12 STORIES

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VARIETY DETECTIVE

AUGUST

MAGAZ

DEATH HOGS THE SPOTLIGHT
Detective Novel
By RALPH POWERS

THE HAUNTING CLUE
By WM. E. LANGFORD

And 10 Other Smashing Stories

Missing Page

Inside front cover

12 STORIES

VARIETY DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

AUGUST 1938

Vol. I No. 1

Cover by
Norman Saunders

Published bi-monthly by Ace Magazines, Inc. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield, Mass. A. A. Wyn, President. Editorial and executive offices, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Application pending for second-class entry at Post Office at Springfield, Mass. Title registration applied for at U. S. Patent Office.

Manuscripts will be handled with care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. For advertising rates, address Ace Fiction Group, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y. Twelve issues, $1.00; Single Copies, Ten Cents.

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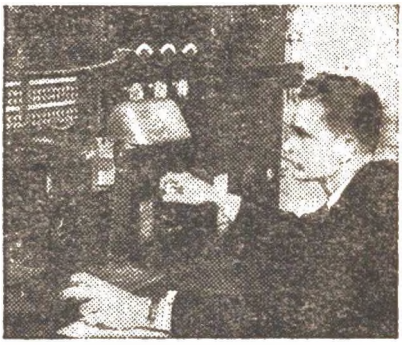

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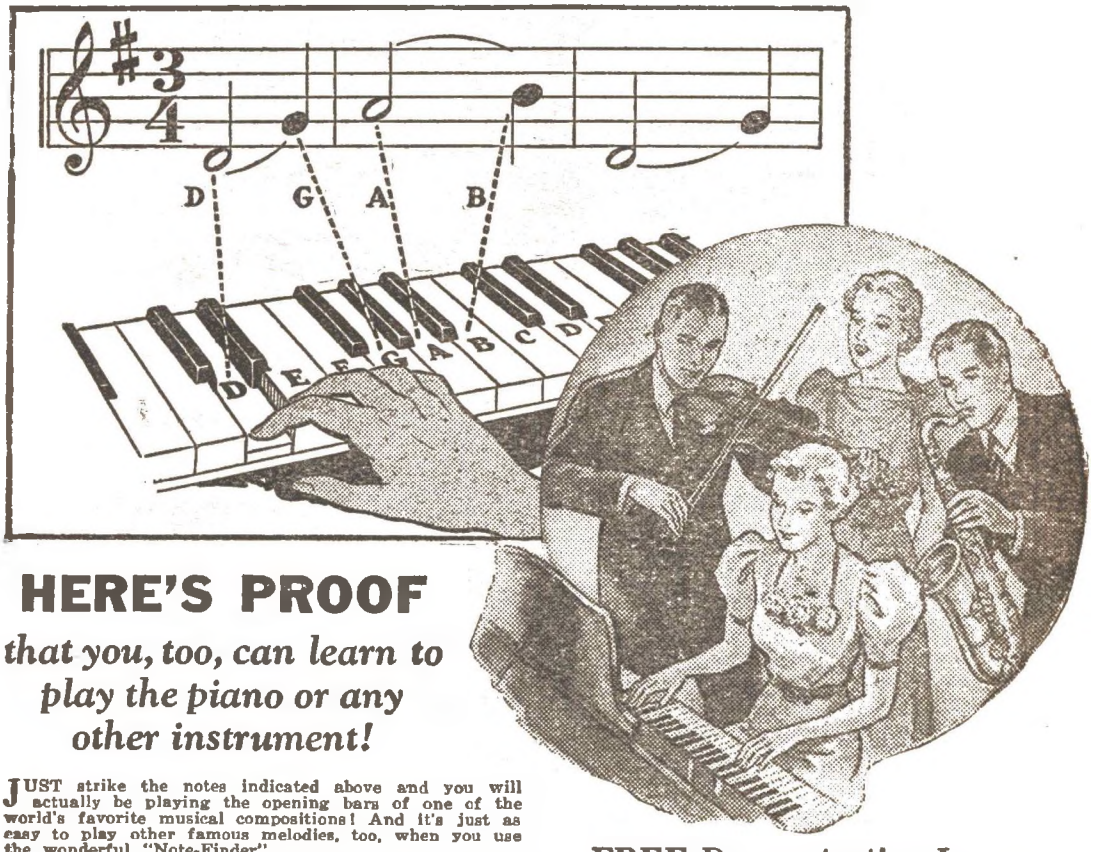

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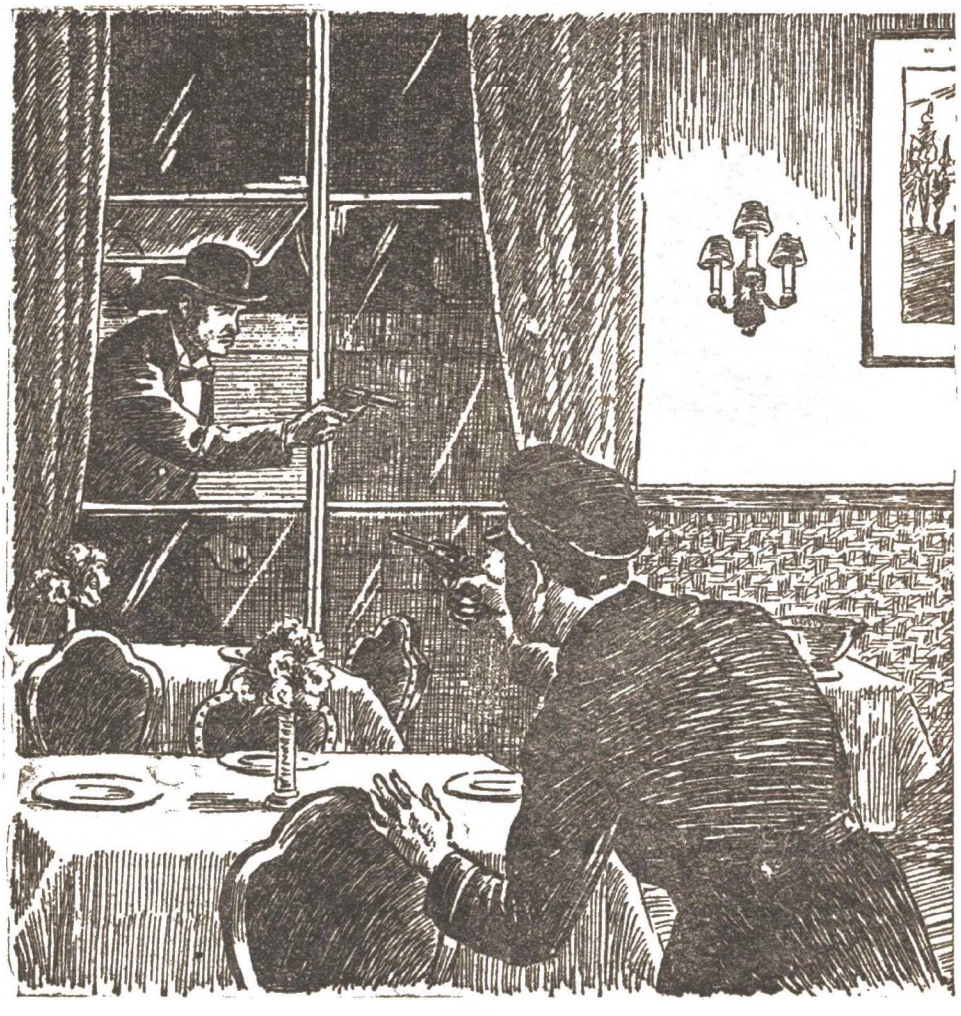


Being both a newspaperman and in love, Dallas Kirk proposed to his girl at the scene of a murder scoop. Cupid and the killer enmeshed Kirk in the tangled web of a swingster Romeo, a platinum chorine, and a gutter-bred racketeer.

CHAPTER I

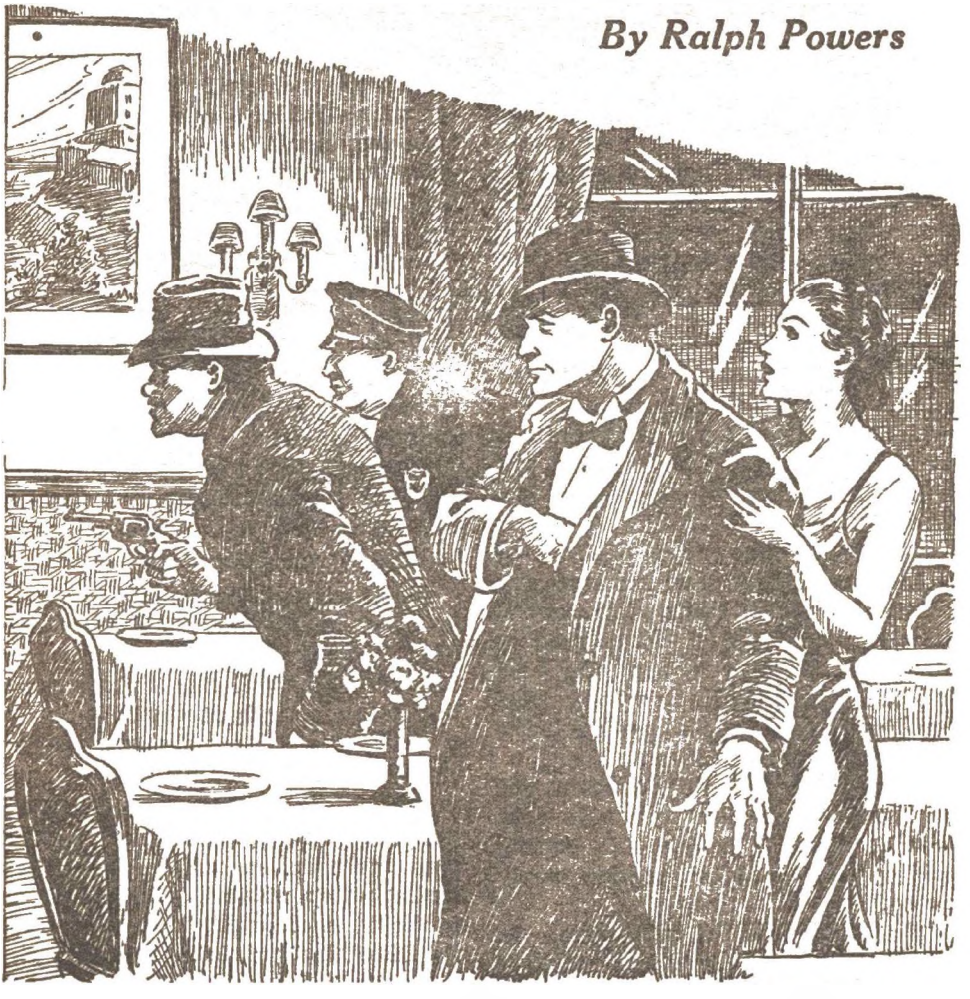
MURDER STEALS THE SHOW

THE CLUB MONTPARNASSE rocked with applause as Synco Arietta rippled his last nasal notes into the microphone. He was slender, dark, and press-agented as the Sultan of Swing. He bowed low, then turned to face his Harmony Hounds swing band.

Hot rhythm b l a r e d. Bare-legged chorines surged out upon the dance floor. An atmosphere of hectic excitement pervaded the Broadway night spot.

the Spotlight

By Ralph Powers



"A helluva place to ask a girl to marry you!" muttered Dallas Kirk, lean, keen-eyed young reporter for the *Morning Express*. He gazed across the table at Faith Brierly.

The flickering flame of the candle upon the table glowed warmly and softly on the smooth contour of her cheek as she sighed ecstatically. The charm of her fresh, unspoiled comeliness was refreshing in contrast with the hard, cynical, disillusioned feminine faces about them.

"Isn't Synco Arietta just too perfectly wonderful for words, Dallas?"

"Umph!" grunted Dallas. He didn't think Synco was so hot. If it hadn't been for that anonymous tip, he'd never have brought her to the Montparnasse on his night off.

IF YOU WANT FIRST CRACK AT THE BIGGEST STORY OF THE YEAR, BE AT THE MONTPARNASSE EARLY TONIGHT.

Such was the wording of the telegram he had received a few hours earlier. There was no signature. It had been filed at a branch telegraph office on upper Sixth Avenue, which was all he could

learn about it. He had pegged it as a press-agent plant, to grab off publicity for some freak stunt on the part of Arietta—but, being a newspaperman, he couldn't disregard it.

"Faith," Dallas asked tentatively, "how'd you like to live here all the time?"

"Oh, it would be just too positively grand!" she breathed, her rapt brown eyes still resting on Synco Arietta.

Dallas muttered profanely beneath his breath. How could you propose to a girl when she was sighing over a slick-haired swingster?

"Look, Faith," he said, quickly, in an effort to divert her attention from Arietta. "See that swell-looking frill at the table up front? That's Marcia Brice."

"Marcia Brice? You mean the dime-store heiress? Why, I've seen her pictures in the rotogravure sections dozen of times!"

He tapped a cigarette on the back of his hand and lighted it at the fluttering flame of the candle. "You see 'most everyone in a place like this. Take a slant at that hard-looking guy with the blue jowls and tight lips. Know who that is? Wart Denzil, one of the higher-ups in the numbers racket."

"My goodness, Dallas—you newspapermen know everyone, don't you? He looks bored to death. I believe he's getting ready to leave—and the evening barely started."

Dallas nodded, puffed on his cigarette. "See that bald guy with the red face who's giving Wart the eye? Barney Lang, police inspector—off duty, maybe, like me."

"And to think—" the girl sighed wistfully— "that I've got to leave all this and go back to Centerville tomorrow!"

Dallas took courage again. "On the level—you think you'd like to live here, Faith?"

"I could stay with my aunt, and maybe I could get a job dancing in the chorus." She eyed him archly, teasingly.

Dallas grimaced. "Yeah—and burn yourself out in a couple of years. Look at that chorine—platinum baby, third from the left. Not much older than you—and just about through, already."

The chorus vanished in a sudden blackout. An instant later, the spotlight bored through the darkness, revealing Synco Arietta posing before the mike. Another moment, and he was rippling again.

Dallas clenched his fists, licked his dry lips, swallowed hard. He was going to try again. "Faith—there's something I've been wanting to ask you."

She held up a slender, silencing hand, her eyes upon the swingster. "Please, Dallas," she whispered. "Wait until he's through, won't you?"

DALLAS groaned, and then lapsed into silence. Synco Arietta finally reached his last rippling note, and stood statuesque, motionless, waiting for the expected applause.

It broke after an instant of silence—a tidal wave of frantic hand-clapping. Dallas cleared his throat nervously.

"What I was going to say, Faith—"

Dallas stopped. For he saw Synco fold up gently in the oval glare of the spotlight. The swingster's left side seemed to cave in. He fell, twisting slightly, clutching at the microphone stand. It crashed to the floor with a terrific clatter as Synco collapsed in a limp heap.

The lights flashed on again. Dallas grunted. It occurred to him that this must be the press-agent plant he had been summoned to witness. A cheap bid for publicity, he thought, if it was merely the faked illness of the famous swingster.

The trap-drummer had gripped Synco under the arms. Awkwardly he tugged at the limp form until he had raised it to a sitting posture.

Clearly visible to everyone was a tiny black spot upon the stiff white front of the swingster's shirt. Angling upward from it was an irregular crimson line, like the tail of a kite. Now, another similar crimson line began tracing its way slowly downward from the black spot.

Death had stolen the show. Death had hogged the spotlight; taken Synco's final bow; had staged a smashing, staggering, stunning finale.

Some one gasped. A woman screamed. Chairs began to scrape. Suddenly a wave

of excited and hysterical questioning swept through the room.

"Murdered!"

Dallas leaped to his feet. "What a story! What a break!"

CHAPTER II

MASTER OF MURDER

WART DENZIL believed he had evolved the perfect crime.

The big shot of the numbers racket had committed three murders during his career, and had gotten away with 'em, scot free.

Inspector Barney Lang could have told you that Wart had turned these tricks. But to prove it to the satisfaction of a jury was something else again.

But these killings had been accomplished solely as a matter of business, merely a matter of routine. Now Wart was determined to pull off a job for his own personal satisfaction—a masterpiece of the killer's art, astoundingly daring, stunningly dramatic, and so absolutely perfect as to defy even the shadow of suspicion on the part of the law.

Wart was a smart guy, and he knew it. He felt he had a right to be proud of his accomplishments. He was tremendously egotistical. He had never failed to get what he wanted, or to hold it—except once.

Thersa Rossi was a platinum blonde doll whom Wart had plucked from the chorus and installed in an expensive apartment on Park Avenue. Thersa was a pretty dumb cluck, but her blonde prettiness more than made up for it, so far as Wart was concerned, so long as she kept her trap shut.

And then Wart's egotism suffered the cruelest blow of his entire career. For Thersa unexpectedly went blotto over—of all persons—Synco Arietta!

So Wart beat hell out of her, and threw her out of the apartment on her ear, expecting her to return the next day, chastened and begging to be taken back.

Instead, Thersa got a job in the Montparnasse chorus, through the influence of Synco, just as soon as her blackened eyes permitted. Wart was astounded.

Not that he cared two whoops and a holler for Thersa, any more. It was the idea that a pretty boy swingster like Synco could take his woman from him, that rankled. His vanity was sorely wounded. Thersa had given him the run-around—*him*, Wart Denzil—for a soft squirt like Synco. It was the only time in his life that anyone had slipped such a thing over on him.

Under the harsh code of the streets in which he had been schooled, it was out of the question for him to stand by and take it. Meekness was a quality beyond Wart's ken. When a mug did you dirt, there was just one thing to do.

Here was a chance to display some real genius in the art of murder. He might have arranged for a dozen alibi witnesses, and then mowed Synco down from a speeding taxi. But such methods were entirely too crude.

"These wise boids think that a poifect crime is impossible," he mused, his thin lips twisted into an egotistical smile. "Which is okay, so far as these cheap guns is concoined. But not for a big shot like me. I'll show 'em."

First of all, the proposed murder must be absolutely safe. And, above all else except safety, it must be dramatic. What could be more dramatic than to turn the trick in full view of a hundred guests at the Montparnasse? More than that, in the presence of that little blonde rat, Thersa herself?

BUT could it be done? Sure it could be done, he decided. To make sure of his ground he visited the night club during a slack hour when the chorus was absent, and made a careful survey, with particular regard to the windows.

They were of modern latticed steel construction, with sections which opened upon a horizontal axis to provide ventilation. When open, these sections were supported by notched steel slats.

The Montparnasse occupied the twenty-eighth floor of a building of the modern step-back type of architecture. The windows opened upon a tiled terrace step-

back, upon which meals were served during the summer months, but which was unused, now. Doors giving upon the terrace from the night club itself were kept locked during the winter. But Wart discovered it could be reached through a door opening from the elevator corridor.

"The set-up is poifect," he admitted to himself. "Made to measure. It'll be on Page One of every paper in the country, tomorrow night."

To insure the very highest degree of dramatic effect, he sent two vaguely worded tip-off telegrams; one to the *Express* reporter whose by-line had appeared over a famous murder story; and one to Police Inspector Barney Lang.

Before departing from his apartment for the night club, he provided himself with an automatic, a souvenir lead pencil he had taken from the Montparnasse, and a stick of chewing gum. He did not trouble to remove finger-prints from the weapon, for he had planned how he would dispose of the rod so it never would be found. He discarded his shoulder holster, and dropped the gat in a pocket of his dinner jacket.

The wind was howling and hard, fine flakes of snow were swirling through the air as he stepped into his limousine. The driver knew nothing of his plans. However, the fellow carried two spare rods, for Wart never knew when an extra automatic would be useful. He directed the driver to wait, and was borne upward in the elevator to the night club.

A generous tip insured him his choice of tables near the windows. He looked about him, and immediately spotted the police inspector. He did not know Dallas Kirk by sight, although the latter had seen Wart during a police show-up and thus was enabled to identify him for the benefit of Faith.

Wart noted that every window was closed tight against the outside cold, except for one on the farther side of the room which was opened for ventilation.

Wart downed a leisurely meal. Then during a spotlight number when the rest of the lights were out, he slipped behind a curtain, unseen by the guests whose attention was focused upon Synco, and raised one of the window sections. But instead of using the notched steel slat to hold it, he propped it open with the lead pencil.

Then he stuck his wad of chewing gum upon the frame where the section would descend when closed, and returned to his table. All this was accomplished within a few seconds.

As the spotlight number ended and the chorus emerged upon the floor, Wart prepared to leave. Thersa had not seen him. He saw that Inspector Lang was eyeing him. He smiled genially and waved a hand at the officer as he made for the door.

He found the corridor deserted, and at once slipped outside to the terrace. Then he halted, and for an instant was on the point of abandoning his whole plan. For the tiled floor of the terrace was covered with a thin sheet of drifted snow. And snow meant—footprints!

"Hell!" he spat a moment later as he noted that the four-foot wall rimming the terrace on the outer edge had been swept clear of snow by the wind. "This is a swell break for me! Couldn't ask anything better!"

He climbed upon the wall, where he would leave no telltale footprints, and crawled along to a spot from whence he could see Synco through the window he had propped open, standing in the spotlight. Wart waited, confident that he could not be seen from inside, even though the attention of the guests had not been concentrated upon the singer.

As Synco finished, and the tidal wave of applause burst forth, Wart drew his automatic. He was counting upon this pandemonium of hand-clapping to drown out the report, although it was unlikely it could be heard through the single open window, anyway.

Now it was but a matter of straight shooting—and Wart was no tyro with the gat. He lined his sights first upon the pencil which propped the window open. Then he moved the weapon until the pencil was on a line with Synco's heart.

His automatic spurted flame. The steel-jacketed bullet sped through the pencil, and on into the victim's body. As the pen-

cil was shattered, the unsupported window-section dropped shut. Whatever incriminating clang might have resulted was muffled by the wad of gum upon the frame.

Wart, his thin lips twisted in a triumphant grin, dropped his automatic down the drain pipe, within which it would fall to the next step-back some twenty floors below, to remain in the pipe probably as long as the building stood. He crawled back along the wall, slipped through the door into the corridor, and took the next express elevator to the street floor.

There he bought a handful of cigars, lingering at the counter in conversation with the clerk. Not a tremor in his voice disclosed his elation at the thought that he had just perpetrated what he thought was a "perfect," insoluble murder.

CHAPTER III

A Hundred Witnesses

DALLAS whirled fiercely to face the girl. Faith, stunned by the shock, was shrinking back in her chair. She was as motionless as the candle flame which, as if somehow sensitive to the chilling presence of death, had ceased its nervous fluttering.

"Faith!" he barked peremptorily. "I got to flash this to the office! You sit where you are. Don't you move till I come back. Don't get scared. Nothing can hurt you."

He turned and darted through the tables. Now a resounding voice was bellowing authoritatively above the din of excited voices. Dallas recognized it as the voice of Inspector Lang.

"Sit down, everybody! Sit *down!* Keep your shirts on. I'm the law. You waiters —lock the doors! Don't let anybody out. I'm telling you, somebody in this room killed Synco Arietta! Nobody's going to leave here till I find out who done it!"

At the same moment Dallas and the radio announcer reached the telephone on the lowboy behind a potted palm. As the latter reached for it Dallas placed a hand on his chest and shoved him violently backward.

"Wait your turn, Jack!" he snapped as he snatched the instrument from its cradle and barked the number of the *Express* into the transmitter.

"Hello . . . . *Express?* Gimme the city desk, Sadie—quick! . . . . Hello. Hello. Walker? . . . . Kirk. Get this. Synco Arietta murdered at Montparnasse —full view of hundreds—shot dead while taking bow!

"Exclusive. Biggest beat of the year! Sewed up like a case of appendicitis! We can beat the other rags onto the street with it by a good five minutes! Switch me to Gus and I'll toss him the flash. Yeah . . . . Yeah . . . . Okay."

During the moment needed to transfer the call to the *Express'* star rewrite hound Dallas turned to survey the night club. A scene of hopeless confusion confronted him. Some had obeyed the inspector's shouted orders. Others, panic-stricken, were bolting for the door, there to be herded back by a squad of frightened, white-faced waiters. Inspector Lang was pushing his way toward the murder victim.

"Hello? Gus? Hot stuff! Tie into it, kid! Ready? Full view hundreds festive merrymakers Club Montparnasse, Synco Arietta—huh? Oh, all right, I'll spell it for you. S for son-of-a-gun, Y for yap, N for nerts, C for cop, O for okay—S-Y-N-C-O, Synco. A for applesauce, R for razz, I for—huh? Oh, you got it? Heard of him, huh? Bright boy!

"—Synco Arietta, premier swingster America, idol million feminine hearts, shot down by assassin's bullet tonight as taking bow spotlight.

"Slayer as yet unidentified. Belief of Inspector Barney Lang—okay, I'll spell it. L for louse, A for aspirin, N for nutty, G for goof—L-A-N-G, Lang. Of 'Spector Lang, who was present and assumed charge of investigation, murderer among guests of night club. Roar applause drowned report fatal shot.

"Doors barred prevent assassin's escape. Guests in panic. Lang expects arrest

any moment. Impossible slayer flee . . . . Huh? Yeah, instantly. Smack through heart. Motive unknown, but safe to suggest jealousy, only hang it onto police. Give Barney break—he's swell guy. S'all flash. Phone you follow five minutes. Smear on atmosphere thick as you like. Step on it, old kid. G'bye."

As he turned from the phone he pretended to stumble in his excitement, and jerked the instrument loose from its wires.

"Sorry, Jack," he snapped at the flabbergasted radio announcer. "There's another phone down in the lobby."

He was sewing up his scoop—tight. With the mike on the fritz and the phone haywire, he was sitting pretty. He knew there must be another telephone in the office of Gildman, the manager—which was the reason he had suggested the lobby phone to the excited announcer who, he knew, would find it plenty tough breaking through the cordon of waiters at the door.

MEANWHILE, he had succeeded in getting the first flash of the Arietta murder to the outside world. Now, the rival sheets couldn't pick it up from the broadcast—until too late. Nor, as yet, had the word gone even to the police, there to be relayed to the rival rags.

As Dallas whirled about to make his way toward the fallen swingster, now surrounded by the excited members of the orchestra, he felt a little tug on his arm. He turned, to find Faith looking up at him with frightened, pleading eyes.

"Oh, Dallas! Take me away from this terrible place! I—I want to go home! I—"

"Take you away?" He stared at her blankly. "Do you think I'm crazy? I got to stay here till this thing's mopped up! Don't you understand? I'm a newspaperman!"

"But this is your night off, Dallas! It's my last chance to—to talk to you before—before I go—"

"I told you to sit down and wait for me," he interrupted gruffly. "You do it—see? And don't bother me any more!"

He pulled away and started for the group surrounding the murdered man. It didn't seem strange to him that he should have spoken so abruptly to the girl whom he had been on the point of asking to marry him. Wasn't he a newspaperman? Well, such things as proposals just had to wait when hot stuff like this was breaking.

Inspector Lang, his bald head now as red as his face, poked an unlighted cigar at the pallid proprietor.

"Got any idea who did this, Gildman? Nope? Well, you have some one hop to the phone and notify headquarters. Homicide squad. And I'm telling you, if anybody slips outa this room until I give the word, I'm going to hold you responsible, see?"

"Sure, inspector," agreed Gildman, his shoulders shimmying. "Right away I get somebody to phone for you. What a awful break for me! Bankrupt, I'll be. This will cost me fifty grand if it costs me a cent, inspector!"

"Somebody in this room done it," growled Lang fiercely. "I'll frisk every person here for a gat—men and women. The killer can't get away, Gildman!"

"Yes, inspector. Fifty grand it costs me, if—"

Lang thrust his unlighted cigar between his lips, and spoke from one side of his mouth.

"Listen. You knew Synco as good as anybody. You oughta know who had a grudge against him. Think, now! Some gent whose frill he'd copped, maybe. Huh?"

"A thousand women were crazy about him, inspector. A dozen he always had on the string. You know, he had a way with him, inspector. That Brice girl, now. Millions she's got, yet all the time she was bothering him."

"Okay. We'll buzz her about it. She's here. I seen her."

Swiftly he turned to face the panicky night club patrons. Removing his cigar from his lips, he called out:

"Anybody see who fired that shot?"

There was no answer. Everybody was peering suspiciously at some one else. The inspector scowled.

"C'mon, now. Speak up. *Some*body

must of seen him. I'm telling you, a guy couldn't shoot in a room full of people without *somebody* seeing him!"

Again, silence, except for the hysterical sobbing of some woman.

"Who *heard* the shot?" Lang demanded fiercely. "Somebody *must* of heard it!"

STILL no answer. Gradually the excited murmur had subsided, to be succeeded by an awed hush.

"Maybe," suggested Dallas, who had pushed his way to the inspector's side, "maybe they're scared to step up and speak their piece, Barney. Scared the killer might pop 'em off. I betcha if you take 'em one at a time, alone, some one will cough."

"Hi, Dal," growled the officer. "Yeah, maybe you're right. We'll put 'em through the mill soon as the hommy squad gets here. I can't handle a hundred of 'em, alone.

"Gildman, you better have those orchestra lads lug Synco to your office. Then you better close the joint for the night and let your entertainers go. No—wait a minute. Keep the orchestra here—I want to talk to 'em. They were behind Synco when he was shot, so they're all 'out,' far as the killing is concerned, but they may be able to give me a steer. Might as well turn the chorines loose and shoo 'em home. They were in the dressing room at the time, so there's no way they can be figured in."

"Better I should close up my doors forever and cancel my lease," moaned Gildman with an expressive shrug. "This will finish me, inspector. Fifty grand, if it costs me a cent!" He turned and trotted toward the office.

"A man murdered," sniffed the inspector, "and Gildman bellyaches about money. Fooey!"

But Dallas scarcely heard him. His eyes were on the door, where the squad of waiters were arguing with some one. The group parted, and a swagger figure in a tight-fitting Chesterfield and a derby cocked on one side pushed inside.

"Wart Denzil!" exclaimed Dallas as the slender numbers racketeer advanced toward them, a cigar cocked between his thin lips.

"Hi, Barney," he greeted the inspector in a silky voice. "Here I am." Black eyes were giving Dallas the once over.

"Gimme your gun, Wart!" snapped Lang.

Wart chuckled softly. Slowly, so the act might not be mistaken for an overt move, he drew back both Chesterfield and dinner jacket, revealing that he carried no weapon either in a shoulder-holster or upon his hip.

"Cripes, Barney, *you* oughta know I never pack a gat! Why should I pack a gat? I ask you."

"Frisk him, Dallas," directed the detective sharply.

Dallas frisked him, patting every pocket. At the mention of his name, Wart looked at the newspaperman searchingly.

"He's clean," announced Dallas.

"What's the big idea, Wart?" growled the inspector.

Wart simulated surprise.

"Don't you want me for this job?" he asked softly. "If you don't, it's the foist time a trick was turned that you dicks didn't try to hang onto me, from a turn-off to fanning a hick."

"Did you spot Synco, Wart?"

"How could I, Barney? I wasn't even in the joint. You seen me leave, with your own eyes. Many's the time I've wanted to squash him out, Barney, 'cause the way he sang gave me the gripes. But you can't give a mug the juice just for wanting I've never spoke a word to Synco in my life, Barney. Nope, I didn't kill him Louse exterminating ain't in my line. Sorry."

"I saw you in here, Wart. Where did you stash your gun?"

Wart shrugged. "Sure, I was here. You seen me—before the shooting. You seen me leave—before the shooting. I was downstairs in the lobby when a pilot bulges out of the elevator and squawks that hell's ripped loose up here."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. And don't think I didn't build myself an out by showing myself to the cloiks, the pilots, and everybody in sight

I'm wise, Barney. Too wise to take it on the lam when the lid blows off.

"What would of happened if I'd taken a run-out powder? The whole force would of been on my tail and I'd been sloughed in the can so quick it would of made my head swim. You know that, Barney. This ain't the foist time you boids have put the squeezers on me. If Synco had been in on the racket, I could see where you might suspicion me. I may be a hard guy, inspector—but I ain't so hard I go 'round bumping guys who I ain't never spoke a woid to, just because I don't like their looks."

"Why did you come back here, Wart? Are you crazy?"

"Like a fox. I had an out, so I came back to spill it. Those dough-heads at the door weren't going to let me in, at foist. I didn't know Synco got his, till they told me."

The inspector rolled his cigar between his lips.

"This kind of a job *ain't* in your line, Wart. I'd put you on ice anyway, if it wasn't that I seen you leave, with my own eyes. Somebody inside the room done it, and I know you were outside. Which lets you out. Your 'out' seems puncture-proof. You got any idea who did do it?"

"Sure. Some guy whose sweetie had been warbled away from him. Anybody can see that."

"Uh-huh. Anybody can see that. Question is, to find out who."

"That shouldn't be so tough, for a bright fella like you, Barney. You know it's some one in this room. All you got to do is to search 'em, and grab the guy who's packing a gun. I'll mix around, and if I learn anything I'll tip you, Barney."

"Okay, Wart . . . . Here come the boys from headquarters."

A score of eager dicks and flatties came surging through the door. Dallas gripped Wart by the arm.

"Say, fellow. You and Gildman are like that, aren't you?" He held up two fingers, close together. "There's been some talk about Synco leaving him flat when his contract was up, next month. Know anything about it?"

The racketeer eyed him coldly. "You're one of them newspaper guys, ain't you? Well, you can quote me as saying that, in my opinion, Europe is a powder keg—waitin' to be touched off."

CHAPTER IV

Behind Closed Doors

DALLAS turned and sped toward Gildman's office. Synco's body was stretched out upon the glass-topped table, deserted now by the members of the orchestra, who had returned to the center of excitement. Dallas snatched up the phone with one hand, and began searching Synco's pockets with the other.

"Hello. Hello—Walker? . . . . Police grill racketeer suspect. . . . . Nope—no pinch yet . . . . Questioned by Inspector Barney Lang, Wart Denzil claims 'out' . . . . Marcia Brice, subdeb heiress, witnesses murder . . . . Patrons of fashionable night club face wholesale third degree . . . . Love theft theory looms as probable motive, police seek jealous rival . . . . S'all . . . . No! Wait a second!"

From Synco's pocket he drew a small, red notebook. Awkwardly opening it with his free hand, he found that it contained merely a list of telephone numbers.

"Hot doggie! Hello. Walker? . . . . Get this: Police find book containing phone numbers of slain swingster's sweeties. May prove clew to identity of slayer . . . . Yeah, I've got it. It's exclusive . . . . What? . . . . Okay. Put some one else on the wire and I'll read 'em off so you can check on the addresses through the phone company."

A moment later he was dictating the numbers. When the list was almost completed, a reporter for a rival sheet dashed into the office, seeking a phone. Instantly Dallas began to stall, saying:

"Yeah, like I said, no new developments." For some moments he stalled, repeating matters of no consequence into the transmitter, merely to kill time and delay the opposition reporter.

He thrust the notebook into his pocket. Its information he intended to keep for

himself. What a sensation it would cause when those phone numbers, with the identities of their owners, were published! Presently, he relinquished the phone.

The other reporter barked his number impatiently, but while waiting for his connection found time to exclaim enviously: "What a break! You sure wiped up on this yarn, Kirk!"

Dallas hurried from the office. A police guard had replaced the waiters at the door. Members of the homicide squad were searching the guests for arms. Wart Denzil was dragging at his cigar calmly, staring about him as if bored.

Other reporters were arriving now, among them two from the *Express*, sent to assist Dallas. With the reporters came the camera men.

For a moment Dallas was busy aiding the *Express* photographer to pose a member of the orchestra in the place where Synco had stood when he was shot—a picture which would appear with the caption, "X Marks Spot Where Swingster Fell."

His brain was working swiftly as he strove to reconstruct just what had happened. Synco's back had been to the orchestra, and he had been facing the tables when the shot had been fired. He had taken it squarely from the front.

"The only way the killer could get away with it without being seen, was by firing from the back of the room, close to the windows," he surmised. "The only possible explanation is that he was behind everybody, and that everyone was looking at Synco."

He frowned thoughtfully. If his reasoning was sound, then he had narrowed down the locality from which the murderer had fired to a comparatively small area on the opposite side of the room—near the very table where he and Faith had been seated.

Who else had been seated near by? Barney Lang himself, for one. Gildman, the owner, alone at his table. The others he could not remember.

Marcia Brice and her escort had been at one of the front tables, which seemed to let them out. For the life of him he couldn't recall the faces of any of the others in that comparatively small area. And now, all had left their places, and were hopelessly lost in the shuffle.

Wart Denzil, unknown to Dallas, was watching him closely—much more closely than he was watching the inspector.

He spotted Barney Lang pushing toward Marcia Brice and her escort, and tailed along after him.

"This is Miss Brice, ain't it?" demanded the officer, removing the cigar from his lips. "You were a friend of Synco, weren't you?"

"I'm sure I don't know what that has to do with it," put in the girl's escort stiffly before she could answer. His patrician nose and sharp chin made up for the washy effect produced by his schoolgirl complexion.

"Who are you?" demanded Barney bluntly.

"Marcia's brother."

"You didn't have much use for Synco, did you, Brice?"

"I beg your pardon. That is neither here nor there."

"Nope? Well, young fella, I may learn you different before I get through with you. It sort of griped you to know that little sister was buzzing around that Synco like a moth around a gas lamp, didn't it? Dazzled as bad as any of the million-dollar babies working in your papa's ten-cent stores. You came down here with her to—what *did* you come here for?"

The girl flinched as if she had been struck. Her brother paled slightly.

