, Lin! How on earth did you —" Then she ran toward him, and caught both his arms. "I'm so sorry, but we can't dine with you, Lin. You'd barely left here when the Police Commissioner phoned. Dad had to leave right away."

Zeng Tse Lin's bland face became grave. "The Commissioner asked your father to break a dinner engagement?" He edged her toward a bench of teak inlaid with ivory. "Sit down, please. I was hunting that worthless servant, Chow. What has happened?"

"It was hardly ten minutes ago," she said breathlessly. "I couldn't help overhearing because you'd left one of your amplifiers cut in. I got the message when Dad answered the ring in your smoking room. Prince Yuan has been horribly murdered. Some maniac — bit him to death — tore his throat out — with human teeth! The marks are unmistakable."

"Prince Yuan of Mongolia? The one staying at the Saint Francis?"

"Yes, but it happened at Forest Baker's house. It is all so uncanny that the Commissioner wants Dad to handle it, with your help. And I'm afraid of the whole thing, Lin. They were speaking of looting Genghis Khan's grave in central Asia, just before this happened. It's as if some curse, some demon — oh, of course,

it's silly, but I hate to think of Dad mixing up in such an outrageous thing! Why can't they let him alone, after thirty years of service? Why can't younger men —"

"No younger man could equal your father, my dear," Zeng Tse Lin gravely answered, his black eyes resting on her lovely face with an inscrutable expression. "He knows the Chinese colony, and this sounds like a Chinese crime, I am sorry to say. But perhaps I can help him."

"That would be just as bad! I mean—you're a doctor, not a detective!"

Zeng Tse Lin smiled faintly as he realized that she was concerned about his safety. In spite of her belief that he was Chinese and a person to be regarded as a scholar and not as a man.

He turned to help Anne with her mink coat. The lustrous fur had scarcely settled about her shapely shoulders when Lai Hu Chow *clump-clump-clumped* from the passageway that opened out of the smoking room. He was breathless, his pie-round face battered and his hands bleeding.

"Honorable Master," he said woe-fully, "two foreign devils beat me with clubs and guns. I lost the stuffed duck and the shark fins and the seaweed and the preserved oranges—"

"As I saw it, you beat and kicked the two foreign devils until they were half dead, and then ran before they could shoot you down," Doctor Zeng interrupted. "What manner of thing is that, throwing knives and hatchets in a movie theater?"

**C**HOW shifted his weight to his pegleg, grinding it well into the inlaid hardwood of the floor. He grinned amiably now that he realized that Doctor Zeng knew the truth.

"Every time I see the big bearded man shooting at the tall young man who rides the white horse, I do not like it. So this time, I threw knives at the ghost-pictures, each time I hit the dark bearded man's shadow, he will feel ghost knives in that same spot. The foreign devils tried to stop me, so I kicked them both in the stomach. How much will it cost to have a man beaten or jailed in my

place? Please take the amount out of my pay, Exalted Master."

Anne, who conducted an English class in Chinatown, understood enough of Chow's dialect to follow. "Does he actually believe those movie stories are true?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dr. Zeng. "And he does not realize that he can't buy a substitute to serve his jail sentences." He turned to Chow: "You have already drawn eleven years' pay in advance to pay fines for brawling, for gambling debts, and for movie tickets. So for the next thirty days, you will not leave the house."

"But the shopping, pious and learned Doctor?"

"I will do that with my own hands."

Chow knelt and knocked his forehead on the floor. "That will disgrace me!" he groaned. "I will lose face. I will be a man of no account."

Zeng considered for a moment. "Well, I'll let one of the clerks do the shopping. But you stay away from movies till further orders, or I'll not only do my own shopping, but I'll cook the stuff myself."

The human mountain was still kneeling in remorse when Anne and Zeng stepped to the screened doorway which led to the exit.

"You have the most unusual methods of discipline, Lin," the girl said.

Doctor Zeng smiled. "Two policemen with clubs hardly made an impression on him, you know. Possibly my way has its good points. But tell me more about Prince Yuan."

"There's nothing more I can add, except that a Russian woman's mixed up in it—Nadja Karakhov—and that every person in the house has a perfect alibi."

"And, doubtless, perfect teeth!"

The elevator made an air-cushioned stop at the ground floor, and Doctor Zeng helped Anne into the long, vermillion sedan waiting there in the underground garage. As the hundred and sixty horsepower engine rumbled, then subsided to a sleepy whisper, he pressed the horn button.

At the double-toned blast, the garage door opened, and Dr. Zeng drove the rakish attractive car up the grade and into the swirling mists.

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## CHAPTER II

### *The Uighur Scroll*

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FIFTEEN minutes later Doctor Zeng was in Forest Baker's somber library where the body of Prince Yuan was sprawled in a leather upholstered chair. The dead man was as bulky as Chow, though years younger than Zeng's Mongol servant. His heavy throat was a gory cavern from whence blood had drenched his white shirt and the satin lapels of the dinner coat he had exchanged for the jacket and felt boots of his native country.

His broad, flat face was brought into stark relief by the glow of the hearth fire. His big mouth sagged and his little eyes stared as if he still wondered what had come to tear out his throat. Captain Carter stepped from the group of plainclothes men, photographers and assistant coroners, who were eying Doctor Zeng curiously.

"Look at his hands," he said. "Look at that brandy snifter on the end table. If he'd made any move at all to defend himself, something would have been disturbed."

Captain Carter's close-cropped moustache bristled and his ruddy face tightened into challenging angles as he gestured, his squarish hands turned palms up. He added, "This is a devil of a fix. It's impossible, and still it's up to us to explain it!"

The baffled cops were not discussing business. One muttered to his neighbor, "Where do they get all these big Chinks? If it weren't for his eyes and that dead pan, I wouldn't believe Doctor Zeng was one at all!"

Zeng's ears were far sharper than anyone realized. He turned blandly. "Lectures on anthroplogy are out of place here, gentlemen, but I might explain. Many of my countrymen are taller than I am, many of them have noses as prominent as yours or mine. China, like these United States, has been a melting pot. In the heart of Asia there are Mongolian men with —"

He pointed to the Captain of Inspectors. "Permit the personal touch, sir. Some have hair as red and eyes as gray as yours."

The Inspector looked confused. "Then what the blazes *is* a Chinaman?" he growled.

"Inspector, what the blazes *is* an American? What is the standard size, color, facial expression, or weight?"

Zeng's answers which implied that he was Chinese were deliberate. Basing them on fact and wide knowledge, long ago he had decided that Linwood Lawton, the son of Doctor and Mrs. Hartford Lawton, would become a Chinese scholar.

A bit of simple plastic surgery had given his eyes just enough slant to give his face a Mongolian expression. His cheekbones, a shade on the prominent side, helped the imposture, and the cunning use of a bleach proof dye he had invented while studying chemistry enabled him to put on the finishing touch.

The big query was, would he be equally convincing in China when he went far into the interior to hunt down the criminals who had murdered his father and mother?

All this flashed again through his mind as he stood there calmly explaining to the police that he was Chinese in spite of his size. Then he turned again to the corpse and eyed the savage laceration of the carotid artery. Blood had spurted from it, and was now drying black on the cream-colored hearth tiles and on Yuan's outthrust shoes.

**D**OCTOR ZENG pointed at the inside pocket of the dinner jacket, indicating the agate knob which tipped the end of a hardwood rod about which was rolled a length of silk damask.

"As we agree that human teeth did managle Prince Yuan," he said, "let us consider this ancient manuscript in his pocket. Inspector, have you made your fingerprint routine? May I touch it?"

"Help yourself, Doctor. Say, what kind are you, an M.D. or a Ph.D.?"

"Both. Also a Doctor of Science," was the amazing answer as Zeng

plucked the roll of silk damask from the dead man's pocket and unwound it. As he read, one eyebrow slowly rose in an ironic arch. "This Uighur manuscript has something to do with treasure, I understand?"

"Yes, and a crazy yarn, too!" Captain Carter supplied. "Genghis Khan's armor, his sword, the horse-tail standard he carried in battle—sacred relics, you might say, plus a few wagonloads of treasure his officers buried with him. But it seems no one could read the manuscript."

Anne came a little nearer. "I am sure Doctor Zeng can read it!"

"I knew many of the Uighur people of Turfan," Zeng said, evasively. Then, to Anne's father, "Captain Carter, I would like to speak to Forest Baker, and to Nadja Karakhov. They told you about the treasure, did they not?"

"They did. They're upstairs in Baker's study."

Carter led the way to the second floor. The coroner's assistants were impatient, but until further orders they had to wait for the corpse. Doctor Zeng was making the most of his Chinese deliberation. Instead of following Captain Carter at once, he joined Anne, and paused for a moment to inspect the rows of leather-bound books, the tall bronze floor lamps, the jade bowls, and the life-sized porcelain Fu dogs. Half-hidden by gilt-encrusted draperies was an old camphor chest, ornately carved; but unlike most of its kind, it had no brass lock and lock plate, nor any metal binding.

"Professor Baker seems to appreciate Chinese art," Zeng murmured.

Anne, impatient as the others, took his arm and demanded, "What are you holding out, Lin? In spite of that horrible sight, you've been smiling to yourself."

"I am sure no one noticed unseemly mirth."

"I did! What does that manuscript say? That started it."

Zeng shook his head. "Better to hear first what they say about the manuscript. Kindly wait below."

He gently disengaged his arm. Leaving her in the vestibule, he went

up the stairs, stately in his sleek silken tunic. Captain Carter, pacing and chewing his cigar, was waiting at the door of Baker's study.

"They're a pair of polished liars, Zeng," he whispered. "Better interview them separately. Which will you meet first?"

"By choice, the lovely Slavic lady. But you are unjust, assuming them to be pervaricators. Let me see them together."

Carter barely suppressed a snort; he was annoyed at this upset of a basic principle, that of separating witnesses so that neither could influence the other. But Carter tapped, and a man with a scholarly voice invited them in.

Zeng paused at the threshold, clasped his two hands, and bowed ceremoniously as Captain Carter presented him to Professor Baker and Nadja Karakhov.

"How is your health?" he began. "I trust that your business prospers? And your parents, they are well, I hope?"

Captain Carter's impatience faded when he saw how that formal, old time Chinese litany was confusing the two witnesses, for they had not been prepared for such an approach. But of the two, Nadja Karakhov was the first to meet Zeng on his own ground.

"I hope that your parents are in good health," she countered in that soft, Slavic purr which made her English just a little hard to follow.

**N**ADJA'S black hair was drawn severely back and gathered in a gleaming knot at the nape of her neck. Her gray green eyes had a faint slant, and like Zeng's, her cheek bones were prominent. She was a pale-skinned, lovely woman, with a face angular enough for strength, yet with features sufficiently softened to be wholly feminine. She wore a black gown, snug fitting enough to accentuate her substantial Slavic frame, and for all the warmth of the room, she had a short silver fox wrap about her. One hand held it snug, while the other gestured.

"We were sitting here, Professor Baker and I, when it happened," Nad-

ja answered, once the ceremonial touch was over. She indicated Baker, whose thin face was as expressionless as a totem pole, and not a great deal more amiable. "Prince Yuan had become drunk and a little stupid, so we left him in the library."

"To swill more brandy!" Baker grimaced. "The man fairly drained the decanter after dinner. In spite of cocktails and wine."

"That was old and fragrant brandy," Zeng said. "Very costly."

Baker sat up, pulled his dinner jacket into shape. "It's not that! We'd met to discuss business, and he became swinishly drunk!"

Zeng sighed. "Mongols love hard drink. A racial failing, I might say. It is sad, very sad, that you humored him. But where did Prince Yuan fit into this? I was wondering about that Uighur scroll in his pocket."

"That's a long story. One of Yuan's ancestors was in the burial party of Genghis Khan. On their return, they were to have been ambushed and massacred by the dead Khan's highest officers, so that the site of the grave would remain hidden forever. But Prince Yuan's ancestor had fortunate suspicions, so he slipped from the cavalcade, and thus was the only survivor. He wrote an account of all this, and of his escape. And, a few months ago, Prince Yuan came from Mongolia with the long hidden document."

"Why did he bring it to you?" inquired Zeng keenly.

"Because of my experience in Central Asiatic archeological expeditions," Baker answered. "And because he can't read Uighur. Also, I was going to finance the expedition."

"You never saw the manuscript until tonight?"

"No. Yuan trusted no one. He could not translate it himself. Like many of his kind, he can barely read his own dialect, much less Uighur. Only tradition and nothing else gave him an idea of its actual significance."

Zeng turned to Nadja. "And you, Miss Karakhov? Are you a partner?"

**S**HE shook her sleek head and sighed.

"No. I knew Prince Yuan in Mon-

golia. He helped my father years ago when he fled from the Bolsheviki. So when I heard he was in San Francisco, I went to pay my respects, and he invited me to come with him tonight."

This cleared up a few details that Anne had not got when her father had been phoned at Doctor Zeng's quarters. Everything seemed logical, and the two survivors of the trio were each other's alibi. The servant who had served the dinner had left perhaps an hour before the murder.

"We were smoking and drinking a few B-and-Bs," Nadja said, pointing to the cigarette butts in the tray—her own, paper-tipped and rouge-smudged; Baker's, cork-tipped, half-smoked, and ground out.

"Prince Yuan became surly, and refused to surrender the manuscript for discussion, and you had to leave him there?" Zeng summed up.

"Yes. Later, when I went down to persuade him into a happier mood—" Baker gestured. "I found him, as you saw. It was some moments before I could compose myself enough to summon the police."

Zeng nodded sympathetically. "Even shocked as you were, you knew that human teeth had bitten him to death?"

"Eh?" Baker started. "Damn it, could any wild animal have entered the house? Every door was closed."

"I suggested that human teeth had bitten Prince Yuan," Nadja interposed. "We Slavs are superstitious, perhaps, but there was a strong magic about Genghis Khan, and his grave would be protected by a curse. I didn't like this venture, though it was no affair of mine."

Doctor Zeng rose, and included Captain Carter in his announcement.

"I do not see how any Asiatic wizard's spell should strike, for there is nothing in that scroll which concerns Genghis Khan. It is a collection of drinking songs, written by a Uighur poet and dedicated to an Emperor who lived a thousand years before Genghis Khan was born! Now let us have the truth."

There was a moment of silence, then a choking sound. Baker bounded to the door.

"You're crazy!" he shouted, and ran, cursing furiously, toward the stairway.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *The White Lotus*

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**D**OCTOR ZENG followed Captain Carter as he raced down the stairs.

Baker was shouting in a cracked voice.

"It's that damned Rayne! He's behind all this!"

Once in the library, Baker seized the manuscript. "The same agate knobs, carved in a lion head." He adjusted his glasses. "Good Lord! You're quite right. Someone did palm this substitute. Yuan would never have known the difference."

"Someone? You mentioned a Mr. Rayne."

Baker flung the scroll into the hearth corner. "A tricky scoundrel! A scholar, but a disgrace to his profession. He was guilty of some hoax in exploration, and resigned from the university faculty some years ago. But he's always had Genghis Khan's tomb on the brain."

"And now you think he committed this murder," Doctor Zeng asked, "and substituted a Uighur manuscript in an attempt to conceal that robbery was the motive?"

Baker shrugged. "I don't know what to say, except that many think the poor chap is a little mad."

"I think we should get Miss Karakhov's ideas," Carter suggested.

"Please do," Zeng answered. "Now, Mr. Baker, where does Mr. Rayne live?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know. We've never been any too cordial, mainly because our field work at one time conflicted. Since his resignation, he's called on me twice regarding Genghis Khan's grave, and suggested that we bury our differences and pool our resources."

The coroner's assistants carried Prince Yuan's body to the waiting ambulance. The Uighur scroll was in-

cluded among the exhibits, and Doctor Zeng was requested to appear at the inquest to testify, officially, as to the nature of the document. This routine was interrupted by the hasty return of Captain Carter.

"Harris," he said to the inspector, "I can't find that Karakhov woman! Did she by any chance come down the backstairs?"

Nadja Karakhov had left the house; that soon became clear. Baker's outburst had given her the opportunity to get away unnoticed.

"But why?" Carter demanded. "She wasn't under suspicion. Inspector, have men watch her apartment."

"Please do not disturb her," Zeng requested. "Let me handle this. Her address is on your records, and she would not be silly enough to try to leave town."

"Then what in hell was the idea?" the inspector growled.

"That," Doctor Zeng answered, "remains to be seen."

He bowed to each member of the group, and then went to where Anne had withdrawn to an alcove in the far angle of the somber room. "I am sorry that I shall not be able to drive you home."

"Lin," she said anxiously, "you mustn't try to handle this yourself. That Mongol giant was caught off guard by some horrible maniac, someone he knew, but whose madness he did not have any reason to suspect."

"You mean Baker, or Miss Karakhov?"

"Oh, I don't know! But do be careful."

Doctor Zeng's vermilion sedan swooped out of Saint Francis Wood, and up over Twin Peaks. For a moment, San Francisco was spread out beneath him, long avenues of neon that winked through low-lying mists. The Bay Bridge reached across the water, its vast spans outlined in sodium lights.

He toiled the powerful car over the hump, and down the roller-coaster grades which led to the long curve of the Embarcadero. Presently, he was in a confusion of blind streets.

**H**E parked and snapped off his lights. There was a moment's pause, and when he emerged he was no longer in his conspicuous gray robes. Instead, he wore a black tunic which he had taken from the car's glove compartment. Darting up the flight of steps that made the narrow street passable for pedestrians, he moved with weasel swiftness to the heart of the Telegraph Hill district.

Old frame houses clung to the steep hillsides. Music came from a café, and there was shrill laughter from one of the many studios of San Francisco's Latin Quarter where squalor and gaiety and luxury were strangely jumbled. Finding an address in this section at night would have taken the average person hours, and for all Zeng's knowledge of every part of the city, he lost valuable moments.

Finally he was at a narrow door which seemed to open into the basement level of a cluster of rickety buildings. He fingered the latch, and

[Turn page]



Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

stepped into a narrow passageway. After thirty feet of darkness he emerged in a small courtyard. In the gloom he could just distinguish stairways which led to balconies overhanging the rubbish-littered back area. Above him, unless he had entirely miscalculated, was Nadja's back door.

In the darkness, he oriented himself. Then he stealthily crept up the swaying stairs which were guarded by a slender railing of gaspipe.

As he ascended, he noted the odors of stale cookery, of sour wine and spaghetti. Then he caught the faint smell of joss sticks; someone who had not long since left a Chinese temple was lurking in this crazy tangle of balconies.

At the end of the flimsily railed back porch Zeng heard a hinge creak, a vague stirring, and then a woman's startled outcry.

"What do you want?" she demanded in Russian.

There was no answer, and no repetition of the question—only a choking sound, the scrape of a chair, a muffled gasp. A man exclaimed in Chinese, "Watch out!"

Glass shattered. A Man cursed. There was a moan, and a thump that shook the rickety floor.

All this happened during the moment it took Doctor Zeng to bound to the end of the porch and a screen door there outlined by a light within. His felt-soled shoes made no sound, and he was across the threshold before the four men could turn from their captive.

They were dressed in dark suits, their faces masked. Two of them still struggled with Nadja, who for all that solid thump on the floor, had not quit fighting. A silken scarf had cut off her protests, and its folds were now looped about her throat, choking her. One had her about the ankles, and another held her wrists.

"Hurry, tie her!" the leader commanded.

The room was well furnished, which was not surprising in that unpredictable quarter. Much of the light came from a heap of letters which blazed on the hearth.

The leader turned as Zeng bounded

into the room and whipped out a straight-bladed knife. The gesture and the flight of steel were little slower than the drawing and firing of a pistol, but Zeng had not barged blindly into an encounter. He had landed poised on both feet, quick eye and quick muscle functioning at once. He twisted, and the knife barely grazed his black tunic. Scarcely checking his advance, he snatched a decanter from an end table, and hurled it.

**T**HE heavy missile splattered to fragments against the Chinaman's jaw, knocking him flat. Too certain of impaling the new arrival, the knife thrower had been caught prettily. But the others, having Nadja throttled into semi-consciousness, were now on their feet, and drawing blades.

Zeng sidestepped, caught the wrist of the man nearest him, and twisted. The fellow dropped his knife, yelling with pain from the savage wrench that crippled his wrist. Then Zeng made another dizzying shift, using his disabled opponent as a shield against the other two.

They hesitated, then they separated to attack him from both sides at once. That was what Zeng's maneuver had intended to accomplish. Once again, he was a move ahead. He catapulted his captive crosswise, knocking the two off balance. Working together, they could easily have overpowered Doctor Zeng, but they failed because he had anticipated their reactions to each feint he made.

The knife hurler staggered up, brushing the blood and glass from his forehead, and closed in. Zeng faced the charge, and learned that the leader was more dangerous empty-handed than when armed. The fellow had a deadly collection of wrestling tricks, and for all Zeng's advantage in height and weight, he had his hands full.

For a moment they grappled, vainly shifting from one hold to the next, each testing the other's endurance to the limit, each trying to disable the other. Neither could gain, and the three who had been knocked into a corner during Zeng's first victorious rush were gradually recovering from

the shock of crashing against furniture and walls.

Nadja was recovering enough to claw the silk scarf from her throat and mouth. Zeng heard her half-muffled outcry. Breathless himself, he panted, "Grab that knife!"

He spoke in Russian, hoping that Nadja would gain an instant for self-defense. He needed only a split-second's advantage to settle his wiry enemy as the man was weakening from savage punishment.

Then Zeng and his adversary both lost. They lurched over the threshold and against the fragile railing of the balcony. The piping tore from its anchorage. Still grappling, the two crashed to the sloping roof of a low shed.

Above, Nadja screamed. A pistol fired, furniture scraped and thumped, and a door slammed. Zeng and his opponent rolled down to the paving. The shock stunned Zeng, but it was worse for the tough little wrestler. He shuddered, twitched, and lay still, his head lolling at a grotesque angle. His neck was broken; and all Zeng's efforts to take a prisoner for questioning had been wasted.

There was not much chance that anyone would call the police. In this quarter people minded their own business. Recovering from the shock, Zeng went up the stairs as fast as he could. Nadja came running from the front. She had a six-millimeter automatic, which she lowered as she recognized him.

"Where are they?" Zeng demanded.

"I did better than pick up the knife," she said, "and they ran. Please sit down, Doctor Zeng."

The letters in the hearth had not only been consumed, but the charred paper had been stirred up beyond reconstruction. Then he noted one envelope, crumpled and browned, which must have been blown from the blaze by a draught. Zeng picked it up.

"Pardon me," he asked, "but were all those letters from Hubert Rayne?"

"So you did come to spy on me?"

"Hubert Rayne," Zeng blandly went on, "is Forest Baker's rival. He seems to have been carrying on a confidential correspondence with you, yet you

continue to enjoy Mr. Baker's confidence. In view of tonight's peculiar murder, explanations are in order, Miss Karaknov."

"Indeed!" Mockery and defiance were mingled. "Please continue."

Zeng pointed gravely to an overturned chair. "See that square of red silk, those brass coins—and that one blossom of white lotus?"

"My visitors probably dropped those things while you were knocking their heads together."

"That is my impression," agreed Dr. Zeng dryly. "Those visitors were members of the White Lotus, the *Society of Heaven and Earth*. Their presence tonight tells me that you do not have too long to live."

"What do you mean?" The Russian woman was badly startled.

"I will explain this to you, if you are kind enough to make some things clear to me. Such as this friendliness with one Hubert Rayne—and your haste to destroy evidence of it."

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Opium Smoker*

**I**N grappling with Nadja's assailants, Doctor Zeng had unexpectedly won an advantage more useful than anything he could have gained from the mere questioning of a prisoner. He settled down to making the most of it.

This square of silk is a certificate of membership in the White Lotus Society," he said. "You read Chinese?"

She nodded, and he went on, indicating characters with his fingertips.

"Overthrow Tsing and restore Ming. And the Four Excellent Ones, Han Phang, Han Fook, Chang Tien, and Chang Kwok, Guardians of the Gates."

"I don't know why they came after me." Nadja was deeply troubled.

"To me it is quite clear," Doctor Zeng said. "The White Lotus ordered the death of Prince Yuan. Next they sought you. Undoubtedly there will be others."

She leaned forward to lay a trembling hand on his sleeve. "You know? Is that why you came to my apartment?"

"You have not told me about yourself and Hubert Rayne, the man Forest Baker accused of stealing the Uighur manuscript," Dr. Zeng countered.

"Had someone really palmed off a substitute on Prince Yuan? Or were you just bluffing?" the woman pursued. "You Chinese are wily."

"Baker read it after I calmed him down," Zeng answered. "How did you leave, and why?"

"Baker's hysterical outburst distracted the police," Nadja answered. "It was easy for me to leave. I followed a sudden impulse."

Zeng shrugged meaningly. "An impulse, but a rational one. When Baker accused Hubert Rayne, you left because you wanted to destroy every trace of correspondence between you and Baker's rival."

She eyed him for a moment, then slowly nodded. "Yes," she admitted.

Zeng rose, folded his arms, and sighed. "And now the Society of the White Lotus seems to suspect you of having the missing manuscript. Do you? Is that why you left so hurriedly?"

Nadja's face was a pale mask. "I was shaken by that horrible killing. I couldn't stay in that house any longer."

"I can advise the police to search your rooms," Zeng said. "The scroll is evidence pertaining to the murder of Prince Yuan."

"I can't stop you, and I'm grateful to you for having saved me from those four ruffians." She gestured. "You want to use the phone?"

"There is no such hurry, Miss Karakhov. Please sit down and tell me about you and Hubert Rayne." He handed her the half-burned envelope. "And you may have this surviving bit of evidence."

"You're very puzzling," she reflected, taking the scrap. "You could hand this to Forest Baker and convince him that I have been tricking him, secretly working with his rival."

"True, but it does not serve my pur-

pose. Now tell me about Hubert Rayne."

She seated herself and spoke frankly. "I met him in Turfan a few years ago. I was half-starved, the daughter of another Russian refugee. He was and had for years been looking for the sacred relics of Genghis Khan. He was kind to my father and me. In return we gave him bits of gossip we had picked up in our wanderings among the Mongol and Manchu tribes. Later, I met Prince Yuan. And just recently, in San Francisco, I learned that he had come to the United States. Hubert Rayne told me, asking me to find out what Baker and the prince were planning."

"So you really were spying on them, to help Rayne?"

"Do you still want the police to search my place?"

**H**E did not answer. Instead, he stepped to the telephone, and dialed headquarters. When Captain Carter was on the wire, Zeng said:

"Miss Karakhov was attacked in her apartment by four Chinese thugs. May I suggest that plainclothes men be detailed to guard her? . . . Of course, as a material witness, and, incidentally, to prevent another murder. . . . No, I can not explain the details over the telephone, but please believe me, this is not a false alarm."

He then said to Nadja, "With that small but efficient pistol, I think you'll be safe enough until they arrive. I shall leave by the back door. Good night, Miss Karakhov."

Once in the court, he played a fountain-pen flashlight about the corner in which he and his opponent had landed. The man with the broken neck was not there.

Zeng smiled, and nodded as if satisfied.

"His comrades came to look, and they found him."

Back at his car, Zeng pressed a button at the left of the starter, and there was a faint humming under the cowl. He had cut in an ultra-short-wave radio set.

"Lai Hu Chow! Lai Hu Chow!" he said to the concealed microphone.

Two receivers would respond to

that wave-length. One was concealed in the apartment above the Almond Blossom Hall; the other was in Chow's wooden leg. In a moment the big Mongol was answering: "Yes, Honorable Master?"

"Drive to Berkeley, and watch the house of Hubert Rayne," Zeng ordered, giving the address. He added, "Just watch. Do not take any action unless it is necessary to prevent a killing. If Rayne is in, and should leave, follow him."

Zeng cut the switch and then drove back to Forest Baker's house in Saint Francis Wood. Now that the police had finished their routine it was time for an unofficial look.

Thus far, Zeng had no reason for having Rayne watched, except on the chance that Nadja might try to get in touch with her friend. He reasoned that she would consider herself much more secure from further attack if she left the place which the White Lotus had searched; and Rayne's place would be a logical refuge. Also, she would want to tell Rayne what had happened.

Zeng parked his car and covered the last block on foot. His earlier concentration on the possibility that Nadja had switched scrolls on Prince Yuan was not blinding him to the chance that Baker might have executed such a sleight-of-hand performance himself. Zeng wanted to see what he was doing, now that the police had left the house.

The building stood well back from the street, surrounded and half-hidden by oaks. During the investigation Zeng had noted the layout. He had now his knowledge to serve him, as did the ivy whose luxuriant growth half-hid the bricks of the English manor. But before he began his ascent to the second floor, he paused to consider the peculiar glow that came from the window of the study.

**T**HE light, dimmed, strengthened again; then there was a moment of absolute darkness.

"Someone is searching the place, using a flashlight," reflected Zeng.

He kicked off his shoes, and tested the ivy whose hundreds of tentacles

had won a hold in the crevices of the masonry. Slowly, carefully, he drew himself up, taking every advantage of joints in the masonry, getting footholds that relieved the ivy of part of his weight. Like a vast black bat, he clung for moments at a time, resting from the strain of combining strength with delicacy of touch. His ascent was rapid, nevertheless, and presently he grasped a sill and found solid support.

The window was unlocked. Zeng had attended to that earlier. From the first, he had decided upon this unofficial search, for the death of Prince Yuan had been too uncanny to be entirely convincing.

The window rose silently. Zeng slipped through and passed into the dark hall. When he reached the door of the study he saw the purpose of the dim light and the cause of its wavering.

A man in a dark suit squatted in the far corner. He had moved a screen to one side, exposing a wall safe. Now he was spinning the dial, and trying the lever that opened the door. He shifted his light, referred to a scrap of paper and renewed his twirling of the dial, cursing under his breath as he began again.

Doctor Zeng waited patiently.

Bit by bit, he got a complete picture of the intruder from each shift of the light that cast a reflection from the burnished metal of the safe. The man was tall, thin and wiry, with a lean, sallow face. He wore woolen socks over his shoes, and on his hands he had white cloth gloves. But most interesting of all was the perceptible reek of opium. He had recently been hitting the pipe.

The man sighed and relaxed. The tumblers slid softly, and the door opened. With trembling hands, he searched the pigeonholes. He pocketed various folded papers, but something apparently was missing.

"Damn it!" he muttered, "Where—"

"Maybe I can help you," Zeng suggested softly.

The man whirled, dropping his light. Zeng closed in, and made a chopping blow with the edge of his hand. The man pitched forward,

stunned by the impact against the base of his skull.

Doctor Zeng caught the unconscious intruder, lowered him gently to the carpeted floor. Then he squatted beside him and methodically took the plunder from his pockets.

The papers were closely penned notes on Mongolia, some apparently quotations from ancient records, Mongol and Uighur and Turki, and all of them referring to the burial place of Genghis Khan. But the most interesting thing was the man's identity, which Doctor Zeng learned from the contents of the sallow man's wallet. He was Hubert Rayne, Nadja Karakhov's friend and her accomplice.

The house was still silent, for there had not been enough scuffle to awaken Forest Baker. Zeng closed the door of the study, picked up the memorandum which had guided Rayne in opening the safe, and squatted beside his half-conscious captive.

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## CHAPTER V

### *The Second Victim*

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"**PIUM** addict . . . scholar . . . apprentice safe cracker," Doctor Zeng said to himself, as he studied the memorandum Hubert Rayne had been using. "Ah! A woman's handwriting."

He saw why Rayne had been fumbling. There were several sets of figures, each varying a little: "*Five right to fifty; four left to thirty-eight; three right to twenty-seven; two left to zero.*" Some of the variations were in the number of turns, others were in the digits at which the dial spin was to stop. This suggested that the memorandum had been made by a person who had watched Baker opening his safe and had put down the best possible guesses, as decided from some distance behind him.

Rayne stirred, muttered, opened his eyes. Zeng saw from the contracted pupils that this was indeed an opium addict. When Rayne tried to strike out with his fist, Zeng spoke a gentle warning.

"Be quiet, please. You will awaken Baker, and that would embarrass us both." He smiled reassuringly, and gave the man a hand up. "Like yourself, I am an amateur house breaker."

