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FIVE DETECTIVE NOVELS

WINTER 1950

# 5 DETECTIVE NOVELS

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

WINTER  
25¢

MAGAZINE



**CLAIM OF THE  
FLESHLESS CORPSE**  
By GEORGE BRUCE

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**MURDER SUSPECT**  
By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

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**MURDER UNDER WRAPS**  
By NORMAN A. DANIELS

---

**THE HOUSE OF FROGS**  
By WESTMORELAND GRAY

---

**THE CASE OF  
THE ASTRAL ASSASSIN**  
By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



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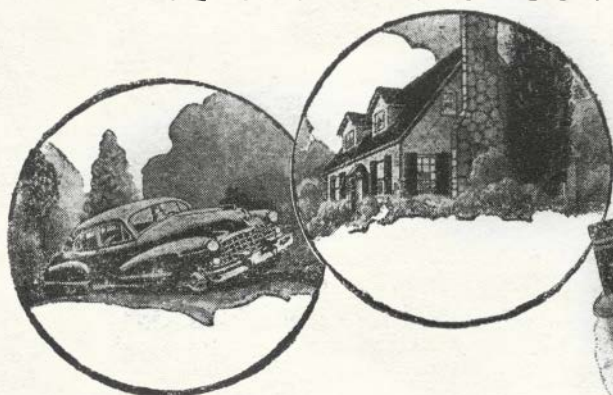
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# 5 DETECTIVE NOVELS

MAGAZINE

Vol. 1, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Winter, 1950

## CLAIM OF THE FLESHLESS CORPSE

Was it really murder? To find the answer, Insurance Detective "Toughy" Nichols and Doctor Sylvester Corrigan, famous surgeon, must join in a strange crime-solving operation that brings a skeleton back to life!

GEORGE BRUCE 11

## THE HOUSE OF FROGS

On a swamp-shrouded island in the Louisiana bayous a kidnap mob plies its evil trade—until Detective Tracy Hill steps into the picture to play a perilous game for high stakes while mysterious murder stalks!

WESTMORELAND GRAY 32

## MURDER SUSPECT

When a killer spins a baffling web of mystery aboard a motor cruiser, a lady fugitive decides to swim ashore—and leaves newspaperman Hugh Jeffrey all at sea with a strange and puzzling death riddle to solve!

FREDERICK C. PAINTON 63

## THE CASE OF THE ASTRAL ASSASSIN

George Chance, the magician-sleuth known as the Green Ghost Detective, pits his skill against that of a mysterious killer who can vanish into thin air—and fights to still the voice of an invisible death menace!

G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS 90

## MURDER UNDER WRAPS

When a beautiful girl pilfers a train ticket, lawyer-detective Leslie Kane learns the destination's murder, full steam ahead—and he plays hide and seek with grim death at a palatial mountain estate in Maine!

NORMAN A. DANIELS 122

## ON THE DOCKET

A Department 6

## FAMILY AFFAIR

A. Boyd Correll 55

## BOOMING LOGS (A True Story)

H. C. Levin 85

## TOO CLEVER

Calvin J. Clements 114

## You Practice COMMUNICATIONS

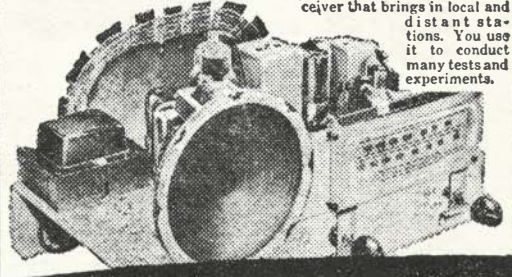
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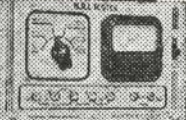


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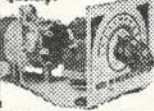
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# On the DOCKET



## A PREVIEW OF CASES TO COME

**L**ET'S begin by expressing our thanks to you hundreds of thousands of readers who, with overwhelming response, welcomed our first issue of FIVE DETECTIVE NOVELS. We felt there was a place for a new magazine that would again bring to the fore the great classics of detective fiction that have won acclaim and honor for their outstanding merit. However, we must admit that we did not anticipate the wild enthusiasm and tremendous demand that swept up copies just as fast as we could print them.

So—thanks to all of you for your cheering endorsement, and double thanks to the many thousands of you who wrote us letters and postcards to tell us your appreciation. We pledge ourselves not only to “keep up the good work”—as so many of you wrote—but to spare no pains in making each issue better than the last!

### “Red” Lacey in Action!

This issue brings you five more great novels by famous authors. Our next issue will bring you another glittering galaxy of the best crime, mystery and detective stories ever written!

Perhaps when you read this, you will already have thrilled to CLAIM OF THE FLESHLESS CORPSE, by George Bruce, in this present issue. If so, you will be pleased to know that our next issue brings this famous Hollywood writer back again with another of his crime classics—MURDER MONEY! Happily enough, this great story features “Red” Lacey, hardest of the hardboiled private sleuths.

Red Lacey was pleased when he saw the beautiful girl step into his office. He approved of her slender ankles, her

trim legs and—not incidentally—the other and more important parts of her. She was the kind of glorious blonde he liked to have for a client.

In a heartbroken voice, she told how she had won a beauty contest, found employment in a Broadway smash musical. Everything was wonderful—until she met a certain false alarm named Mr. J. Washborne Knox. Knox knew how to get what he wanted, and his method of getting lovely innocent Aline Carter was to blackmail her via an indecent motion picture, cleverly faked so that Aline saw what appeared to be herself in scenes too rotten even to mention.

Red Lacey thought the case sounded interesting. He was sure it was interesting when he took to the bank the thousand dollars Aline paid him to help get her out of the mess. The money was—counterfeit!

That's where the fast action commences and the blood begins to flow in—MURDER MONEY! There's never a letup until the last shot is fired and the last corpse accounted for. It's Red Lacey at his best!

### A Quaint Custom

And, speaking of corpses, another of our novels next issue will be—CORPSES CAN'T TALK, by James Donnelly. The title to this one has a double meaning. The corpses can't talk for the usual reasons, of course. But they also can't talk for an unusual reason. They have no heads!

The Moros of the Philippine Islands and the Jivaro Indians of South America are known for their quaint tribal custom of collecting heads—but had that hobby spread to the United States?

(Continued on page 8)

# Is High School High enough?

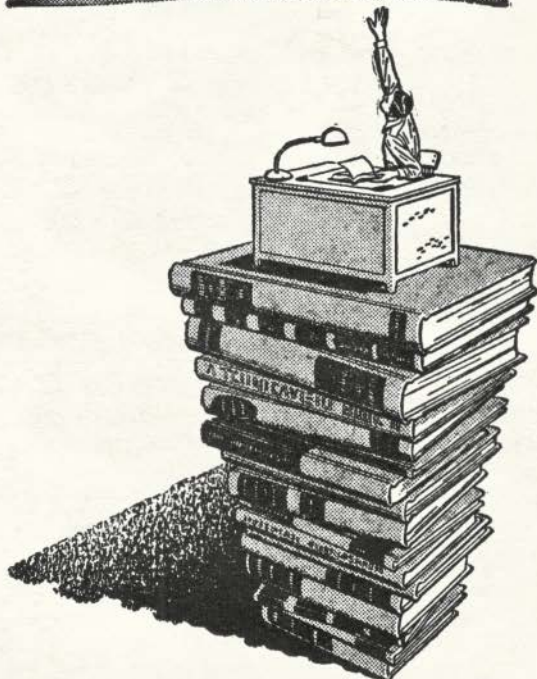
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## ON THE DOCKET

(Continued from page 6)

It made Private Investigator Pete Baird's job triply difficult. He had been given the assignment of locating a missing girl. All the three headless bodies in the morgue were those of girls, and Pete had the task of determining which of the three—if any—was the one he sought.

Meanwhile threats were developing from other quarters, and soon Pete realized it was going to be all he could do to keep his own head on his shoulders. For thrill on thrill, and chill on chill, look forward for—**CORPSES CAN'T TALK!**

## On Be-Bop Alley

Next on the docket we'll have **TAL-ENT FOR TROUBLE**, by Sam Merwin, Jr. Most troubles are mild as milk compared with the kind of grief Harmon Scott found himself in. Bored with a weekend at a millionaire's country mansion, where the millionaire's daughter was begging him to marry her (that's right), Harmon sneaked away to New York and tried to find some cheer on rhythm's be-bop alley—52nd Street.

Harmon had a talent for banging the ivories, and so he sat in for a session with a bistro's band. When he came to next morning, there was little he could remember about the night before. But it didn't take him long to discover that he was in a strange apartment, and that he was wanted for murder—the murder of the millionaire whose party he had left!

## The Shadow of Crime

Leaving Harmon, let's take a look at what happens to girl reporter Marjorie Kane. Marjorie went to interview an old woman who had been acquitted of murdering her father thirty years before, but who had lived under the shadow of that crime ever since. Marjorie was sure the kindly old lady was completely innocent until that night when a young fellow was murdered—again, supposedly, by the old woman. . . .

**MURDER ACROSS THE YEARS** is the name of this tensely exciting, tight-  
(Continued on page 145)





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# ... AND THEN DAN SAVED THE DAY

WOW! A DEAD STICK LANDING AND HE'S SNAPPED A SKI!

LET'S GET OVER THERE. HE MAY BE HURT!

RIDING THEIR MOTORIZED-SLED, TWO STATE GAME WARDENS ARE RETURNING FROM A LONG WOODS PATROL WHEN ...

ARE YOU HURT, MISS?

NO, BUT I'M DARNED MAD. MY ENGINE CONKED OUT AND NOW I'LL MISS THE ICE CARNIVAL.

IT'S JUST A FEW MILES TO HEADQUARTERS AND WE'LL RUSH YOU TO ORVILLE BY CAR.

WONDERFUL! I'LL SEND A REPAIR CREW FOR THE PLANE TOMORROW.

I DO HOPE WE'LL MAKE IT. MY APPEARANCE IS SET FOR EIGHT O'CLOCK.

SAY! YOU MUST BE SANDY OLTNER, THE FLYING FIGURE SKATER!

AND I LOOK LIKE A TRAMP.

REID'LL GET YOU THERE WITH TIME TO SPARE, MISS OLTNER. HOW ABOUT IT, DAN?

YES, SIR... I'LL EVEN HAVE TIME TO CLEAN UP HERE FIRST.

BLADES? TRY THESE

HERE'S THE BLADE I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR! NEVER HAD SUCH SMOOTH SHAVING.

THIN GILLETTES ARE MADE TO ORDER FOR TOUGH-BEARDED GENTS.

OUR COMMITTEE IS GIVING A LITTLE PARTY FOR SANDY LATER. WILL YOU JOIN US?

WE-L-L... HANDSOME!

PLEASE DO!

TO GET REFRESHING, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES AT A SAVING, TRY THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE KEENER AND LONGER-LASTING THAN ANY OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADES. WHAT'S MORE, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY AND PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM THE IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES IN THE HANDY TEN-BLADE PACK.

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*Claim of the*

# FLESHLESS CORPSE

A Novel by *George Bruce*



Right under my feet  
was the most grisly  
thing I had ever seen

*Was it really murder? To find  
the answer, Toughy Nichols must  
bring the skeleton back to life!*

I

**I** NEVER could get much of a bang out of the ordinary guy telling a detective story. The usual stunt is to submerge his personality as far as possible under the exploits of his "master." Me—I'm no self-effacing Dr. Watson. So don't count on any false modesty from me.

In the first place, I draw twenty-five grand a year from the Continental Insurance Company for saving them millions in phony claims. I earn every nickel of the dough they pay me, and if sometimes I turn in an expense account that looks like the annual accounting of the European Armament Program, why I figure I'm due for the extra dough, and

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## An Insurance Detective and a Surgeon Join in a

the company must have the same idea—for they never turn me down—and the auditors ask no questions. In my racket I'm supposed to be tops, or I wouldn't have that twenty-five G salary.

To get squared away for this yarn I suppose I should write down here that my name is John Nichols. When guys like Winchell or Sobol or Ed Sullivan give me a mention in a column they do it like this: "John (Toughy) Nichols." There's no use in my trying to ease out from under that nickname. If I wasn't tough, and if I didn't have a reputation for toughness, I wouldn't last in my racket for ten minutes.

I'm about five-ten in height. I weigh a hundred and seventy without an ounce of suet on the frame. I'm no Broadway playboy in dress. I manage to look prosperous and in dough, but I don't splash with the scenery. I've got one scar across the bridge of my nose, running over onto the left cheek, where a fire-bug decided to cut his way through me after I got the goods on him and trapped him while he was making his third touch-off.

I've got another couple of scars across my chest and stomach, where a bar-room holdup put the heat on me before I could remember to duck. I've got funny green eyes, a kind of a pug nose from having it mashed a couple of times, a hard-looking mouth, a tight chin, and a bull neck. I can still take it downstairs even at thirty-five, and it doesn't do a lot of good to let me have it on the kisser, either, because I don't go down easy.

In my game, I've got to handle all kinds of people, from Park Avenue socialites to Bowery smoke joint bums. I've been in on blackmailings, counterfeittings, murders, suicides, grave robberies, ghosts, insane asylums, window jumpers, fake drownings, crooked jewelers, crooked public officials, crooked doctors, crooked lawyers, crooked dentists, crooked bank officials—hell—pull the human family apart, see what makes it tick, and you'll understand the kind of a job I have.

**N**ATURALLY, in my racket, a guy gets around a lot. He gets to travel. He gets to know people. Important people, and people who think they're important. People who have an idea they

can get easy money by gypping the insurance company. Listen—when you get a nickel from the insurance companies in this day and age on a phony claim you're entitled to it! Take it from me.

I've got a hundred and seventy-three major cases in the files—for everything—and not one guy or gal has ever collected one nickel on a phony claim. Most of those guys and gals are now in places far removed from the angry mob, and some of them went out scorching, if you know what I mean.

But, there was one business that had me licked. I guess everybody sooner or later runs head on into a stone wall, and all his smartness gets him is a headache. It was like that with the "Claim of the Fleshless Corpse." I believe in giving credit where credit is due, which is how come this yarn is being written. The guy who solved that case for me is a duck by the name of Corrigan—Sylvester Corrigan, M.D., Harvard Medical School.

The first time I ever saw this Corrigan, he's called in by my company for a special piece of medical investigation. We have a claim originating from the Wiltshire Hospital, where Corrigan is the chief surgical consultant and resident surgeon. It's a swanky joint right off Park Avenue at Fifty-eighth Street.

Anyway I get a call from downstairs, and it's my boss, the chief of the Claims Division, on the phone. "Toughy," says he. "We just got a tip from the police that one of our cases has been snatched into the Wiltshire Hospital. We've got fifty thousand bucks tied up in the gentleman in question."

"What kind of a case?"

"Suicide. Shot through the head. Policy has been in force for seven years, so we'll have to pay—if it's on the level."

"Name of the deceased?"

"Parsons, William H. We've retained Dr. Corrigan to do an autopsy on the remains. You better go over to the Wiltshire Hospital and stick around to see if he finds anything."

And that's how I met Corrigan. He was standing at the side of an operating table. He had a scalpel in his hand. He was making instant, beautiful, precise incisions with the scalpel, like a man who knew exactly where he was going and why. I've seen a lot of autopsies in my day. This one fascinated me—and

## Difficult and Deadly Crime-Solving Operation!

only because of the way this surgeon was handling the job.

"I'm Nichols from the Insurance Company," I said.

"I talked with Mr. Nelson," he said.

"Well?" I said. "Is it suicide—or isn't it?"

He looked at me. His eyes were enigmatic, half-smiling, half deadly. There was a little quirk at the corners of his mouth.

"Can't you tell?" I asked him.

"Sure, I can tell," he said almost flipantly. "But it isn't properly a part of



DOCTOR SYLVESTER CORRIGAN

an autopsy—and I'm no detective. I'm a surgeon."

"Let's quit being technical," I suggested. "We're interested in learning whether we pay fifty grand for a suicide. If you know how to prove murder and not suicide, I'll go to work from there, and you can put it in your bfl."

His eyes flicked over me just once. He didn't turn his head, merely called over his shoulder. "Jones! Bring me some paraffin in two white cakes together with a couple of layers of thin gauze dressing."