"I don't propose that my sister shall be submitted to any third degree, officer. I am prepared to make a statement in her behalf. If it isn't satisfactory, the next move is up to you—for we shall say nothing further except through legal counsel."

THE inspector's lip curled slightly "Shoot," he directed.

"I recognize the right of the police to question the witnesses. We were seated near the front, where dozens would have seen me if I had fired the fatal shot. Both of us have been searched, and no weapons

have been found on us. Manifestly, therefore, we are innocent of any wrongdoing. Further than that I have nothing to say—nor has my sister."

"Is that so?" growled the inspector. "Well—"

He was interrupted by a member of the homicide squad.

"We've searched every person in the joint, Barney, including the waiters. The only cannon we found was an automatic in the desk of Gildman, the manager—loaded with a full clip and apparently unfired. We've looked under the tables, behind the hangings, everywhere where a gun might have been stashed."

"The hell you say!" exclaimed Lang, visibly disappointed. For the first time his confidence seemed to be shaken. "And nobody squawked? I thought sure we'd pick up the gun, and a dozen confidential tips."

"No guns. No tips. Nothing."

Dallas, too, was mystified. Like Barney, he had expected the shakedown to reveal the killer. How could the murderer have disposed of his weapon? It was not in the room. Consequently it must be—

He hurried across to the area where, he had surmised a moment ago, the slayer must have stood.

"He could have tossed his gat out the window!" he told himself eagerly.

But his eagerness vanished after a brief examination. All the windows on this side of the room were closed. Of course, it was barely possible the killer might have closed one after tossing his gun outside, although it seemed almost incredible that this could have been accomplished unseen by the throng within.

He pushed aside the heavy curtains which were looped to the walls by gold-tasseled tie-backs, wondering if the weapon might have been hidden behind them, and escaped the eyes of the searching police. Upon the floor was a splintered pencil.

A forlorn hope led him to the door, where his police card permitted him to pass out into the elevator corridor, which was jammed with an excited crowd striving for a glimpse of the scene of the murder. He pushed through the door leading out upon the terrace.

A moment's search disclosed no weapon upon the terrace. He thought it barely possible it might have been hurled through the window with such force that it had cleared the terrace wall and fallen in the street, or upon the first step-back, far below.

He leaned over the parapet, and then his heart leaped suddenly as it flashed upon him that the fatal shot might have been fired from the terrace *outside* the windows.

He whirled about eagerly, and then his heart sank.

"If he'd been outside, there'd be footprints in the snow," he muttered. "And the only prints are my own."

Nevertheless, he made a hasty examination, searching for bullet holes in the window panes. When he found none, he abandoned his latest theory with a regretful sigh, and started inside to phone the office.

Thus far he seemed to be up against a blank wall. The only theory that held out the slightest promise concerned Gildman, the manager. According to reports, he and Synco had been unable to agree upon a renewal of the crooner's contract.

Gildman had been seated in the area from which Dallas had decided the shot had come. Still, the manager stood to take a huge loss through the tragedy. It seemed improbable he would wish all this on himself, merely because he could not reach an agreement with Synco.

He found police were clearing the elevator corridor of the curious outsiders. Already those patrons of the Montparnasse who had been searched, questioned, and found beyond suspicion were being permitted to leave. As he pushed through the door some one touched his arm.

"Any luck, Scoop?"

It was Wart Denzil, his face expressionless, his thin lips clenched upon his cigar.

Dallas hesitated. He hated to admit he was completely baffled, yet it was not

his policy to reveal anything to an outsider before it appeared in print.

"They always overlook something, these killers," he returned noncommittally, and hurried on.

CHAPTER V

Hot Trail

"NOW, what did he mean by that?" Wart asked himself uneasily as he racked his brain in an effort to recall whether he had overlooked anything which might prove to be an incriminating clew.

Dallas hurried to Gildman's office. He found that Synco's body had been removed. An opposition leg man was on the phone, but hung up as Dallas appeared, and darted from the office as the latter snatched up the instrument. Dallas was half sitting upon, half leaning against the glass-topped table as he barked the number of the *Express* into the phone.

The C.E. snapped at him impatiently. "We got the head for the next edition in type already: 'Police Nab Swingster's Slayer.' Shoot the works, Kirk. They got him?"

"Better than that," said Dallas quickly. "They haven't! Biggest mystery of the year. Hundreds witnessed killing, yet murderer remains uncaught. Police baffled. Search fails to reveal death gun. The story sweetens."

Briefly, he barked out the details of the most recent developments. "How about the list of phone numbers?" he asked. "Checked on 'em, yet?"

"Yeah. But you don't need to worry about 'em. We'll handle that angle from the office. We've sent men out to two or three of the most promising, and we'll get the rest as soon as we can."

"Better read 'em off to me," snapped Dallas impatiently. "Might give me a lead to work on." He fished a pencil and a folded pad of copy paper from his pocket. Holding both the pad and the phone in his left hand, he rapidly transcribed the list of names and addresses, repeating each as it was dictated to him. The last on the list was without a name, being merely a theatrical boarding house on West Forty-third Street. As he scribbled it down, Dallas heard footsteps approaching, and Gildman stepped into the office, wringing his hands.

Dallas wondered if the Montparnasse proprietor had told all he knew. It flashed upon him that here was the opportunity to throw a little bluff. It might gain him much if he succeeded, and could cost nothing if it failed.

He edged gently back on the table until his weight rested lightly on the cradle of the phone, thereby severing the connection. With the instrument dead, he continued talking into the disconnected receiver, assuming an air of intense excitement.

"Yeah . . . . Yeah . . . . I tell you, the police got it sewed up! Hold everything and wait for the flash when they make the pinch! Sure, they've got the killer dead to rights—only he don't know it, yet! Some one nobody suspects . . . . Sure, sure! I know his name, but there are certain reasons I can't tell you now . . . . Check! G'bye."

"You think maybe they got the dope on the killer?" asked Gildman excitedly as Dallas replaced the receiver.

"There's no 'maybe' about it," said Dallas. "Listen, Gildman — you got to keep this under your hat, see?"

If the owner of the night club was shaken by Dallas' crack, he failed to show it.

"Fifty grand it costs me, pinch or no pinch. Holding the sack, I am, all account of some dumb fluff. Maybe I should go out and peddle papers for a living, now."

"What makes you think a jane figures in it, Gildman? Maybe it wasn't that kind of a job. Maybe—"

"Always a jane figures in it when there is trouble—always! And it costs somebody fifty grand! Only don't put it in the paper that I'm ruined. I might change my mind."

Dallas left him moaning and wringing his hands. He almost bumped into Wart Denzil as he hurried from the office, seeking one of the *Express* men who had been

sent to aid him. Wart eased himself into the office and confronted Gildman.

"You been talking to that newspaper boid, Gildman?"

"Who? Me? Sure. Fifty thousand—"

"Yeah, I heard that before. I was wondering what he was phoning to put in the paper, when—"

"Plenty he's going to put in the paper. He says the police know already who done it. Who is it, Wart? Right away I'm going to sue him for fifty—"

"He says he knows who done it, does he? The lousy liar! I talked to him a minute ago and he just stalled."

Not the slightest flicker of expression was visible on Wart's dead pan to betray the flutter of trepidation that he felt. How much did that reporter know, anyway? Wart had seen him go out to the terrace, and then come back and hurry to the phone. And now Gildman reported he had flashed the office that the case was sewed up!

Wart was confident he had left no trace on the terrace. How did that newspaper guy get that way, anyway? Had he merely *guessed* how it was done? These reporters were pretty smart. Usually they were about two jumps ahead of the dicks in figuring out a big case. Wart began to wish he hadn't wired that tip to the news hound.

The next instant he was cursing himself for his weakening nerve. Of course the reporter hadn't guessed it! What if he had? Even if the worst came to the worst, it was nothing but a guess. There wasn't a shred of evidence against him. Even if they pinched him, they couldn't make it stick. The worst that could happen would be a repetition of the history of his first three killings—dropped for lack of evidence.

"Didn't he say anything, Gildman, that you would take for a lead as to the guy he suspected?" His voice was careless, casual, as if nothing more than idle curiosity prompted the question.

"Nothing. Absolutely. When I came in the office, he was copying down an address on Forty-third Street."

WART'S heart leaped suddenly. "On Forty-thoid Street? What address? Can't you remember?"

"Sure, I remember." Gildman repeated the address of the theatrical boarding house. Wart shrugged as if it meant nothing to him, and turned away.

"Well, Gildman, I'll be seeing you." He strolled from the office in a leisurely fashion, although his heart was pounding with excitement.

For the address was that of Thersa Rossi, the Terpsichorean whose desertion had led to Synco's murder. How had the newspaper guy come to be in possession of her number?

Wart put two and two together, but fear doubled the total. He jumped at the conclusion that somehow Dallas had guessed the truth, although as a matter of fact, at that moment Dallas was utterly at sea so far as the solution of the case was concerned.

Fear was gnawing at Wart's mind. He thought he saw the flaw in his carefully planned case—the flaw which the reporter had presumably discovered. And that flaw was—Thersa. So far as the actual commission of the crime was concerned, Wart was certain he had carried it out perfectly, without leaving a clew behind. But he had not taken the girl into consideration.

She would know he had killed Synco. Fear of Wart's vengeance might seal her lips, but on the other hand, love for the slain swingster might lead her to squawk. Wart instantly decided the one vitally important thing he must accomplish to save himself was to keep Thersa from talking.

Meanwhile Dallas had sought out Inspector Lang, only to learn that the officer was completely baffled. "I've questioned every member of the orchestra," he growled, rolling his unlighted cigar between his lips. "We've frisked and grilled every guest, every waiter. This is beginning to look like a tough case."

Dallas recalled that the members of the chorus had been dismissed, because they had been in their dressing room at the time, and hence could not be con-

sidered as suspects. They, however, were the only ones who had not been questioned. Likewise, Dallas knew that they, if anyone, would be wise to all the gossip concerning Synco and his feminine friends.

He started for the dressing room, but found it deserted. However, tacked upon the wall was the call list showing the names, addresses and phone numbers of the chorines. He started to copy the list, intending to have the office check up on them later.

Then he came to one which caught his attention. The name was Thersa Rossi, and the address was on West Forty-third Street. He recalled having written that address but a few minutes previously. Turning over his pad of notes, he compared them and found that the phone number and address of the Rossi girl were identical on each list.

Dallas decided to locate the girl. After all, things had come to an apparent impasse at the night club. He could leave the two other *Express* men in charge, to cover anything which might break during his absence. He started for the elevator.

He was conscious of an uncomfortable feeling that he had forgotten something. Then it dawned upon him. He had clean forgotten Faith! In the excitement of following the hot news trail, the presence of the girl he hoped to marry had almost slipped his mind.

"I can't leave her here," he said to himself, a bit irritably. "And I can't send her home alone in a taxi. Only thing to do is to take her with me."

He found her at their table, white-faced, tense, staring at the unwavering flame of the candle as if hypnotized. "C'mon," he said curtly. "We're going!"

"Oh, I'm so thankful!" she breathed as she rose. She shuddered. "What a terrible place! I hope I never see New York again!"

A few moments later they were climbing into a taxi. Faith gasped as Dallas gave the driver the address on West Forty-third Street.

"But—but, Dallas! I thought—thought you were taking me home, to my aunt's! I can't—"

"I'll take you home just as soon as I clean up on this story," he interrupted impatiently. "You don't seem to be able to get it through your head that I'm a newspaperman—that I can't let anything interfere when a red-hot story like this is breaking!"

"But, Dallas—"

"Don't argue with me. I'm telling you. And don't bother me. I got to think. I got to dope this thing out, see?"

Faith shrank back into a corner and regarded him in puzzled silence.

"You wait here for me," he told her as the taxi drew up in front of the brownstone boarding house. "I won't be more than a couple of minutes." He hopped out and dashed up the steps. As he flung open the door a slatternly old hag in a soiled kimono stumbled down the staircase, screaming harshly:

"Call the cops! Call the cops! Miss Rossi has been moidered!"

CHAPTER VI

GREEDY GATS

DALLAS leaped up the stairs, four steps at a jump. A group of excited lodgers, some only partly dressed, were clustered about an open door on the second floor. He pushed through them into the shabby room. Huddled on the floor, her mop of platinum blonde hair resting in a slowly spreading pool of blood, lay the girl whom Dallas had pointed out to Faith in the Montparnasse chorus less than an hour before.

By her side, upon the worn, flowered carpet lay a silver-framed photograph of Synco Arietta, glass and picture smashed.

"Who did it?" barked Dallas.

A dozen hysterical voices tried to answer. Dallas hushed them into silence and singled out a man with rumpled hair, in trousers, stockinged-feet and undershirt.

"Nobody knows who done it!" the fellow gasped out. "I'm in my room acrost

the hall, see, getting ready for bed, see, when I hears three shots, quick. Like this, see—pow, pow, pow! I thinks maybe it's a truck backfiring or something, see, until I hears a turrible scream from Miss Rossi's room. I hops into my pants, see, and piles out and knocks on her door and yells 'What's happened?' Nobody answers.

"The door is locked, see? I'm going back to bed, 'cause I knows Miss Rossi don't get home till late, see? But Mis' Baumzweig—she's the landlady, see?—she says Miss Rossi is already come home early, looking white and scared to death.

"I says we better bust down the door, but the landlady says who's going to pay for the damage, and we gets into a argument, see? Pretty soon the hall is full of people yelling and carrying on. I chins myself on the transom, and sees the dead lady inside. I says 'To hell with who pays for the lock' and busts down the door, see? The room is empty, but the window is open, so that is the way the moiderer gets out. Are you the law?"

"Where's the closest phone?" demanded Dallas. There were countless other questions he wanted to ask, but the urgent need of the moment was to get the flash to the office on this latest murder.

The landlady had not thought to phone for the police, but had run screaming into the street in search of the nearest patrolman. A moment later Dallas was dialing the *Express* number on the wall phone in the lower hall.

"Hello — *Express?* Gimme Walker, quick! . . . . Walker? Kirk. Big stuff. Arietta murderer slays Montparnasse chorine to still her tongue . . . . Thersa Rossi, beautiful night club entertainer, found riddled with bullets in fashionable apartment on West Forty-third Street.

"Shattered photo murdered swingster by her side indicates she is victim of mysterious killer who bumped Synco hour ago. Police believe triangle woman slain because she alone knew identity of Arietta assassin . . . . Huh? No, police aren't here yet, but that's what they'll believe. Mystery murderer vanishes into night."

He barked out the remaining scanty details of this second amazing killing, and turned from the phone just as the landlady reappeared in the wake of a running, uniformed patrolman. He halted her as the officer bounded up the stairs.

"Who was her boy friend?" he demanded abruptly.

"I should know!" panted the woman breathlessly, clutching her kimono about her. "Ten days ago she came here, with two black eyes. Such a refined young lady! So quiet like, never saying nothing about herself. So—"

"No men callers?"

"I give it to you to understand, young man, that this is a respectable house."

"Phone calls? You must have taken 'em on the house phone!"

"Sure, sure. Plenty phone calls. But should I pry into the affairs of my guests? No, I don't know his name. Don't ask!"

These calls, if all from one man, must have been from Synco, who carried Thersa's number in his book, Dallas thought. "Any other girls of the Montparnasse chorus live here? Any close girl friends who might know something about her private affairs?"

The panting landlady shook her head. With an exclamation of annoyance, Dallas brushed past her and started up the stairs again.

THE policeman had banished everyone from the room, and had sent the man in the undershirt to notify police headquarters. Dallas' police card admitted him. The officer made no objection as he went through the room, searching for some clew which might reveal the name of the slayer. But he found no letters—nothing which shed the slightest gleam of light upon the case.

Apparently the girl's admirers had been too shrewd to commit anything to writing — either that, or she had destroyed their letters.

Dallas leaned from the open window. It gave upon the lowest platform of the fire escape. Plainly this was the means by which the murderer had made his escape, although the steel grating had

been swept clear of snow by the wind and revealed no tracks.

Dallas climbed outside, and lowered himself to the ground. He found himself in a narrow alley. The snow had melted as it reached the cement pavement. There were no footprints. As he reached the street a police car with shrieking siren shot up to the curb with screaming brakes. Six plainclothes men tumbled out.

"It's a cinch this job is connected with the Arietta killing," he told himself breathlessly. "The busted photo of Synco shows that much. Picture's beginning to get a lot clearer—like a movie fade-in.

"Thersa is the third side of the triangle. Synco won her away from some one. That some one murdered Synco, and then killed the girl, either in a frenzy of jealousy, or to stop her from talking. It oughtn't to be such a tough job to find out who her sweetie was before she took up with Synco. When I've found him, I've got my man!"

He turned toward the door again, and then hesitated. He hated to leave this angle of the yarn uncovered, even though he was confident he had learned all the police could unearth. His problem was solved when another taxi rolled up to the curb, and an *Express* reporter hopped out. Dallas hailed him, and briefly gave him the lay.

"You stick here, and try to dig out the name of this girl's sweetie," he directed hurriedly. "If you learn it, phone me at the Montparnasse. S'long."

He started to signal a passing taxi. Then he remembered his own cab, with Faith inside, was waiting for him. His intense concentration upon the solution of the mystery had almost led him to forget temporarily the existence of the girl. Faith greeted him with a gasp of relief as he hopped inside.

"What's happened?" she demanded in a voice which trembled with fright. "Why are all those policemen—"

"Nothing," he retorted hurriedly. "Don't bother me. I got to think." To the driver he said, "Club Montparnasse."

"But," put in the girl timidly, "but I thought you were going to take me home, now?"

"Can't you see I'm trying to think?" he growled at her irritably. "I'm going to take you home just as soon as this job is finished, see?"

Faith turned from him and began to sob softly. "This is ter-terrible," she said, with a catch in her voice. "And you're so—so rude. I hope I never see New York again—or you, either!"

Her sobbing pierced his crust of concentration as nothing else could have done. He leaned over and patted her on the shoulder. All the puzzling problems of the murder case were momentarily banished from his mind.

"There, there, Faith. Don't get sore. I didn't mean to be nasty. You got to remember that I'm a newspaperman, that's all. I'm not that way all the time, honest. Stories like this don't break *every* day."

"I—I know, Dallas. I want to go where it's quiet, and safe, and—"

"Listen, Faith. At the moment Synco was shot, I was just on the point of asking you—er, something. You said you wanted to live in New York. New York isn't like this—all the time. Folks can live here all their lives, just as peaceably and comfortably as you can back in Centerville.

"When I saw you sitting across the table from me, with the light from that candle glowing on your face, so soft and pretty, I couldn't help thinking— Well, what I'm trying to say is, I was thinking you might be sitting across the table from me, all the rest of our—"

He broke off lamely. She ceased her sobbing and perked up suddenly.

"Yes?" she said, softly and eagerly. "Yes, yes—go on, Dallas!"

A moment of awkward silence. And then he burst forth with startling suddenness:

"I've *got* it!"

"Got what?" demanded the astonished Faith.

"Got the solution of this whole damned case! The one thing the killer overlooked! Shut up! Don't bother me! I got to think!"

CHAPTER VII

TELLTALE CLUES

WART DENZIL, who had murdered two persons within an hour, stepped from his limousine in front of the building which housed the Club Montparnasse, as casually as if he were just returning from a spin through the park. He wore an air of bored indifference as he strolled through the lobby to the express elevators.

In fact, Wart was quite well satisfied with himself. He had disposed satisfactorily of the one factor he had overlooked when planning the elimination of Synco. Now Thersa no longer could be considered a peril. Her tongue was silenced forever. During the months she had lived in his apartment, she had gone under another name. None, except perhaps his closest friends, who could be counted upon to keep their mouths shut, knew that Thersa Rossi had been Wart's moll.

Even if the worst came to the worst, they had nothing more than suspicion against him—not a whit of real evidence. None had seen him enter or leave Thersa's room. None, probably, had even noticed his absence from the Montparnasse, in the excitement. So far as the killing of Synco was concerned, he considered his "out" airtight.

Wart reasoned he was playing safe by returning to the Montparnasse. Nevertheless, this time he carried a gat in his pocket. He had little fear of being searched again, but the weapon was his driver's, clean and unfired, so it could not be used as evidence against him in case he was frisked a second time.

Flicking the ashes from a fresh cigar, he strolled from the elevator with an air of bland and untroubled insouciance, his iron nerve unshaken. The police guard at the door was intent upon the proceedings inside, and he was unnoticed. So, instead of going inside, he turned down the corridor and passed through the door onto the terrace.

"I'll show myself, walking up and down past the windows," he said to himself, smiling. "Then, if they've noticed I been gone, they'll think I been out here all the time, taking the air."

But before he tried to show himself, he peered through the windows to get a line on the situation. Inspector Lang was pacing up and down, his unlighted cigar chewed to a frazzle, firing questions at Gildman, who was seated at a table guarded by members of the homicide squad. Wart wished he could hear what the dick was saying, but the closed window cut off all sound.

Presently, as Wart watched, he saw the *Express* reporter burst through the door, followed by a thoroughly frightened girl, who sank into the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands. The reporter was barking something at Barney Lang, but Wart couldn't hear what it was.

The question that the breathless Dallas shot at the inspector was:

"Where is Wart Denzil?"

Lang shrugged. "Search me. He was here a little while ago. Why?"

"Because," cried Dallas triumphantly, "he's the man who murdered Synco—and the Rossi girl! But of course he wouldn't be crazy enough to come back here!"

The inspector was unimpressed. "Whatsamatter, Dal? You blown your top or something? Wart is the only one with a perfect 'out' because he wasn't even in the room when Synco got his."

"Of course he wasn't! Which *proves* he was the murderer! He was outside on the terrace, crouching on the wall where he wouldn't leave any tracks!"

Barney smiled indulgently. "I never seen you go off half-cocked this way before, Dal. The windows was all closed. I thought of that, too, and looked the windows over for bullet holes, but there wasn't any. Which proves you're cuckoo. Now, don't bother me with any more wild theories, until I finish with Gildman, here, and—"

"Cuckoo, huh?" cried Dallas eagerly. "Crazy, am I? Looky here, you big hunk of boloney, and I'll prove to you who's gone nerts, you or me! The window was open *before* the shot was fired, but closed afterward—closed by the very bullet that nailed Synco!

"Wart had figured everything out in advance—everything but the one little inconsequential clue which pins this job on him! No, it wasn't the pencil with which the window was propped open, and which was shattered by the bullet and let the window drop—although you'll find the splintered pencil on the floor!

"The perfect crime has never been committed. Always the criminal leaves some clue behind. Wart had thought out everything—except this!"

"What is it?" Lang demanded bluntly.

"This!" exclaimed Dallas, pointing at the candle on the table in front of Gildman. "I was sitting right there, and a moment before the shooting I lighted a cigarette at that candle, and the flame was fluttering in the draft—which shows the window was open. But the very instant after the shot was fired, the flame stopped fluttering—which shows the window had been closed! That's the thing that Wart overlooked—the fluttering of a tiny candle flame, which proves the shot was fired from outside. And he was the only one—"

"I'll be damned!" exclaimed Barney. "Kid, I believe you're—"

"I'll prove it, Barney! Look—the candle is burning steadily, because the window's closed. But if you'll open it, you'll see that—"

He broke off, suddenly startled. For, unexpectedly, the candle flame had begun to flutter. All eyes flashed to the window—to behold the evil face of Wart Denzil peering at them through the open pane.

Wart, overcome with curiosity to know what the reporter had spilled, thus to excite the police, had opened the window so he might hear — and by so doing had clinched the case against himself!

"There he is!" yelled Dallas. "Get him!"

"Take your time, boys!" boomed Barney. "He can't get away—and he hasn't got a gun!"

"The hell he hasn't!" shouted Dallas. "The one he used on Ther—"

Pang! The sharp crack of the racketeer's automatic proved he was armed—and ready to fight to the death. The steel-jacketed bullet sped through the window and ripped through Dallas' coat.

WART, who couldn't guess how it had happened, but who knew only that somehow they had got the goods on him, blazed away at the reporter whom he knew to be responsible for his downfall.

Dallas dived behind the tub of a potted palm. Instantly the guns of the police began to roar. As if by magic a dozen little round holes appeared in the glass. Wart leaped aside, dashing for the door to the elevator corridor.

"C'mon!" roared the inspector, sending the tables crashing and spinning as he plowed toward the door of the night club. "We got to keep him from reaching the elevators!"

The roar of the police guns died away.

Two of the officers remained behind to prevent the gunman from breaking through the locked French doors and escaping through the night club. Dallas leaped to his feet and plunged toward Faith.

"Jump!" he ordered harshly, gripping her by one wrist and dragging her from her chair. "Lead will be flying again in a minute—I got to get you where you'll be safe!"

He dragged her across the room to Gildman's office. Just as the guns began to roar again he flung her roughly behind the safe, where stray bullets could not reach her. Then he snatched up the phone and barked the number of the *Express.*

"Dallas?" came the girl's frightened voice as he was waiting for his connection. "Dallas—you—"

"Shut up!" he snapped. "Can't you see I'm— Hello! Walker? Kirk. Police corner double murderer of Synco and girl! Battle to death with Wart Denzil on terrace of night club, twenty-eight stories above street! . . . . Huh? Yeah —yeah! That's the sounds of the guns you hear! They're staging the battle right now—right in front of my eyes!

"Barney Lang and aides cut off slayer's flight by elevators! Another squad—hear that crash? That's the other squad smashing down the French doors! . . . . Sure, sure! I'm phoning from Gildman's office —can see it all! Denzil cornered between two groups of police! I can see his automatic spouting fire! He's falling back! Police closing in on him!

"His back is against parapet! He's climbing up on it! They're blazing away at him! . . . . Wait! Wait! . . . . Man alive! They've got him! *Got* him, I tell you! He's dropped his gun! Grabbing at his belly! Toppling—toppling! There he goes—twenty-eight floors down to the street . . . . Yeah, yeah! Okay, switch me to Gus, and I'll feed him the story!"

He took a deep breath as he waited for the city editor to switch the call to the rewrite hound. His hands were trembling, every nerve in his body was tingling. In that brief interval he heard Faith speaking up timidly from behind the safe.

"Dallas! Is it all over? . . . . I've been trying to—in the taxi you were saying there was something you wanted to ask—"

It flashed upon the tense Dallas that there *was* something he'd wanted to ask this girl. Oh, yeah—he was going to ask her to marry him! Very well, he'd ask her and get it over. A helluva set-up for a proposal, but then, he was a newspaperman, and newspapermen had to take the breaks as they came.

"Okay, Faith!" he gasped. "Will you marry me? . . . . What? Hello, hello! Gus? No, you damn' fool, I wasn't speaking to you; Here—tie into this: Riddled by police bullets, body of Wart Denzil, racketeer, gunman, hurtled twenty-eight floors from terrace of Club Montparnasse tonight and ended police search for double murderer of Synco Arietta and beautiful actress, solving most baffling crime mystery of decade . . . . Faith! You *will!* Darling! You—"

"Huh? No, Gus, I was speaking to some one else. No, I'm not drunk. Nor crazy. Grab this: Greedy gats of gangland proven to be responsible for double slaying by shrewd detective work of Inspector Barney Lang, who led police squad in desperate battle with cornered slayer high above roofs of city.

"Huh? Sure, Faith, I know I solved it. But I'm a newspaperman, and a reporter's always got to give credit to the police in a case like this . . . . Huh? No, Gus, damn it all, I wasn't talking to you! Here—Jealousy over swingster's love theft of gangster's moll motive for sensational double murder. Say, Gus, what time does the marriage license bureau open? . . . . No, no, you fathead—that's not a part of the story! . . . . Flickering candle flame slender clue upon which police based solution of what was considered 'perfect' crime.

"Yes, darling—just as soon as the bureau opens . . . . No, no, you damn' idiot—why should I call *you* darling? Don't you understand, you boob? I'm going to be married! To the swellest little girl in the world! . . . . No, of course I'm not going to let it interfere with finishing this story! Don't you realize I'm a *newspaperman?*"

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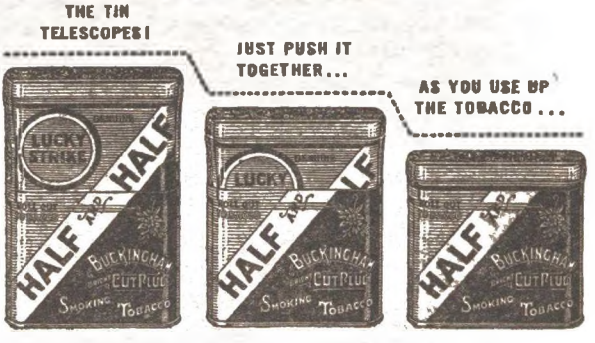

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Homicide on High

By Arthur Flint

Giffard hated his boss, and his own underdog existence. Only murder would appease his warped brain—and erase years of frustration.

ELMER GIFFARD leaned far over the low brown-brick railing of his penthouse terrace. Twenty floors down! That would do, nicely.

Straightening, he smoothed the pomaded wisp of white hair that had fallen

over his long, clean-shaven face, and compared his excellent wrist watch with the distant Metropolitan clock, a gold-dotted disk against the night.

Ferguson would be arriving now, any minute. Arthur Croly Ferguson—Giffard squinted at the city as he thought of that name and all it had meant to him.

He looked back over the year during which they had fought, in bitter, unspoken rivalry, to the top of the exporting firm that now bore the single name of—Ferguson!

Yes, Giffard had lost in the struggle. Ferguson, portly, hearty, heavy-drinking, had outsmarted him — and had handed him a miserable place on his directing board. As far as Ferguson was concerned, the race, the battle, was over.

But Giffard's face sat like stone whenever he looked at the door on which was lettered that name. And he had dreamed of that name.

Day in and day out, he had been steeped in his hatred of Arthur Croly Ferguson. Even what other men would have called success failed to soothe his intense rancor at having lost that battle of almost two decades. Ferguson had bested him; Ferguson was the better man—keener, more quick-witted, a business wizard. Giffard had longed to be that, but he was of a different mold. He was slow, calculating, stolid. While he considered things slowly, deliberately, Arthur Croly Ferguson snapped to his feet and flashed out brilliantly with the solution to any problem.

Well, this was the end. Giffard threw back his head, breathed deeply, and walked back into his apartment, softly

closing the terrace French doors. He had known for years that he might some day lose his head and kill Ferguson. It was curious, now that the time had come, that "losing his head" had had no part in

it whatsoever. Carefully, stolidly, he had planned, rejecting in his mind a hundred schemes for a successful "perfect" murder. He had come to the conclusion that the cleverest murder is the simplest.

And this had been built along the simplest lines. Ferguson had been in Europe. An unusually vigorous drinker, and his health in danger, he had gone to visit an old friend who had become a prominent London specialist. Giffard had run the business meantime, for three months.

During that period he had tasted the blood of power. He had had the authority he hungered for. And he had planned to keep it, had planned well.

His doorbell rang. Elmer Giffard sauntered into the spacious modern foyer—there were no servants—and cheerily greeted his guest.

"Hello, Arthur! Well, you're looking splendid, man!"

"Feel pretty fit, Elmer." Ferguson's red face was shiny with the buoyant good-fellowship of the traveler who expects and hugely enjoys enthusiastic welcomes.

GIFFARD wore an easy smile which he had cultivated for months in his contacts with this man—ever since, in fact, he had decided on what he was to do this evening. In every word, every look and gesture, he had tried to show Ferguson that the old hatchet had been buried, that they were friends. He had been rewarded when Ferguson made him acting president during his absence.

While his superior had been abroad, Giffard had cabled frequent cheery greetings, assurances that all was going well at the offices. And he had thrown a gay party for the "old man" just before Ferguson left.

The final move in this campaign had been a radiogram which reached Ferguson on his returning boat:

"HOW ABOUT DROPPING IN AT MY PLACE WHEN YOU ARRIVE TO DISCUSS IMMEDIATE BUSINESS DETAILS."

Ferguson sank heavily into a low modernistic armchair, sighing:

"Well, travel's great stuff, but it's a lot of bother, Elmer. I don't mind being at a place, or traveling in between; it's the starting and arriving that tires me out. Take today: I've been all day getting from Ellis Island to Forty-second Street! But I feel better—no question about it."

"The doctor—the specialist over there—was pretty good, I take it," suggested Giffard, opening a box of expensive cigars.

"Good? He was a magician. Straightened me out fine. Great guy. Came back with me on the same boat."

Giffard looked sympathetic. "Was it very serious?"

"Certainly. Doctors over here gave me a year to live, maybe less. Herbert—that's Doctor Ingram—pooh-poohed all that; put me under his care up in the country, seventy miles from London, and I'm tiptop. That's what they say over there—tiptop."

"You've become a regular Britisher," Giffard complimented him, and Ferguson beamed.

Giffard rose, excusing himself, and stepped into his kitchenette. In a moment he returned, carrying a whiskey bottle and two small glasses.

"None for me," said Ferguson airily. "No, sir. Doctor's orders. Go ahead yourself, though."

"Oh, come now. Your first day back—come on, just a little snort for your health. This won't hurt you."

He poured two glasses of the rye.

Ferguson refused again, pleasantly, lighted his cigar, and asked about the business.

"Everything's shipshape," Giffard told him. "Like clockwork, that's how it is." He lifted his glass. "Well, old times, Arthur, eh?"

The other waved a large red hand, smiling.

"Hell!" exclaimed Giffard, his tone still genial. "Don't tell me travel's narrowed your mind! Why, I've seen you drink whiskey like beer. It's bum hootch that hurts people. This is the best there is. Smell." He leaned forward, holding his glass under Ferguson's red-veined nose. "Can't get anything better in England, I'm telling you."

"It's good, but I'm not drinking, thanks," said Ferguson, a little irritatedly. He could not be budged, once his mind was made up, Giffard knew. "Elmer, I'm a bit tired: how about going over those details you spoke of in your radiogram?" Ferguson considered the fine ash of his cigar, waiting for his host to speak. When there was nothing but silence, he looked up, and the long ash dropped as his hand jerked nervously, Giffard was covering him steadily with a black automatic.

"What the—"

"Drink your drink!" Giffard's smile had gone. His face was set, white, his dark eyes glittering unnaturally.

"What the hell're you up to, Giffard?" Ferguson stood up abruptly, blood darkly flooding his cheeks. Giffard rose and backed away.

"Pick up that glass and drink it," he commanded quietly.

"What do you mean by this? Is it—poison, or something?"

"No. If you think that, why, drink the one I was starting on. As a matter of fact, you will drink them both, and much more. I won't hurt you, Ferguson. I just want you to drink."

"You're insane! Or drunk, maybe." The firm president moved toward the door. Giffard checked him coldly.

"I'm neither. Sit down. Sit down!" His voice, still low, had become more vibrant, as if he were working himself up to the point of pulling the trigger. He walked forward, talking nervously. "Sit down. Drink, Ferguson. Drink, you damned fool, before I—"

That note in his voice frightened Ferguson, and he sat down—and raised the glass slowly to his lips. He drank. The glass was returned to the table.

"Well, what now?" he demanded.

"That other glass, too."

"Oh, say, you're crazy. What do you want me to drink for?" But, his eyes filled with fear as the gun-hand tensed, Ferguson obeyed. Meanwhile, Giffard filled the first glass again, being careful to keep the automatic leveled at his guest-victim. Silently, then, he pushed this drink across the low walnut table in front of Ferguson's armchair.

NO WORDS were spoken now. The strange pantomime continued, minute after minute, Ferguson slowly lifting and gulping one small glassful after another, his eyes blinking in perplexity, resentment, and increasing fear; Giffard bending forward to refill each empty glass, then settling back in his chair to watch while the other drank.

The liquor began to take effect. Ferguson stared through a haze at his tormentor, and seemed to be trying to bring his mind to bear on the amazing situation in which he now found himself. His wary manner of drinking, his intent gazing at Giffard over the top of each glass, changed. Now, settling into his seat, he peered down into the whiskey as if seeking the answer there. His head lolled. His cheeks were beginning to glow, horribly.

"Not any more, Elmer, for God's sake!" he begged, setting down another glass. The bottle was three-quarters empty. Giffard had not touched a drop. Unspeaking, the grim host tilted the bottle—just as the continental phone, across the room, rang. Frowning, he backed over to it, answering in a feignedly drunken voice.

"Mish'r Ferg'son. Hol' a wire." The gun gestured. Ferguson lurched forward, but before Giffard gave him the phone, he clapped one hand tightly over the mouthpiece and gritted: "Say anything out of the way and I'll plug you right through the back, Ferguson. Take the phone now—and talk drunk and happy. If it's your butler, tell him you'll be home late."

Ferguson fumbled at the phone.

"'Lo? Bert? What? . . . . Sure it's me! Who'd y' think, y' poor boob! Eh? . . . . Am I drunk? Why, hell no. Drunk? Me? No, I'm—"

Giffard jabbed him in the ribs. Ferguson started, and went on:

"Sure, Bert—drunk but happy. Oh, I know I'm off the wagon, but—Elmer here's an old friend—old friend, Bert. Li'l celebratin', that's all. Sure. Yop. Forget it, Bert. Trouble with you's you don't know anything 'bout good fellowship—"

He put down the phone, swaying.

"Son of a gun clicked off on me."

"Who was that?"

VD

"Jus' my doctor. Nosy guy. Regular Nemesis. Tryin' to keep me from drinkin'."

Ferguson was getting his nerve back; was sparring for time. Giffard did not give him a chance, however, but forced him to drink more, and in larger and more frequent doses than before. Ferguson became sodden, maudlin, his manner punctuated by sudden gusts of fear that swept him.

"You need a little air," remarked Giffard at length. "We'll go out on the terrace." He clicked off the lights and opened the French doors. There was enough moonlight and light from distant buildings to enable them to see with fair clarity.