This approach bewildered the still groggy Rayne. "What is this about?" he muttered. "Who are you?"

"Doctor Zeng Tse Lin, a person of insatiable curiosity. You, if I am not mistaken, are Hubert Rayne, Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, and one time authority on Central Asiatic history and archeology."

"One time!" Rayne echoed, voice low and bitter. He cast an apprehensive glance toward the hall. "This is no place to talk."

Zeng smiled. "Then you would leave, and I would wait for the police."

"Eh? Wait for them?" Rayne's face twitched. "What do you mean?"

"If you wish to know, permit me to call them." Zeng gestured toward the extension on the study desk. "They will explain, readily."

Rayne recoiled. "You're a Chinese detective," he accused.

"Rest at ease. Baker's bedroom is some distance from this study, so we are quite safe. Answer a few questions, and I shall not detain you."

Rayne pointed at the safe. "Who are you, what does all this mean? If you're with the police, you can't let me go. See here, are you after the same thing I am?"

"The Uighur scroll that reveals the burial place of Genghis Khan?"

Rayne's face changed. His lips drew back in a snarl that exposed his strong, white teeth. Then his mouth clamped shut. Zeng intently eyed him, and made gestures, a three-fold move with both hands.

He extended his right, with forearm bent, thumb and two fingers straight, and the last two curled back against his palm; his left hand, fingers similarly placed, he put against his heart. Rayne's mouth sagged. He sat there, incredulous and puzzled.

Then Zeng's hands, still in the same position, made a change; forefinger and thumb shaped a circle, and the other three pointed out straight. Rayne, still too confused to speak,



The floor sank beneath Zeng's feet and he dropped headlong into a red glare below

half rose from his chair. Zeng's fingers again shifted, middle three bent back against his palm, with two outstretched to shape horns, or the points of a crescent moon.

"You should not be amazed at my making the Threefold Sign of Heaven and Earth. I need not ask if you know the answer. Your recognition of this mystic gesture of the White Lotus Society tells me that you did not waste your time in Asia."

Rayne mopped his forehead. "Doctor Zeng, I've never betrayed any secrets. What do you want?"

"I want information. Tell me about Nadja Karakhov, Forest Baker, and why a man of your caliber loots a safe. I promise not to hinder you when you leave. It is well that you do not have the Uighur scroll, and it will be better if you make it very clear to *everyone*—" he paused at that emphasized word—"that you do not have it. Now relax and speak."

**R**AYNE believed, and was reassured. His face twisted a little and he blinked. The succession of shocks had come close to cracking his poise.

"Baker gradually wheedled me into letting him study my notes," he began. "The papers I just took from his safe." He reached to his pocket. "Those papers you have are mine."

"The handwriting told me that. I am sorry, but I must keep them."

Rayne went on in an apprehensive whisper. "Once he had my notes locked up, he would not finance my expedition. There were plausible delays, month after month. But as long as he himself did not fit out an expedition, I was not alarmed. Finally Nadja arrived from China and warned me.

"Then Prince Yuan came from Mongolia and met Baker. I began to realize that I had been played for a fool! Whatever Prince Yuan's Uighur script may contain, my years of study are still valuable, for if the script gave the full secret, so that any scholar could readily use it, why has it not been used during all these centuries?"

Zeng considered during Rayne's

pause. "There are many answers to that. But this much is clear. Nadja Karakhov helped you in your attempt to keep Baker from excluding you from the agreement he was making with Prince Yuan."

"Leave her out of this!"

"Very well, but I still believe that she got you the combination to this safe. Prince Yuan was murdered here some hours ago. Do you understand now why I am here?"

"Yuan murdered?" Rayne snapped to his feet. "My God!"

This ended Zeng's control of the opium addict, and he was unprepared for the crazy outburst. Rayne yelled wildly, swept up an ash tray, the tray filled with Nadja's paper tipped cigarette butts, and flung it as he whirled. Though the ashes blinded Zeng, and a rug skidded under his feet, he caught Rayne by the ankle. Rayne toppled. The leather upholstered couch broke his fall, and his frenzied kick smacked Zeng's jaw.

A metal wastepaper basket clattered against the desk. Rayne lunged headlong through the window. Glass and sash scattered, the pieces tinkling to the ground. He landed with blind luck in a clump of bamboo. Recovering with scarcely a break in his stride, he raced around the corner of the house.

Zeng smiled ruefully. "Four men caused me very little trouble," he said, dusting his hands, "and now one scholar makes a fool of me."

Rayne, if his panic flight took him home, would fall under Chow's catlike vigilance. "Unless," Zeng said to himself wryly, "there is a western movie in the neighborhood!"

The house should by now be in an uproar. But there was no sound to break the unnatural silence.

Zeng snapped on a hall light, and called, "Baker!" He went to the head of the stairs, and repeated the hail. He was still considering the possibility that Baker, poise cracking at last, had taken too many drinks of brandy, and was sleeping off his stupor. After his rigid composure during the police investigation, there might be a reaction. A nervous man would want liquor and plenty of it.

So Zeng knocked at the bedroom door. There was no answer.

**H**E tried the door. It opened. He snapped on a light. Then he saw why Baker did not answer. He was sprawled in an upholstered chair, clad in a lounge robe that was soggy with the blood which had come from his torn throat.

Blood splashed the counterpane. It drenched the book which Baker had been reading. His posture and the stains indicated that there had not even been any dying struggle. Whether drugged or slugged, Forest Baker, in all probability, had never realized that a monster was about to tear his throat.

There was a fine trail of drops on the cream-colored Chinese carpet. Zeng regarded these, noting their continuation on the hardwood floor.

One had been spread out, as by a shoe sole, the slayer apparently having stepped into the gore dripping from himself.

Zeng followed the trail to the bathroom adjoining the master's suite. There he found a sodden towel on the floor. There were stains in the bathtub.

But there were no footprints on the tiles, and the gleam of the chromium taps convinced him that fingerprints would be lacking.

There was no longer any doubt that a monster in human form had bitten Baker to death.

Zeng wondered where Hubert Rayne had been when the fangs of doom killed Prince Yuan.

As he went back to the study, he said to himself, "Both Rayne and Nadja Karakhov have exceptionally good and strong teeth."

He sat down and dialed Captain Carter's residence.

"Consider this anonymous for the time being," he told the police official. "It is very late, and I am not a relay of men, as you police are. Forest Baker died precisely as Prince Yuan did. I depend on you to release this in a way to keep me from being needlessly detained tonight, for I have much to do."

He hung up, not mentioning Rayne.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Ultimatum*

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**D**OCTOR Zeng, in spite of pleading fatigue, was far from the end of his endurance, but he wished to meditate on what had happened. He sat in his reception room, his tall frame overshadowed by the carved dragons of the big teak chair. Concealed vapor tubes cast an eerie light unlike the glow of any hour of the day.

"The present is the summation of the past, and an introduction to the future," he reasoned. "The more we consider time, and deal in alibis, the more we are deceived by preconceived opinions as to the time-linkage of events."

So he sat there, considering motives; for motivations do not vary with the hour.

"The unknown, this drinker of blood, killed Yuan and yet left no trace in a house that was searched. Baker, amazed or feigning amazement, was frantic when I told him that Prince Yuan's scroll did not deal with Genghis Khan's grave.

"Nadja left, and the White Lotus overtook her. Fear of further investigation seems to have made her destroy letters from Rayne. No one knows where Rayne was before I caught him rifling Baker's safe."

He considered each statement. He had to find the motive. For, in his own mind, a madman is sane.

"Person crazed by brooding about real or fancied wrong kills Prince Yuan and Forest Baker. Or, Nadja, Rayne's ally, commits this slaying. Or, the White Lotus is moving against all those who seek the grave of Genghis Khan."

Then he pondered on the ancient terror of Genghis Khan's name; on the uncanny power which had welded the Mongols into a people who had conquered more of the earth's surface than any other had, before or since. Mongols had gone to seed, yet they were still the same hardy nomads, the same blood. The lack of the power

kept them from setting all Asia aflame once more.

"The source of power may be buried in the grave of Genghis Khan. Find that symbol, that magnetic talisman, and Mongolia will produce another conqueror."

But thus far, he did not see clearly whether these murders were to prevent the rise of a new Genghis Khan, or whether they were a madman's vengeance.

Zeng let his mind wander. He trusted the subconscious, which has more wisdom than any man's studied effort. He relaxed, making way for that mysterious inflowing of wisdom, opening the road that Occidental education would have blocked had he not in his childhood spent so many years in Central Asia.

Half-reclining in that spacious chair of twining dragons and red silk damask, Zeng slept for a while. Then, refreshed as though he had stretched out on his bed, he stepped into a sound-proofed compartment which a dummy screen concealed. This was his short-wave radio room. Soon the tubes glowed and the transformers hummed.

"Lai Hu Chow! Lai Hu Chow!" he said.

There was no vocal answer, only a curious *click-clack-clock*. Chow's bawling Mongol voice could not be subdued, and this was his way of saying, "I am listening for orders, but I cannot speak."

Zeng said, "Come home and report."

Once more the clacking sound, then silence. Chow had cut the battery power of the tiny set in his wooden leg.

**H**ALF an hour later, Chow came up from the garage.

"A tall, good-looking Russian girl came to that man's house and entered with a key," he reported. "She acted as though she owned the place. He was not there. She waited, smoking many cigarettes. Finally she stretched out on the lounge and slept, leaving the lights on."

Zeng waiting for his servant, had with his own hands prepared breakfast. He uncovered bowls of rice, and

steaming tea into which butter and barley meal had been stirred.

"Eat, Chow; it has been a cold watch," he said, and picked up long jade chopsticks.

The big Mongol grinned and noisily drank the tea prepared as the men of the steppes drink it, salty and greasy and thick. Between gulps, he spoke.

"Later a man came in, a thin man who smelled of opium. He looked wild, his face was cut. When the woman asked what had happened, he said, 'Damn-damn, I do not find.' Then he pulled the shades. I smelled opium



and when the woman tried to make him stop, he said once more, 'Damn-damn,' and then a door closed hard."

"What manner of house is it, and where?"

"Big, but old and badly kept, far out of Berkeley, with many weeds in the yard. He is poor, so he smokes *yen shi*."

Zeng sighed. It was melancholy, considering the case of a brilliant man who had been reduced to smoking pipe scrapings.

"Go, Chow, and rest while I study these things. Tonight you watch again."

It was past noon when Anne Carter and her father rang for admittance.

"Did you find things as I said?" Zeng asked the grizzled captain.

Carter grimaced. "All too much so!"

"Lin, I've been worried about you, and now this second awful murder!" Anne cried anxiously. "That stealthy lurker must know about you. You'll be next! Why on earth did you risk slipping back into that house?"

"For purposes of observation." Then to Carter, "What did the police laboratory find?"

"That human teeth bit Prince Yuan. That the same teeth settled Forest Baker. It's incredible, but a maniac has killed two men."

Anne shuddered. "And will kill others."

Zeng spread the red silk certificate, the wilted lotus blossom, and the three brass cash on the table. "Perhaps I forgot to mention that the White Lotus Society is involved. I walked in on several ruffians who were attacking Nadja Karakhov, and in the scuffle, one of them must have dropped these."

"The White Lotus? Weren't they outlawed in Singapore?" Carter rose, paced up and down the room. "Now they crop out in San Francisco! I thought we had tongs and criminal organizations whipped, tamed down."

Carter had spent years working for peace between the tongs, but even his broad acquaintance with things Chinese did not include more than a scanty account of the mysterious White Lotus and its bloody deeds in Singapore. Zeng gestured reassuringly.

"It is not as bad as you think. The tongs in themselves were honorable enough, organized for mutual protection and benevolence. Unscrupulous members dealt in drugs and gambling concessions, and hired highbinders to fight rivals in true gangster fashion."

"I know, I know!" The captain was a little impatient.

Zeng smoothly continued. "The White Lotus was originally a splendid fraternal and patriotic organization, much like some of your American lodges. But, unhappily, scoundrels used it for criminal purposes, just as was the case with the warring tongs you finally quieted. Without doubt many chapters of the White Lotus are honorable, useful."

"Where is the local chapter?" Carter demanded. "I've not heard that one exists."

"A raid would be inadvisable," Zeng cautioned. "You do not wish to indict a lodge, you wish to convict an assassin."

**C**ARTER'S ruddy face darkened. "Zeng," he snapped, "this is the first time I've felt that you're obstructing justice! I cannot allow you to cover the White Lotus. Damn it, man, much as I hate it, I shall have to—to force your hand."

Zeng knew that the hot-headed

captain was threatening to expose his, Zeng's real identity. Anne rose and stood there, tense, wide-eyed.

"Lin! Dad!" she said, "I can't understand this."

For a moment, Zeng was tempted to say, "Force my hand, Captain, and let me abandon my pose. I'd like Anne to know I'm a white man." Then he remembered his mission, and knew that even to win Anne as more than a friend, he could not quit his duty.

"To force my hand would do much harm," he said soberly. "Give me twenty-four hours in which to arrest the guilty person, and the madman who serves him."

Carter's flare of wrath was fading. "Granted, Zeng."

"Do not have me trailed. That would be a death sentence, and you would gain nothing," warned Zeng.

That solemn voice troubled Captain Carter. He picked up his hat and said, gruffly, "Let's go, Anne. If you're going to continue streaking around to watch police work, you'll have to quit that language class!"

Later, Zeng called Chow. "From now on watch Wang Lu's place on Pagoda Lane. I think that he is the Grand Master of the White Lotus."

"Can do," Chow said, testing out his English.

At first glance, it seemed absurd to suppose that the burly Mongol, handicapped with a wooden leg, would be anything but useless in a quest involving stealth, but Zeng knew his man.

Chow grinned, took a hatchet from under his tunic, and tested the edge.

"Boss-man plenty crazy, gettee kill," he said. "My finish White Lotus fella plopa, every damn all."

"I don't intend to get killed, and no matter what happens I don't want you to try to cut down every man in the White Lotus Society. You will only get into a great deal of trouble."

Chow left, honing the hatchet on the palm of his hand.

"Premature vengeance by a loyal servant would embarrass everyone," Zeng reflected. "Haste is indicated."

Then Zeng prepared for a further inspection of the late Forest Baker's home.

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 CHAPTER VII

*Murderer's Chest*


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IT did not take Zeng long to coax Captain Carter into a more amiable frame of mind, although Carter still grumbled as they stepped into Baker's library.

"I can't understand why it didn't occur to you in the first place to look for secret closets or cubby holes," he growled.

Zeng ignored the query. He set about patiently tapping the paneled walls, checking every dimension of the room and comparing it against the outside measurements of the house. Outside, men were busy looking for footprints that might have escaped notice when the first lot of moulage had been made. Thus far, they were getting nowhere.

The house was as prosaic as it was large. There were linen closets in which a man could have hidden. There were bins and cabinets in the basement. But there was no disturbed dust to indicate any such taking of cover.

"Note the dust on that Camphor chest," Zeng finally said.

"We fingerprinted that," the captain answered. "What of it?"

"Everything else has a fine film, which is customary when servants care for a bachelor's house. The chest has a heavier coat. This is not reasonable, unless a long-stored chest was carried in after the last house cleaning."

That was what started it. They made a rapid check on the insurance. Every item in the library which was of value comparable to that antique chest was on an inventory, and there were fire and burglary policies. But the dust-coated chest was not listed.

"Why omit it?" Zeng demanded. "Because it is a recent acquisition. Please get in touch with the servants while I examine it."

There was neither hinge nor lock nor any visible joint where the lid fitted on the chest. It was not at once apparent where the cover began,

and the metal binding was equally ambiguous. And here was where Zeng's knowledge of things Chinese served him well.

"Puzzle box," he said to the plain-clothes men who had come in after completing their second search of the grounds. "No two alike, yet all follow the same principles."

He began tapping, prodding the carved figures, twisting with seeming aimlessness.

"Get a saw!" someone suggested.

That brought a laugh, but Zeng blandly countered, "Not necessary, gentlemen. Look!"

"Huh?" another exclaimed. "I'll be damned, if he ain't gone and done it!"

A panel swung. Zeng plucked at a length of hardwood uncovered by the first motion. He drew up on the tongue of wood and then lifted an inner lid.

"Chinese puzzle, gentlemen, literally that." He pointed into the small space in the center. No wonder the chest was heavy, considering the thick walls needed to contain its ingenious wooden mechanism. "This can also be opened from the inside."

"The hell you say!"

"Recently altered." He indicated chisel and saw marks, showing how the original linkwork had been modified. "For this assassination. I am sure the person who bit Prince Yuan to death was carried here in this chest."

The cops howled that down. "Now, looka here, Doctor Zeng, even a contortionist couldn't double up into that little space!"

The interior was little over three feet long and perhaps a bit less than thirty inches wide. But Zeng had an answer.

"A dwarf, let us say. Very short, but powerful enough to bite a man to death. See there air holes, recently drilled? Enough to prevent suffocation."

"I guess he could hear, too, when the coast was clear?" said a detective dubiously.

"A dwarf could have enough clearance," Zeng went on, quite unperturbed, "to lift the lid a little, peeping and listening. One move of the inside

lever will lift or lock as he desired."

As he spoke, he knelt beside the puzzle chest. He played his flashlight into every corner. "See the coarse black hairs, doubtless rubbed from his head. Note the smell of opium, of joss sticks. See these stains? Possibly blood. So, I shall now look for a Mongolian dwarf."

**CAPTAIN CARTER** stepped into the room just in time to hear Zeng's concluding words.

"What's that, Zeng? A dwarf?" Carter echoed.

"Yes. Presently I shall explain. But what of the chest, Captain? Any history?"

"A truck brought it here, the handyman says. Forest Baker did not know a thing about it, had made no such purchase, and didn't know what to do with it. But he rather liked it, and decided to keep it until the owner traced it. That was yesterday afternoon, and Yuan was killed that night."

When Captain Carter heard Zeng elaborate on his original terse statements, he began to admit the justice of the deductions.

"That undersized monster was probably there in the chest, waiting for us to clear out so he could escape," he grumbled.

"I would rather say," Zeng corrected, "waiting for his chance at Forest Baker. He may even have managed to put through a telephone call between the time of the first murder, and the time Baker came down to try to wheedle the drunken prince into a better humor."

"You mean, this damn-blasted dwarf took Yuan's Uighur manuscript, and substituted a phony, to throw us off the trail? Not counting, of course, on your noticing the switch?"

Zeng frowned for a moment. "Theorizing makes for confusion. By the way, Captain, will you start my twenty-four hours from now, instead of from the time of our discussion?"

Carter laughed shortly. "Zeng, I still don't know what to make of you. You know very well I could hardly refuse you, and still I ought to clamp down!"

Zeng bowed. "Thank you for the

extension. I shall report later."

Zeng's approach to Hubert Rayne's house was open and casual. He expected Rayne and Nadja to be in the weatherbeaten, two-story house in the Berkeley foothills, simply because such a course would be more logical than flight.

Nadja had every reason to fear the White Lotus, and Rayne had been terrified at the thought that Zeng might be an emissary of that sinister society. And since by now Nadja would have told her ally that Zeng had defended her against the White Lotus, they would logically conclude that he was an independent adventurer, taking a hand in the quest for Genghis Khan's relics.

"For all Rayne's comparing notes with Nadja, he could hardly imagine that anyone connected with the police would let an intruder go free," Zeng shrewdly concluded. "So his problem is evading the White Lotus, rather than avoiding the police. And his own house is as good as any place."

He walked through the weed-grown garden and into the deepening shadows of the oaks which half-hid the long-neglected house.

"This is where a splendid mind is buried in poverty, despair, anger, and the fumes of opium. This is a tomb, for nothing lives but the man's body."

**AND** then he pressed the push button, wondering if he might not have to use his lock picks.

His pulse quickened as he heard the *click-clack* of a woman's heels. Nadja Karakhov, breathless as though she had raced downstairs, came to the door. There were dark rings about her splendid eyes, and her face was drawn, weary.

She still wore the black dinner gown.

"I didn't stop to pack a bag, last night," she explained by way of greeting.

"In an hour," Zeng said gravely, "your gown will be quite appropriate. Could we not set the clock forward and put you at ease?"

She laughed, somewhat nervously. "You came to see me?"

"You and Mister Rayne."

Nadja closed the door after Zeng. "I'm sorry, but you can't see him for a while. He's . . . asleep. He sat up with a pistol, watching, all night."

Zeng's nostrils flared. "Ah. . . asleep, of course."

"Oh, all right—opium. I thought I'd aired the place out. Poor devil, I might as well admit, I've watched for him!"

She led Zeng into a dusty living-room which, twenty years ago, had been quite fashionable. Zeng seated himself on the lounge, and spoke.

"Let us cease fencing and begin being abrupt. I have just twenty-four hours to arrest the assassin who killed Prince Yuan and then murdered Forest Baker."

The name of the last victim shocked Nadja, Zeng was sure that her amazement and fear were not feigned. He went on.

"Do you see how the fangs of doom bite deep? Already two of those seeking the grave of Genghis Khan have died terribly. It is not accident that you are still alive. It is design, but patterns change swiftly!"

She raised her hands, hiding her tense face for a moment. "Baker—bitten—like Yuan? Oh, my God!"

"This was shortly before Baker's safe was looted, by a person who had a memorandum of the combination, written—in your hand!". He was bluffing now.

"You can't prove that," she said, half-heartedly.

Zeng ignored the challenge. "Tell me the truth as you know it, and perhaps I can save you. Who and what are you?"

"I told you." She became stubborn. "I told you all."

"How resolutely they bare their throats to the fangs of doom! It is very clear that you and Baker lied to conceal each other's moves. Yuan was drunk, the autopsy proved that to be true. Baker without doubt did go down and discover the corpse. But some time in the evening, you went down to persuade Yuan. You went first. You exchanged manuscripts, before the assassin bit."

"You're guessing!" she flared.

"What of your swift flight at the

first chance, your wearing your coat, so needless in that heated house? You were ready for flight with the true Uighur scroll."

"Why didn't you search me?"

"Because I didn't want to act on suspicion and warn you by a false move. I kept the police off your trail, and went myself to watch you. And the White Lotus was there before I arrived!"

"They were, but what of that?"

"Simple. The slayer was hiding in a chest in the library, watching for his chance to catch one member of the gathering alone. You came down, deftly exchanged manuscripts, and the slayer saw. Though a mad little monster, he need not be without intelligence. Suppose he telephoned, reporting not only his first slaying, but also your bit of juggling?"

Nadja was on her feet, slowly backing away from the smiling Doctor Zeng. He hammered on relentlessly.

"If this was not the case, then it was coincidence that the White Lotus arrived from Pagoda Lane in just a little less time than it took me to follow you from Saint Francis Wood. Coincidence has its limit. The White Lotus and I both came to your apartment for the same reason, and we both failed. You burned letters, as a blind, and used my intervention to get the Uighur scroll out of your possession. Where is it?"

SHE shrugged helplessly.

"You're right, Doctor Zeng. Someone at the house must have set those Chinese on my trail. The scroll? I dropped it out the window while you were grappling, falling. Then I retrieved it, the moment you left, and dropped it in a mail box, and came to tell Hubert Rayne. Now you want to search the house and get the scroll. You're assuming it's Prince Yuan's? Well, you're wrong! We paid—Professor Baker paid—"

"I do not care who paid whom! The White Lotus is determined to keep expeditions from uncovering the sacred relics. Do you think you can outwit them?"

"I'm afraid I can't. Maybe it is well that Hubert is—er—sleeping. I'm

sick of all this, Doctor Zeng. I'll get you the scroll. You can give it to the White Lotus, and let peace be declared."

This was better than he had expected. Possession of the scroll would enable him to enter the secret council of the White Lotus, and without the mortal risk of posing as a member. So he followed Nadja into the adjoining room.

She fumbled in a table drawer and found a key and a flashlight. "He locked it in that closet," she said, gesturing.

The panels were solid, old-fashioned; a room with such high ceiling would have high doors, and these would have to be massive, far more so than necessary in rooms of modern style. The door was hung on three hinges instead of two. No doubt that Rayne's most precious things were behind it, for a hasp and solid padlock secured it.

She used the key. "It's never been wired," Nadja explained. "Take this flashlight, and there's a low step-ladder."

One end of the large closet was pigeonholed, and scrolls filled it as player piano rolls in a cabinet.

"The top row," Nadja directed.

Zeng played the flashlight, and saw the jade and agate and coral knobs of the rods on which the rolls of paper and damask were wound. He entered the large closet.

Then the door slammed. As he whirled, bounding back, the padlock snapped.

"I could not anticipate your being a fool!" he said. "You are exposing yourself to certain death!"

"I'm sorry to do this, but I have my business, and my risks, just as you have," Nadja answered.

Zeng had counted on the growing menace to force Nadja to good faith; he had not anticipated what he now sensed was a fanatic resolution. Lock picks would do him no good here. And unless he broke out, and quickly, he would be completely discredited with Captain Carter. That would be bad, even though Anne still believed in him.

And if he did escape in time, there

was no Uighur scroll to pave his way into the secret circle of assassins. He would have to go as a member, a special envoy just arrived from China. The peril of such an attempt made him shudder for a moment.

Then he began to consider a line of attack.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### *Shrine of the White Lotus*

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**D**OCTOR Zeng escaped sooner than he expected. Had it not been for a pen-knife whose blades included one with saw teeth of an alloy steel, it would have taken him hours longer. This blade, little heavier than a jig saw, won him his start. Skillful use of his strength enabled him to complete the jail break.

Zeng snapped on the lights and started on a swift tour of the deserted house. He wanted a clue to Rayne's destination, and Nadja's. And then, upstairs, he found his man.

Rayne was hanging from the bridging of the groined ceiling. He dangled at the end of a new manila rope. His eyes stared sightlessly, his mouth gaped. Near him lay an overturned chair, the varnished seat marred by scratches, indicating that he had kicked it aside.

"Hubert Rayne, destination unknown," Dr. Zeng muttered.

In the fireplace there was a heap of charred paper broken to black bits. On the work table, Zeng noted dustless spaces, exposed by the removal of papers and books. A few unburned bits of paper showed traces of Uighur script, with marginal notes in English. Near the alcove lounge was an opium-smoking layout.

"What poppy dream made him destroy his notes, and hang himself?" Doctor Zeng asked, and then stepped closer to the dangling corpses. He frowned as he eyed the rope, and his expression changed again as he observed the distance between Rayne's feet and the floor.

Doctor Zeng was no longer con-

vinced that this was suicide.

He drove into town and called Captain Carter. "Another man—Hubert Rayne—is dead. Be pleased to get in touch with the Berkeley police, for I am not notifying them. While this is in their jurisdiction, it is really your case."

"Wait, I'll be right over," Carter said.

"I cannot wait," Zeng answered. "I am calling on the Society of the White Lotus. Meanwhile, I suggest an all-car alarm to pick up Nadja Karakhov."

"Wait a second!" Carter exclaimed.

But the line was dead. Doctor Zeng strolled from the drugstore. He took the wheel of his sedan and headed for San Francisco.

Carter, meanwhile, was blasting it over the Bay Bridge, Harris, Captain of Inspectors, with him. They wanted first look, and that was what they got. Without siren or red spotlights they approached the desolate house whose lights Zeng had left burning.

Carter said to the inspector, "Damn Zeng's hide, why would he have to run out?"

"I think Zeng knows what he is doing," the inspector answered.

"Of course he knows!" Carter panted a little, racing up the stairs. "But the White Lotus will murder him first and investigate later!"

"Why didn't you have the Chinatown Squad cover the place? You might have given me all the angles, Captain."

"Oh, hell! He convinced me that that would put him in more danger."

The inspector laughed grimly. "You're not staying convinced, Carter."

"Of course I'm not. If Zeng were my own son, I'd not be more worried."

"A swell Chink, all right." The inspector headed down the hall. "Well, here's the corpse."

**C**ARTER had brought neither moulage specialists nor photographers with him. But he did have a kit and a camera of his own. Some minutes later he had made a cast of the dead man's teeth.

"For all of Zeng's theories, I still

think this is our madman," he explained to the inspector. "A hophead with a grudge. And now, in a lucid moment, the poor devil hangs himself."

The inspector scrutinized the wax matrix, and looked at the dead man's teeth. He whirled about. "You're right, Captain. Look at those incisors! Those canines—their peculiar shape. It's in the bag—Hubert Rayne's teeth and nobody else's bit Prince Yuan and Forest Baker to death! And now Zeng is risking his life for nothing at all!"

Carter groaned. "And I hounded him to it! I hurried him, or he'd have noticed, he'd have suspected. Take over and notify the Berkeley police. I'm going back. I'm doing something about this, regardless!"

Zeng, in the meanwhile, was busy in San Francisco.

There was little chance that the men he had scattered in Nadja's apartment had not identified him. All Chinatown knew the conspicuous Doctor Zeng. Thus, instead of resorting to disguise, he went openly.

He was unarmed. These Chinese were his adopted kinsmen, and Zeng would not declare war. He was acting against criminal individuals, and the less he depended upon armed force the better he would serve justice.

All that Doctor Zeng took with him was his versatile penknife, and a vial of caffeine tablets from his third-floor dispensary. Having seen the recurrence of opium in the background of these weird crimes, he was preparing himself in advance. Already he had swallowed four tablets of the concentrated alkaloid to counteract possible sleepiness.

Zeng threaded his way down the dark alleys that paralleled Grant Avenue. Steep stairways sank from the narrow sidewalks and down into basements. In some of these murky dens, craftsmen and artisans plied their trade, making toys and souvenirs for tourists, shaping dolls, carving images, sawing and soldering metal. In other places, beady-eyed men played main po and fan tan and poker. But for each rendezvous of vice, there

were fifty places where yellow men worked overtime, earning a few dollars for the relief of kinsmen in China.

He stopped at the back of the place where Chow should be spying, a narrow shop, unoccupied because of a boycott put on the building. The door was open. Zeng made a chirping sound, like a cricket, but there was no answer. He played his fountain-pen flashlight about the gloom. Chow was not there.

There was no sign of struggle, no trampling of the heap of chestnut shells, and the husks of watermelon seeds where Chow must have squatted, nibbling as he watched. Zeng glanced at his watch. Too much time had passed to allow for inquiry or search. He had to strike at once, for with Hubert Rayne's death the quota of murder was complete, and the assassin might be leaving.

"If Chow is dead, his body would be here," he reasoned. "If he is a prisoner, then he will keep."

Zeng left the deserted post, and went to Wang Lu's place. The narrow shop was lined with shelves containing jars of ginseng roots, mandrake, snake's liver, and dried tigers' hearts—row on row of herbs and seeds and animal substances to cure all ills. A curtain rustled, and an old man stepped from behind its shelter.

**H**E was short and shriveled. He wore a black jacket, black silk trousers, and felt slippers. A skull-cap covered his bald head, and his cunning eyes peered through silver-rimmed glasses.

He clasped his hands and bowed as he said, "The Honorable Doctor Zeng is welcome."

"May the Honorable Wang live a thousand years," replied Zeng. Then he made the threefold sign of Heaven and Earth, the succession of gestures which had terrified the late Hubert Rayne.

"Why is your coat so old?" Wang asked.

For twelve hundred years, the answer has been, "It was handed down by Five Ancestors." Zeng made this response, for he was still on firm ground.

The scarcely perceptible stirring of

the red curtain with its gold embroidered phoenix seconded the sixth sense which warned Zeng. Hidden eyes were regarding him. His arrival was not a surprise.

"I come to warn you as a man, not as a Brother of the Lotus," he now said. "Do you care to hear what the sons of the wind are whispering?"

A son of the wind meant, in the secret slang of the order, "a police spy, a traitor, an informer."

The Honorable Wang gestured toward an alcove as he drew aside a curtain that concealed it. Opening from the floor was a trap door with stairs leading underground. Zeng followed the shopkeeper. He had seen Wang press a button, and he was sure that men were being warned, that they in their turn called others.

Doctor Zeng had never fully learned the ritual of the White Lotus. It involved an oath that he would not take, and thus in China, he had declined invitations. But, from studying records seized by the British police in their raids on criminal chapters of the Society, he had learned enough to have a fighting chance.