He lit a little alcohol lamp, worked the paraffin over it until it softened and became easily pliable. Then he spread the stuff over the hands of the dead man

on the table, working the stuff in between the fingers and all over the palms as if taking a cast of the hands. On top of the first layer of paraffin he put a layer of gauze to hold the paraffin in shape. Another coating of paraffin went over the gauze. Finally, he removed the cast he had thus made and applied a reagent.

HE said to me, over his shoulder, as if instructing a very dumb class, "The paraffin test to show whether or not a person has recently fired a gun. If Mr. Parsons committed suicide, it follows that he must have fired the shot into his own head. If he fired the shot, in about twenty minutes small dark spots will appear on that paraffin cast. Those spots will be the tiny particles of nitrates picked up from the dead man's hand by the wax of the mould and made visible by the reagent. A few seconds after the spots first appear on the mould they will turn a dark blue in color."

He was looking at his watch. The minutes passed with a torturous slowness. I could feel my eyes straining in the watching of that cast. Then, at the end of twenty-two minutes, Corrigan shrugged his shoulders, and looked at me.

"The subject was murdered," he said in a peculiar flat voice.

I stared at him. "You're—sure about this?"

"Listen," he told me, passing his eyes over my face as if trying to assure himself as to my classification as an insect. "Go over to the Parsons apartment where he was found dead—shot through the head. I'll give you some of Lunge's Reagent and some paraffin and gauze. Make a cast of the hands of every person who was in the house when Parsons was shot. When you get a blue stain from the mold, grab that person and charge him with murder!"

I induced Corrigan to go with me.

We went up to the Parsons apartment. We make those paraffin casts. Three people were in the house when Parsons was killed. His wife and the two servants. And what do you think? We get beautiful blue polka-dots on the cast we made of Mrs. Parsons' right hand!

I got a lot of credit for solving that

one. But the man who should have broken out in the papers and received all the nice words from the chief was Doc Corrigan. But like a mule he refused even to go downtown to the office or to let me give his story to the office, or to let me give his story to the newspaper boys.

"I told you—I'm a surgeon and a scientist. I'm not a detective!" he growled at me.

But if you think I'm the kind to forget something like the stunt he pulled, you're crazy. I cultivated Doctor Sylvester Corrigan. Believe me, I needed him—for the coming of a rainy day.

## II

**A** COUPLE of nights a week I went up to the Wiltshire Hospital just for the mental kick of talking with Dr. Corrigan and the pleasure of being with him. We didn't fool each other. He respected me because he knew that under the slang and brashness I used for a front, I had what it took to think things out, and that all my reading had not been confined to the sports pages.

I respected him because he had more brains and more knowledge in that funny looking skull of his than any man I had ever known. And more, along with the brains, he had in that skinny body of his what it took to lay me right down on the flat of my back in a fair wrestling match. Not brute strength you understand, but with science pinch-hitting for muscle. The guy wasn't afraid of anything that walked, talked, dived, flew or crawled.

I got so that I'd sneak up to the hospital in the mornings to watch him operate. I've seen him do things in an operating room that brought looks from nurses and doctors present, looks as if they might be looking at the shadow of God.

So, naturally, when this business of the "Fleshless Corpse" came up, the first thing I did was to ring Doc Corrigan on the phone, from what the newspaper boys call "the scene of the crime."

When Nelson, my boss, got in touch with me that 4 A.M., asked me to run out to Briarcliff Manor, I was dancing at the Copacabana with a little blonde number out of the show, named Fay Cairns. The page boy picked me out of the mob on the dance floor, just as I got

a good hold on the gal and was set for a few long distance thrills.

"Telephone in the booth, Mr. Nichols," said the page boy.

And for that I have to give up a quarter to the boy, and a combination bar-lock and body-press on the gal.

I get a very snappy Mr. Nelson, who opens the conversation with, "For Pete's sake, Toughy, why don't you leave a forwarding address, and why the devil don't you stay home nights? Do you know—"

"Spill it!" I suggest. "I've got something waiting for me inside that is liable to spoil if it stays off the ice too long."

"A man has just been found, burned to death in the basement of a house owned by Albert Browning, in Briarcliff Manor. Mr. Browning is missing. Mr. Browning is insured against death in our company for half a million dollars. Accidental death gets him two-for-one. The assumption is that the body is that of Albert Browning. Jump out there. Look things over."

"Listen," I argue. "You aren't the only one bothered by burning bodies. Can't we leave this Browning guy cool off a little—say until morning—"

"It's morning now. You get the devil out there—and now!" And the phone went dead.

**S**O—I shook off the Cairns girl, got my car out of the parking lot, and high-tailed it for Briarcliff Manor, thinking as I drove about what I knew of Mr. Albert Browning and family. They were very up-town people. They were the country-club, blue-book, ultra-ultra type. When they gave a party it crashed the society page with an eight-column streamer head.

And Mr. Browning was incinerated!

It takes nerve to go plumb into the bosom of a stricken family at five in the morning. And it was no different and a lot worse walking into the elegant residence of Mr. Albert Browning in Briarcliff Manor. There was more to this house than just the presence of violent, shocking death. I caught it the minute that front door opened.

A smell. Like beef burning in a dry pot. It was everywhere, in spite of the fact that doors and windows were opened and curtains were blowing in the breeze. That smell permeated the whole joint.



"That's what the  
dead man looked like,"  
Corrigan told me

Mrs. Browning came down. She was in a white negligee. She was forty. She was fair. Life had been easy on her. Her hands were beautiful and white. Her eyes were haggard. Her body shook a little.

"Please—must we have more of the police—at this hour? We have been through so much—" She stopped, looked at me.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Browning," I told her, "but I'm not from the police. I'm from the Continental Insurance Company."

Her eyes stared. Her mouth opened a little. She said, "Insurance company? Oh—"

It's funny what an announcement like that has on the people connected with the case. You see, they expect the police and the medical examiners, but the insurance company! They think the insurance company is a green and gold policy that you send checks to once or twice a year—and if anything happens, a check comes back.

"The insurance company," I went on. "Mr. Browning carried heavy insurance with my company. Under the circumstances it is usual for the company to conduct an independent investigation."

"Oh, yes, of course," she said, vaguely. "I hadn't thought of that."

"I'll try to be as easy as possible."

I saw Martin, of the Homicide Squad, sitting reared back in a chair in the hall. I knew Martin, a detective-lieutenant and a good man on detail. He didn't miss anything and he wrote everything down in his little black book.

"If you don't mind," I said to Mrs. Browning, "I think I can dispense with any questioning now. You go on back to bed and get some rest. I'll just look over the—"

She went white, and turned and fled. Martin uncoiled himself from the chair and stood up. "I figured you'd show up," he said. "Half a million bucks is dough, even in Chinese yen. And it's a devil of a mess."

"You talk to all the people in the house? Get the stories?"

"Sure. They all check."

"Let's have it."

**H**E went into his coat pocket and got out the black book, licked his thumb, wrinkled his forehead and started to read.

The Brownings had a dinner date tonight. Mr. Browning, Mrs. Browning, Alice Browning, and Sonny Browning. Last two mentioned: daughter aged twenty, son aged eighteen. The dinner was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Sturtevant, 141 Chestnut Lane, Braircliff Manor. Old friends. All the Brownings were invited. The dinner party was for eight-thirty. Because the Brownings expected to be gone all evening, they gave the servants the night off—all but the chauffeur who drove the car. At eight-fifteen the family got ready to go to the Sturtevants'.

They were getting in the car, outside under the driveway porch, when Mr. Browning got a sudden heart attack. That is, he got a pain in the heart. He decided not to go. He had a couple of those things during past months and the doctors had told him to take it easy.

He insisted that the rest of the family go on to the dinner and to make excuses for him. They waited a few minutes, to be sure that he was okay. Then they went on to the Sturtevants', and arrived at eight thirty-five. The servants, every one, were out of the house. We've checked that, and where they were.

At eleven-fifteen the Browning party left the Sturtevants', driving in the Browning car, which had remained at the Sturtevants' all evening. It took them ten minutes to get home. Sonny Browning smelled smoke as soon as the car stopped. When they opened the door, the house was full of smoke, and there was a smell of something burning. They dashed through the house, traced the smoke to the locked furnace room in the basement, rushed down the steps in the smoke. Sonny Browning unlocked the furnace room door with a key hanging on a hook outside, tripped over something on the floor, went headlong, burned himself against hot metal—and went near crazy—

Charley Martin paused and glanced at me from the pages of his book. His face was unhealthy-looking for the minute.

"I don't blame him. It must have been a shock," he said in a jagged voice "I've seen some sights in my life, but this topped everything."

"Well, what did he see?"

Martin consulted his notes:

He saw the body of his old man, on the floor, burned to the bone. It was in the furnace room, metal-constructed, to make it fireproof. The walls were still very hot. A fuel oil tank had gone up, somehow, and the



old man had been knocked out, maybe by an explosion, or maybe by inhaling the first sheet of flame from the fire, and had been trapped in that vault-like furnace room, roasted alive. The door to that room has spring hinges which close it and snap a spring lock. It can be opened from the inside by merely turning the knob on the lock, but it takes a key to open it from the outside. The fireproofing of that room, and the door, kept the whole house from going up in smoke.

"Did you check on the apparent cause of the fire?"

"Clark, of the Homicide Squad, had John Gaul, of the Incendiary Squad, up here. Gaul looked it over and decided it was a short circuit in the wiring, touching the fuel tanks, causing explosion of fumes and then flame."

I said: "H'm," and looked very wise. "Mind if I go down and take a look around?"

"Hell, no! But don't ask me to go with you. I've had enough looking at that for one day."

"Show me the way down."

### III

I WENT with him to a flight of stairs leading to the basement. "The lights are on," he said, "but I'm telling you. Go down slow, and don't let yourself in for any surprises."

I don't know how that family stood it in that house. The smell of burned beef was all over the place. It came up from the cellar in a solid wave when I opened the door. Martin went white around the gills. He tried a laugh.

"It's all yours," he said with a gesture on his hand. "I had to work down there for an hour. You can have it."

I went down the stairs, one at a time. The place was still hot. I had a look at the furnace room. Built into one side of the cellar, it was made out of fitted sections of steel walling that shut the space off from the rest of the basement. The steel sections were warped and scorched-looking. I opened the door Martin had mentioned and stepped inside the furnace room.

Right under my feet was the most grisly thing I had ever seen in my life! Try to get a picture of a skull attached to a skeleton body, the mouth of the skull hanging open, showing dental work—

everything else burned black. Here and there a shred of flesh adhering to blackened bones. Lying in the middle of a floor, grinning up. The hands and arms of the thing outflung, half crooked, as if they had tried to protect the face against a blast of sudden heat.

I stood there staring, my eyes fixed on the body. I didn't want to look at it, but it was like a magnet, dragging my eyes back time after time to the burned skull and the blackened arms. Subconsciously I was trying to create a picture of Albert Browning alive. What had he looked like? What had he worn that night? What had he been thinking of when that blast hit him?

And, suddenly, one of those crazy thoughts struck me, and that little chill feeling ran along my spine. "What had he been doing in this specially built furnace room after eight-thirty at night—in July—when that furnace had not been fired since May?"

It was like a question whispered to me by a voice within.

I gave it an answer, aloud. "Yeah—what was he doing here?"

I looked up at the wiring conduits overhead, all metal, a good job of wiring. I traced them with my eyes until they went into a fuse box in the cellar outside. I opened the door of the fuse box. There were four series in the box. The fuse on the line leading to the furnace room had been replaced. Around the fuse socket was a blackened space.

A burned-out fuse was in the bottom of the fuse box.

I went upstairs. I sat down with Martin.

"Just what was the deceased wearing when last seen alive?"

"Quite a sight, ain't it?" asked Martin as he dug for the little black book. He went through the thumb-licking again, stopped at a page, frowned. Then:

He was wearing a dinner coat, black with satin lapels. Black evening trousers. Patent leather shoes. Black silk socks. Garters. Shirt and shorts. Stiff bosomed shirt. Platinum and diamond studs. Platinum-case watch and chain. Key-ring and keys. Wallet. Handkerchief in breast pocket of coat and in hip pocket of trousers. White collar. Black tie.

"Listen," I said, "why was he down in that furnace room?"

MARTIN looked at me. The answer to that was not in the little black book. I could see that on his copper's mug.

"Huh?"

"Why was he down in that furnace room?"

"Why, a man has a right to prowl his own joint, hasn't he? Maybe he was after a drink. Going down to bring up a bottle."

"Not a chance! There were no bottles in that furnace room. The furnace hasn't been burned since warm weather came to stay. There was nothing in that furnace room to call down a man dressed in evening clothes. No alibi about tending or looking at the fire even if the help was out. So I'm asking. Why was he down in that furnace room at all?"

"How do I know?" snapped Martin.

"Another thing. Has the body been touched?"

"The M.E. gave it the once-over," declared Martin defensively.

"Move it?"

"Some."

"Take anything away with him?"

"No."

"Except for the medical examiner's examination, everything is as it was?"

"Couple of boys barging around. Wrecking crew making pictures—all that stuff. Not much though. It was a cinch accident. Just routine investigation."

"You in charge?"

"Yeah."

"You take anything away from the scene—anything?"

"No."

"You're staying on the job here until the wagon comes just because the Brownings are very important people?"

"That's it."

"And they may slip you something for your sympathy and help—and you can lose a little sleep on the gamble?"

"You go to the devil!" But he grinned.

"Who put the new fuse in the fuse box?"

"Me—I did. A man can't go prowling around with a pocket flash."

"The fuse was blown?"

"Certainly."

"How about the bulb in the socket in the furnace room? Did you put a new bulb in there?"

"Sure."

"What did you do with the old one?"

"What old one? I just put one in the socket and the light came on."

"You mean you didn't have to take anything out of the socket? You just screwed a new bulb in?"

"That's right."

"Listen. Do you suppose old man Browning was down there lighting matches to see his way around, or operating with a flashlight? He had to see, didn't he? What happened to the bulb that was in the socket when he was scouting around in that furnace room? Fire doesn't explain it. Even if the glass melted, the brass end of the bulb would still be fused in the socket, wouldn't it? You didn't unscrew the remnant of the other bulb, did you, before you put the new bulb in?"

Martin looked at me. His answer was much slower. "No. I—I just put the other bulb in place and the light came on."

"So in spite of the fire that burned him to death, and in spite of the short circuit that blew the fuse, there was nothing wrong with the wires? When you put in a new fuse, and screwed in a new bulb, the light came on."

"Yeah."

"So that means the switch was turned on all the time? Therefore, Browning was not in the dark!"

"I see what you're driving at!" marveled Martin. "What the devil do you suppose did happen to that other light?"

I got up off the chair. "I want to ask one of the Brownings one question," I told him.

It was broad daylight. Martin looked at his wrist watch. "Hey, it's six A.M. A devil of a time to ask questions."

"I'd ask 'em in a graveyard at midnight—for a million dollars. That's my job."

"Better ask the gal," he advised. "She took it better than the kid and the mother. And we questioned her the least."

"Lead me to the lady's boudoir," I told him. "I've always wanted to see what the haute monde uses for sleeping quarters."

WE knocked on the third door on the right from the head of the stairs. After the second knock I heard a sound inside.

"Who is it, please?" a voice asked then.

"It's me—Martin. I'm sorry but I

have to see you for a minute, ask you a question."

"Oh, please. Can't it wait until morning?"

"It ain't me, Miss Browning," apologized the rat. "But Toughy—I mean Mr. Nichols, is here—the insurance company investigator."

There was a little sound from inside the door. A little sound like, "Oooh," suddenly hushed. And then she said, "I'll be right out."

She was, in two minutes, in one of those foamy negligees. She was gorgeous and she was blonde and her hair was plaited into two thick braids and wrapped around her head. She had a small face, blue eyes, a firm little chin, a white, full throat, a thin upturned nose, graceful hands and arms. At six in the morning, without an hour's sleep, she was a knockout.

"I'm Alice Browning," she told me, standing framed in the doorway to her room. "You are—"

"Nichols, Special Investigator for the Continental Insurance Company, Miss, and very sorry. I want to ask you one question."

She waited. I watched her eyes and her mouth and her hands.

"Why did your father go down into the furnace room? Why did he unlock the door to that place and go inside?"

She looked at me, and suddenly she was very white. She held her breath. "Why—why I didn't think of that. I—I don't know."

Martin gave me a dirty look.

"Did he go down there often?"

"Of course not. He never went—"

"Think now. Did you ever know him to go into that furnace room, to tend the furnace for instance?"