No one from below, however, could see the men on the penthouse terrace, and there were no other buildings near enough for the drama to be witnessed by outsiders.

Ferguson stumbled against the doors, then shrank back.

"No!" he cried. "Say, Giff'd, you're not—"

Giffard shoved him out, followed quickly, and prodded him to the low railing.

"It's twenty stories down, Ferguson." He moved nearer to the terrified, groggy man who was retreating from that yawning edge. "That's where you're going, now, you damned—"

Ferguson fainted, or passed out, as Giffard rushed at him. The doorbell rang loudly at the same moment. Giffard halted, swung about, undecided. He had rushed Ferguson in the drinking after the telephone call, vaguely anticipating something like this. At the moment, then, the doctor's call had seemed harmless, as far as the success of Giffard's plan went. This doctor's talk with the drunken Ferguson on the wire would be corroborative evidence later on, if it were needed, Giffard had thought.

It had been his plan to shove the intoxicated man over. An autopsy, if there were one, would show that he had been heavily under the influence of liquor. After the fall, Giffard had intended to drain a stiff quantity of whisky himself, get himself drunk as quickly as possible, and claim that the death had been an accident.

NO ONE could prove otherwise. Similar accidents were frequent in New York. His, Giffard's, responsible position, and the fact that Ferguson had trusted him to run the business, would help to keep the police from becoming suspicious.

Here was a hitch, though. Of course, it might not be the doctor. Possibly just an elevator man with a message. Why not then, go ahead with his plan at once, and pitch the unconscious Ferguson over? But no—that would prove too close a coincidence: a man falling just as a visitor was ringing the doorbell. No matter who the visitor turned out to be, doctor or elevator boy, it would be bad—in either case.

Giffard decided to gamble with time, Ferguson had passed out. He would stay that way for some time, certainly long enough for Giffard to dispose of the caller.

He went in, closing the French doors, and hurried to the table to tilt the bottle for a few generous gulps. This was a necessary detail; he must seem somewhat drunk. The bell rang more insistently and Giffard, trying to appear a little tipsy, at last answered it.

It was a basilisk-eyed man of about forty whom he admitted—a man clad in English tweeds—a squarely built, tight-lipped, sardonic man who said crisply:

"I am Doctor Herbert Ingram. My patient, Arthur Croly Ferguson, is here, I just telephoned."

Although an American, he spoke with a slight Oxford accent, the result of years of living in England.

"Mr. Ferguson has gone, unfortunately," replied Giffard, pretending great self-control to conceal a drunken state.

"Gone? But he said he'd wait for me." Ingram looked around sharply, noting the whisky bottles. "You've been having a few glasses, I take it?"

"Celebrating, yes." Giffard smiled his best, lurched a little. "Arthur's firs' day back—came down t' talk business. We're practic'lly partners—"

"I know." Doctor Ingram cut him short, fidgeted impatiently, and spoke again in his clipped manner: "But—but he must be here. I told him I'd come over and he said he'd wait. If I can't come in I'll get an officer. This man is my patient. I've forbidden him to drink. He's been drinking. As his doctor, I demand that I see him at once."

Giffard saw that he was badly placed. If he refused admittance, Ingram could get a policeman. It would look bad. If Ingram came in, Giffard could say: "The fact of the matter is, Ferguson has passed out. I just didn't want you to see him in such a condition, since it's against your orders. I'm sorry. I didn't know he wasn't supposed to drink."

But Ingram would revive his patient, and Ferguson would tell how he had been forced to drink at the point of a gun! Giffard could deny it, but the gun was in his pocket! He had had no chance to replace it in his desk. His possession of a gun was covered by a permit. As an official in a big firm, he had had no trouble in obtaining that, a long time ago.

There would be a rotten mess. Giffard would be thrown out of the company, if not actually jailed.

Slugging or shooting Doctor Ingram was out of the question. And he could be neither admitted, nor barred out. It was imperative that the murder of Ferguson be carried through. Giffard's original plan would still work perfectly if there were some way of dealing with Ingram—getting him out of the way. Could he send the man off on some pretext? Giffard knew, from the dogged expression on the physician's face, that this was not possible.

THEN he saw a way out—an idea forming dimly, taking shape in his mind as chess moves evolve in the brain of a player. He had determined originally on a simple murder, following out his premise that ordinary "perfect" murders were too well schemed to be successful. Too many details make too many possible slipups. Giffard's plan had been simple, natural—no carefully arranged settings, no selection of psychological moments, no stupid reconnoiterings. Simplicity. He must not abandon that now. He must be casual, natural.

"Y're unnecessarily excited, doct'r—
—your pr-fessional zeal, I s'pose. 'S creditable, but—there's no cause for it. I'm sorry—I'm quite drunk."

"You don't sound drunk."

"Funny thing with me, th' drunker I get th' more elaborate, th' more dignified I get. Lots of people're that way. Come in, by all means."

Doctor Ingram walked in, on his guard.

"I'll confess," said Giffard amiably, "that I misled you. Like mos' people I'm 'fraid of an outraged doc—an' you've cause to be outraged. After all, I've led your patient astray and—"

"He's here, then! Where is he?" Ingram went grimly to the bathroom, the kitchenette, a bedroom, another, and back to the living room.

"He's on the terrace, doctor," Giffard informed him courteously, "Thoroughly drunk. Prob'ly passed out by now."

Ingram banged open the French doors, Giffard imperturbably on his heels. Ferguson lay huddled in a corner of the terrace, reeking of whisky. His doctor stooped over him.

He examined his patient, then rose.

"He'll be all right," the doctor told Giffard. "I'll run down to a drug store for some medicine. If he comes to, tell him not to worry—that I'm here."

Giffard's tenseness relaxed. This was splendid—better that he had desperately hoped.

"Certainly, doctor. I'll do my best to

rouse him while you're gone—only I hope he won't be out of his head if he comes to. He used to be that way."

Ingram left with a reassuring word, and Giffard, lighting a cigarette, stood at the door, listening for the elevator sounds. Presently, opening the door, he made sure that the doctor had gone, and, planting his gun in his desk and turning out the lights again, ducked out to the terrace, where Ferguson still lay, inert.

It was a job, lifting him. Giffard tugged and puffed and swore in muffled gasps. When Ferguson was propped against the wall, half lolling over Giffard's shoulder, the latter peered over and down—and nodded to himself as he saw Doctor Ingram entering the corner drugstore. Then Giffard worked quickly—hauled Ferguson roughly to the rail, balanced him, a great, sagging hulk—pushed, swung the legs up—and let go.

He heard the distant thud, and the screams of people in the street as he raced back into his apartment, snapped on the lights, gulped enough whisky to lay a man out cold, and rushed to the elevators, holding the buzzer in frantically. A car shot up, after several minutes of waiting.

Doctor Ingram stepped out, with two policemen. Without a word, they frisked Giffard, found nothing, snapped handcuffs on his wrists, and took him back into his rooms. There they left him for a minute or two with the physician, and went about the routine business of examining the premises.

Ingram smiled at the prisoner.

"You're going to have a lot to explain, Giffard."

Giffard shrugged.

"Not at all," he retorted confidently. "Ferguson came to, crazy drunk, reeled against the railing, and fell before I could save him. Try and disprove that."

"You poor fool, it wasn't necessary to hurl your victim down twenty stories," said the doctor, as if he had not heard.

"I didn't. I resent your saying that I—"

"Giffard, he couldn't have come to and reeled. Before I left here, Ferguson was dead!"

Giffard turned gray. The physician went on calmly:

"You thought he had passed out. Actually, the man you wanted to kill was dead. I knew he'd be dead as soon as I heard him talk over the phone. I had warned him that one more good souse would kill him. That's why I hurried over here."

Giffard had been pondering. Now, suddenly, he beamed.

"Then I couldn't be guilty of murder, if the man I was supposed to have tossed over was already dead!"

The strange light showed in the doctor's eyes again.

"You're quite right," he smiled evenly. "But do you think I'm going to tell the jury that? No, Giffard, I shall send you to the chair with the simple testimony that this man was alive, but unable to move"—the doctor paused—"gripped with sudden paralysis!"

The Pipeline Juggernaut

By CLIFF HOWE

THE earth seemed to turn inside out, A blue-hot flash lighted the telegraph office of the pipeline pump station. The big windows flew to bits. Rocks, dirt, fragments of steel spouted into the office. Then came the roar of the explosion. It made the solid red soil of Oklahoma shimmy for miles around.

A pretty blonde gave a fellow the air. And the breeze rocked an Oklahoma oilfield where mutiny and mystery rode the torrent of unleashed black gold.

Evans was telegraphing the hourly gauge to the oil despatcher at Tulsa when the blast came. He had just finished sending the total of oil moved by the pump station during the last sixty minutes. He was waiting for the oil despatcher to okay the transmission.

The concussion slammed him against the telegraph table. His shiny nickel "bug" was knocked off the table. The bug, capable of making dots and dashes far faster than they could be made with the prosaic telegraph key, hopped across the floor.

Dazed, Evans hauled himself off the table—the only piece of furniture the telegraph office held, other than a chair. Dust powdered his long frame. Clods and chunks of mortar fell from his baggy clothes. Blood from a cut in his scalp looked like a red cord hanging down his bony face.

He reeled over, picked up his bug and plugged it back into the telegraph circuit. He made sure he heard the sounder tongue click down. No good operator ever went off and left the wire open.

To the door he stumbled. It wouldn't open. The blast had sprung the pump station walls. Evans climbed out the gaping hole where the window had been.

Spud Rainer, the assistant engineer, came racing from the direction of the pump room.

"Tully! Where's Engineer Tully?" he screamed. Spud was short and much too fat. He was puffing, although the run from the pump room was not a hundred feet.

"What about Tully—" Evans began.

Spud pointed with both arms. His voice became a piercing shriek.

"The gate-house! That explosion was in the gate-house! And Tully went in there!"

Evans stared. Horror seized him—it was like oysters sliding down his back.

Thirty yards distant, gory, awful flame climbed into the night. It made a roaring like a whirlwind in a scrub oak thicket. The intense heat from it dried the very moisture out of his eyes.

"Tully went into the gate-house?" he rasped.

"He sure did—to take out the scraper that came through the pipe from the Seminole station!" Spud's fat face was as gray as if it were cellophane stuffed with ashes.

Evans dabbed at the wet cord of crimson wriggling down his bony face. There was nothing they could do for poor Tully. To go nearer that searing, moaning colossus of flame was impossible.

"I can see the body—what's left of it!" Spud said with a sort of mixture of horror and morbid interest. "It'll all be burned up in about a minute!"

Evans turned swiftly and walked behind the pump station. There were things no man cared to see. What was happening in the ruin of the gate-house was one.

A car roared up the near-by road. It stopped with a squeal of asbestos lining on brake drums. A man dived out and ran toward Evans.

It was Roy Glick, the superintendent.

Glick was a solid man with a loud vest and a louder voice. He reminded Evans of a carnival spieler. But Glick had fists that might have been chisled out of fourteen-inch bit steel. He was the stuff they make oil men out of.

"What let loose?" Glick yelled. "What happened? Has somebody got your tongue? Spit it out, damn it! Can't you talk?"

The way he spewed words reminded Evans of a carnival spieler, too. Some day, Evans reflected, he'd like to take his shiny nickel bug and bash Glick between the eyes. Maybe it would shut the man up for a minute.

"Somebody just murdered Engineer Tully," Evans said.

"Murdered! Murdered! Murdered!" Glick might have been spellbinding an audience of a thousand. He always sounded like that. "Where'd you get that idea? What makes you think so? How'd it happen? Who murdered him?"

As if that wasn't enough, fat Spud mopped his ashy face and whined shrilly:

"Ain'tcha goin' off half-cocked, Evans? Tully went out to take the scraper from the pipe. He must've been smokin' a cigarette and touched off some gas."

Evans wiped the crimson off his face again. "No gas lines go into that gate-house. Where would the gas come from?"

"Well, maybe oil leaked out—"

"Don't be a nut, Spud. You could drop a match in a fifty-five thousand barrel tank of crude and not get as violent an explosion as that."

"Well, maybe somebody stored some nitro-glycerine in the gate-house!"

Evans raised his voice. He was impatient. "I went out to the gate-house fifteen minutes ago to listen on the pipe. I wanted to see if I could hear the scraper coming. There was no nitro around!"

Glick clapped his hands like an auctioneer. That was another trick he had.

"Dry up about it being murder!" he shouted. "I don't want to hear such damn stuff talked until we got some proof! Go tell the oil despatcher to shut down the station pumping to us from Seminole. We don't want to lose any more crude than we have to through the broken pipes in that gate-house. Here comes the fire truck from the refinery. We'll soon have this blaze extinguished."

Evans climbed into the telegraph room through the hole that had been the window. He could hear the red fire truck wailing up.

With the bug, Evans called "DS" a couple of times. The oil despatcher answered. Evans gave him the news. The dots and dashes that came from Evans' bug were beautiful. The bug was set so fast the dot strings sounded like the whizz of a grasshopper's wings. But Evans didn't stumble once or make a single combination. His sending was far more expert than the oil despatcher's, whose salary was a hundred dollars a month more than a pump station operator's.

Evans sent a personal message. In five minutes, the answer clicked out of the sounder. It read:

GLICK

EVANS WILL TAKE COMPLETE CHARGE THERE STOP WORK WITH HIM.

It was signed by the "Old Man" himself—the owner of the great pipe-line and refinery corporation.

Evans climbed out through the gutted window once more. The red fire truck had extinguished the burning oil in the gate-house with chemicals.

Evans gave Glick the message from the Old Man.

GLICK read it. He looked like he was going to burst a button off his loud vest. His loud voice bellowed out until stillmen in the refinery half a mile away heard it.

"What the hell is this? You're taking charge here? You—a damned brass-pounder—"

Those looking on saw Evans' shoulders shift a little. They didn't quite catch the movement of his right fist. That was a bit too much for the eye.

Glick seemed to curl up in the air. He flew ten feet like a thrown coat. He rolled fifteen more and made a loud splash in the cooling pond.

Evans knew the fist blow wasn't necessary. But he had been wanting to do it the entire month he'd been here. So he permitted himself the pleasure.

Running forward, Evans offered to help Glick out of the cooling pond. Glick cursed him and refused the aid.

"Who are you, anyhow?" Glick bawled. The punch certainly hadn't hurt his voice.

"My name is Evans—the same as always," Evans told him. "And I'm your new general superintendent. Next to the Old Man, I'm the big muckety-muck of this company. That enough to satisfy you?"

"Damn you! You can't hit me—"

For the second time, those looking on

didn't quite see it happen. But Glick curled in the air again. He didn't roll in the cooling pond this time. An ornamental cottonwood tree stopped him.

"Why can't I?" asked Evans.

Glick felt too sore around the jaw to answer.

"I'll damn well hit any man working for me," Evans added. "Just as I've seen you hit the men working under you."

Evans walked over to the gaping hole where the gate-house had been. Hot metal steamed and sizzled in the ghastly pit.

"You heard me tell Glick—I'm your new boss!" he informed the men gathered there.

He roamed his eyes over the men. They gave him back stare for stare. They looked tough. They had to be tough to stand the pipeline gaff—wading all day up to their hips in basic sediment in storage tanks with gas masks hampering their breathing—or wrestling eight-pound tongs and twelve-hundred pound casing.

"You can probably guess why I came here as plain Evans, the telegraph operator," he told them. "It was because I wanted to trap the gang of rats who have been setting fire to storage tanks of this company, putting sand in the machinery, and other similar stunts that have been costing us in the neighborhood of one million dollars a month."

The listeners swapped covert glances. They had heard all this stuff as rumors. They knew men were quitting the refinery because accidents were happening too often. For an accident in a refinery usually means from one to twenty men killed. But it stirred them to hear a big shot in the company admit the situation was this bad.

The concern couldn't stand many months of losing a million a month. They'd have to sell out to their competitor, who had the refinery on the other side of town.

"In my personal opinion, a certain oil company who wishes to buy us out is hiring this vandalism done!" Evans said bluntly.

Again, the listeners exchanged glances. This guy Evans didn't mince words.

"I'm here to stop it!" said Evans.

The listeners somehow began to get a sneaking idea he would stop it, too.

EVANS let his eyes rove over the men. His eyes were very cold and blue. Looking into them was like looking into the barrels of a couple of six-shooters.

"There was no explosive in that gate-house fifteen minutes before the explosion," he said, as if he wanted everybody to understand clearly. "Either it was put in later, or—"

He paused. He knew how to build up drama that gave his words force.

"The scraper that came through the pipeline was a bomb!" he ended.

"You're wrong there," said a stocky gangman.

"What makes you so sure?"

"The scraper is layin' in the hole. It must've got here after the explosion. It ain't hurt none, except that the temper has been drawn by the heat of the fire."

Evans went over to stare into the hole. The gangman was right. There lay the scraper. The torpedo-like contrivance certainly had gone through no explosion. It was about as it had been inserted in the pipe at the Seminole pump station. The scraper was forced through the miles of casing by the moving oil. Meanwhile, the projecting blades cut from the pipe interior paraffin and other sediment which had hardened there.

Glick had been talking to one side with Spud, the assistant engineer. Now they called Evans.

"Spud just told me something you oughta know," said Glick. He spoke as though there had not just been a fight. But that was the way of pipeline men. They fought. They forgot—sometimes.

"Yeah—I think you oughta know," said Spud, thrusting his cellophane-stuffed-with-ashes face close to Evans. "I overheard poor Engineer Tully talkin' over the phone about two hours ago. He sounded worried. He sounded like he was worried 'most to death!"

"What'd he say?" asked Evans impatiently.

"'Are you gonna kill me?'"

"Who was he talking to? Did he make the call—or was it made to him?"

"He made it. I dunno who to, though."

"Thanks," said Evans.

Evans climbed into the telegraph office once more. He was tall and not at all natty in his baggy clothes. He didn't look like the company's new boss. But that was because he had been trying not to look the part.

He called the girl at the refinery phone switchboard. All calls went through her. She might have listened in. Girls had a habit of doing that.

"Tully called his sweetie," the phone girl informed Evans. "Her name is Bid Liswood. She lives at nine-twenty Crown Street."

Evans hung up, blessing all feminine inquisitiveness.

NINE-TWENTY Crown Street was a nice little brown brick English cottage. It looked like it had been built about a year. The roses Evans's car spotlight picked up in the yard were pretty. Some day he'd get married and blow himself to a layout like this.

He put his foot on the brake.

A bullet came smacking through the window and gashed open his forehead.

It wasn't the first time Evans had been shot at. But it was his closest call. The sharpshooter had allowed for his speed. But Evans had just put on the brakes, or there would have been a neat little tunnel in his skull.

For an instant, Evans felt as if his veins had been opened and ice water pumped in. Then a Luger pistol was out of his armpit holster and guttering blades of flames.

The shot had come from a corner of the nice little brown brick cottage. With his hand which did not hold the Luger, Evans put the car spotlight on the house. He saw nothing but the fistfuls of brick fragments his bullets knocked off the walls.

He got a flashlight out of the car door and ran for the house, hurdling the roses. He rounded to the rear, gun and flash ready.

No one was in sight. He saw an open window. He looked through it, eyes ranging over a bedroom. The bedroom was lighted by a pale dressing table lamp. The frilled doodads lying around and the makeup stuff on the table indicated it was a woman's room—a young woman's.

Evans vaulted in the window. He crossed the bedroom. The house beyond was dark. The air was warm, fragrant with the smell of a woman's perfume. It was very black in there.

He barged in—and stopped with a pistol snout gouging about an inch above his belt buckle.

Simultaneously, yielding flesh stopped the muzzle of his Luger.

Awful, frozen quiet reigned. Evans didn't know whether his gun was touching a vulnerable part. Probably the other gun wielder was puzzled in the same manner.

Evans was no iron man who never got scared. Once more he felt as though his arteries were running ice water.

A woman's voice—it was his opponent—said, "Well—what do we do now?"

"Oh—I'm sorry!" Evans said hastily. He lowered his Luger.

The woman withdrew her gun the slightest fraction. That was what Evans had hoped she would do when he told her he was sorry.

His hand darted. It clapped over her gun, pushed it aside. Her gun whammed out noise and flame. The bullet played havoc among dishes in the darkness. Then Evans got the pistol. He noticed one important point in the fractional second after he seized the weapon and before it discharged.

It was warm! It had been fired in the last few moments. It was the gun which had nearly put a slug through his skull!

He hauled the hissing, kicking woman along the wall until he found a light switch. He flipped it; the room blazed white.

EVANS had a picture in his mind of how this wench would look. Her lips and cheeks would be thin as paper. Her cheek bones would be bulging. With a few scars where good solid oilfield fists had hit in the past. Her eyes would be big

and mean, like magnified snake eyes. That was the way they got after they had knocked around the oil fields awhile.

He was wrong. Just about as wrong as he could be.

She was a sweet, cuddly little thing. She somehow reminded him of Betty Boop in the movie cartoons. Her big brown eyes held tears. Evans felt an insane impulse to take her in his arms and kiss the tears away. She'd probably kick his shins and punch his nose if he tried. She looked nice like that.

"You didn't miss me much, sister," Evans said, and put a finger to the bullet cut on his forehead.

She recoiled. He realized he must look a sight with the blood all over his face.

"I didn't!" she denied.

"Yeah?" he inquired sarcastically.

"I was lying down in the bedroom when I heard a car," she said. "I heard the shot. Then a masked man appeared at my bedroom window. He handed me a gun. He said, 'There's a man coming here to kill you! Use this gun to defend yourself!' Then he ran off."

Evans laughed. His laugh sounded like somebody had broken a beer bottle.

It was about the most improbable story he had ever heard.

"Are you Bid Liswood?" he asked. "Are you Tully's girl-friend?"

"I'm Bid Liswood," she admitted. "But Tully and I are all washed up. We got that way today. I gave him the air."

"Why did you tell Tully you were going to kill him, when he called you tonight?"

She seemed puzzled, shocked, bewildered. Then her little face cleared. She gave a tiny, very forced laugh.

"Why, Tully was trying to get me to renew our engagement," she said. "He tried every persuasion from pleading to threats. He threatened to commit suicide. I told him he had the air, and that was final. He asked me two or three times if I was going to kill him by turning him down. That must be what you mean."

This sounded a little more reasonable. She was the kind of a little girl to whom big, tough pipeliners like Tully would tell foolish things like that.

"Why'd you give Tully the gate?"

"I can't see that that is any of your business!" she said calmly.

Evans proceeded to tell her why it *was* some of his business. He told her who he was. He told her Tully had been murdered—or that it looked like murder. He got hard-boiled and told her she'd better cough up like a good girl, or he'd throw her in the calaboose.

"I guess I'll have to tell you," she said, very near tears. "I found out Tully had been blackmailing the men who are harming your company. He found out who they were. He had been making them pay him money to keep quiet. It must have been they who killed him."

"Who were the men?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know a thing but what I just told you."

EVANS thought this over. He was finding it hard not to believe her story. He didn't want to believe it—or maybe he did. He was getting dizzy. He, tough guy Evans, wanted to take this sweet kid in his arms and kiss that soft little red mouth. He wished she wasn't so damned pretty. He'd better go off and bump his head against something.

He put an arm around her soft waist.

"I guess I can fix this up, honey," he said. He tried to kiss her.

She kicked his shins. She popped a little fist into his eye.

"Hur-r-ump!" he said noisily—to cover his elation.

She *was* nice. An oil field hussy would have tried to vamp him into letting her go.

He felt of the eye she had hit, wriggled the shin she had kicked, and thought deeply. His head was clearer now. He got an idea.

Suddenly he went to the telephone. He called both the town's two airports. At each, he asked the same question.

"Has a plane come in this afternoon or night from the direction of Seminole?"

"Yes," said the attendant at the second airport. "Hoot Smith flew in about sundown. He was alone."

"What kind of a guy is Hoot Smith? Where does he live?"

"Six months ago he got out of Leavenworth. Served two years for running dope by plane. He lives at the Derrick Hotel."

Evans hung up. He went in the bathroom, washed his face. The girl watched him.

"I'll bandage your head," she offered.

He grinned and said, "Okay, kid. It'll be a struggle, but I'll try not to make a pass at you."

She was about through the bandaging before she asked, "Why did you try to paw me a minute ago?"

"It looked like a good idea at the time," he chuckled. Then he added seriously, "Use your head, kid. I had to see what kind you were."

"Are you satisfied?" She put her head to one side, birdlike.

"You can't imagine how satisfied I am!" he grinned. "Well, I'm on my way. It looks like I've got a big night of playing Sherlock Holmes ahead of me. By the way, what's your phone number?"

"You won't need it," she said. "I'm going along."

He knew he should have said, "The hell you are!" or something like that. But her entrancing little face had him all stirred up inside. What he said was, "You're using bad judgment. But I'd like to see what kind of a picture you make in my car."

The picture she made was eminently satisfactory. Before he was half way uptown, he knew darned well he should have left her behind. She was getting him in a state of mind where he didn't give a damn whether his company went out of business or not.

When he went up to Hoot Smith's room in the Derrick Hotel, he got a shock that put him back on the ground.

Hoot Smith had been murdered. He lay on the dirty hotel bed with a big, sharp butcher knife stuck in his heart.

"THIS cinches it," he told the girl in a level, cold voice. "It was as I suspected. The bomb that killed Tully *did* come through the pipeline. Hoot Smith was hired to fly to Seminole and put it in the pipe ahead of the regular scraper. Then the devils who hired Hoot killed him to shut his mouth."

"What are you going to do now?" she wanted to know.

"I don't know, for sure."

"Did you look in that unused pressure gauge in the pump room where Tully always hid his money while he was on duty?" she inquired.

He goggled at her.

"Good night, kid!" he breathed. "Why didn't you say something about that before?"

"I came along so as to show you the place," she squeaked up at him. "There may be something important there. Tully had documentary proof on the men he was blackmailing. He might have hidden it there. I don't think anyone but me knew of it. He told me about it a long time ago—the hiding place back of the gauge, that is."

Evans's speedometer touched seventy going to the pump station.

The crowd had cleared away. The station was dark, except for a bulb glowing in the telegraph room. No one seemed to be around.

Evans and the girl went into the pump room. He tried the lights. They wouldn't work. Probably the battery was cut off from all but the telegraph room circuit. This was the custom when the station was shut down.

Evans used his flashlight. They found the gauge.

It held a small envelope.

"We'll take this in the telegraph room and see what's in it," Evans said.

She stumbled on the way to the telegraph room and he put an arm around her. She didn't kick his shins or poke his eye this time. But maybe that was because he didn't try to kiss her.

The girl went into the telegraph room first. She screamed sharply. She jumped back. She collided with Evans.

Because she was against him, Evans couldn't get his gun out to shoot the man he had suddenly discovered lurking beside the telegraph room door. The fellow was only a black smear in the darkness.

The lurking man banged Evans over the head with a shovel. The shovel glanced off Evans's head and cut deep into his left shoulder. It stunned him.

Before he could recover enough to start fighting, he was bound securely. A cloth that stank of crude oil was tied over his eyes, blindfolding him.

"Throw him on the telegraph table!" said a coarse voice. It was a disguised voice. "Put the dame in the chair."

Evans was flung on the telegraph table. His hands, tied at his back, were bruised and crushed against his nickel-plated bug.

SILENCE followed. Evans could hear the crimson flood from his gashed shoulder dripping off the telegraph table to the floor. Also he could hear men breathing. Their respiration was rapid from exertion and excitement.

"What do we do now, Glick?" asked one of their captors.

"You damned fool!" shrilled another. "Why'd you go an' give my name away? Now we gotta croak 'em. We gotta hand 'em the same dose we gave Tully and Hoot Smith!"

"Shut up!" growled the other man. "Let's look in this envelope!"

Strangely enough—the pair still spoke in their hoarse, disguised voices, although the name of Glick had been voiced plainly.

Paper rattled.

The girl's tones, low and squeakily mouselike, came to Evans.

"Isn't Glick your superintendent?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "Are you hurt?"

"No," she answered. "They have me tied and blindfolded in this chair—"

"Shut up—or I'll cut your throat right here!" roared one of their captors. "That goes for you both!"

Paper crackled in the silence that followed.

"Jeeze!" said one of the men. "It's lucky we found this! It's that note we got tellin' us to set fire to one of the fifty-five-thousand-barrel tanks of crude. It's the note Tully was threatenin' to take to the cops if we didn't pay him plenty!"

The telegraph sounder abruptly set up a metallic clattering.

"Stop that thing!" gritted one man.

"Nix!" said the other. "Don't you know anything about telegraph lines? If you open the key an' stop the noise, it'll make the oil despatcher in Tulsa curious. Let it go. It ain't hurtin' nothin'!"

A man came over and put a pistol muzzle against Evans' throat. At least, it felt like a pistol snout.

"What's that wire sayin'?" he asked. "And if you lie to me, I'll blow your spine in two!"

Evans replied steadily, "It's the oil despatcher in Tulsa receiving some late-run tickets from the operator at Seminole."

The other man seemed to think this over. Evans could smell his breath. There was corn liquor on it.

"That's right," the man snarled at last. "I can read that stuff. I just wanted to see if you would lie to me."

"And that makes us both liars!" Evans reflected silently. "I lied to him and he lied to me."

The telegraph sounder clacked off dashes and whizzed out strings of dots.

"You sure he ain't sendin' over that telegraph wire?" asked one of the captors.

"Naw—can'tcha see he ain't nowhere near the key!" rasped the one who pretended to be able to read the wire.

That alone would have given the man away. He didn't know a telegraph wire from a clothesline. For Evans was lying on top of his bug. The thing hurt his back and his bound hands awfully. But he didn't complain.

Not he! For he had just sent to the oil despatcher at Tulsa some very interesting facts. The oil despatcher knew their predicament. And he should be getting back from the long distance phone he was using, before long.

The two captors were whispering over in a corner.

"I say kill 'em!" Evans heard one insist.

"Naw—we got it fixed," persisted the other.

The rest of what they said was inaudible.

The telegraph sounder started again. It was the oil despatcher at Tulsa.

"SHFF Q WA," he sent, then closed his key.

The cryptic message was in Phillips code, the shorthand of the telegraph profession. Translated, it was, "Sheriff on the way."

Evans hoped the officer wouldn't be long.

He wasn't.

"Get'm up, you eggs!" boomed a voice from the window.

A PISTOL crashed. Another echoed it. Both were inside the telegraph room. The men were fools. They were putting up a fight.

Two shotguns made a deafening *ploom-ploom* of a roar through the window. That would be the sheriff. Oklahoma sheriffs carried shotguns.

One man fell heavily, not voicing a word or cry.

The other man began to moan and shriek the gibberish usually mouthed by men dying violently. But that lasted only about half a minute, and the man drew a couple of gusty death-breaths and expired.

A red-nosed man who wore the star of the sheriff untied Evans.

"I sure burned up the streets after I got that phone call from your oil despatcher in Tulsa—" he said.

Evans hardly heard. He was wondering why the girl had been so silent. Had the devils done something to her? Or had she fainted?

It was neither. She had iron in her sweet, cuddly little form. She had sat through the horror without a bleat. But she was pretty pale.

The two dead men on the floor wore masks. Evans hadn't known that before, not having had a chance to see. The sheriff unmasked them and looked around questioningly. "Know 'em?"

"It's Spud Rainer, assistant engineer here at the station," Evans explained. "The other is a roustabout from the pipeline gang. I can't recall his name at the moment. But he is the same one who tried to convince me no bomb had come through the pipeline from Seminole."

The girl was surprised. "But I thought—"

"You thought you heard one of them called by the name of Glick, the superintendent here," Evans cut in. "You did. But I knew it wasn't Glick. Nobody could imitate Glick's carnival-spieler voice successfully.

"They probably didn't dare kill us—it would raise too much of a stink. Now that they had the papers Tully was holding over them, they would make us think it was Glick. They were trying to blame Glick, just as they tried to blame you for that shot at me."

"You mean they would have turned us loose?" she asked.

"Hard to say. One wanted to do that. The other figured it wouldn't hurt to croak us. They were arguing about that in the corner."

"Ugh!" she said. "I think I want to go home."

Evans hastily said he guessed he'd take her, if she didn't mind.

She didn't.

Phantom Applause

By Ronald Flagg

When a ham actor is broke and stranded in a foreign port—any role looks like a break into Big Time.

SLUMPED over a table outside the Café del Universo, Carl Horst was drinking up his last few pesos. One thin hand shaded his eyes from the Argentine sunlight that seemed to slash at him through the tattered awning over his head. "This damned booze," he was thinking, "is just so much hog wash. It doesn't help a fellow forget—or think his way out of a tough spot."

Should he have another drink? No. Better quit now. He'd need a bit of silver for a flop that night.

Carl reached into his pocket for his wallet. It was gone.

The waiter, observing the gesture, lazily ambled toward the table. With shaking hand Carl reached into another pocket for a cigarette. The waiter slouched back again into the shade.

No money. Not such a disaster in itself, but on top of all the other things—that cablegram from home, and the whole string of dirty breaks that this strange town had handed him! Just one more thing, and just one too much.

Should he make a break after he finished his cigarette and try to lose pursuit down some stifling hot street? Or should he show them an empty pocket and let them do their worst? When he finished his cigarette, he would try and think.

Lost in a blank stupor, he was unaware of the stranger approaching his table until the man eased his tightly-tailored bulk into a chair.

Carl looked up and blinked as at a ghost. The swarthy man across the table smiled and asked, "An American, no? Down on your luck, perhaps?"

"And how!" admitted Carl bitterly.

The stranger leaned forward confidentially. "Could you go another drink before I pay the bill?"

"Whose bill? I don't get you."

"Yours, of course," said the stranger, flashing broad white teeth and an oily smile.

"It's O. K. with me," said Carl, wondering what was back of this. So far as he had been able to discover, this city was loaded with millionaires and beggars, who put a double price on everything and gave away nothing but curses.

When the waiter brought the drinks, Carl said, "Thanks, but why are you doing this?"

Again the ready smile lit the round face of the stranger. "This? Oh, it is nothing, a trifle . . . . You have been long in Buenos Aires?"

"Too damn long, mister."

"Soudi," said the stranger, producing his card. "The name is Soudi, importer."

"Mine's Horst," said Carl. "Glad to know you, Mr. Soudi."

"Thank you. I hope so. And now, Mr. Horst, our gay city has not treated you so good, eh?"

"Rotten."

Mr. Soudi hitched his chair closer. "I have been watching you. I say to myself, 'There is a fellow with the honest face, and in trouble.' I can help, perhaps?"

Carl sighed and shook his head. "Too big an order."

"I am accustom' to handling big orders. It is simple to get along in this world if you know how."

"Oh, yeah?" said Carl wearily.

"Of course. Every man, he want some-t'ing. You find out what he want. You get it for him and that's good business. Now you, my frien'. You want something. What is it?"

"I want to go home," said Carl, staring at his drink.

Mr. Soudi nodded in sympathy. "And you have no money?"

"No money, and not a chance of getting any."

MR. SOUDI regarded the smoke of his cigarete. "Are you sure about that, Mr. Horst?"

"You're damned right, I'm sure."

"Maybe you don't go to the right places," suggested Mr. Soudi.

"I've been thrown out of all the places," said Carl.

"Out of where?"

"Theatres, movie houses, night clubs, dance halls, and some of the lousiest dives this bright city of yours boasts of."

Mr. Soudi chuckled. "And that is where you go looking for money? Why do you pick those places?"

"Because a dirty, lying little booking agent in New York told me that American vaudeville artists clean up in this country."

"So?" said Mr. Soudi with a gleam of interest. "You are an actor? What you act?"

"Oh, a kind of monologue," said Carl. "I guess maybe I'm a ham, but—"

"Go on," urged his companion, "but what?"

"You wouldn't be interested."

"My frien'," continued Soudi, "I *am* interest'. I say I think I can help you. But I have to know what is what, eh?"

"Oh, all right," said Carl. "Here's the dope. I never did stand 'em up back home in the States, and when that booking agent told me the Argentine was a push-over, I thought, 'Here's my one chance.' So I went to my brother and got him to stake me once more. I wanted to show him I could make good. But that isn't all. I figured also I'd go back with money and help him. So I came down here on his dough. But Buenos Aires is no tank town, and it has a line of its own that I don't savvy. The long and short of it is they put the skids under me plenty, and here I am. But what the hell? I've been broke before. That ain't the real story. You see, yesterday I got a cablegram from my brother. He's a wheat farmer in the west. Last week he got all smashed up by a reaper, and—"

Carl choked at that part of the story, and the sympathetic Soudi ordered more drinks.

"Your brother, he is hurt, is it not?" asked Soudi, as the waiter glided away.

Carl downed his drink before answering. "Hurt and hurt bad," he said at last, "and all his wheat is standing in the fields, and there's notes to be met . . . . Do you know what mortgages are?"

Soudi nodded.

"And then there's still payments on the machinery and— Ah, hell, *you* see. Now when he needs me most, it looks like I'm a bum and I can't come through!"

"Oh, now," said Soudi, "I understand it very clear. If I show you how to what-you-call 'come through' with plenty money, what would you do for me?"

"Anything that's on the level," said Carl. "What's your game?"

Soudi laughed. "I tell you what. You come on my house and I show you how to get back home quick. Sail tomorrow—with plenty money."

"Is it on the level?" Carl repeated obstinately.

Soudi placed a soothing hand on his arm. "My dear young frien', it is all in the open daylight and the best people do it."

"Let's go, then," said Carl.

Soudi paid the bill and they left the café together.

"Is your place far from here?" asked Carl. "I'm just a little bit—tired."