The underground passage became damp and murky. Finally Wang came to a door which was guarded by two men who wore red masks.

The room beyond was square. Its walls were hung with embroidered banners. There were four painted doorways, symbolic of the cardinal were three archways, arranged in a row, to mark the avenue at whose further end was the carved and gilded points of the compass. In the center shrine of the Five Ancestors.

At one side of the shrine was the statue of smiling Kwan Yin, the goddess of mercy. On the other side was Kwan Ti, the glowering god of war.

Before the door closed behind him Zeng saw four or five masked newcomers join the guards. Then Wang Lu seated himself.

"What news do you bring us?" he asked.

"One of the Lotus Brethren has violated the Fourth Oath, and the Thirty-first."

"To violate an oath is serious. You may be mistaken."

"Let me recite," Zeng proposed. "If a member break the laws of the country, he must sustain his own cause, without help from the Brethren." Because of many violations, the White Lotus is outlawed in Singapore, and in Java. Here, a brother has committed murders. You must not shelter him, for it is not only forbidden, but it will bring evil on the others."

**Z**ENG'S contention was sound, and Wang knew it, but he countered, "When the Five Ancestors prescribed that oath, they did not refer to the laws of the foreign devils."

"Honorable Wang, it is also written, 'Should a Brother confess a crime, he must not implicate any other Brethren: and whoever does, may he dies in the Great Ocean, and the spirits of his ancestors find no rest.' There is one who has betrayed you, and brought evil to all of you. There is one whom you must denounce, one whom you are forbidden to shelter!"

"Who did this thing?" Wang demanded.

"I take a risk in coming here. First you must swear an oath."

Wang was uneasy, for he knew now the manner of swearing that would be proposed, and he had the Chinese fear of that dark invocation. "First, tell me more."

"A dwarf was sent in a chest to murder Forest Baker and Prince Yuan. The law knows of this. Someone has betrayed the White Lotus, by making confessions that implicated others. I come as a friend to advise the surrender of the guilty, that the others may be saved."

But Wang Lu had an answer. "Since you know laws, you know this one: if a member has a dispute with a brother, he must bring his complaint before the council for judgment. Even if you are not one of us, and your lack of credentials makes me suspect you, you may face him with proofs. If he is guilty, he will be surrendered for the good of his fellows."

Wang was stepping into the trap, yet Zeng was uneasy, for he sensed that the crafty fellow was baiting him.

"First guarantee my safety, so that

I will not share the traitor's fate, to make silence complete. Suppose that I accuse him, and am cut down the moment I convict him?"

Wang smiled blandly. "I will swear an oath. No one will touch you, except perhaps the man you accuse."

This was trick against trick, but there was no retreat, and Zeng said:

"Let us swear the oath that binds us as you propose!"

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## CHAPTER IX

### *The Executioner*

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**W**ANG LU rose and went to the door. He spoke to the guards, and then beckoned to Doctor Zeng, who followed him to the end of the passage. It opened to a small balcony which overhung an airshaft. The guards, except for two who had gone to obey the herb doctor's orders, came after, and stood at both sides of the railed enclosure.

They looked up at the few stars which reached through the skyglow of the city, and they looked down into the blackness which concealed the bare earth. This oath was to be made in full view of gods and demons, and the solemnity of the impending ceremony checked their tongues.

Presently the men returned. One had a lighted taper, two squares of red paper, two brushes, and an inkstand. The second held two white roosters by the legs; in his other hand he carried a pair of short, heavy knives.

Wang Lu and Doctor Zeng took inked brushes and wrote their pledges on the red papers. Then, standing side by side, they thrust the red squares into the flickering taper flame, and let the ash fall into a small bowl.

Narrowed black eyes stared uneasily from blank yellow faces as Wang Lu and Doctor Zeng each reached for a squawking fowl and a chopping knife. This was an awful appeal to the demons of earth and air to destroy whoever broke the oath.

The blades fell. There was a flapping of wings, and both men recited, "If I break this oath, may the earth

drink my blood, and may I walk in the lowest hell without a head."

Then, as blood spurted into the bowl which contained the ashes of the burned papers, the witnesses chanted, "May that be our end if we allow an oath breaker to live."

The ancient ritual was completed when rice wine was poured into the bowl of blood and ash. Wang Lu and Doctor Zeng drank, and so did the others. The residue was spilled, so that the spirits of earth and air could taste.

When all this was done, and the awed Brethren had filed back toward the lodge room, Wang dismissed them at the door. He turned to Zeng.

"You and I will wait while they go to get the man who betrayed us. That you know of the dwarf is proof enough that there has been a confession to the police. It will be some time before he arrives, so let us smoke a pipe."

Doctor Zeng could not decline the long-stemmed pipe and the drug which had played such a part in Hubert Rayne's doom. Wang Lu took an opium layout from a cabinet, a weapon on which he counted in making a loophole in the dreadful oath he had sworn. Doctor Zeng was sure of this, but he had to carry on, offering himself as bait.

He could not guess how the crafty Wang Lu proposed to harm him without incurring the penalties of oath-breaking. He could only hope that he would be equal to the ordeal, that he would be able to reverse the trap.

For a while, the pipes gurgled. Wang Lu, the seasoned smoker, finally roused himself from his languor when a guard entered and announced, "Master, he is waiting."

The old herb seller nudged his guest, shook him gently, waited for him to gain his feet.

"That door ahead," he said. "It is not a ceremonial dummy. Step toward it."

Zeng's attention was focused on the painted panel. He wondered what was ahead. He took a step, and a second.

The floor sank beneath his feet and he dropped headlong into a red glare below, hot air and choking fumes bil-

lowed up to meet him. Though the caffeine tablets had to a degree counteracted the effects of the opium, he was still not sufficiently alert to catch the edge.

**Z**ENG crashed against a solid floor. There was a momentary suction as the trap above rose and locked into place. The ensuing silence was shocking. It told him how thick the walls must be to shut out the murmur of the city. He was in a sealed room which was quite empty except for the brazier of glowing charcoal and two statues at the farther end.

Dizzy, choked by the dense fumes, Doctor Zeng crawled about the room. It had doors, but one blow told him that they were as solid as those of a cold storage vault. The original purpose must have been to hide fugitives until a police raid was abandoned.

His head was already splitting. The air was dense and sluggish and hot. Carbon dioxide from the glowing charcoal was filling the room. Neither Wang Lu nor any of his men were touching or had touched Doctor Zeng, yet doom spread from that bed of coals. His overburdened heart pounded, distending the veins at his temples.

Kwan Ti, the god on the tall throne, glared triumphantly. Kwan Yin, the merciful goddess, smiled placidly, and made the mystic sign of salvation.

Zeng muffled his fingers with his cap and tipped the brazier. He trampled and beat out the coals before the smouldering floor added to his peril. But this was not enough. He was staggering and red spots danced before his eyes. The invisible fumes already tainting the air would surely kill him even though the source had been extinguished.

His senses began to trick him. The single bulb in the ceiling dimmed and brightened crazily. He wondered why there was any light in that chamber of doom. Kwan Ti's gilded leer seemed to become animate. There was a life-like gleam in the fierce god's eyes.

Zeng sank to the floor, where the fumes were the worst. Carbon dioxide, much heavier than air, settled and surged over the heavy planks as water

would. Which gave him a remote chance. He drew his knife, praying that the slender gimlet would be long enough to reach through the wood. If he could penetrate it, start his tiny saw blade and enlarge the hole, there was the possibility that the fumes would drain out.

Knives seemed to dart through his temples with every agonized heart beat. But for the caffeine that stimulated him, that pipe of opium would have numbed him to his peril, and he would have lain there, yielding to the insidious charcoal fumes. Too late, Zeng saw how cunning Wang Lu had evaded the oath.

He plied the slender saw, Blackness danced about him. Then came a whiff of cold air. He slumped, a sodden heap, for he could not cut a second drain. He lay there, face pressed to the floor, sucking in air.

Zeng did not see Kwan Ti's grin. The gilded face was alive, not carved from wood. The god was descending from his pedestal. His shoulders were very broad, his arms were powerful, though he was only little more than a yard tall. Wang Lu had fulfilled the letter of his oath. Zeng was indeed in the presence of the man he had accused.

A tube, coming up through the painted shrine, had fed the dwarf what fresh air he needed. Thus, seeing his victim collapse, he was preparing for the last move. From behind his pedestal he took a pair of burnished steel tongs whose jaws were set with metal cast in the shape of human teeth, the work of a dental mechanic.

Tracing that work would convict the arch-criminal! The dwarf inhaled noisily from the air tube. Then he waddled swiftly across the room, laid his tongs down and tried to roll his victim face up. Finally succeeding, he set the jaws of the tongs to take a fatal bite from Doctor Zeng's throat.

He had assumed that his victim had succumbed to opium and to suffocation. He did not suspect that the tall man in gray had drunk air from the hurriedly shaped orifice. He yelled hoarsely and tried to jerk back when Zeng snatched the tongs from his

grasp and sat up immediately.

"It is useless to run, little man! While I breathe the air that comes to the shrine you filled, you will be suffocating. Unless you tell me who set you to work."

The monster's eyes glared from that fierce, gilded mask. Zeng used the tongs, and caught him by the leg, holding him helpless, stifling in that venomous air. The memory of Prince Yuan's horrible death, and Forest Baker's steeled him to his cruel task.

This stocky dwarf, warped as much in mind as in body, was no more than the tool of some superior. Beyond any doubt, Wang Lu had sent him, so Zeng could not relent.

"Tell me, fool, or smother," he demanded fiercely. "A better death than you planned for me!"

Then Zeng became increasingly aware of a sound he could not quite understand. At first he had mistaken it for his own pulse, drumming in his ears, but now he knew that the walls, thick as they were, quivered and shook. Those were hammer blows, axe blows!

A door swung in.

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## CHAPTER X

### *End of the Scroll*

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**C**HOW had made good his threat. He had cut away bars and bolts, using an adze instead of his favorite hatchet. His face was slashed and bleeding and his coat was bloody. Behind him, in the dimly lighted passage, two men lay face down in spreading red pools.

Zeng staggered to the door, dragging his choking prisoner with him.

"Where have you been?" he demanded of his huge servant.

"At the movie, just for a little while, Master," Chow answered, chagrined. "To see if my hatchet had hurt the big man. When I came out, someone told me you had passed by. But I could not find you—Wang's door was barred—I knew that I had failed you—so I got an adze and came

in through a skylight, and those men —" he pointed at the ones he had cut down—"were waiting here for something to happen. It did."

One of the dead pair was Wang Lu.

"Where are the others?" Zeng demanded.

"They ran when they could not stop me."

"Take this fellow, but don't hurt him."

Much as Zeng wanted to get in touch with the police, he had to search the place and find the Uighur manuscript which had caused this chain of violence. Likewise, he wanted whatever other clues there were, for even during the short time it would take for him to give the alarm, lurking followers of the dead White Lotus chief would return to destroy evidence.

"Men are coming, many men!" Chow cried. "Hear them! Shall I kill this blood-drinker before they can save him?"

"No, you big ox! Wait!" Zeng listened to the tramp of feet, the splintering of wood, the shriek and chatter and squealing of spectators. "That's the police. They're breaking in from every side at once. Did you call them?"

"I didn't have time, master."

Whoever of the White Lotus Brethren might have been preparing to counter-attack after Chow's surprise party would now be scattered.

"There is something odd about the arrival of the police," Zeng said. "Go to meet them, tell them you have searched the place, that all is well with me. That nothing else is to be found. That this dwarf is the killer, and that I will soon explain."

Before his servant could answer, Zeng darted into the farther gloom of the passage. The sound of Chow dragging his captive up the stairs was muffled by the rumble and roar of the police raid. Zeng found a dark corner behind the compartment in which he had almost been smothered, and listened to the cross-fire of voices.

He was not sure whether he had rightly guessed the origin of the alarm which had brought the police, but his idea was worth following up.

Gradually silence took hold of the building, silence and darkness. Chinese, whether renegade or law abiding, would avoid the locale, lest some enemy report their interest. At last Zeng came from hiding and stealthily ascended the dark stairs which led to the lodge room.

For long moments he waited near the open door.

**F**INALLY a tiny spot of light blossomed at the far end. The circle of glow moved up and down the pedestal which supported the statue of Kwan Yin. Zeng could distinguish the outline of the searcher.

The light shifted toward the statue of Kwan Ti. There was a suppressed cry of triumph, and the thin, white pencil of light reached for the door.

Zeng already had caught a whiff of familiar perfume, and it confirmed his deduction. He flicked on his own flash, revealing the tense, lovely face of Nadja Karakhov. She cried out, and her hand darted toward the bag tucked under her arm.

"Too late to get your pistol," Zeng said, and seized her wrist.

She recognized his voice. "Doctor Zeng!" she said bitterly.

"Yes, I escaped." He lowered his own light, and saw the Uighur scroll which lay on the floor. "If you will tell the truth, I will say nothing about your efforts to obstruct justice. Otherwise, I shall be compelled to tell how you neglected to report the death of Hubert Rayne. How you locked me up, and then turned in an alarm to get Wang Lu's place raided, so that after the police had thoroughly smashed things, you could slip in and search for this Uighur scroll."

"You know everything, Doctor Zeng," the woman murmured.

"I merely reasoned backward and hindsight is always acute," said Dr. Zeng dryly. "Suppose you fill in the missing parts?"

"I will," she promised. "I've failed at every move, thanks to you!"

"Personally, I am very sorry," Zeng said politely as he led the way through the maze behind the late Wang Lu's herb shop.

The heavy doors which had been

hewn or pried from their hinges showed Zeng how much Nadja's strategy had helped him. Chow, dropping through a skylight, had not provided for any quick retreat.

"I shall give you all possible credit for unintentional aid," Zeng said.

Just as they reached the alley a man's voice exclaimed, "There he is now! I knew Chow was lying to us!"

Anne Carter darted out of the shadows. "Lin," she cried, "we've been worried frantic. I made Dad wait here. Oh! You have a prisoner."

"Not a prisoner, but some evidence," Zeng explained, secretly thrilled at Anne's anxiety. "What of Chow and his prisoner? Did the dwarf talk?"

Captain Carter gestured to the car that waited at the corner. "He made a sudden break and Chow threw a hatchet. He missed, and the dwarf ran to the roof where he slipped in jumping to the next building. When we found him, he was beyond talking. I rather think he did it on purpose, judging from what Chow told me."

**B**UT it was not until they went to Doctor Zeng's apartment that Captain Carter learned all the details and received full assurance that the case was actually closed, that the dwarf and Wang Lu had been the principal criminals, while the other members of the White Lotus were guilty of no more than loyalty to a misguided leader.

Zeng pointed to the tongs. "It is very simple. The dwarf first slugged his victims, so they could not yell. The circle of death, of course, was to have closed when Rayne died."

"But he committed suicide," Carter protested.

"No, he was hanged. He could not have kicked that chair away, for his feet were further from the floor than the seat on which he was supposed to have stood. Everything else was nicely worked out, but that one detail was wrong. I did not tell you of that simply because I wished you to think, for a while, that the case was closed, while I closed it in my own way."

"But Rayne's teeth very closely matched the bites that killed Prince Yuan and Forest Baker."

Doctor Zeng smiled. "Rayne was an opium addict. During his sodden hours, the White Lotus could easily have made a cast of his teeth, and must have done so. These tongs prove my point. And after one pipe too many, Rayne could very easily be hanged, as if in remorseful suicide.

"Finally, the White Lotus did not know I had already told the police of their final victim's death. Thus, when I worked my way in on a pretext, they attempted to dispose of me by the same murder weapon, and lay the blame on Rayne."

Anne shuddered. "Do you mean that Rayne was killed just to deflect suspicion from the dwarf?"

"No," Zeng answered. "Rayne knew much of the Genghis Khan tradition. Even without the Uighur scroll, he was dangerous. So they eliminated him." He turned toward Nadja. "And now tell us why you went to such great risk to get this scroll."

Zeng unrolled the Uighur manuscript as he awaited the Russian woman's answer.

"The White Lotus as you must have guessed," Nadja explained, "was opposed to anyone's finding the buried treasure and the sacred relics of Genghis Khan. The Mongol and the Manchu have always menaced China."

"As I explained," Zeng said to Anne and her father.

"I am a Soviet Agent," Nadja went on, "and my duty was to prevent the discovery of the great Khan's grave for precisely the same reason. Imagine the predicament of my government if the Mongol power of old times were revived! And you can be sure that no matter who sent an expedition to dig, the surrounding tribes would wait for the success of the excavation and then close in to seize the relics. That was my mission, and I have failed. You have the scroll."

Dr. Zeng studied the Uighur script for a full minute. The silence was becoming oppressive when he raised his eyes to glance at his companions. Anne and her father leaned forward sharply as he arose and approached a great brass brazier with the precious scroll.

"Don't, oh, don't!" Nadja cried out,

grasping the meaning of his action.

"Damn it, Zeng, Carter shouted, "that's evidence!"

"Evidence against two dead men," replied Zeng calmly as he struck a light and held the flame to the silk damask. "They have already paid the penalty. Destroying this is more important than prosecuting a society of misguided men who, according to their own lights, did rightly enough. The murderers are dead, Carter. And you have not failed, Nadja. The sword of Genghis Khan, his horse-tail standard—all these things must remain hidden beneath the sands of the Gobi lest they do have the power to incite the Mongols and set all Asia afire."

Slowly the flames licked and ate into the time-stained scroll. Silently all of them watched the brazier become the funeral urn for the ghost of a great secret.

Anne shuddered. "Mongols!" she

cried. "How I detest Orientals!" Then she thought of her host, and gasped. She hadn't meant him.

But Zeng was only looking at her with a grave smile about his lips. How deeply he may have been wounded by this involuntary flash of racial prejudice did not show on his features. As far as the world was concerned, he was Chinese—and he couldn't tell Anne any different.

"Oh, Lin!" the girl cried out. "Forgive me. I didn't mean it. I wasn't thinking of you."

"I know," said Dr. Zeng gently. "But I am thinking of you. A courteous host remembers when he has invited guests to dinner, even though they have been delayed. Chow! Lai Hu Chow! Now where can that yellow mountain of flesh have gone!"

"Just serve us some tea and almond cakes, Zeng," yawned Captain Carter lazily. "I'll bet he's gone to a movie."

Next Issue: DEATH WALKS SOFTLY, a Novelet by John H. Knox

Girls rave about the shaves you get  
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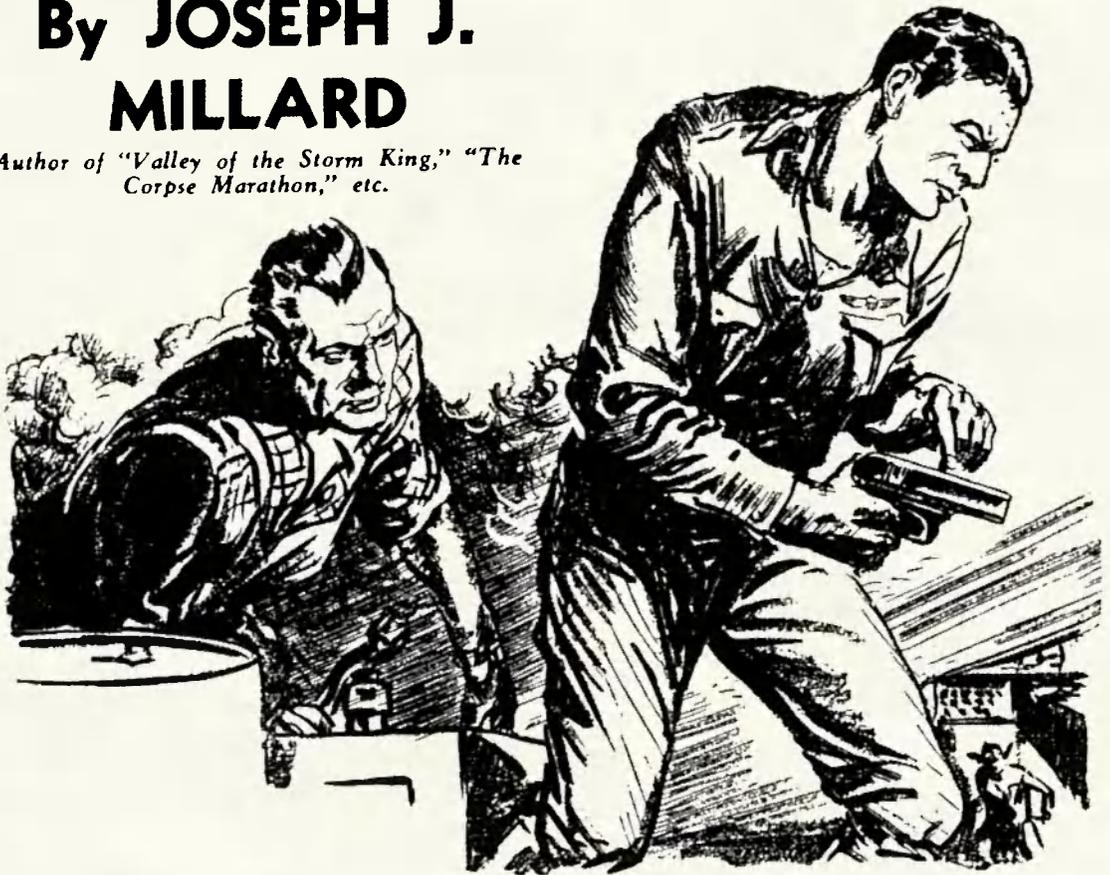
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# WINGS FOR THE DEAD

By **JOSEPH J.  
MILLARD**

*Author of "Valley of the Storm King," "The  
Corpse Marathon," etc.*



Death Lurks in the Sky When an Air Meet Flies Over Forbidden  
Ground—Until Craig Proves a Pilot Can Also Be a Detective!

## CHAPTER I

### *Terror in the Sky*

**T**HE Thunderbird Flying School was far from being a Yale or Harvard of the air. The office was a single cluttered room in a corner of the main hangar, a separate room only by virtue of low partitions. Weather maps, certificates and aviation photos crowded the unpainted walls, while model planes of every type and description dangled from the ceiling or roosted on each of the littered cabinets.

From outside its sanctum, where "Groundhog" Ryan had been testing an overhauled Hisso, blue oil fumes crawled in, to curl snakily under the glare of the single unshaded light. Nick Craig, temporary and unwilling manager of the air school, pawed ineffectually at the sluggish fumes, mopped his streaming forehead and swore thickly.

"What a sucker I was," he growled, "letting myself be talked into managing this haunted junkyard for Willy Glover's heirs until the estate is settled. It isn't bad enough to worry about losing students, trying to get



"Keep on the ground," snapped the hermit, "or the Thunderbird will tear you apart!"

a rating from the Civil Aeronautics Board, and getting set for the aviation meet we're staging in conjunction with the county fair that opens tomorrow. Now I've got a lunatic hermit in my hair, besides."

He slammed an unopened telegram onto the already overflowing desk. It skittered off, starting a miniature snow storm of unpaid bills fluttering to the floor.

Craig swore again and ducked down to retrieve the numerous scattered papers.

At that instant the bellow of a shot-

gun blasted the silence of the night outside. The pane of the raised window dissolved in a glittering cloud and swept in over Craig's frozen, kneeling figure. An invisible hand seemed to sweep across the desk-top where he had just been leaning, scattering riddled papers and splinters of wood across the floor.

Craig went flat on his face and stayed there, waiting for another blast, wondering dazedly what it was all about. There were yells and the quick pound of feet in the outer hangar, then more yells and the

sounds of conflict outside. Finally he heard a quivering shriek that was abruptly choked off.

Craig got to his feet, trembling a little, slapping glass fragments out of his hair. "Birdy" Barnett, chief flight instructor, pounded through the door, wild-eyed.

"Craig!" he panted. "Nick, are you all right? It was that blasted unwashed messiah. He took a shot at you with a ten-gauge shotgun. The boys got him trying to make a get-away."

"The hermit?" Craig's jaw dropped. "I thought the guy was only a feeble-minded pest, not a homicidal maniac. Maybe we'll have to call a keeper on him, after all."

**H**E led the way outside and around, off the concrete apron, to where a knot of men hovered over the yellow wash of a flashlight that outlined a tangle of rags on the ground.

White faces turned as Craig strode up. The chunky figure of Groundhog Ryan, chief maintenance mechanic, got off the bundle of rags and it became the figure of a man. An unbelievably gaunt and bony body showed through shapeless, filthy rags of clothing. Black eyes glittered madly through the tangle of white hair and beard that completely hid the mad hermit's face.

Craig stared somberly down for a moment, then touched the captive with his foot.

"O k a y, Kreevitz," he snapped. "What's the idea of the Wild West stuff? What's the Thunderbird going to say if his favorite disciple gets himself burned up in the electric chair?"

Ivan Kreevitz, the mad hermit of Thunder Knob, wriggled jerkily. A long, bony finger came out of the tangle to point at Craig.

"He told me to! The Thunderbird himself came to my cave last night. He said I was his most faithful follower and he'd reward me with a kingdom in the sky. But he said you were annoying him, flying those airplanes in and out of his cloud. You got to

stop it, or he'll kill you all—every one of you. He'll tear you apart with his terrible claws and throw you down out of his cloud. You won't bother him none when you're smashed up and dead!"

The little knot of students and instructors stirred restlessly as the insane laughter cackled out.

Craig saw their uneasiness and made a strangled sound of disgust deep in his throat. Besides everything else, he had to buck an age-old superstition.

His angry gaze shifted up toward the grim, eternal cloud. It was visible even at night, like a great black bird soaring endlessly, blanketing the stars. The tip of one cyclopean wing overhung the field. The other wing-tip, three miles to the west, brushed the flat top of Thunder Knob, a jagged mountain of rock that jutted out of the flat Atlantic coastal plain where no mountain should be.

It was this knob and the long, winding ridge climbing up to it from the sea that caused the great Thunderbird cloud overhead. Warm air thermals, thrown up by the freak land formation, met colder, moisture-laden sea winds seven thousand feet up and condensed them into the menacing shape that perpetually rode the skies.

From earliest history, Indians had feared and avoided this spot because of the ever-present cloud. To them it was not a cloud but the Thunderbird himself, maker of storms and destruction, who poised there threateningly. Their legends told that the Thunderbird frequently came down in the form of a gigantic bird with the head of a man to slay those who invaded its domain.

When white men finally braved the taboo and established the village of Thunderbird, naming it after the menace in a burst of bravado, they ran into such a storm of disasters that the legends were revived.

Through the years, the superstition gradually vanished from the surface of the little community. But it was always there, lurking underneath, waiting for any untoward happening to bring it out. The fact that huge

hawks, eagles and sea birds chose Thunder Knob for a nesting place helped keep the legends alive. Let a giant eagle sweep his shadow across a field, or a giant hawk attack a chicken or lamb, and whispers of the Thunderbird instantly spread like wildfire

**T**HOSE whispers had nearly wrecked the flying school more than once, but Willy Grove had stuck and fought them down. Now they seemed to be returning, stronger than ever. Craig had sensed the undercurrent of their vague terrors from the first appearance of Kreevitz, the mad hermit who had lived in a cave on Thunder Knob for countless years, worshiping the cloud as a god.

"I better phone the sheriff, hadn't I?" asked Forest Whalen, one of the older students. "This guy was bad enough, darting at every plane today, swinging a club and almost mangling himself in the props. Now, if he's gone kill-crazy, he better be—"

Craig shook his head. "He's just a poor wild animal and I hate to see him caged. After all, he's been harmless for years and this spell might be only temporary. Hold him a minute."

He disappeared into the office and returned, carrying his own forty-five automatic. The hermit flinched back uneasily.

"See that?" Craig demanded harshly, shaking the gun. "You know what that is and what it would do to you. You're scared of death of pistols, aren't you? Well, hereafter we're all carrying guns like this. If we ever see you anywhere near the school again, we'll use them. Does that make sense to you, Kreevitz?"

"You'll die just the same," the hermit snarled deep in his throat, "all of you, if you go up in the Thunderbird's sky tomorrow to do them tricks for the fair. You keep on the ground, or he'll tear you to pieces. He told me so and he likes me because I tear the hearts out of rabbits and put 'em up on the Knob for an offering."

"Get out!" Craig rapped. "Scram, before I change my mind!"

He signaled the group back and the madman scuttled away into the dark-

ness like a furtive animal. Craig sucked in a deep breath and wiped cold perspiration from his forehead.

"The gun talk was bluff, of course," he said, "but watch yourselves just the same, though I think Kreevitz will stay clear of us now. But I wish I knew what set him off all of a sudden, after living up on the Knob for years without bothering a soul."

He frowned at the distant bulk of Thunder Knob, looming black against the stars. It was no wonder the hermit's warped brain saw an object of fear and veneration in the somber monster that hovered endlessly over his cave.

"Curse that screwy cloud, anyhow!" Craig growled.

"You going to put on the air carnival stunts tomorrow?" Whalen asked, eying Craig queerly.

"Certainly. Why not? Because a crazy hermit sees visions that tell him the cloud wants us out of the sky?"

"I don't know," Whalen mumbled nervously. "I've just got a feeling that maybe something's going to happen. It seems funny that a story like the Thunderbird legend could keep its hold on people—modern, educated people—all these years if there wasn't something. . . ."

"Report to me before you start practicing figure eights in the morning," Craig said sharply. "If you're jittery, I'll ground you. We can't afford any accidents."

**W**HISPERING nervously, the students moved off toward the dormitory beyond the hangar. Craig watched them, his eyes cold in the bronze mask of his lean face.

"This would be a swell time for some nervous student to pile up in a crash," he muttered bitterly. "Here we're staging a three-day meet at the Thunderbird fair, mortgaging our shirts for prize money to draw big-name pilots, simply to give the school some national recognition. A fatal crack-up would ruin us."

"How's the big race shaping up?" Barnett asked.

"Okay. The course is to be seven miles straight out to sea, around Beam

Shoal Light, south to Kummer Island and back here for a roaring finish in front of the grandstand. And that reminds me, where the devil is Otto? He was supposed to bring my race entry blanks out from the printer's tonight."

Otto Rimmer was the assistant flight instructor, hired by Glover shortly before his death. Though a grumpy and not overly popular man, Rimmer was a first-class pilot.

"Why, didn't you get them yet? A couple of the students, Olson and Ciper, were going to bring them right back hours ago. They had to go into town, anyhow, to have some films developed from a hike they took up Thunder Knob. They promised to bring the blanks. I think Otto had a binge or something lined up."

Craig opened his mouth to speak, held it open as he stared. The faces of Ryan and Barnett were taking on a queer, lurid flush, like the reflection of distant flames. He saw them staring at him, then at one another. He saw that the crimson glare was deepening, glinting now from the concrete of the apron underfoot.

A sudden wild shout whirled Craig toward the distant students. They were gesturing skyward. He looked up and his breath caught in his throat.

A ball of unbearable crimson fire was floating gently down out of the thick cloud of the Thunderbird. It rocked below the pale blossom of a parachute, throwing a lurid glare across sky and earth. Something dark and shapeless dangled below it.

"A flare!" Ryan gasped.

"Signals," Barnett guessed wildly. "Remember the radio announcement yesterday about the Nazi submarine that attacked a British convoy twenty miles off the coast south of here? The sub was crippled so it couldn't submerge, but it got away in the dark last night. I bet that's a signal from—"

"Subs," Craig said dryly, "don't drop parachutes. That's an airplane flare."

"But, Nick, we'd hear a plane anywhere within a dozen miles on a quiet night like this."

Instead of answering, Craig burst

into a run, pounding across the field toward the spot where the chute seemed due to land. The students raced ahead of him.

At five hundred feet the flare died out, but there was enough starlight to show the chute and its darker burden swinging down. Wherever it had come from, Craig wished fervently it had picked a night when nerves were less ragged.

**T**HE dark object bumped the runway ahead and was swallowed by the folds of the collapsing chute. Whalen and his fellow students reached the spot, began tugging away the chute. Someone snapped on a flashlight.

Craig, with Ryan and Barnett at his heels, burst into the group as the dark object came into view. He stopped short, paralyzed. His nerves went cold and the blood drained out of his face.