"It is an automatic oil burner. We never have to bother with it. The servants look after it. The man comes and fills the tank from a truck. I don't think Father has been in that room since—since it was first built. He was a little afraid of the oil burner at first. He thought it might be a fire hazard, so he had that special paneling constructed. But after it was finished, he never went down there."

"There was nothing in the furnace room he might have wanted?"

She looked at me with wide eyes. "Why, no. There was nothing in there but the furnace and the fuel tanks."

"No liquor, wine—anything like that?"

She shook her head. "That's all in the other end of the basement, in the wine cellar."

"I understand your father was in dinner coat when you saw him last?"

"Yes."

"You don't know whether he changed clothes again, do you—to get more comfortable?"

She stared again. "I don't know," she faltered.

"Could we look in his room?"

"Of course."

We went down the hall, turned into another bedroom. A man's room. The room belonging to the Master of the House. She looked around, opened closets. Searched. I watched every move she made and Martin was sore as a boil.

"He must have been wearing the same clothes," she said. "They aren't here. I'm sure he didn't come upstairs and change. The room hasn't been touched since it was tidied just before we went out."

"Thank you, Miss Browning," I said as sympathetically as possible. "You can go back to bed now if you wish. You've been a great help to both of us."

She went into her own room. She gave me a long, frightened look as she closed the door. But people are always looking at me that way.

Martin said, "I'll bet you get a big kick out of being important as hell with little girls like her."

"Keep your one-track mind focused on that thing downstairs," I said. "Don't let anyone move that body. I'm going to fix it with the medical examiner to leave things as they are for a little while. Until you hear different, don't let even the right guys mess around down there any more. I'll be back."

I went out and got in the car. The air outside smelled clean and fresh after that roast beef odor in the Browning house. I drove down the street, found a restaurant open that had a pay station, called the office, and, so help me, my boss was still there, waiting.

"Get in touch with the authorities and ask them to hold everything up at the Browning house until they hear different," I advised him.

I heard that sudden bark in his voice. "You find something?" he demanded.

"I'd be glad to know what became of

a light bulb—and what happened to a pair of diamond-studded studs and cuff links worn by the late deceased. Also a few technical questions.

"Anything you want to know from the police?"

"Yeah. Be sure nobody touched anything up there, or took anything away."

"Okay. Keep on the job!"

I hung up in disgust and staggered out to the car. I drove to the Wiltshire Hospital. I wanted ten minutes of conversation with Doc Corrigan.

#### IV

**I** CAUGHT him just as he was going into the scrub room. He was dressed in his surgical white.

"You're just in time," he greeted. "I've got a swell case coming up."

I took him by the elbow. "Listen," I said in a whisper, "can I talk to you a minute—in your room?"

We walked along the corridor into his bare little room and closed the door. He gave me a cigarette. I sank down on the bed.

"Don't park there," he warned. "I'm busy. Five ops up to noon, and maybe a couple of emergencies to while away the spare time."

"Doc," I said to him, "how long does it take a body to burn? I mean down to the bone, so that nothing is left."

I told him about the Browning claim. When I finished he was looking at me with those eyes of his.

"That's the damndest thing I ever heard of," he said angrily. "It's a stupid fairy tale."

"A million bucks is riding on that fairy tale," I reminded him.

"Look, out of an incinerator or a furnace designed especially for the job, it's impossible to burn a body to that degree! You may get a bad superficial burning, but that's all. Another thing. In a room like that, the diminished supply of oxygen would smother the fire, if that door was closed as you state. Then again, fuel oil has such a low combustion point that I doubt if even a spark, or a continuous flame from a blow torch would ignite it. It has to be compressed under high pressure and blown into a vapor before it'll burn. You can throw it on a burning fire and it'll put the fire out."

I gave him a nod. "I thought of those things, and also the missing light bulb—and the platinum and diamond studs. The cops swear they took nothing away. If that's true, then those studs should be there. A hot fire might reduce the platinum, but the diamonds should be among those bones."

A nurse came to the door. "The patient is on the way down from the fourteenth floor, Doctor Corrigan," she said.

Corrigan glanced at me. "Damned interesting, but I've got to go now."

"Look, Doc," I said. "I'm not making any promises. But where a million dollars hangs at stake, I know my people are not going to kick at a fee—say, ten grand—if I can prove that this is murder and not accidental death, and it's a gyp on the insurance company. Can't you get the day off? This is right down your alley! Somebody tossing a puzzle in your face and laughing because you haven't got brains enough to solve it."

That funny, eager, hot light came into his eyes. He gave me one glance. Then he picked up his telephone.

"Ask Dr. Lyons if he'll take over for me in the operating room this morning," he told the superintendent. "I'm called out on a very important case."

And he turned around to me grinning. "I knew if I got tangled up with you, I'd be up to my neck in detecting. I felt it coming on. But—hell—let's go!"

He dressed for the street. Then he pattered around, getting stuff together and putting it in a trick case.

I drove him out to Briarcliff Manor in the car, exhibited the Browning claim. The police department had called everything off until the Continental gave the okay to go ahead.

I wish every police chief or head of a bureau of investigation in the whole wide world could have sat in on what happened after Doc Corrigan walked into the furnace room in the Browning basement.

Corrigan's eyes, bright, questing, looked around the small enclosure. He put his kit bag on the floor. He went over to the body. He looked, eyes narrowed, over every inch of it. He rose, unscrewed the light bulb from its socket, looked at the socket. There was a puzzled gleam in his eyes.

"Your hunch is right, Toughy," he said softly, as if to himself. "This is a phony."

I could feel a little hot bubbling sensation inside of me, working to the surface.

"First, in my own line, I'll give you my opinion that no matter what kind of inferno raged in this place, that body could not have been so badly burned. This was a quick-burning fire. It raged for a few minutes and burned itself out. I'll tell you something else. Those bones were blackened before this fire was lit. And make no mistake—this fire was lit! Take a look. You'll see two types of black on those bones. Both are from fire, but from different fires, and I'll prove it.

"There was a deliberate attempt made to produce evidence that a shorted light circuit somehow ignited the fuel oil in this room, and caused the fire. There was a short circuit all right, but it was not accidental. A screwdriver or some metal object was thrust into this light socket to blow the fuse. Then oil was thrown on the floor, all around the place—oil mixed with about ten gallons of gasoline to make it burn. The whole works was touched off, and the guy who touched it off, beat it."

"Yeah," I said, hollow-like. "But that doesn't give the Continental Insurance Company an out. Even if it was murder—that's double indemnity—and a million bucks. We pay off either way."

But Corrigan wasn't listening to me. He was on the prowl again. He was studying the floor, black with the soot of the oil fire. There were footprints on that soot. Mingled footprints of photographers, detectives, the M.E.—everybody who had been in the room. But Corrigan was looking at something else, something under the soot. A vague outline.

"Get a load of that!" he invited. "That's a footprint! It was made before the fire—on the concrete floor of this room. See? The soot from the fire has almost obliterated it, but it's there. Look, now. If this room hasn't been used since May, it might be Browning himself made that footprint when he came in here last night."

He opened the case. Took out things, hovered around the footprint.

I've seen the Department make casts of footprints—in sand, mud, grass—but a shadow on a concrete floor! It couldn't be done.

That's what I thought!

Corrigan had a habit of talking as he worked—like a man talking to himself for the benefit of someone else. He talked as he worked on the barely perceptible mark on the concrete floor of the furnace room.

"A man by the name of Bertillon once told his pupils in crime detection that a bird flying against a cloud bank would leave a recognizable impression which could be identified. That's a pretty long statement, but he wasn't so far wrong. Ever hear of a gent by the name of Mullner, Dr. Hans Mullner?"

"No."

"This Dr. Mullner perfected a very delicate way of making a plaster cast of a handprint or a fingerprint in the dust of a table. It's delicate, but you get the cast perfectly. So, over here, another chap named George A. Weber, improved upon the Mullner method, so that he can do what I'm doing now—practically lift a shadow off a concrete floor and make a perfectly good and permanent cast of it."

[Turn page]

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I kept watching him work. Out of his kit he took a thing that looked like the round sides of a hat box. It was folded, but when he opened it, it made a round "fence" about the shadow under the soot. Then he took a little atomizer and began spraying a fine liquid in the air about a foot over the top of the bottomless and topless hat box on the floor.

"I'm squirting a fixative in the air—spraying it, so that it'll fall on top of that mark on the floor. It has no weight, but after it dries it'll fix that soot and that mark, almost like varnishing it. Then I wait for the first layer to dry and do the same thing all over again, three or four times, until I get a certain amount of thickness through the succeeding layers of fixative."

It went on, minute after minute, Corrigan working with infinite patience, waiting sometimes five minutes for the spray from the atomizer to fall and harden.

Then, from the kit he took a single piece of surgical gauze, put it down very gently over the fixative at the bottom of the fence, covering the shadowy footprint, and went on, spraying, working faster now. When these new layers were dry, he spread a black, puttylike stuff from a tube over the entire surface.

"Moulage material," he said over his shoulder. "I'm just about ready to lift the evidence under the soot."

Three minutes maybe, and then he removed the fence, folded it, took hold of the two untreated ends of gauze and, so help me, the whole thing came off the floor. He had lifted that footprint perfectly, with every nail mark showing, every crack or crease or line in the leather sole! He had a perfect cast of a shadow!

"Well, what do you think of Mullner, improved on by Weber?" he grinned. "Slick, eh? We've got that footprint for all time. When we find the shoe that made it—zowie!"

Tenderly, the cast went into a section of the case kit. I kept my mouth shut and followed him around. He treated the walls for fingerprints—everything.

Then he said, "It's interesting here, the scene of the crime and all that, but if there is something phony about this case, we won't find what we're after here. We'll find it back at the hospital—

in my laboratory. Back there we have the equipment to produce the proof, if it's there. We have work to do. Let's go—with the body."

I could feel my jaw drop. "The body?" I asked weakly.

"You said it! I can't very well work on it here. You said you had drag. Well, I'm waiting. I want the body."

So I went to the telephone and called Nelson. "It's a phony, all right," I told him. "I can prove it's no accident. But if it's no accident, it's murder, and we pay off. Listen. I've got to have that body for a while, understand? I want to take it to the Wiltshire Hospital, without anybody knowing I've got it or where it is. Can you fix it?"

"I'll try," promised the boss. "I'll call you back."

Five minutes later the phone rings. I'm sitting at the stand in the hall seeing that no one is listening in.

"It's okay," said Nelson. "They're sending a regular morgue wagon out for it, like regular police routine—autopsy and all before the body is released to the family for burial. The driver of the wagon has instructions to take his orders from you and ask no questions."

In thirty minutes the morgue wagon came and the crew carried the long wicker basket into the house and down to the furnace room.

Mrs. Browning met us in the hall when we came up. She just looked at us, horror, indignation, grief in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Browning," I told her. "There will be a routine autopsy. Then—you can have him."

## V

IT WAS even worse in Corrigan's laboratory than it had been on the floor of that furnace room. The thing was more grisly because it was on a table amid sterile, white surroundings, and it made the contrast all the more vivid. But Corrigan worked around it, whistling to himself in a queer minor key.

He worked for a long time over those blackened bones. He had another atomizer filled with a brownish-black liquid. He sprayed the exposed bones of the corpse very lightly with the vaporized liquid. "Know what I'm doing?" he asked pleasantly.

I shook my head. It was a mystery to me.

"I'm looking for latent fingerprints," he announced casually.

I felt my face grow hot. "For Pete's sake!" I told him. "Cut out the kidding! Fingerprints on a stiff that has been burned to death. What kind of fingerprints can you get—"

He shook his head sadly. "You guys!" he sighed. "Listen. I could get fingerprints off a piece of cloth—if the fingerprints had been made five years before. If, as we decided, this is phony business and this body did not get burned this way in the furnace room, then it was burned somewhere else and taken into that furnace room. If that's true, it had to be carried in there to make the plant look perfect. If it was carried it's a safe bet that hands were employed in the carrying somewhere along the route, and there may be prints on the bones of this cadaver."

"But there isn't even a smudge on those bones that looks anything like a print!"

"I don't have to have smudges, Sherlock. I make my own smudges. Another gentleman you never heard of—Dr. E. M. Hudson, perfected this stunt to get latent prints from cloth, wood, metal—anything that hasn't a shiny or glossy surface. You see, fingerprints are made possible only because the body sweats and gives off oils. Those things make the markings you see in a fingerprint. The sweat—and it has to be there even if in minute quantity—is the important element. So Hudson decided to go to work on the chemistry of sweat. On a light surface he used silver nitrate. The silver nitrate develops the sweat traces, even in invisible fingerprints, into silver chloride. When exposed to sunlight, the silver chloride turns black, making a perfect pattern on the light surface—and there is your fingerprint!"

"Now, on a dark surface, like these burned bones, we use calcium sulphide solution and the fingerprint impression comes out light in color—making a contrast with the dark background. Get it?"

Suddenly, I had a dizzy feeling, a sick feeling. I closed my eyes, and then opened them—but the spots were still there. Spots—coming up out of the soot and blackness of those bones. Fingerprints on the bones of a burned body!

It was too much! I felt ~~like~~ running out of the joint.

I heard Corrigan say, "Ah!" Then he was bent over the spots with a magnifying glass looking, searching. He lifted his head. His voice was very soft. "There you are," he told me. "Fingerprints. This cadaver did not make those prints upon itself. They are not the prints of anyone who moved the body—because they would be plain for all to see—on the surface and on the soot. So—there is one other person who could have made those prints."

I heard myself giving him the answer. "The man who carried Browning's body inside that room, inside the house, after burning it outside somewhere—"

Corrigan smiled and his eyes were slits as he looked at me. "For a man drawing twenty-five thousand dollars a year from an insurance company, that's not bad. But then, it's not good either. But we'll let it pass."

He photographed the prints with a Leica camera, with a sun lamp for illumination.

He took the charred remnants of cloth off the body gingerly, worked on them with tweezers, fixed them on a slide, looked at them through a microscope, made notes on a pad.

After half an hour, during which I stood around, itching at the silence, he lifted his head and said casually, "Find out who was Mr. Browning's tailor. Then go to the tailor and question him about the last dinner jacket and evening trousers he made for the gentleman. I want to know about materials—what were they made out of, and when?"

So I called the Browning house and talked to Sonny Browning, and after quibbling I found out it was Marchand—Fifth Avenue. So then a phone call to Marchand. And finally Mr. Marchand in person.

"I handled Mr. Browning's fitting myself," the tailor stated. "I remember very well. The material was broadcloth, midnight blue. It was an exquisite piece of material. The cutfit was delivered to him just sixty days ago."

"Midnight blue, broadcloth," I repeated. "Thanks very much."

I hung up and went back in the laboratory to Doc, gave him the information I'd got from Marchand.

"Thanks!" said Corrigan. He was

peering into the microscope again. "I just wanted to be sure. The microscope shows that the material of the cloth fragments adhered to the body was mohair—and black."

He left me to digest that bit of news, and went on with his peering.

Some time later, I heard my head thump against the wall and discovered that I was going to sleep in a chair. Corrigan looked at me.

"Go in my room and park yourself on the bed," he advised. "There is nothing you can do here now."

So I went. That's how come I didn't see everything he did with that cadaver.

When I came to, it was dark. I looked at my watch. My heart jumped up and hit me a smack in the throat. Cripes! I had been asleep for twelve hours. I must have been dead on my feet.

I took a shower in the Doc's bathroom, and returned to the land of the living. It was quiet in the hospital. I made it up to Corrigan's laboratory. I opened the door.

I came nearer to heart failure in that minute than ever before or since. For one second, things went black and green, and I could feel myself going. Then I heard Corrigan's laugh.

"S'matter, Toughy?"

He had that fleshless body sitting up on the table, propped up and he was working on it. And, so help me God—it had a face. A human face—with the burned bones for a body. It was the queerest, ghoulish thing I had ever seen in my life. A lifelike human face, looking at me, color in the cheeks, and below it, that hideously burned body! I must have clutched at the air and gulped a dozen times.

"What in the name of heaven is that?"

Corrigan's eyes were red-rimmed and haggard, but they were burning. He had the lights out, and a beam of light, like a spotlight, playing on the face of the fleshless corpse.

"That's what the gentleman who burned to death in the cellar of the Browning house looked like," he told me. "Or, at least, that's what his bones looked like. I've reconstructed his face. Mouflage. Ever hear of it?"

"Sure, I've heard of it, but I never saw it work."