"In my business," said Soudi, "we never walk. You and I will take a carriage."

ONCE the carriage had started on its way Carl leaned back to enjoy a moment of luxury—the luxury of feeling that responsibility had been lifted from his tired shoulders and that something was really going to be done for him by a person who knew all the ropes. As the

conveyance rolled on into the more prosperous sections of the city, Carl's brain cleared and his mood of exhausted acceptance of facts changed to one of interest and curiosity.

Soudi, who had observed tactful silence, reopened the conversation. "Look about you now, Mr. Horst," he said. "Do you not think that perhaps Buenos Aires is a beautiful city?"

Carl grinned. "I guess maybe it depends on where you are when you look at it. From a carriage it looks like a different town altogether, but I didn't see this section. Is this where all the swells live?"

Soudi laughed softly. "Not swells. Mostly business men like me. I live here."

The carriage stopped and they dismounted. Soudi led Carl into a house that welcomed them with fragrant coolness. There was a sound of splashing water in the distance.

"First we will go into my office for a little business, and then we will have dinner in the patio, maybe."

The room into which they passed looked more like a library than an office. The only bit of furniture suggesting business was a small safe in one corner. Soudi waved Carl into the depths of a leather armchair and a servant appeared, unbidden, with drinks. Before he left he dropped Venetian blinds over the two windows.

"Now we come to the point," said Mr. Soudi, removing a small package from the safe. "Tomorrow you sail for home. You do me one small favor in New York and I pay you very handsome."

"Shoot," said Carl, "what do I do?"

"You take these for me," said Mr. Soudi, "into the United States." He opened the small package and displayed thirty emeralds that glittered frostily even in that subdued light.

Carl's eyes widened. "Are they real?"

"Real," said Mr. Soudi. "Brazilian emeralds of the first water."

"And you want me to—"

"Yes, exactly."

"Nix," said Carl. "I got trouble enough, and besides, people don't get away with that stuff. The boys at the customs house are smart, and when they find stuff like that—"

Soudi smiled scornfully. "We will not worry about them. They get nasty only when they are suspicious. You will go through the customs with all courtesies, like a senator, for two reasons—first, you have a face so plain and honest that no one suspect you of being—uh—in the importing business. And in the second place I have a way that makes it all easy. Remember, I pay all expense' and take all risk away, and you have no trouble."

Carl's eyes shifted between Soudi's face and the fortune in small green stones that lay by his elbow.

"Well," he said, "what's your idea? But mind, I'm not saying I'll do it."

"Oh, yes, you will do it, my frien'," purred Soudi. "You get big money for little work—and no risk. I make the plaster cast on your arm. It seems like you have broke him, see? Deep in the plaster are the stones. Our man meets you in New York. You go with him. He takes off the cast, and give you one—thousand—dollar!"

For a moment Carl's mind wavered like the tall wheat in his brother's field.

"Well," said Carl, "if I didn't so much need that thousand—"

"Ah, but you do," said Soudi quickly. "Fine. We will go to work. Pour yourself another drink."

CARL complied with that suggestion while Soudi busied himself with collecting the necessary materials. Soon a layer of plaster, half the thickness of an ordinary cast, was on Carl's arm and Soudi was pressing the emeralds into the moist surface. As he carefully covered them up with another layer of plaster, he said, "Tonight you will sleep here very comfortable in spite of your 'broken arm.' My man has gone to get your tickets. Tomorrow I will see you off myself, personally."

Carl finished off several more drinks before bedtime, chiefly to keep from thinking about the events of the day and

those that might follow. As he drifted off to sleep he had a feeling that he was being watched.

When Carl awoke the next morning Soudi's man was in the doorway waiting to escort him to breakfast.

"A beautiful morning, is it not?" said Soudi as they sat down to eat. "A fine day for sailing. Particularly for sailing home to get a lot of money in New York."

After breakfast Soudi accompanied Carl to the ship. As they walked up the gangplank together, Soudi remarked, "I will go and see that accommodations are of the best. And also I want to introduce you to the doctor on this boat. He is a frien' of mine."

Carl wondered what Soudi was trying to imply by that statement.

"Oh, yes," Soudi went on. "He is a good frien' of mine and will take care of your arm if you have any trouble which I am sure you will not."

Perhaps, thought Carl, as they crossed the deck through a crowd of passengers, Soudi is just talking to be overheard—to fix things for me.

They went first to the doctor's stateroom.

"Doctor Ramirez," said Soudi, "I want to present my very good frien', Mr. Horst. He has had the misfortune to break his arm. My own physician has placed it in splints and a cast, as you can see. I doubt if it will trouble him, but if it does I am sure you take good care of him. Perhaps if it hurt tonight, you might give him a little something for to make sleep come?"

Carl studied them both closely as Soudi spoke, trying to determine whether by word or look any secret understanding passed between them. As far as he could judge from the pleasant, open countenance of the doctor, Soudi's speech and Carl were being accepted at face value. But with these South Americans, thought Carl, you never can tell.

Soudi next took Carl to his stateroom. Carl said he was pleased.

"Good. I am glad you like it," said Soudi. "I am sure you will be very comfortable on the voyage. You will find nice friendly people on board, but—" his voice sank to a lower pitch, "you will not be too friendly—in talk to them. You understand?"

"I get you," said Carl. "You mean watch my tongue with everybody? Even the doctor?"

"Oh, yes, yes," said Soudi. "The doctor believes what I tell him. You must say your arm gives you no trouble at all."

"All right," said Carl. "And what happens when I get to New York?"

"Our man will be on the dock," said Soudi. "Just outside the customs gate. I cable him to speak to you first, by name. And he will mention me, so you know he is all right. He will fix up your arm and give you the money. Then you go where you please. And now they are calling, 'All ashore,' so I will say *Adios!* and a pleasant journey."

"Thanks," said Carl, "but you might wish me a pleasant landing as well."

"My dear frien'," said Soudi as he backed out of the door, "I can assure you there is nothing to worry you. Oh, by the way, you remember the café where we met? I found this on the floor. It occurs to me that perhaps it is yours."

With a smile, he tossed Carl's lost wallet into the stateroom and disappeared down the corridor.

THE trip, as it turned out, was anything but pleasant. Carl wished from the start that he had asked Soudi for enough money to radio to his brother. He was constantly haunted by images of his brother lying helpless in the farmhouse, wondering what was happening to the wheat, wondering why Carl did not answer his cablegram.

These thoughts alone would have spoiled the pleasure of Carl's trip. But there were also the actions of some of his fellow-passengers which kept him in an almost constant state of tension and suspicion.

On the first night out he was awakened by a rattling in the lock of his stateroom. His first thought was that some one on the boat knew that he carried a fortune in emeralds on his arm and was trying to get it away from him.

The sweat of terror ceased to pour only after he heard drunken mutterings

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and unsteady footsteps thumping down the corridor away from his room.

Every friendly greeting, every attempt to open conversation with him, placed Carl on his guard. What was back of those seemingly harmless remarks about weather, and South American business, and later on about the best ways to get through the customs without trouble?

Were they all natural shipboard chatter or did some of them conceal sinister meanings? And those questions about the arm—about how he happened to break it and how he felt? At the first words of such pleasantries Carl braced himself for a challenge—an accusation.

He assured the doctor that the arm was doing splendidly, that it gave him no pain or concern. And then he wondered if he had been too emphatic. Perhaps he had aroused the doctor's suspicions? Perhaps Dr. Ramirez was waiting until they got to port?

Twice people bumped into him on the deck. One man was profuse in his apologies, which made Carl fear that this was an opening to more pertinent conversation. The other man was brusque and barely apologetic. His seeming indifference aroused Carl's suspicions. Perhaps that man knew that the collision couldn't be painful.

And again when two men seated near Carl in the smoking room started to discuss the Brazilian emerald trade, Carl rose and left hurriedly.

As soon as he was on deck, he could have kicked himself for his sudden exit. Maybe they had noticed it and were even now wondering why the subject of emeralds had made that silent Mr. Horst leave the room so suddenly.

But the days did pass at last, though each seemed a month in length. The ship was once more in cold northern waters.

Politely refusing offers of aid in making out his customs declaration, Carl carefully penned that document himself. As the ship was being warped into her berth, he sat staring at the paper which rested on his plaster cast. It stated simply that Carl Horst, vaudeville artist returning from professional tour, had "nothing to declare."

THE "ordeal" of the customs which Carl was dreading turned out to be nothing at all. The ship docked in the late afternoon of a day which had been a heavy one for customs inspectors. Whether through weariness or simple lack of suspicion, Carl was quickly passed through without even a search of his satchel.

As he passed through the gate he felt a hand on his arm.

"Hello, Carl," said a strange voice. "Soudi told me you'd be on this boat."

Carl turned and looked at the speaker, a wizened edition of Soudi with a yellowish unhealthy complexion.

"Soudi told you to look for me?" asked Carl.

"Yeah. And he told me to look for this," the man replied, tapping the plaster cast. And then as other passengers approached him, he added, "How's de wing?"

"Feels fine," said Carl. "Where do we go from here?"

"We take a little taxi ride," the man replied. "Come on!"

They boarded a taxi at the dock. Carl did not hear the instructions given the driver, but after a journey of a few blocks the taxi turned into a ferry house.

"Going to Jersey, are we?" asked Carl.

"Yeah."

"Whereabouts in Jersey?"

"Never you mind," said the little man unpleasantly. "Just you do as you're told and you get your five hundred."

"Five hundred!" demanded Carl, unable to keep a note of anxiety out of his voice. "Why, Soudi promised me a thousand."

"Yeah?" said the other indifferently. "If you think you get a grand out of this, buddy, that's just too bad."

"But, listen," said Carl. "It was understood—it was Soudi's idea and I've got to have a thousand. Why, if it wasn't for the thousand I wouldn't have—"

"Shut up," snapped Carl's escort. "You'll get five hundred—and like it." He lowered his voice. "Listen, let me put you straight. You've gotta like it, because I'd just as leave take a plaster cast off a dead arm as a live one. See?"

CARL saw. During the rest of the journey he kept a brooding silence.

It was dusk when the taxi stopped on the edge of the little town that stood on the Jersey meadows. Carl's guide paid the driver and said, "We'll hoof the rest of the way."

They walked a short distance to an apparently empty house at the side of a road leading from the town through the meadows. Carl tried to get his bearings.

"Cut out looking around," said the man at his side. "I'll bring you back this far."

When they reached the house, Carl's guide opened the door with a key. He lit a candle which showed Carl that they were in a dusty room, bare of all furniture except a dilapidated chair and a table.

"All right," said the man. "Let's get goin'. Lay your arm here on the table." He produced a chisel and a small hammer from his pockets.

"Wait a minute," said Carl. "I was told I'd get a thousand dollars. Now you say five hundred. How do I know I'll get even that once you have the emeralds?"

"I told you I'd give it to you," snarled the man, "and I will."

"How do I know you've got it?" countered Carl.

"I suppose you'll want to see the money on the table before I get to work, huh?"

"You're damned right I do," said Carl.

"Suspicious mug, ain't yuh?" grinned the man. "Well, all right, here it is. But if you make a move for it before I tell yuh—"

Carl merely looked at him. His lips remained set in a grim line.

In silence the man commenced to chip the plaster. Half-way through the outer layer he stopped and listened.

"Did you hear something outside?"

"Hear what?" asked Carl.

"A voice."

They listened together. Carl shook his head.

"No, I guess not," said the man, and resumed his chiseling operations. Suddenly his head jerked to attention. "There it is again."

Carl, too, could now hear the sound of a muffled word, and then a whole sentence in a sort of stage whisper, "—cover the front door; I'll take the back."

Carl's companion crushed out the candle flame. A door softly opened and closed, and Carl was alone. He sat for a moment in the silence, then lazily he rose and hurled his chair against the window. Glass crashed and tinkled.

"I hope he was near enough to hear that," said Carl to himself.

He carefully replaced the sling over the battered cast. Stuffing the five hundred dollars into his pocket, he calmly left by the front door—headed for the railroad.

It was a foot-weary but contented Carl who finally sat down in a train.

He sat dreaming and planning, until the train made its first stop. There a telegraph messenger climbed aboard. Carl took a pad of blanks from the boy and commenced composing a telegram to his brother. He chuckled to think how his brother would enjoy the complete story when he could hear it. That story of the one audience that really was "panicked" by Carl's act. Well, that story would have to wait.

Carl contented himself with dispatching the following telegram: "Hold everything. Am bringing home bacon. Finally found way to make my ventriloquism pay big."

Leaving the car, the telegraph boy was startled to hear a voice—seemingly outside the car—say, "—cover the front door; I'll take the back." Then a man laughed. He turned around to see Carl laughing to himself.

The Miniature Coffin

By Jack Archer

A miniature coffin lay in a dead man's hand. Detective Sergeant Patten found he was linked to it in more ways than one. And both ways meant a full-size coffin—for him.

DETECTIVE SERGEANT PATTEN looked down at the body sprawled in the gutter and glanced back at the patrolman who stood by his side.

"Is this the one you plugged?" he asked.

Patrolman O'Brien said: "No, sergeant. The one I hit is over by the alley. It was like this. I was a little late on my

one-thirty ring because of a drunk I had to put to bed. I was just going to pull the box when I saw two guys running down the street. One of them pulled a gat and plugged the other guy. I let a couple fly in the air, but the one with the gun wouldn't stop. In fact, he turned around and sent a slug at me. So, I let him have it. I got him through the neck."

Patten examined the body and grunted. "I don't know this one, O'Brien," he said. "Let's have a look at the other body."

Together both men walked quickly toward the second prone figure a hundred yards away. Patten dropped to one knee and turned the man's head over.

"Good hunting," he told O'Brien. "This is Birdie Hoffman. He's wanted for a couple of things, including murder. May even be a reward on him. If there is, it's yours. Now I wonder what the devil this is."

Patten was uncurling the fingers of the dead man's left hand. They were clenched about a box. A small box it was, probably six inches long and three wide. It was colored an ebony black. He got it loose, stood up and tried to open the cover. His searching fingers could find no opening, no catch.

He muttered a little, held it in the beam of O'Brien's flashlight and saw that the box was sealed with a hard substance. He shoved it in his pocket and turned to greet the medical examiner.

Back in his police car, Patten took out the box and examined it closely. Somehow it reminded him of a tiny casket. It was long, narrow and above all, a funeral black.

He got out a pocket knife and began to peel off the sealing substance. It took him five minutes to do it. He raised the lid of the box and his jaw dropped a notch. He shook his head just a little to be sure his brain wasn't full of cobwebs.

Nestled in a bed of velvet was a human finger. It had been neatly amputated below the knuckle. The finger was immaculately clean and in perfect condition. There was a faint odor emanating from the box and Patten wrinkled his nose as he tried to place it. He touched the finger experimentally. It was cold—and clammy. The finger was embalmed. That was the smell he had detected.

"I'll be damned," he muttered. "Birdie must have bumped the other guy to get this. But what the devil is so important about a finger without the rest of the body it belongs on?"

He started back to headquarters, a perplexed frown on his face. There was little traffic at this early morning hour, but Patten's mind was too occupied to notice a heavy sedan that pulled alongside of him. The big car cut in, forced him to the curb and before he could draw his gun, the door beside him was yanked open and a leering face grimaced at him. Two men were at the door. Both gripped automatics in a businesslike manner and there was death in their cold eyes.

"Come on in," Patten offered. There wasn't anything else to do. Those threatening guns were introduction and recommendation in one. The first man grunted climbed into the tonneau and sat down. He smiled widely as he spotted the black box in Patten's lap.

"Don't make a break for your gat, copper, or I'll drill you sure," he warned.

"Think I'm crazy?" Patten asked. "Go ahead, take what you want and beat it. I'll see you later."

"Think so?" the second man rasped. "How do you know you'll be able to see us later?"

"Because it's not healthy to bump a cop in this man's town, buddy," Patten said glibly. "They burn you for that, but they tear hell out of you first. What do you guys want, anyway?"

"What d'yuh suppose?" the first man grunted. He lifted the black box from Patten's lap, shoved it into his pocket and moved away a little. "You ain't done nuthin', mister," he said, an evident snarl of hatred in his voice, "but because you're a lousy dick, you get this."

So fast did the man's arm travel that Patten had no chance to defend himself. A blackjack caught him squarely on the forehead. There was a crunching sound and awareness faded from Patten's brain on a wave of mocking laughter.

HE came to in a hospital room, the white-painted walls aching his tired eyes. He had a slight concussion of the brain, but nothing serious, the doctors said. Two or three days and he'd be up and around again.

"Two or three days, huh?" Patten murmured in his pillow. "Like hell!"

But it was a day later before he was able to get his pulpy legs to hold his hundred and sixty pounds of body. He was weak in the knees as he climbed into the police car that had been sent for him. He was driven to headquarters and ordered into Captain Bruce's office.

"And you let a man smear you all over the place," Captain Bruce's voice was cutting. "You just sat there and took it while a couple of murderers got away. How come, Patten?"

"Just as my report shows," Patten replied. "They forced me to the curb, stuck a couple of guns under my nose and lifted that damned box. One of them slugged me with a blackjack and—well, here I am."

"Just like that," Bruce said curtly. "Okay, sergeant, get going. You'd better bring in the men that pulled this job. They must have been friends of Birdie's. We checked a few of 'em. You said you didn't recognize the men who slugged you. Well, maybe it'll help to tell you Birdie had been running around with a Frisco gang for the last couple of months. You can pick 'em up some place and see if you recognize the birds that walloped you. Call in if you need help."

"The only help I'll need," Patten said as he arose, "will be a couple of stretchers to bring those guys in on."

The Frisco gang wasn't hard to find, but the men who had kidnaped and slugged him kept out of sight. It took a stool pigeon to give him a line on the three he sought. They were holed up in the Alhambra, a cheap hotel far downtown.

Patten sauntered in the lobby and a score of lounging men rose hurriedly and left. They spotted a dick like a chicken spots a hawk. For half an hour Patten sat idly, making no pretense of reading.

He just stared at the desk. His keen eyes spotted a bellhop walking idly toward the desk at a covert gesture from the clerk. There had been a phone call a minute before and the clerk had paled a little.

The bellhop listened to whispered instructions and started for the staircase. Patten rose and walked swiftly after him. He turned as he reached the stairway and saw the clerk grow chalky. He was on the right trail. The bellhop went up the stairs. The hotel sported no such luxury as an elevator, nor did the rooms have telephones.

Five flights he went with Patten following. Patten made little noise. The boy hurried on, secure in the belief that Patten still sat in the lobby. He reached five eleven and tapped on the door. As it opened a crack, Patten threw himself at it. He shoved the boy aside and went hurtling into the room. His gun was in his hand and the three men inside slowly backed toward the wall, their hands elevated a little.

"Make a break and I'll drill you," Patten warned. Two of the men, he knew. "Nice to see you again," he offered finally.

"What's the big idea?" one demanded. "You gone nuts?"

"Yeah," Patten smiled. "From the crack you gave me on the bean. Just nuts enough to want that little black box back and to know the story connected with it. Who's going to spill it?"

"Aw, hell," the gangster curled his lip. "It's a dick."

"Uh-huh," Patten agreed grimly, "in the flesh, but that's not your fault. It's my mother's—for feeding me lots of cod liver oil and making my skull puncture proof. I wonder if you guys are bullet proof?"

"Aw, lissen." The third man, whom Patten didn't know, was plainly frightened. He was small and whining. His voice quavered a little. "We don't know nuthin'. We got in from Frisco a couple of days ago. We ain't seen you before. Honest, we ain't."

"Do you think I went blind from that crack you gave me?" Patten demanded sarcastically. "You three guys have a

date down at headquarters. Ever hear how we handle guys that attack cops?"

"We ain't done nuthin'," the small crook insisted. His face was gray and his elevated arms shook. "We just blew into town."

"All right," Patten said. "You tie up those other two guys good and tight. Take a walk with me, and I'll see that you get back to Frisco with your hide still on your lousy body. Back out on me, and I'll nail that hide of yours to the door of City Hall."

The small man shivered and looked pleadingly at the two men. They glowered at him. The biggest snarled a warning. "Go on, stoolie," he said. "Spill all you know. It'll be the last time you ever talk."

Working fast, the little crook tied the two others with strips of cloth. Patten went over the knots to see that they were tight. He grunted in satisfaction, grabbed the smaller man by the arm and yanked him out of the room. In his right hand he held his gun ready.

These men might have friends, although he doubted it. They hadn't mingled much with the gangs of this city and were evidently on the prowl for something in which they wanted no competition.

HE hailed a cab after getting no more opposition than surly snarls and muttered curses of the loungers who had returned to the lobby. The two men he had left tied in the room would be free soon. He had to work fast before they got on the trail of the little man who had double-crossed them.

As the taxi toured the heavily trafficked streets at Patten's orders, the detective questioned his prisoner. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Weise—Otto Weise," the little crook answered. He looked up pleadingly at the detective. "You ain't gonna hurt me, are you?"

"Not if you tell papa the whole business. What are you guys doing here, a couple of thousand miles from your own backyard? What's here you want so bad?"

"Honest, mister, I dunno. I drove them guys here from Frisco and they're payin' me twenty bucks a day to keep my trap shut, but I ain't gonna get in no jams with the cops. No, sir! I done a stretch in San Quentin once and I don't ever wanta see them bars again."

"Who did they see while they were here?" Patten went on. His only hope lay in this rat.

"Well, they went up to see a guy some place around 120th Street yesterday. They left me outside in the hall, but I heard 'em talkin' and it was big money. Fifty grand I heard somebody say. I ain't so sure of the number, but I could recognize the joint if you went up there."

"Okay." Patten gave orders to the driver and settled back in his seat for the long ride uptown. He regarded his prisoner quizzically. Somehow this was going along too smoothly. It didn't smack of the work that crooks who dealt in fifty grand deals would let go so easy. He leaned forward and tapped on the window of the cab.

"Stop beside the first traffic cop you see," he ordered.

"You ain't gonna turn me in, are you?" the little crook squealed. "I'll take you to the joint. Honest, I will! I wouldn't fool you, copper."

"I'll say you wouldn't," Patten replied. "Don't worry! I won't send you in yet. I'm going to tell this cop to have those two guys you tied up brought in. I should have done it long ago."

In his mind Patten knew they had been free three minutes after he had vanished from sight. The cab pulled up to a traffic standard and a red-faced cop lumbered across the road towards them. Patten got out, slammed the door after him and took the patrolman aside. He talked in a low voice for a moment, then the two walked back to the cab.

The patrolman held the door open and as he began to slam it shut, he saluted. "I'll have 'em send a radio car down to the dump, sarge. They'll have the two guys waitin' for you at headquarters when you get back. Good luck!"

The cab started out again and Patten was sure he detected a smirk of satisfac-

tion on the face of the little crook. He said nothing and until his prisoner suddenly went into an excited spasm as they passed 120th Street, they were silent.

"That's the joint, mister," Weise said, leaning out of the cab. "I know that doorway. Sure, that's the place—an' say, I can get you into the apartment I was in yesterday, too. The guy on the door'll remember my mug."

"How could he forget it?" Patten grinned. He gave orders for the cab to pull to the curb half a block away. He sat back, drew out a pack of cigarettes and stuck one between his lips. Idly, he contemplated his prisoner.

"You wouldn't kid me, Otto?" he said suddenly.

"Who? Me?" Otto was amazed. "Kid you? Like hell, I would! I know a tough dick when I see one. I don't want to be swabbed all over the floor at headquarters. No, sir! I'll take you in the place if you'll promise to see me outa this mess. I wanta go back to Frisco. I got friends there."

"Okay." Patten glanced at his wrist watch. "I'll see you get away, all right. But not right now. You're worth something to me and I'm going to see you don't slip away."

He dangled a pair of handcuffs in his hand.

"Aw, hell, you ain't gonna put them bracelets on me, are you? I ain't done nuthin'."

Patten grinned. "And you're not going to, either. Come on, now, stick out your mitts like a good guy."

Otto held his hands out sullenly. A look of rage had passed over his face.

Patten cuffed one wrist, snapped the other cuff on his own left arm and dragged his prisoner from the cab. He went up to the driver and solemnly showed him his badge. Then he held out the handcuffed key.

"Drive to headquarters," he said. "Hand the desk sergeant that key and tell him I'll bring in the animal it holds pretty soon. I ain't so sure but this little runt is trying something fancy, and he ain't going to get away if he is."

He handed a five dollar bill to the driver. The cab shot into the traffic and vanished. Slowly the detective began to walk toward the apartment. Otto tried to hurry and every few steps Patten yanked him backward.

THERE was no doorman and the inner door wasn't locked. Otto went in as though he knew the place all right. They ascended carpeted stairs to the third floor. Otto paused a moment in the hallway, deliberating. Finally he pointed a shaking finger toward a further door.

"That's it," he said. "I remember we had to walk down that way."

"Okay, come on." Patten pulled his prisoner along. He stopped in front of the door and listened intently. No sound came from within. There was a glass-doored fire escape a few feet from the apartment door and the detective opened this, stepped out into the iron cage and looked down.

Then he went inside again, shoving Otto about like a sack of meal. He tried the door of the apartment gently and it opened under the pressure of his hands. He shoved it wide and stepped in.

The door slammed shut after him and a gun was shoved into the small of his back. A voice that was growing familiar greeted him.

"Reach, dick."

Patten reached. He turned and grinned pleasantly into the face of the big man he had left tied in the hotel room. When he turned his head forward again, he stared at the second thug.

Otto was laughing hugely, enjoying his little joke. "What a dick!" he roared. "Let me lead him right into our mitts again. And they say these N'Yawk dicks are smart."

It was Otto's turn to yank and the handcuff bit deeply into Patten's wrist. He was pulled into the living room and he eyed the windows a moment. Otto saw him and snickered.

"You ain't gonna jump, wise guy. Not with me hooked on your wrist." He turned to the other two men. From the tone of voice he used now, Patten saw that he was the real leader. And a fine actor he was, too. He had taken the part

of a squealer to lead Patten into a trap better baited and more secure. They could bump him at their leisure in this apartment and no one would hear.

"Guess neither of us are going very far, Otto," he said gently. "We are both hooked up, you and me."

"Yeah," Otto grinned, showing crooked, tobacco-stained teeth. "Listen, flatfoot, you were smart in sending that key to headquarters, but they won't do anything for hours yet. They'll think you're on to something big and they'll let you alone. When they find you, we won't be cuffed together, mister. I dunno if I'll cut off your hand before I croak you or after."

"Just like cutting off a finger, eh?" Patten tried a shot in the dark.

"Huh?" Otto's mouth opened a little. "You know about that?"

"Sure I know about it." Patten smiled.

Otto wasn't getting this. Normally this dick should be either begging for mercy or fighting with his last breath. This dumb cluck didn't even seem worried.

"Get wise," he snarled. "You'll squeal different when we start to hack off these cuffs. You're so tough I guess you won't mind it. Jakie—look in the pantry for a knife. If it ain't too sharp, don't mind. We'll saw his damned hand off."

Jakie, the man who had so far spoken no words at all, hastened to obey. The big gangster stood, back to the windows, and gun in hand. He was grinning evilly.

"Well," Otto gloated, "do you want ether or will you take it straight?"

"You know," Patten nodded his head to emphasize the words, "before I tried anything like that, I'd take a good look out of the window. I think there's an apartment next door and I think it's got windows in it."

"What the hell!" Otto ejaculated. He started for the window, but came to a sudden halt when Patten didn't budge. The bigger man hurried to the window, pulled aside the curtain and gasped.

Directly opposite them and a story higher, two windows faced those in this room. Otto lurched forward, dragging slower Patten along. He glared out and paled. A machine gun, backed by a blue-coated shoulder, was trained directly into the room. He looked down. A score of patrolmen paced the sidewalk, while across the street a riot truck was hoisting a ladder. A man with a sack of tear gas bombs was ready to climb.

"Smart, eh?" Patten grinned. "You didn't think you fooled me, Otto? When I talked to that traffic cop, I told him to tail me and have a riot squad sent up to this block. When I went out on the fire escape, I was just giving them an idea where I was in the building. Well, are you going to be good?"

"Yeah," the big gangster grated, "you're so damned smart, Otto. Thought you fooled this dick and got the whole three of us into this jam. What in hell are we gonna do when—"

Otto's gun blazed once and the big crook sat down heavily. He gripped his stomach, groaned once and rolled over into a squirming heap.

Patten yanked the cuffed wrist of the little crook the moment the gun blazed, but lead traveled faster than his hand. He grabbed the gun, reversed it and slammed the little crook on the head. The third member of the trio came into the room, got the significance of the thing and made a line for the doorway. He flung it open, disregarded Patten's warning and leaped out on the fire escape. Somewhere a gun cracked and the man came hurtling back into the hallway. He sagged down into an inert heap.

"Hell!" said Patten. He hoped Otto would survive long enough to come through. So far a man had been murdered for the sake of a little black box and an embalmed finger. Then the murderer had in turn been killed. A detective had been kidnaped and almost murdered with a blackjack. Now two more men were dead while another hung limply, held only by his handcuffed wrist.

The hall filled with police and Patten quickly unlocked the handcuff that held his wrist with the extra key he had had all the time. He snapped the loose cuff to Otto's bare wrist and handed him to a burly patrolman.

"Take him down and put him to bed," he said. "I'll be in later to tell him a bedtime story."

HE cleared the apartment of men and fell to searching it. Carelessly thrown in a drawer of one bedroom he found the black box. He opened it and swore. The finger was gone!

He went back into the room where the body of the big gangster still lay. He searched the pockets of the man half-heartedly. He drew forth a thick wallet from the inside coat pocket and he sighed weakly as his eyes feasted themselves on a thousand fifty-dollar bills.

Otto hadn't been making up that talk of fifty grand. Somehow, that amputated, useless finger had brought this little Pacific Coast gang fifty grand in cash.

He went back to the black box and brought it into a better light. He yanked out the velvet lining and at the bottom of the box, an unpainted wooden interior, he saw a blob of the same sealing substance that had sealed the box shut when he opened it for the first time.

Clearly imprinted in that hard blob of substance was a well defined fingerprint. Patten examined it closely and saw that a finger had been carefully rolled in the stuff before it had cooled and hardened. He didn't doubt at all but that this print was from the severed finger. But why? The finger had been in the box, after all. Why this print?

Patten knew his fingerprints and he took a small magnifying glass from his pocket. He traced the loops and whorls carefully and classified it within ten minutes. A telephone was on the table and he called headquarters.

"Jimmy," he said when he was connected with the identification rooms. "Take a look-see for a print like I'm going to describe." He gave the classification carefully, heard Jimmy repeat it and then he waited, hanging onto the receiver.

It didn't take long. Modern police departments are efficient in this work. "Nothing doing," Jimmy said. "We've no print like that on file. Want me to call Washington? They have every print ever taken in their files."

"Go ahead," Patten agreed. "I'll wait here and you can give me a ring as soon as you get it. Hurry it up, Jimmy. It's as important as hell."

"Okay," and the fingerprint man waited as Patten gave him the telephone number.

The detective hung up slowly. He lit a cigarette and got up to greet the coroner who came hurriedly into the room. They chatted a moment and Patten gave him brief details of the two killings. The tinkle of the phone interrupted him.

"Gosh," he muttered as he picked up the receiver, "some service."

But it wasn't Jimmy who answered his hello. A voice he had never heard before greeted him. He tensed as it came over the wires. This was a break!

"This Otto?" the stranger asked.

"Yeah," Patten tried to make his voice sound like the little crook's. He failed and he knew it.

"I want Otto himself, not any of you wharf rats," the voice snarled. "Is he there?"

"This is Otto," Patten tried it again.

"Like hell it is!" came the prompt answer. "I'm no fool! Tell Otto to call me as soon as he gets in."

The phone clicked in his ear. "Damn," Patten said.

He got central and put through a tracer. The phone jangled again just as he hung up. This time it was Jimmy at the identification bureau.

"Guess you've gone a little daffy, sarge," he said with a laugh. "Those prints are on file all right, but that's all. They've never been identified. Eight years ago a guy named Lester Arno was bumped off in San Francisco. Stabbed—and on the knife they found a single print. That's it. Are you sure you counted the loops okay?"

"Anybody picked up for the job?" Patten asked, disregarding the last remark.

"Yeah," Jimmy hesitated, evidently consulting some notes. "They arrested a guy named Baker, Limey Baker, they called him—came from London. Limey, it seems, had it in for the guy that was bumped. When they got him, the finger that should have made that print was missing. He proved a doctor had amputated it two weeks before the murder, when it became infected. They had to let him go, even if they were sure he was guilty."

"Did you get a line on what this Limey Baker looks like?" Patten asked.

"Nope. Didn't get that. Have to call Frisco. Want me to buzz 'em?"

"Naw." Patten hung up. The phone jangled again. This time it was the operator.

"That call came from a pay station in the Hotel Elite. I contacted the operator who took it and she told me she heard sounds of some kind of a party going on. I checked that and there are four sections of booths in the hotel. One of them is in a banquet hall."

The Hotel Elite! Patten swore again. Of all the high-hat places, it had to be that dump. They'd pick out a dick as quickly as the desk clerk of any underworld flop house. Nobody, less than the commissioner himself, could conduct an investigation in that hotel.

HE taxied out there and on the way had a brilliant idea. When he wandered into the gaudy lobby, he was whistling softly. He walked by the desk clerks, who happened to be busy. A bellhop directed him to the banquet hall and he sauntered into an elevator. There was a bright-looking bellhop in it and Patten cornered him. A green-back swiftly changed hands. They both got out on the third floor.

Patten found the banquet rooms by the noise coming from it. A partly open door went wider under his shove. A short, tuxedoed man stepped up to him. Patten flashed his badge.

"I'm here to stay," he said swiftly. "Make the slightest break about me being here and I'll smear your name all over every tab in New York as a snitcher."

The man hurried away, his lips grimly sealed. The bellboy slid by Patten, gave him a little nod and in a loud voice he began to page.

"Mr. Umpety-ump," he cried unintelligibly. "Mr. Umpety-ump of San Francisco. Gentleman from San Francisco."

"Here, boy," Patten saw a swarthy man rise from his chair and beckon. "I didn't get the name, but I'm from Frisco. Name's Brown."

But the boy had vanished. The man named Brown looked about astonished, shrugged his shoulders and sat down again.

Patten walked quietly behind the long row of diners until he came to Brown's side. He tapped him on the shoulder.

"The finger," he whispered. "In the next room."

Brown gulped, wiped away little beads of perspiration with his napkin. He rose, hurriedly excused himself and followed Patten's broad back.

The detective led him into an empty room. He closed the door and locked it. Then he sat down. Brown was glowering at him.

"What's the idea?" he said. "Why did you bring me in here?"

"Want to talk to you," Patten answered, "about a little matter of fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thou— Say, are you crazy?"

"Not yet," Patten advised with a grin, "but maybe I will be before long. Ever hear of Otto Weise?"

"Otto? Listen mister whoever-you-are, I don't know any Otto Weise. I don't know anything about fifty thousand dollars. I don't know you and I haven't the slightest idea why I was fool enough to follow you into this room. My name is Arthur Brown. I happen to be a member of that party outside, and an important one, too, if that will give you any uneasiness. I'll—"

Patten opened his hand and showed the gold badge nestled in the palm. "From the cops," he said. "Otto Weise kicked in with all that dope about you. There's a hard, hot chair waiting for you in San Francisco, Limey."

"Limey?" Brown frowned heavily. "I guess you're wrong, officer. I can prove my identity, of course, and I will. Who is this Limey you speak of?"

"He's a rat that knifed a man a few years ago. He left a fingerprint that would nail him proper, but he knew he left it. He was probably scared away before he could wipe the knife clean. That one print could convict, so he got a doctor to cut off the finger which left that print. Smart idea, especially when the doc swore he did it two weeks before the murder.

"I don't suppose the west coast cops caught up with him until the finger had damned near healed and nobody could prove it wasn't cut off before the crime. But that finger was valuable. The surgeon who amputated it knew that, and being crooked enough to perjure himself, blackmail must have come easily to him. Limey was trailed and given the low-down. Fifty thousand dollars or—the chair. That ought to worry you, Limey."

"You're mistaken," Brown insisted, but Patten caught a glimpse of fear in his eyes.

"No, I'm not. I'll tell you why. You paid fifty grand for that finger. Otto Weise knew that the crooked doctor in Frisco had bled you for plenty. You must have forced the doc to send you the finger and he did—by special messenger. That messenger was bumped off by one of Otto's gang. Then Otto blackmailed you.

"You paid him fifty grand in fifty dollar bills today. He gave you a finger, but he didn't give you the right finger. I have that in my pocket now. I even have the black box your doctor friend kept it in so it wouldn't be ravaged by decay. Otto got another finger someplace. He was going to get fifty grand more out of you."

"You," Brown said steadily, "must be mad. First you accuse me of being some one known as Limey. Then you say I murdered a man. Now you're trying to tell me you own a finger of mine. A finger! Well, look, man. I've got ten fingers. What do you think of that?"

Patten looked in dismay as the man stretched out his two hands. There were ten fingers, all right, and Patten saw it with a sinking heart. But around the index finger of the right hand was a plain gold ring.

"I'M almost convinced," he said. "Just take off that gold ring and I'll apologize and make myself scarce. I've heard of peg legs and false arms. Maybe there's such a thing as a false finger."

"Certainly." Brown began to tug at the ring, bringing his hands across his chest as though he experienced difficulty. Patten was watching his hands. Had he noticed Brown's face, he would have been forewarned.

A look of intense fury and hate spread across the now crafty face. Suddenly Brown's right hand darted like a streak of light beneath his coat. It came away gripping a gun. Patten had no chance to go for his own gun.