He was staring down at the horribly mangled body of young Peter Olson, one of the students who had gone for the entry blanks. Only the face, twisted in the agony of horrible death, was unmarred. From shoulders to feet the rest of the body had been slashed and torn as if by terrible, ripping talons.

Young Whalen broke the frozen silence.

"I told you," he shouted hysterically. "I told you something was going to happen. The Thunderbird did it! I told you—I told you—I told you!"

His voice went up into a shriek and broke on a note of wild, gurgling laughter. Craig barely heard him. He was staring at the mangled body in the bloody parachute harness, at the twisted, unmarred face—at the crude image of a soaring bird that was drawn in still-damp blood on the pale forehead—the image of the Thunderbird!

From somewhere far off in the night, in the direction of the hulking Thunder Knob, came a cackle of insane laughter.

It was the laughter of Kreevitz, the mad hermit, from his den under the Thunderbird's wing.

## CHAPTER II

*The Show Must Go on*

**H**OMER Weems, the secretary of the Thunderbird county fair, was a fat man with a calculating eye, a love of good things and asthma. He was also the local banker and note-holder for most of the local businesses.

He came panting and wheezing into the school office at dawn, gnawing on a cold cigar, rubbing unshaven jowls with a nervous hand. Craig sat behind the littered desk, his face in his hands. He had been there most of the night.

"Craig," Weems wheezed, "this is terrible! I just heard about it. The sheriff called me. I got out of bed and drove right out to— Well, has anything new—"

"Nothing," Craig said, his voice muffled by his hands. "It was too dark to fly up and search the cloud. None of us heard a plane, but we've got a man phoning all the farmers west of the Knob to see if they heard one. Poses are still hunting for Olson's bunkmate, Teddy Ciper. And your idiot sheriff smeared any fingerprints there might have been on the chute harness couplings."

"Ghastly! Simply unbelievable, that such a horrible—I mean, I only hope it won't— That is, you aren't—"

Craig raised a haggard face from his hands.

"If you're trying to ask, are we going through with the air show," he said harshly, "the answer is yes. A poor kid died horribly, but the show must go on. You can go back to bed. Your investment's safe."

"Investment? Craig, I assure you it's only the fair I'm thinking of—the people of Thunderbird County—"

"Nuts! I happen to know you hold most of the paper that was floated to finance the fair corporation here. Right now you see what happened only as swell box-office. The ghouls should flock in by the thousands when this story gets out. Well, we're going

ahead, not for the sake of your pocket-book, but because of those pilots who have spent money to fly here for the meet. Now get out and let me alone."

"What? See here, Craig, I—"

"Get out!"

Weems looked at Nick Craig's eyes, gulped and left. A moment later his car purred off.

Craig got up wearily and stood looking out the shattered window, across the morning mists rising from the landing field. Half a mile away, beyond the field, the buildings of the fairgrounds loomed gray in the dawn. Overhead, the Thunderbird cloud hovered ominously, its black belly crimson-smeared by the rising sun.

Blood-red! Fresh blood from talons that had so recently torn the life from the body of a young boy?

Craig swore in a choked voice. What had really happened? No legendary beast could carry a mangled body up into the sky on soundless wings, then drop it precisely on the runway before the hangar. A chute dropped at random might drift for miles on the cross-winds up there. Why had young Olson been murdered? Had the mad hermit's ravings been something more than insane babble?

**C**RAIG cursed the thought without being able to shake it off. That was the insidious thing about that cloud. You came under its spell, laughed at its superstitions, looked at it only as a freak of nature and went along without even thinking of the cloud. And then, one day, you awoke to discover that the weird spell of that hovering phantom had seeped into your soul and planted the seeds of doubt and terror in some dark, unnoticed corner.

The citizens of Thunderbird would laugh at the legends and flee in terror from a manifestation of them.

Still worse would be the effect on the air show, Craig realized. Older pilots of the barn-storming school were inherently superstitious. Someone who wanted to spoil the show by driving away the fliers could have picked no better way than by reviving the Thunderbird legend.

Craig started to turn away from the window. He swung back sharply, his eyes narrowing, fingers clawing unconsciously into the unpainted sill. Something was coming across the landing field. A human figure, reeling and stumbling, was falling and then getting up to stumble on. Mist phantoms distorted the figure so that in the graying light it was impossible to recognize it.

Craig whipped around, went racing out of the hangar and across the apron, his fists clenched and cold sweat on his face.

The figure fell again and made no effort to rise. Craig reached it, dropped to his knees and turned it over. The square, gray-white face of Otto Rimmer, assistant instructor, looked up at him.

There was a dark, ugly bruise across one cheek and the clothing over his chest and abdomen was slashed and blood-smeared.

In the center of Otto Rimmer's pale forehead was the crudely drawn figure of the Thunderbird, outlined in darkening blood.

"Nick!" Rimmer's eyes fluttered open, blinked dazedly up at Craig's tense face. "The Thunderbird—says not—to fly—today. Got—to call off—air meet—or—all killed!"

"What happened to you?" Craig demanded fiercely. "Where have you been all night? Do you know Pete Olson's been murdered?"

"I know," Rimmer gasped weakly. "I—saw it."

His eyes closed and he went limp, dropping out of Craig's grasp. With terrible fury in his eyes, Craig fumbled among the bloody rags until he found the racing beat of a heart. Rimmer was all right, evidently weak from loss of blood and shock. Craig's hasty investigation showed that the slashes across the body were not deep enough to be dangerous.

He left Rimmer lying on the damp grass and raced back to the hangar. While he was arousing Groundhog Ryan and Birdy Barnett, the sheriff's car pulled onto the field, returning from a fruitless search for the missing Teddy Ciper. With the lanky Sheriff

Timmons was Dr. Damon, who had been helping in the search.

Together they got Rimmer to bed in the dormitory and Dr. Ramon dressed the shallow wounds.

"He'll be okay after a rest, but he wouldn't be if he'd been an inch closer to the beast, or whatever it was that slashed at him."

**H**E was sticking the last strip of tape into place on the pilot's chest when Rimmer's eyes opened. For a moment he recoiled, staring wildly at the figures bending over the bed. The terror went out of his face, though, as soon as Craig touched his hand.

"Can you tell us about it now, Otto? You said you saw Pete Olsen murdered. Who did it?"

"The Thunderbird! Don't look at me like that. I'm not crazy. I tell you, I saw it! I had some beer in town and was walking out, taking a short-cut across the field. Suddenly a huge black bird swooped out of the darkness and knocked me down, hit me alongside my jaw with one wing."

"What kind of bird?"

"It was huge and black and it had the head of a human being. I couldn't see it very well in the dark, but I could see human features. I swear it! And it talked to me. It came and stood over where I lay and told me we'd all be killed if we didn't call off the air meet. It said if I dared to fly again, I'd be the first one to die."

"What about Pete Olson?"

"I—I was so scared and dazed that I couldn't move, Nick. As I lay there, it stalked off into the dark and came back, dragging something. Then I could see that it was Olson, all slashed and mangled. The Thunderbird made me look, said that's how we'd all be if we didn't call off the air meet at once.

"Then it slashed me once with one giant claw and flew up into the sky, carrying Olson's body. I guess I passed out then, because the next thing I knew, it was daylight and I was lying in a puddle of blood at the edge of the field. I started walking back and you met me."

Craig's face was cold, expressionless. He started to turn from the bed. Otto Rimmer caught at his arm.

"Nick, for God's sake, you'll call it off, won't ybu? You aren't going ahead after what's happened!"

Craig raised white-knuckled fists.

"I don't believe in anything I can't poke in the jaw," he said thickly, "and I never smacked a ghost. You catch some rest, Otto. We'll talk about the meet later."

He turned and stalked out. The others followed, leaving Dr. Ramon with the wounded man. Groundhog Ryan trotted at Craig's side, his eyes narrow.

"Nice speech, Nick," he said finally. "How much of it do you believe yourself?"

Craig's lips were taut across set teeth.

"I wish I knew, Groundhog," he mumbled. "I wish I knew."

**S**PIRITS rose with the climbing sun, however. By ten o'clock, when Craig sent Barnett across to the fairgrounds infield to lay plans for the afternoon events, no one raised the question of calling off the meet.

A number of pilots had arrived and their planes were staked out around the headquarters tent in the infield. A runway had been built, connecting the school landing field with the fairgrounds, to be used if cross-winds prevented landing and take-off directly in front of the grandstand. Otherwise everything was to take place as close to the crowds as possible.

At ten Craig was in the hangar, watching Groundhog check the Eagles in somber silence. Suddenly they heard the bumbling drone of a plane overhead. Groundhog cocked an ear.

"Monocoupe," he stated positively. "Warner One-twenty-five, recently overhauled. Nice power plant, Nick."

They went outside and watched the blue-and-white ship circle the field low and slide down onto the east-west runway with a groan of shock cords and a clanking grind of the tail-skid. It taxied around and up onto the apron in front of them. The motor *blurred* and died.

A girl climbed out. Craig stared at her tall, trim figure, at coppery hair catching the morning sun above smiling violet eyes.

"Hello," she said, stripping off light gloves. "Are you Nick Craig? I'm Mona Lacy. . . ."

She stopped, waited. A fleeting frown touched her forehead. "Well, won't I do, or didn't you get my wire?"

"Wire?" Craig came out of his daze and slapped at his pocket. Stiff paper crinkled beneath his hand. "I forgot all about it. You see, it saved my life last night when it came. In the excitement I overlooked it." He grinned at her blank bewilderment. "It fell off the desk. I leaned over to pick it up just in time to miss a load of buckshot aimed at my head. Since it isn't polite to read in front of guests, maybe you'd better tell me what the wire said, Miss Lacy."

"I'd better," she said with visible irritation. "It was simply a notice that I was coming in this morning to take charge of Thunderbird Flying School. I own it now. My cousin, Will Glover, left it to me by the terms of the will that was probated the day before yesterday."

Craig shook his head with genuine pity.

"Lady, all I can say is that you picked a sweet time to inherit *this* flying school."

"Why? Is—is anything wrong?"

Groundhog Ryan turned away to hide his unhappy expression.

"Oh no, miss—I mean Boss. Not a thing. Not a single thing at all. Everything is just honky-gory."

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## CHAPTER III

### *Flaming Coffin*

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**T**HE sun beat down furiously on the Thunderbird county fairgrounds and on nine thousand gaping paid admissions, most of whom secretly hoped to see another mangled body come tumbling down out of the sky. Three hours had passed since

the air meet opened, with that morbid hope still unsatisfied. But the time had served to tighten, rather than ease the tension of Craig's nerves.

For three hours he had paced the railed platform of the judges' stand like a caged panther, directing the air meet and shouting a description of the events into a portable mike that hurled his amplified voice into grandstand and bleachers.

Planes had taken off and landed, roared up into the sky and screamed down again, raced and dog-fought and stunted. Pilots had chased floating balloons, had bombed a tar-paper shack in the infield with sacks of flour, had competed in dead-stick spot landings and short-leg races.

During that time Craig's own private ship, a Hydra Bullet, had waited close to the stand, warmed and ready for action. The Bullet was one of the fastest jobs that ever split a cloud, literally twin flying engines with just enough silver airplane around and between to get them on and off the ground. Craig had figured that if anything did happen, it would happen in or around the Thunderbird cloud. He was ready to rocket up into it at the first warning.

By four o'clock the strain of watching and waiting and dreading had drawn his nerves out almost to the breaking point. He signaled Birdy Barnett over from the line-up to take his place at the mike. He dropped to the ground, where Mona Lacy sat in the shade of the stand. She greeted him with a tense smile and made room on the bench.

"No trouble yet," she said. "Sitting out here in the fresh air and sun, with the familiar sights and sounds all around me, it's hard to believe anything as horrible as you described could actually exist. Maybe nothing more will happen."

"I wish I could think that," Craig groaned, mopping his face. "Lord, how I wish it! But Teddy Ciper's still missing and we're still defying the killer of his roommate. If I only knew what lay behind it, I wouldn't feel so helpless. But I've had lines out all morning and can't locate an

enemy, outside of the mad hermit, who isn't clever enough for such a stunt. There aren't any competitors we might be hurting. Nobody's ever wanted the school badly enough even to try to buy it."

"How about a personal angle?" Mona asked reflectively. "Maybe some personal enemy of those boys. . . ."

"Then why attack Otto, too? And if Otto was the intended victim, why attack the boys? Before long there won't be anything left to believe but the crazy hermit's story."

He broke off as a plane came bumping up over the runway from the school field and taxied toward them down the line-up.

"Hey!" Craig shouted. "That's a school Eagle, but who's in it? The students are supposed to be grounded."

The plane swung close to them and stopped with the prop ticking over. Otto Rimmer climbed out stiffly. Except for the bruise and the bulk of bandages under his shirt, he seemed normal enough as he came toward them.

"Doc said it was okay," he forestalled Craig's objections. "Nick, you had me scheduled for some stunts along about now. Let me go through with them, will you?"

**N**ICK CRAIG started. "You aren't fit for punishment like that yet, Otto. Even a pressure of three or four gravs on a pullout might be enough to pop those gashes open and start a hemorrhage. You'd better wait a day or two."

"Nick," Rimmer pleaded, "I've got to go up. I'll take the stunts easy and I'm pretty well strapped up, anyhow. Nothing's going to happen. I've got to go up and—and prove I was only having a bad dream last night."

Craig stared a moment; then nodded reluctantly.

"Okay, if that's how it is, but take those dives easy. And stay clear of—"

But Rimmer was already climbing back into the Eagle and revving the motor to swing toward the take-off line. Craig leaned against the slip-

stream, his nerves eerily cold.

"I wish I hadn't said yes," he growled. "I've got a feeling—"

The rest was drowned in the surging roar of unleashed power as the speedy Eagle whipped down the infield and lifted into the air. Birdy was shouting into the mike, reading a description of the stunts Rimmer was scheduled to perform. The words boomed out into the packed grandstand and flatted back in crashing echoes.

The Eagle banked and came back over the field, climbing steadily, getting altitude. It vanished into the face of the sun and reappeared, higher and smaller. The roar of its engine dwindled to a high, distant drone.

Now the plane was no more than a speck, insignificant beneath the monstrous Thunderbird cloud, circling steadily up toward it.

"Keep out of that cloud, you fool!" Craig shouted, unaware that he cried the words aloud.

At seven thousand the plane was suddenly swallowed by the floor of the cloud. A moment later its whispering drone was muted. Cold perspiration broke out of Craig's forehead and ran down his face. He stared up until his neck muscles ached.

The dragging seconds were eternities while he waited for Rimmer's ship to reappear. A sudden sharp pain in his arm made him look down. Mona Lacy was unconsciously gripping the flesh with tense fingers, her face drawn and deathly pale as she stared upward. As if sensing an event out of the ordinary, the murmur of the crowd died away to tense silence.

Suddenly the Eagle burst back out of the cloud. Craig started, let out his breath and then caught it again. Something was wrong. The ship was coming down in a narrowing spiral and the roar of its motor reached his ears as a thin, high, terrible scream. The spiral tightened until the nose was boring straight down and the tail assembly whipped behind in a deadly circle.

"He's spinning!" Mona cried, half-sobbing. "Stick ahead! Stick ahead and left rudder!"

Somewhere nearby, a voice cried, "Oh, God! Oh, God!" over and over and groans burst from the packed stands. Down the field, men were racing toward the waiting ambulance and crash wagon. Craig tore his eyes away from the spinning ship and seized at Mona's shoulders.

"Stay clear!" he yelled. "Whatever happened to him happened in that cloud. I'm going up."

**B**EFORE she could protest, he was running across the sod toward the waiting Bullet, waving for Groundhog to race through the props.

The Eagle was only a thousand feet up now, screaming down toward mid-field beyond any possibility of escape. It struck at the instant the Bullet's warm cylinders caught fire. There was an earth-shattering roar and the Eagle vanished in a mushroom of smoke and dust. The mushroom was still growing when the first terrible tongues of flame spurted out from the wreckage to complete the destruction.

Craig jammed both throttles ahead. The Bullet lunged for the runway, taking off heedlessly cross-wind in a thunder of incredible speed and power. Craig looked back and down only once, to see the black wave of the crowd burst its barriers and surge out toward the flaming coffin that had been a plane. Then he set his teeth and turned his eyes up toward the waiting black maw of the Thunderbird above him.

At seven thousand feet the Bullet rocketed up into the cloud like an explosion with wings. The cold, gray wall of mist closed in around Craig, plucking at the wingtips with sentient fingers, shredding away from the slipstream in writhing coils. Hard-eyed and grim, he held the climb until the lighter gray of the cloud's ceiling showed over the Bullet's nose and the plane trembled near stalling speed. Then he levelled off and began to whip back and forth through the cloud.

Craig had no idea what he might see. But Otto Rimmer had flown up into the dark belly of the Thunderbird and had come spinning out to flaming destruction. Something had

caused that spin. Craig couldn't believe it was caused by a thing that could not exist. Last night Petey Olson had fallen from this same cloud, apparently murdered by something. But until he could see and fight a supernatural being for himself, Craig still thought in terms of "someone," rather than "something."

Cloud phantoms danced away from the plane's nose and shut in behind. Up and down, back and forth, Craig kicked the superb ship around and around, his head kept turning endlessly, searching the cloud walls. When he burst up into the clear air above, he quickly dived down again.

What had caused the spin? Unless Otto Rimmer had been unconscious or dead, he could have pulled out of it in ample time to land safely. Had he deliberately crashed, his overstrained nerves driving him to suicide? Craig dismissed that thought the moment it was born. Otto Rimmer was not the suicide type. Like Olson, Otto was murdered.

Craig saw it at that instant and his nerves froze. It was only half-visible, distorted by the wraiths of fog and too far away to be clearly visible. At first glance he thought it was a gigantic eagle winging its way through the cloud. Then he saw that this was too immense for any natural bird.

The vast wings spread twenty feet from the thick gray-black body, motionless as the impossible creature soared gently. Tucked up close to the great belly were two ugly talons, blood-red, as though freshly stained.

But it was the head of the thing that made Craig yell aloud. For just a fleeting moment he saw an unmistakable human head and bearded human face above that bird-body. Then the weird phantom folded its great wings and plummeted down out of sight in the cloud mass.

Cursing, sweating, trembling, Craig kicked the plane around in a tight turn and roared in pursuit. He tried to find the spot of the creature's disappearance, but in the thick cloud all directions were the same. Though he sent the plane roaring back and forth for ten minutes, he saw nothing. The

monstrosity, whatever it had been, had utterly vanished.

Craig flipped the Bullet over and sent it screaming down out of the cloud, reluctantly abandoning the search. His palms were slippery against the rubber grip of the control stick and his knees trembled with reaction. The thing he had seen could not exist, but he had seen it—the Thunderbird itself!

**C**RAIG dropped the Bullet onto the field, as close to the surging crowd as he dared, and tunneled his way through to the center of the mob.

Chemicals from the crash wagon had beaten down the flames. Men with asbestos gloves and wet towels over their faces were tugging at the twisted wreckage to get at the pitiful bundle of charred rags that had so recently been the spitting, hissing core of those flames. The ambulance stood close by. Beyond it, a wrecker from the Thunderbird garage waited to hook onto the half-imbedded tangle of debris and haul it away from the sight and memory of those who must keep flying.

Mona Lacy came out of the circling crowd and clung to Craig's arm, trembling violently. Barnett and Groundhog stared at him with white, sick faces and then looked away.

Craig took Mona's arm and pulled her back out of the crowd. Wordlessly he boosted her into the Bullet's cockpit and taxied across to the school, away from the crowd and the wreckage. The sun was setting, a blood-red ball on the western horizon, painting the belly of the Thunderbird cloud with dripping crimson as they climbed out on the apron and went into the office.

"Did you find anything?" Mona whispered.

"Yeah," Craig said flatly, and described his experience.

"Nick!" Mona clutched at his arm, her face stark-white. "Nick, what was it? What could it have been but the—the thing that can't exist? Nick, do you think there really is—"

"I don't know," Craig stated, his eyes blank. "I don't know. Twenty-

four hours ago, I'd have called the booby-hatch on anyone who said a cloud could come to life. This morning I was ready to believe Olson's body was dropped from a motorless glider, soaring on those thermals inside the cloud. It's still possible, but a glider doesn't look like what I saw. I'm finding it harder and harder to do, yet I must stick to reality. I've got to keep thinking I saw only a clever trick of some kind."

"I wish I could think so," said Mona, shuddering.

"So do I," he admitted.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Last Warning*

CRAIG sank into the chair behind the littered desk and dropped his face into his hands. His voice came muffled through his fingers.

"I'm almost ready to go up on Thunder Knob and ask the hermit to sublease part of his cave and accept my apologies."

He raised his head and his dazed eyes fell on a sheet of paper propped against a plane model. He snatched it up, stared at the lines of crude printing in blood-red paint that marched across the sheet, at the crude emblem of the Thunderbird that formed a signature. Mona came around and read it over his shoulder.

Craig, this is your final warning. Call off the air meet at once. Unless you immediately cancel the sea race scheduled for tomorrow afternoon and send the pilots away, you and every flier entered in that race will suffer the same fate as Otto Rimmer. The Thunderbird has spoken. Take warning and live. Disregard this and die.

He crumpled the sheet as Mona turned away and walked to the window. She stood for a long minute, staring out at the crimson sunset. At last she turned. Her face was white and drawn.

"Do as it says," she ordered wearily. "Call off the show and the big race. Take the money we put up for prizes and pay the expenses those pilots in-

curred in coming here. It's the only honest thing to do, Nick. We can't go on like this, murdering innocent men and boys by our stubbornness. I'll go back to—"

There suddenly appeared a hot flame in the depths of Craig's eyes.

"No, we won't give up! If the Thunderbird exists, then giving up won't save others from facing the same death another time. If this is all a murderous hoax, quitting will only help a killer accomplish his sinister purpose. Give me a few hours to work on this, Mona. I want to run down an idea or two of my own. If I haven't made any headway by morning, you can cancel."

"But what could a human killer be trying to accomplish?" she objected. "How could anyone profit by making us call off a perfectly innocent air meet? Or is someone trying to bankrupt the school?"

"That's what I don't know. If I could guess that, I'd have the whole answer. I checked this morning and couldn't find any record of anyone every trying to buy out the school. We aren't stepping on any competitor's toes. As far as I can find out, there's no trace of mineral wealth that would make anybody want the land here. And the equipment the school owns would just about pay off the current indebtedness at a forced sale. I don't see how anybody profits by these killings."

"No?" Groundhog Ryan said savagely from the doorway. "You should see that fat slug, Banker Weems, strutting around counting admission receipts. The biggest day the fair ever had before was four thousand people. Today there was close to eleven thousand. After this crash, there'll probably be twenty thousand jamming in tomorrow. And most of the profits go right into his pocket."

Craig sighed. "If Weems could fly and hadn't been standing in plain sight all the while Otto was up, I'd say you had something, Groundhog." He rose wearily, his face deep-lined and haggard. "Why don't you go rest up a little, Mona? I've got to arrange a couple of unpleasant matters. Pete

Olson's body has to be shipped home, and I've got to bundle up Otto's personal effects and see if there are any relatives to be notified."

**W**ITH Mona in a room at the dormitory and Groundhog off on an errand, Craig went back to the rear of the hangar and rummaged through the desk that had been Rimmer's headquarters between classes. He found nothing there but papers pertaining to school work. He left it to plod wearily up to the room Rimmer had occupied in the dormitory. The students were gone and the place was a dark, empty shell in the deepening dusk.

Out to sea, searchlights threw winking pencils across the dark sky. Craig frowned at the unaccustomed sight. Then he remembered the Nazi U-boat supposedly lurking out there somewhere, crippled, and the destroyer squadron detailed to patrol the area. Funny, he thought, how important a war seems until you get a little insignificant murder or two close to home to crowd it out of your mind.

He went up the echoing stairs, past the closed door of the room where Mona was resting, and snapped on the light in Otto Rimmer's cubbyhole. For twenty minutes he worked at his grim job, piling an assortment of clothing, books, letters and personal effects on the bed. He skimmed through some of the letters hastily in an effort to learn the names of relatives to be notified. All of them were business letters.

As he worked, Craig tried to think constructively of the tragedies and their possible cause, but his mind felt numb. He could see only visions of Otto Rimmer climbing into his ship for the last long flight, or stumbling across the misty flying field with the crimson symbol of the Thunderbird on his forehead.

Abruptly Craig stiffened and his breath whistled out. From the hangar next door came the sudden, shattering roar of a motor. Who could be starting a plane now? Groundhog had gone to town and Barnett was supposedly taking care of the wreck details.

Whirling, Craig raced back down the hall and out into the darkness. Light poured through the open hangar door, throwing a golden rectangle across the concrete apron. As Craig pounded toward that light, with terror clutching at his heart and strangling his breath, the roar deepened to an echoing thunder.

A blue-and-white bulk trundled out of the open hangar door and across the rectangle of light. Craig yelled incoherently. For a single instant, the light had fallen on the familiar lines of Mona Lacy's moncoupe and on the dark, shapeless figure in the pilot's seat. Then the plane was beyond the light, racing out across the dark field with growing speed.

The tail lifted, then the wheels. The light plane hung for a moment, quickly roared upward, its exhaust trailing a blue flame across the first winking stars of evening. The flame-trail circled back, turned and turned again, climbing in a tight spiral up toward the dark, sullen mass of the Thunderbird overhead. Mona Lacy, flying her ship up into the deadly cloud. . . .

"It can't be Mona!" Craig cried aloud, a cold knife of agony in his heart. "Somebody's stealing her ship."

He raced back into the dormitory. The closed door of her room slammed open under the impact of his frantic drive. He stumbled into darkness. His fingers found the lightswitch and a sobbing breath tore from his lips.

**T**HE room was empty. The bed still showed the faint imprint of her body. In the center of it lay a sheet of paper, covered with lines of blood-red lettering. Craig snatched the paper, stared wildly at the crude scrawl.

Craig, send the pilots away and cancel the air meet at once, or you will never see her again. She is beyond your reach, in the kingdom of the Thunderbird.

Snarling curses, Craig jammed the message into his pocket and raced out. Overhead, the moncoupe was faintly visible in the twilight glow that still touched the bottom of the clouds. Even as he found it, the ship whipped

up into the dark streamers of mist and vanished. A moment later the faint drone of the motor died, muffled by the cloud.

Craig stood frozen, staring upward, clenched fists driving the fingernails deep into his palms, perspiration shining on his set face. Mona was gone, up into the cloud that had given death to two others. Suddenly Craig knew that her life and safety meant the world to him, though he had known her less than twelve hours.

The moncoupe came shrieking back out of the cloud, spinning down as Otto Rimmer's ship had spun, dragging the tight spiral of its exhaust flare down through the deepening darkness toward the field below. Craig knew only vaguely that he was running across the field through the darkness, yelling.

The spinning plane struck a thousand feet away from him with a crash that seemed to shatter his own heart to bits.

This time there was no fire. Craig ran through the settling dust clouds and tore at the tangled wreckage. The impact had driven the motor back through the cabin, leaving a ghastly jumble of metal where the pilot's seat had been. He staggered back.

The wrecked cabin was empty!

The crash wagon screamed up outside. Searchlights illumined the wreckage. Craig straightened, his eyes deadly cold and his face grim. Groundhog Ryan stumbled around to grab his arms.

"Nick, what happened? Where is she? Did she jump before the crash?"

Craig shook his head. "No, she didn't jump. I was watching every minute. I'd have been able to see a chute. A person jumping without one would have landed within a few yards of the plane. She went up, but she didn't come down."

"Are you nuts?" Groundhog shook him, his eyes worried. "Where is she?"

"Up in the Thunderbird."

Trotting back across the dark field toward the hangar, with Groundhog mumbling and cursing beside him, Craig felt his horror-frozen mind be-

ginning to thaw and think again. Constructive, sane thoughts began to stir across the screen of his brain.

"Get on the phone," he ordered Groundhog suddenly. "Locate Doc Ramon for me, wherever he is, and hold him until I get to the office. I want to talk to him, but I've got to go up to Otto's room first. I'm beginning to understand things I overlooked before."

He pounded up to the room where Otto Rimmer's possessions still lay heaped on the bed. For a moment he pawed through the pile, his lips moving.

"Undershirts, drawers, handkerchiefs, socks, ties, shoe polish and brushes, comb. . . ."

He whirled to the tin wastebasket and dug out empty cartons that had recently contained new tubes of toothpaste and shaving cream. He gasped, searched the room for the fresh tubes Otto had evidently just bought. When he couldn't find them anywhere, he raced out the door.

**G**ROUNDHOG surrendered the telephone as he burst into the office. Craig snatched the instrument, digging in his pocket at the same time for the two wadded messages that had been left by the Thunderbird.

"Doc, tell me something," he panted when a voice answered. "You remember that figure of the Thunderbird drawn in blood on Rimmer's forehead? Which direction did it face—left or right?"

"Huh?" Dr. Ramon sounded startled. "Why, let me see. . . .To the right, I believe. . . .Yes, to the right. Why?"

"Tell you later," Craig exulted and hung up.

As Groundhog stared, he spread the two messages on the desk. The crude signature emblem on each, the rough sketch of a winged figure with its satanic human face, faced to the left.

"That proves my theory!" Craig said triumphantly. "Groundhog, do you know exactly where the hermit's cave is on Thunder Knob?"

"Approximately. It's right under the edge of the cloud on this side.

You can locate it by a big rock finger that juts up above it. Kids used to climb pretty near that high and ride down the trail on their bikes until somebody got hurt and the town put a stop to it. But the trail is good. Why?"

"Is there room to land a ship on the knob?"

"Not safely, but the top, up inside the cloud, is fairly flat and smooth. Willy landed there once on a bet, when he was tight, but I'd hate to try it sober."

"Get the Bullet out and warmed to go up right away. I'll be ready in ten minutes. Hurry!"

He snatched up the telephone again.

"Have you placed any long distance calls from this number in the past three days? You have? Get me the name and address of the party right away. Then connect me with the F.B.I. in Washington, D. C."

Several minutes later the Bullet chased the yellow spears of its landing lights across the dark field and thundered skyward in a relentless, soaring leap. Craig snapped off the lights the moment he was in the air. He looked back along the tail surfaces to where the dwindling figure of Groundhog Ryan stood in the hangar door.

He turned back, his eyes cold, and slammed the twin throttles full ahead. The engines exploded into roaring thunder and his shoulders pressed against the padded back rest of the seat. On the dashboard, the air speed needle went crazy. Craig slid the cockpit cover back and chill night air slashed at his exposed face.

He threw the Bullet into a climbing turn and the sprawled lights of the fairground wheeled off the left wingtip. Then the lights were gone and he was rocketing into darkness, following the dark shadow of the Thunderbird overhead to a rendezvous with horror.

The black hulk of Thunder Knob reared up beyond the plane's nose, cutting off the stars in its climb up into the hanging cloud. Craig eased back on the stick and the Bullet roared up the face of the rock and into

the curtain of gray mist above. The landing lights snapped on and lances of light washed up over the weird tangle of rocks.

Something moved in the light and was gone, too quickly to be identified as man, beast or wraith. Craig's lips thinned and his eyes narrowed. He touched the pocket of his flying coat, was comforted by the flat bulk of his forty-five automatic. He no longer had any illusions about what he was going to meet.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Thunderbird*

**T**HE light puddle washed up, grayed by the thickening cloud, and swept out over the flat top of the Knob. Craig wheeled the plane, studying the rocky table. Landing was impossible from three sides. On the fourth, he could only drop in and pray that the ship could be stopped before it slipped off the far side into the depths below.

He circled and cut the motors to a burbling whisper, riding the whistling night wind down over the hungry, reaching rocks, kicking right and left rudder alternately to kill forward speed. The Bullet, its stubby wings built more for speed than support, settled fast—too fast. He could never stop in time.

The rock came up and met the wheels with a grinding thud. He dragged the tail down hard, cut the switches and clawed at the brake lever. His breath whistled through set teeth as he saw the sharp rim of the far side racing toward him in the glow of the landing lights. He was going far too fast to stop in time, but too slow to regain support speed if he went over.