"Take the contour of the bones, work over them, preserving every line and

angle. Knowing your anatomy helps. Build as God would have built the same face, and pretty soon you come up with it! Only thing I don't know is what color eyes the man had. I got his hair from a couple of strands I found adhered to his body. The eyes I had to guess at—and the exact flesh tones of his face. But I think it's a fair job."

I stared in silence. I could feel the horror churning around in me.

"Know anybody who looks like that?" he asked quietly.

I shook my head.

"Well, somebody does—or did. We've got to find out who. Make it fit in with the whole business. Look, Toughy, you're going to do a crazy thing. You're going to transport our friend here down to Police Headquarters. I want every detective and every policeman in the city to have a glimpse at this face I've created. Maybe—it's a chance—someone on the Force will identify it. If we only get a vague recollection, it'll be valuable. Tell 'em to look for a man who has hung around barrooms, hasn't been particular about keeping himself clean. When he worked, he was a stone cutter or a stone mason, working on public buildings perhaps, or some place where work in gray granite was being done. Fifty years old. Hard drinker, hard fighter and he probably lived near a factory or a power station that has a tall chimney and burns soft coal. The day before he died, he had a job unloading flour from a truck."

"Why don't you gimme his name and address?" I scoffed. "Wouldn't it make it a lot simpler?"

"Get out of here," snarled Corrigan. "I'm half dead trying to earn your huge salary for you, and you come up with a bunch of so called humor."

"Okay, Doc!" I soothed him, "I'm sorry."

"Furthermore, I want you to find out the name of Browning's dentist, and get me a copy of his dental record as soon as possible. I also want you to get me the name of his doctor, and any records the doctor has concerning visits by Browning. Got that? Also, get a suit of clothes to drape over the bones of this stiff," said Corrigan. "Dress it up so that it looks like something human. Have it sitting on the line-up platform before you let any of the Force in to view the mouflage reconstruction, and



then sit back and wait results. It's in your hands now, for the time being. Take it downtown whenever you're ready. I'll give you an ambulance and a basket for it."

## VI

**T**HE next couple of hours were as hectic as any I ever spent in my life.

First: that line-up, downtown. I'll never forget the look on "Iron Mike" Cassidy's face when I dragged "Exhibit A" into the lineup room, and set the stage to show it off to the cops. It was a nasty sight to spring on anyone without warning, but I was so wrapped up in the case I never gave a thought to Iron Mike's nerves. I just threw back the lid of the wicker basket Doc had given me to transport the corpse, and the next thing I knew, Iron Mike was leaning against the wall, dead white, staring—like someone about to go out with a bum pump.

But he recovered after a bit, caught on to the idea, and then we went to work and dressed the burned body in a suit of clothes and propped it up in a chair on the platform. It wasn't a bad job. Dressed, and with those blackened bones concealed by a suit of clothes, the face looked more lifelike than ever.

When the first batch of viewing officers came in Cassidy took the microphone. The searing show-up lights flooded the platform with a white brilliance.

"Men," boomed Cassidy's enormous voice, "this is a special viewing at the orders of the Commissioner. I want you to take a good look at the figure on the platform. And I want you to jog your memories. Think hard. Try to remember if you have ever seen that face. This is a moulage reconstruction. It may not be exact. The flesh tones may not be exact, nor the color of the eyes. But from general appearance I want you to try to remember anyone you knew who looks like that."

There was a deep silence in the room. You could feel the awe and thrill of horror running through the men in the room.

"All right!" boomed Cassidy. "That's all. If any of you know somebody like that, report to me—later."

The second batch came in, and a third—and it went on for three hours while the routine work of the department was

held up at the request of the Continental Insurance Company.

I tried to see the faces of those men viewing the Fleshless Corpse. I tried to read recognition into their faces. But they sat there, almost expressionless, staring, silent.

When the last batch had gone through and almost three thousand men had looked at the face Corrigan had reconstructed, I began to feel licked. No one had made an identification.

"It'll take all day to finish this job," Cassidy said. "The men have orders to report here as they come off duty."

We went out into the corridor. A hand touched Cassidy. "Excuse me, Lieutenant Cassidy," a voice said dubiously. "I didn't want to butt in before. You said to report to you later. I've been hanging around. It's about that—that dummy we looked at in the line-up room."

I grabbed for him. "Detective Carson," Cassidy introduced him hurriedly. "Well, what's on your mind, Carson?"

"Well," said Carson slowly, "I know someone like that, and then again I don't. And it has me going. If he ain't the man, then it's his twin brother. Only the one I know has a big wart on the side of his nose, and he's a little older looking than the stiff in there and has a scar across his right cheek."

I fought down the desire to yell. "Tell us about the one you know," I suggested.

"Well, he didn't have that much hair, and it's a little different in color. But it's his face, ail right—without the scar and the wart. I ought to know. I called an ambulance for him ten days ago and had him carted to Bellevue—found him paralyzed drunk in a gutter on Houston Street."

"Go on, go on!" I told him.

"Around the neighborhood they called him 'Smoke' Riley. He was a stone worker. Then the weather got bad, and last job he had was helping unload a consignment of flour for the New Baking Company, over at their warehouse. Only a day's work, but enough for a drunk. I saw him working that day."

"You're sure of the identification, excepting for the scar and the wart and the hair a little off-color?"

"Sure. I've handled that souse at least twenty times. I had him pinched twice for brawls in gin mills. He's got a record—petty things."

"So you called an ambulance and sent

him to the hospital. You're sure of that? Bellevue?"

"Yeah. The same day he was working for the baking company. That night. I get a tip that he's out like a light, and the man who owns the smoke shop he passed out in lays him in the gutter. That's where I get him. In the gutter. I call the ambulance from the box on the corner and they take him away to Bellevue."

"And you haven't seen him since then?"

"No."

**I** TRIED to walk, not run to the nearest telephone and called the superintendent of Bellevue.

"Look," I told the hospital chief, "you had a drunk named Riley, ambulance case, ten days ago, picked up out of the gutter by Detective Carson, alcoholic. What disposition, please?"

There was a little silence. Then the voice came back, terse and to the point. "Morgue. D.O.A., acute alcoholism. Cerebral hemorrhage. No p.m."

Three minutes and the voice read from the record. "No claimant. No inquiries. After routine M.P.B. check body was given to Harper Medical School. Routine. Receipt for body made part of record."

I hung up. I was going 'round and 'round in the brain. We were getting places—to the dissecting laboratory of a medical school uptown. And from there—what?

It was noon. I took a chance on calling Doc Corrigan. He was awake.

"We got an identification on your work of art," I told him, trying to keep it casual. "But are you looney! The guy had a wart on the right side of his nose and a knife wound scar on his right cheek, and his hair was a couple of shades lighter! His name was Smoke Riley. Passed out from a brain hemorrhage, blind drunk, ten days ago. Sent from the morgue to Harper Medical School."

There was a queer sound over the phone, but no words. "Where's the exhibit now?" Doc asked then.

"On the way up to your butcher, wrapped up neatly in the basket. And it was a sensation downtown."

There was a short pause. "Listen, kid. If Browning was insured by your company, he signed papers and things, didn't he?"

"Sure. Policy applications, medical examinations, stuff like that."

"Get me every paper he ever signed for your company, and bring 'em up here when you come."

"Good as done."

"And for the love of Pete get the lead out of your feet and get up to see Browning's dentist and doctor, as I told you."

Well, you can't argue with the Doc. So I settled by calling Nelson and asking him to get me all of the papers Browning ever signed for our company. Then to Park Avenue and Rexford Press, D.D.S. I get into a private office in mahogany, and I get face to face with a round face, blond, waxed-mustached. Very ultra-businesslike dentist.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Nichols. You wanted to see me, my receptionist says."

"Nothing very important," I tell him. "We found out you were Mr. Browning's dentist. There is the matter of verification of identity before the claim can be settled. The body was pretty badly burned, just about impossible of recognition. But with your help, your dental records, perhaps we can shortcut on the matter and establish the identity through your identification of your own work."

**S**HORTLY, I had what I wanted. After that to Dr. Carter Hill. More Park Avenue. More swank offices. More swell nurses.

Hill is tall, stooping, fifty, broad-shouldered, granite-faced, powerful, commanding, iron-gray hair, challenging black eyes.

"Sorry, sir," I told him. "The insurance company is trying to clean up the claim of Albert Browning. You were his physician?"

"For years." Final, emphatic, disinterested.

"In the investigation we learned that you had cautioned him on the condition of his heart. The night of his death he complained of a pain in the heart. Naturally, we have the idea that he might have had a heart attack, down in that furnace room. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Did he have a heart condition?"

"Hardly that. My warning was more or less precautionary. Mr. Browning enjoyed excellent health, but he led an active, nervous, high-tensioned life. The

events of the past few years in his business were not conducive to the rest and quiet which he should have had at his age. I found no sign of heart disease in him, but I did find cause to warn him, that's all."

"In your opinion, could he have died of a sudden heart attack?"

"From my personal observation, I should say that was remote. But then anything can happen—to anyone. I should not like to give an opinion on that point."

"Thank you, Doctor. For the record, when I include your statement, may I have your qualifications as an expert?"

"Heidelberg. Vienna. Sorbonne. Professor of Surgery, Harper Medical School."

A little, white-hot flame flickered in the center of my chest. I turned my head away and reached for a cigarette.

"By the way, you wouldn't know Dr. Rexford Press, dentist, right down the street?"

The black eyes stared at me reflectively. "Press?" he asked. "Press, the name is familiar—"

"You may recall him as Mr. Browning's dentist."

"Ah, that's it. Certainly! I was sure I heard the name before. Yes, yes. Press. I remember perfectly now. He called me on the phone one day. He wanted to know whether it would be all right to give Mr. Browning gas in the course of some dental work. Seemed anxious. Said he understood that I had suggested a heart condition. Wanted to be sure. I told him to go right ahead. No danger. Certainly—Press. That's all I know about him."

"No matter," I assured him. "Merely curious."

"There is a question about proper identification of Mr. Browning's remains, is there not?" he asked, curiously.

"Routine. The body was badly charred. In cases of that kind we must have corroborative identification."

"Well, then, I imagine the very best source possible would be that very dentist—er—Dr. Press, you said. He should be able to make a complete identification from his records of the work in Browning's mouth."

"We thought of that, Doctor. I have the records in my pocket. I hope to make a very quick settlement of the claim. Thank you for your courtesy."

## VII

**D**R. CORRIGAN was in his laboratory. He was leaning over a desk, spraying with his eternal atomizer—over papers. He looked up.

"A messenger came up from your office a little while ago with a sealed envelope for you," he told me. "I figure the envelope contained the papers I asked you to get from your office. The Browning papers. So I receipted for the envelope and opened it. The papers were inside. I went to work on them. Hope you don't feel hurt."

"Listen! I've got something hot. I have a hunch this case is going to break wide open."

"Calm yourself, Toughy. You'll die of acute hypertension. The devil with the heat you brought back with you. Wait till I get finished with this."

I was sore. "Listen, this is more important than messing around with those

[Turn page]



## The Dark Continents of Your Mind

DO YOU struggle for balance? Are you forever trying to maintain energy, enthusiasm, and the will to do? Do your personality and power of accomplishment ebb and flow—like a stream controlled by some unseen valve? Deep within you are minute organisms. From their function spring your emotions. They govern your creative ideas and moods—yes, even your enjoyment of life. Once they were thought to be the mysterious seat of the soul—and to be left unexplored. Now cast aside superstition and learn to direct intelligently these powers of self.

Accept this FREE book • Let the Rosicrucians, an age-old fraternity of thinking men and women (not a religion), point out how you may fashion life as you want it—by making the fullest use of these little-understood natural faculties which you possess. This is a challenge to make the most of your heritage as a human. Write for Free Book, "The Mastery of Life." Address: Scribe M.Z.F.

**The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) San Jose, California,**

old papers. We've got a lead. Something we can sink our teeth into."

"Sit down!"

I sat. I sulked. I wanted to tell him where he could go. But I didn't. Because he was pulling rabbits out of the hat again and curiosity got the best of me.

"What are you doing?" I groused at him.

"Looking for fingerprints, my son," he said.

The hissing sound of the atomizer went on and on. The spray fell on the papers, over the faded ink signatures.

"Whose fingerprints are you looking for?"

"Mr. Albert Browning's."

"What makes you think you'll find 'em there?"

"When a man signs a paper he usually holds the paper with the fingers of his left hand—if he's right handed. Hence he leaves perfect impressions of all the fingers of his left hand on the paper. Sometimes he reads the paper before signing and then we have the fingerprints of both hands. I'm betting Browning read these documents. Policies and applications for half a million dollars worth of insurance are fairly important."

"More hocus-pocus!" I snorted.

He grinned. But under the greenish glare of his powerful sun lamp, the brown of the silver nitrate solution he'd sprayed brought out ridges, loops, and whorls. Brought 'em out beautifully and sharply, as if they had been made scant minutes before.

Corrigan seemed excited. His eyes glittered. He didn't wait to photograph the newly developed prints. He stared at them, counted with his lips, soundlessly. Then he drew a great breath.

"My sleuthing friend!" he said exultantly, "we are face to face with the fact that a dead man carried his already burned-to-death body into a house, downstairs, into a furnace room, and there burned himself to death—after having been burned to death all the while!"

I stared at him. "What are you talking about?"

"What I am trying to convey in my peculiar fashion is: the fingerprints off those documents you got for me are the same as the fingerprints on the bones of that fleshless corpse—prints you saw me re-create with calcium sulphite—prints I photographed in your presence off those very bones. Those prints are iden-

tical. Here, see for yourself!"

He thrust at me the photos of the prints from the bones and from the Browning documents. I looked. They were the same. I got heat eddies in my brain. I felt helpless and hopeless—like an old lady caught in the middle of the traffic at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street.

"What goes on here?" I asked him. "What's it all about?"

"Wait. Now tell me what you discovered by yourself."

I told him. Everything. About the lineup. About Carson's identification. About Smoke Riley and his mason job and the job of flour-unloading for the bakery. About the last drunk. Bellevue. The Morgue. Harper Medical School. The visit to the dentist and the visit to Browning's doctor.

HE sat for a long minute, his eyes queerly veiled in thought. Then he grinned, and he looked more like an animated skull than ever.

"Give me those dental records!" he demanded.

He walked like a man ice skating on the clouds. We went into another room. The basket was there—with the fleshless body. And Corrigan stripped the moulage ruthlessly from around the jaws, so the jaw hinges would work, propped open the mouth, and studied the dental chart of Albert Browning and the dentistry in the mouth of the hideous cadaver. When he finished he looked at me. His eyes were swirling.

"That's that!" he said. "Toughy, my boy, we're some sleuths! Out of nothing, we're going to produce plenty. The dentistry in the mouth of our boy friend here is identical with the dentistry in the mouth of Albert Browning, according to these dental records you brought to me. Tooth by tooth, bridge by bridge, inlay by inlay, it checks—and double checks!"

I felt a nauseating, sinking sensation in the pit of me. "Why—" I blubbered—"that means that everything is screwy. I'll go down and tear the head off that Carson flatfoot. Why, if those dental records check with the mouth of that thing, then that is Albert Browning in the basket!"

Corrigan grinned. "You oughtn't to think out loud like that, my friend. Some day those very important persons con-

nected with the Continental who okay your salary and swindle sheet are going to hear you, and then you'll be among the unemployed."

"I wish I had a nice job," I groaned. "Like being the lone attendant in an insane asylum."

Doc poured me a drink out of a bottle.

"Let's see what we have now," he suggested. He made notes on a prescription pad. This is what he had written down:

1. The nature of the fire (Phony we think.)
2. The condition of the body (Impossible . . . I know)
3. The footprint under the soot—pointing, as you may have observed, toward the door and not into the room. A going-out footprint.
4. The absence of the platinum and diamond studs, noticed by our Mr. Toughy Nichols. Also the absence of other valuable evening wear accessories.
5. The absence of a light bulb—also noticed by our Mr. Nichols.
6. The fact that the fuse to the furnace room was deliberately blown by thrusting a metal object into the empty light socket.
7. Fingerprints on the charred bones of the Main Attraction.
8. Fingerprints (identical) on certain papers signed by Mr. Albert Browning.
9. Moulage reconstruction of face gets identification of Main Attraction as Mr. Smoky Riley, deceased, morgued, and given to Harper Medical School.
10. Dental records from office of Dr. Press, being exact records of work said Dr. Press did in the mouth of Mr. Albert Browning.
11. Examination of Main Attraction shows astounding fact that absolutely identical dentistry exists in mouth, as recorded of the mouth of Mr. Albert Browning.
12. Dr. Press was Albert Browning's dentist.
13. Dr. Hill was Albert Browning's Physician, and is also Professor of Surgery at Harper.
14. If Toughy Nichols misses out on this now, I'm going to write a letter to the Continental Insurance Company, demanding his recall—and I'll be off him for life.