"Stick 'em up," Brown ordered brusquely. "You're no detective. You're a madman and I'm going to call in some one to take you away from here. Make a single move and I'll shoot."

"Cut it out, Limey," Patten said. "That index finger of yours is a fake. Look at yourself. You're squeezing the trigger with the middle finger. Why don't you use the index one?"

"Damn you," Brown raged. Gone was

his mask of a gentleman. Limey was reborn—a murderous product of London's lowest pits of crime. The gun was centered on Patten and the hand holding it was steady.

"Come out with the black box and that cursed finger," he snarled. "And go mighty easy when you reach for it. Nobody will hear my shots. The orchestra is loud enough to prevent that. Put that box and finger on the table."

Very slowly Patten dropped a hand into his coat pocket. He brought out the sinister black box and laid it gently on the table. Limey stepped a little closer.

"Now move back against the wall," he ordered. "Keep your hands high while I see if this box is empty or not."

He picked up the box and gloated over it.

"This is all I need," he said. "I see what that rat Weise tried to do, now. I've got some one else's finger. Probably a dead man's. Well, I'll burn that along with the one inside this box. No one knows but you and—you'll never talk."

"Maybe that little box is empty," Patten suggested. He felt a cold chill creep over him. Limey was getting ready for the kill. He could escape easily enough through the crowded hotel. Patten was trapped and he knew it.

"What do you mean?" Limey looked up with a new fear in his eyes.

"Maybe I sent the finger to headquarters."

"If you have," Limey hung on each word, "I'll shoot you where you'll suffer for hours. I'll soon know if you're lying."

His left hand was tugging at the top of the box, but Patten knew that it took two hands to open it. Limey placed the box on the table. Still gripping his gun, he tried to manipulate the lid while holding it down with his gun hand.

Patten took a long breath. It was now or never. He made a wild dive to his right, ducked as the gun crashed and hurled himself across the room at the murderer. Limey fired. A slug seared into Patten's shoulder, but he scarcely felt it. His hands closed about the gun and wrenched it free.

Limey pulled himself loose. His hand went up and behind his head. A knife flashed. Patten laughed and came for him. He side-stepped the downward curve of the deadly blade and smashed the killer in the side of the face. Limey staggered sideways and before he could recover, Patten hurled a mighty blow that connected with a dull crack.

Limey's jaw sagged. His eyes glazed over. Patten caught him and threw him into a chair. He walked weakly over to the desk and lifted the phone. . . .

"The guy is a murderer named Limey," he told Captain Bruce at headquarters fifteen minutes later. "He killed a man in Frisco and left the print of his right index finger on the knife handle. He knew the cops found that print so he paid some quack surgeon to amputate the finger and swear he did it days before the kill. When the San Francisco cops caught up with Limey, there was no evidence.

"But the doctor waited until Limey went up in the world and changed his name. Then he blackmailed him. He finally agreed to settle for fifty thousand dollars and sent a messenger with the finger to meet Limey. But Otto Weise was in on it and he had one of his pals kill the messenger.

"Patrolman O'Brien came along too conveniently and killed Otto's man. I found the finger and Otto hijacked it and sent me to the hospital."

"Where you belong now," Bruce broke in. "That's no pin-prick in your shoulder, sergeant."

"Let me finish," Patten puffed on a cigarette. "Otto got the finger, showed it to Limey and collected fifty thousand dollars for it. But that crooked surgeon took an impression of that finger on some sealing wax that he stuck in the bottom of the black box. That was just a precaution so Limey couldn't steal that finger and replace it with another one, as I figure it. All the doc would have to do was check the prints and he'd know. We'll have to thank him for that when he's picked up. That was the one lead I had, and it landed Limey."

Two bookworms turn on a . . . .

Model for Manslaughter

By Paul Chadwick

A QUEER tight smile twitched Hal Archer's lips as he lingered before his mirror. There was an empty feeling in his stomach. But his hands were steady. He finished shaving, spread cold cream over his smooth, good-looking face and combed English pomade into his seal-black hair until every strand lay glossy and flat. A man must look his best when he goes to commit murder.

Downstairs, his elderly cousin, Waldo Kane, sat on the porch of the big seashore house. Kane looked up from a book when Archer approached.

Archer made his voice sound natural as he announced: "I'm going for a drive, Waldo." Then he added, with a trace of mockery: "Hope you have a nice dip over on the island." Archer's tone held the usual contempt for his bookworm cousin.

For Waldo Kane couldn't swim a stroke or drive a car. The elderly man's idea of outdoor sport was to chug around in a wheezy motor-boat or bathe like an old woman in a tepid island lagoon.

Archer smiled as he drove through the single village street. Old Andy Beede, the town constable, was warming himself in the early May sunshine. Beede could never be regarded as an obstacle in a murderer's path. He was slow-moving, flabby; a bookworm, like Archer's cousin.

Archer headed west out of town, made a long detour, then headed east toward the deserted, brush-grown bluff opposite Gull Island. Just before he reached the beach he stopped and listened. The *put-put-put* of his cousin's boat faintly punctuated the lazy wash of the channel swell. Kane was still out of sight, a half-mile away.

Easily as a seal, Hal Archer slipped into the water, swam to the middle of the channel. Even now he wasn't nervous, though the cold water made him shiver.

"Hi, Waldo," he called when the prow of the one-lung boat was twenty feet away. "How about a lift?"

Kane was day-dreaming at the tiller. He lifted his head with its stiff, gray pompadour. Then he swung the boat toward Hal Archer and throttled the single-cylinder motor. "What are you doing here, Hal? There's a current in the chan-

nel. Even if I could swim, I wouldn't—"

Hal Archer, grinning disarmingly, climbed over the boat's low gunwale, dropped onto the floor out of the wind.

Kane stared at him disapprovingly and flung a towel. "You'll get pneumonia, idiot. The only place to bathe this time of the year is over in the shelter of the island."

Chattering under the stinging bite of the sharp May wind, Archer rubbed himself briskly. Exultation filled his brain. All his life he had hated this wealthy, parsimonious cousin; hated him and envied him with the bitterness a full-blooded man feels for an anemic rival in superior position. Archer was Waldo Kane's sole heir. The time had come now to cash in on it.

"Look, Waldo," he said suddenly. "What's that thing in the water? Right there to your left!"

Kane fell for the deadly bait. He rested the tiller a notch, stood up and peered near-sightedly at the surface. It was child's play for Hal Archer to swing him overboard. Kane's frightened scream sounded like the thin cry of a gull.

"Hal, I can't swim. You—know—it!" His words sounded between choking gurgles. His white hand shot up, groping futilely at the air he was never to breath again. Hal Archer lost sight of him as the boat chugged forward.

Archer let the craft move on its course. Easily, lazily, he dived overboard. He reached the shore unseen, dried himself, climbed up to his coupé and dressed. Now, his hands were steady. He lighted a cigarette, inhaled deeply as he started back to Rockport by another, roundabout route. Triumph filled him. In the natural course of events, Waldo's fortune would soon be his.

THAT evening Kane's empty boat was found by a fishing smack far up the coast. The whole town knew Kane couldn't swim, and a half-dozen other smacks put out at once to search.

At nine o'clock, they found his clothed body floating sluggishly off the western edge of Gull Island.

There was no talk of foul play; no suspicion that his death had been anything but an accident. Three people down near the Kane mansion had seen him going off alone.

Old Constable Beede, joining the small group at Stauber's Undertaking Parlor, was the only man even to hint at the possible advisability of an inquest. Looking gravely at Kane, his round old face spun with wrinkles, Beede said:

"You never can tell. Nobody *saw* him go over. Maybe he was bathing on Gull Island alone and got slugged by a tramp."

Corbett, the village physician and county coroner, turned sharply. "Nonsense, Andy! There's no mark on him anywhere. He fell overboard. It's plain as the nose on your face. Any man who can't swim is running a risk when he goes out alone in a small boat."

"Maybe he was drugged," persisted Beede stubbornly. "I was readin' in one of those scientific books on crime the other day—"

"You read too much, Andy!" snapped the doctor.

This brought snickers from those gathered in the funeral parlor. Everybody knew that Constable Beede spent hours with his nose buried in a book when he should have been on his beat, earning his salary.

Unabashed, Beede's mild blue eyes remained stubborn. "You got to take a lot into consideration, Doc, when you're dealing with crime. You got to study a feller's character. Mr. Kane here was a careful sort of man. He couldn't swim any more than I can, but he'd been foolin' around in that boat of his for years. It don't seem likely he'd tumble over."

The doctor snorted. Another laugh went up. "Is that all you've got, Andy, to base your appeal for an inquest on?"

"Ain't suspicion enough, Doc?" Beede asked, earnestly.

The doctor turned to Hal Archer, who stood by unperturbed by Beede's ramblings. "What do you think, Mr. Archer? You're Kane's nearest relative. Do you want an inquest?"

Hal Archer felt Beede's blue eyes on his. The old fool was looking for any

excuse to make a mystery out of Kane's death. If he was thwarted now he might continue to harbor his suspicion of foul play. He might even gossip and start some ugly rumor. The best way to spike it was to pretend to play in with him. Archer knew he had nothing to fear from an inquest.

"I've got a lot of faith in Constable Beede's opinion," he said. "If he says so, I agree that there ought to be an inquest."

That settled it. Solemnly, while some of the town's leading citizens looked on, the inquest was held. But the jury, as Archer had known it would, gave its official verdict of accidental death.

He grinned to himself over Beede's disappointment. The old fellow looked so sheepish that Archer felt sure Beede would let the matter rest right there.

But twelve hours later, while Archer was busy with details of the funeral, Beede's rattly old car came up to the big house. Beede eased himself out, and laboriously climbed the steps.

"I've been thinking," he said cautiously, when they were out of earshot of the servants. "In fact, I sat up most of the night thinking. I've figured it wouldn't be fair to you or your cousin if I didn't go over to Gull Island and look around. I read in one of my scientific books a few days ago—"

Hal Archer broke in impatiently: "What do you want me to do, constable? I'm very busy."

"I know, I know," said the old man meekly. "All I was goin' to suggest was that sometime today we go over to Gull Island and look around. There might be tracks. Maybe we could find some clue." Again Archer felt the old man's blue eyes fixed upon him. He felt annoyed, and vaguely uneasy. Again it flashed through his mind that he didn't want the fool constable spreading gossip, airing his stubborn belief that Waldo Kane might have been murdered. Better to get it out of Beede's system now, Archer thought. And, anyway, there was nothing on Gull Island for the constable to find.

"All right," Archer said. "I'll meet you down at the dock this afternoon."

The constable shook his head, looking sheepish. "Not down at the town dock, Mr. Archer. People are laughing at me now. They think I'm an old fool imagin' things. I don't want to make it any harder for myself than I have to. No need to let anybody else know we're goin', or what for."

Beede had a little dory with an outboard motor. He picked up Archer at a point just around a bend in the shore. They landed on the island about three o'clock. And Hal Archer realized, for the first time, just how hepped up Constable Beede was on the subject of modern crime detection. Beede had brought a box of homemade criminological apparatus. And with this, he poked around the island until the sun went down—and Archer's patience was exhausted.

"I've got to get back," said Archer curtly.

"Sure. Sorry I kept you so long, son." Beede's voice was contrite.

The motor wouldn't start at once. It was nearly dark when they got it going. Beede seemed crestfallen. He was silent as they began the trip back to town. Then he said glumly:

"I guess I do seem like a damned old fool. But I've been holding something out on all of you. When I asked Doc for an inquest I had what I thought was a pretty good clue. I still think I can fix it to catch the killer. But I wanted to get something else that would back it up."

Hal Archer was suddenly tense. Maybe the old bird wasn't as stupid as he looked. "You've got a clue, eh?" he asked, with forced nonchalance. "You really think my cousin was murdered?"

"Yep," said Beede. "That's what I figger. Listen, son, Mr. Kane wasn't alone out here. And I'll tell you how I know. I found a towel in that boat. I got it in my desk drawer now. And that towel had been used by somebody besides Mr. Kane. There's a sweet smell on it—like perfume or hair-oil or somethin'. Now, Mr. Kane didn't bother with none of them things. Nope, somebody else used that towel. Mr. Kane had a passenger in his boat. If we can find that passenger—we'll have the killer."

THERE was something deadly in Beede's mild voice. Hal Archer's pulses hammered. He recalled the brisk toweling he had given himself in Waldo's boat, and inwardly cursed his carelessness.

"But even if there was a towel with scent on it," he said, casually, "how would that identify this alleged passenger?"

Beede chuckled. "Science, son! I keep up with the times by readin'. I ain't any chemist myself, but I've got that towel right in my desk drawer. I'm going to send it to a chap I know in the city. He'll tell me what's on it. Then we'll look for the feller who uses that stuff."

It seemed to Ken Archer that he had ice-water in his veins instead of blood. That expensive English pomade he used—there probably wasn't another person in Rockport who had it. This old fool constable had stumbled on the one thing that spelled danger.

Hal Archer's startled mind raced feverishly, seeking some safe means of escape. His thoughts clutched at an item of conversation he had heard. He remembered it now. It was at the inquest. Beede had mentioned that he couldn't swim. With a vicious snarl, Archer leaped. No fancy stuff, this time. No trying to bait his victim.

He merely stooped, heaved up on Beede's hundred and eighty pounds. It was no easy job, but Archer was an athlete.

Beede gave a surprised gasp and clawed wildly at his attacker. But he had lost his balance and went overboard like a sack of grain. A moment later the darkness had swallowed him. One despairing, gurgling scream trailed after the boat to remind Hal Archer that he was a murderer a second time.

But now he wasn't so cool. It was one thing to plan a murder and execute it neatly. It was quite another to have the necessity of murder forced upon you. And what Beede had said about the towel filled Archer with unholy dread. Beede was disposed of, but the towel with its damning evidence was still there. Supposing some detective from outside found it in Beede's effects?

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As Hal Archer beached the boat cautiously on a deserted bit of shore, he felt trapped. Except for the towel in Beede's desk, he could be reasonably sure of getting away with both murders. But the thought of that square of cloth with his hair scent on it filled him with horror. Behind it he saw the grim outline of the electric chair. He had to get that towel—destroy it.

He stole into the shadows at the edge of town. When he reached the rear of the store which housed Beede's office, he was trembling and dewed with sweat. But his hands groped purposefully for a rear window. With his jackknife, he began scraping the putty loose around a pane. It was a long and nerve-wracking process. Each instant his terror increased. He must get that towel before Beede's death was discovered.

The pane loosened, finally. He unlocked the window, vaulted over the sill. Passing a dusty counter, he crossed to Beede's old desk and fumbled frantically through the drawers. When his fingers encountered soft cloth—he sobbed with relief. He held the towel to the dim light from the front window, made out the initials W. K.

But at that moment, the voice of old Andy Beede came out of the shadows behind the counter. "Don't move, son. We don't want another killin'. I've got you covered good."

In spite of the warning, sheer panic sent energy into Hal Archer's legs. To him, Beede's voice was the voice of a ghost. He dived for the big front window. He heard the boom of the gun, felt the hot slug in his thigh that spun him around. He staggered, fell, cursing and crying.

A flashlight sprayed on Archer's face. The man with Beede, Doctor Corbett, leaned over Archer. But it was Beede, his clothes still damp, his teeth chattering, who spoke.

"I had to hurry, son," he said, "to get here in time to meet you. And I nearly froze behind that counter waitin'."

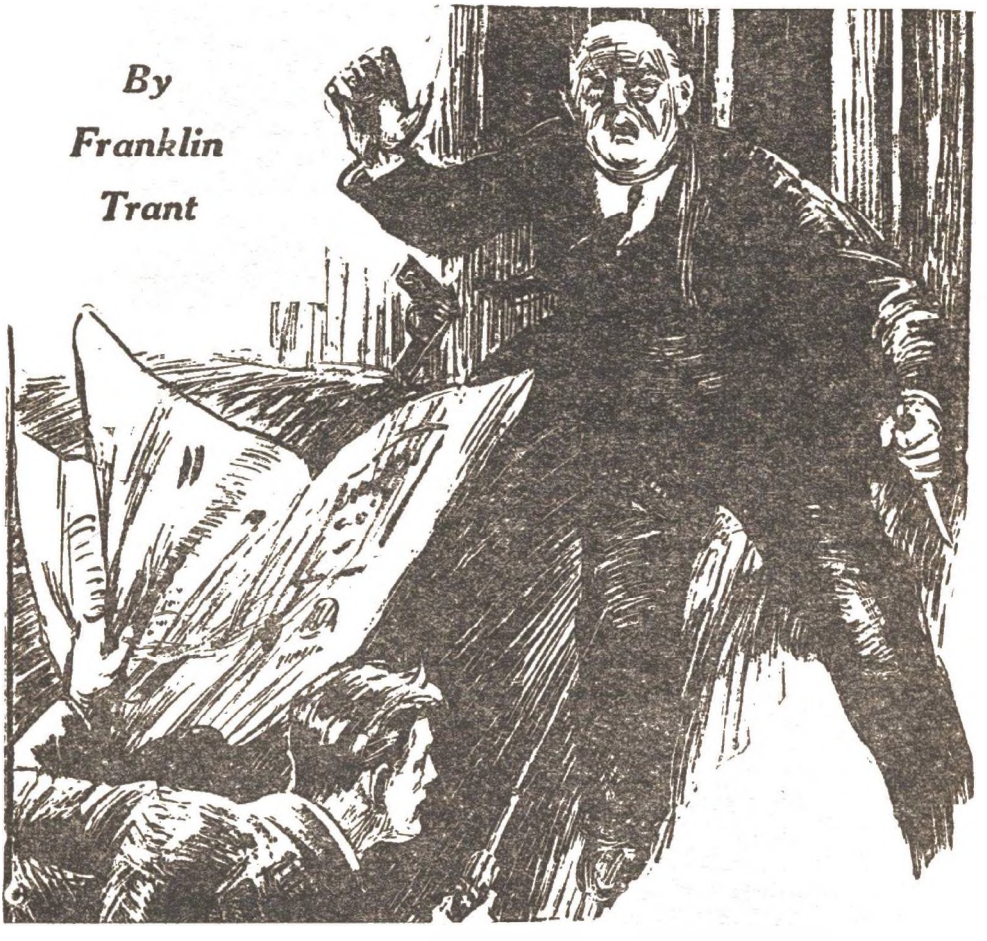
"But you can't swim!" Archer blurted. "You—you—"

"That was bait I threw out. Bait that you grabbed at like a young flounder. I've swum ever since I was a kid. I ain't afraid of the water. It was all bait, son—except for the findin' of the towel. I knew the towel wasn't enough to convict you. I had to have somethin' sure, somethin' conclusive. And you comin' here to steal the evidence is just what I needed. You've branded yourself guilty, son. You can't squirm out. Might as well confess."

Beede, staring at Archer with his mild blue eyes, added softly: "There's two kinds of science that the books tell of for dealin' with criminals. There's the physical kind that would have showed the sort of scent on that towel. And there's what the books call criminal psychology. Crimes go in patterns like. When a man commits a murder and thinks he's got away with it, he's likely to use that as a model and try the same stunt again, providin' the circumstances are right. I made the circumstances right, son, just to see if you'd push me over. You did—and it came out perfect."

Scientific Suicide

By Franklin Trant



Detective Carson set a trap for an uncanny criminal—and in ten horror-shot minutes learned how ghastly death could be.

STRANGELY, the heavy door yielded easily to his touch. Detective Crom Carson pushed it wide open and listened. No sound came from the inky blackness of the apartment.

One minute, two, he waited. Somewhere, now, a clock was ticking, and the rhythmic beats synchronized with his thudding heart. He heard the clock tick off the seconds—ten—eleven—twelve. Creeping like a cat, he crossed the threshold into the impenetrable dark. One hand gripped his automatic; his other hand groped for the light-switch. He felt the button, and at his touch the electrics flared in a brilliant glare.

The room was empty. Maitland was away.

Crom sighed with relief. So far—good. He had hardly dared hope for this luck. He had only to wait here until Maitland returned and then catch him. Before

morning, probably, he'd have Maitland behind bars.

He walked toward the center of the room. Furnishings of rococo ornateness crowded it: a carved teakwood chair, Ming pottery, a bust by De Buzo, on the wall a life-sized painting of a man.

Suddenly the scarcely audible creak of a turning hinge startled him. Crom wheeled; gun ready. His gaze fixed on the door through which he had entered.

The door was closing slowly, propelled by an unseen hand.

In a bound, he leaped toward it. Too late. The mahogany slid silently into place, and there came a faint click. Crom tried the knob. Locked. He ran toward the other egress. That door, too, was fastened. Trapped!

With deepening dismay, he turned to face the unknown menace that he knew now awaited him. Tense stillness, broken only by his own stertorous breathing, pervaded the room.

He'd begged Cap Jackson for this chance—to bag "Diamond" Maitland alone. And Jackson, reluctant at first to give such a ticklish job to a new man, had finally consented. Maitland had laid a cunning trap, and he'd blundered into it. Might have known better—

Crom paced the floor, his young face wrinkled in thought. Two doors, both locked. He inspected the room minutely; no other way out. He might batter through one of them and get away. No! He had come for Maitland, and he would get Maitland. His chin set in determination.

"Listen!"

Crom jumped. The voice, biting, cruel, chilled his marrow. He whirled to face the apparent direction from which it had come, and he saw a man, a young man, well set up, looking straight at him. Instinctively his finger tightened on the trigger of his gun. Then he almost dropped the weapon. The man was his own reflection in a large wall mirror. Crom pulled himself together.

From behind the mirror the voice continued:

"You have come here uninvited, evidently seeking information of the jewel robberies of which I am suspected. No uninvited guest has ever crossed my threshold and lived. Probably you belong to the police, and policemen are especially repugnant to me. They hamper me in my work."

The speaker paused, and resumed suavely, suggestively, "Shall we call it the third murder?"

For an instant, Crom's red blood froze in his veins. Then his pounding pulses calmed and his brain cleared, became cold as ice.

"If you like," he said. "You have killed other men, then?"

"Perhaps," the other fenced.

CROM looked at the large painting, and something in the fixed, sardonic expression of the face told him that this was Maitland himself, the demon that he had to fear. At least, he knew what the man looked like.

The heavy aura of impending death hung over the apartment.

The lights! If he could extinguish them—

Before he had taken three strides, the voice spoke again:

"Stop! The lights remain on."

Ignoring the uncanny divination of his thoughts, Crom flipped the switch. The incandescents did not even flicker.

A mocking laugh sounded.

"I have certain devices here for my protection. Since you will never leave this room alive, I can tell you what they are. The lights, for instance, have double wiring, and the doors close by pushing a button. But this mirror—ah—it is wonderful. From my side I can look through and see the entire room, plainly. But from your side it seems an ordinary mirror. Just a little invention of my own—one of the precautions that my scientific mind deems necessary to preserve my liberty."

Crom faced the glass. "Maitland, you can't get away with this. The men at

headquarters know that I am here. If I do not return—"

Maitland caught him up: "Naturally, they will come here. Of course. I will say that I never saw you. Your body will not be found. In order to prove the crime of murder, the body must be produced. *Corpus delicti* I believe the legal gentlemen call it. Checkmate! What next?"

Crom did not answer him. How or when the struggle would come he had no means of knowing. Perhaps a shot; perhaps gas. Involuntarily he looked toward the ceiling.

A hole marred the fresco, and from the hole a short pipe protruded!

He moved farther away. Detective Crom Carson, unafraid of facing danger, was helpless in the lap of fate. He could do nothing but await the next move of his mysterious antagonist.

Calmly he crossed the room. The evening paper lay on the table, and he bent over it. He picked it up, taking it with him to the teakwood chair, and, as his tense body sank into the cushions, he spread the paper before him. It shielded his face but not his vision. Through the small hole that he had punched through the sheet when he picked it up, he could see most of the room.

He had not long to wait. The side door moved open a few inches, hesitated, and opened wider. As the aperture widened, a man peered in.

CROM gasped. He had seen monstrosities in human form, but this man was unlike anything human save that he had arms and legs and a body. His chalk-white face was distorted with a fantastic leer. His head, too big and misproportioned for a normal man, was superimposed on a body so squat and muscular that it might have belonged to a gorilla.

Cautiously the man entered, and the door closed noiselessly behind him as he sidled through. He moved with quick, sharp movements, as a snake wiggles its form preparing to strike.

The brute's right hand gripped an automatic; more terrifying, his left hand closed over the hilt of an ugly knife.

Through his peephole, Crom watched the automatic rise toward his head, and for a chilling instant he gazed down its dark muzzle.

Quick as light, the detective ducked his body, bending almost double, while his arms remained upward, holding the paper in almost the same position that it had been before.

Just in time! The fiend's gun roared, and the bullet whizzed through the paper.

Twice Crom's automatic spoke, and, when the acrid smoke had cleared away, a man no longer human, and perhaps never possessed of human attributes, lay stretched on the rug.

Crom bent over the grotesque form. Dead. Dark blood from the wounds in his breast welled over the exquisite Sarouk rug that had cushioned his fall.

The door! Crom rushed for the door through which the man had entered, but it had closed. He tried the knob. Locked. He might have known that Maitland's diabolical cunning would have seen to that.

Crom looked expectantly toward the mirror. Surely this chapter in the unfolding chain of astounding events deserved special mention from that quarter. But the mirror gave forth only his own image, and no word came from behind its adamantine glaze.

Might Maitland and the dead man be one and the same? If so, the menace no longer existed, and his only problem was to free himself from the locked room.

Carefully he examined the edges of the glass where it was fastened to the wall. Cemented firmly, it appeared to be set permanently in place. No way out there, unless he smashed it.

Suddenly the voice boomed again, so close that it seemed to be speaking in his ear. Crom jumped back.

"Remember, the third murder!"

The cold glass showed only his own pale face as if he himself had been the speaker.

The third murder? In a frenzy, Crom stepped back and raised his gun. One shot would shatter the glass, perhaps reveal Maitland.

A peculiarly sweet, overpowering odor stole into his nostrils. Too late, he remembered the pipe in the ceiling.

His arms felt like lead, and every nerve quieted with lulling lethargy. Again he feebly tried to raise the gun, but the gas, seeping into his senses, overwhelmed him. Down, down he slumped into oblivion.

WHEN Crom opened his eyes again, his languid glance wandered over the room. What was this place? Where was he? He tried to recollect, but his numbed senses failed him. Pleasanter to sleep—

Some one was prodding his arm. "Wake up."

A bottle was forced between his teeth, and he tasted the burning stimulus of raw whiskey. Gradually his mind cleared, and he looked about him.

Was he dreaming? It couldn't be real —that thing. Ten feet away a man sat slumped in the teakwood chair. The man's eyes, veiled with the film of death, looked straight into his. The face, ashy white, and the head twice too big for its body. The lifeless hand clutched a revolver, an automatic.

Recollection came to Crom with a rush. The mysterious attacker that he had shot! He remembered everything now, and with remembrance he felt the paralysis of fear, but he managed to fight it off. In an instant, he was alive again.

He tried to rise from the chair in which he sat, but sturdy ropes bound him with a firm hold. Pinioned and helpless, he waited for what was to come next.

"You are with us again, I see."

With a thrill, Crom recognized the voice of the mirror; but now the owner of it was in the room with him. The man, who had been standing behind, came forward, and Crom saw him for the first time.

His sharp eyes took in every detail of the man. He had the face of a scholar; the lofty, bulging forehead crowned regular features. Almost handsome, except for his eyes, which were closely set. They were small, bright eyes, and in them was a peculiar burning glint. In the brightly lighted room the man's complexion seemed a trifle sallow. The suit that covered his thin body was of expensive cut and fitted perfectly.

"I'm Maitland." The shrewd eyes appraised Crom.

Crom knew as much. He jerked his head toward the picture.

"Your portrait flatters you, Maitland."

The equanimity of Maitland's face was not disturbed by the dubious compliment. He smiled slightly.

"Perhaps. That is neither here nor there. There are more important matters to consider. You are of the police, and the police and I are natural enemies. You probably know that I am suspected of certain jewel robberies that have recently taken place, and that is why you have come here. Right?"

"Right," said Crom.

"This will be the third—"

Crom interrupted, "The third murder, Maitland? You have said that before."

"Precisely."

Maitland joined the tips of his fingers, and his face composed in thought. He resumed:

"Your death, however, will be different. In dying, you will be comforted by the thought that you have contributed to science. I will explain partly by action."

As he listened, Crom's muscles were straining under the bonds, but the cords held him relentlessly. He watched Maitland approach the dead man.

Mainland turned. "Allow me to introduce Barney. You met him before this evening and exchanged compliments. As a result, poor Barney will not be with us again, but he, though dead, will have eternal revenge upon his killer."

Crom was in a cold sweat. Was the man mad? He hung on Maitland's words.

"Barney was my valued assistant. For years he has helped me. He will help me now, and your blood will not be on my hands." Maitland laughed callously. "Too much blood on my hands already; sometimes I have difficulty in sleeping nights."

Maitland coolly raised the dead man's hand—the hand clutching the gun—and laid it on the chair arm. He adjusted the weapon so that it pointed directly at Crom. Stooping, he sighted along the short barrel.

"Right at the heart," he said. He wiped his hands with his handkerchief, and smiled. "Now—we shall see. The term *rigor mortis* doubtless means nothing to you. However, it is a scientific fact that shortly after death the tendons of the muscles shorten, draw together, as it were. Barney has not been long with Satan, though the time may, to you, have seemed interminable. Am I not right?"

Crom shivered. Maitland's voice droned on, "In a few minutes, Barney's dead fingers will begin to draw together as *rigor mortis* sets in. The pressure on the trigger of the automatic that he holds will increase. Soon, without warning, the gun will be discharged."

Maitland paused dramatically. "The gun points toward your heart. You killed Barney. And by doing so, you will bring around your own death. You might even term it suicide. Scientific knowledge is a great thing, my friend."

THE full import of Maitland's machinations dawned on Crom. For minutes that would crawl like leaden hours he must sit waiting, staring at the unseeing eyes until the hand, flexing in the throes of afterdeath, hurtled lead into his body. No use to cry out; the house was too isolated.

Maitland was regarding him. He saw the man cross to the radio and pull a button.

"In your last hours—no, more exactly, minutes—you may wish to listen to the police broadcasts. This is a short wave set, attuned to them. It may serve to distract your mind from the depressing business so close at hand. Meanwhile, I shall be waiting."

Faint hope stirred in Crom. He might move the chair out of range. He pushed his feet hard on the floor, but the chair did not budge.

Once more the uncanny prescience of Maitland asserted itself.

"Of course I took the precaution to fasten the chair to the floor; it cannot be moved."

Crom strained against the hempen bonds until the fibers creased his raw flesh. If he could get out of line of that threatening muzzle—the bonds gave not an inch.

Panic seized him. Away from those dead eyes, then. He could easily close his own, but the dead man's countenance, like a supernatural magnet, held his gaze, and the enormous head with its ghastly face filled his vision and could not be erased.

Abruptly the radio blared forth.

"All squad cars attention! We now have the exact description of the man who held up the Traub jewelry store this afternoon. Note carefully: about five feet four, squat, muscular body. Distinguishing feature, an abnormally large head. Complexion, ashy white. He is believed to have an accomplice who waited for him in a large car. Traub offers a reward of five thousand dollars for either man, dead or alive."

Crom's glance, momentarily distracted, fixed again on the dead man in the chair.

Maitland laughed harshly. "Yes, they are speaking of Barney. Too bad you can't collect!"

Crom did not appear to hear him. His head lay on his chest in an attitude of utter dejection.

Maitland rasped: "Lost your nerve, eh? Oh, well," he shrugged.

CROM had not lost his nerve. Suddenly he had discovered that with his teeth he could reach the rope that bound his arms and shoulders. His keen incisors clamped down. One strand gave way. Another. He glanced upward, and the hope in his heart smothered at sight of that malignant face watching him, gun ready in a lifeless hand.

How long? If what Maitland said was true, and it sounded plausible, any minute, any second—

He bent his head again, but the rope eluded him, and sudden fear shot to his heart. There! He found it, and another

strand snapped. He strained against the rope, but it did not weaken.

Maitland was reading a newspaper, paying no attention to him.

Silently he worked his strong jaws, champing on the rope, and one by one the infinitesimal strands that held him were giving away.

Once Maitland spoke without looking up. "Soon, now. Barney has been dead eight minutes."

Crom could feel the rope weakening. His heart throbbed with wild elation. One fiber broke of its own tension. Another.

In spite of himself, he looked again at Barney. One of the dead man's eyes was partially closed, and the sight flooded him with quick terror. *Rigor mortis?* Was it coming now?

The dead hand held steady, and behind the threatening muzzle, Crom imagined that the finger was tightening. He could almost see it tightening—

Frantically he bit at the rope. Any moment Maitland might look up and discover him. But curiously, Maitland did not look up, and Crom was watched only by an eye that would never see.

The rope started to give. Not ceasing in his work, he began to move his numbed muscles so that they would be ready to respond to instant action.

Only a few filaments between him and freedom. Crom's brain danced.

He took a deep breath, and all the power in his body flowed into a forward jerk. The rope twanged like a bowstring.

Snap! He was free!

He bounded from the chair, only to face the wicked gun that Maitland held on him. So absorbed had he been that he had not noticed that Maitland had witnessed his escape and was ready.

Crom danced sideways, but the gun followed him. He paused for a split second to gather himself together. The spring in his legs relaxed, tightened. In a flash he catapulted through the air, straight at Maitland.

The gun thundered so close to his ear that the fire burned him. He heard the tinkle of glass as the overhead light was shot out. Darkness, instant and terrible. Mad mêlée of thrashing bodies. He felt Maitland's agile form squirming in his grasp, but it eluded a firm hold.

MAITLAND still had the gun. Crom tried to hold his arms, to reach the gun, but they evaded him. Blows hammered on his head and body. Weakened as he was from the narcotic and the strain, he clung desperately to his adversary. Crom's breath was coming shorter, in gasping pants.

He marshaled all of his strength for one last effort. His right fist drew back, poised, shot blindly into black space. Given luck, he might hit Maitland.

He felt his muscles crack against solid flesh. Heard the thud of a body as it struck some piece of furniture. A low moan. Too spent to follow up his advantage, Crom slumped in a heap. Tense quiet pervaded the room.

Where was Maitland? Was he getting ready for a new attack? Crom strained his eyes into the impenetrable darkness but he could see nothing. Somewhere, Maitland was waiting—

The suspense was unbearable. Crom raised himself.

A faint rustle from the center of the room. The noise was not repeated, but he fixed the direction of the sound.

Cautiously, not to make a noise, he raised himself. Without hesitating, he flung his body toward the spot from which the sound had come.

Suddenly the thundering roar of guns filled the air with hellfire. Flashes of blue-yellow light bit into the dark. The room became a black inferno filled with flame.

Bullets whizzed by him. He dodged, cringed, drew back. If only he had a gun—

The deafening noise stopped abruptly, and the room settled to pregnant quiet. The smell of gunpowder wafted to his dazed senses, filling the air, choking him with acrid fumes.

Where was Maitland?

Thump! Thump! Crash!

Some one was pounding furiously at the outer door.

For one uncertain moment he did not know whether it was friend or foe. Then he heard his name called.

"Crom!"

The police! Unmindful of personal danger from Maitland, he shouted.

"Be careful, boys. There's a dangerous man here and he has a gun!"

His words were drowned in a splintering crash as the door fell inward. Three men plunged into the room, and from the faint light in the hall Crom recognized Detectives Thomas, Olson, and Adams. Thomas had an axe.

"That you, Crom? You didn't come back, so Cap Jackson sent us after you."

"It's me, all right. Watch out! Maitland's here," Crom added sharply.

In concerted understanding, every man listened. Not a sound.

Crom remembered the flashlight that he had not dared to use before. He pulled it from his pocket, and touched the switch.

The sight that the beam revealed made him recoil in mute horror. One of the detectives started to speak, but the words trailed to a gasp.

Maitland, blood-spattered, was slumped in the chair that Crom had so recently vacated. Crom's blow had sent him sprawling there, and the thundering gun had done the rest. Blood flowed from many wounds. The man, target of a murderous fusillade, was stone dead.

Sickened, Crom pointed the light to where Barney sat. The lifeless fingers were still clutching the automatic. It was pointed toward Maitland, as it had pointed toward Crom when he had sat, a prisoner, in that same teakwood chair.

Crom shuddered. Unsteadily, he walked toward Barney and touched the gun. The metal was hot.

Barney's fingers, in *rigor mortis*, had pulled and held the trigger until the magazine of the automatic had emptied.

"That's all, boys," said Crom. "Maitland's done for."