Craig braced himself against the instrument panel with his left hand, kicked left rudder hard and jerked the left wheel brake full on. The Bullet lurched to the left, skidded sickeningly and piled over sideward onto its wingtip in a desperate ground loop. Craig fought the plane's efforts to roll

along the line of its initial progress.

The ship struck a rock, bounded, came down with a crash of snapping strut and crumpling wing. It halted with one wingtip overhanging the black depths.

Craig pawed perspiration from his forehead, unsnapped the webbed belt and climbed out. For a moment the solid rock underfoot seemed to heave with his reeling sense. He steadied himself, caught his breath and got a flashlight out of the cockpit. Then he moved across the flat table rock toward the edge that faced the flying school, toward the side where Kreevitz, the mad hermit, had his cave.

Craig found a spot where the rocks were fairly open and a faint semblance of a trail led downward. Beside this trail, a pile of broken granite fragments offered a shelter. He let himself down off the rim and crouched in pitchy darkness behind those boulders, listening.

He waited five minutes that seemed five hours before he heard the furtive scrape of footsteps on the trail below. There was no light, but the steps came on without hesitation or stumbling. Craig held his breath until a darker shape stirred against the stars, moving up the trail beside the rocks. Then he snapped on the light and sprang out.

"All right, Kreevitz! Hold it right there, or I'll use this!"

He let the sheen of the automatic show in the flashlight's beam. The madman shrieked and cowered back, dirty clawed hands pushed out before his bearded face to ward off the menace.

"I didn't go back again," he whimpered, recognizing Craig. "I stayed away from your place, like you told me. It was the Thunderbird himself who—"

"Where is she?" Craig interrupted harshly. "Have you got her tied up in your cave? Take me there right away."

The hermit squirmed back, shaking violently.

"I don't know what you mean. I never went near your place."

"I told you what this would do to you," Craig snarled, shoving the gun

down into the light, waving it before the mad, glittering eyes. "Will you tell the truth, or must I show you what this will do?"

"I'll tell!" Kreevitz shrieked. "She's there, in the cave. But I didn't take her. The Thunderbird brought her and told me to take care of her until tomorrow."

**W**HIMPERING and shaking, he scuttled away down the trail with Craig at his heels, swung in behind a towering rock finger. Craig's flashlight showed the dark mouth of a cave. It was shallow, less than six feet deep.

Mona Lacy lay bound and gagged against the rock wall at the back, beside the tangle of filthy rags that was the hermit's bed. Her eyes widened and lost their gleam of terror at the sound of Craig's voice.

He pushed past the frightened lunatic and freed her with quick slashes of his jackknife blade.

"Mona, are you all right?" he asked, sick with dread.

"I'm all right, Nick, only scared to death. But, Nick, I saw the Thunderbird! Oh, he was a ghastly, horrible. . . ."

Her startled shriek sent Craig whipping around, grabbing for the gun he had put back into his pocket. He caught a glimpse of Kreevitz, shrinking back in babbling terror from a gigantic bird-thing whose great black body entirely filled the entrance to the cave. He saw one enormous wing sweep inward toward him. Then the knobby shoulder of that wing struck him and he went down into cloying darkness, with the shriek of the hermit's mad laughter in his ears.

He regained consciousness moments later to find himself bound beside Mona on the floor of the flashlight illumined cave. The Thunderbird towered in the cave's mouth. The mad hermit danced on the ledge behind it, gesturing and babbling wildly.

Craig could get a better look at the grotesque bird-creature now. He saw the bearded human face with coldly

glittering eyes above the bulk of dark, glistening plumage that formed the bird-body. The creature was sitting on the rock floor, its ugly stained talons drawn up close to its thick middle.

The Thunderbird looked at Craig's open eyes and spoke in a thick snarl.

"You were warned, Craig. What must happen to you and the girl now can only be blamed on your own stubbornness."

Craig's lips twisted in a sneer of contempt.

"Why don't you take off the false beard and feathers, now that you've got us, Otto?"

Mona drew a sharp, sobbing breath beside him.

"Otto? But Otto is dead. I saw him die, burned in the plane crash."

"Not Otto," Craig corrected grimly. "You saw the dead body of poor Teddy Ciper being systematically burned beyond recognition. Am I right, Otto Franz Von Rimmer?"

The eerie figure stirred. A human arm poked out from under one black wing and ripped away the tangle of black beard. The square face of Otto Rimmer twisted sardonically.

"Very clever. How did you get so shrewd all of a sudden?"

**C**RAIG kept his eyes on the pilot's taunting face.

"By waking up to evidence I nearly missed. This morning you sliced yourself up very carefully and used some of your own blood to paint that Thunderbird on your forehead, before staggering back to the school to spread your terror build-up. But you made a little mistake, Otto. You used a mirror when you drew the Thunderbird. Naturally the mirror reversed the image, so you drew the emblem on yourself facing to the *right*. All the other Thunderbird emblems faced the left. That started me thinking.

"I remembered how Clem Sone, the batman, used to play the fairs and carnivals, jumping out of a plane and gliding down a few thousand feet on big canvas wings, making himself a human glider. I figured the same

stunt, with better wings, should enable a man to stay aloft on those strong thermals in the cloud. He could jump out of a plane that was set to crash and ride the air currents right back to the top of Thunder Knob, hidden in the cloud the whole way.

"I could see how a man could do that, Otto, but not how he could swoop down to earth, snatch up a body and fly back into the sky. You claimed you saw the Thunderbird do that with Olsen's body. You wanted to make your story good, to build up plenty of fear, but you made it too good. Once that reversed drawing on your forehead set off my suspicions, I could see how wild your story really was.

"Then, too, you were the one flier who was always missing when the mysterious happenings occurred, though you probably figured on your own 'death' covering that. And you made one silly little mistake."

"Yeah?" Rimmer said heavily. "What was that?"

"When you got ready to disappear, you stuck your razor, shaving cream, toothbrush and toothpaste in your pocket, Otto. I wouldn't have noticed it if I hadn't been suspicious of you. But when I couldn't find any of those articles in your room, I was sure you had left with the intention of holing up somewhere."

"Pretty smart," Rimmer snarled. "What else do you know?"

"I know you dropped Olsen's body from a two-place glider that you probably launched over the rim of Thunder Knob, into the air currents. I also know you faked your own crash with Ciper's body. You probably had it hidden in the Eagle, with gasoline spread all over it to guarantee a fire that would make the body unrecognizable.

"You flew up, set the controls for a spin and jumped out to ride those plastic bird-wings through the cloud to the Knob, while we thought it was you crashing and burning. But why? Why did you have to kill those two kids?"

"I didn't want to kill anybody. I only wanted to scare the pilots away from the meet, but those two *dumm-*

*kopfs* hiked up the ridge this afternoon and saw the rails where I launched the glider. They were too far away to tell what they were, so they took pictures. They were going to tell you about it, study the pictures and then climb higher to investigate. I had to get them out of the way before they talked."

"And you rode back, probably on a motorcycle," Craig added grimly. "You flew Mona's ship up for a crash tonight, so I'd think she was either dead, or a prisoner of the phantom. You took a chance, gliding back to the Knob in the dark on those trick wings, Otto."

**R**IMMER drew himself up stiffly. "It was easy to one trained as I was in *der Fuehrer's* air service. I learned to fly in gliders. It was there that I developed these light plastic wings."

"Why did he do it?" Mona Lacy asked bewilderedly.

"I can guess," Craig said. "Tell me if I'm right, Otto. You're a spy, aren't you—a Nazi Fifth Columnist, one of a number planted around air schools to keep track of the growth of America's air service?"

Mona gasped as Rimmer glared without answering. From the mouth of the cave, the bearded face of Kreevitz, the hermit, gaped in. Craig rushed on desperately, focusing attention on his words, while behind his back his hands frantically sawed the binding cords against a jagged sliver of rock.

"Day before yesterday, the British crippled a Nazi sub a few miles out, but lost it when darkness fell. The authorities figured the sub would either make repairs in the night and get away, or head down toward the Indies where there's supposed to be a secret base. Destroyers patrolled the neutrality zone along the coast as a matter of policy. They didn't see anything.

"I'm guessing the sub didn't hit to sea at all, but took a desperate chance and came inshore to hide among the sand banks of Beam Shoals. Discovery, of course, meant capture and

internment and all sorts of nasty complications. The ship was too valuable to risk losing, though, so they took a chance and hid there. It was so far in that not even the Navy bothered to hunt those shoals.

"I'll bet the sub is there, right under the course we were to fly in our race tomorrow. Isn't that right, Otto? Isn't that the reason you got sudden orders from Bund headquarters yesterday to stop our air race at all costs? I got a report of a call tonight that F.B.I. Headquarters tells me came from your Bund leader."

Rimmer's eyes glittered and his big hands reached out in eager claws.

"It is there, but by tomorrow night they will have made repairs and put to sea! Meanwhile your swine of sailors do not credit its captain with the courage to come right in against your coast. They hunt him miles at sea. And when your bodies drop from the clouds in the morning, with the mark of the Thunderbird on your foreheads, there will be no race. Our ship will be safe."

Craig's lips twisted into a grin.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Otto, but that hum you hear out over the sea isn't a swarm of locusts. That's our swine of a navy on wings, Otto, covering the course of our race with flares and searchlights, backed by a destroyer or two below. I'm afraid your efforts were in vain, as your Big Boss' plottings are going to be eventually."

With an incoherent snarl of fury, Rimmer launched himself at Craig, the bloody steel talons clenched in his hands. At the same moment a final jab severed the ropes that bound Craig's wrists. He twisted aside and the raking talons struck sparks from the rock where he had lain.

Before Rimmer could recover, Craig lashed out with his still-bound feet. Hard heels caught the Nazi in the side and sent him staggering back. Craig used the moment of respite to haul himself erect.

"Kreevitz!" he shouted at the gaping, bearded face. "Did you hear him? He admitted he isn't the Thunderbird, but an imposter. He's been fooling you, profaning the real Thun-

derbird. Get him! Destroy him!"

With a roar of fury, Rimmer recovered and tore at Craig, shaking off smashing blows to slash at his enemy with the deadly talons. Searing agony tore across Craig's chest, lanced down his left arm in the wake of the knife-edged claws. He reeled back, numbed by the blows. Rimmer then lifted the bloody steel for a killing slash at Craig's unprotected throat and face.

**A**T that instant a raging whirlwind burst into the cave and landed on Rimmer's back. Kreevitz, the mad hermit, awakened to jealous rage by Craig's words, was attacking the desecrater of his insane religion. Rimmer whirled, lunged and battered the ragged figure from his back against the rock wall. Kreevitz fell heavily, moaned and lay still.

But the moment's respite gave Craig time to hop closer and set himself. Both fists lashed out with all his force behind them. One sank deep into Rimmer's middle. The other *cracked* like a pistol shot against the big man's jaw.

Rimmer went backward, off-balance, the folded plastic wings dragging and tangling around his feet. He stag-

gered blindly toward the ledge at the mouth of the cave, teetered for a single sickening instant. Abruptly he plunged from sight.

There was a high, broken shriek, dying away into a single, crunching *thud* far below.

Craig leaned against the wall, weak and dizzy. At his feet, Kreevitz whimpered and scrambled to his feet, staring wildly. Apparently he was not seriously hurt.

"Beat it," Craig panted. "If I know Groundhog Ryan, he'll be swarming up here with the sheriff and about twenty deputies in a little while. If they catch you, it'll be too bad. You helped me, so I'll help you. If you hide and promise never to attack anyone again, I won't tell about your worshipping a false Thunderbird. Now scam!"

He watched the pathetic figure scuttle away into the darkness. Then he turned and his gaze met Mona's eyes, glowing at him from her drawn face. Some of the weariness went out of his shoulders.

"Besides," he added, "I didn't want him around, gaping. I've got a little business to attend to before the others come. Mona. . . ."

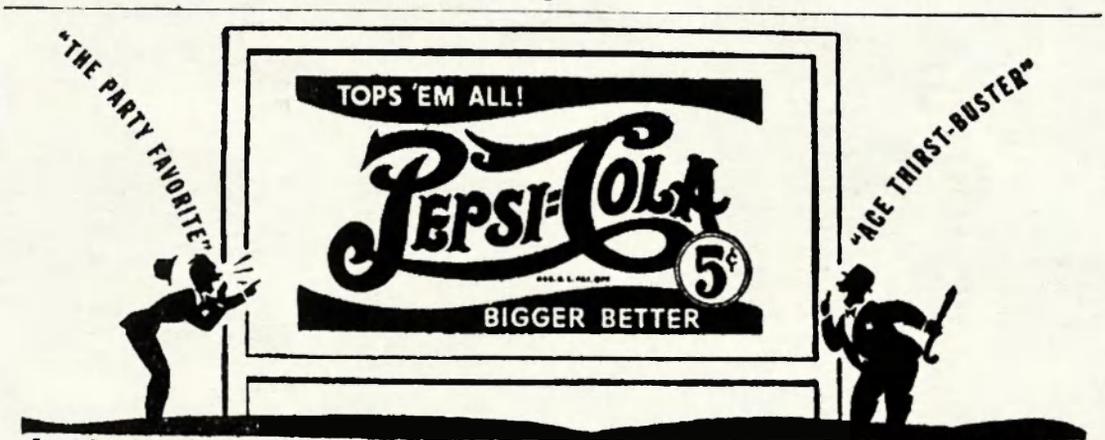
"Nick!"

COMING NEXT ISSUE

## THE DOUBLE FOR HATE

A Complete Novelet of a Baffling Ten Grand  
Murder Deal

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**



Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

# DEATH IS TOO EASY

By

**ARTHUR J. BURKS**

*Author of "Thistle Fen," "The Execution of Chopper Chun," etc.*

**Officer Truce Didn't Like to Kill — but He Forgot His Squeamishness When His Partner Was Trapped!**

"**C**ALLING Car Seventeen! Seventeen! Seventeen! Go to Ninth and Harvard! Ninth and Harvard! Burglary! See the woman! See the woman! That is all!"

The voice came droning over the radio. John Loess, driving the car, snorted with disgust.

"That's us," he said. "Probably a cat got into the window box and made a noise, and the woman's out on the sidewalk in her nighty waiting for the coppers to hold her head for her until she gets over being scared."

"It's a yell for help, Jack," said Martin Truce, his co-prowler. "It's our job to answer 'em. And maybe there is a robber, and you can kill somebody!"

Thus Martin Truce effectually shut the mouth of complaining John Loess, who had just made headlines in all California newspapers by killing his third criminal in a gun-fight. They were beginning to say that he was a modern Wyatt Earpy, a streamlined Wild Bill Hickok, and he was rather liking it—or so Martin Truce thought.

John Loess snorted and gave the car the gun. It jumped under them both. Loess was a perfect driver, could handle any car, even in the Los Angeles traffic, probably the world's toughest. That traffic, according to



Jack Loess was securely bound when he recovered consciousness

Los Angeles coppers, would whiten the hair of the best New York drivers with its speed.

John Loess knew every short-cut, every rule of the road. What he didn't know he could guess at. He never grazed anybody's fenders, never hit a pedestrian, but he scared plenty, and he came entirely too close to many cars for the comfort of their drivers.

John Loess, at twenty four, was a hard, disillusioned young man who found little good in anybody, and none at all even in petty criminals. He liked Martin Truce, however, mostly because Truce, an older man, with vaster experience behind him, didn't hesitate to express his thoughts about Loess or anybody else. Martin Truce was a straight shooter with guns and words.

The scream of rubber matched the wail of the siren. The prowler car took the turn into Harvard on two wheels. It just missed an old man who discovered, at the last moment, that he, who hadn't walked without a cane for years, could still jump for his life. Martin Truce clucked disapproval.

"Well, I didn't hit him, did I?" said Loess.

There wasn't a "woman" to see, but there was trouble on the corner. Two men were fighting with one man. The one man was in pajamas, the two men in rough clothes. It was a commentary on the speed of the police that Loess and Truce had arrived so hard upon the heels of the robbery, whatever it had been. The car swung in to the curb. The man in pajamas went down. The two men whirled toward the back of the house before which the fight was taking place.

The man in pajamas, his head covered with blood, cried out as he collapsed.

"Don't let them get away! Don't—"

The two officers didn't hesitate. Their gun hands were already rising as they ran across the lawn to the man in pajamas. The two guns spoke, at the same time. The two running men went down. One of them lay very still. The other writhed in anguish. His moans could be heard easily by the two coppers, who now knelt be-

side the man in pajamas.

"A woman telephoned the police," said Loess, studying the situation. "One of the burglars caught her at it. Her husband, if that's who this gent is, then tried to grab and hold one or both of the burglars. The other joined it, and they used their jacks on him."

**T**HEY left the man in pajamas, strode to the two men on the ground in the shadows between this house and its nearest neighbor.

"I took the one that's still moving!" said Truce quietly.

Loess didn't say anything. He could sense reproof in the voice of his partner. Truce took the weapon of the man whose knee-cap he had broken. Loess merely grunted.

"That makes four, eh?" said Truce. "It wasn't necessary. You're a crack shot. You could have brought him down, same's I did this one."

"If you'd done as I did, these lads wouldn't have had to be tried in court. I saved the county and state plenty of time and money."

"You've no right to kill every man who commits a crime," said Truce. "You could have—"

"I'll be commended for it," said Loess. "The man was a law-breaker. Any other copper would have shot to kill."

"I didn't!"

"You don't think. You could have settled the whole case, and made sure that neither of these laddybucks ever prowled another house."

"Jack, you're a natural-born killer!" said Martin Truce, softly. "You don't belong in the police force at all. You're using it as an excuse to *kill*, do you understand? I've been watching you, listening to your very heartbeats.

"You like to read about yourself in the newspapers. So do all bigshot gangsters. You're deadly. So are hired murderers. And you can't go to the chair, Jack—*because you're an officer of the law!*

"You're using that fact to give yourself a right to hunt what some people consider the greatest game in the world—*man!* You don't kill to

punish, you kill because, as an officer of the law, you can kill and get away with it!"

The face of Jack Loess was white in the dim shadows of the alley between the two houses. He looked down at the man he had shot, touched him with his foot.

"Know who he is?" he asked. "He's Monk Gowan! Wanted for three kills, all done during house prowls. If I'd met him two years ago he wouldn't have killed those three people! He rates being killed."

"Too easy!" said Truce. "Too easy! His punishment doesn't last long enough. Besides, you're keeping an honest judge and jury out of work. And something else, far more important, you're making Jack Loess more of a killer than Monk Gowan. And I'm finished with it, Jack! I'm asking for relief. I want to ride with a human being again, before I get car-bunkles on my own conscience!"

Loess stiffened, but his voice was calm.

"Suppose we go on investigating this show we're on!"

Truce put the bracelets on the man he had wounded, manacled him to the iron fence. Then both officers hurried back to the front of the house, where the man in pajamas still lay, moaning, calling a woman's name.

"Dulcie! Dulcie! Dulcie!"

Loess and Truce exchanged glances. Then Truce led the way inside. They pushed open the outer door, then an inner door. The house was filled with silence. There were no lights. Truce was playing his flash ahead of him. He carried his gun in his right hand.

The pencil of light from his flash suddenly struck upon a white face, a woman's face. It held there for a moment. Then Loess swung his own flash around, found the light switch. The room became bright as day. The woman on the floor beside the telephone was a young woman, had been pretty. Truce knelt beside her, touched her heart.

"Dead!" he said grimly. "She must have heard the burglars, got up to investigate, got caught phoning the police—and been killed by one of the thugs!"

The woman had been struck a savage blow on the back of the head. It had knocked her sprawling. She had rolled to her back. She had not known what had struck her, perhaps.

A frantic voice was coming out of the telephone, the receiver of which was dangling off the overturned stand. Truce put the receiver to his ear.

"This is the police," he said. "Give me headquarters."

**T**HE experts would have to take it from here on. When they began moving in, and Leslie Osman, the man in pajamas, started to tell the story of how his wife, Dulcie, had got up without waking him and walked to her death, the prowler-cops were back on routine.

"Now, Marty, what do you think?" said Loess. "I only wish I'd been there sooner to drill Monk Gowan. I'd have kept him from braining Dulcie Osman. I killed him too late—except to keep him from killing someone that will now go on living. Don't you see? If every copper used his head, like I do—"

"I told you, before you knew what had happened there," said Martin Truce, "that I'm through. I want a human partner, not a killer, do you understand? Even the most ghastly murderer, Jack, is a human being. You're forgetting that. You need some dreadful shock to wake you up. I don't want to be around when you get it."

"It wouldn't be," said Loess, "that you're slightly jealous because I get all the publicity? Because nobody ever even writes that there are two men in this car?"

"Pull over to the curb," said Truce. Loess did so. "You're going to swallow that, here and now," said Truce, "or I'm going to break your jaw, do you understand? I'm not pulling away from you because you're a famous killer, but because you're a killer! Also because the honor of a police force is based upon its value to the people, not on how many of them it can kill! Your kind doesn't even belong in uniform."

"The newspapers won't say so!"

"They like sensations! But take a gander at the reporters themselves when they ask you questions. Half of them already have you marked as a killer who, sooner or later, will kill in such a way that you can't hide behind a uniform! Their jobs, the reporters' jobs, are stories—but you don't see any of them asking you home, do you? And I'm waiting for that apology!"

For a long moment the two men locked glances. Truce stared into the chill black eyes of Jack Loess, studying the man more deeply than he ever had before. Loess glared back, and for just a moment Martin Truce saw in his steel-gray eyes the thing he feared—murder. For just a split second Loess thought even of killing Truce. Truce hoped to God he had been wrong, but he feared that he was not. He got out of the car then, slammed the door with finality.

"You can tell headquarters whatever story you like," said Truce. "I mean what I've just told you so much that I'm risking my badge to keep from spending the rest of this cruise with you. That *ought* to mean something to you, but probably doesn't!"

Martin Truce walked away. John Loess stared after him. Then he sat for a long time behind the wheel of the car, thinking—and finding himself becoming afraid. If there were one person on earth whom he respected, it was Martin Truce, who had just walked out on him. Was Truce right about him, Jack Loess? Was he an innate killer?

"*Why don't I ever worry about the men I've killed?*" he suddenly asked himself, and with realization that he never had, that he was untouched not only by his shooting of Monk Gowan tonight, but by the death of the woman, Dulcie Osman, a chill hand of terror gripped at his heart.

"Is Marty right?" he asked himself. "If I weren't a cop would I, sooner or later, be like Monk Gowan?"

He recalled that before becoming a cop he had wanted to join some foreign army, to get into war somewhere. Had that been because the urge to kill was in him?

It was something he had to fight out

with himself. A cold anger at himself, as Martin Truce for criticizing him in spite of the fact that he had slain in line of duty, laid hold of him. While it lasted, he did not hear the voice over the radio, or think of his uniform.

It was as though a curtain of red had dropped over his thoughts. He drove the police car at a terrific speed. He seemed to be taking huge chances, though he was too good a driver for even on reflexes alone to be dangerous. He drove south on Harvard, traveling like the wind.

**N**OT until he was in an area of comparative darkness did he realize that he had been followed, ever since he had left the Osman home, probably, by a car as well driven as his own. He set about losing that car. It clung to him doggedly.

And then, when he had driven into a stretch of street where there was no danger of collision, he discovered that the other driver had an even better, faster car. For it suddenly whipped in against him, on the left, and crowded him to the curb.

He wouldn't have given an inch for anybody, but he had seen the muzzle of an automatic pointing at him, from the back seat of the pursuing car. There were several men in the car, three in the back seat. Two in the front, including the driver.

He could drill some of those men, certainly, but in the end they'd get him, if they wanted him so desperately that they were going to take such dreadful chances. Besides, he couldn't drive at such a high speed, trying to avoid collision all the time, and shoot with any degree of accuracy.

He swung over to the curb, brakes screaming, rubber smearing the concrete. He jumped out, intending to take cover behind the car, fight it out from there. There hadn't been time to summon help. Nor was there any chance now.

The other men knew exactly what they were doing and were willing to pay whatever the price might be. John Loess was covered by four automatics before he could even get into position to start shooting. He swore bit-

terly, not at his attackers, not at himself, but at Martin Truce. If Marty had stuck with him, instead of walking off like a sulking child, he'd have seen the pursuing car, and they could have made a fight of it.

"Take it easy, copper," said a rasping voice. "The Boss wants you alive, see? We'll sort of shoot off a few arms and legs if we have to, but we're taking you in kicking, understand? He wants you bad. He's a great guy, the Boss.

"Perfectly willing for three-four of his boys, us boys here, to get killed, just to get the 'modern Wyatt Earp', if necessary. And I'm sure you wouldn't want to kill any of us, would you? You never like to kill anybody, not really!"

He should have started shooting, of course, but he hadn't. And now, when he thought of broken legs and arms—he knew without testing the knowledge that these lads could put their bullets right where they wanted to put them—he didn't open fire. It wasn't lack of courage, but sound good sense.

"You can't kidnap coppers and get away with it," he said.

"We're doing it," said the rasping voice. "Whether we get away with it sort of depends. Okay, Barbo, do something with the prowl heap. We've got to get going!"

John Loess went into the back seat of the car which had run him down, captured him with such consummate ease. One of his captors, starting to sit down on one of the jump-seats, suddenly drove a savage right to Loess' jaw. He went out like a light.

When he regained consciousness he was in a huge room, tied to a chair. The room was brilliantly lighted. There was a large table in the middle of it. A man with snow-white hair sat at the head of the table. There were a dozen other men with him, ranged at his right and left. When Jack Loess spotted that man with the snowy hair, and noted the faces of his "guests," his heart sank.

"Whitey Gargan!" he ejaculated. No wonder everything from petty pilfering to bank robbery was picking up in this burg, he thought. Whitey

Gargan was a big-time crook for whose talents no job was too large, and none too small.

"You killed one of my men tonight, Loess," said Gargan, interrupting. "That makes the fourth man you've killed since you became a copper. I don't mind matching wits with the coppers. It's part of the fun of being Whitey Gargan.

"But I don't go for coppers who kill everybody who happens to be on the wrong side of the law, because they can do it in line of duty! Crime is a game to me, and not one that's played the way you play it. Even a murderer in this country has a right to trial by jury."

"Monk Gowan killed a woman tonight!"

"**H**ID you know that when you drilled him in the back? Nope, you didn't. The woman's an afterthought. And a copper like you makes my men nervous, understand?"

"So I have to do something about it, or I lose control of a city before I even get it, or know the names of its principal streets—and I don't like that.

"I'm here to coordinate crime, and you're a distinct bit of discord, Loess. So I've brought you here to tell you so—and if you don't change a bit, to break a rule of my own and simply have you shot!"

"Change?" said Loess. "What do you mean?"

"Accept enough of my dough so you can't squeal, then go back to your job, see? But use a little judgment after this. Don't drill everybody you see."

"And the alternative is?"

"You're done for. Time enough, too. Your personal publicity makes things too tough for men like me and the lads I run. It calls too much public attention to the state of the city's morals. Well, what do you say? You're a killer already, you shouldn't mind accepting a bribe, if it's big enough!"

A cold fury, the same cold fury that had entered him when Martin Truce had called him a killer, settled in the pit of Loess' stomach. He met the

cobra-like stare of the leader of this newest California mob forced out of some Eastern city—with the desire in his heart to rip him apart with his bare hands. He longed to be free among his fellows with two gats, one in each hand, so that he might fight until he dropped. The faces of Gargan's men made him like that. All were wanted men. There were murderers among them. All were men who would rather commit murder than earn their living honestly.

"Well?" persisted Gargan. "Why make a show of hesitating? If you had the guts to refuse, you'd have the guts to take criminals alive. You'd have had the guts to fight my men when they ran you down a couple of hours ago. So quit stalling."

"You can go plumb straight to hades!" said John Loess. "I'm one egg you can't buy, or handle in any way at all. If you'll just turn me loose with a couple of guns—one gun—"

A rasping cackle came from Whitey Gargan.

"Brave talk, Loess. Turn him loose, gents, and go to work on him. Maybe we can soften him up a bit. If we can't—"

The alternative was plain. One of the men who had captured Loess in the first place, the same one who had knocked him cold, kicked over his chair. His head crashed against the floor. Someone brought out a knife, to cut his bonds. Somebody else gave him a sickening kick in the ribs.

He had no idea where the house was in which he had found himself. He took it for granted that nobody knew where he was. Whitey Gargan hadn't spent all his devious life out of prison without planning every step he took in advance.

The situation was this. He, John Loess, was going to have to become Whitey Gargan's man, as so many other men in so many other cities had become Whitey Gargan's men, or else Whitey was going to have him killed—as he fancied Whitey had had many another copper killed.

He never for a moment considered giving in to Whitey Gargan. Nor did he for a moment intend to take the

last rap lying down. Maybe this mob would fix him up, all nice and pretty for the morgue, before they were done, but they wouldn't hear him squawk, and if he had any chance at all, he'd take somebody with him. Failing in that he'd leave his marks on as many of them as he could. Naturally, they weren't going to give him guns—even one gun.

**T**HEY were just going to "soften him up." Whitey Gargan could always use a man on the force if he could manage it, and it would be rather nice to have the man who was so famous for killing crooks. It would give Whitey prestige among his own men. Whitey didn't overlook things like that. Loess knew. He'd read a great deal about Whitey, in magazines—things could be said about Whitey, but couldn't be proved in a court of law.

They got the ropes off Jack Loess, and allowed him to get to his feet, but no further than that. Obviously these men of Gargan's had had a great deal of experience, softening people up. They went at it like men who knew every move. They used fists and gun muzzles—as a matter of routine precaution, he figured.

They could slug a man, but if he turned out to be tougher than they had expected, they could always shoot him. Loess didn't approve of anything about these men of Whitey Gargan's. Much less did he approve of Whitey Gargan himself.

He began to express that disapproval both verbally and with his fists, feet, head—everything about him that could express disapproval. But he had no guns. He didn't know what had happened to them. And he still felt as he always had felt about crooks.

So, Whitey Gargan was trying to "take over" Los Angeles. The law didn't know it, or Loess would have known it. There had been an increase of all types of crime, that was all. Whitey usually started small, worked up. Whitey was almost an institution, and the policeman, or dick, or police force that got him, finally,

would be doing a vast public service.

The men of Whitey Gargan lined up. One of them, the one who had slugged Loess first, in the kidnap car, slugged him again. Loess went spinning down a line of husky looking thugs, everyone of whom smashed at him either with a gun muzzle or a fist. His head swam with the ache of the blows. He had never been hurt so much and so often, with so little chance to fight back.

He sprawled on his back, panting, blood dribbling down both jaws from smashed lips. His pain-filled eyes focussed on the man who had hit him in the car, and several times since, and he started crawling back up. Maybe he'd never get his hands on that baby, but he couldn't be killed for trying—or at least *wouldn't* be, right away.

He flung himself forward. A man moved out at him. He sent a left to a fat face, felt the hand sink into soft flesh, heard a man swear. His eyes were still glued to the face of the man who had slugged him the most. He must get to him, smash him once, at least once, for luck. There wasn't much sense in it, maybe, but the urge was there—and a copper didn't just up and quit.

The man he wanted most wasn't unwilling. He came to meet John Loess, and he moved as if he knew a great deal about fighting. He had cauliflower ears, too.

John Loess got one hand on this man. Then he went down from a righthander that almost tore his head from his shoulders. He didn't have a chance against the man with the cauliflower ears — so what chance could he possibly have against him *and* as many others as Whitey Gargan cared to turn loose on him?

He staggered and fell to his knees when he tried to get up to resume the struggle with Cauliflower Ears. But through the sick fog which enveloped him he could hear the voice of Gargan.

"Don't you realize you can't get anywhere, Loess? Suppose you forget it? My doc'll fix you up, you take a little hush money, be Whitey Gar-

gan's man, and we'll call this thing off."

"You remember where I told you to go, Gargan?" said Loess, through smashed and bleeding lips. His voice sounded crazy even to him because it appeared that teeth were also missing.

"Well, the door is still open, as far as I'm concerned. There are a lot of things I wouldn't do with Gargan money. I wouldn't take it even to save my teeth and lips and whatever else your cannibals want to chew on!"

"Try him some more!" said Whitey Gargan.

**T**HEY were closing in on Loess, who was on his feet, getting ready to take some more, when a voice that Loess couldn't believe was real, sounded in the room.