"Gee, Doc, I'd get it—but the dentistry in the mouth of the Main Attraction is the same—and the chances of that happening is one in a million."

"Come on," Corrigan said sadly. "I'll take you by the hand and lead you to your next triumph."

"Where?"

"Don't ask questions. Just come. And try to look as if you meant business. Remember—any fighting, shooting, stabbing or mayhem is your job."

**WE** walked into Dr. Hill's office. The minute we opened the door I had chills down my spine. Corrigan's eyes were burning and hot and his body seemed propelled by coiled springs. The nurse let us into Hill's private office. The doctor was sitting at his desk.

"Ah, back, again, eh?" he said to me. He looked at Corrigan.

"This is Dr. Sylvester Corrigan of the Wiltshire Hospital, Dr. Hill," I said, fumbling for the right cue and cursing Corrigan inwardly for a poker face and not giving me the lowdown.

"Glad to know you, Doctor," said Hill. "Won't you sit down? What can I do for you gentlemen?"

Corrigan shrugged. "You can deliver into the hands of the representative of the Continental Insurance Company the person of one Albert Browning."

His voice was cold and cut like a knife. I froze on the spot. I could feel the creeps running over me in little waves. I was out of this play. The two of them stood there and stared into each other's eyes.

Hill sat down at his desk. His face never moved a muscle. "If this is a jest—" he began, never taking his eyes off Corrigan.

"The joke—if you call it that—is on you, Doctor," said Corrigan in that same deadly cold voice. "I imagine Mr. Browning is right here, in your private rooms, recovering from a plastic operation to alter his face. After all, he could not very well appear in public after being admitted as dead and the insurance on his life paid in double amount, could he?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," said Hill. "Really— isn't this going too far? May I offer you a cigar?"

He slid open the top drawer of his desk. His eyes were flinty hard and his mouth tight, grim.

I may not be up on microscopes, but I know a killer going into action. The hand moved into the desk drawer. I'm a quick draw from a shoulder holster. I

caught the one glimpse of the blue-black gun coming out of Hill's drawer. I went for my rod—and shot him right in the middle of the stomach before he could cover Doc Corrigan with his own heater.

He slipped down in his chair.

"I hope you're right!" I told Corrigan. "Not even the Continental can square this—if you're wrong."

Corrigan was on his feet. He didn't even look at Hill. He opened a door leading out of the other side of the office.

Upstairs in a front room, we found a man, his face wrapped in bandages. A man who jumped up, backed away from us and stared out of fear-stricken eyes when we walked into the room. Corrigan nodded. I jumped across the room and grabbed him.

"Albert Browning, you are under arrest for conspiracy to defraud the Continental Insurance Company into paying to your heirs and assigns the amount of insurance carried on your life."

There were no bandages on the fellow's wrists. That's where I put the handcuffs.

"You want to break down and sign a confession here?" I asked him. "Or shall we drag your whole family through the mud and the newspapers?"

Whatever he said was muffled by the bandages, but he wrote a ten line confession and signed it.

"What do we do now?" I asked Corrigan.

"Phone for an ambulance to take Hill away, and we then go down and pick up Dr. Rexford Press, D.D.S., on the same charge. Conspiracy."

Which we did. In spite of the fact that the little soft monkey fainted like a woman and we had to carry him out to the car.

## VIII

**I** COULD go for the moulage Doc, and even for the hocus-pocus with the fingerprints," I told Corrigan. We were sitting in his room—rather, I was stretched out on his bed. I had a glow going. The Doc's pre-war rye was responsible for that. "Only I'll break down and confess that I don't know how you got together that dope on Smoky Riley. Saloon hanger-outer. Rummy. Stone cutter. Living near a smoke stack that discharges soft coal smoke. Last job unloading flour—

and all that stuff. Listen, you didn't read that on that stiff. You must have had a lead!"

Corrigan's eyes were soft again. He was relaxed. "While you were asleep," he told me, "I swabbed out the middle ear of the corpse. You can find the history of any man in the wax of his ear: where he's been for weeks and months—it's all there waiting. All it needs is for someone to read it for the record."

I sat up on the bed. "Are you ribbing me again?" I asked him.

"I'm giving it to you straight. I found traces of gray granite, soft coal, flour, a lot of things. From those microscopic traces I was able to tell you what his job was, about the flour business—everything."

I took a long drag on a cigarette. Somehow there wasn't anything to say to this Corrigan mug. He knew everything.

"I just about solved that little problem when I looked at the body the first time," he mused. "Everything possible to visual identification was destroyed, except the teeth—the dentistry in the mouth of the body. Anybody with enough brains to figure out a scheme like that would have taken care of those teeth first. But they needed those teeth in the mouth, with that dentistry intact, to prove the identity of the charred body as that of Albert Browning. Get it?"

"I get it now. But it was a pain in the neck before."

"It was simple. Maybe it was Browning's idea in the beginning. He saw easy money. It took dough to run that place at Briarcliff Manor, and to support his family in the blue-blooded manner. No matter whose idea it was, Dr. Hill and Browning worked it out together.

"They needed a cadaver, in size and weight almost identical with the size and weight of Albert Browning. When they had the cadaver, Press was to duplicate the dental work he did in the mouth of Albert Browning in the mouth of the cadaver. Then they would destroy possibilities of identification by burning the body and planting it in a pre-planned fire in the Browning house. See? That furnace room was a perfect set-up for the business. It was almost as good as an incinerator.

"So they waited—and Smoky Riley gave them the 'go' sign by drinking him—

self to death. Hill was on the watch for a cadaver of the right size and weight to come into the dissecting laboratory. Riley came up from the morgue. And it was all set. Hill got possession of the cadaver, kept it preserved while Press did the dental work—and it must have been a plenty nasty job. Then Hill burned the corpse in his own incinerator.

"The Brownings got invited out to dinner. That was the cue. Hill drove the body out to Briarcliff Manor, turned it over to Albert Browning. Browning carried it downstairs into the furnace room, touched off the fire—and you know the rest.

"When I found that Marchand dinner jacket and evening trousers in the closet in Hill's house, the room Browning was using as a bedroom, and those platinum studs in the drawer, along with the platinum watch and all, that was the payoff.

"The thing that tickled me was exactly how the soles of Browning's evening shoes matched that cast I made from the impression under the soot on the concrete floor of the furnace room. That was beautiful."

I took a drag on the cigarette. "In a couple of weeks Browning's face would have been healed from the plastic sur-

gery. He would have stepped out on the street, disappeared, and his wife would have collected one million bucks from Continental."

"Of which Dentist Rexford Press and Dr. Carter Hill would have got a slice," reminded Corrigan.

"Ain't it the devil?" I asked him. "The Brownings seemed such nice people. It sure is the devil."

"Well, don't get the bed wet crying over it," grinned Corrigan. "Say, what was that little blonde's name you were telling me about at the Copacabana?"

"Fay Cairns. Why?"

"Well, what are we waiting for? I need mental relaxation. Maybe she has a sister."

We grabbed a cab and went downtown.

In the cab I suddenly grabbed him by the arm.

"Damn it!" I blurted out. "I knew there was something I forgot!"

"Something?" mocked Corrigan.

"Sure! I wanted to ask that Browning guy what he did with the electric light bulb he took out of that socket. Now it'll be on my mind all night."

"Tut, tut!" mourned Corrigan. "Isn't that just too bad!"

P. S. He got the ten grand.



When Detective "Red" Lacey gets a beauty contest winner as a client, he is suddenly thrust into a case of blackmailing, death menace and counterfeiting that is far from lovely in—

## MURDER MONEY

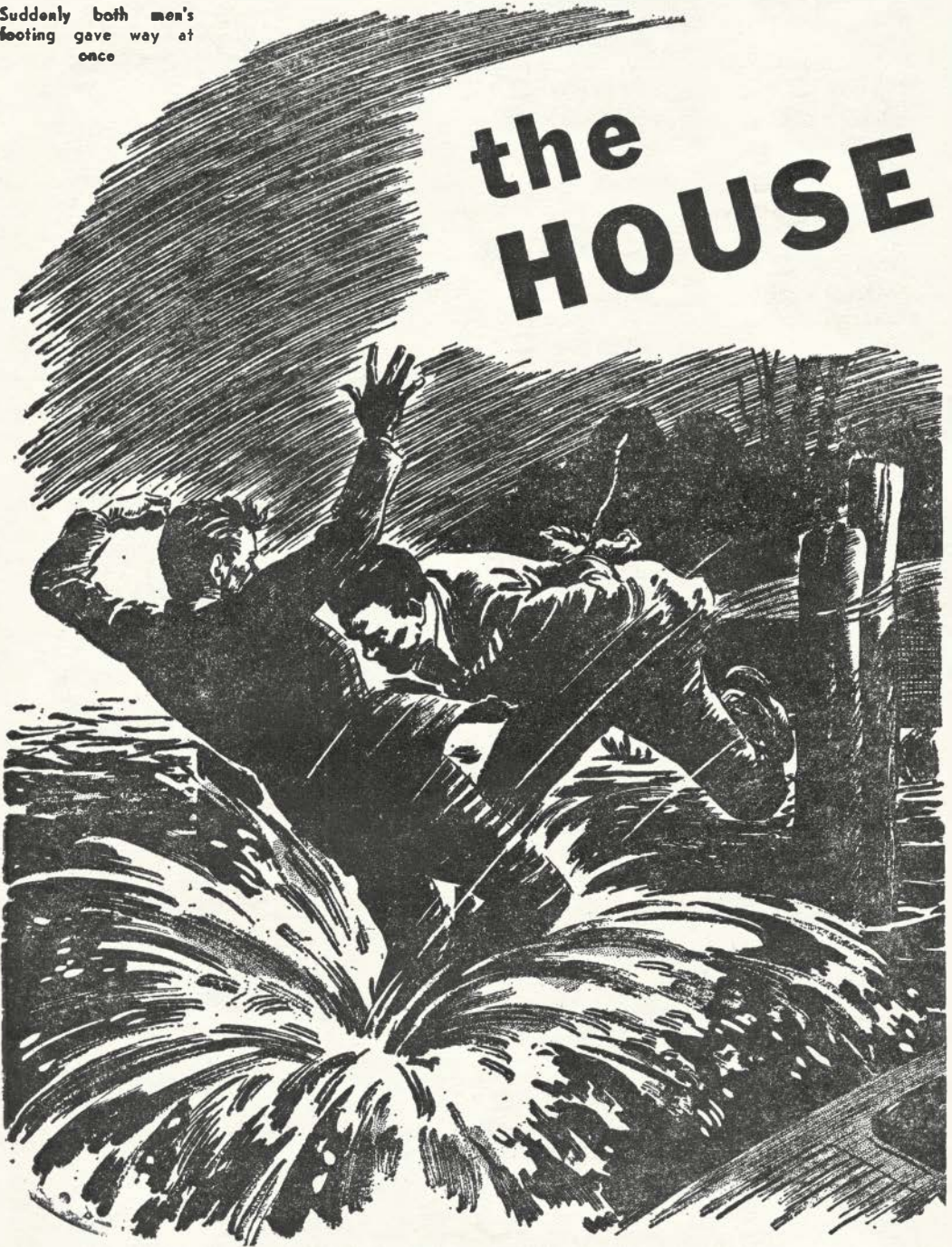
By

GEORGE BRUCE

●  
ONE OF NEXT ISSUE'S FIVE FEATURED MYSTERY NOVELS!

Suddenly both men's  
footing gave way at  
once

# the HOUSE



*On a swamp-shrouded island in the Louisiana bayous a kidnap mob  
plies its deadly trade—until Detective Tracy Hill steps into the picture!*



# of FROGS

A Novel by WESTMORELAND GRAY

## I

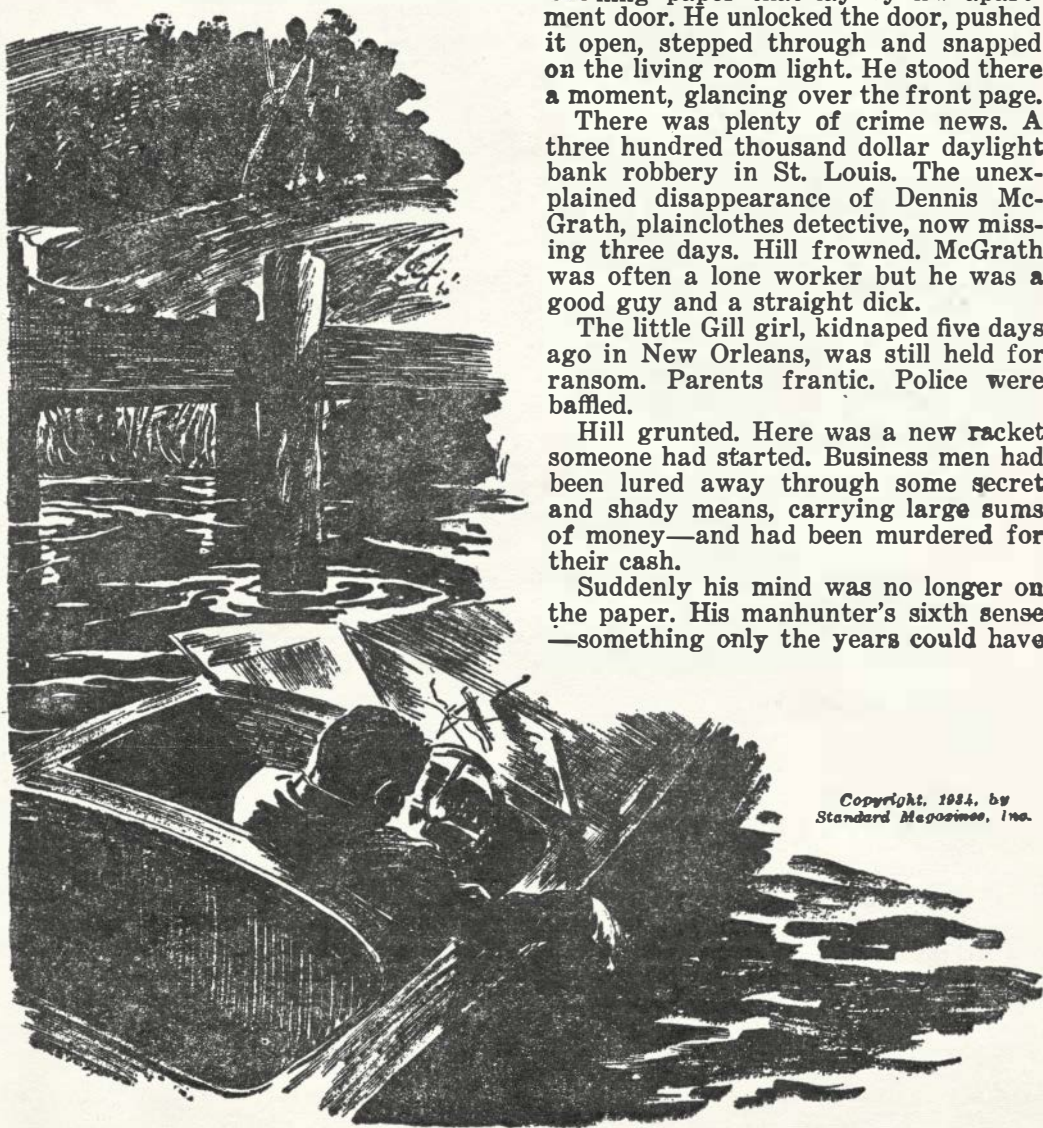
**T**RACY HILL picked up the evening paper that lay by his apartment door. He unlocked the door, pushed it open, stepped through and snapped on the living room light. He stood there a moment, glancing over the front page.

There was plenty of crime news. A three hundred thousand dollar daylight bank robbery in St. Louis. The unexplained disappearance of Dennis McGrath, plainclothes detective, now missing three days. Hill frowned. McGrath was often a lone worker but he was a good guy and a straight dick.

The little Gill girl, kidnaped five days ago in New Orleans, was still held for ransom. Parents frantic. Police were baffled.