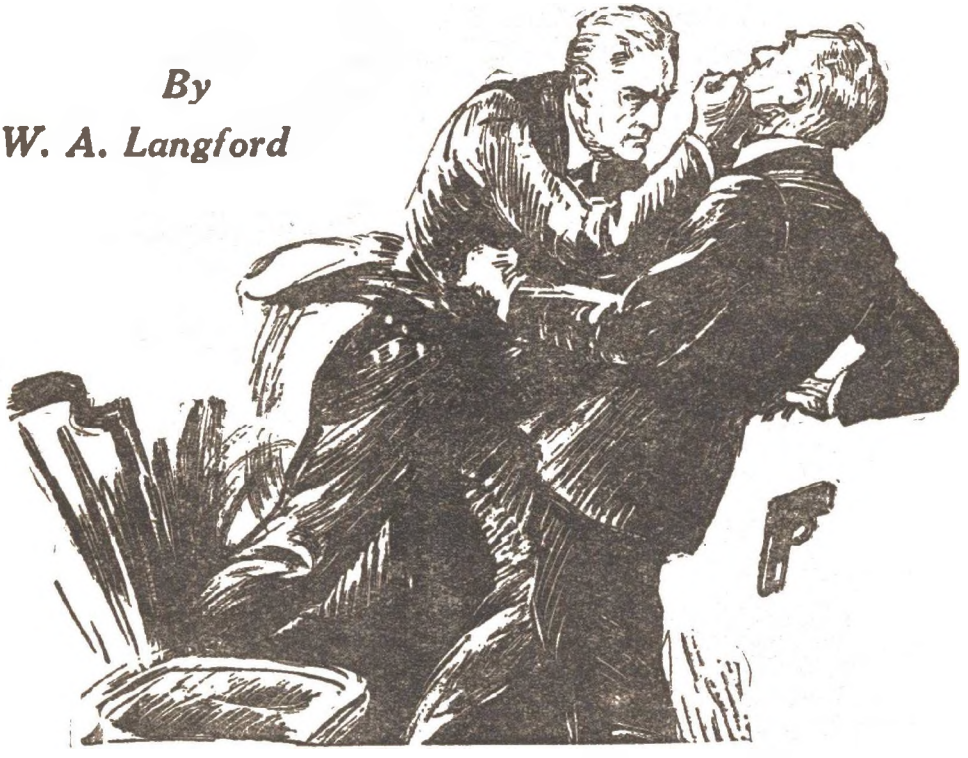
"You killed him, Crom?"

"No, *rigor mortis* did it."

"Reggie Morris? Who's that guy? Never heard of him," said Detective Olson.

The Haunting Clue

By
W. A. Langford



Peter Starr made five futile attempts to escape San Quentin. But his sixth attempt could not fail. For the grim scythe of eternity would bring him freedom.

"LUKE PARKINSEN, you've framed me. Some day I'll come back and make you pay." Five years ago Peter Starr had stood up in the court room and said those words to the district attorney who prosecuted him.

Five long years that were like centuries behind gray prison walls, but the words burned as clearly in Peter Starr's mind today as they had the day he uttered them.

Five years and Peter had tried unsuccessfully to escape five times. Once every year he attempted to hurdle those gray walls of San Quentin and return and make Luke Parkinsen pay. Five times he had been thwarted. Five times he had been shot by an alert guard and sent to the prison hospital in a critical condition. Four times he had recovered, determined that the next time he would escape. But he never had. Would he the sixth?

"Six was always my lucky number, Mike. If you'll help me—I'll make it this time. It's an air-tight scheme. I can't lose. And you—"

"An' me," whispered the emaciated skeleton of a man in the adjoining bed.

"I'm dyin'. Got two—three days to live yet, the Doc told me. Mebbe I'll kick off tonight. Just another victim of T. B."

"That's what makes the scheme airtight. They always believe a dying man. You were in Los Angeles when I was sent up. You were even arrested as a suspect. By the time my busted hip gets well, I'll be a free man. Of course, it's a lot to ask of a man."

"A lot, hell!" wheezed the dying convict. He tried to laugh and started coughing. When he had stifled his wracking coughs, he lay panting for a minute, then continued. "It ain't much. I'd do most anything to help a friend. I'm a bad man, Pete. I've murdered people—I've robbed 'em—done everything. Now I'm dyin'. I don't care what happens after I'm dead."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Yeah. I'd do more if I could, just to get a last crack at th' damned law that made me what I am—an' Luke Parkinsen. Don't worry, Pete. I'll tell 'em a story that'll make their souls cringe, damn 'em. You've been my friend four years now. Th' only friend I ever had."

"Shhhh! Here comes the screw," warned Peter Starr.

The attendant paused between the two beds. He glanced down at Peter. "Five times you've been shot trying to escape. Takes a long time for some convicts to learn they can't escape. Anyway, you'll remember this time. You'll be lame the rest of your life."

When Peter continued to stare at the ceiling, he turned to Mike Shabin. The dying convict was breathing with difficulty. Each breath threatened to be his last.

"Th' chaplain," gasped Mike. "I'd like to see th' chaplain. Wanta make a confession. Don't wanta die till I do."

"Want to make peace with God before you kick off, eh?" grunted the wooden-faced attendant. "It won't keep the devil from getting you, but I'll send the chaplain around. Time to take you to the death row, anyway."

"Good-by, Pete," Mike whispered, as the attendant moved away. "I'll do my best."

"Good-by, Mike. I'll never forget you."

Two prison nurses came then and Mike Shabin was wheeled away. Peter Starr lay staring at the ceiling. All the hatred, the bitter gall of injustice, welled to the surface. Five years of living hell. Five years for a crime he had not committed. It was no wonder that Peter Starr had gone a little mad when the steel gates closed behind him. No wonder he had tried to escape—to return and make the man who framed him pay.

"Luke Parkinsen!" he breathed the words in a silent whisper, a grim smile twitching at his lips. "You murdered my uncle and made me the goat. It took me two years to realize that, but you're gonna pay."

HOW poignant was the memory of his murdered uncle. He had quarreled with Sam Starr one day. The next day he had returned to ask forgiveness, only to find his uncle dying in a welter of his own blood. Sam had tried to talk, to tell Peter who shot him, but only two words passed his lips before the grim hand of death claimed him. Then Luke Parkinsen had entered with the chief of police. That entrance was not a coincidence, but Peter had not realized it at the time.

Luke Parkinsen. The very name nauseated him, filled his soul with burning hatred. Parkinsen had demanded his arrest. He had proved to the court that Peter was the murderer of his uncle. How well he had proved it. He had proved that the bullet which killed Sam Starr had been fired from Peter's gun.

He used Peter's quarrel for the motive. And Peter had been unable to prove his innocence. Far from it. Shocked at the fate that had crashed down upon him, he had completely forgotten the two words his uncle had gasped out. It wouldn't have done him any good had he remembered then. Parkinsen would have seen to that.

But after two years in prison, Peter had recalled the two words. He had guessed at their meaning—the prompt appearance of Parkinsen. He realized Parkinsen had committed the crime.

Why, he did not know, but he was going to return and then—

Peter let his mind drift back to Mike Shabin and his scheme to escape. Hour after hour he lay staring at the ceiling, thinking, scheming with a mind sharpened to a razor edge by five years of prison life. The hours lengthened into days. His bullet-shattered hip was mending nicely. Another week and he would be up and hobbling around on crutches. Two months and he would be as well as he ever would be.

Those three months passed swiftly for Peter. He was back in his cell again. Still there was no word of Mike Shabin. But Peter only smiled to himself. Mike, of course, was dead and buried—forgotten by this time. Yet Peter knew that Mike had not failed him. Only the law could fail him.

But the law did not fail him. A week after he returned to his cell, he was called before the warden.

"Peter Starr, I have good news for you," said Warden Ackley, smiling. "The governor has granted you an unconditional pardon."

Peter's eyebrows lifted in surprise, but that was the only sign that he had heard.

"Possibly you would like to know how this came about," the warden went on. "One of the men arrested as a suspect at the time you were arrested died in this prison about ten weeks ago. Mike Shabin was his name. Possibly you remember him. Just before he died he confessed to robbing and murdering Sam Starr. I sent his confession to the governor. This pardon is his answer."

He held out the pardon to Peter. Peter grasped it with fingers which trembled a little. There was a wry smile trying mightily to form on his lips, but couldn't.

"I can appreciate your many attempts to escape. Five years in prison for a crime you never committed." The warden shook his head sadly. "A terrible miscarriage of justice. I cannot blame you if you are bitter with the law. You have a right to be. You must try to forget, though. You are an American citizen again—a free man. You have had a terrible setback, but you must not judge the law too harshly. You still have many years before you."

Peter nodded slowly. "I have no complaint against you, the prison, or the law," he said, meeting the warden's sympathetic eyes. "It was just a miscarriage of justice, as you say."

"That's the spirit," the warden said. "You'll get much out of life."

AN hour later Peter Starr left the penitentiary. His head was up and his lean shoulders were squared and there was a light of triumph in his eyes. The taxi at the penitentiary gate took him to San Rafael. He stepped out of the cab and disappeared—vanished completely from the world.

But though he had vanished to the world at large, Peter Starr did not for a moment forget the man who had framed him. Five years ago he was no match for the witty Luke Parkinsen, but now—His mind was as keen as a razor. He was capable of matching wits with the cleverest of the clever.

No one who had known Peter Starr before he was sent to prison could have recognized him as the shabbily dressed tramp shuffling along the highway in a limping walk. His once black hair was now a dirty gray. The once broad shoulders were shrunken and bent as if they had carried a great burden for many years. The once handsome, laughing, reckless face was lined, shrunken. The dark eyes that once danced with the joy of living were now puckered and squinting. His skin was brown and dried out.

Peter had not made the mistake of returning to Los Angeles too soon. He had deposited some money in a San Rafael bank before he entered the penitentiary. He drew it out and from San Rafael he had journeyed south and disappeared into the wastelands of the Mohave Desert until such time as the prison pallor had left his skin—until his muscles were like steel. Luke Parkinsen was a treacherous snake and he was taking no chances of being recognized.

Luke Parkinsen was no longer district attorney. Several questionable cases

had lost him his prestige and he had been defeated for reelection at the polls. But he was still to be feared. He would know that Mike Shabin's confession was a lie. Fear for his own safety would cause him to plot against the freedom of Peter Starr.

Peter realized that his precautions were justified the moment he reached Los Angeles. He had hardly reached the city before a car rolled up to him and two sharp-eyed police officers looked him over. Peter smiled to himself as the police car rolled away. The cops were looking for a young man with black hair and dark brown eyes.

"Luke ain't taking any chances," he mused, as he plodded on. "He's got the bulls watching for me. I'll bet he's got all my old haunts watched. I'll have to be careful."

But Peter had no fear of being recognized. Parkinsen was the only man he feared. Neither did he worry about the cops that he was certain were watching his old home, or rather his uncle's old house on West Third Street. There were things about the old house that neither Parkinsen nor the police knew.

He boarded a street car and rode through the business district and alighted two blocks from his old home. He entered a small second-hand clothing store, bought a shabby handbag and a change of clothes. Then he walked cautiously down the street until he was opposite Sam Starr's old house. He didn't glance across the street at the old house, but instead stepped into a tiny café. From the café he could watch the house and spot the dicks watching it.

He ordered his supper and sat down at the table nearest the window. His steak arrived after a few minutes and he began to eat, but with one eye on the house across the street. The house appeared to be about the same as when he had last seen it. And it was vacant. Peter was glad it was.

Until he had settled accounts with Parkinsen, he would live at the old house. After that he would fix it up a little and sell it, together with the rest of the property he had inherited from his uncle. After that he would go to some other state and begin life over.

Just as he finished his dessert, a Packard coupé rolled to a stop before the house. Peter caught his breath. Luke Parkinsen got out of the car and glanced at the two men standing in a doorway. When the men shook their heads in answer to Parkinsen's inquiring glance, the ex-district attorney nodded his head, walked up the steps, produced a key, and entered the house.

Peter frowned, then chuckled to himself. He suddenly knew why the house was vacant. Parkinsen had seen to it that it remained vacant. There was something hidden in the house that he wanted—something Sam Starr had hidden. The fact that Parkinsen was entering the house was proof that he had not found what he was looking for.

"And he won't find it," Peter soliloquized. "I'll just give him a scare."

Peter didn't know what it was Parkinsen was looking for, but he did know that if Parkinsen had business at the house that business concerned the murder of Sam Starr. It also concerned Peter Starr.

PETER picked up his bag, paid his check and sauntered out on the street picking his teeth. Walking to the corner, he crossed the street and turned down toward the house of Sam Starr. There was a cheap rooming house alongside the house, and he entered it.

"Like tuh have room 210 if'n it's vacant," he said, when the heavy-set landlady appeared. "Had it once a'fore, 'bout five-six years ago."

The landlady grunted and handed him a pen. He signed a name, planked down a dollar, picked up the key the landlady tossed at him, and went up to room 210.

Peter chuckled as he locked the door. Sam Starr had rented this same room on several occasions. Peter wasn't supposed to know this, but he had caught his uncle doing the same thing he was now about to do. Sam Starr was a queer man.

He had built his house to fit his own needs and fancies. While his life was mostly a closed book to Peter, Peter,

boylike, had learned most of the secrets of the house where he grew to manhood. In prison he often thought of those secrets and had as often wondered at his uncle's past. Now those secrets were to be of service to him.

Opening the one window, he glanced across the three-foot opening between the two buildings. The building directly across from his was closed and the shade was drawn. But that fact didn't worry him. Making certain no one was watching him he reached across the gap, opened a tiny door concealed in the siding, caught hold of a steel ring and pulled. The window across the gap slowly opened.

With another glance around, Peter stepped across the space and into the house of the late Sam Starr. He chuckled grimly as he thought of meeting Luke Parkinsen in the dark house. To meet him now and put a scare into him—to make him suffer fear of the damned would be a good beginning of the payment he would exact for the years in prison.

Peter closed the window behind him and started down the hall. Doors were open on either side of the hall and he glanced through them to see ransackage everywhere. The entire floor had been gone over by a relentless searcher. Furniture was torn apart, scattered about; the floors were torn up; the walls and ceilings were a wreck.

On the ground floor a door slammed. Peter catfooted down the stairs, glanced cautiously about. A shade was up in the library and a tall, raw-boned man, with snake eyes and cold features, passed before the window. He was cursing like an infuriated mule-skinner.

Then he turned and saw Peter standing in the doorway. His glittering, beady eyes swept over the man he had five years before condemned as if he was looking at a stray mongrel.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded harshly, coming toward the door, right hand gripping an automatic pistol in his coat pocket. "This isn't a bum's hotel."

"Possibly I have a better right here than you have, Parkinsen," Peter returned softly, smiling coldly. "I own the place."

Parkinsen stopped as if shot. He sucked in his breath in one huge gasp. He stepped to one side so the light would strike Peter's features. His face was white with sudden fear; his snaky eyes were boring through Peter with disbelief.

"I recognize you now," he gasped at last. "You're Peter Starr. You've come to—"

Peter Starr laughed harshly, the first laugh in five years. "No, nothing so crude as killing you, Parkinsen. I promised you I'd come back and make you pay. You're going to begin to pay now — tonight. You're going to answer for those five years in prison. Just look what it did to me."

"Answer to you," Parkinsen fairly screamed, face chalk white, eyes dilated with the fear of death, his huge frame crouched. "Yes, I'll answer to you—you murderer."

His hand jerked from his coat pocket with gripped automatic. Up flashed the gun, leveling with Peter's breast. Crack! Flame and smoke belched from the blue muzzle.

PETER STARR'S harsh laugh followed the explosion. He had been expecting Parkinsen to draw his gun and was ready. His steel-hard muscles were ready. He ducked and leaped an instant before the gun roared and the bullet intended for his heart fanned his cheek. Before Parkinsen could pull the trigger again, Peter caught his wrist in a grip of steel.

Parkinsen screamed in mortal terror as his wrist was cruelly twisted. The pistol fell to the floor. The terror of death gripped him. He leaped back, tore his wrist from that vicelike grip with superhuman strength.

Before Peter could get another hold, Parkinsen was bounding for a side door like a madman. Peter leaped after him, but his crippled hip slowed him. The door had been flung open and Parkinsen was racing madly down the hall for the street door, yelling for the police, before Peter reached the door.

"The yellow cur!" Peter muttered, as the front door opened and Parkinsen leaped outside. "Not man enough to stand up and take it. He'll have the dicks in here in about thirty seconds. But damn him, he won't get a chance to frame me again."

He picked up the pistol that had fallen to the floor, glanced at it to see that it was loaded, set the safety and dropped it into his pocket. Then he bounded for the living room. As he paused in the great room for a momentary glance, he heard the two detectives cautiously enter the front door.

He chuckled. Let the police hunt for him. They would never find him, not unless he wanted them to. And Parkinsen—There was a surprise awaiting the ex-district attorney; that is, if Peter was not mistaken. And this very night.

Still chuckling, he bounded across the room to the huge fireplace, making certain that he did not leave his footprints in the thick dust. Bending down into the huge opening of the fireplace, he raised up and reached up into the sooty chimney. His groping hand found another of Sam Starr's secrets—an iron ladder rung. He pulled himself up, found another rung. Hand over hand he went up. His feet found the bottom rung and he crawled slowly up the chimney.

It was a tight squeeze, but he made it. Why Sam Starr had made the chimney large enough for a man to ascend and fitted it with iron rungs, Peter hadn't guessed until he was in prison. But there were a lot of things people hadn't guessed about Sam Starr.

No one ever found out why he had come to Los Angeles twenty-five years ago with his infant nephew, then built a house and settled down to the life of a real estate broker.

Peter reached a square crevice in the chimney somewhere in the vicinity of the second floor. He was sure it was built into the clothes closet of his uncle's bedroom. He stood on the lower edge of the indented crevice and listened.

Voices reached him. One was loud and angry; two were low and consoling.

"But I tell you he must be here somewhere," the high-pitched voice said as the detectives paused in the living room. "And he's got a gun. He—he shot at me."

"Probably went out the back door as we came in," said one of the detectives. "But we'll look around. Come on, Ed. He ain't in here."

"That's one more lie against you, Parkinsen," Peter muttered to himself as the voices trailed away.

THEN he took the small flash light from his pocket and flashed it on the crevice. The two words Sam Starr had uttered before he died were: "Safe—chimney." Now if Peter's deductions were correct, there was a safe hidden in the chimney. Ah, there it was.

Before Peter was a square steel door about a foot square with a thumb latch, covered with a thick coat of soot. He opened the door and—there was the safe.

Sam Starr had given Peter two safe combinations some months before his untimely death. One had been for the safe in the library, the other combination was for an imaginary safe. At least Peter had thought so at the time. It had taken Sam's two dying words and two years of cogitation in prison for Peter to grasp the location of that second safe. Now his heart pounded as he recalled the combination, a combination kept fresh in his memory by constant repeating.

He twirled the knob with throbbing nerves, taut with grim expectation. In a minute he had the safe open. He breathed a sigh of relief, laughed silently.

He turned his flash light in the safe while fingers that trembled as with ague examined the contents. There was an old newspaper dated 1904. There were two large envelopes. One of the envelopes contained five one-thousand-dollar federal reserve notes; the other contained an affidavit written and signed by Sam Starr, with a notary's seal affixed, and a note of instruction.

Peter stuffed the contents into his breast pocket and closed the safe and snapped off his light. The detectives were still searching the house and he didn't

care to take any unnecessary chances. He could pursue the contents of the safe at leisure in his room.

Climbing on up the chimney, he cautiously raised his head above the chimney and glanced around. The way was clear. Already darkness was settling down and he made an indistinguishable shadow as he climbed out onto the roof and glided to the edge of the building. A glance over the side told him there was no one in the narrow alley. He leaped across to the roof of the rooming house, trotted to a trapdoor in the roof, opened it and climbed down the ladder, closing the door after him.

Once in his room, Peter brushed the soot from his clothes and washed it from his hands and face, then he sat down to scan the contents of the safe. He chuckled satisfactorily as he thought of Parkinsen and the detectives searching the house for him. Let them keep on hunting. They would never find him.

He was still chuckling as he drew the affidavit from the envelope and started reading it, but the chuckle soon changed to a laugh of sheer satisfaction.

"My hunch was right," he thought when he had finished the document. "Uncle Sam was too smart for Parkinsen."

He laughed silently and long. Then he read a certain item in the old newspaper. Lastly he read the note of instructions. He nodded his head with satisfaction. He was all ready now to make Luke Parkinsen pay for those years in prison.

Changing his clothes, he pocketed the documents and left the rooming house. The tramp had disappeared; he was now a well dressed middle-aged man with a limp and a walking stick. Parkinsen and the detectives were not in sight as he stepped out on to the sidewalk. Neither was the former's car. So far so good.

"A cigar, a telephone call, the theater, then I'll make a call on Mr. Parkinsen. He ought to be home by then," he decided, as he made his way to the street car line.

LUKE PARKINSEN'S home was located in the city's most prosperous residential district. Peter had been to the house but once, but he had no difficulty in reaching the rear of the house unobserved. Here he met an obstacle.

The same two detectives he had seen at his uncle's old house were on guard. But he only grinned to himself. He had learned many things in prison. Luke Parkinsen might lock himself in his palatial home and place detectives on guard outside, but Peter would find a means of entering.

He waited patiently until the detective on guard at the rear had strolled around to the front, then he leaped over the fence and darted for a basement window. It took him but a half minute to unfasten the screen and pry open the window. Another half minute and he was in the basement and had closed the screen and window behind him.

Silently and cautiously he felt his way about the basement until he located the stairway. He went up the stairs as silently as a cat. As silently he opened the door and stepped into the kitchen. The kitchen was dark, but opening a door he gazed down a dimly lighted hall.

As he approached the house, Peter had seen a light in one of the front rooms. Luke Parkinsen, if he was in the house, and Peter was sure he was or there would have been no detectives on guard outside, would be in that room.

With Parkinsen's automatic in his hand, the stalking man catfooted down the hall. A board squeaked underfoot and he froze against the wall with stilled breath. A chair scraped in a room down the hall, but no one came to investigate.

He crept ahead, testing every board before he bore down on it. He came to a door. Light shone under it. He bent down and peeped through the keyhole. He smiled with satisfaction as a long row of books met his eyes.

The room was Parkinsen's study.

He took hold of the doorknob and turned it slowly and silently, then pushed gently on the door. It opened. A chair scraped again and a man cursed.

Peter shoved the door wide and leaped inside with the ease and grace of a panther.

"Not a sound out of you," he warned, pistol covering the man half out of the

chair. "An' keep your hands in sight. I'd like nothing better than to shoot you, Luke Parkinsen. Don't touch that phone."

"Starr!" Parkinsen gasped, his heavy, bleak face chalk white. Suddenly his knees gave way and he sank back in his upholstered chair. "You come to kill me?"

"Maybe I'll kill you, you yellow-bellied snake," Peter hissed, all the hate of injustice boiling in his blood. "You should've been killed in 1904."

"You—you—you found—"

"Yeah, I found what you hunted five years for and didn't find. Too bad I didn't know your past five years ago. My ignorance cost me five years of hell. But you're going to pay now. I made you a promise when you sent me up for a crime you committed. Now you're going to pay."

Luke Parkinsen knew he was staring death in the face. He knew his minutes were numbered, unless he could trick Peter—kill him. If he was to live Peter Starr must die. His snake eyes darted about the room. He thought of the unsuspecting detectives on guard outside; he thought of the gun lying under a paper on his desk a foot from his hand; he thought of the telephone.

He was at his wits' end. But Peter Starr must die. His hand moved slowly toward the gun under the paper. Peter couldn't have seen the gun.

"Don't move," Peter warned, facing the man he hated across the desk. "Just to make sure you won't hurt yourself, I'll take that gun under the paper." He reached across the desk, brushed the paper aside and picked up the gun. Then, "I'll give it back to you when I leave. You might want to use it."

HE stepped back, a grim smile on his lips, his eyes boring like hot irons into the cowering man across the desk. It was the moment for which he had waited five years.

"I've asked an old friend of yours to meet me here at midnight," he went on, his voice now like chilled steel. "Judge Keller who sentenced me to San Quentin. He should be here any minute now."

Parkinsen's eyes jerked to a wall clock. It was five minutes to midnight. He licked his bloodless lips, cleared his throat, then turned his scared eyes back to Peter.

"I'll give you anything you want if you'll turn that affidavit over to me," he said, with desperation. "Say a hundred thousand."

"Here comes the judge now," Peter drawled, as his keen ears caught the sound of squealing brakes. "I told him your servants were out and to walk right in."

"I'll make it half a million!" Parkinsen cried, breathing hard. "You can't do this to me, Starr!"

Peter laughed at him. Footsteps sounded in the hall. He got up, slipped the automatic into his pocket, and opened the door.

"Come right in, judge."

"This is rather unusual, Mr. Parkinsen," the judge began as he stepped into the room. "A man who didn't give his name telephoned me to meet him here on important business." Then he saw Peter and stopped.

"Take a seat, judge," Peter motioned to an upholstered chair. "Yes, it's unusual, judge. But I have a strange story to tell you. I'm going to prove to you that I didn't murder my uncle, Sam Starr."

"What's that?" Judge Keller stared at Peter, his gray, sympathetic eyes wide with astonishment. "Who—who are you?"

"Peter Starr."

"I—I remember you now. Yes, I remember. You were pardoned several weeks ago. Now you wish to prove you were innocent. I don't understand."

The short, dried-up, gray-haired judge sat down, his eyes darting from Peter to Parkinsen sitting behind his desk as if stricken with palsy. He frowned.

"I'll explain, judge," Peter said, handing the old newspaper and the affidavit to the judge. "Those papers will prove my story."

"Well, it's late, and I'm waiting," said the judge, his mind going back to the trial of Peter Starr. He remembered it vividly. Also he was remembering the confession of Mike Shabin, and Peter's consequent pardon.

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"At Keokuk, Iowa, in 1904 two men held up and robbed a Judge Hess of one hundred thousand dollars," Peter began, keeping a wary eye on Parkinsen. "The judge was killed and the bandits escaped. There wasn't a clue and the robbery was never cleared up. But a little later Sam Starr and Luke Parkinsen left Iowa.

"Sam Starr came to Los Angeles and went into the real estate business. Parkinsen wandered about the country for several years, then came to Los Angeles and started practicing law. Here he met Starr again. He wanted money and began to fleece Starr."

"Just a minute, Starr," the judge interrupted, leaning forward with keen interest. "Make it a little plainer. Are you trying to say that—"

"That Sam Starr and Luke Parkinsen robbed and killed Judge Hess," Peter finished for him. "They did, judge. Sam Starr bought real estate with his share, but Parkinsen squandered his. When he found Sam Starr had invested his and was prospering, he demanded another cut, threatening to expose Sam unless he got it. Sam kept giving him money until bankruptcy threatened him, then he refused to give Parkinsen another penny.

"They were at a deadlock until Parkinsen threatened to prove that Sam had committed the crime singlehanded. Sam wrote an affidavit, giving the details of the robbery and murder, stating that Parkinsen was the actual slayer of Judge Hess and giving the one bit of evidence that would fasten the murder on Parkinsen—his fingerprints.

"This he showed to Parkinsen along with the account in the newspaper which stated that the police had found the pistol used to murder the judge and had discovered the murderer's fingerprints. Parkinsen compared his fingerprints with the classification published in the paper and found they compared.

"Parkinsen then tried to get the evidence that would convict him, but Sam hid it and demanded return of all the money he had given Parkinsen. Parkinsen murdered him to silence him, but he never found those papers. You know the rest. I didn't know about those papers when he made me the goat and sent me up. And I couldn't trust any one else to get them—not with Parkinsen looking for them."

"Are these the papers you mentioned?" the judge demanded, glancing at the papers Peter had handed him.

Peter nodded. "They are. Read them carefully."

The judge did. When he finished with them, Peter took them from him and pocketed them.

The judge frowned. "You have presented a very convincing case. I have no doubt that Parkinsen can be convicted of the crime." He glared frostily at the silent, cowering Parkinsen. "In fact I'm sure of it. Not only the murder of Judge Hess, but of Sam Starr. However, I don't quite understand why Mike Shabin confessed on his deathbed to murdering your uncle."

Peter chuckled. "I coached Mike into making that confession so I could get out and settle with Parkinsen."

"Clever, I must admit," the judge replied, and chuckled. "As far as the law is concerned, you're a free man. However, what are your plans. I stand ready to help you."

"Thank you, judge!" Peter said, and smiled. "I would appreciate it if you'd drive me to the offices of the Los Angeles *Examiner*. I want the newspapers to get a chance at those papers before I do anything more. The more publicity, the more Parkinsen will suffer. After that, well, I'll turn this old newspaper and the affidavit over to you so you can have me pardoned again—and can send Parkinsen to San Quentin to take my place. Then —I'll turn Sam Starr's property over to the heirs of Judge Hess.

"Uncle Sam came by it dishonestly and I want none of it. He left me five thousand dollars that he came by honestly. That will give me a start somewhere. We'll leave Parkinsen here. He can't get far."

Treachery Island

By Leon Dupont

An isolated lighthouse in the South China Sea held two men. One was a murder witness—the other was a twentieth-century assassin who practiced the tortures of the ancients.

THE big man in whites and sun helmet pushed briskly into the *Cantina La Paloma.* Just inside the flapping doors, he came to an abrupt stop. His bleak darting eyes raked the boisterous throng of Filipinos, Malays, Chinos, Japs, Moros, and half-castes.

The Filipino orchestra died with a twanged discord of their long-stemmed

instruments. Shuffling feet scratched to a stop on the sawdust floor. Swarthy seamen in greasy sweaters looked uneasily about. Then they saw that big man in white linen and cork helmet.

With glowering, suspicious eyes they watched that hard-faced *Americano* look searchingly among them. Some of them furtively pulled their caps over their faces—for they did not relish the close scrutiny of the governor general's chief investigator.

Then "Flint" Warren looked over their heads to the balcony at the far end of the lantern-lighted room. It was there he saw the white head he had been searching for. Under that thatch of white hair was the red face of Old Man Nolan. And perched on Nolan's knee was a lithe Filipino girl. Warren said something through his teeth, and started down the room.

A patch was quickly made for him. Something like a sigh of relief rippled through that motley throng of mixed races. The instruments once more whined forth their chantlike rhythm. But the swarthy seamen kept suspicious eyes on that big man in white, and hostile hands close to knife hafts.

Flint Warren ducked under a cobweblike fishing net dangling from the rafters, and climbed the rickety steps to the balcony.

Old Man Nolan saw him coming. With a hasty shove of his arm, he dislodged the dark-skinned girl.

"Evenin', sir." He respectfully got to his feet.

Warren frowned at the girl, then looked hard at Nolan.

The red-faced Nolan pointed to the liquor on the grimy table. "Jus' buyin' Infanta a drink."

"Sure," said Warren. "Now tell Infanta to beat it."

Nolan blustered a dismissal to the girl. Then he jerked his head toward a secluded corner table. "We can talk over there, sir."

Still frowning over his shoulder at the girl, Warren walked to the table and sat down. He cuffed his helmet back on his head. His eyes bleak again, he coldly studied the red-faced Nolan. In a low voice, he said:

"Maybe you're getting too old for this job—and weak!"

"No, sir," hastily protested the seaman. "Gals come an' go—but Old Man Nolan keeps his hatch battened down."

Flint Warren said nothing. He dropped a cigar on the table, and lighted up another for himself. When it was going, he asked, "Ever heard the name—Aranda Pombal?"

Nolan rolled that name silently on his tongue. He nodded his head a little uncertainly. "Pombal—that the lubber what murdered his wife, an'—"

"And got away with it," finished Warren. "He's up here in the Luzon—not many hours ahead of me."

Nolan shook his head. "Ain't seen no one what looks like a murderer. To be tellin' the truth, sir, I've been havin' troubles of me own. Manuel out there at the lighthouse—"

WARREN'S hand clamped down hard on Nolan's arm. "Not so loud, man! When you have anything to say about Manuel—*whisper it!*" The big Manila agent drew evenly on his cigar. Without taking it from his mouth, he said tersely, "I put Manuel out at that lighthouse for a damn good reason. And I told you to keep a tight mouth about it."

"That I have, sir," responded Nolan firmly. "An' I've been skipper of the lighthouse tender for a good many years, an'—"

"All right. All right," said the flint-faced Warren. "But get this—I'm grappling with a man who never makes a slip. For a leak to spring in my organization—Hell, Nolan, I can't afford it!" he ended in a hoarse whisper.

Suddenly Warren looked over to see the sleek Infanta edging back along the balcony railing. Their eyes met. Then Infanta tossed her tawny shoulders, and padded down the steps. The musical tinkle of the spangles on her sleazy, transparent skirt was soon swallowed in the ribald hilarity below.

"That girl's got something on her mind," frowned Warren.

"Jus' wants another drink," and Old Man Nolan attempted an easy smile.

"The hell she does," muttered Warren. "But tell me—what's all this trouble with Manuel?"

Nolan leaned closer. "The old trouble, I guess. The natives say the lighthouse is haunted. Maybe Manuel figures the curse is gettin' at him. Always he's complainin' that somethin' or other's the matter. Yesterday I carried him a month's supplies. The lubber started complainin' again—an' wanted a doc. So today I ships him one."

"That's fast service from Manila," said Warren. "Doc Reynolds must be getting ambitious."

"But," put in Nolan, "I didn't take Doc Reynolds."

Flint Warren craned his neck as if he hadn't heard correctly. "You didn't take Doc Reynolds?" he asked incredulously.

Nolan shook his head. "I carried over a doc from here. Manuel was complainin'—"

"There's no white doctor at this jumping-off place," said Warren impatiently. "Who in the name of—"

"He was a perlite Spanish lad," faltered Nolan. "He was motorin' north—but didn't mind the run out to the light. Said that a doc should go where duty calls—"

"Never mind that!" gritted Warren. "What did he look like?"

Nolan gulped the liquor in his glass. "He was a gintl'man, an' you may lay to that. Always bowin' an' smokin' fancy cig-rettes, he was."

Warren flung his cigar on the sawdust floor, spiked it with his heel. "Did that Spanish doctor of yours have a small, waxed mustache?"

"Aye, sir, that he did. You know the lubber—"

A short bark of a laugh came from Tom's throat. "I know him—sure! He's Aranda Pombal!"

"The lubber what murdered—"

"That's him. And the last man in the world to be alone with Manuel! . . . . Come on, we're going to that Cavalier Isle lighthouse . . . . Maybe we'll find Manuel—alive."

Pushing the squat, stubble-faced seamen right and left, Flint Warren gouged a lane through the chattering crowd of the *cantina*. Out of the tail of his eye he caught sight of the supple-bodied Infanta. The girl's black eyes held a mocking taunt. Then Warren was at the heavy swinging doors, with the lumbering Nolan puffing up behind him.

A MOONLESS night is black in any part of the globe—but it is blackest in the murky maw of the South China Sea. And straight out into this great cavern of darkness chugged the creaking lighthouse tender. Dropping off its stern were pin-points of light dotting the countless bays and inlets of Luzon's Asiatic shore.

Warren sat in the bow, fingers restlessly drumming the helmet between his knees.

"How far out is that light?" he asked.

"Better'n six leagues, sir. It'll be after dawn before we heave anchor."

"That," said Warren harshly, "will give Pombal all night to work on Manuel. It's not pleasant to think of—when you know Pombal."

Old Man Nolan spread his hands out. "That Pombal lubber can't pull nothin' rough—when every one knows he's out there."

"He can do anything," said Warren flatly.

Nolan was silent as he lashed the wheel due west, straight for the coast of French Indo-China. This done he took out his ancient pipe. Flint Warren volunteered no conversation, so Nolan suggested:

"Maybe you're steerin' the wrong course, sir. Maybe this Spanish doctor ain't the murderin' divil—"

"Tell me, Nolan, did you walk up to this doctor and say: 'Are you a doctor, mister? And if you are, will you make a trip to Cavalier Isle? Did you say that to him, Nolan?"

"Well—now—sir. Jus' didn't come 'bout like that. It was Infanta what told me 'bout the doc. She—"

"Sure," cut in Warren, "after she got you drunk enough to shoot off your mouth about Manuel being at the light—she rings in the doctor." Warren's face was flint-hard in the dim glow of the port and starboard lights. He shook his head grimly. "I've got to hand it to Pombal."

A long silence ensued, finally broken by Nolan's:

"Don't you be worryin' too much 'bout that Pombal, sir. He didn't look none too vicious to me."

Warren stopped his restless finger-drumming to ask, "Know anything about the tortures of the ancient Chinese and Romans?"

"Aye, sir. They had divilish ways of stretchin' an' cuttin' people."

"Right. And Pombal knows 'em all." Warren jutted his rocklike jaw. "Something else—he gets away with 'em." Again Warren went to drumming his helmet. "He got away with murdering his American wife. Did her up in hellish shape. But left nothing to incriminate himself."

Nolan ignited his pipe with a spluttering sea match, illuminating the paint-chipped tub with its chugging engine amidships. He smoked in silence.

Flint Warren went on in his abrupt manner. "I got one of his servants to testify against him. Almost hung him. But again Pombal was one jump ahead of us. He bribed the native jury. I've been looking for him since." Warren swore harshly. "He's a murder maniac. He can do anything!"

Old Man Nolan suddenly became alert. He scanned the darkness off the bow. Then he tested the rope-lashed wheel. "She hasn't run a point off her course," he muttered.

"What's up?"

"Dunno, sir. By all rights we oughta be seein' a speck of that light."

Warren said, "The way this tub crawls we'll never see the light." Then he added, "Or maybe Pombal is talking to Manuel about the ancient Chinese."

Nolan wagged his head. "This Pombal may be all the divil you claim—but he's not fool 'nuff to murder Manuel. Anyway, sir, what's he got again' the lad?"

"Nothin'," spat Warren, "except—that Manuel is the servant who testified against him." Warren slapped a cigarette to his lips. "The Manila government offered to protect Manuel—and hid him out at the lighthouse. Hell! Can't this damn tub go faster?"

"She's doin' her best, sir." And Nolan lapsed into silence. Seemed there was nothing more he could say. Then suddenly he sat bolt upright. "There's the light! Burnin' high, too, sir. Manuel's wastin' his wicks. Oughta know better'n that."

Warren sucked on his cigarette, said nothing.

Hours later, the light went out—and stayed out.

Dawn came up behind them, as the laboring craft nosed her bow toward the reef.