"That'll be all for now, gentlemen. The law has moved in!"

There wasn't much of the law that had actually moved in. It was just Martin Truce, who would have two guns, no more, and no chance to reload either of them. Martin Truce, the man who didn't believe in killing criminals for any reason! And while one of these gents lived and could think, he would keep right on shooting. They were whirling now, to take a crack at Martin Truce.

Bullets began to hum in the place, to kick splinters out of the floor, to break windows, to create a terrible bedlam.

Loess tried to help all he could. His erstwhile attackers had turned their backs on him to get a crack at Truce, who had somehow managed to follow, get in, and break up the "softening-up" process. Loess didn't ask how. Maybe Whitey had been too sure of himself, hadn't thought sentries necessary. In any case, here was Martin Truce, his guns flaming.

Cauliflower Ears went down. He fell right at Loess' feet and Jack looked down at him. There was a hole in the bridge of his nose, with blood oozing from it. Whitey Gargan was yelling commands. The room was shambles.

"Hey, Jack," yelled Truce, "catch!"

One of the weapons came spinning, end-over-end, to Jack Loess. Then, with fist and gun muzzle, Jack was fighting his way to stand beside Martin Truce. He saw Whitey Gargan, scrambling for what appeared to be a door. He used two shots on Gargan, saw him go down. Loess grinned to himself. It was good to have a gun in his hand again.

There were soon plenty of guns. Loess shot a couple out of men's hands himself. And he sent bullets into them in plenty of other places. There were dead men scattered around. Martin Truce was fighting now with one hand only. His left arm hung limp at his side, and blood dripped from every one of his fingertips. He must have taken a slug through the elbow. The arm seemed to be broken. But Truce was doing very well with the good arm.

Men were breaking for the doors now, going down as though they were being tripped by an invisible wire. Bullets were coming close to Loess and Truce still, for Loess' legs both felt numb, and he wasn't sure that he could stand on them much longer. If he went down this time, he wouldn't get up again.

Martin Truce, the man who had called him a killer, was shooting to kill. He must have changed his mind.

Loess was feeling giddy, even silly. He wanted to laugh at the whole foolish business. The smell of powder, the odor of blood and the constant taste of his own blood all added up to pure nonsense. Just because he had killed a man in line of duty, and got into an argument over it with Martin Truce, a lot more men had been killed, and more were going to be killed before this nest of thugs was wiped out. But Whitey Gargan, whatever happened, was through in Los Angeles, before he had even got started.

If Gargan did the usual, of course, some friend of his would haul him out before the police followed the sounds of shooting right into his hide-out.

Now and again, in the midst of the shooting, Loess turned to see whether

Gargan was getting away. He wasn't, so far. He was writhing, probably cussing, yelling commands to his gunmen, but he wasn't getting away.

Nor did he.

**T**HE officers from a lot more prowling cars came in, just as the first of Whitey's men started out through the door, and Loess yelled to a sergeant that Whitey Gargan, no less, was the man on the floor, near the far door. They got Whitey, then, in a hurry.

This done—and the rest of the gunmen collared, Loess and Martin Truce looked at each other. Then they looked down at the dead men scattered about. Loess shook his head and made clucking sounds with his mouth.

"Shame on you, Marty!" he said. "You've killed some people! I shot at legs and arms. That's why we've got Whitey Gargan to send to the gas chamber. I'm surprised at you, Marty, after all you said to me. Right here, in no time at all, you've killed more men than I killed in months of what you called hunting!"

Truce's face was very white. There was no hint of a smile on it.

"I regretted what I had said," he explained, "and started to go back to the car. I saw you haul away from the curb. I commandeered a car I thought was fast enough to catch you. I saw that other car swing in behind you. I followed, that's all."

"And will finish in tomorrow's papers by being the man who captured Whitey Gargan," said Loess grinning, "and rescued the 'modern Wyatt Earp!' Then you come in here, you who argue against killing, and shoot five men to death. You toss me a weapon, but I don't kill anybody. I just break a bunch of bones. How do you add all that up, Marty? Am I to be the critic hereafter, and you the killer?"

"Maybe," said Martin Truce, "we're neither one of us so good alone. Maybe we make a better team, after all. But I don't know. When I came in here, and saw them working on you I—well, maybe there's a bit of killer in every one of us."

"Only *my* killer, Marty," said Loess quietly, "is, and always will be, on the side of law and order. No one I have shot bothers me, you understand?"

Martin Truce looked down at the gunmen he had shot, shook his head.

"Funny," he said, "I don't feel anything, either. Maybe it's because they were working on somebody I liked, someone very close to me. Maybe *that* makes the difference?"

"To a cop," said Loess, "every man, woman and child he's supposed to protect is as important as a loved one. That's why I'm a cop. I feel that way.

Sometimes it gets in the way of 'sportsmanship' and I shoot a man, but when I think of Dulcie Osman, lying there by her dangling telephone."

"That'll do," said Truce, swaying on his feet. "I'll never preach to you again!"

Loess grinned.

"Suppose we put it this way, as partners should," he wagged his head. "You preach at me when you feel like it. I'll preach at you when *I* feel like it. It'll help to pass the time."

"Between shootings?"

"Between *deserved* shootings!"



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Alice screamed at Tony, who had a gun in his hand

Rivalry and War Intrigue Make an American Marquise Dizzy When She Stages Her Blitz on Nazis in Occupied France

**W**HEN Alice saw the tall man with the dark hair and the sunburn approaching the first tee, her fingers tightened around the shaft of her driver. She thought that for the first time in her life she was going to pass out.

He came toward the three of them awaiting him to make up the foursome, slowly, a little stiffly, idly swinging his driver at the heads of low-growing clover blossoms in the grass. His sports suit was tight at the waist, the trousers a little too narrow. As he drew closer, Alice could see that it was ersatz material, shabby imitation tweed.

Beside her, her husband, Rene, was quiet, but her sidelong glance saw and read the half-hidden smirk that quickly faded into vacuousness. On her other side, Curt Schmidt, massive, Teutonic, and Nazi, lifted an arm in salute to the approaching man. The four soldiers of the Army of Occupation who had been impressed as caddies stood woodenly at attention.

"Greetings, Herr Colonel von Rieger," snapped Schmidt as the man came near. "Department Superintendent Curt Schmidt at your service."

Von Rieger acknowledged the introduction curtly, looked curiously at Rene, appraised Alice to the tips of her worn golfing shoes.

"Permit me," said Schmidt, with a bow toward Alice and her French husband. "The Marquis d'Ambricourt and the marquise. The marquis has been of great assistance to the occupying forces. The marquis is an American. They, with you and me, *Herr* Colonel, will make up our foursome today."

"Charmed," said von Rieger. "I have been looking forward to this recreation for many months. There is so little time for it now."

His French was excellent, but a trifle throaty and rigid — schoolboy French. He bent low over Alice's hand.

"You fool!" she thought. "You crazy, terrible fool!"

She felt Rene's hand tighten about her arm while von Rieger's face was hidden in his low bow.

**T**HE very name, von Rieger, was a travesty. Looking quickly at his face she thought of sand dunes on the English coast, of a debutante party in Manhattan, of long automobile rides in placid countrysides. And she wondered what Tony Carter, of

London and Devonshire, was doing here, on a run-down golf course in Le Touquet, in the shoddy guise of a Nazi Gestapo chief.

Not by a flicker did he betray recognition as he smiled at her. Nor did he reveal his awareness of Rene, though the two had almost come to blows over her not too many months before—months that might have been ages ago so distant were they through a curtain of war.

Nor did Rene show signs of giving him away. The smirk, the hand tightening on her arm told her that her husband had not gone suddenly blind. What was he going to do?

She no longer knew what Rene thought, had not known for more than a year. He had accepted the Nazi occupation with docility, almost with eagerness. As he was a person of consequence, the d'Ambricourt chateau had not suffered from the war. Other people went hungry, but not the d'Ambricourts. More often than not, important Nazis graced their board. Alice had grown thin, though, for she had long since lost her appetite.

She drove first, miserably, slicing her used ball into deep rough. The entire course needed a shave for that matter. The once-smooth fairway was almost a rough, the greens were so pitted and worm-eaten.

Whatever the danger of his position, this masquerading Tony Carter seemed blithely unaffected. He sent a long ball straight down the middle a good two hundred and fifty yards. Rene matched him, and Curt Schmidt, a formless player, half-topped a ball that died in the overgrown fairway a hundred and fifty yards from the tee.

There was no talk until they reached the third tee, their caddies marching stolidly behind them. Then Rene, before addressing his ball, smiled at the Englishman whom Curt Schmidt fatuously believed to be Nazi.

"I have a few bottles of cognac my great-grandfather laid down a hundred years ago," he said. "Perhaps you, Colonel, and *Herr* Schmidt would join us after the match."

"Delighted," said von Rieger-Car-

ter. "We can get down to business after dinner, what, Schmidt?" He turned to Alice stiffly. "It is what you Americans call a nineteenth hole, is it not?"

"That's right," she said, wondering if the pallor her compact mirror revealed was not giving this strange show away.

Rene drove long and straight again, and she felt sick. What was he going to do to Tony later? She hated her husband's sophistication that once had been so fascinating. She knew now the egotistical purpose that lay in his acceptance of the inevitable. Watching his smile as he turned from the tee, she thought inevitably of a cat with a mouse. He was playing with Tony cruelly, making him suffer the anguish of suspense.

Tony was feeling it, she knew. When she caught his glance it expressed the polite disinterested admiration of a stranger for a pretty girl. But when her back was toward him, she could feel his fear in her soul.

**A** GOOD golfer, she never played more poorly. Luckily Curt Schmidt was not a good player, so the match was close. For Tony and Rene were playing a grim best-ball duel as if their lives depended on the outcome. As if anything could really affect the outcome! Alice set her teeth and tossed back her golden hair before cutting savagely at her trapped ball with a rusty niblick.

How had it happened? How had Tony managed to step into the massive shoes of Colonel Heinrich von Rieger, ace Gestapo organizer, and liaison man between Himmler and the army.

Oh, she knew about the real von Rieger. She knew a great deal about the Nazi machine. Rene, a prominent convert to the New Order she instinctively loathed, was accepted as a host by the high officials of the occupied area.

She knew von Rieger had been expected for some time with anticipation and awe by Curt and other lesser *gauleiters*. He was a shadowy emissary, a man who took "vacations" in

various parts of Europe. And after such trips, drastic things happened. He was supposed to have come to Le Touquet on such a "vacation" now.

The suspense continued, almost unbearably, throughout the match. Near the finish, gunfire sounded in the distance, from the anti-aircraft batteries in the so-called invasion ports that were strafed night and day by the R.A.F.

Such of her friends as were able to get in contact with Alice told her she was a fool to stay in such perilous country. But the chateau itself was safe enough. It was miles from any military concentration large enough to draw extensive bombing raids. Perhaps that was why so many high Nazi officials used the chateau or the little village beyond its gates for their meeting places.

Anyway, where would Alice go? She was Rene d'Ambricourt's wife. And she seemed to care little, for the events of the last two years had left her somewhat apathetic, incapable of initiative, living from day to day. It took the shock of Tony's dramatic appearance to shake her inertia, make her realize how much she had come to hate the man she had married.

Thanks to a fluffed approach by Alice, she and Rene lost the match on the final green. They paused there to sign score cards and light cigarettes, while the soldier caddies stood woodenly by.

"It is an honor," said Rene, holding a match for Tony, "to have the privilege of being host to such an eminent apostle of the new united Europe as yourself, Colonel. As it is an honor to have dueled with you on the links."

"From a player of your calibre, that is flattery," said Tony gravely.

Alice wanted to scream. The drama was slipping perilously close to the lip of farce. Talking like this, like strangers—and they had only opposed each other at Pine Valley, Piping Rock, St. Andrews and Bournemouth in days gone by.

It was worse at the chateau. The precious brandy had survived three wars and three generations of change that had scarred the face of the world, tasted like some unpleasant medicine

of childhood to Alice. The men laughed and chatted, unbending under the pleasant influence of the brandy, but she barely heard what they said.

"Perhaps," she heard Rene say finally, "you gentlemen would honor us by staying for dinner. You can discuss business if you wish. The marquis and I will be glad to withdraw."

**T**HE invitation was accepted with alacrity, for the d'Ambricourt chef was famous.

Alone with Rene in the great hall of the chateau, Alice stopped him as he sought to move past her toward the main entrance.

"What are you going to do?" she asked tensely.

"I am going to the village," said Rene quietly. "If I should be late for dinner, go ahead without me. Tell them I'm ill. Make some excuse."

"But, Rene, that's Tony in there!"

"Is it?" he said coolly.

"You know it is! You're being cruel."

"These are cruel times, my dear." His voice, as he spoke, was low, his face grim. Alice clutched at his arms.

"You're not—" she whispered.

"I am going to the village, *cherie*. Do as I ask and nothing will happen to you."

His lips brushed her cheek, and he was gone.

Alice stared after him, shattered. In some way she could not figure out, he was going to betray Tony. She'd had come within a breath of marrying Tony more than once. He had been devoted to her for years. He was—well, Tony. She couldn't let it happen. She must not let anything happen to Tony!

Why hadn't Rene betrayed Tony openly to Curt as soon as he had showed up on the links as von Rieger? That would have been the obvious move. But no, Rene had to have his subtle revenge on an erstwhile rival who had been delivered into his hands by Fate. Perhaps he thought Curt Schmidt was too decent for a Nazi, would have been too easy on Tony. For Curt, in his lumbering, fanatical way, was decent.

In a quick tide of panic, Alice went from the chateau to the garage. Rene's car, a special favor conceded him by the Nazi overlords in return for his privileged cooperation, was gone. The other cars had been appropriated by the German armies more than a year before.

She mounted the gardener's bicycle, ignoring the way its bar tugged at the skirt of her yellow afternoon frock. The soft twilight breeze fluttered the camel's hair topcoat she had thrown on hastily as she left the house.

Somewhere, two miles ahead, Rene was on his mission. She had to get to the village in time to stop him, to save the man she had almost married from—her husband!

At the rim of the little cluster of houses and stores with their vine-covered walls and ancient chimney-pots, she left the bicycle and proceeded on foot. It would never do for the marquis to be seen searching for her husband on a wheel. But she could always walk, couldn't she?

Casual villagers, moving home before the curfew, bowed to her as she walked through the main street. But she did not return their nods. Her whole being was concentrated on finding the car, on finding Rene and she did find it.

It was standing outside the cottage where Curt Schmidt lived!

She moved cautiously to the door. Inside a quartet of brown-shirted Gestapo men were playing cards. They saw her and rose, clicking their heels. It is part of the Nazi credo to recognize nobility, especially cooperative nobility.

"The marquis will be out shortly, Madame," said one of them. "He is on an errand for *Herr* Schmidt. I did not know you were with him."

"I wasn't," she managed to say. "I was just taking a walk and saw the car. I'll wait out there."

**S**HE got into the front set deliberately and removed the ignition key, slipping it into her stocking. Rene was not going to move the car until he had told her what he was doing.

He came out, hurrying, with a

cheery word for the guards. Her hatred exploded inside her. How could he, a Frenchman of honorable lineage, be such a traitor to his country and to every standard of his birth!

He saw her with a quick look of alarm.

"Alice," he said quickly. "You shouldn't be here! We've got to get back to the chateau."

"So you can watch Tony arrested?" she asked softly.

Her smile was grim as he looked for the key, saw it was not in the lock, and began to go through his pockets.

"I threw it away," she said defiantly. "You're not going to do any more than you already have."

"Where did you throw it?" he asked, his face a mask of alarm as he peered at her in the twilight. "Where?"

"You're a heel, Rene," she said. "A twenty-four carat, unmitigated insect of the seventh water."

"Get out of here—quickly!" he snapped.

"Oh, no you don't," she said, her voice still low. "I'm not one of your Continental wives. I'm American, and I have as much right here as you."

With a sudden quick gesture, he tossed her from the car. She landed on gravel, shocked and hurt in body and spirit, and with her stockings torn. At that moment, watching his set, almost pinched face, she wanted to kill him.

In miraculous answer to her unuttered wish, a thunderbolt spoke from the skies.

They must have been flying high, must have come in out of the sunset with motors cut, for there was almost no warning. The sudden drone of their racing motors was numbing as they came hurtling toward earth at five hundred miles an hour. There were three, six, nine of them, and they swooped over the little headquarters cottage with unerring accuracy.

The world exploded in fire and noise as bomb after bomb struck ground and cottage with explosive impact. Blinded by the flashes less than a hundred yards away, Alice was barely aware of the grinding of brakes and hurried movements behind her.

Then the bombers were gone, and men in Nazi brown and *Reichwehr Feldgrau* were running past her in apparent confusion, seen on the red glare of the blazing cottage. Her vision came back, and she could make out figures and faces.

And then she saw Tony again!

His tie was torn off, and he had a gun in his hand. She stood up, screaming at him to get away, but he came grimly toward her.

Then a brawny arm ripped off her coat, went around her neck, a big hand grabbed her wrist. A brownshirt beside her blazed away at the Englishman, and she saw him stagger.

"In with her!" she heard a familiar voice.

It was Curt Schmidt, and he was dragging her into an armored car. She screamed, but could not hear her own voice.

"Quick!" cried Curt in German. "She'll make a hostage if the others get away."

**H**ER heels bumped the door sill of the heavy vehicle as the Nazi dragged her inside.

Then, almost in her ear, a pistol exploded, deafening her. The brown-shirt who had hit Tony crumpled at her feet. The grasp around her neck was relaxed, and she slid to the sharp gravel. The pistol exploded again and again over her head with unerring accuracy. Two more Nazis dropped.

Tony was there, one side of his head bright with blood, and again urgent arms dragged her inside. There was the clang of a heavy steel door, and the motor roared.

"Are you all right, Tony?" a low voice asked when they were out of range and speeding toward the beach. It was Rene, bending grimly over the wheel.

"I think it's just a graze," said Alice, bending over the Englishman on the jolting floor. Tony managed a grin.

"It's okay," he said. "I had blood in my eyes. How's brother Schmidt?"

Brother Schmidt, in the back of the vehicle, did not answer. He was sound asleep with the dent of a pistol butt in his scalp. And Alice was suddenly happy. She didn't know what had

happened or was going to happen, but somehow everything was all right.

Later, in the tiny cabin of the E-boat that was taking them with their prisoner across the channel to England, Alice looked up at Rene, whose arm was tight around her shoulders. Across the cabin, Tony was nursing a bottle of Navy issue rum.

"I called you a lot of names, darling," Alice said to Rene. "But you earned them for not telling me anything."

"You're too honest, *cherie*," said Rene, smiling at her and ruffling her golden hair. "Tony and I agreed we'd have to keep you in the dark from our first meeting."

"I thought you'd become one of them!" Alice wailed.

"I'm a good actor," said Rene. "Maybe, after the war, I can go to Hollywood and be another Boyer."

"He's all right at that," said Tony. "The lucky stiff." He toasted them with the bottle.

"Please, somebody, tell me what it's all about," begged Alice.

"All right, *cherie*," said Rene. "You can know now. Before the evacuation last year, Tony came to see me. He told me that the British were getting out, asked me to stay. He wanted to take you, but it was safer then for you to keep out of the battle area. So you had to stay too. I've done what I could since. It hasn't been much."

"It's been plenty, Rene," said Tony. "Listen, Alice—he's passed more tips along about concentrations and supply dumps than any other agent. We'd still want him at the chateau if it weren't for the Russian affair."

"Friend Curt has charge of coast defense for the whole section," said

Rene. "He made Ambricourt his headquarters because it was out of the way. But with Hitler tied up in the east, the time for counter-blows has come. We needed the plans for planning a move, needed them up to date."

"So you arranged the von Rieger visit?" Alice asked.

"Von Rieger arranged that," said Tony. "We merely waylaid him. Luckily for us, he's a secretive chap. Not many people would know him."

"But why that terrible game of golf?" Alice moaned.

**R**ENE grinned faintly.

"You remember we signed scorecards," he said. "My card was a trick one with another paper underneath. In signing, Curt signed an order for me to get the papers from his safe and bring them to von Rieger."

"Oh!" said Alice, and her voice was small. "And I—"

"And you nearly wrecked it, not to mention almost getting yourself killed. And you've made your husband very jealous of an Englishman named Tony. We arranged the bombing to cover the theft. I had just time to get away when you threw away the key to the car."

"I'm so sorry, darling," said Alice.

"It's all right, Alice," said Tony. "When I found you'd gone after Rene, I ran the two miles after you on foot. And Curt got wise and came after me in his blitz buggy. But have some rum. We're entitled to a nineteenth hole if anybody ever was."

"No," said Rene, pouring a tot of the heavy liquor for Alice, "in view of the game we've finished, I think we can call this the twentieth hole."

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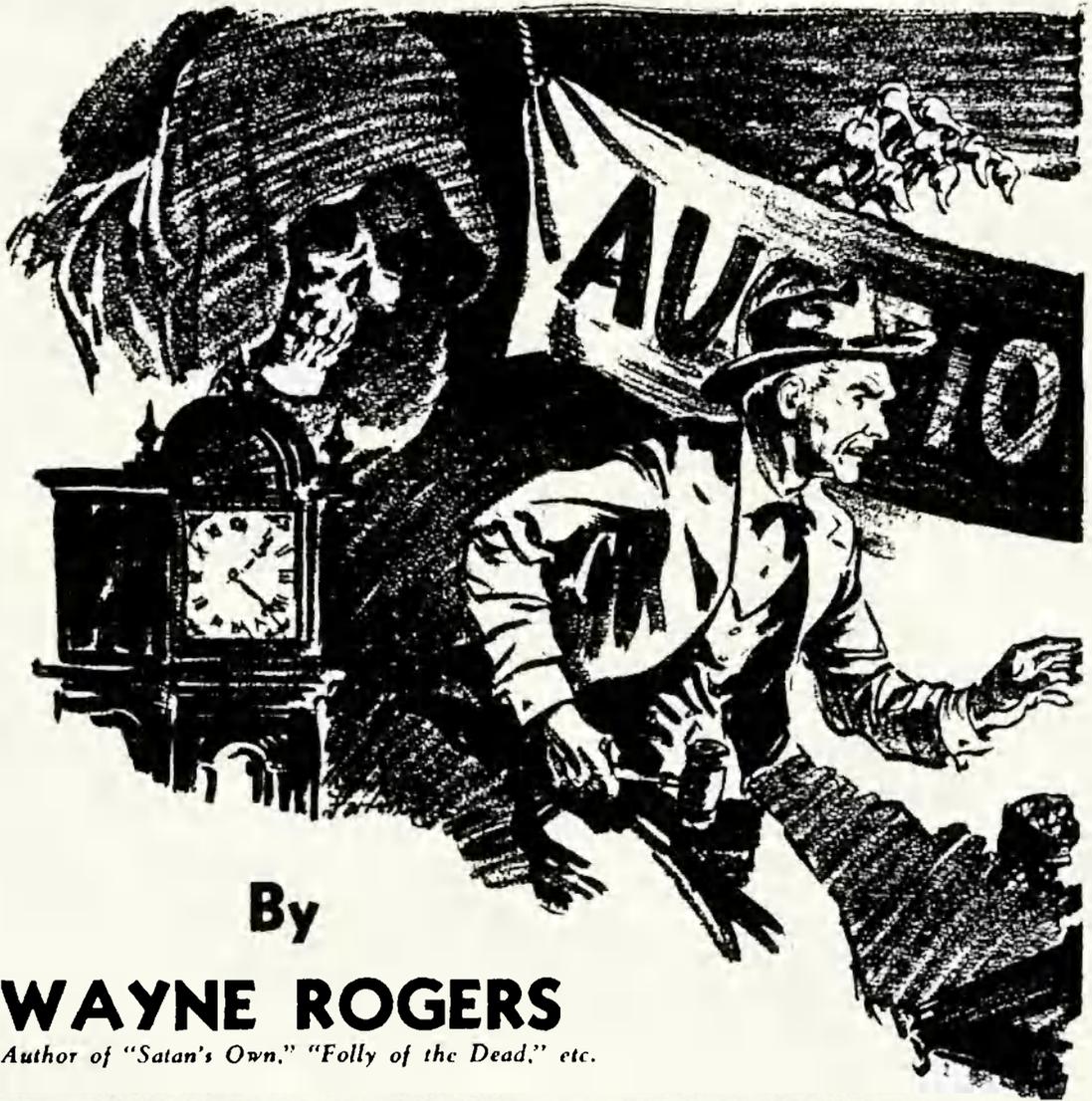
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# DEATH TO THE



By

**WAYNE ROGERS**

*Author of "Satan's Own," "Folly of the Dead," etc.*

An Auction in New England Starts a Bloody Roman Holiday—  
and Maynard Goes Into Action to Stop a Weird Slaughter Plot

## CHAPTER I

*Mine Alone!*

**A**UCTIONS usually are festive occasions in rural New England, opportunities for the whole countryside to get together for a semi-picnic, semi-entertainment and all around gossip visit. People look forward to them, flock to them eagerly in a holiday spirit.

But they didn't flock eagerly to the Effe Currier sale. Not that it wasn't

well advertised. Ward Bradshaw had given it plenty of newspaper publicity and had scattered handbills featuring the antiques all through the county and even farther. There was a fine turnout, don't mistake that. But there was something missing, something wrong.

We sensed that as soon as we reached the big, severely prim house, which now looked strangely disheveled with its furniture spilling out over the wide porch and onto the lawn beyond. We caught it in the eyes that greeted us uneasily as we

# HIGHEST BIDDER

*A Complete  
Novelet*



mingled with the uneasy throng.

"You'd think this was a funeral instead of an auction," Tom Leavitt grunted, but I noticed that he also spoke little above a whisper.

That was it—there was no laughing, no joking. The voices around us were subdued, guarded, as if a sternly

watching eavesdropper might be close by. The furtive glances, too, seemed to be searching for a lurking somebody who was not there, yet who must be there.

The sober-faced, unsmiling, eccentric old woman who was almost a part of that house seemed to stare from

every chair, to peer disapprovingly from every shadowy corner. The uncarpeted rooms seemed to echo with her crisp tread and her sharp, decisive voice. But old Effie Currier was not there.

She was twenty miles away, in the State Hospital, where the court had temporarily confined her. She was gone, but her shadow seemed to hang over the musty old house and cast a chill over the neighbors who had known her so long. For years they had known that Effie was becoming a little queer, had realized that sooner or later she would not be able to take care of herself. But now that she was gone, now that the home she had guarded so jealously was to be broken up in her absence, the occasion did not lend itself to light bantering.

**J**EAN and I had come in the hope of picking up some little odds and ends to help furnish our little place. We had been in New Hampshire only a year and there was plenty we needed, plenty more we wanted. But this air of semi-bereavement made me feel like a ghoulishly covetous eyeing the furnishings at a funeral.

And Jean caught it, too. I could tell by the way her fingers tightened on my arm, by the way she stayed close at my side, instead of leaving me flat to wander through the furniture-piled rooms.

"Wonder if Bradshaw had anything to do with this," Tom Leavitt speculated as the four of us—Jean and I and Tom and Ruth, his wife—stood a bit to one side and watched the curious behavior of our neighbors. "It would be just like him. He's the slickest auctioneer in the State. If he can start them feeling weepy enough, he'll get double the prices out of them."

Tom Leavitt was our reason for being in Halstead. He and I had gone to college together. When his father died, he inherited the Halstead *Herald*. I turned out to be a novelist, or wanted to be, anyway. It was his inspiration that we move to Halstead, so I could give him part-time assistance with the paper and have the rest of the time for my writing. So

far it had seemed to work out fine.

"Ward Bradshaw didn't have narithin' to do with it," a high-pitched nasal voice interrupted. I turned to find a pale-blue-eyed, gray-haired old fellow at my elbow. "Folks feels the way they do because they know 'tain't right to sell out Effie this way. The town oughta take care of her proper. That's the least they owe the sheriff. He gave his life servin' them and now they turn his widdier out."

Bert Howard was a man of medium height who managed to look small and tired. His shoulders drooped, his eyelids drooped, his mouth drooped to complete a picture of perpetual weariness. He lived in a little shack behind the Currier house and had attended to the manual labor around the place for the old woman.

"Effie's better off where she is," Leavitt told him. "Her property will be administered for her and she will be well taken care of. She's much better off, Bert."

"Uh-huh," Bert Howard grunted. "Maybe so. Maybe the sheriff would've been much better off if he hadn't bothered about Ed Dawson. Ever stop to figger that?"

Sheriff John Currier and the Dawson gang were a part of Halstead history that had become almost legendary. It was the one time the little town had figured briefly in the metropolitan newspapers. I had read all about it in the back issues of the *Herald*, but there was no stopping Bert Howard once he was started. He recalled the details avidly.

Edward Dawson had been a notorious gangster of nearly twenty years before. He and his outfit had raided throughout New England and had climaxed their depredations with a daring jewel robbery in Boston. Fleeing with their loot, they had stopped in Springfield and held up a bank. They separated after that and made their way into New Hampshire and Vermont.

Sheriff John Currier had gone out after them when they were reported in his neighborhood. He had closed in on Dawson and killed him. That had brought Currier salvos of pub-

licity, but it had brought him something more. The rest of the Dawson gang began swarming around him.

Shortly after Dawson's death, a killer named Henry Potter had tried to ambush Currier in his own home. He followed his chief when Currier's gun blazed a death warrant. But several weeks later it was the sheriff who went down with a bullet in his brain.

**A** BLAZE of big-time killings in a sleepy little New England town! A two-gun sheriff against city gangsters! It had been a momentary sensation in the metropolitan dailies. Within a few weeks, though, it had been forgotten—by all but Bert Howard.

"What became of the rest of the gang, the ones who killed Currier?" I prompted as Howard came to a reluctant finish.

"We couldn't prove nothin' on them." He shook his head regretfully. "Massachusetts caught them and sent them away for long terms. Life almost for two of them. Guess they're in jail yet."

"And their loot, how about that?"

"Dawson only had a few hundred dollars on him when the sheriff killed him."

"That was nearly a score of years ago and that's the last job Bert ever had." Tom Leavitt grinned as the old fellow left to answer the auctioneer's summons. "He used to be Currier's deputy. Since then he's been retired, 'looking after' old Effie."

By now the auction was well under way. Ward Bradshaw was a master at his trade, but I felt sorry for him as I saw how prodigiously he was laboring. His best gags died. His favorite tricks fell flat. Time and again he seemed on the point of giving up in despair when he was forced to knock down articles at prices that must have wrenched his pride sorely. But the stuff was moving, at least. Though there was something strange and unnatural abroad in that crowd, they were New Englanders and they were not passing up bargains.

In the midst of the selling I heard Jean's voice call out a bid, heard her

frantically trying to conceal her excitement as she topped someone who raised her. Again and again she raised. And for the sum of eight dollars we became the possessors of a parlor organ.

That was only one of her achievements, she told me proudly as she led me up to Clem Trow, the clerk to hand over the cash and have my name recorded beside the purchased articles. The other was a fine old spinning wheel to place beside our open hearth.

Those were the highlights of the auction for us, until Bradshaw was nearly finished. He stopped in front of a platform rocker with a worn carpet back and seat. His face brightened hopefully.

"Sheriff Currier's old rocker, good as on the day it was made! No, sir, they don't make rockers like this any more. What am I bid for it? What am I bid?" He picked up a bid. "Two dollars, two dollars. Who will make it three? Three dollars? Three dollars from a man who knows comfort when he sees it! Three dollars, three dollars. I have three dollars. Who'll make it three-fifty? Three-fifty! There we are, I have three-fifty. Three-fifty, three-fifty. Who will make it four?"

"Four dollars!" came a high and clear voice from the far end of the room.

When the auctioneer grinned and turned to identify the new bidder, the grin wiped from his face. His jaw dropped and his eyes stared. He moved his lips soundlessly, staring at a thin, straight-backed figure framed in the doorway. It was an old lady in a black dress, with a gray shawl draped over her shoulders and held in front by a pin. She had white hair that divided in the middle and was tied in a bun at the back of her head. But that hair was no whiter than her ashen face.