Hill grunted. Here was a new racket someone had started. Business men had been lured away through some secret and shady means, carrying large sums of money—and had been murdered for their cash.

Suddenly his mind was no longer on the paper. His manhunter's sixth sense—something only the years could have



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## A Private Eye Plays a Perilous Game for High

developed for him—warned him. He was not alone in the apartment. And Tracy Hill, hard-hitting private detective, had plenty of enemies.

The paper fell from his fingers. The spring clip under his left arm released his automatic into the fingers of his right hand. His gaze swept the living room, even to its shadowy far corners. The room appeared empty. He swung abruptly about, made for the bedroom. Dark in there. Hill stepped swiftly through, hand sliding along the wall for the light switch. He had to turn half around to find it.

With deceptive speed the darkness stirred. From the corner of his eye Hill caught movement a bit too late. Something gouged him in the side even before he could whip around. There was a low guttural, animal-like grunt. Hill snapped on the light and stood still, holding on to his gun.

"Ugh!" came the grunt, harsh, full of meaning.

The gun gouged his side harder. Tracy Hill let go of his own automatic. It clattered on the floor and Hill slowly raised his hands. He swiveled about and stared. An exclamation of surprise escaped him.

A thick, moronic face, unintelligent, with little bestial, bright-glittering eyes. A horribly twisted, hunchbacked body, with shambling legs, long apelike arms and great hairy hands. The man was coarsely dressed in worn shapeless clothes.

"Who are you?" Hill demanded.

The man shook his head, keeping little piercing eyes on Hill. He opened his mouth and pointed at it with his blunt left thumb. Revulsion crept through Hill's body. The man's tongue had long since been cut off, halfway back.

The tongueless man reached over with his long left arm and caught up Hill's fallen gun.

"What do you want?"

With another guttural *ugh* the man turned Hill around toward the living room. He gouged again with his gun. Hill moved through the door.

"Ugh," the man said and indicated the overstuffed chair.

Hill sat down, stared up at his visitor. The man had taken a piece of paper from somewhere in his soiled

clothes and extended it to Hill. Tracy Hill flattened the note out in his hand. It was neatly written in large letters with a crayon pencil. It read:

*Mr. Tracy Hill: You are to go with this messenger. Offer no resistance, for he knows no cure for resistance but to shoot. Give no alarm and leave behind no cause to be followed. You shall be greatly repaid.*

*The Frog.*

Hill looked his astonishment. He glared at the half-human thing confronting him. "And who in the blazes is 'The Frog'?"

Something like a leer crossed the thick face. The man grunted again and shook his head from side to side. The hunchback caught Hill by the shoulder and pulled him roughly to his feet. He pointed his thumb at the bedroom door. Hill marched through the apartment. The broken lock on the service porch door explained how the hunchback had entered. Zigzag stairs led down the outside of the apartment building, from landing to landing, on down to the area-way. Hill was somewhat chilled. Was one of his enemies putting him on the spot?

LIGHTS were on in the other apartments and as the two descended Hill could hear laughter and voices beyond the lighted windows. He thought of shouting out but the hunchback's gun was in his back.

Tracy Hill gritted his teeth and went on down in silence. At the head of an alley, half a block from the apartments, a dirt-spattered car awaited.

"Ugh!" the hunchback said and jerked Hill to a halt with his left hand.

Hill debated making a bolt for it. But now he was determined to see the thing through. He allowed his hands to be tied behind him. He had to submit to being blindfolded. He was prodded into the front seat on the right side. The hunchback crawled under the wheel, gears clashed, the car rolled away.

Hill had little idea of the direction they went. Presently concrete paving gave way to gravel. They were on a country road, traveling pretty fast. The road became rough and bumpy. For

## Stakes When Mysterious Murder Menace Stalks!

about two hours the old car took it about as fast as it would go.

The car turned suddenly, jolted over a roadside ditch and then bounced along for several minutes. Then it stopped. The hunchback got out. Rusty door hinges creaked. The man crawled back in, the car rolled forward again, came to a sudden halt and the hunchback killed the motor.

"Ugh-ugh!" he said to Hill, reaching across to open the right-hand door.

Hill got out. His captor removed the blindfold. It was pitch dark. They were



TRACY HILL

in a cavernous old musty building. The man prodded Hill ahead of him. Outside Hill saw that the building was an old cotton gin, long out of use, rotting and falling down.

"What about cutting my hands free now?" Hill asked. "I'll be good."

The hunchback grasped Hill's arm and hustled him along through dead weeds and tall grass. They crawled through a wire fence. After about a mile, the ground grew soggy underfoot, the air dank. A marsh. For two miles they trudged through this, the mire sucking at their shoes. Then they came

upon a dull stagnant expanse of water. A swamp! The hunchback walked straight ahead into the treacherous mire. Was the man really insane?

Tracy Hill didn't try to make sense of it. He sloshed into the treacherous water. Two hundred yards out was a rank growth of brush. They crashed through the brush. The center of the clump was hollow and a motorboat was hidden there. With a rough shove Hill's deformed companion indicated that he was to climb in.

With an oar the hunchback threaded the boat through the brush, out into the open waters. Then he started the motor. The hunchback must have known the channels. He ran without lights, yet not once did he run afoul of shallow waters. They churned across the muddy expanse, until slowly ahead of them something black and huge took shape. An island!

Probably this had once been a great Southern estate. All the land was gradually sinking, Hill guessed, being claimed by the swamps. Probably on the island would be an old plantation home.

Hill was conscious of a veritable bedlam of sound as they neared land. It was the croak and boom of frogs! It sounded macabre and reverberating across the lagoon—the voice of a million frogs.

The boat grounded easily. For a moment Hill could see nothing but blackness ahead. Then he made out a rough log pier which led fifty feet up to land. Rank shrubbery and trees literally ran wild over the island. Farther inland, a small square of sickly, feeble light glowed—little more than a pinprick in the vast blackness.

The hunchback said "Ugh-ugh!" and stood up.

Then with hellish suddenness things happened. There was a quick blur of movement at the far end of the pier. Vicious jabs of flame lashed out and the night burst into awful sound—the stuttering roar of a heavy caliber automatic.

The hunchback made horrible noises in his throat. Hill saw his body buck with the impact of every slug. The luckless man whirled around but he could not get up his gun. He folded by sections—knees, thighs, waist.

## II

**T**RACY HILL dropped low in the boat. He crouched down under the cowl and peered over. A dark figure was creeping toward the boat. Hill's hands were still tied behind him. He twisted them as far as he could to one side. His fingers groped for the gun that the dead man had dropped. He gripped it tightly, index finger laced taut about the trigger. The killer neared the end of the pier, still creeping up.

To test his man Hill raised his head a little above the cowl. "Who are you?" he called out. "What do you want?" And then he ducked.

The automatic flared again from the darkness. Its roar bellowed across the black lagoon. The bullet bit through the edge of the cowl. Hill cut loose with the dummy's gun. He had almost to turn his back on the killer on the pier, even to shoot in that direction. He fired three times. Viciously as a striking snake came the the snarling, flaming retorts. One—two—three!

Hill gave a shout of triumph. He reared to his feet. The man had fired seven shots—a clipful! Hill lunged over the side of the boat. Mighty awkward business without the use of his arms. Somehow his feet connected with the logs of the pier. Somehow he kept from floundering into the water. He plunged at the dark figure, which had promptly started backing away.

Straight at him Hill dived. He got a dim fleeting glimpse of a gray-white smudge of face and a short stocky powerful-looking body. Hill's head struck the man just below the breast bone. The man's breath left him with an awful "ouf!" He was thrown back several steps.

But the killer was far from done for. He flung his gun with a wicked thrust and it grazed Hill's shoulder. Hill backed up a pace and plunged again.

Then suddenly both men's footing gave way on the slippery pier at once. They fell together, floundering over the edge and splashing into the slime, mud and stagnant water. Hill's assailant darted loose, pulled himself up on the pier. Slipping, sliding, he ran toward the dark island. In a moment the black shadows had swallowed him.

Hill swore feelingly. He managed to get up on the pier again and stumble

back to the boat. He shouldered himself over the planking and again found himself beside the corpse. He managed to push on the switch of the cowl light with his chin and stared down at the grisly sight.

There was a knife in the dead man's pocket and Hill managed to work it out and open it. He cut his hands free. Grimacing with pain he rubbed the circulation back into his wrists. He took his own fully loaded automatic from the hunchback's clothes, fitted it back into the spring clip under his arm and stood up.

Tracy Hill wanted that killer. He wrung some of the water out of his clothes and climbed back onto the pier. He strode on to where the bushes and vines came down to meet the water. The frogs had again taken up their hoarse bellow.

For a hundred yards Hill walked through the shallow mud. The dense brush thinned out a little then but there were straggling thickets of it everywhere. He pressed himself among the shadows and kept a wary watch as he went forward. Now he was possessed with an eerie prickling sensation that some one was watching him. His sixth sense was warning him. Three times he whirled to stare behind him.

Farther inland he could again make out the feeble glow of light he had seen from the boat. It came from the upstairs window of a great hulking pile of a house that looked ominous and forbidding.

The boom of the frogs never ceased. Hill decided to circle the house and grounds before approaching too close. He clung to the darkest brush as he moved. Once he heard soft, padding footsteps behind him. He whirled, dropped to his knees beside a bush and stared hard into the gloom. But the footsteps had stopped. And Hill could see nothing.

His search told him little. The house was of the old Southern Colonial type, built of dark stone with great pillars and almost covered with moss and thick vines.

**E**AST of the house the deepening marsh forced him farther away from it. He found however, a small isthmus through the marsh, made by a narrow rise in the ground, and followed it

through. Hill had discovered by now that his small fountain-pen flashlight had not been harmed by his ducking. He used it cautiously to flash his way about through the heavily overgrown shrubbery.

In the little flashlight's glow he found something which made him drop to his knees for closer scrutiny. Heel-prints in the soft ground—the prints of a woman's high heels!

Hill followed the heel-prints until they played out in the grass and shrubbery nearby. And then he stopped stock still, intently listening. Ahead of him, somewhere in the dark, someone was running. Silently Hill sprinted forward, racing hard toward the sound.

He saw the figure—the bulk of it—and grunted with surprise. It was a grotesque figure—a bulky, bloated one. A queer, dark shape, running through darkness. Hill shuddered and could hardly choke back a cry of astonishment. A Frog! That was what the ungainly shape looked like. A huge frog which stood almost upright and ran like a man!

It was an apparition well calculated to terrify any normal human being. It lumbered into black shadows and suddenly Hill could hear the footsteps no more. He probed about with his little flashlight and though he felt that the frog-man's eyes were on him he found nothing.

Reluctantly he turned to walk out of the shrubbery back toward the house. And abruptly there was nothing but empty space under his feet. He dropped three feet into a narrow open pit, floundering as he fell.

He landed on something at the bottom of that pit—some *thing* that was soft and yielding, that crunched under the impact of his feet. Instinctively he knew what it was. A body in an open grave! Hill recoiled and fought his way back up. His fingers were not very steady as he turned his flashlight down on the grisly thing in that black gash in the earth.

Hill stared in fascinated disbelief at the face upturned in the feeble glow. It was Denny McGrath, the detective who had been missing from Headquarters for three days. Hill cursed softly.

He had known McGrath and liked him. McGrath was a good dick. He and Hill had helped each other. And here

he lay in an open grave with no coffin, without even so much as a blanket for a shroud.

But there was more that was bewildering. From McGrath's breast projected the long ugly stem of an arrow! For long minutes Tracy Hill stared, stupefied. Then he snapped off the flash.

Had the tongueless hunchback brought Dennis McGrath to this island just as he had brought Hill? Was the plan to murder him just as McGrath had been murdered? Then why had the hunchback been filled with bullets the moment his boat had touched the pier? And why, in the name of all that was reasonable, had Denny McGrath been shot down with a bow and arrow?

Tracy Hill shook his head. He pushed his way through the foliage until he came out west of the marsh, into thinner shrubbery. He sighted the old house again with its feeble yellow glow coming from one of the upper windows.

Hill paused a moment to stare up at it. A hurried soft step sounded directly behind him. Hill whirled. He saw a blurred, furious twist of movement in the dark and something struck his head like an iron fist.

The gloomy island tilted high on one end, then rocked crazily back. The faint glimmer of light became a dazzling maze of them that swam high in the heavens. He fell on his face.

### III

**H**ILL came to with a booming croaking noise ringing in his head. He opened his eyes, saw that he was in a dimly lighted room, filled with somber shadows and dank smells. The sounds were the hollow croaking of frogs—and inside a house!

His senses cleared and the sounds receded a little. Hill realized that they must come from down in the cellars. There was a stir in the room and a form came into his view from the shadows.

Hill's numbed senses reeled a little at the sight. A huge upright greenish frog—man-sized, horrible, slimy appearing. He stared at it but presently came the realization that it was nothing more than a man, rigged up in some rubberish material with a goggle-eyed frog's head for a mask.

"I'm a grown man," Hill chuckled

harshly. "You don't frighten me in that childish get-up."

The answering voice was the voice of a frog. "It has frightened others," it said. "I have no desire to frighten you."

Hill lay on a dilapidated, moldy couch. The only light in the room was a feeble kerosene lamp. He saw an antiquated chair, a heavy old table, a tarnished mirror. And against the wall leaned a great bow with half a dozen arrows beside it.

Then this creature must be the island's archer, the one who had slain Denny McGrath!

"I take it that you are 'The Frog,'" Hill hazarded.

"I am."

Hill's hand went beneath his coat lapel to the spring-clip holster under his arm. It was empty.

"I guess I was brought here to be murdered—like Denny McGrath," he said bitterly.

"That depends. And if you contemplate any resistance right now—" The frog-arm reached out and grasped the bow, drew an arrow, moved closer to Tracy Hill.

"I have a mission for you to perform," the hollow voice said. "One you'll be glad you have done, once you learn what it all means. But that will come later. If you'll agree to forget this place, never to return to it again—you can leave the island tonight. Otherwise—"

After a pause Hill said, "The mission?"

"You will leave this place with the motorboat, which you'll hide where you found it when you were with the hunchback. You'll take with you a large box, a rather heavy box. You'll not open this box until you are well on your way back to the city. Then you'll understand everything."

Hill shrugged. "You're keeping *all* your cards in the hole, aren't you? You must be a good poker player."

"I'm a better archer."

"Where is this mysterious box?"

"Then you'll agree?"

"I'll agree to nothing I don't have to," Hill said angrily. "I'll probably be glad enough to leave this island and willing to carry the box. But I won't drop the matter of Denny McGrath's death half as lightly as that!"

The clumsy green-and-white figure waddled forward toward Hill, brandish-

ing the bow. The croaking voice became menacing. "I won't be routed out of here—I tell you I won't." He went on, with less show of temper. "But you'll go away tonight, with the box?"

Hill did not like the proposition. This man must be insane. Yet what could Hill do but promise?

"I'll take the box," he said finally.

The frog-man turned quickly. "In case you think I can't protect myself with this weapon—"

**Q**UICKER than Hill's eyes could follow he whipped an arrow in place, drew the bow—and the arrow streaked across the room, to sink quivering in the center of a round wooden decoration at the corner of the window casement.

"I'll go now to get the box ready," the voice croaked out again. "It will be but the matter of minutes. Then you'll go with me and we'll carry the box to the boat. There may be trouble getting off the island. I expect it."

The weird figure backed toward the door. As he went into the dark corridor he pushed the door to, and turned a great key in the rusty, heavy lock.

Hill surveyed the room. It was something of a prison. The one other door was also locked. There were windows but they were closed, locked.

He decided to wait for the man's return and watch for a chance to overpower him. For Hill had made up his mind that he would not go back to civilization without carrying the murderer of Denny McGrath with him.

Minutes passed slowly. Hill waited, tense and impatient. He waited fully half-an-hour. Sounds from below were shut off now by the heavy doors. Hill went to the door, examined it and the lock. It would take quite a lot of force to break that lock. He waited five minutes longer, then made up his mind that he would get out of that room.

Three times he ran against the door with all his weight, ramming it with his shoulder. A sore shoulder was his only reward. He looked about the room. His gaze fell on the heavy couch. It had rollers. He dragged it across the room, directly opposite the door, the rusty rollers shrieking in eerie protest. Then he threw his full strength against it, shoved it hard across the floor, and rammèd the door.

Momentum did the job. The old lock snapped. The heavy door flew open and slammed against the corridor wall.