CAVALIER ISLE had carried its noble name for many centuries—but its reef was as low and treacherous as nature could sink. Like tiger's teeth, jagged fangs of rock jutted out of the sea. And for every rock above surface, there were three more beneath eager to rip out a ship's vitals.

Old Man Nolan knew this well, as he zigzagged his tender to the miniature wharf built out on the reef.

It was then that Flint Warren got his first look at the lighthouse. About one hundred yards back from the wharf he saw the lightkeep's shack. Above the shack rose the great iron scaffolding which supported the oil tub and glass cupola of the lantern.

While Nolan docked the tender, Warren dog-trotted up to the shack.

The chug of the tender must have awakened someone in the shack, for a freshly-shaven man in whites appeared at the door.

Warren went up to him. "Get out of that door."

A quirk of a smile flicked across Pombal's dark features, showing twin rows of gleaming teeth. He stepped to one side, bowing slightly.

The flint-faced Manila agent shoved

him further out of the way, and went into the shack.

Manuel lay in his bunk dressed in trousers, soiled undershirt, and heavy shoes. To all appearances he was merely resting.

"Manuel!" barked Warren.

There was no answer.

Warren touched the young Filipino. Then he swung on Pombal.

But the Spaniard spoke first. With bowed head, he murmured. "Poor Manuel has passed on to his ancestors."

Flint Warren's jaw jutted agressively. "You knew that I was some hours behind you—and still you murdered him. You won't get away with this!"

"Manuel died a natural death," politely corrected Pombal.

Warren quickly stripped the body. Expertly he went over every inch of the dark skin.

"No wounds," he muttered to himself. Then he carefully tested for signs of poisoning. Twice he went over the body. He shook his head grimly. Without a word he went over to a chair and sat down.

Pombal started to do likewise.

"On your feet," said Warren.

The Spaniard sneered thinly.

From his chair, Warren asked, "How did Manuel die?"

"He just stopped living," explained Pombal matter-of-factly.

"You have no other diagnosis?"

Pombal lifted his shoulders eloquently. "My limited medical knowledge can find no cause for death—other than a natural one." He blandly suggested, "If my word is doubted, why not take the body to your government doctors?"

Warren nodded slowly. "You've done a perfect job, Pombal—so far. I know the lad hasn't been wounded or poisoned."

"Then," asked Pombal, "how could he have been murdered?"

"Let me ask the questions," cut in the big Manila agent.

Old Man Nolan, who had been standing in the doorway, came in. He looked at the body. "Aye, sir, Manuel was always complainin'. If he ain't been murdered—maybe the curse of this hellplace got him."

Pombal smiled. "I've neglected my studies in superstition. But I must say there is a possibility—"

"Rot!" grunted Warren. "Manuel was educated. Trouble was he got lonely here and imagined things were the matter with him." Then the big investigator looked sourly at Pombal. "Could your limited medical knowledge set the time of death?"

With an obliging smile, Pombal bent over Manuel. From where Warren sat, he could see the Spaniard's profile. And Pombal looked like he was laughing—laughing at the dead body!

BUT when Pombal again turned around, his dark face held a calm, professional expression. "This unfortunate fellow has been dead about three hours."

Warren's face was devoid of expression. "Of course, you were with him—when he peacefully passed on?"

A gleaming flash of teeth. "I'm afraid I don't know. Manuel rested in his bunk. I couldn't tell whether he was dead or sleeping. Naturally, I expected nothing was wrong, and didn't investigate."

"You worked the light?"

"I did my best."

Flint Warren smoked another cigarette, his eyes roving about the shack. In the corner opposite the bunk squatted an iron, pot-bellied stove. In another corner lay the newly-opened boxes of the month's supply of food, water and several huge tins of oil. The walls were decorated with a numerous assortment of rapiers, cutlasses, pikes, battle-axes, daggers and muzzle-loading blunderbusses.

These antiquated weapons took Warren's mind back to the naming of Cavalier Isle. Centuries ago, an ill-fated Indiaman had lost the route to India. For months it was buffeted around stormy seas, until finally wrecked on the reef six leagues off the Philippine Islands. Here her cavalier company perished. Native legend gave the reef a curse, and her superstitious sons

shunned it. The United States Government gave it a name and a lighthouse to safeguard South China Sea shipping.

Warren's eyes went from the weapons to the corpse. Seemed strange that a weaponless death should take place in so warlike a setting.

Then the big government agent looked bleakly at Pombal. "Your clothes are soiled," he pointed out.

Pombal nodded toward the iron ladder running up the scaffolding to the lantern. "I did my best with the light."

"It was sure tough on your suit. Did you slide down the ladder?"

The Spaniard drew himself up. "I've never taken the trouble to make a study of lighthouse keeping."

Warren said nothing. Getting to his feet, he made two careful rounds of the room. On the second trip he stopped at the newly arrived supplies. He examined them minutely. Then looking up, he spoke to Old Man Nolan:

"There's no wicking here."

"Manuel had 'nuff to last for a coupla days," hastily explained the tender skipper, "so I didn't overload the boat. Fact is, sir, I have it aboard right now." Nolan glanced sharply about the shack, then pointed to a box near the bunk. "There oughta be some in that, sir."

"There is," said Flint Warren. "And Manuel's been careless with government property." The Manila investigator made another round of the shack. Once he turned sharply to find Pombal's mocking eyes on his back.

The Spaniard's twist of a smile tightened in contempt. "I trust this farce will soon end, Lieutenant Warren. I would like to get back to the mainland."

"Maybe to see Infanta?"

"Infanta?" repeated Pombal. He shrugged his slim shoulders. "There have been so many—names elude me."

"And in the morning," Warren went on, "the Luzon would learn that Infanta had died a 'natural death.' Right?"

Pombal sneered openly. "This has gone far enough. I demand that you take me to the mainland. If you persist in your foolish idea — take along the body, too. Have it examined. I wish to leave at once!" He faced Old Man Nolan. "Are you ready?"

The skipper of the lighthouse tender looked to Warren. "Aye, sir, I told you right along that nothin' was amiss. You said yourself that Manuel ain't been shot or poisoned. If I may say, sir—"

Flint Warren shut him up with a wave of his hand. "Pombal is so damn anxious to pull out—I'm going to stick around awhile." Warren tossed away his cigarette. "I'm beginning to like the place!"

HE TOOK hold of the iron ladder leading to the light. "I'll get a better view of things from up there." The big investigator quickly ascended the ladder. And every step he took he could feel Pombal's sinister eyes boring into him.

Up and up went Flint Warren, the scaffolding narrowing as he climbed. He paused at the great oil tub which was filled by hand ladling. Far below him he could see the full stretch of the treacherous reef stealing out into the billowing expanse of the South China Sea.

Then Warren studied the construction of the light. Eight flat wicks ran from the tub of oil up through a slitted iron sheet. Each wick was operated by a thumb-screw on top of the metal sheet. Also on the metal sheet was a glass cupola with a window for each wick.

Warren had to climb up on the catwalk circling the lantern to see the thumb-screws, for the glass was piled high with millions of moths. The wicks, he noted, were screwed up clear of the oil tub, and had burned out for lack of fuel. This explained the sudden glare of light he had seen on the water last night. The wicks had been turned up too high, and not replaced.

Slowly, Warren went down the scaffolding. Not far from the roof of the shack he paused to inspect the ironwork. Minutes later, he started down, slowly—and very thoughtfully.

In the shack he slid into his chair and fired another cigarette.

"Well," demanded Pombal, "are we going?"

"We're going, all right," said Warren, flatly.

"Good," grinned Pombal.

"You can sit down now," offered Warren. "I don't think you've got the guts to take it standing up."

The Spaniard eased himself into a chair and relaxed comfortably. *"Gracias,"* his teeth flashed genially.

"Manuel's testimony almost stretched your neck, didn't it?" asked Warren.

Pombal nodded. "The poor fellow suffered under a delusion. But justice triumphed."

"Anyway," continued Warren, "suppose we say—just for an argument—that you were guilty of your wife's murder. Then your best way of getting hunk—would be to hang Manuel. Right?"

Pombal pinched his mustache. "Suppose you prove that Manuel was hung. Suppose you prove that he was strangled—that his neck was broken." The Spaniard nodded his head toward Manuel. "His neck was not broken. Even you—can see that."

For several minutes Flint Warren studied the walls of the shack. Then he looked up at Pombal, saying:

"You must have made a specialty of Roman history."

The Spaniard eyed him silently.

"Specially the Christian era," went on Warren. "The Romans didn't like 'em. Fed 'em to animals—burned 'em—and—"

Pombal got out of his chair, backed to the wall.

Then Warren smiled for the first time since he had set foot on the roof. And it was not a pleasant sight to see. He pointed up to the lantern and said slowly:

"Why didn't you replace the wicks in the lamp—when the light went out?"

He got no further. With a twisting leap Pombal snatched a rapier from the wall. Thrusting it out before him, he lunged at Old Man Nolan, who stood nearest the door.

Warren's hand, still pointing upward, flicked off his helmet and scaled it at Pombal's face. The visor struck the Spaniard's nose, momentarily blinding him.

And in that moment Warren crossed the room. His knotted fist thudded against Pombal's jaw. Pombal went down moaning. The rapier clattered to the floor.

"Couldn't chance a bullet," said Warren to Nolan. "I want him to hang in good health." Warren bent over and clicked handcuffs on Pombal's wrists. "By the way, Nolan, I want your tender to run Pombal back to the mainland. Tomorrow I'll send out another lightkeep. You watch the light tonight."

"Ayre, sir, that I'll do. But tell me, sir, how was the lad killed. I can't get the course of things."

Warren took up a handful of wicking. "The reason Pombal didn't replace the wicks last night—was because he was using them for another purpose. Look at the rust stains on this wicking—and on Pombal's suit. He used the wicking to hang Manuel from the scaffolding above. And he got himself all mussed up doing it."

"But Manuel's neck—?" began Nolan.

"Manuel was hung the Roman way, Nolan—by the feet! And the heavy shoes he wore prevented any marks of the wicking showing on his feet."

"It was a horrible death. Blood rushed to his brain—and slowly killed him. Then Pombal laid him in the bunk. He knew the Filipino's body would have the appearance of a natural death."

Pombal sat up groggily on the floor. Flint Warren jerked him to his fet. His eyes were bleak when he said: "Manila will treat you to a hanging, Pombal. It's shorter than yours—but the result is the same."

A gay gambler plays double or nothing on . . . .

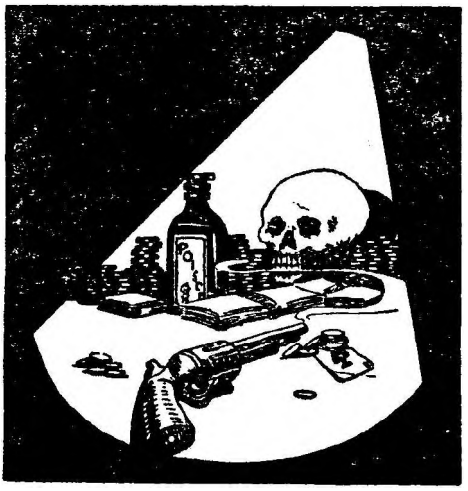
The Grim Reaper's Bait

By James Francis Bonnell

"YOU found him?" I said. "Then why did you lose your job?"

Gallivan waggled two fingers at the bartender. "It isn't one of those neat little stories you weave for the magazines," Gallivan said, with a touch of scorn for my profession. "This really happened."

I ignored the scorn. "Let's get this straight," I suggested. "You were working for The Colossus Insurance Company, investigating suspicious claims. They sent you to Peru on this case. You were looking for a man who held a one hundred thousand dollar policy in your company. His relatives had reported him dead, and were trying to collect on it. You found him—alive. And then the company fired you. Is that right?"



Gallivan smiled his enigmatic smile. "Right," he said.

I ordered the drinks this time.

"The lad's name," Gallivan said, after downing his Scotch, "was Don José Albero Marie di Martinez. We'll call him José. His old man made a fortune selling land up around Cerro De Pasco to an American Copper Company that wanted to mine there.

"He sent José to good schools in the States. Just after José finished, the old man very considerately died, and left José all his money.

"José needed it. He had expensive tastes in wine, women, and other forms of diversion. So—it wasn't many years before he could see the bottom of his pile.

"He came back to the States, then, and caught Colossus for that policy. One hundred thousand dollars, with a clause calling for double payment if he should die by violent means. He paid a couple of premiums, and sailed for home.

"He had some trouble with a passenger on the ship. There was a fight one night, and José was pitched into the sea. The other passenger was tossed into the jug. But he escaped before the boat reached Callao, and couldn't be found. It was believed he had drowned himself.

"The beneficiary was José's sister, a skinny, pitiful little woman of thirty or so. And that was the story she told. She had the captain of the ship to bear her out about the fight and the escape of the passenger, and so on. She asked Colossus to pay out two hundred thousand dollars—double the bet, in view of the violence—in honor of José's passing.

"Colossus said no. Not yet. The thing looked fishy, so they'd like to look around before paying out. And yours truly, Gallivan, was sent to Peru to do the looking.

"The first night off the boat I met Hendryx, in Callao. It was then that things began to look very, very easy."

Gallivan shook his head sadly, raised two fingers to the bartender.

"I knew Hendryx on the job I had in Peru several years before. Hendryx stayed on, after the job was over, took up with some native woman, and slowly went to hell with himself.

"We had a couple of drinks. I thought Hendryx might be of help to me, so I told him why I was there.

"Hendryx knew the country very well, knew who José was. He told me there had been great mourning over his passing, especially in the gambling palaces, where he was probably the country's leading goat.

"When Hendryx had heard my story, he agreed that the whole thing was a frame. He thought José would probably hide out in his old stamping grounds, around Cerro De Pasco, until the policy was paid—and then light out for far places.

"Hendryx offered to help me. We decided he should go up to the Copper town and snoop a little. He was known up there, and his presence wouldn't excite suspicion. We were to meet a week later.

"I stayed in Callao and picked up some interesting information. Such as this: that none of the passengers on José's return trip remembered the passenger who was supposed to have killed him. And the fact that the captain of the boat had lately left for parts unknown. Not conclusive, but helpful.

"When I met Hendryx, he had a girl with him. One of those dark, black-eyed, very beautiful girls that grow down there.

"HENDRYX was excited. 'I've got good news, Gallivan,' he said. 'José is living alone in an abandoned shack in the hills beyond Cerro. An old servant goes to him with food every other night. I followed him, and I can lead you there any time you say.'

"And Hendryx had more. 'This girl,' he said, 'is Margarita. She's a cast-off sweetheart of José's. We could take her along to identify him.'

"Margarita didn't understand English. That was why Hendryx talked so freely. I thought it was a great idea to bring her along. It might become necessary—in the interests of Colossus, of course—for her to come to Frisco to swear she had seen José alive. It would be a nicer trip with Margarita on the boat.

"We went to Cerro the next day. That night we set out for the cabin. Hendryx knew the back trails. We waited at one point for the old servant, tapped him on the head, trussed him up, and left him to be called for on our return trip.

"The hideout was an old shack, deep in the woods. When we came close, we could see beams of light seeping through cracks in it.

"We rapped on the door. José opened up, thinking it was the servant. Hendryx, Margarita and I poured in before he could get the door closed again.

"I took a quick look at him. Then:

"'I'm from Colossus,' I said. 'We had an idea you were still alive, so I came down for a look. Do you recognize this mug, Margarita?'

"José wheeled toward the girl, and his eyes blazed. With recognition, first; then with hate. Fierce, deep hate.

"'Why, you—' he snarled at her. 'You led these men to me! You—'

"He was too furious to speak. He hauled out a long knife, and made for her.

"I don't blame Hendryx. He did what any man would have done in the circumstances, with a wild lunatic charging a pretty woman, and swinging a deadly knife.

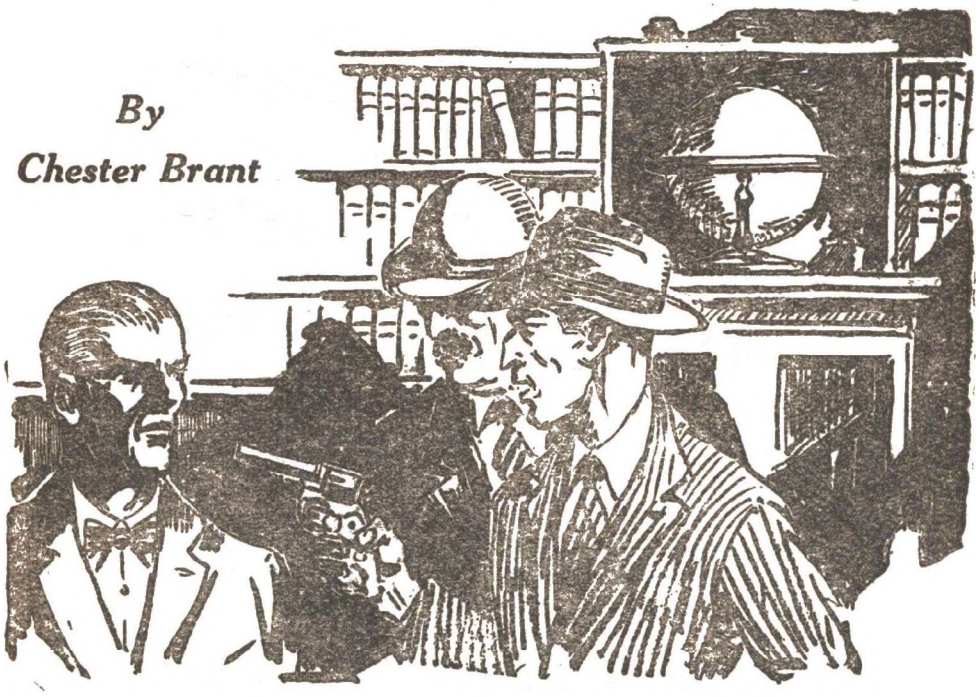
"Hendryx lifted the chair that was beside the table, and crowned José with it. Hard. A terrific wallop. José went down, and stayed down."

I said: "And you lost your job?"

"Two months later, when Colossus paid on the policy. Sure, double the bet. Death by violent means."

Vengeance of the Phoenix

By
Chester Brant



The World War battlefields had taught Colonel Hawtry the cheapness of human life. And now—when a beautiful girl stood in the way of a huge fortune—he drew on that harsh schooling

EDITH HAWTRY swung into the oak-paneled library of the Douglaston mansion with the free stride of an open-air girl. Her cheeks glowed with health. Her brown eyes were steady. Her voice resonant. "Got to have the limousine repaired, Uncle Ed. Smashed into another car, trying to pass it on a curve. The mud-guard's crumpled and chassis dented."

A shade of anxiety came to Colonel Edward Hawtry's gray eyes. His bearing was soldierly, his face strong, clean-shaven, clean-cut; lined from the strain and stress of former service Over There. "How about the occupant of the car?" he asked with concern.

A humorous twinkle came to the girl's eyes. "Occupant bumped around like corn in a popper. Black and blue where I bounced against the side, that's all."

He took one of her slim arms in each hand and held her at a distance, as he studied the lovely face. "Edith, I can't let you have a chauffeur who will put you in danger."

"It wasn't Dave's fault," she assured him. "I urged him to get ahead."

"Wish you would be more careful, Edith." His voice was kindly.

"You're a dear, Uncle Ed, not to be cross. Now I've got to dress for a dinner at the Ritz. You'll be asleep when I get back—so good night." She leaned forward and kissed him affectionately.

He heard her run lightly up the stairs. For many minutes he sat deep in thought at the desk, the smoke of his pipe trailing

across the library in the sluggish air.

At the entry of his country into the Great War he had given up his business and volunteered without waiting for the draft. He had endured the hardships and witnessed the horrors of the trenches and had come back to America without money to find that his older brother, Horace —Edith's father—had taken advantage of the draft exemption, and while enjoying the luxuries of New York, had amassed three-quarters of a million, selling army supplies.

Then Horace had died, leaving his daughter an orphan, and also leaving a will devising to her his wealth in trust, with the proviso that if she should not marry, the estate would revert to the younger brother, Edward, who was appointed her guardian and trustee, with a small annuity sufficient for his maintenance, but not much in excess.

Colonel Hawtry regarded the situation as unjust; and underlying his constant kindliness to his niece was a bitterness, entirely unsuspected.

As he reviewed the past his thoughts drove the kindliness from his face, and brought to it the ruthless sternness that had always been there when he gave a command that sent his men over the top to mutilation and death.

Making sure the phone connection with the upper floor was broken, he dialed a number. "Ned. Come out here for dinner. Good meal; good smokes; good liquor. The only drawback will be my yarns."

"I can stand those, colonel, if you've got the other things," responded Ned Winton, his former regimental orderly, a much younger man.

Hawtry's voice was level. "I want to discuss a business proposition with you in private, and my neice will not be at home. I'll send the servants to the movies and we'll get the mess ourselves."

"Like old times, colonel, when beans were the staple."

"Exactly. I'll expect you. There's a train from Penn Station at 7.45. I'll meet you at Douglaston in the roadster."

He heard Edith come down the stairs and called a cheery good-night to her. He told the maids and butler they could have the evening off, and heard them leave the house. In the roadster, he met the 7.45 from New York, but the car was parked a distance from the platform, and there were few passengers, so no one saw him drive off with Ned Winton.

THE mess was good and appreciated by his former orderly, who during post-bellum days had substituted the gat of the racketeer for the rifle of the soldier, but his clean-shaven face, lean and not unpleasant, retained its firmness, and had not been brutalized by the change.

As the smoke of their two cigars wove phantoms in the library, Colonel Hawtry outlined the situation, stressing the benefit which would accrue to him if his niece, Edith, should die before marriage.

As Winton listened his face hardened with understanding and his eyes became shrewd.

At the end Hawtry said, "You have seen men gashed in battle, Ned, and—you have seen nurses shattered when an ambulance or a hospital was bombed?"

Winton stared coldly across the desk, his face now a mask. "Lots of 'em, colonel—men *and women*. They all look alike when they're mashed up."

A cynical smile came to Colonel Hawtry's lips and the lines of cruelty were at the corners. "Ned, I cannot have a *careless* chauffer driving Edith around dangerous curves. I need a man I can trust."

Winton's lips were cynical, too. "Yeah, one you can trust to do what you want him to." His next words were blunt. "What's the split, if I take the job?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," answered Hawtry without hesitation.

"Make it fifty grand and I'm your chauffeur. You get three-quarters of a million if I conclude to go through with it when I get here. Fifty grand is fair for me if I do the job up brown. Is it a go?"

Colonel Hawtry nodded assent. "What security do you want. Ned, that I will perform my part of the contract?"

Winton's eyes narrowed. "None. When the job's done, you'll pay, all right, colonel."

Hawtry's brows contracted. "Yes—I—will—pay," he said slowly. His eyes were fixed thoughtfully on Winton's. "I do not lose sight of the fact that having paid, you may demand additional amounts in the course of time."

WINTON'S expression did not change. "And I don't lose sight of the fact that after you've paid me you may bump me off when the affair has blown over."

"We understand each other," was Hawtry's comment.

"You bet we do," responded Winton with decision.

"You are competent to handle the situation without instructions, Ned. I leave the details to you."

Then Winton sketched a plan of a young girl's mutilation and murder as impersonally as though he were discussing an army maneuver.

"First I've got to get the lay of the land around here, then I've got to find out the habits of your niece, and that may take quite a while. The racket's got to be pulled off when she's alone in the car with me, and it's got to be in a place where no outsider's around to see just what happens. Night is the best time. The car'll roll over in a ditch. I'll jump out before it crashes. There's got to be a deep gully beside the road so the car'll be smashed up, and she'll be mangled."

The two sinister men were sizing each other up, neither giving the other his full confidence, although pretending to do so.

Winton noted the colonel did not evince horror at the ghastly details.

The colonel noted a peculiar expression of inquiry in Winton's eyes.

"Why the mutilation, Ned?" he asked calmly.

"It will be better to have the girl dead before the car goes over," Winton answered. "A knife will do that, and the body must be smashed or burned so the knife-cut can't be seen." A grim smile came to his lips. "If the gasoline tank doesn't explode naturally, I'll be there to see it does. Any suggestions, colonel?"

Hawtry shook his head in silence.

"When do I report for duty?" asked Winton.

"Day after tomorrow — Thursday," Hawtry answered. He got up and, without a tremor of his hands, mixed two highballs. "Shall I take you down to the station?"

"No, I'll walk," Winton replied. "No need of anybody outside seeing us together tonight."

He went out the back door for concealment, skulked across the lawn in the shadows of the shrubbery and only came out on the public walk when he was a distance from the house.

Colonel Hawtry was in bed, apparently asleep, when his niece returned from the Ritz after midnight.

On Thursday there was blazing anger in Edith's eyes when she was told of the change of chauffeurs. "You had no right to discharge Dave, Uncle Ed. I ordered him to pass that other car on the curve."

Colonel Hawtry took her by the arms in his customary manner and held her away from him as he looked into her face; but she jerked the arms from his grasp and strode to the window.

He was patient. "It was Dave's duty to disobey your order, Edith, if it meant peril to you. I should be severely censured if I retained a chauffeur who would take you into danger, even though you insisted on it."

The girl drummed on the pane with her fingers. "I don't like this new man, Winton," she said sullenly. "Who is he?"

"He was my orderly on the other side—drove my car. I know he is an expert driver."

Edith glared at him. "All right. Hire him. I'll make you a present of the limousine. He can drive *you* around in it; he won't drive me."

Colonel Hawtry flushed. It was galling to be the recipient of a girl's bounty—one who would take her castoff car when she wanted it no longer.

She slammed the door after her with a bang that made the windows rattle. But evidently Edith gained confidence in Ned Winton quickly for within a few

days he was driving her around in the limousine.

Colonel Hawtry met her in the foyer when she returned from one of these drives. His smile was disarming, but tantalizing. "Indian-giver. I see you've taken back your car."

Her answering smile was a frank acknowledgement. "You win, Uncle Ed. Sorry I flew into a temper the other day. Ned certainly can burn up the roads and he *is* expert. I rather like him. Hope you are satisfied."

"Perfectly satisfied, dear." Hawtry's tone indicated the perfect satisfaction.

Later in the day Winton accosted him. "Get the fifty grand ready. Somebody'll phone you about an accident soon. My plan's going to work out just as I want it to." Again the shrewd, inquiring expression in the chauffeur's eyes made Hawtry thoughtful. "Wish I knew exactly what his plan is," he mused.

The message came the next Tuesday night at 10.30.

HAWTRY was in the library, smoking the inevitable Dunhill and reading the memoirs of Marshal Foch. The tinkle of the phone made him put the book down hastily. It was Winton's voice, with a quaver in it.

"A terrible accident, colonel—on Syosset hill."

Colonel Hawtry's first thought was his dear niece—his voice must register proper anxiety, for some one might be listening in at the other end of the wire. "Edith— is she hurt?"

There was a moment's hesitation before the reply; then the words came haltingly: "She's—dead."

Colonel Hawtry must now register horror and grief. He groaned, and Sheriff Lenahan, who was listening in at the other end, heard the moan of grief.

The colonel's voice was broken as he asked, "How—how did it happen?"

"Something went wrong with the brakes," Winton informed. "Those newfangled oil brakes, damn 'em. We ran over a strip of metal. I heard it jangle underneath the car. Nothing seemed to be wrong, but it must have cut the oil cylinder. When we came to the steep down-grade on Syosset I jammed on the brakes. They didn't hold at all. The car plunged into a gully. I had a chance to throw myself from the wheel before it went down, but—but Miss Hawtry—"

"Edith was held inside the car?" gasped Colonel Hawtry in horror.

Sheriff Lenahan, listening in, heard the gasp of horror.

"Yes." Winton's voice was husky with emotion. "The gasoline tank exploded and the wreck caught fire."

"And she was — burned to death." The anguish in Colonel Hawtry's voice was manifest.

"No. She was killed by the crash. She didn't suffer pain from the fire—but her head and the upper part of the body were —destroyed."

No one was present in the library with Colonel Hawtry, and the gloating satisfaction in his face, now sinister, was not repressed. The destruction of the upper part of the body would do away with any trace of a knife-thrust. "I will be right over. Wait there until I come," he responded, his voice trembling with grief.

"Sheriff Lenahan is here personally, in charge," stated Winton. "I've made a full statement to him and signed it."

"That is right," Hawtry assured. He was glad he had to deal only with an unskilled county sheriff and his deputies, for this meant there would not be the exhaustive probing for minute details, nor the scientific investigation of a trained police force. The situation was beautiful. Winton could not have chosen a better place than the desolate Syosset hillside, with no house close to the scene of the—accident, and no one near enough to hear the girl's cry of terror when she saw the knife, or her scream of agony as it pierced her flesh.

An awed and silent group surrounded the charred wreck at the bottom of the gully and the blanket-covered form on the ground.

The sheriff recognized Colonel Hawtry as he approached and came toward him. Lenahan was stalwart; his dark eyes keen; his lips firm, with lines of sternness at the corners. His hat was in his

hand and a mop of iron-gray hair crowned his massive head.

"Horrible, Colonel Hawtry," he muttered.

Hawtry apparently could not trust himself to speak. He shook his head sadly and in silence.

Lenahan spoke concisely. "Only your formal identification of the body is necessary. You can doubtless make that from the unburned portion of the clothing. You need not look at the—mutilation."

Colonel Hawtry was grateful. "Thank you, sheriff, for making it as easy as possible."

Lenahan continued. "Poor Winton is half-crazed with remorse, and no blame can attach to him. Of course it might have been more prudent to have stopped and examined the car when it ran over the metal strip, but he says it drove perfectly afterwards without any sign of damage. Stopping under those circumstances is something no driver would have thought of doing."

Hawtry felt his nerves tingle at mention of the metal strip. If search were made for that metal strip it would not be found. There was a quiver, not assumed this time, in his voice as he asked: "You have no doubt the oil cylinder was punctured by the metal?"

"None at all," answered Lenahan with decision. "I sent a deputy back along the road to see if it could be found."

Ice crept up Hawtry's spine, for the failure of the search might cause suspicion and he could not keep his hands from trembling, but Lenahan assumed this to be due to grief.

He added, "It was found in the middle of the road about an eighth of a mile up the hill, just as Winton said—an iron barrel hoop—edges sharp—a regular knife."

Lenahan interpreted the colonel's indrawn breath of relief as one of sorrow. Hawtry's worry was gone, but his face did not mirror the unutterable satisfaction of his mind. Ned Winton must have planted the barrel hoop to corroborate his story of the useless brakes. The crime had been perfectly prepared and executed.

"May I make the identification now, sheriff, so poor Edith can be taken away from this morbid crowd?" asked Hawtry.

"Just a word first," answered Lenahan.

Again Colonel Hawtry tensed, but outwardly there was no sign of the numbing fear in his brain. Was there some detail which had not been thought of now coming to the surface? In an agony of doubt he waited for the sheriff to speak again.

"Winton tells me he drove your car in France and that was the reason you hired him as chauffeur. Do you know that for the past year or two he has been under suspicion of being connected with a gang of policy racketeers?"

HAWTRY gave a start of surprise. "That is astounding to me. I supposed he had been chauffeur for a family in New York before he came to me. If I had known that!"

Lenahan interrupted. "It has nothing to do with this accident and it needn't be disclosed, if you prefer it to remain secret." The sheriff's keen eyes were fixed on Hawtry's face as he made the suggestion.

"Naturally I prefer the public should not comment on my hiring a chauffeur who was under suspicion by the police, yet I see no reason why you should not make it public."

That statement was manifestly proper and natural, and Lenahan's eyes left Hawtry's face as he added, "Winton asked me to speak to you. He assumed you'll blame him and won't want to see him so he will return to your home to get his wearing apparel, and then leave at once. He has agreed to hold himself subject to our orders for the inquest, and I'll trust him to be there."

Hawtry was thoughtful a moment. "It will be better for me not to speak to him now. I am unnerved by this tragedy, and might do or say something I should be sorry for afterward. Tell him I don't blame him—tell him I'll meet him when he returns to the house for his clothes, and pay him off. I could not stand seeing him around the place every day after

this. Won't you let me identify the body, sheriff, and get poor Edith away?"

Every detail had worked out perfectly and he wanted to terminate the interview.

Lenahan raised the blanket from the unburned portion.

Hawtry saw the tan walking skirt; the tan stockings fitting snugly the slender legs; the dainty shoes. His hand went up to his eyes. He tottered and staggered back a step.

"It is Edith," those near by heard him murmur, and the blanket fell gently, concealing again the pitiful stillness of the young girl.

A mortuary car had come, and into it the charred and mutilated form was reverently placed.

Afterwards, with face blanched and steps faltering, Colonel Hawtry entered the Douglaston mansion that was now his own. He was now the master, and not a servant, like the others, working there for a stipend. There was no evidence of this thought, however, in his voice or manner. As one almost overcome with grief, he gave brief details to the butler and the sobbing maids gathered in the foyer.

He wished to be notified upon Winton's return, and until then he desired to be alone. Yes, he wished to be alone and undisturbed, for it was now the time for Colonel Edward Hawtry to prepare a flank maneuver of which his ally in crime had no intimation.

He went into the library, closed the sliding doors after him and locked them noiselessly, so the servants would not know he had done so. He went to the wall safe and took from it an envelope containing fifty thousand dollars, which he had previously drawn from the trust fund for a fictitious purpose.

The amount was in bills of large denomination. From another package he took a single bill of one hundred dollars. This he put in his wallet.

He sat at the desk and made out a deposit slip to the Douglaston National Bank for fifty thousand dollars, and carefully placed this between the bills in the envelope in such a position it would not be readily seen. Upon the envelope he wrote, "For deposit in Douglaston Bank Wednesday morning." The envelope he placed in the upper left drawer of the desk, and from that drawer he took a flat, snub-nosed automatic pistol and placed it in his coat pocket. Then he unlocked the sliding doors as noiselessly as he had previously locked them.

He was entirely satisfied with himself and with everything. He lit his pipe.

The sliding doors opened softly and the butler stood there. "Winton has returned, sir, and is at the garage, if you wish him."

"Have him come here, Henry, and please remain in the room while I talk with him. I don't want to be unjust, but I am not myself after this terrible tragedy. If Winton angers me I may start something. In that event, you have my permission to restrain me forcibly, Henry."

"I understand, sir," said the placid butler.

THE idea was in Colonel Hawtry's mind that if Winton showed evidence of insubordination at the interview, the gun in his pocket might then and there end the possibility of future blackmail, and also save the fifty grand which was to be Winton's reward, but he realized that he himself must be careful not to say anything suspicious.

The break must come from Winton. The shot must be fired under circumstances the butler would declare to be self-defense, or an unpremeditated act under uncontrollable grief at the tragedy.

A moment afterward the chauffeur entered quietly and stood before the desk.

Colonel Hawtry noted in Ned Winton's eyes a look of complete satisfaction and confidence. His strong jaw was thrust out aggressively. Hawtry did not like the chauffeur's assurance. He might get nasty if crossed.

The butler came a little inside the doors and watched with eyes alert.

Colonel Hawtry's voice was low, tense, as though repressing passion. "Winton, I want you to understand I do not blame you for what has happened. Yet your continued presence in the house would be

a constant reminder to me that you were in charge of the car at the time poor Edith was so horribly killed." He paused.

"I prefer to go, colonel." Winton's voice seemed about to break, but his level eyes bored into those of Colonel Hawtry steadily and with an expression of scorn, almost hate.

However, it was perfect acting on the part of both, and Henry would be a perfect witness as to all that transpired, if any question arose.

"Here is a hundred dollars, Winton." Hawtry took the bill from his wallet, took the envelope from the drawer and placed the bill in it so the butler could not see it contained anything else. He held the envelope toward the chauffeur.

Winton took the envelope. "Thanks. I've already packed my grip. I'll walk to the station. Good-by, colonel."

"Good-by, Winton; good luck." Colonel Hawtry sank back in the chair, his head resting against its cushions, his eyes staring at the ceiling.

Winton passed out of the room and Hawtry heard him go along the hall; heard the back door slam shut after him.

"Good night, sir. You have my deep sympathy," said the butler in a voice devoid of feeling, and closed the sliding doors, leaving Colonel Hawtry alone with his grief.

But Colonel Hawtry was not so well satisfied now. Winton had been too shrewd to start a scene and give him a chance to use the gun. Winton alive was dangerous.

Colonel Hawtry came to tense activity. The heavy shades at the French windows he quietly pulled down; the sliding doors he again locked without noise; also the door at the back of the library.

The garage was at the right of the mansion and to the rear, and it would take Winton a few minutes to get his grip from the garage. The French windows of the library were at the left of the mansion and could not be seen from the garage.

Through one of these windows Colonel Hawtry stole, and in the shadows of the shrubbery skulked across the lawn. knowing the soil underneath the grass had been baked hard by a period of drought and would not retain footprints. Behind the high privet hedge bordering the sidewalk he crouched and waited. A distant arc light gave a dull glow sufficient for him to aim, but not bright enough to disclose what actually happened, if anyone chanced to be in the neighborhood.

He heard Winton's footsteps crunching the gravel of the path which led to the front gate; then heard his shoes striking the flags of the sidewalk with military firmness.

A car filled with joy-riders dashed past, and Colonel Hawtry's eyes glowed with satisfaction, for it would be from that car that any chance observer would believe the shot had come. Ned Winton was a racketeer and it would be assumed he had been put on the spot by his pals for trying to go straight. Hawtry would make the sheriff think so, too.

Ned Winton's shadow blurred the hedge. He strode by.

Hawtry took careful aim at the broad back so the bullet would plow through to the heart, and fired.