"Effie!" Bradshaw finally found his voice. "Effie, how did you—you can't —"

"Four dollars!" rang again in the suddenly hushed room.

"But, Effie," the disconcerted auc-

tioner floundered, "you can't bid here. I can't—"

"Don't stand there and tell me what I can't do, Ward Bradshaw," Effie Currier cut in scornfully. "I am bidding four dollars for that chair. Close the bidding. And then you can start this auction all over again. I could not get here sooner."

**F**OR an instant we were even more tongue-tied than Bradshaw. We stood there and gaped at her, open-mouthed, while the chills, shivered up and down our spines. It was as if we looked at someone who had risen from the grave, and indeed she looked like a reanimated corpse. How had she got there? How *could* she be there?

Then the spell broke and her friends flocked around her. They tried to soothe her, attempted to lead her from the room. At first it seemed that they would succeed. She started with them to the door, but suddenly she whirled and was out of their hands before they could grasp her. Wildly she dashed through them, her eyes blazing from her ashen face, straight to where Ward Bradshaw stood with one hand on the rocker.

"Four dollars and the bidding is closed!" she screamed. "It's mine! Everything here is mine. Do you hear? They're my things and nobody else will have them!"

Thrusting Bradshaw aside, she seized the rocker, clawed her fingers into its back and seat cushions and ripped with savage fury. The old carpet tore into fragments. Padding and springs spilled out on the floor. But the sight of the destruction she wrought seemed only to add to her rage. Grabbing the wooden frame, she tugged and wrenched, pulled it apart with berserk frenzy. She jumped on it until the arms were reduced to kindling, until nothing but the rockers and the platform remained intact.

And still her seething fury was not satisfied.

Like a maddened animal she threw herself upon the battered wreckage and tore at it with superhuman strength. Grabbing one of the rockers, she ripped it, pried it from its an-

chorage on the platform, until the overstretched spring snapped with a *crack* like a rifle shot. It flew through the air and thudded against her temple, cut through the almost transparent skin and sank deep into the flesh beneath.

Blood bathed her face, but even before she collapsed on the twisted skeleton of the demolished rocker, the wild light faded from her eyes. Effie Currier was dead.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Fear*

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**T**HE head wound did not cause her death," a hastily summoned physician soon announced to the tense crowd. "The shock of it contributed, perhaps, but she died from a stroke."

The strange drama of Effie Currier's startling appearance and sudden death reached out and gripped our imaginations, held them with chill fingers that sent something like superstitious fear seeping into us. How she had managed to get there? Miraculous as that at first seemed, we were soon reminding one another of the notorious laxity at the State Hospital. For one of Effie's determination and cleverness, escape from the institution was not too difficult.

Knowing that her belongings were to be auctioned off that day, Effie simply had evaded her guards and come home, and there her choleric temper had resulted in a death stroke. That was all there was to it, yet her passing settled over us like a pall that was heavy with scarcely concealed uneasiness.

In the momentary panic that followed her death, it seemed that the auction would break up. More timid people started to leave, but Ward Bradshaw quickly took charge. He urged the rest to remain until he was finished.

Bert Howard got busy with a broom, clearing away the mess in the center of the living room. In a few minutes we were ready to proceed,

just as a new arrival drove into the yard.

I was near the door and turned to look at the truck as it braked to a stop. It belonged to Eli Weston, an antique dealer from below the Massachusetts line. A man came hurrying out from behind the wheel, a smallish, hunch-shouldered man with close-set eyes and a pinched, curiously ratlike face. Instead of the worn gray suit he was wearing, he should have been clad in black, I thought instinctively. He looked like an undertaker, but he did not talk like one.

"Too late, ain't I?" he demanded as he strode up to the door.

Before I could answer him, a flood of profanity poured from his lips, directed at the steaming truck.

It seemed that Mr. Weston had had trouble a-plenty. The truck had broken down not once, but three times on the day he had wanted it to perform perfectly. Due to these mishaps he was tragically late. He had heard about old Effie's possessions and had intended to be on hand in plenty of time.

He brushed past me and pushed his way inside. There I heard him wrangling with Ward Bradshaw, which held things up a bit longer. Finally Bradshaw got going again, only to find that Clem Trow, the clerk, had lost his sales sheets during the confusion.

Jean and I left after that. We tied the spinning wheel over the hood of our car and strapped the organ onto one of the running boards. We got our new possessions home without difficulty.

They were an improvement for our place, I had to admit. Jean placed the organ at one end of the living room, where it filled an empty space nicely, and the big wheel went beautifully beside our wide stone hearth.

Three days later I had become so accustomed to them that it seemed as if they always had been there.

**I**N those three days the furor caused by Effie Currier's death had subsided. But the auction remained a lively topic of conversation, especially since Eli Weston was still in town.

He was stopping at the hotel and from there was campaigning for various articles he had missed at the sale. Antiques that increased in value overnight appealed to our thrifty Halsteaders. He picked up many of them and made offers on a lot more.

I had just watched him drive by the *Herald* office when a car drew up at the curb and a woman came scrambling out. Scrambling is the right word, for she almost fell as she slid out from under the wheel and ran across the sidewalk. Lucy Draper, I identified her, a middle-aged, level-headed farm woman who lived a few miles out on the road beyond the cemetery.

Before I could open the door for her, she was inside. She clutched the edge of a high-topped desk and stared at me with terror-rounded eyes, while her trembling lips twitched soundlessly.

"Effie Currier!" she managed to gasp at last. "I just saw her—on the road—out near the cemetery! I saw her, I tell you!"

From a barely audible gasp, her voice had risen to a shout, to a shriek. It carried all through the office and brought Tom Leavitt running from the print shop with several of the men at his heels.

"But Effie was buried yesterday afternoon," I tried to soothe her. "You must have been mistaken. You must have seen someone else who looked like Effie Currier."

"I know she was buried yesterday afternoon," the woman chattered. "I was there—I dropped earth on her—but I just saw her and I wasn't mistaken! I know Effie. I know that black dress and that gray shawl. She was walking toward the cemetery. I passed within twenty feet of her. Seeing her that way made me so scared, I almost lost control of the wheel. When I got the car back on the road she was gone. She had just disappeared—but I know she was there!"

This was nothing but a case of hysterical imagination, I assured myself. And yet there was a positiveness, a sense of unshakable conviction about her that was strangely convincing.

Despite myself, I caught myself wondering. The little hairs at the nape of my neck began to assume individuality and stand on end.

"Mr. Maynard is right, Lucy." Leavitt stepped forward and tried his hand at reassuring her. "He has to be right. You must have seen someone else. I tell you what. We'll drive out there with you and convince you. We'll go to the cemetery and see that nothing has been disturbed."

"Yes," the Draper woman agreed doubtfully. "Yes,—but—"

I knew what she was thinking. So did Leavitt. Before she could object, he cut her short and started her toward the door. But there he paused, turned to the workmen who were going back to the shop.

"Charlie, maybe you and Buck better come with us," he invited.

When I tried to catch his eye, he avoided me.

So there were four of us who drove out to the cemetery with Lucy Draper. It was late afternoon. Dusk was just beginning to gather, making the shadows of the trees deeper, the surrounding hills more impressive, more lowering. We left the car at the road and went through the iron-grille gateway beneath which Effie Currier had been carried little more than twenty-four hours before.

**S**ILENTLY we stepped up to the new grave and stood looking down at the floral pieces that were beginning to wilt. Their funeral odor was heavy in our nostrils. Nothing had been disturbed. Everything was just as it had been left yesterday.

"You see, it was just your—" Tom Leavitt began.

The words died on his lips. When I glanced at him, I saw that he was looking beyond the graveyard, off up the road to where a thick column of black smoke was billowing upward.

"That's the Fisk place!" he shouted, and we broke for the car.

We could see the flames even before we reached the doomed building. They had broken through the roof of a one-story ell that formed the kitchen. Now they were licking up to

the second story of the Cape Cod structure. It was too late to save the building, we knew, but we might be able to salvage some of the Fisk's furnishings.

When we stopped at the roadside and glimpsed the front yard, sudden fear gripped us. No furniture had been dragged outside. There was not a sign of life around the place. George Fisk would be in town, at work in the garage at this time of day, but his wife ought to be there.

The kitchen was a roaring blaze when we reached it, but the same thought was in the minds of all of us as we raced to it. Ada Fisk might have been trapped in there. The fierce heat drove us back twice.

Tom Leavitt led the way around to the back, where the flames were not quite so fierce. With our coats wrapped over our heads, we ran to a window that had not yet been broken by the heat. Tom smashed it with a pole and we stared into a raging inferno.

"She's in there—on the floor!" Tom gasped.

We staggered back and mopped our scorched, sweat-drenched faces. We knew that we could do nothing for her. It would be too late, even if we were able to reach her. Nothing could have remained alive in that fearful blaze. We were looking at Ada Fisk's funeral pyre.

"It was that gasoline stove did it!" panted Buck, the pressman. "I saw parts of it in there, all blown to perdition. George Fisk was telling me last night that they bought it at Effie Currier's sale."

For a moment there was not a sound but the roar and cackle of the flames. Then Lucy Draper spoke through the clamor in a voice that was a hoarse whisper.

"She said nobody else would have her things!"

With the fire-truck came scores of cars. In a few minutes hundreds of people were gazing at the huge bonfire, and from mouth to mouth leaped the reason for the fire. They were gripped by that chilling sense of helplessness that is always produced by

the sight of roaring flames raging unchecked.

But they were gripped by something more. In their eyes, as they turned away from the smoldering embers, was a glint of ancestral fear. I saw naked the inescapable dread that envelopes man when, for a brief moment, the somber veil that cloaks the grave stirs ever so slightly. . . .

There was nothing mysterious or inexplicable about this tragedy, common sense told me as I drove back to town. Ada Fisk had been using a stove she did not know how to handle, a dangerous type of stove, and it had blown up. That was all, yet I could not banish the tenaciously persistent doubt that gnawed at my brain.

"You're getting to be as bad as Lucy Draper, seeing ghosts walking in broad daylight," I told myself angrily.

One thing was certain. No intimation of this hysteria must be allowed to creep into the *Herald's* account of the Fisk fire. I sat down and wrote that account carefully, but I might as well have spared my pains.

Before I was finished, another story had burst upon the town. This one whipped up the spreading fear like a whirlwind, and it was a story that I did not know how to write.

It came from Melvin Allard's house. Allard was a member of the volunteer fire company. He had been at the Fisk blaze and had driven home, eager to tell his wife about it. But when he reached there, stark tragedy awaited him.

"I suspicioned there was something wrong as soon as I came in the back door," he sobbed to his neighbors. "Dora wasn't in the kitchen, fixing supper like she should've been. I called her and there was no answer, so I went through the dining room and the living room. And there she was, lying at the foot of the stairs, all covered with blood!

"I ran over and picked her up, but it was too late. Her throat was cut bad with broken glass. Her head was smashed in where the mirror must have landed on top of her before it went to pieces. I told her to leave that stuff downstairs till I got home

tonight. But she must've tried to carry it up by herself, the mirror and those two big pictures. She must've lost her footing and tumbled over backward."

The gruesome evidence bore him out. The wall along the stairs was scraped and gouged. On the blood-soaked floor at its foot was a jumble of broken wood and glass. That splintered wreckage had been two large framed pictures and a heavy wall mirror—Dora Allard's purchases at the Effie Currier auction!

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Vulture's Flight*

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**I**NVOLUNTARILY my gaze darted to the old parlor organ, to the spinning wheel beside the fireplace, when I came home that evening. They were just as they had been when I left earlier in the day. During the intervening hours, though, they had undergone a strange metamorphosis. Something about their homeliness had disappeared, to be replaced by a half-sensed menace. Whatever it was, it made me squeeze Jean to me more tightly than usual, made my kiss more ardent.

For a moment I held her so close that she gasped and looked up at me in surprise. She little suspected that I was resolutely thrusting out of my mind the sudden, appalling vision of poor Melvin Allard clutching the blood-drenched body of his dead wife.

A great weight lifted from my heart as I held her, warm and soft in my embrace. I breathed more easily and relief surged through me. Jean was reality. Jean was sanity. There in my own home I knew that the things I had been thinking were ridiculously impossible.

And yet they flooded back into my mind a few hours later when a car stopped in front of the house and a caller rang our bell.

It was Eli Weston, the antique dealer. Now, when he took off his hat as he stepped inside, his sleek gray hair,

clinging close to the skull, made him look more than ever like a rat with hungry, acquisitive eyes. They darted almost instantly to the spinning wheel and to the organ. His sharp-featured face brightened momentarily before he masked his eagerness.

"I came to see you about that spinning wheel and perhaps the organ, Mr. Maynard," he explained. "You just bought them, so they can't have a sentimental value for you. You ought to be willing to sell them at a profit eh?" He cocked his head to one side and eyed me with a leer that was intended to be knowing. "They have no great value, of course, but it happens that I have a customer who is in the market for articles of this sort. I might be able to take them off your hands if you will name a price."

I was not interested in naming a price, but Eli Weston was. He named one that was twice as much as we had paid for the things and he was willing, almost eager to go higher. Jean stopped him.

"We are not interested in any offer you may make for them," she blurted impulsively. "We don't want to sell them."

She turned and slipped her arm around me. I knew that Eli Weston was going to do no business. He knew it, too, and the pretended friendliness dropped away from him. His close-set eyes frosted over and glinted malevolently.

"Very well," he grunted. "You're the boss. You know what you want to do, or maybe you don't. Maybe you'll change your mind. In case you decide you want to get rid of the stuff, I'll be staying at the hotel for a couple of days."

I had not liked the man at first glance and now his thinly veiled hostility made me like him even less. I took a step toward him, but he turned his back and walked to the door. It was not until after he had gone that the significance of his remarks began to dawn upon me.

"Maybe you'll change your mind." What had he meant by that? Why might I change my mind? Because of what had happened to Ada Fisk and

Dora Allard? Because of the sentient fear that was beginning to seep through the whole town, or because of something more—something that *he* knew was coming?

**S**UDDENLY, as I sat staring into the fire and mulling that over in my mind, my scalp prickled and I could fairly feel eyes staring at me. Eyes seemed to be peering in at me out of the darkness.

I whirled and for a fraction of a second I was certain that I glimpsed a face at the side window. A thin, white face with hard, staring eyes, with gray hair drawn back severely over the ears. That could not be Effie Currier's face!

My blood was like ice in my veins as I ran to the door on queer, hollow-feeling legs and plunged out into the darkness. The night was dark and still and empty. There was nobody at the window, nobody anywhere in sight. I strained my ears. The only sound I could catch was the low threnody of the insects.

Wet with perspiration, I went back indoors and tried to avoid Jean's anxious, questioning eyes. I was becoming jumpy as a cat, I told her, and did my best to let it go at that. But she knew me too well to be so easily deceived. Several times during the rest of the evening I caught her watching me surreptitiously.

When we finally went to bed, I knew that my jitters had affected her. There was fear in her eyes—fear of something she could only sense, could understand no more than I. . . .

I was not due at the office until past noon the next day, but Tom Leavitt telephoned me shortly after breakfast.

"There's the devil to pay again, Fred. Out at Justin Skinner's place, on the Standish road. He's dead and I hear the place is a mess. I'm going out there now."

Twenty minutes later I joined him and walked through the awe-stricken crowd that milled around the house of death. Skinner, a widower who lived alone, lay where he had been found on the floor of his living room.

At first glance it seemed that every-

thing in that room had been wilfully hacked to pieces. Then I saw that litter of springs and cushion padding, of torn fabric and splintered wood, represented what had been only two chairs, a large overstuffed easy chair and a horsehair sofa.

They had been demolished so completely that it was difficult to recognize what was left of them. Evidently Skinner had ripped and slashed the upholstery to bits with a knife and then had attacked the frames with an ax. His task had been almost finished when the steel head must have flown from the helve. It had caught him in the forehead and had split his skull, killing him before he realized what had struck him.

"He knew that stuff had a curse on it," I heard an appalled voice explaining to a newcomer beside me. "He tried to bust it up, but it got him before he could finish with it. My wife bought a couple chairs at old Effie's sale, but I lugged them out to the barn last night. Today I'm gonna burn them far away from the house.

Old Effie's sale. . . The hushed words echoed in my brain. Again that vague, nameless dread left me with an empty, all-gone feeling in the pit of my stomach. Now I remembered that horsehair sofa. I had been sitting on it with Jean during the auction. It had been right behind Effie Currier when she had launched herself on the platform rocker and hacked it to pieces.

"Everything here is mine. Do you hear? They're my things and nobody else will have them!"

Her wild scream rang in my memory. I felt the warm blood rush into my cheeks when I caught Leavitt's eyes fixed upon me, studying me curiously.

**“WHAT** do you think of it, Tom?" I asked as we walked out to my car and started back to the office.

He hesitated uncertainly.

"I don't know. Last night I was willing to believe —"

"Yes, I know," I interrupted impatiently. "The Fisk fire might have

been an accident. The Allard case might have been another accident. Though why any sane woman would try to carry two heavy pictures and a mirror up a flight of stairs at one time is beyond me. And this might have been an accident, too, conceivably. The first two I was willing to accept as no more than a strange coincidence. This one you might say is not even that. It seems to follow somewhat logically after the other two, but I don't believe a word of it."

"You think—" he prompted as I lapsed into silence.

"I think there's a bloodthirsty murderer running loose in this town," I snapped. "Some ruthless devil is deliberately spreading panic to further his own ends."

"But why, Fred? Who would kill people who have never done anyone any harm in their lives?"

"Someone who stands to benefit by ruining this town with disastrous publicity," I gritted savagely. "Some dirty hound who figures to line his pockets in some way that I haven't been able to figure out yet."

The moment I said it, Eli Weston's ratlike face flashed into my mind. At that time we turned a corner and the antique dealer's truck was almost in front of us. He was coming out of old Granny Nutting's house, carrying a desk. He added to the chest of drawers that already stood on the sidewalk, the center of a hard-eyed, scowling audience.

I pulled over to the curb and watched him pile his purchases into the truck. When he was through he climbed up onto the seat, with no more than a grin for the nasty remarks that were being thrown at him. But the instant he started away from the curb, stones and anything else that came to hand took the place of the insults. Angrily the crowd pelted the van, ran after it, hooting and brandishing their fists.

"The cheap grave-robber!" one of the old lady's neighbors shouted. "Last night Granny turned him down, but this morning he was here bright and early with the news about Justin Skinner. You can't tell me that dirty

buzzard ain't got something to do with what's happening in this town!"

I recognized those wild lynch symptoms all too easily. Already in the grip of unreasoning fear, these men were eager to find something concrete on which to vent their rage. They had found it. Soon the whole town was buzzing with angry denunciation of Eli Weston. From anger they passed swiftly to threats.

By mid-afternoon a howling mob stoned the truck right up to the hotel door and then surrounded the building, demanding that Weston come out.

**T**OM Leavitt took a hand. With a deputy sheriff and several other level-headed citizens, he went inside and warned the dealer to get out of town before he precipitated a riot.

Weston was thoroughly scared now. I could see that as he scurried out of a back door and climbed into the cab of his truck. Crouching over the wheel like an old vulture, he drove out through the lane we opened for him and fled beneath a barrage of missiles.

That was the last we would see of Eli Weston and good riddance, I told myself. But scarcely half an hour later we heard that his wrecked truck was at the bottom of Thompson's Gorge.

Leavitt and I were among the first to arrive at the scene of the accident. Weston had been dragged out of the wreckage, battered so badly that he was hardly recognizable. The gorge is deep and steep. His truck must have turned over half a dozen times before it reached the bottom. Its contents were reduced to kindling. Not a piece of Effie Currier's furniture remained intact. Most of it looked as if a steam-roller had gone over it.

"The jinx got him!" I heard awestricken mumblings all around me. "Old Effie wouldn't let him get away with her things!"

Certainly there was plenty of evidence to bear them out. The side of the road, where it passed the gorge, was well protected by a stout cable fence, but Weston had left that intact.

He had picked out the one possible spot, just before the fence began, to lose control of the machine and plunge down the hillside.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *White-haired Menace*

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**I**T wasn't until the second time we looked at the mangled body that Tom Leavitt pursed his lips in surprise. In the same instant I saw what had caught his attention. Weston's hat was gone and his head was badly battered. But it was not the sleek, gray-haired head he had uncovered in my living room! Now he was almost bald, the round skull covered by a close stubble no more than a quarter-inch long!

"That's a prison haircut if I ever saw one!" Tom whispered. He bent over the body and went through the coat pockets. That search revealed nothing of consequence, except the folded sales sheets Clem Trow had lost so mysteriously at the auction. The address had been marked down beside the name of each purchaser and item after item had been checked off as Weston had bought them up.

The gorge was still crowded with the morbidly curious when Tom and I drove back to the office. There we got busy on the telephone. In less than an hour we had added considerable information to Eli Weston's obituary.

In the first place, we had discovered that he was not Eli Weston at all. The antique dealer had gone out of business some months before and had sold his truck to a second-hand man, who had not bothered to paint out the name before reselling it. In the second place, we had learned that the Massachusetts State Penitentiary authorities were scouring the country for a trusty who had escaped less than a week ago.

That trusty was a man named Pfeiffer—a former member of Ed Dawson's gang!

[Turn to page 94]

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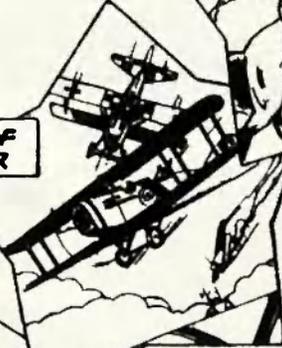


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"So there's your answer," Leavitt summed up as he leaned back in his swivel chair. "Pfeiffer must have read a newspaper notice of the auction. It was so important to him to get hold of Effie Currier's furniture before it was scattered all over town that he broke out of jail and rushed up here. He got here too late. There was nothing he could do but buy up whatever he could and commit murder to get his hands on anything that was refused him. Why? Now that he's dead, your guess is as good as mine."

But I wasn't even guessing. Relief surged through me and left me feeling weak, spent. My forehead was wet with perspiration and the palms of my hands were clammy. I realized what our refusal to sell an old spinning wheel and an organ might have meant to Jean.

I had already called her and knew that she was safe, but now that did not satisfy me. I wanted to see her, to hold her in my arms. Tom nodded quickly when I said I was going home and offered to drop him off on the way.

He invited me in when I turned into his drive and put him down at his front door, but I wasn't stopping just then. I wanted to get home.

I slipped the car into gear, started away. Before I reached the road, Tom's frantic yell brought my foot down on the brake. He was standing on the porch, waving to me frantically. Something about his face, under the porch light, prickled my scalp.

I did not wait to back up. I leaped out and ran to the porch, across it and through the front door. I froze there, transfixed with paralyzing horror.

There on the floor lay Ruth, pinned down beneath the wreckage of a tall grandfather clock—the very same clock she had bought at Effie Currier's auction!

The heavy top had crashed down on her head, had crushed her skull and battered one side of her face to a bloody pulp. But she was still alive. Tom had gathered her up in his arms, was holding her close against him while tears streamed down his writh-

ing cheeks. And out of that twisted, blood-dripping mouth came gasping words that were scarcely audible.

"Effie — Effie Currier — she knocked me down — she —"

The gasping stopped and Ruth Leavitt was dead.

**S**TARK horror made my body an insensate lump of flesh, my hands and feet icy cold as I got back into my car and drove home. With breath-taking suddenness the grateful relief, the fine security we had built on the bogus Eli Weston's death had been shattered. Ruth could not have been attacked more than a few minutes before we arrived, long after the masquerading criminal had plunged into the gorge.

And with her dying breath she had whispering Effie Currier's name. She had accused a woman whose disintegrating corpse was lying in its grave.

Effie Currier . . . That name, echoing in my brain, spawned an unholy terror that was beyond endurance. I could hear her high, sharp voice ringing in my ears as I got out of the car. I raced to my front door. But no, that wasn't her voice. It was the organ Jean was playing in the living room.

That organ and spinning wheel were cursed, devil's toys. They were a menace, a peril to Jean every moment they were in the house. Blind rage against the hideous objects swept through me. My hands balled into hard fists, my jaws clenched. I wanted to smash them to bits, to hack them to splinters the way Justin Skinner had fallen upon the overstuffed chair and sofa.

But when I stepped into the living room and saw Jean sitting at the melodeon, when she turned and smiled happily at me, it was as if a bucket of cold water drenched me. That joyful shock restored my sanity and chilled me with the realization of how strongly this horror was preying on my mind. A little more and I would go berserk, just as Skinner must have done.

"I have a job for you, Fred," Jean told me as I crushed her in my arms.

"The organ needs fixing. Some of the reeds aren't working. After supper maybe you can take it apart for me."

And when I saw the eagerness in her eyes, I could not muster the courage to suggest that we throw the thing out. She always wanted a parlor organ like her grandmother's. Now that she had this one to play, it would break her heart if I insisted on disposing of it. I nodded noncommittally, then told her what had happened to Ruth Leavitt.

That cast a pall over our evening. Jean wanted to go right down to the Leavitts', but there was nothing we could do there. Tom had asked me not to stay and I knew how he felt.

We had our supper in silence. Though we tried to forget the tragedy that had struck so close to us, it was in our eyes every time we met each other's glances. Desperately I cast about for something to take our minds off it. It was then that I thought of the organ. While I was with Jean, knowing I could fight to protect her, my mind grew more realistic. I wanted to inspect Effie's late possessions carefully. I was beginning to suspect that I understood the reason for the murder, but I wanted to be sure.

Moving it out into the center of the room, I unscrewed the back and lifted it free. As Jean watched, I took off the keyboard cover, unfastened the front panels to get at the reeds. I started to take them out to clean them. One was tightly jammed. I bent close, trying to pry it loose. And suddenly she screamed.

"Effie!"

Just that one piercing shriek, but it was so fraught with terror that it seemed to stop the beating of my heart.

I whirled, started to spring upright, even as I heard the quick rush of feet behind me. I was too late. Before I could raise a hand to protect myself, something crashed down hard on my head. I dropped straight to my knees.

Blindly I groped, trying desperately to get back onto my feet. The second blow seemed to split my skull

wide open. A thousand kleig lights blazed at me and then winked out into smothering blackness. . . .

**C**HOPPING and pounding rang in my aching brain, as if it were a beating drum. The sound brought me back to consciousness. I opened my eyes and stared at Effie Currier. I closed them again, shook my throbbing head. This must be hysteria or madness, I told myself as I tried to rally my dazed senses.

But the banging and smashing went on and now there was another sound. I heard a low sob that I knew was Jean's.

I opened my eyes again and there was no mistake about it. That was Effie Currier standing over the nearly demolished organ. That black dress and gray shawl, that tightly drawn white hair gathered in a bun at the back of her head — she looked exactly as she had when she had hurled herself upon the platform rocker.

The organ was in little better condition than the rocker she had torn to pieces. Not satisfied with taking it apart, she was using an ax upon it, reducing it to splinters.

That much I saw as I got my eyes back into focus. And then I saw Jean. She was propped up in a chair, her ankles and wrists tied together with ropes. She was sitting there, watching the old woman as if the devil himself was at work in our familiar living room.

Not until then did I realize my own plight. I was lying on the floor a few yards from what was left of the organ. My ankles were lashed together so tightly that the blood had been stopped. Rope was wound around my torso from my shoulders to below my waist, binding my arms close against my sides. I tested those bonds experimentally. The result was discouraging.

"It ain't here." A voice from the shattered wreck of the organ froze me into immobility. My eyelids almost closed. "Just like I thought, you found it before I got here, heh?"

Effie glowered at Jean. But that wasn't Effie! It wasn't Effie's voice.

Now that the head was raised, so that the light fell more fully upon the features, I saw that it wasn't Effie's face. It was made up to look like Effie and to be deceptive at a distance, yes, but it wasn't good enough to stand close scrutiny.

Neither the face beneath the white wig, nor the worn pair of men's shoes beneath the hem of the black dress!

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## CHAPTER V

### *Death of the Dead*

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"YOU found it, but it won't do you no good," the man disguised as Effie Currier threatened as he stepped toward Jean. "You're gonna hand it over to me. Oh, yes, you are!" Her lips had clamped together and she tried to shrink back from him. "You're gonna tell me where it is. I got lots of ways of makin' you talk. Fire and knives and slivers of wood jabbed up under your fingernails like the Indians done. You'll talk quick enough."

At that instant I knew who he was. Small observations that had seemed to have no significance now made ghastly sense. In the sudden flood of blinding rage that rushed into my brain, I lost my head completely.

"Bert Howard!" I shouted at him and could have bitten my tongue off the moment the name left my lips. "Let her alone! You can't get away with this!"

But my voice gagged in my throat when he turned and looked at me, his face alight with devilish satisfaction.

"So you woke up, heh?" He grinned malevolently. "That's fine. You got some sense, so you know that I ain't bluffin'. I want that paper, Maynard. Hand it over and you won't neither of you be hurt."

"What paper?" I parried, trying to draw him out.

The grin left his face.

"The paper you took out of the organ."

"I didn't see any paper. I didn't

take anything out of the organ. What kind of paper was it?"

"You're a liar!" he flung at me. "Why did you take it apart then? To fix it? Sure! You're a liar. I know what you was after. You got wind of it somehow and you found it before I got here. But you'll hand it over, all right."

Reaching down, he took hold of Jean's skirt and tore nearly a foot of material from all around its hem. Deliberately he fashioned the material into a gag, thrust it into her mouth and fastened it there. icy terror wrapped its paralyzing tentacles around my heart.

"Don't be a fool, Maynard," he warned as he stood over her. "You know I ain't bluffin'. I got three parts of that map now, but they ain't no good without the piece you found. I had to kill five people to get this far. You oughta know I ain't gonna stop now."

"What map are you talking about?" I sparred desperately for time, anything to keep his fiendish hands off Jean.

"The map the sheriff got from Ed Dawson!" he flared. His impatience abruptly turned to rage. "The map that shows where Dawson buried the stuff they stole. The sheriff tore it in four pieces and hid it in his furniture. You know that. I found the first piece when I was cleanin' up the mess after Effie bust up his rocker, so I started huntin' for more.

"One was in one of the picture frames Allard bought. Another was in the big clock the Leavitts bought. And you found the last piece right here in that organ. I been through your pockets already and didn't find it, but you've got it and you'll hand it over."

Into my mind flashed the details of Sheriff Currier's clash with the Dawson gang. I had suspected that Ed Dawson had buried his loot when the pursuit became too hot, that Currier had taken from him the map showing its location. That explained why Henry Potter had taken what had struck me as a senseless risk to break into Currier's home and search for the

map. After that visit the sheriff had done what I thought — quartered the map and hidden the pieces to protect it for the county. But he had died with the secret locked in his breast when the survivors of the gang had trapped him.

"The county never done right by the sheriff and they never done right by me!" Bert Howard raged. "I been takin' their guff for years, but now I'm gonna get mine. You ain't stoppin' me, Maynard."

As he spoke, he picked up the ax and a piece of wood from the wrecked organ. He began trimming frightful, sharp-pointed slivers. Those slivers were going to be driven up under Jean's fingernails!

**H**ORROR gripped me by the throat and threatened to strangle me as I realized my helplessness. There was nothing I could do to convince him that I did not have his map. Finding me there with the organ half-dismantled was too circumstantial. He was certain that I had beaten him to it and Jean's agony would not dissuade him.

If only I had the map, I would give it to him and let him kill us quickly, for I knew now that we were doomed. But I could not even save Jean from a fiendish torture that made me writhe at the very thought of it.

Frantically I struggled against the ropes, fought and twisted in every possible way. It was useless. At last, though, I managed to inch the lower coils up a bit by bending at the waist, succeeded in working them up so that the lower two-thirds of my forearms were free. With that came an inspiration.

Drawing up my knees so that my hands could reach my shoe tops, I pretended to be thrusting something into one of them. Howard was on me like a flash. He ripped off the shoe and eagerly searched inside of it, shook it. In that moment I jack-knifed myself up so that I could get my hands on him, was able to grab hold of him and cling desperately as I struggled to free my imprisoned arms further.