It was dark out there but luckily Hill still had his small flashlight. He went through, played it on the head of a stairway. He peered down, saw nothing. He descended, the boom of the frogs again in his ears. In the lower hall he looked about. The big front door was locked and bolted. He went into a cavernous library, dark and moldy. Just across the hall was a big living room, as old, as musty and as desolate. Hill noted that one of the tall French windows had been broken out.

He went toward the rear of the house. An ancient dining room, long disused, its massive furniture falling to decay. A butler's pantry as moldy. The whole house gave an impression of decades of desertion and rot. All except the kitchen. In it were a scant supply of foods, an old range which had recently been used.

The noise of the frogs was louder here. Guided by the sound, Hill crossed the hall and entered the open black doorway of what proved to be a dank, smelly storeroom. It was littered with ancient plunder. Behind one of these piles Hill's flashlight showed a yawning aperture in the floor. The voice of the frogs was a bedlam issuing from this pit. Narrow stairs led deep into that humid hole of a cellar.

A sound other than the croak of frogs came to Hill's ears. It was a hollow tortured groan.

The thin circle of light came to rest on the body of a man on the stairs, halfway down. Agonized eyes gleamed in the sickly glow as he stared up at Hill.

Hill was cautious. This might be a trap. He snapped off the light and descended warily. He reached the man, stood still for a moment.

The man groaned again and clutched at Hill's legs. Hill stooped over him and flicked on the flash. He let out a cry of horror. It was a man with an ageless look, but with wildly growing gray hair. And his face was a mass of old scars that looked as if they might have been made deliberately with a knife years ago.

There was a dark stream of blood on the stairway below the man, a trail of it that led down and mingled with the water below. With an exclamation Hill

lifted the man and turned him over. There was an ugly hole in the right side of the man's torso.

"Get me up—out of this," the old man begged in a gurgling whisper.

HILL carried him upstairs and across the hall into the dining room. There he laid him on the cushion of a dilapidated window-box in the bay of three tall windows. Then Hill found an ancient brass lamp, which reeked with kerosene, and lighted it.

The man opened his eyes. "There's whisky in the kitchen—top shelf—east corner," he mumbled. "Get it please."

Hill brought the whisky. The old man took a long drink, lay back, sighed deeply and was still. Hill cleaned the wound, dressed and bandaged it with a cloth he found in the kitchen.

"I'm done—for—I guess," the man muttered thickly after a time.

"Who shot you—the Frog?"

Dull eyes wandered over Hill. "The Frog?" He roused. "You must capture the Frog—kill him! The man who wears that frog-suit is a fiend."

The scarred face writhed with pain and the man lay back. He gestured feebly for the whisky. Hill allowed him another long drink.

"Who are you?" Hill asked.

"I—my name is—Will Macomet."

"What are you doing here?"

"I live here."

Hill turned the name Macomet over in his mind. It had an odd ring of familiarity to it.

With a spasm of sudden effort Macomet sat bolt upright. "The box!" he cried. "It's empty. The devils have taken the—"

The man stopped, stared at Hill. He groaned and sank back on the tattered cushion.

"What's been taken?" Hill demanded. "Who took it?"

The fellow glared and did not answer.

"Macomet, you know what this mystery is about," Hill said earnestly. "I'm a detective and I'm entitled to know. Already there have been two murders and you have been shot. If I'm to get the Frog you must tell me everything that will help."

Gasping with effort, Macomet pulled himself to a sitting position. But Hill was not looking at him now. He was staring at one of the bay windows. A

face was pressed against it outside. It was a small delicate oval of a face—the face of a young and beautiful woman!

Hill swore as the face faded and was gone. Those high-heel prints he had found flashed in his mind. He leaped to the window, strained to open it. But the lock was stuck with rust and disuse.

"It was a face—a woman's face," Hill told Macomet.

Macomet rocked dizzily. "I must tell you my story while I can," he gasped. "I've lived on this island—in this house—for five years. I've lived here with the frogs. I—"

He paused—and the night outside was rent with a woman's scream of terror. It came again, but this time it stopped short—with a horribly suggestive abruptness!

Hill left the old man's side with a leap. He jerked up a heavy brass poker from the old fireplace, ran through the hall and out by the broken living room window onto the great wide veranda. He made directly for where the scream seemed to have come from.

He brought up in a shadowy cluster of swamp-cedars. He flashed his light cautiously. There were footprints in the sod. Some of them were the tracks of a man or men, others the prints of a woman's high heels.

Hill stopped to get a closer look. With a vicious whirl something passed over his shoulders and *zipped* into the bole of the cedar there by him. An arrow was buried in the tree-trunk, still quivering from its swift flight.

He dropped flat. His eyes sought the direction the arrow had come from. It was from the gloomy black shadows in the bushes. A vague something was stirring there.

Then it came toward him—the bulky, bloated, now familiar figure of the Frog! Not sure of his kill, the Frog was coming forward to finish his job. Hill lay as still as a dead man. The Frog stopped halfway, stringing another arrow on the bow.

The Frog would shoot from where he stood!

Hill did not give him the chance. He dropped the old poker and before the arrow could be trained on him he scuttled forward at amazing speed. He made a flying tackle for the grotesque froglike legs.

But the Frog saw him coming. He leaped aside so that Hill plunged by, little more than brushing him. But no arrow stabbed Hill's back. He staggered up and whirled after the Frog. The figure fled in the darkness, disappearing eastward in the maze of lush shrubbery.

Hill wasted five minutes in futile search. Disappointed, he turned reluctantly back to the old house. He entered through the broken living room window. Mad clear through, Hill stalked on to the old dining room. Old Macomet was gone!

#### IV

**N**OW Hill realized that the whole thing had been a ruse. He swore savagely at the way he had struck at the bait. He knew now that there were at least four people on the island. Macomet, the Frog, the girl and the man who had murdered the hunchback and fought with Hill at the boat landing. There might be—probably were—other people roaming the dark and sinister place. And he was unarmed.

What could be the motive behind all this murder and intrigue? Surely there was something more than a crazy whim that stirred in the mad brain of the man who called himself the Frog. Hill decided to search the house from top to water-logged cellar.

The upstairs rooms netted him little. They were great gloomy holes, filled with a jumble of old furniture. Only two had been used in years—the one in which Hill had met the Frog, and the one just behind it.

The wall of this second one was a veritable archer's arsenal. A profuse display of bows and many arrows were in it. Two racks were empty.

Tracy Hill went on to the lower floor. There were yet unexplored rooms in the west wing. He pushed on into these. Immediately signs of recent occupancy struck him. Rumped blankets on two beds and on a cot. Papers littering the floor. Many cigarette butts strewn about. A smoky lamp, nearly empty of oil.

Hill turned back and headed for the cellar. He climbed over the pile of plunder and onto the rickety stairs leading down. He descended until his feet were in the water. His flashlight shone on



something on the opposite side—a low table with a box on it! The box Macomet had mentioned! Hill sloshed across to examine it. Frogs skittered in every direction before him.

Just an ordinary pine box. About five feet long, eighteen inches deep and eighteen inches wide. There was a cleated handle on each side of it, recently attached. The lid was off. It was empty save for an old blanket padding its bottom.

But Hill stooped closer, sniffing. An odor, a faint sweet odor assailed his nostrils. Chloroform! Brows knit in puzzlement Hill finally turned away. With an impatient gesture he ran the flashlight glow again around the cellar. His eye caught something glistening below the water's surface by the edge of the stairs. He crossed and picked it up. It was his own automatic.

He took the gun up into the hall with him and carefully cleaned and dried it with his handkerchief. Carefully he dried and reloaded each of the four remaining cartridges. With his gun restored to him he felt better able to combat the Frog and whoever the Frog had for henchmen.

Then he remembered the boat. Probably the ignition keys were still in it. If he took the keys now he would be the only one on the island with a quick means of leaving. He left the house and walked west toward the boat-landing. And then he stumbled, fell sprawling.

The body of a stocky man was lying face down on the sodden ground. The hilt of an arrow projected from his back. Hill turned him over and stared at the face. It was vaguely familiar but Hill could not place it.

Hill went through his clothes, found an assortment of papers and a card. The card identified the man as Paul Oland, St. Louis, dealer in imported goods. Hill believed he remembered now where he had seen that face. He thought it was in the rogues' gallery of Hill's local police headquarters.

The croaking of the frogs brought Hill's mind back to the matter in hand. He got up wearily. Somebody on this island was kill-crazy. He swung around and started cautiously for the boat-landing.

He heard soft footsteps. He paused, listened. He ducked deeper into the shadow of bushes. A man came vaguely

into view, heading hurriedly toward the pier. A tall man. It was not the Frog. "Stand stock still and throw up your hands!" Tracy Hill cried out harshly. "My gun's on you!"

THE man spun around like a top. Hill swore but did not fire. The target was too vague. The man ducked low and darted swiftly toward the water.

With all his power Hill threw himself at the fleeing man, tackled him low. The man went down grunting, twisting, writhing, fighting viciously to free himself. He clubbed at Hill with his gun. Hill gripped his wrist and wrenched hard. The man cried out and dropped his weapon.

But Hill could not hold him. Their wallow in the soft ground had made the man's clothing slick. In one fierce wrenching movement the man got free, leaped up, ran out on the pier and vaulted into the boat. A shove with an oar sent him out in the water before Hill could leap aboard. A second later the motor purred and the boat was churning away.

Hill did not fire. He needed to conserve ammunition. He stood a moment staring gloomily, then turned back to search for the man's gun. He could not find it. Working his way cautiously back toward the house he racked his mind for some link to connect up the bewildering things that had so speedily followed each other on the island.

Something rustled behind him. Hill whirled. "Don't do it, detective," a cool voice said.

Hill stopped. A girl stood facing him in the shadows. Hill could see the oval of her face, the trim outline of her figure. He could also see the glint of her small gun.

"So you're the young lady who screamed and tricked me," he said.

"Lady is good," her hard assured voice came back. "Let me tell you you've stepped into the buzz-saw, mister, when you stuck your nose into this business. Let's see how quick you can turn loose that gun."

Hill had sense. He let his gun thud on the ground. She knelt quickly and picked it up.

Then she said, "I've got a friend who would like to talk to you. Turn around, hold your hands clear of your sides and march."

The gun was in his back. He walked ahead in the dark.

"Bear right," the woman ordered.

Then she whistled two shrill notes. From away forward in the night she was answered.

"Who wants to talk to me?" Hill asked. "The Frog?"

"Yes. The Frog."

"Where is he now?"

"Where you're going."

That suited Hill. "What's behind all this?" he demanded. "What's your connection with the Frog? Why have all these murders been committed?"

The girl laughed a hard little mirthless laugh. "You'd like to know."

Hill's normal tones had served slightly to relieve her tension and ease the pressure of her gun in his back.

**L**IKE a shot he dropped low on the ground. Instead of scuttling forward, he sprang backward against her knees. She screamed and fired. The bullet whispered waspishly as it plowed through the shoulder of his coat. It stung his flesh in its passage.

Hill reared straight to his feet, his eyes avidly on the gun which sought him. His long right arm shot upward and his fingers with lightninglike speed closed around her wrist. The girl screamed. Hill twisted hard. She screamed again and again. She fought like a tigress.

Hill threw his left arm about her and cupped a hand over her mouth. He heard running footsteps coming toward them. Someone was calling hoarsely. Hill swung the girl off her feet, lifted her and ran precipitately toward the denser brush and blacker shadows. He was not ready yet to meet the Frog or any other enemy.

He crouched low, carrying the girl bodily, his hand still tight over her mouth. He ran into low muddy ground. Somewhere behind him a hoarse voice was shouting, "Elissa! Elissa!"

At last Tracy Hill halted in a remote marsh thicket. "If I have to smash your head with my gun to keep you quiet, I'll do it," he growled in the girl's ear.

He stood her against a small tree. bound her hands behind her with his belt and strapped her to the tree. All sounds of pursuit had ceased.

"Now," he said in a harsh metallic voice, "you're going to talk. You have heard of the third degree, haven't you?"

"You wouldn't do that to me!" she panted. "My friends will kill you."

"They're trying their best to do that anyway. Who are your friends?"

"There are three men on this island who will kill you on sight if you harm me."

"What are their names?"

Her eyes glittered stubbornly back at him. Hill grasped her shoulder in a crushing vise.

"Answer me," Hill gritted.

"You can't make me talk, you thumb-handed dick. Go ahead manhandle me."

"Tough, eh?" Hill muttered. His voice resumed a conversational tone. "Who are you? What are you doing here on this island?"

"My name is Elissa Youree, detective. What I'm doing here is my business. But I can tell you this. The old man you talked to in the house—the one with the scar-pitted face—he will murder all of us if he can."

"But what about the Frog?"

Elissa Youree hesitated. "You have nothing to fear from him."

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"No. He's very much alive."

"And very much trying to kill me. One of his arrows missed me by inches just a while ago."

"He didn't understand," she said. "He thought Macomet had turned you against him."

Hill laughed hollowly. "As if I were ever for him. And when I first came to this island tonight the Frog knocked me unconscious or had it done."

"You are mistaken. That was Macomet's work."

**W**AS she lying? He certainly had no cause to trust her.

She spoke intently. "Let me take you to the Frog now. Keep your gun on me. You'll be safe. The Frog only wants to talk to you. He'll—"

The girl ceased speaking abruptly. A noise faded through the dirge of the frogs. It was the purr of a motorboat approaching the island.

"He's coming back!" she whispered in a horrified voice. "Something has happened."

"Who is coming back?" Hill demanded savagely.

"Max Ugalt. If he—"

Then abruptly the girl stopped. Hill could get her to say no more. They

both listened in strained silence as the boat came to land and the motor was shut off. It did not land at the log pier. Hill guessed it was now less than a quarter of a mile from where he and the girl stood.

"I'm going down to see about that boat," he said.

"You'll be stepping to hell," the girl said without concern.

Hill ran toward the shore. He came out on sloping marshy ground which led down to the black water. He crouched low, watching, eyes following the water line. Finally he made out the boat against a small spit of land. Nothing moved.

Warily Hill moved out to the boat. Mud sucked at his shoe tops, sloshed to his ankles. He gained the little spit of land. At the boatside he paused, hardly breathing. His gun was gripped ready in his hand. He snapped on his little flashlight, peered into the boat.

The dim light revealed a figure huddled in the front seat. A man, dead—

The haft of an arrow projected from the man's bosom. Hill drew a heavy deep breath. It was the man he had tackled at the pier, the man who had got away from him in the boat.

Tracy Hill climbed over into the boat. Carefully he went through the man's pockets. There were ordinary letters. These all were addressed to Max Ugalt at a downtown office number in New Orleans. Then his eyes lit on something on the seat beside Ugalt. He picked it up and stared at it. A small dainty piece of silk, figured in dainty pastel colors and edged with a bit of real lace. It was the lower half of the sleeve of a child's dress. Pinned through the middle was a tiny platinum brooch. And still clinging to pin and cloth was a damp fragment of heavy paper—part of a note which had probably been ruthlessly torn off and thrown away.

Though Hill searched the boat and the water and mud around it he could not find the note. And there was not one word left on the fragment pinned to the cloth to give Hill some clue as to the message.

The gathering horror of what that piece of silk probably meant struck Hill's mind full force. It made him determined to have no mercy on Elissa Youree, Will Macomet, the Frog—any of these mysterious enemies—until he was

at the bottom of this nasty affair.

Somewhere on the dark ill-smelling island a kidnaped child—a little child—was being held.

## V

AT last, Hill felt, here was something that might lend motive to all the mad whirl of events. Then Hill, hardened manhunter that he was, felt his heart chill and contract with a horrible thought. Maybe the child was already dead.

He examined the ignition switch of the boat and found that the key was gone. Then he climbed out of the boat. His grim, determined face was not good to look at. He was not greatly surprised to find Elissa Youree gone when he reached the tree where she had been bound. On the ground at the foot of the tree Hill found the pieces of his belt which had bound her hands.

Hill swore heavily and headed back toward the boat. He hoped now that he might meet the Frog and Elissa Youree. He felt exactly like smashing into people who stood between him and the child he believed held prisoner.

There was no one at the boat. But someone had been there. An extra set of tracks was in the mud, and farther inland Hill discovered the sharp prints of Elissa Youree's spike heels. He was more interested in a third set of footprints. Those, he felt certain, were the prints of the man who had murdered Ugalt. Murderers were more of a piece with kidnapers than a man who merely released a girl he found in distress. Hill followed the tracks of the killer.