Winton moaned. His knees sagged under him. He dropped over on his face close to the hedge. His arms sprawled out. The fingers of his right hand dug into the gravel at the side of the flags. His legs twitched a moment. He raised his head a little. It dropped back, his face in the gravel. He lay still.

Hawtry's arm stole through the hedge to get the envelope that was in Winton's pocket, but at that instant heavy shoes pounded on the run along the flags and a police whistle shrilled.

There was not time for Hawtry to fumble in the chauffeur's coat and abstract the envelope before this running officer arrived and detected him. He withdrew his arm, and slunk quickly back in the shadows of the shrubbery to the library.

The gun? A secret compartment underneath the desk would conceal it until the next day, and then it would be effectively disposed of.

AS HE closed the secret compartment there was the sound of the butler's footsteps going hurriedly along the hall, but he did not try the sliding door. Henry was a thoughtful servant and would not disturb his master when he desired to be alone.

Colonel Hawtry quickly but noiselessly unlocked those doors and also the one at the back of the library. He was pleased Henry had not tried to open them when they were locked. He felt his body trembling; knew he was losing his grip; and with an effort mastered his emotion. He raised a couple of the window shades and again sat at his desk.

The first imperfection had appeared in Colonel Hawtry's execution of the plot. The envelope containing fifty thousand dollars was still in Winton's pocket, but Hawtry's flank maneuver had been shrewdly planned for that contingency. His face became set and merciless and his eyes gloated as he thought how perfectly the deposit slip of the Douglaston National Bank in the envelope with the pack of bills would dispose of that contingency.

The butler opened the sliding doors and saw him at the desk smoking his pipe and reading. He did not think his master had been out of that room at all.

"What is the matter, Henry?" asked Colonel Hawtry, without undue interest.

"A shot was fired down the road, sir," said the butler.

Hawtry laid aside the book in mild surprise, not sufficient, however, to prevent him from turning down the corner of the leaf. "Indeed. I heard a car just go by, hell-bent-for-election, and thought it backfired."

"People are running that way, sir. I think something has happened. I heard one say it was Winton, sir."

Colonel Hawtry rose quickly then, his face showing natural concern. "Why, he just left me, Henry, as you know. He seemed much distressed. Can the poor fellow have committed suicide in remorse?"

"Some one said 'Murder,' sir," replied the butler.

Colonel Hawtry appeared thoughtful. Now was the time to sow the seed in stolid Henry's mind. "Lenahan told me something after the accident which I did not know before. He said since Winton lost his regular job in the city he has been hooked up with some racketeering gang. Possibly he knew too much, and now he was trying to go straight; his confederates may have put him on the spot so he could not disclose their crimes. I hear such things are done in the underworld. Possibly the shot came from the car we heard go by."

He crossed the room and yard with rapid strides, and when he reached the sidewalk did not hesitate to run to the place where a small crowd had collected. He had taken pains to stride across the lawn and to run along the gravel at the side of the flags, so any grass and dirt which might be on his shoes could be attributed to this trip.

He almost bumped into Sheriff Lenahan on the outskirts of the crowd. It gave him an unpleasant shock that Lenahan should be there.

"My butler told me something had happened to Winton—the chauffeur," Hawtry panted. He had been running and was out of breath.

"Shot," said Sheriff Lenahan laconically.

"Not dead?" Colonel Hawtry recoiled, his face showing proper horror.

"Dead as a door nail," responded Lenahan.

"Suicide—from remorse?" Colonel Hawtry inquired. His rôle was played as pat as though it had been rehearsed.

The sheriff's eyes bored into him. "Shot in the back. Does that look like suicide?" he snapped.

Now was the time to sow the seed in the unskilled sheriff's mind.

"I heard the report while I was in the library," Hawtry mused. "But a car had just rushed by and I took the sound for a backfire. From what you told me tonight, sheriff, could Winton's pals have put him on the spot for trying to go straight?"

"That's likely, colonel." Lenahan was plainly impressed with the idea. "That car is a good clue. Did anyone else hear it?"

"I think my butler mentioned it," Hawtry told him.

"We'll interview him when we finish here," said Lenahan, and the two edged through the crowd to the body. A robe from an automobile which had stopped at the scene of the tragedy had been thrown over it.

Lenahan raised the robe for Colonel Hawtry to identify. The chauffeur was lying with his face in the gravel just as he had fallen.

"It's Winton," said Colonel Hawtry sadly. He shuddered and drew back. "It is the second time tonight I have had to do—this."

LENAHAN and he were standing a little aside.

"When did you last see him?" asked the sheriff.

"Only a few minutes before this happened. I paid him off in the library and told him I would no longer need his services. You understand I could not bear to see him around, and—"

"You've told me that before," interrupted Lenahan brusquely. "How much did you pay him?"

Colonel Hawtry's face showed surprise which was not assumed. He was a little alarmed and at a loss to understand Lenahan's coldness. Was there a suspicion? Hawtry's tone in reply did not betray the thought. "A hundred dollars. I gave him extra on account of letting him go without notice."

"Was there any other money lying around the library he could have got hold of and stolen from you?" asked Lenahan.

Then Colonel Hawtry understood the sheriff's changed manner. Of course, he had found the envelope with the bills in Winton's pocket and it had caused suspicion. Hawtry answered without hesitancy, "Yes, an envelope in the desk drawer containing cash I was going to deposit tomorrow in the Douglaston Bank. The name of the bank is written on the envelope, and there is a deposit slip inside for fifty thousand dollars."

Lenahan's eyes were fixed on his face. "You are careless in handling an amount of that size," he said tersely.

"I don't think so," responded Hawtry, assuming a trace of natural anger. "I had just put the bills in the envelope and was about to place it in the wall safe when the butler announced Winton was there, so I dropped it in the desk for the moment. I do not regard that as careless."

Sheriff Lenahan did not comment. "Let's go inside and I'll bet you won't find your money there."

The two returned to the library and Colonel Hawtry opened the drawer. His face went blank and he stared at the sheriff as though in amazement.

Lenahan threw the envelope down on the desk. "There's your cash, colonel. Count it. We found it in Winton's inside pocket. Better see it gets in your safe now and in the bank the first thing in the morning. Too many people know about it now. They will know I returned it to you and some one else may make a try for it."

Hawtry felt easier. Lenahan had evidently accepted without question the theory of a gang killing and also the fact that Winton had stolen the intended deposit from the desk. His thankfulness that he was not dealing with the Metropolitan police returned. There would be no search of the house made that night and the gun could remain safely in the secret compartment until it could be permanently disposed of. The true facts of the second death had been as perfectly concealed as those of the first one. He had planned and executed every detail perfectly.

But Lenahan's next question startled him again. "How could Winton have stolen the envelope from the drawer? Were you out of the room at all while he was here?"

Hawtry had no time to think, but he answered promptly. "I went out the door at the back to get the hundred-dollar bill to pay him."

The minute the words were out he realized the slip—the first real slip in the perfect crime—for his mind then visualized the butler standing stolid-faced, but keen-eyed, in the room all the time he and Winton were together there, and he knew Henry's precise mind had registered all the details of the interview and he would

deny that Hawtry had left the room at any time.

But Lenahan accepted this statement also without question, so the butler in all likelihood would not be examined concerning it.

"That gave Winton the opportunity he needed," said the sheriff. "Good-night, colonel. Sorry this additional trouble has come to you."

He strode from the room and Hawtry heard the butler let him out the front door. Then the butler closed the sliding doors of the library that his master might be alone again.

Hawtry sank in the desk chair, his athletic form relaxed from strain; his mind freed of its last worry now.

The grandfather clock in the hall ticked solemnly. The fragrant smoke of the seasoned pipe hung level in the air. A soft breeze murmured through the maples bordering the driveway. The silken curtains swayed just a little at the opened windows.

Colonel Edward Hawtry was the owner and master of this splendid estate.

Something cold, and hard, and small, and circular, touched the back of Colonel Edward Hawtry's head.

Instinctively his hands went up.

A VOICE as cold and hard as the metal thing that pressed against his head spoke low. "You thought you could croak me, Hawtry, before I could ask for more money, but I fooled you." It was Ned Winton's voice!

"Missed," muttered Colonel Hawtry, his arms upraised stiffly, his head rigid.

A vindictive chuckle came from behind him. "Like hell you missed. You're too good a marksman to miss at close range. Your shot struck me plumb back of the heart, but I had on a bullet-proof shirt. I know you too well to take chances. . . . Keep your arms straight, Hawtry, and put both your hands on the desk, palms down. If you move, I'll pull the trigger."

Hawtry's hands rested on the desk, arms extended. "You will go to the electric chair, Ned, if you murder me. The envelope with fifty thousand inside is on the desk. Take it. Nobody has seen you here. I will swear you have not been here."

Winton's arm stole around Hawtry's body, while his other hand still kept the gun pressed against the back of Hawtry's head, and Winton took the envelope. "That was mine, anyway, whether you live or die," he said. His voice was cold, hard; without pity or mercy. "If I don't croak you now you'll croak me the first chance you get. You won't give up till you get what you want, damn you—you never do—so you pass out of the picture tonight for good."

Colonel Hawtry's voice was firm. "Have it over with, Ned."

"Plenty of time," said the man behind him.

Heavy footsteps were heard pounding up the front stoop. There was a sharp ring at the door. Colonel Hawtry knew the sounds meant life for him, but he did not move.

Ned Winton knew that, too, and spoke sharply. "I'm going out the back door of this room. Ring for Henry and tell him to let those people in. Keep them talking here until I've had a chance to get away. I have not been here. Remember that, Hawtry. If you wise 'em up I've been here, and they get me, I'll wise 'em up you hired me to kill your niece, and we'll both go to the hot seat on the same day."

The cold circle left the back of Colonel Hawtry's head. There was the faint creak of the door opening behind him and closing softly again.

Hawtry pressed the button on the desk.

The butler came in.

"See who it is, Henry. If it is anybody who ought to see me, have them come in."

HE HEARD the door open. He recognized Lenahan's voice. Relief came.

"That cuss wasn't dead," blurted the sheriff, agitated, chagrined.

Colonel Hawtry jumped up, apparently as agitated as the sheriff. Lenahan continued. "He must have been temporarily stunned or something. We jammed him in the back of a covered wagon, thinking he was dead, and he came to and got out while we were on the way to the police

station. We thought first the back doors had swung open accidentally and the stiff had rolled out, but we couldn't find it on the road."

"Damned careless of you, Sheriff Lenahan," snapped Colonel Hawtry.

Lenahan glowered. "Haven't seen anything of him, have you?"

"Of course not. He wouldn't come back here again after stealing my money."

"Don't be so damned sure about that, Hawtry," Lenahan growled. "You got the cash back and he may have found it out and try to steal it again."

late; then controlled himself. "Sure you have not seen Winton since he was shot at?" he asked.

Colonel Hawtry in turn became angry. "No, of course not. You are behaving like a child, Lenahan. I told you I had not seen him."

"Better look around," said Lenahan quietly.

Colonel Hawtry wheeled.

In the back doorway of the library stood Ned Winton, grinning.

Hawtry stood aghast at the apparition —then pulled himself together and played

"He can't do that. I put it in the safe as you advised."

Lenahan's anger was not appeased. "Get it out. I'll give you a receipt for it and take it to headquarters until I get a court order to return it to you. I'm not going to be accused of any more carelessness."

Hawtry outwardly was undisturbed by Lenahan's demand. His voice was level. "Really, I can't give it to you tonight, sheriff. The safe has a time lock and after I put the envelope in I set it for noon tomorrow, as the arrangements for poor Edith's funeral will keep me busy all the morning."

Lenahan mumbled something inarticu-

the game without a tremor. "Get that rat, Lenahan. Send your men back through the hall and get him from the rear. I'll take the risk of his shooting at me. Get him before he runs away."

"He won't run away," responded Lenahan as though with confidence. "But he's a crack shot, Hawtry, and I'd advise you not to try it either." Then his face became hard and his voice menacing. "You lied, Hawtry, when you said you had not seen Winton after he was shot at. You lied when you said you put the envelope in the safe, for Winton's got it in his hand. Why did you lie?"

Colonel Hawtry did not blanch or hesitate. His voice had a tinge of sarcasm.

"While I was talking with you I knew Winton was back of that partly opened door, covering me with his gat. I know as well as you he is a crack shot. It is quite apparent why I lied."

Lenahan muttered profanity. "Gaffney, McFarlane, come in here!" he ordered.

Into the room strode two deputies, and behind them came—*Edith Hawtry!*

COLONEL Edward Hawtry crumpled into the chair and his eyes bulged.

"Miss Hawtry will explain," said Lenahan.

The girl's hand trembled. There was a mist in her eyes as she looked at her uncle, who had invariably been kind and sympathetic, even during the latter days when he had been plotting her hideous death. Then her eyes turned from the cringing man at the desk and were fixed on Sheriff Lenahan as she told the story.

"Ned Winton took the position here only to warn me that Un—that Colonel Hawtry was planning to have me killed. He was horrified but he pretended to agree to it, for he knew if he refused Colonel Hawtry would plan my death some other way. The day after Ned came he told me all about it, and asked me to go to the police and he would make a full statement. We did go to you, Sheriff Lenahan, but you told us Colonel Hawtry had not yet done anything for which he could be imprisoned for more than a short term, and—and—"

The girl turned to the crumpled figure in the chair.

"You are a murderer at heart, Colonel Hawtry, and I wanted you killed as a murderer."

She bit her lips to check more angry words, and continued calmly. "The sheriff advised us to go through with the plan, to get evidence of a more serious crime. He obtained the body of an unfortunate girl who had been killed and mutilated in an automobile accident, and whose body was unclaimed at the morgue. While I stayed with a friend they put a suit of my clothes on her, and— Oh, I can't go on. I know how her poor body was burned."

Sheriff Lenahan continued with grim satisfaction. "Even after we had made the wreck look like the real thing we were not sure of convicting you, Hawtry. You would have denied Winton's statement and claimed he was lying to blackmail you, and that he had duped your niece through more lies into believing you plotted her life.

"You had been pretty smart, Hawtry. Your niece really knew nothing incriminating against you, except that Winton had told her. It would have been his word against yours. You are an honorably discharged colonel of the army, and a man of standing, while Winton is hooked up with racketeers. A jury would probably have credited your story, and you would have gone free to plot the death of your niece in some other way.

"So Winton agreed to carry on further and come here tonight to get the fifty grand in his possession as evidence against you. Again you out-smarted us by making it appear that he had stolen money you intended to deposit in the bank."

An expression of rage and scorn came to Sheriff Lenahan's face. His voice bit. "Hawtry, you are too damned clever to be at large. Next you shot Winton, and I didn't expect such absolute savageness on your part, so I didn't have my deputies stationed to see the shot fired. No one had proof you fired it. Still you were riding high and liable to go scot free on a trial. So Winton volunteered to try again, and this time we got you, for we had men outside the window who heard what you said to him when he had the gun against your head."

Colonel Hawtry staggered up from the chair. He steadied himself and stood erect, his shoulders thrown back. His face was lined and furrowed, but carved in granite. He wheeled and strode toward Winton firmly. His voice rang out sharp in command, as it was wont to do Over There. "Put an end to this, Orderly."

His former orderly obeyed the command, as he was wont to do Over There. His gun cracked and Colonel Hawtry died.

"Self-defense, Winton; we'll all swear to that," declared Sheriff Lenahan.

A Gentleman at Large

By Eric Lennox

This cavalier crook made an art of his rather shady profession. And no matter what the consequences, he tried to be a gentleman.

SITTING in his suite of rooms in the Hotel Montcalm, at Broadway and Fiftieth Street, Mr. Auguste Lapin was in something of a dilemma. A dress suit and a tuxedo were spread out on the bed before him. He was wondering which would be the most appropriate on this particular evening.

So far as the proprieties went he could wear either; but he had also to consider the demands of his profession. Things, certain small articles, were sometimes more easily concealed under the long tails of a dress suit. On the other hand, a tuxedo gave a feeling of ease and a freedom of movement that was also an advantage in his line of work. These delicate distinctions were not to be regarded lightly. To a man who was an artist in his field they were worthy of a good deal of thought.

AUGUSTE LAPIN

He finally decided on the tuxedo; and then, with a smile of satisfaction on his amiable face, sat and smoked a Turkish cigarette down to where the cork tip began. His eyes had a far-off look in them, but his mind was active.

Mr. Lapin liked to pass himself off as a Frenchman. He had a pointed nose, a little waxed mustache and a sallow complexion which he nevertheless was in the habit of having carefully massaged by an expert facial masseur at least once a week.

The police of five countries were not sure whether Mr. Lapin was French or not, nor were they interested in the care he bestowed upon his pigmentation. They only knew that as a jewel thief he was incomparable and that, in eluding the fingers of the Law, he displayed the mental and physical agility of a fox. They never guessed that Mr. Lapin had a private and personal code that he always adhered to.

This code was simple. Mr. Lapin believed that even a thief should at all times be a gentleman. He prided himself that his conduct had never been anything but gentlemanly even when he had staged some of his most famous robberies. It was his manners, he knew, that gave him the entrée into some of the most exclusive circles in the various countries through which he travelled.

Another thing which Mr. Lapin prided himself upon was his cosmopolitanism. He was at home anywhere. He liked everybody. There was nothing snobbish about him—although this could not be said of the people with whom he mixed.

But he would just as lief steal from an Englishman as a German. He found the flamboyant cutting of Italian gems just as attractive as the more chaste ones that the Dutch fancied. He often felt that his good taste gave him more right to the stones he took than any

claims which their legal possessors might have.

He only regretted that he could not keep the stones for his own personal enjoyment. The necessity of selling them through a fence often grieved him deeply. But as he pocketed a fresh roll of banknotes he would shrug and try to be philosophical.

A gentlemanly code and a cosmopolitan spirit were not the only things which contributed to his success. There was also his native shrewdness—one might almost say his business sense.

This evening, after he had dressed himself in his immaculate tuxedo, Mr. Lapin went to the closet at the end of the spacious bedroom. He reached in and lifted out a heavy and expensive looking pigskin traveling bag. He took out a couple of extra dress shirts and a set of underwear.

The bag was now to all intents and purposes empty. But Mr. Lapin turned it upside down and pressed four of the large brass studs on the bottom. Something happened then. There was a faint clicking of metal and an oblong panel of leather came out disclosing a cleverly concealed false bottom. In it, wrapped in a silk scarf so that they would not rattle, were a number of objects.

There was a short and flat but wicked-looking automatic of small caliber which Mr. Lapin at once pocketed. There was a roll of bills and a number of cancelled checks. There was also a small parcel done up in chamois skin. This Mr. Lapin took out carefully and laid on the bed. Then he closed the bag and put it back in the closet.

HIS eyes glowed with pride as he opened the chamois-skin parcel. It contained a pearl necklace, beautifully graduated and of charming luster. There was a story behind this necklace. The pearls which formed it were perhaps the only gems that Mr. Lapin had not stolen in his entire career. He had actually bought and paid for them and—they were imitation.

But Mr. Lapin knew that and it didn't bother him. No one except an expert would have guessed it. They were Séclas, the finest artificial pearls made. But the strangest thing about them was that they were an exact counterpart of the famous Cuthwaite necklace which some months ago had been on exhibition in the city's museum.

It was through the kindness of the dazzling and buxom Mrs. Cuthwaite that the public at large had had a chance to see what sort of precious trinkets a grand society dame adorned her person with. She had loaned her jewels as a temporary exhibition, and Mr. Lapin had gone often and admired much.

Being a connoisseur of pearls, the necklace had caught his eye and had become almost an obsession. But the museum case which held the pearls was made of metal framework and plate glass, and museum guards hovered about it as tenderly and anxiously as mothers around their first-born. Their expressions, however, had all of the force and none of the gentleness which the maternal instinct inspires.

And so Mr. Lapin had had to curb his passion for the Cuthwaite necklace. There is a time and place for all things. Yet the image of it did not leave his mind. He had noted the number of individual pearls in it; their size and luster, and even the exact design of the catch that held the string together when the necklace was around the plump neck of Mrs. Cuthwaite. He had made little sketches of the catch, paying particular attention to the manner in which it was opened.

And then he had bought the Sécla pearls one by one so as not to arouse suspicion. He had had the platinum chain and the gold catch made and had strung the pearls himself. The necklace was almost as beautiful as the original—almost—and it had cost him five hundred dollars, for Sécla pearls were not cheap even if they were artificial.

Yet he regarded it as a sound investment. What was five hundred dollars compared to sixty thousand, which was the conservative value of the Cuthwaite necklace? He had only to await an opportunity to substitute his imitation for the

original and a neat profit of fifty-five thousand dollars would result. Surely no business man could expect more!

That an opportunity would come Mr. Lapin had never doubted. He was a gentleman and had a social way with him. He had gone to some pains to discover the preferences and habits of Mrs. Cuthwaite.

She liked literary folk, and, presto, Mr. Lapin became a distinguished French author. A bit of plagiarism from the classics, a few privately published books distributed about among society Bohemians who would talk, and, lo, Mr. Lapin was being invited about to teas among folk whose good taste was not as great as their wealth.

Mrs. Cuthwaite was included in this group. She just "adored" people who did things. She particularly liked personable young men who had an exotic air. Mr. Lapin filled the bill in both respects. He could be exotic when occasion demanded, and he certainly "did things." Police of many nationalities could testify to that.

And so tonight, Mr. Lapin, masquerading under the glamorous name of Pierre Alphonse Deveroux, was among the honored guests at a dinner and dance in the home of the wealthy and exclusive Mrs. Cuthwaite. He was, needless to say, looking forward to the event greatly. It would be pleasant to find himself face to face once again with the Cuthwaite pearls.

THE Cuthwaite mansion in the suburbs was just as magnificent as Mr. Lapin had anticipated. It was, he told himself, a jewel of a house in a setting of spacious lawns. The many windows might have been the gleaming facets of some gigantic gem. It made him think again of the Cuthwaite necklace, and he smiled a small twisted smile which tweaked up the point of his mustache at one side.

He entered the house with a feeling of exhilaration. It was great to be a famous personage, to be received as more than an equal by these aristocrats of wealth.

Mrs. Cuthwaite came forward and greeted him effusively. She was a huge battleship of a woman. But she was all smiles and pleasantries. And tonight she was especially imposing. The famous Cuthwaite necklace not only graced her neck, but on her head was a diamond tiara of ravishing beauty. Mr. Lapin saw it and was dazzled, but even it could not eclipse the lure of the necklace in his sight. He was a man of single purpose and intense loyalty.

"It is a pleasure to have you with us, tonight, Mr. Deveroux," said Mrs. Cuthwaite, smiling. "It isn't often that we are honored with the presence of a great author."

Mr. Lapin bowed low over the lady's hand almost as though he were going to kiss it. But at the last moment, just before his lips brushed her fair skin, he raised his head and looked soulfully into her eyes. It was a maneuver that Mr. Lapin had practised often. It never failed to impress.

The other guests as they came up to be introduced were cordial, too. It seemed to Mr. Lapin that this was going to be one of the most successful evenings of his career; successful because he was holding his own in a world of wealth and fashion and because his talents would soon have an opportunity of expression in the theft of a sixty-thousand dollar necklace.

And then, just when he was sitting pretty, just when the stage was set for his master coup, Fate, that fickle and sardonic goddess, stepped in. Mrs. Cuthwaite came toward him, leading by the arm a hatchet-faced and dark-skinned gentleman whose piercing eyes were set altogether too close on either side of his Gargantuan nose. And Mr. Lapin, alias Pierre Alphonse Deveroux, started and turned slightly pale.

The gentleman with the large nose also started. His swarthy complexion would not allow him to turn pale; but for a moment his eyes swiveled around wildly.

"I want you to met Señor Carendo, the Spanish poet," said Mrs. Cuthwaite with enthusiasm. "You two are both

literary and will have a great deal in common."

Mr. Lapin bowed and so did the Spanish poet, Carendo. But after Mrs. Cuthwaite had gone and left them alone they seemed to have little to say—for a time at least. Then the Spanish poet found his voice.

"You here!" he growled. His little eyes glittered.

Mr. Lapin nodded. "Yes," he said. "We are both here, it seems."

He knew just three things about Señor Carendo. The man was not Spanish; he was not a poet, and his name was not Carendo. Added to these certainties was a strong conviction which Mr. Lapin held, namely that the fellow had no right to be here. Carendo's real name was Carotti and he came from sunny Sicily —although his disposition was anything but sunny.

"The last time we met," went on Mr. Lapin with an effort at nonchalance, "was under far different circumstances."

"Yes," said Señor Carendo, and he grinned nastily.

Both men were thinking of an English prison with tiers of ancient cell blocks and of gray days spent amid gray surroundings. It had been one of the few times that Mr. Lapin had slipped. They had sent him up for a year and a half, and Carotti the Wop had been his cellmate.

Mr. Lapin had nothing against Italians in general. They were generally fine fellows. But he had conceived a violent hatred of Carotti. The man was a vulgarian; a braggart; a fellow with coarse instincts and coarse ideas. His table manners were bad, his conversation was boring, his taste was non-existent.

In fact, Mr. Lapin liked nothing about him. And yet they had spent weary days in each other's company, and the hate had been mutual. Carotti had no more use for Lapin than Lapin had for him. They had parted hoping that they would never lay eyes on each other again. But here they were.

Carotti seemed to be taking Mr. Lapin's presence as a personal affront. His face was convulsed with fury.

"If you crab my game," he warned, "I'll expose you as a jailbird and thief."

"You are no one to talk," said Mr. Lapin more suavely. "I could do the same to you—but I have no idea what your 'game,' as you call it, is."

"You know very well we both came here to steal."

Mr. Lapin hadn't, of course, any doubt as to that. He knew that such a person as Carotti wasn't there merely to cheer the other guests. But now he had a real qualm.

"What is it you are after?" he asked in sudden apprehension.

"The diamond tiara, of course, that our hostess wears—and you?"

"The pearl necklace," said Mr. Lapin, much relieved. There was a caressing note in his voice as he spoke of the necklace. Then a puzzled frown appeared on his forehead. He looked at Carotti questioningly. "I don't see," he said, "how you can possibly steal the tiara. It is pinned in her hair." The conversation was becoming a technical discussion between two experts.

But Carotti grinned, showing his ugly teeth. "There are ways," he said, "of skinning a cat—even an old one. And how, my little cake-eater, do you think you can grab the necklace?"

Carotti hadn't answered Mr. Lapin's question. Besides this, Mr. Lapin found Carotti's tone offensive. The very appearance of the man riled his finer sensibilities. Carotti really shouldn't be in this sort of work. He had no finesse, no manners. He should be a safe-cracker.

"Since you have not told me your method I shall not tell you mine," said Mr. Lapin quietly. "I don't like your insulting manner, Carotti, nor your insulting words. Please remember that even thieves can be gentlemen."

Mr. Lapin held himself proudly erect as he said this. There was no question but what he was a finer type than Carotti. He was a jailbird and a thief, of course. He carried a gun, was even prepared to kill in self-defense if the need should ever arise. He was a rogue

and a menace to society, and unquestionably he should have been locked up.

Yet in that strange region of Mr. Lapin's soul there were redeeming qualities which seemed to have no place there. There was a sort of Robin Hood flare that made him do gallant things on occasion. He had more than once helped destitute people with the money he stole from the rich. He never forgot a favor —and he tried to be a gentleman always.

AND now he was reluctant to place the details of his artistic scheme for stealing the pearl necklace before the crass Carotti. They had spoken freely enough up to this point. But now they had reached a deadlock.

Though Mr. Lapin admitted to himself that he was eaten up with curiosity as to how Carotti could hope to succeed in his ambition, he knew that the man's brain was not the finely adjusted mechanism that his own skull contained.

But Carotti had a certain crude force. He drew his lips back again now and glared at Mr. Lapin.

"You always were a nut," he said gratingly. "But forget this gentleman— stuff and remember one thing—if you do anything to crab my game I'll turn you over to the dicks—or stick a knife in your ribs."

"Try anything like that," replied Mr. Lapin, "and I'll send a bullet through your addled wits."

Before Carotti could answer, a perfumed and rustling female Goliath swept up to the corner where they were having their tête á tête. Their smiling hostess was upon them.

"You two seem to have a lot to talk about," she said, "just as I thought you would."

"Yes," replied Mr. Lapin gravely. "Two men of the same craft always have a common meeting ground." The music in the next room struck up just then, and Mr. Lapin smiled into the eyes of Mrs. Cuthwaite.

"May I have the honor of a dance?" he asked, and she accepted.

HE WAS very attentive to her from that time on. At dinner he conversed brilliantly about French authors and related anecdotes he had picked up in cafés of Montmartre.

And it was after dinner that his great chance came, the chance for which he had prepared and been waiting.

Mrs. Cuthwaite ordered the lights in the ballroom turned low. She had arranged a crystal ball on the ceiling which revolved and threw the beams of a small spotlight around the walls and on the floor in subdued prismatic colors. The orchestra moaned and sobbed, and Mr. Lapin held his plump hostess in his arms and danced with her as lightly as a feather.

And during the course of the dance, on a dark side of the room, he found it a simple matter to reach up with one hand and as though delicately caressing her neck to snap the catch of her necklace with one thumb nail.

The necklace dropped and rattled on the smooth floor. Mrs. Cuthwaite let out a little cry of dismay. But Mr. Lapin instantly reassured her.

"Don't worry," he said. "Your necklace dropped, but wait, it's right here, at your feet."

He disengaged himself, stooped and picked up the pearls. But previous to this his hand had slipped in his pocket. He held the imitation pearls in his palm. And now it was a simple matter to substitute the artificial for the genuine.

He steered Mrs. Cuthwaite over to a lighter spot. With the tenderness of a lover he fastened the imitation string around her neck. She smiled and blushed as his fingers touched her skin. The pearls slipped into place and looked as well as ever. It would be many days before she discovered the substitution.

Mr. Lapin smiled. His heart had hardly increased its beat during the whole maneuver. But now he felt a glow of pride and that strange thrill that success brings. This, he felt, was robbery as it should be done. The robber and his victim on good terms; everything genial and mannerly; all the conventions preserved.

They danced on, and Mr. Lapin wondered how that vulgar rogue, Carotti, could possibly succeed in what he was planning to attempt. Several times he had examined the diamond tiara. It was a magnificent thing.

But the tiara was fastened to the wealth of her hair. He saw no possible way of getting it without her knowing it.

Mrs. Cuthwaite began gasping as stout people will. She complained of the closeness of the room. And Mr. Lapin suggested that they step out into the garden for a breath of air.

The night was soft. The scent of flowers was in the air, and as they walked along the porch and under the balcony which loomed above the steps into the garden a faint silver moon showed through the leaves overhead.

"Isn't the night lovely?" she said. And Mr. Lapin agreed that it was.

But then, as they stood there, something made him glance upward. It was as though some inner sense were telegraphing a warning to his nerves.

For an instant he saw a sly face and a pair of close-set eyes. A brown and wrinkled finger was placed to a pair of cruel lips in a command for silence. But what horrified Mr. Lapin most was the thing that was coming from the balcony. It glittered a bit and could not escape his sharp eyes. It was a hook, a triple-pointed fishhook on a piece of string. And even as he gazed it caught in Mrs. Cuthwaite's tiara.

There was a jerk, a scream from Mrs. Cuthwaite, and a sight that made Mr. Lapin cry out in horror. His face on the instant became as pale as death. And then he leaped, leaped upward and caught that string. With a savage tug he wrenched it out of Carotti's hands as he stood on the balcony above.

He unhooked the prongs from the tiara. Soon the gleaming jewels were back on her head.

But Carotti above was in a terrible fury. He was almost frothing at the mouth. As his violent Sicilian temper rose up he threw discretion to the wind.

(Continued on page 111)

A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

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Now another change is 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 to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

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 Connecticut man writes he has made $55.00 in a single day's time. 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.

Not a "Gadget"— Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices 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 dealers 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 saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into 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 $58.60, 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.

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, $5.83 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 size 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 for pressure 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 to 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 overcrowded*—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 cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory in your own business—*that pays more on some individual sales than many men make on a week and sometimes on a month's time*—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, *get in touch with us at once* for the rights in 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 turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, *use the coupon below*—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. *Address*

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Many women from Coast to Coast, formerly childless for years from sterility due to functional weakness, ARE NOW PROUD AND HAPPY MOTHERS from knowledge and use of a simple home method—details of which I send FREE on request. Parents are admittedly far happier, healthier, and more contented than childless couples! A baby gives the real home spirit and ties a husband and wife in truest enduring love and mutual interests. The majority of discontented, unhappy marriages are those of childless couples.

Get This Knowledge FREE

During my 40 years of practice in functional conditions of women I developed this home method, which is described in my illustrated treatise sent FREE ON REQUEST. It discusses many subjects relating to the female organs and tells how you too may often combat your troubles as have others who reported arrival of babies after being childless for years, due to functional weakness and report as well satisfactory relief by this home method. *(Copr. 1936).* **DR. H. WILL ELDERS, 7th & FELIX STS., SUITE 202-G ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI**

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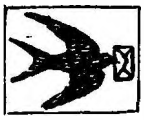

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(Continued from page 108)

He began screaming curses down at Mr. Lapin.

"Thief!" he cried. "Fool! Jailbird, imposter!"

He was like a furious and sinister ape gibbering there on the balcony; but Mr. Lapin menaced him with his automatic.

Mrs. Cuthwaite was still quite hysterical when two private detectives who had been among the guests arrived. They took Carotti in charge; but they listened to his story about Mr. Lapin and their faces became stern.

They held him for questioning, searched him, and then the pearl necklace came to light. Experts made a comparison, discovered what Mr. Lapin had done, and the cat was out of the bag. He had been caught redhanded with the stolen goods upon him. Years of imprisonment faced him.

But a mystery developed. Mrs. Cuthwaite seemed strangely reluctant to press charges against him. She appeared in court. She had long talks with Mr. Lapin's lawyer and with Mr. Lapin himself. It was plain that he had robbed her, but she was wealthy. Her desires carried weight, and somehow or other they got Mr. Lapin off on a technicality. The case was mysteriously hushed up. And while Carotti did time, Mr. Lapin left the state a free man. No one could understand why.

And it was months afterwards that he told the inside of the story to a friend.

"You see," said Lapin, shrugging whimsically: "Carotti was a vulgarian, a man with no manners, no social sense. He had discovered from Mrs. Cuthwaite's maid that the good lady's head was as bald as an egg. She wore a wig, the tiara was fastened to that.

"When the hook caught in the tiara and he jerked the string, the wig came up also as he had planned. If I had not interfered he would have left her thus, bald, hairless before her guests, humiliated, and she would never have been able to live it down. It was a shocking trick," he added. And then he drew himself up proudly. "There are things," he said, "which no gentleman would allow."


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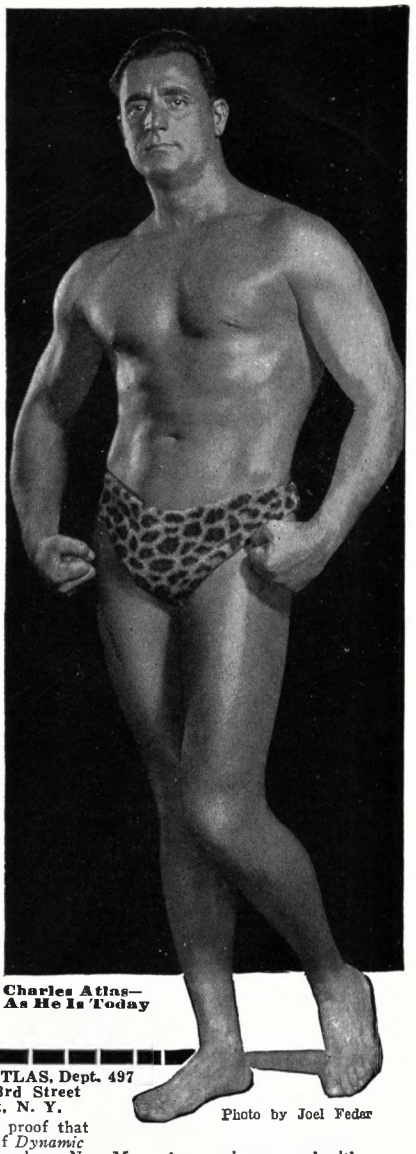

Charles Atlas—As He Is Today

Photo by Joel Feder

By CHARLES ATLAS

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All I want to know is: Where do *you* want big, powerful muscles? How many pounds of firm flesh do *you* want distributed over your body to fill you out? Where do *you* lack vitality, pep, and robust health? Where do *you* want to take off flabby, surplus fat?

Just tell me, give me a week, and I'll show you that I can make a *New Man* of you, give you bodily power and drive, and put you in that magnificent physical condition which wins you the envy and respect of any man and the admiration of every woman.

My own system of *Dynamic Tension* does it. That's the way I built myself from a 97-pound weakling to "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." And now *you* can have a big, balanced muscular development like mine in the same easy way.

THIS STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

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You begin to FEEL and SEE the difference in your physical condition at once, without using any tricky weights or pulleys, any pills, "rays," or unnatural dieting. My *Dynamic Tension* is a *natural* method of developing you *inside and out*. It not only makes you an "Atlas Champion," but goes after such conditions as constipation, pimples, skin blotches, and any other conditions that keep you from really enjoying life and its good times—and it starts getting rid of them at once.

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Gamble a stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my new illustrated book, *"Everlasting Health and Strength."* It tells you all about my special *Dynamic Tension* method. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundreds of others, it can do for you, too. Don't keep on being only one-half of the man you *can* be! Find out what I can do for you.

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(less than 10c a day).

(about 8c a day)

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(Just about 6c a day).

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