Howard straightened and got to his feet, but I clung to him like a bulldog. I clung to him until he shook one of his arms loose and drew it back for a blow. His fist smashed full into my face and lifted me off my bound feet, to hurl me into the spinning wheel.

My hundred and seventy pounds smashed it to pieces as if it had been made of toothpicks. The wheel, legs, treadle, distaff, shuttle and framework flattened beneath me and scattered in every direction. And from somewhere inside of it a little roll of brown paper dropped out onto the floor!

We both saw it at the same moment, but Bert Howard had it before I could even move my bound body. A mouthing like a growl of animal satisfaction broke from his lips as he spread out the paper. His eyes blazed. Eagerly he thrust his hand under his black dress and brought out three similar pieces.

I knew that our fate was sealed, our minutes numbered.

Carefully he folded the pieces together and put them back into his pocket. When his eyes flashed to Jean and then to me, they mirrored cold-blooded murder. He glanced speculatively around the room — at the ax, at the fire — and I could read his thoughts. He was going to bash our skulls and burn the house down over us. . . .

We didn't have minutes left now. Only seconds remained, but each of those terror-fraught seconds was like an eternity. My brain worked with frantic speed. There was only one slim hope, a single mad chance, I told myself.

I took it.

I was lying on the edge of the hearth. I hitched closer. Then it took only a coordination of muscles, a thrust and a twist, to roll over into the flames.

I had figured that roll to the inch. It left me face forward, with my left shoulder and arm and part of my side against the foremost of the burning logs. I had figured that, had expected pain. But I had not even approximated the fearful agony that con-

vulsed my seared flesh as the flames ate through my khaki shirt. My jaws clenched, ground together so that it seemed my teeth must break as I fought back the groans that welled up into my throat.

**M**Y nostrils filled with the sickening odor of my own roasting flesh, but Bert Howard smelled it also. On that I had gambled desperately. He whirled around and instinctively made a dive to pull me away before the ropes burned through.

I was ready for him. I grabbed him with both hands, clung to him fiercely as I fought to stay there, while flaming doom was raging at my back.

That struggle helped. My straining muscles, taxed to their utmost, swelled against the fire-eaten ropes and snapped some of them. The rest loosened, gave way, and my arms were almost free!

Not until then did I let Howard yank me clear of my agonizing bed and then I came away with a speed he little expected. Before he knew what was happening, my left arm wrapped around his neck and I lifted myself clear of the floor. My dangling weight pulled him off his feet. We fell heavily together, floundered there until my groping right hand closed on what my fingers were so despairingly seeking.

The distaff of the smashed spinning wheel was made of hard wood and tipped with a sharp metal point. In my terrible extremity it offered a heaven-sent weapon. Half-tied and

agonizingly burned, I could save Jean and myself from the murderer only by seriously wounding or killing him with my only weapon, and that had to be done quickly.

Gripping it like a dagger, I swung it up and plunged it into his throat, drove it into his neck, into his chest again and again. Those deep stabs carried all my rapidly failing strength behind them. I was deluged with the blood spouting from the deadly wounds they made.

Bert Howard screamed in terror. He struggled wildly to get to his feet, but the black dress hindered him. It entangled him, tripped him, rolled him closer to the flaming hearth. There his struggling suddenly ended. Blood gurgled up into his throat and throttled his fear-maddening cries. He sat back limply and I thought he was dead.

Life had not yet quite left him, though. His eyes were glazing, but abruptly his hand came out from amid the rumpled folds of Effie Currier's black dress. It flicked toward the hearth and four scraps of frayed brown paper dropped on the burning logs. For an instant they curled, charred. Then, with a puff of flame, they were gone.

"It's mine!" came from his blood-frothed lips in a dying gasp. "Nobody else will have it."

I had been expecting it every second, yet I was vaguely surprised when I toppled to the floor in a faint. The last thought that flashed through my mind was that Jean was safe, and she was worth a million buried treasures or rewards.

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THE STORY OF A THOUSAND THRILLS!

## THE POWER OF THE PUPPETS

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COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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# DEAD MAN'S EYE

By **MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN**

*Author of "Drifting Atoms," "The Accursed Isle," etc.*



The financier screamed and sprang to his feet, his face a mask of fear

**W**ITH remarkable strength of will, the dying man raised up suddenly on his elbow in the narrow charity ward cot. He laughed. Harsh, bitter laughter pealed out, silencing the chatter of other patients beyond the screens that hid his bed from sight. The two interns, bending over him, recoiled and thought of straitjackets.

But the dying man was quite sane. His bright brown eyes looked up at them with intelligence, his mouth still twisted in an ironic smile.

"So," he whispered weakly, "now he wants something else that's mine. I didn't think he'd left me anything desirable! My wife—he took her when he had me transferred to the tropics. My ambition, my sense of humor, then

**Hammerhurst Thought  
Anything Could Be Bought  
—Until He Discovered That  
a Corpse Has Positively  
No Use for Any Money!**

my health. White men don't last long in fever-country. And finally my honor, when he made everyone believe I had stolen money and had me kicked out of the company. All that Mr. J. C. Hammerhurst took from me. Now you come to me on my deathbed and tell me I must give him my left eye!"

He fell back on his pillow, shaking

with harsh laughter until the tears ran down his wasted cheeks. The older intern coughed.

"Mr. Smith, there are no relatives to claim your body. It would go to a potter's field. I was sure you would be willing, in return for . . . a decent funeral. Mr. Hammerhurst would be quite generous, I think."

"Generous?" the little man retorted. "A golf ball hits him in the eye at his swanky club and destroys the cornea. Fever and heat have killed me by inches. A fancy tombstone, in return for my left eye! Yes, that's the kind of honest bargain J. C. always did offer!"

A fierce, defiant light flared up in his eyes. Once more, with a terrific effort, he raised himself on an elbow and glared up at the two doctors.

"No!" His whisper shrilled with intensity. "Let him buy some other guinea-pig, if he can. My eyes are my own. They were born with me. They grew up with me. Now they'll die and be buried with me. They're one thing he can never own! Tell him—I said—"

A rattle in his throat cut him short. "Mr. Smith," the charity patient without a name, fell back on his pillow, dead. His clear brown eyes were wide open. The younger intern bent over him swiftly, felt the pulse. He straightened with a shrug.

"Gone. Poor old guy, he was crazy as a coot. Persecution complex. What are we going to do about that cornea? Stevens starts operating in fifteen minutes."

The other intern scowled.

"Yeah. This poor guy must have been out of his head at the end, blaming all his failures on the first rich man we happened to mention. Hammerhurst may regain his full eyesight by having a new cornea grafted on. What's an eye, more or less, to this poor devil now?"

**H**OURS later, in an expensive room on Third, called by hospital employees the "Royal Suite," a stocky, florid man in silk pajamas lay with his eyes bandaged. He was conscious now, queasy from the anesthetic and resentful of the hushed noises going on about him.

"Stop whispering and shushing

around!" he roared suddenly. "Get me a cigar. Get me the afternoon paper and read me the stock reports. I never saw such complete inefficiency! Stevens, you can cancel those plans for the annex. I've thought better of it. Why should I promise a hundred thousand dollars to you pack of fools just for doing your job?"

"Yes, Mr. Hammerhurst."

The surgeon's quiet voice cut through the tirade with studied patience. Across the tycoon's bed, he and the special nurse exchanged a look of weary understanding. The financier muttered under his breath. A smug look of satisfaction came into his face.

"So the operation is a success, is it?" he grunted. "Well, why not? I'm paying for success, not failure. You say I'll regain the use of this eye completely?"

"I have every reason to think so, Mr. Hammerhurst," Stevens answered. He hesitated. "That new cornea was taken from the body of a charity patient who died this morning. The interns assured him that you would be generous in the matter of a decent funeral, if he—"

"Charity patient?" the financier exploded. "Why should I? His family should take care of that. What's his name?"

"He gave the name of Smith. They usually do." The doctor shrugged. "Then you won't give anything toward his funeral?"

"Certainly not!" J. C. Hammerhurst bellowed. "What difference does it make to a charity patient where they dump his remains? Bring me a cigar, nurse! How many times must I ask for something around here?" He chuckled, raising a hand to his bandaged eyes. "So I'll be seeing the world after this through another man's eye. A dead man's eye. Very amusing!"

Stevens looked at him, sickened. Without another word, he strode from the room. . . .

Hammerhurst's eye healed rapidly, for he was a man who had taken expensive care of his body. Before a month passed, he was back at his business, with only a dark lens in the left side of his glasses to remind one of his accident.

Dr. Stevens called almost daily to inspect his handiwork, fearful of what this tyrant could do to his professional reputation if anything went wrong. In Hammerhurst's inner sanctum, two weeks after the operation, fear touched his spine as the tycoon roared:

"You told me I could see out of this eye as clearly as the other! Well, I can't. Whenever I try, everything blurs and I get a vicious headache. See here, you told me in the presence of witnesses—"

Stevens held his temper with an effort.

"I did say I thought you'd be able to see inside two weeks. But any doctor can miscalculate, Mr. Hammerhurst. Take off your glasses for a moment, please. I'll draw this shade a bit. Now shut your right eye and open the left. Focus on my face."

Hammerhurst, seated in a chair of dark red leather, scowled petulantly. Then with a grunt he obeyed. He took off the glasses, shut both eyes. Squinting painfully, he opened the left.

The blood ebbed from his florid face. A strangled sound escaped him as his left eye stared up at the surgeon. A tremor went over him and he leaped to his feet, grabbing at Stevens' arm and shutting both eyes convulsively. His voice was harsh, unsteady, tinged with a deep horror.

"Stevens, I—I— My God, what a ghastly illusion!"

**T**HE doctor sprang to his side, forced him into the chair.

"Take it easy, Mr. Hammerhurst. You're all right. The optical nerve is a tricky thing sometimes. Be calm. It's nothing. Tell me, what was it that you thought you saw?"

The financier had slumped in his chair, quivering. The blood flowed back into his face, which darkened with anger. Putting on his glasses again with the one dark lens, he glowered up at Stevens, furious at being comforted by a weaker, less clever man.

"Certainly I'm all right! Just a momentary dizziness. But let me tell you this. I'm through with your distinguished services. Tomorrow I'm

(Continued on page 108)

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#### REQUIEM

**T**HERE have been many stories of beautiful music having been heard at the moment of death. No one can explain it. To add to this collection, here is a letter just as it was received from Mrs. Anna C . . . of Elizabeth, N. J.

Dear Chakra: Having been interested in your *Mystery-Scopes* for many years, I want to tell you of the strange thing that happened in my home last night.

My mother has been ill for several weeks. In her younger days in Poland, she was a pianist and had been complimented on her playing by Ignace Paderewski, whom she adored. Naturally, she taught me to play the piano, but I do not play as well as mother who up until her sickness would be at the piano every day.

Being confined to bed, she missed her music terribly, so I have played for her each day whenever I could find time from my housework and caring for my children.

Last night it was very hot, so I did not retire early. In fact, shortly after eleven o'clock, my baby woke up, and it took me considerable time to quiet him.

Finally at 11:30 (I remember looking at the clock) I sat down in the living room before going to bed. I looked at the piano and had a strange desire to play. I almost started to, when I realized it was too late and might wake the baby and mother. So a few moments later I put out

the light and stepped into mother's room to see if she was all right.

But she wasn't asleep. She looked up at me and smiled joyously as she said: "You played beautifully just now, Anna. I could have believed it was Paderewski."

Believing she had been dreaming, I patted her and soon she was asleep. It was 11:40 when I put out her light.

Perhaps I would have forgotten the incident had I not picked up the newspaper today and read: "Ignace Jan Paderewski, 80, world famous pianist and Polish statesman, died last night at 11:35 in New York City. As he passed away, his fingers seemed to be moving as though he were playing his own requiem. They will never play again."

#### DEATH WAITED AT THE CROSS-ROADS

**A** VISITOR from the middle west reported this story. His name is Al Levans. He claims that his friend, Tom Gruber, a police sergeant, answered the phone late one night at police headquarters and distinctly heard a deep voice say: "Tom, better go out to the cross-roads on Route 22. A car turned over. Driver needs help." Then the caller hung up.

Sergeant Gruber, always suspicious of false alarms when people refuse to give their identity over the phone, hesitated a moment. But finally he decided to investi-

gate. It wasn't far away—about three miles out—a bad crossing and near a curve. Should have a light anyway.

A few minutes later, Gruber arrived in his car. But there was no sign of activity at the cross-roads. The place was deserted, no wrecked car in sight.

"Some college kid trying to be funny," thought Gruber. "But no—that was an old man's voice. Sounded something like Dad's." His father had been dead a year.

Then Gruber sat in his parked car awhile and pondered. Just what had the man said? And the more he thought about it, the more vague it seemed. Maybe he had dreamed it. He had been dozing off all evening. Then he began to laugh. "Guess I'd better go on the day shift," he muttered, and started his car back to town.

He had driven less than 200 feet when he heard screaming brakes at the curve behind him. Then a crash. He looked back. A car had turned over.

In a moment he was beside the wrecked car. It was beginning to blaze. He pulled the lone driver out in time and rushed the man to the hospital. The face was bloody.

Not until Gruber reached the hospital did he recognize the driver. It was Tom Gruber's own brother—Douglas of Chicago, who, after he had been revived, not being seriously hurt, said he had decided to visit Tom on his way South.

Dream or no dream, that weird phone call had enabled Tom Gruber to save his brother's life.

How do you account for it?

## DEATH BOMB

**H**ERE is a story vouched for by Ed Bodin, New York literary agent for Captain Kenneth Brown Collings, world war aviator, adventurer and author. A substantiating witness is Henry Mackey of Nutley, N. J.

Early in April, 1941, Captain Collings came into Bodin's office and handled the agent a manuscript. It was an article about the late "Socko" Reagan, the American marine flyer who originated a style of dive-bombing many years ago. Collings had flown with Reagan.

Collings told Bodin that he was going to Canada the next day to sail for England where he would ferry plane from English factories to combat zones. Bodin smilingly asked: "Are you coming back, Ken?"

Collings shrugged his shoulders and looked at his own framed photograph which hung on Bodin's wall.

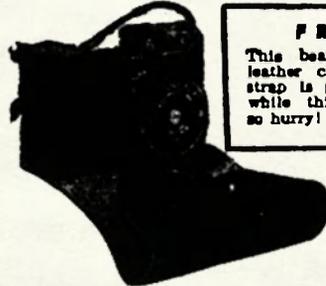
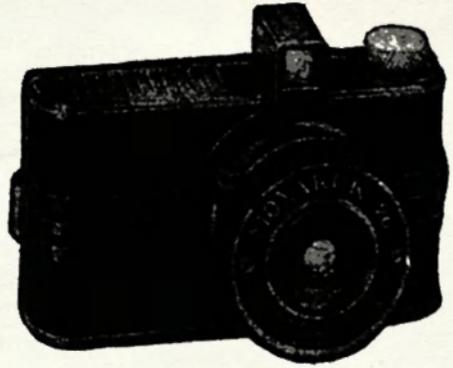
"Well," said the famous flyer, "if I don't, I'll look up Socko Reagan, and we'll get permission of Saint Peter to dive-bomb hell."

And then he added: "Anyway, you'll hear from me one way or the other even if I have to drop a bomb on your office to tell you I'm still around."

It was the afternoon of April 30th. Bodin was sitting at his desk talking to Henry Mackey. Suddenly, without appar-

[Turn page]

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ent cause (no one was near it) the large photograph of Captain Kenneth Brown Collings crashed to the floor.

Both Bodin and Mackey jumped from their chairs. "Wow," said Mackey—"that doesn't look good for Collings, does it?"

Bodin repaired the frame and dismissed the matter as coincidence. But a week later he was shocked into horrible realization when Henry Mackey brought in an evening newspaper reading: "Captain Kenneth Brown Collings killed at sea along with ten other American flyers when their ship was torpedoed in mid-ocean April 30th."

**GRATEFUL PIGEON**

**A** QUEER story has been reported at a certain chemical laboratory in New Jersey, where chemists are experimenting on new type gas-masks.

It seems that John Hickson, one of the chemists was very fond of pigeons, having raised them as a boy. A few pigeons would flock around his laboratory window each day, and Hickson would feed them. He bought a 100 pound bag of cracked corn just for the birds. His colleagues would ridicule him as being a softie, but Hickson didn't mind. His smiling answer would be: "Pigeons bring good vibrations and luck."

One morning in May Hickson was feeding his pigeons. They were eating out of his hand. His main pet was a big gray one who flew on his shoulder readily. He was interrupted by one of the engineers bringing in a new gas-mask and ordered Hickson to test it in the gas-chamber. The most deadly and powerful gas was to be used. The engineer assured Hickson that the gas-mask was flawless and he need have no fear.

Hickson put on the mask and fastened it securely. When he was satisfied of its perfection he headed toward the gas-chamber across the court-yard.

As he reached the open he looked up at the pigeons circling above him. He wondered if his pet pigeon would recognize him with the mask on.

Before he could realize what had happened, his pet pigeon had swooped down, its claws and beak fighting the mask. In a moment a section of rubber was ripped, rendering the mask useless. Never before had the pigeon acted this way, and Hickson had worn masks many times testing them in the same manner.

As the chemist took off the mask, he was angry. He knew the engineer would be furious. He could imagine his colleagues saying: "I told you so. You would pamper rat pigeons."

With all apologies he reported what had happened. There were some ugly words on part of the engineer until he looked at a section of the rubber. Then the engineer exclaimed: "Good God, man—look at this eye-piece—there is a flaw in the glass. It's a good thing you didn't give this the A test. You would have been

dead. I don't know how this was overlooked. It must have been due to the shadow which was not noticeable from the outside."

When Hickson went back to find his pet pigeon and give the bird some extra corn, it had disappeared. It has not been seen from that day until the time of this writing. Everyone at the laboratory admits there was something uncanny about the whole thing. They remembered how that pigeon never associated with the others. Its eyes had been different.

Had it fulfilled its earthly destiny in the saving of Hickson? He thinks so—and he's a practical chemist.

## THE HOLLOW TUBE OF MAGIC

**A** STRANGE tale of magic has been reported by John Greenwood, who recently returned with his wife and daughter from a visit to Mexico.

It seems that Mr. Greenwood had taken a trip on account of his daughter, Margaret, who, sometime ago, began to show signs of insanity. Greenwood had spent a large amount of money taking his only daughter to specialists and psychiatrists; but none could help her. She was developing a dual personality—a Dr. Jekyll and Hyde complex. At spells she would talk like an old hag or witch and cackle in glee especially when someone was hurt or a chicken was killed.

These spells would last for several hours and she had to be strapped for fear of doing harm to herself and others. She had no recollection of her actions while under the control of what seemed like a demon.

Mr. Greenwood was desperate. He didn't want to send his daughter to an asylum. It would be torture to her in her rational moments.

One night, in talking to a world traveler, he was informed that there was an old man near Mexico City who had cured many insane people by "drawing the demon out of their bodies through a hollow tube."

Scientists naturally laughed about this story; but Greenwood was in such a state of mind that he would try anything in order to save his daughter from a fate worse than death.

So, without telling his wife his mission, he arranged for a trip to Mexico. The so-called witch-doctor was located and, after certain arrangements, Greenwood took his daughter to the old man's hut. Mrs. Greenwood nearly fainted when her husband revealed what was about to take place. But he convinced her and she sat by, terrified. The daughter thought it was just a funny examination.

Here is what Greenwood reports:

"The aged man stripped my daughter to the waist. Then he took a hollow black wooden tube, about 12 inches long, and placed one end of it against her chest above the heart. She closed her eyes at the witch-doctor's command and she seemed to be hypnotized. Then the old

[Turn page]

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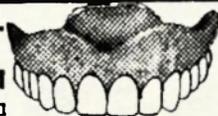
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## DEAD MAN'S EYE

(Continued from page 101)

writing Trumbaur to come and take over the case. You're nothing but a clumsy quack, a chiseling veterinary! Get out of my office! Get out and don't come back!"

Dr. Stevens stood erect. He gave the financier one steady look. Then with a faint sigh of resignation he walked out.

For a month thereafter, Stevens felt Hammerhurst's pressure in his work at the hospital. Two wealthy patients demanded another surgeon. The hospital head became exacting and suspicious. When the board of directors met, only his record of fine service kept him from losing his place as head surgeon.

The doctor fumed, but could do nothing against a man like J. C. Hammerhurst. Men who incurred the tycoon's disfavor went down like wheat before the scythe. Stevens could only wait and pray for a lucky break.

It came when Trumbaur called at the hospital and asked to see him one morning. The noted surgeon's friendliness and admiration for the American doctor undid all the harm that Hammerhurst had accomplished in the eyes of the hospital director. For it was about J. C. himself that Trumbaur had come to consult with Stevens.

"A strange case," the famous doctor stated at once. "Stevens, you did a beautiful job on that cornea. As far as the X-rays show, there are no complications whatever and no injury to the optical nerve. But something is out of focus about that eye. Frankly I've never seen a man so horribly nervous and frightened. He's mortally afraid to use that left eye of his! Almost psychopathic about it. Wears an eye-flap over it every waking hour. That's absurd. The eye has healed perfectly."

"But he can't see out of it?" Stevens frowned. "It pains him, you mean?"

"No." Trumbaur averted his eyes, then looked back at the other surgeon with a queer expression. "No, it doesn't seem to pain him at all. There's just something wrong with the way it receives visual impressions. He sees things with it that he doesn't see with his other eye. Those are his

own words. I've asked him what things, but he won't tell me. Can't seem to bring himself to put it into words."

Stevens' frown deepened.

"Sees things? He isn't going insane, is he?"

"Hardly." Trumbaur shrugged. "The man has a remarkable mind, strong personality. No, he's quite normal, except for these hallucinations of the left eye. It isn't unique. I've had some peculiar experiences with the optical nerve. Multiple sight, blind spots and so on. There was one patient of mine who imagined that everyone she saw had only one eye. The vision of two objects, you see, just came together and made one with her distorted focus.

"There are numbers of upside-down sight cases. I asked Hammerhurst if his illusions were similar, but the way he laughed at me was insulting. Much as one might laugh at a child inquiring about the fourth dimension!"

The American doctor whistled, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Trumbaur cleared his throat.

"And then," he blurted abruptly, 'yesterday he came to me and begged me to take out his left eye, or the grafted tissue, and put in another one! Stevens, this sounds like madness, but I assure you Hammerhurst was quite normal otherwise. He said his left eye was dead!"

**S**TEVENS blinked uncomprehendingly at him.

"Dead? Meaning it hasn't adjusted to the other tissue?"

"That," Trumbaur answered oddly, "is not what he meant, I think. Well, I'm going home tomorrow. There's nothing I can do, as I told him. One doesn't take out a man's eye and put in another when it's perfectly healthy and unimpaired. Your operation was a complete success—medically. Hammerhurst's trouble must be neurotic. Good day, sir. It's been a pleasure and an honor to be associated with you."

Stevens bade him farewell in a glow of gratitude and went back to his work with new enthusiasm. But all day he was thinking of the financier

[Turn page]



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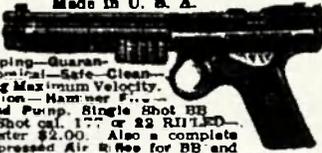
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and his eerie obsession. After operating hours, out of curiosity he called the two interns into his office and questioned them, hoping to find some angle to dispel Hammerhurst's morbid fear. But what he heard about the dying charity patient, Stevens decided, was nothing to soothe any neurotic.

"If Hammerhurst was told about the man's hatred of him," he said to the interns, "that might be the cause of his neurosis. But he wasn't, you say? Nothing more than my request for the funeral money? And he'd forget that at once. Oh, well, it's no longer my case, so what am I worrying about?"

But that evening, at his bachelor apartment on Argyle Circle, pounding on the door startled him from a much-needed nap. When his servant opened the door, a disheveled figure shoved past and almost fell into Stevens' study. It was J. C. Hammerhurst, wearing a black velvet flap over his left eye.

Stevens gaped at him, shocked that any man could have lost so much weight and taken on so many years in a month's time. The man was haggard, sallow and so nervous that his hand shook, sloshing out half the brandy the doctor offered him at once. He stood there, breathing hard like a spent runner, that one eye of his flitting over the room constantly as he spoke in a pleading rush of words.

"Stevens, I'm sorry for all I—I've done to you, or tried to do. You've got to help me. You've got to! You're the only one—"

The American surgeon looked up at him coldly. At the abject humility in the tycoon's face, his anger vanished. Gently he led Hammerhurst to a chair, eased him into it.

"Try to get a grip on yourself," the doctor murmured soothingly. "There. Lean back and relax. Tell me all about it."

Hammerhurst stared at him, his one eye glaring weirdly, filled with a horror so plain that it drove every other expression from his face. His fingers plucked at the chair arm. It was the only sound in the quiet room.

"Stevens," the financier blurted, "I'll build you that hospital annex. I—I'll give you a gram of radium, or

any other equipment you need. Name your price, if—if only you'll—take out this left eye of mine and replace it with a—*a live one*. No other surgeon in town will take my case. And I—just can't stand it any longer!"

Collapsing, he buried face in hands and began to sob weakly. Stevens rose, walked to his side and laid a steadying hand on his heaving shoulder.

"There, now. Don't give way like this, Mr. Hammerhurst. Hold your head up a minute. Let's take a look at that eye."

The financier recoiled violently, jerked away.

"No!" he rasped. "I can't take off the flap! I—I can't let it—"

**T**HE surgeon paid no attention to him. Skillfully he ripped off the velvet flap. Holding his patient's head steady, he turned back the closed left lid and examined the eyeball. It was clear and healthy, only a little blood-shot from disuse. But Hammerhurst screamed like a wounded horse and clapped a hand over the eye.

"No . . . no . . . no!" he moaned. "Oh, don't make me look at it! Don't, don't!"

"At what?" Stevens demanded quietly. "You must tell me what you see, or I can't help you."

The financier trembled under his hand.

"Horrible—horrible—" he breathed. Stevens' grip tightened on his shoulder commandingly.

"Tell me," he repeated gently. "You must."

Hammerhurst shuddered again.

"I . . . I'll tell you," he whispered sharply. "You won't think I'm insane? I see it, Stevens! I really see it with this left eye! It's dead, you know. A dead man's eye. And it—*it sees exactly what his other eye is seeing, not what my right eye sees.*"

He lifted his face slowly, a white mask of horror and despair and sleepless nights. Stevens, though accustomed to the sight of suffering, was appalled.

"The walls are moldy. The furniture is shabby and broken and eaten by termites, rotted away by age. I can see you as a rotting corpse, Stevens,

[Turn page]

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with my left eye! With *his* left eye. It's dead, you see. That's why I—I want it out!"

"My God!" Stevens gasped, gripping his patient's arm. "You poor devil, I had no idea you were suffering from a neurosis like this! It's only a neurosis, Mr. Hammerhurst. You should have gone to a nerve specialist, not to me. You must go tomorrow."

The faint look of hope in the tycoon's face died slowly as he spoke. Stevens watched it go out like a candle, but he talked on.

"There's nothing to this. It's all in your own mind. You need a rest in a good sanatorium. There's not a thing wrong with your left eye. It's healed perfectly. I couldn't undertake an operation on a healthy eye. You must see that. Next time it might not be a success. You might face a future of partial blindness."

The laugh that escaped the financier was wild, bitter and despairing.

"You think I haven't been to a psychiatrist? I've seen three! They can't do a thing for me. The trouble is in this dead eye, I tell you! But you refuse, too? That's your answer?"

Stevens nodded, shrugged. Hammerhurst's mouth twisted. He rose jerkily, slipping on the eye-flap with hands that shook.

"I see," he said harshly. "Professional integrity. I—I thought everyone could be bought, Stevens. But—Good night."

He ended abruptly and strode toward the door, staggering like a drunk.

"Have you tried Hotchkiss?" Stevens called after him. "He's the best nerve man in the state."

But the slam of the apartment door was his only answer.

**W**HEN the morning paper came, he read the headlines and cursed himself for not running after his ex-patient and having him hospitalized for observation. He was mad, of course. No sane man would have taken the cigarette lighter from his car and burned out his own eyeball with it. . . .

His own eye? Stevens paused and the printed column blurred before his vision. He was thinking suddenly of what those two interns had told

him. A fever-wasted little man, dying in the charity ward, had whispered in a last burst of defiance:

"My eyes are my own. They were born with me, they grew up with me, and now they'll die and be buried with me! They're one thing he can never own!"

## Next Issue's Headliners



### DEATH WALKS SOFTLY

A Colonel Crum Novelet

By JOHN H. KNOX

### THE DOUBLE FOR HATE

A Murder Mystery Novelet

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

### THE POWER OF THE PUPPETS

A Gripping Crime Novelet

By FRITZ LEIBER, JR.

## DOWN GO TIRE PRICES

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FIRESTONE-GOODRICH  
and Other Standard Makes

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Only our 25 years' experience, big buying power and volume production make it possible to offer these season long tire values. Think of it: Standard size recommended tires, serviceably repaired by experts with high-grade materials at a fraction of original cost. Order now. Enjoy the tremendous savings our cut prices make possible.

### BALLOON TIRES

Size	Three Tubes	Two Tubes
28x4.40-21	\$2.85	\$2.35
28x4.50-20	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-19	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-20	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-21	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-22	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-23	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-24	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-25	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-26	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-27	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-28	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-29	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-30	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-31	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-32	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-33	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-34	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-35	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-36	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-37	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-38	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-39	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-40	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-41	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-42	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-43	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-44	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-45	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-46	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-47	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-48	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-49	2.85	2.35
28x4.75-50	2.85	2.35

### TRUCK BALLOONS

Size	Three Tubes	Two Tubes
6.00-20	\$3.10	\$1.85
6.50-20	2.45	1.95
7.00-20	2.45	1.95
7.50-20	2.15	1.75
8.00-20	2.15	1.75
8.50-20	2.15	1.75
9.00-20	2.15	1.75
9.50-20	2.15	1.75
10.00-20	2.15	1.75
10.50-20	2.15	1.75
11.00-20	2.15	1.75
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58.00-20	2.15	1.75
58.50-20	2.15	1.75
59.00-20	2.15	1.75
59.50-20	2.15	1.75
60.00-20	2.15	1.75

### HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Three Tubes	Two Tubes
6.00-20	\$3.10	\$1.85
6.50-20	2.45	1.95
7.00-20	2.45	1.95
7.50-20	2.15	1.75
8.00-20	2.15	1.75
8.50-20	2.15	1.75
9.00-20	2.15	1.75
9.50-20	2.15	1.75
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58.50-20	2.15	1.75
59.00-20	2.15	1.75
59.50-20	2.15	1.75
60.00-20	2.15	1.75

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Drafting      | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Drafting      | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering   | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work         | <input type="checkbox"/> Ship Drafting             |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician        | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer      | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist                | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Raising          | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering    |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking           |   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing          | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman    | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work            |
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|---|---|--|
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New Duo-Therm Power-Air saves up to 25% in fuel oil! Now, more than ever before, fuel-oil econ-

omy is vitally important! *Actual tests have proved* that Duo-Therm, with its patented Power Air blower, gives you floor-to-ceiling comfort . . . **PLUS up to 25% saving in fuel oil** over a heater without Power-Air! A Duo-Therm with Power-Air gives you *more* home comfort . . . and makes every drop of oil go *farther!*

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you just the degree of heat you want . . . and *Coordinated Control* insures proper draft for perfect combustion! Open the *Radiant Door* and enjoy a flood of cheerful warmth. Special *Waste-Stopper* saves fuel.

**Small down payment!** Ask your nearest dealer *today* to show you the modern Duo-Therms—the most *beautiful, most efficient* heaters ever made! Many models. Capacities 1 to 6 rooms. Ask about *easy terms!* And mail the coupon below *now*, for complete descriptive information!



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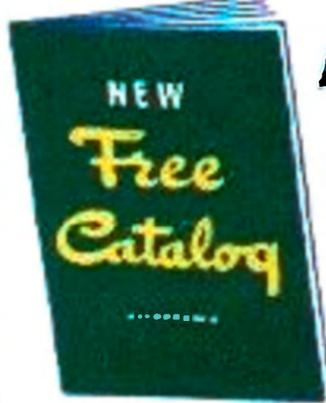
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