They led inland. They played out in a dense mass of branches. Tracy Hill beat through. He eventually picked up the tracks again on the other side, though they were almost indefinable in the weakening light of his little flash. After a time they led into an inky dark grove of moss-hung trees.

Hill stopped abruptly. There was movement there ahead of him. Not stealthy movement but quick, grunting, violent movement. Men were struggling, fighting somewhere in the dark close by. Hill could hear the rasping grunts, the smash and thud of bodies thrown together, occasional hoarse oaths.

He went forward rapidly, his gun

ready. In a hollow pit, surrounded by tangled foliage and trees, two men were fighting, apparently to the death. Hill ran forward just as the bulkier figure raised something in the air and crashed it down on the other's head. There was a sickening thud, then the bulky figure stood alone, panting, turning, peering about. It was the Frog.

Tracy Hill crept forward three paces. "Don't move, Mr. Frog," he said.

But the Frog did move. He whirled and started toward Hill. And it was no clumsy bow-and-arrow weapon he used now. It was a flaming automatic, puncturing the air devilishly close to Hill.

Hill fired twice, aiming at the center of the bulky misshapen torso. He saw the Frog's body buck and flinch. But he came forging on, his automatic blazing death before him.

Hill fired once more, almost-point-blank. Still the great, ungainly figure did not go down. Hill knew his shots should have been telling ones. The only thing which had saved Hill up to now had been his leaping, twisting, dancing about to confuse his opponent. Now he was on his knees. He had but one shot left. And three bullets had hit the Frog, yet he was still on his feet, still coming on.

It flashed on Hill then. A bullet-proof vest! Under that awkward, bunglesome disguise the man had his body protected. Hill raised his gun to plant his last bullet in the man's head. At that instant the Frog spun around and lurched away. But too late for Tracy Hill to save his shot. His gun roared and the bullet wailed harmlessly over the Frog's head.

Tracy Hill charged to his feet. He felt something warm and sticky running down his left arm and knew he had a flesh wound. He lunged forward in pursuit. The Frog did not run far. Only to where he had left his other victim. He stooped quickly, picked up the fallen man. Hill was almost on him and he roared with surprise as Hill charged him. But as Hill reached out to strike viciously with his empty gun, his foot caught in the gnarled exposed root of a tree and he fell sprawling.

The Frog was lumbering away, carrying the other man in his arms. Darkness swallowed him quickly. Frenzied, Hill dashed forward. But the Frog was gone.

HOW long he searched Hill did not know. He gave it up at last and came out of the shrubbery not far from the dark hulk of the old house. Then Hill saw the hated figure again. It was still carrying the victim which Hill had seen clubbed unconscious.

As Hill watched and moved forward cautiously the figure mounted the veranda steps, faded into the shadows there and entered that broken window. Hill paused and considered. He meant to go into the house, to face the Frog again. But he carried an empty gun. Then he remembered the gun he had forced Elissa Youree to throw away. If she had not gone back for it after her release, if luck were with him—

Luck was with him. Back at the place where he had his tilt with the girl, his fast-dimming little flashlight finally located the small .32 automatic. There were three cartridges in it. Hill gripped it tightly and started back for the house on the run.

He approached it warily. There were no lights at all in the house now. He cautiously entered the old house through the broken front window. Except for the doleful, unnerving chorus of the frogs there was an ominous pall on the house. Hill shuddered and steadied his nerves with an effort.

He jumped, startled. Somewhere close by there was a rasping noise. Hill froze in his tracks. The sound ceased. Hill sent his flashlight rays exploring the room. Dust, eerie shadows, a massive divan, old, old chairs, a giant table, spectral tall windows. But emptiness, save for Hill himself.

Carefully he searched the house, from cellar to upper floor. Halfway down the stairs from the upper floor, he paused. A vague indefinable sound put him on guard, caused him to walk on the balls of his feet, to keep his flashlight dark. He crossed the hall, stood in the wide doorway to the living room.

A sound came from the veranda just outside the broken window. A small whisper of sound and then a blurred shadow of movement. A figure loomed vaguely there in the window. Someone was entering.

Hill tiptoed closer. His fingers drew forth the little .32 automatic while his left hand thrust forth the small flashlight.

"Don't make another move!" Tracy

Hill commanded sharply, and he snapped on the flash.

A man straightened up from the window sill. Startled eyes blinked in the light. The man was not, as Hill had hoped, the Frog. Nor was it Macomet. It was a man Hill had never seen before. And as Hill stared the man's arm made a lightning dive beneath the lapel of his coat.

"I wouldn't do that, mister," Hill gritted. "It amounts to suicide."

He let the man hear the click of the released safety catch. The man's body stiffened and his hand fell away from under his coat.

"Who are you?" he asked in a strained, tight voice.

"I am Tracy Hill, a detective," Hill said.

"Tracy Hill! What luck! I'm desperate, Hill. I want to talk to you."

"I'll feel more conversationally inclined when I have taken your gun."

Tracy Hill stepped forward. He drew a .38 Smith and Wesson automatic from the man's shoulder holster, stowed it away in his hip pocket.

"Come into the room," Hill said tersely.

The man obeyed, moving to the room's center. "Can't we light a lamp?" he asked. He produced a match, struck it and lighted the old brass lamp. "Now I feel better."

"What are you doing here?" Hill demanded.

"Trying to get away. This is the bog-hole of Hades. And I need your help. I was kidnaped and brought here, Hill. I'm afraid they intend to kill me."

"Where do you live?"

"New Orleans."

"Why were you kidnaped?"

"For ransom, I suppose. And that's a joke, considering my financial status." He laughed humorlessly.

"Tell me about it," Hill said curtly.

"Four days ago I went home to find that a horrible looking creature had broken into my apartment and was waiting for me. He was a hunchback and could only grunt. He was armed and kept his gun on me. He forced me into a car and drove miles and miles up the highway. Then he turned into the swampland. He put me in a motorboat and brought me to this island."

"Just a minute," Hill cut in. "What's your business? Your name?"

THE man produced a card. It read: *Laval G. Mistrot, Importer, New Orleans.* Hill stared him up and down.

"Mr. Mistrot, I don't believe your story," he said flatly.

Mistrot shrugged.

"It's true," he declared. "I've been held a prisoner these four days. And awful things have been happening on this hell-ridden place. Murders. I've heard gunshots. I've found two men with arrows through their bodies."

"There are three. You've missed one. Who has held you prisoner?"

"A wild-eyed and crazy old man named Will Macomet. He rigs himself up in a greenish outfit and calls himself the Frog."

Will Macomet the Frog! Hill was not convinced.

"How did you get free?" Hill asked.

"Where had you been? How did you happen to be carrying a gun?"

"I was a prisoner in this house," Mistrot answered wearily. "In that dark reeking cellar with the frogs. I've always carried a gun—special permit in New Orleans. But the hunchback took it from me when he first stuck me up. Tonight Macomet came down in the cellar. He was going to murder me and pack my body in a box. I surprised him, took the gun and shot him. I escaped."

"Was Macomet rigged up as the Frog then?"

"No."

Hill frowned. If Mistrot's story was true, Macomet had discarded his grotesque disguise between the time he had left Hill prisoner in that upstairs room and when he had gone down in the cellar. But why?

"I wandered around the island, seeking some means of escape," Mistrot continued. "I stumbled across an arrow-pierced body out there on the grounds. I got a glimpse or two of the Frog—and then I knew I hadn't killed him. Half an hour ago I discovered the motorboat. There was a corpse in it."

"Did you know either one of those dead men?"

"I had never seen them before. I tried to start the boat but the ignition was locked. I came back here hoping to find Macomet again, stick him up and get the key."

Hill reached quickly into his pocket and brought out the little piece of lace-trimmed silk.

"Mr. Mistrot," he said, spreading the cloth before the man's eyes, "have you ever seen a dress like this?"

Hill's eyes bored into the man's face like gimlets. Mistrot did not hesitate.

"Not that I remember. Why?"

"Do you know anything about a child, a little girl who has been kept prisoner, a kidnap victim, on this island?"

"Good Lord, man, no! I've seen or heard nothing of her, and I have been here four days."

"Mistrot," Hill said quietly. "I'm sorry I can't help you now. I've got to find this child if she's here. That's my job, first of all. But I'll not try to molest you if you want to try to get off the island."

"Thanks, Hill. And my gun? I may need it. Macomet is dangerous, you know."

Hill took the .38, took the shells from it, pocketed them. He handed the gun to Mistrot.

"That's as far as I can go on our short acquaintance," he said.

Mistrot took the gun. "I'm going on a hunt for Macomet," he said grimly. He turned and climbed through the broken window.

Hill smiled thinly. He stepped to the window, watched the figure stride away from the house. Then he slipped through the aperture himself and took up Mistrot's trail.

But Hill did not count on that scurviest trick of nature—the swamp fog. Like a cold puffy serpent it came up out of the marshy lagoon. Thick and murky and sluggish it wrapped itself about the old house, about the moss-hung trees. Hill could not see half a dozen feet in front of him.

He trudged and trudged. Treacherous brambles clutched at him. He walked into mire half knee deep. And at the end of a tortuous half hour he had to admit that not only had he lost Mistrot but was rather hopelessly lost himself.

## VI

**B**UT Hill kept walking. He went now in what he believed to be the general direction of the old house. That was approximately the center of the island. He thought of the things Laval G. Mistrot had told him and wondered if there was any truth in them. Macomet as the Frog? It was possible. Was

Macomet using the island for a vast, wholesale kidnap farm?

That would explain Denny McGrath's murder and Ugalt's and possibly Paul Oland's. And no doubt it was Oland or Ugalt who had killed the hunchback, attempting to capture the motorboat.

But Hill could think of no reason why he himself had been brought here by the Frog's henchman. Had the Frog hoped to dupe him into acting as a tool in his plot? Hill shook his head.

He barked his shins on something and swore. It was a heavy stone block. A moss-grown old carriage block, relic of earlier days. Hill breathed a sigh of relief. He was lost no more.

A moment later he was silently treading the steps to the veranda. A dull blob of light greeted him. He made for its glow, mingled with the fog as it streamed from the broken living room window.

Hill sensed movement inside, heard a furtive footstep. He pressed his back to the wall, waited a brief moment, then peered cautiously into the yawning, dim-lit living room. The room was thick with fog. But Hill made out the awkward form of the Frog, holding the brass lamp, looking about into the fog-veiled corners of the room. Clutched in his other hand was a wicked-looking automatic.

Hill decided not to surprise the Frog now. Perhaps he would be able to follow the devil to the hiding place of the little girl who, Hill felt sure, was being held prisoner on the island.

The Frog was cautious. For a long time he stood in his tracks, listening to the dirge of the frogs, staring about. Suddenly he turned toward the broken window, holding the smoking lamp aloft.

Hill dodged behind the casement. A full minute passed. Then slow trudging footsteps came toward the window.

The Frog was there, not a yard from Hill in the fog. But he had left the lamp on the table. Hill could hear him breathing. The frog-man moved back into the room. Hill took an easy breath.

Then the croaking voice boomed sepulchraly: "If that's you at the window, Mr. Hill, come in! But come in with your empty hands showing—or I'll shoot to kill."

"If I come in, Macomet, I'll come shooting," Hill answered. "And this

time I won't waste bullets against your steel vest. I'll aim between your eyes."

"So you think you know my identity huh?" the voice answered. "I'm not afraid of you, Hill. But I really don't want to kill you. I had a purpose in bringing you here—and I still have a mission for you to perform."

"If you don't want to kill me why did you aim that arrow at me out there in the dark? Why did you try to empty a clip full of lead almost in my face?"

A heavy silence followed.

"Maybe there are two of the Frogs rampant tonight," the Frog said then.

Hill digested that. It might be true. But it would not help him one whit if the Frog in there were the wrong one.

"Lay your gun on the table in plain sight," Hill said finally. "I'll holster mine. I'll come through the window and if you make a move the slow man will be the dead one."

Hill shifted along the wall away from the window. Then he catfooted to the edge of the veranda, and moved sideways back to where he could see into the fog-shrouded room. Hill stood there a long time, straining his eyes, before he made out the grotesque form, blurred and dimmed in the room. The Frog stood back of the lamp.

"I'll take you up, Hill," the croaking voice said. "Can you see me? Here's the gun."

The Frog's arm came into the glow of light. Hill saw the automatic laid flat on the table. And yet he kept rigidly still. Then Hill moved warily two steps forward, crouching low. He twisted abruptly aside.

Instantly the Frog's gun roared out. He had snatched it up and it blazed through the thick gray vapor in a vicious tattoo of death.

**B**UT Hill had expected treachery. His body was a dancing, twisting wraith in the fog and eluded the three blasting shots that came through the window. Hill's own purloined gun was speaking as he came forward, aimed directly at the flame-spitting automatic in the Frog's hand.

And one of them took effect. The Frog howled and Hill saw his gun drop to the floor. Hill leaped through the window.

"Now, my dear Mr. Frog," he snarled, "I'm going to unmask you. You are going to uncover your cowardly face and

show me exactly who you are. You are going to tell me the meaning of all these murders. You are going to tell me where that little child is hidden."

Big, ungainly, awkward, the Frog backed away, spread his arms and pressed his back to the wall. "Wait!" he cried. "Don't unmask me now. You'd only cause the murder of an innocent child."

"Then there is a kidnaped child on this island?"

"Yes. There is a child." The hollow voice was low.

"And you'll lead me to her?" Hill demanded. "But I couldn't depend on you. You'd lead me into a trap."

"You'll have to depend on me. I am the only one who can help you save the child."

"All right. If you make a false move there'll be a bullet in your skull."

The spread-eagled form of the Frog relaxed. He caught his benumbed right hand, nursed it with his left.

"Please sit down in that chair," he said. "There is plenty of time."

"Start talking," Hill said. "Where is that little girl?"

"There's a lagoon on the northeast corner of the island—just a sort of slough." The hollow voice was humble. "It's bordered on both sides by trees and a heavy growth of foliage. A quarter of a mile down this slough there's a raft. On that raft—" The voice changed. "I think, Mr. Tracy Hill, you are on the spot!" the Frog bellowed.

Hill whirled about. A window on his left crashed out. Through the black, jagged hole in its pane projected the blunt, ugly nose of a submachine-gun!

Hill caught a fleeting glimpse of mean, beady killer's eyes over the thick barrel of that machine-gun. He went into action. He flung one hasty, inaccurate shot at those eyes and leaped over the divan at his right.

He crouched there, his body racked with tension. For half a dozen heartbeats there was nerve-killing silence.

The Frog laughed. "Fine protection, that couch. Let him have it, Black!"

The mad, mocking chatter of the machine-gun burst on the silence. The old sofa danced with the impact of slugs. Splinters debouched from its back. Tufts of upholstering flew from it as the bullets probed for Hill's body behind it. Hill wedged himself

hard into the angle made by the back of the old sofa with the floor.

The man with the machine-gun was thorough. The divan was riddled and the slugs came lower and lower, seeking Tracy Hill with lances of death. There was a lull. The acrid smell of burned powder assailed Hill's nostrils. He lay deathly still, holding his breath.

"I guess that's got him, Black," the Frog said. "Now throw a burst into that closet and our job here will be cleaned up."

Hill's eyes flew to the narrow closet door in the rear wall of the room. The machine-gun snarled again. Up and down, crosswise, aslant, the ugly holes appeared in the dark woodwork of the closet door. The door shook in its frame. It danced to the lash of those high-powered bullets.

"Now give Hill one more load to make sure and we'll get out of here," the Frog ordered.

Hill flattened, cringing against the expectancy of more bullets. He had no doubt they would find him in the next burst. His glimpse caught the brass lamp. Instantly his gun rose a little under his cramped armpit. He fired at the dull flame. The lamp sputtered out with a tinkle of its broken globe. Thick murky darkness wallowed through the room.

Instantly the darkness was slashed by the leaping, flashing jets of fire from the machine-gun. The deadly fusillade whipped again at the mutilated old divan which hid Hill's figure.

Then the man at the window spoke. "Go see if he's done for."

"I'm no fool," the Frog answered. "I know how that detective can use a gun. We'll wait a minute. He won't be able to lie still long. If he moves let him have another dose in the same place."

**T**ENSE seconds went by. Hill was painfully cramped, but he knew furtive eyes were straining across the darkness, ears were listening for the slightest sound that would show that life was still in his body.

Neither of his enemies spoke again. How much longer he lay there Hill did not know. He was weak, sick. After what seemed a long long time Hill moved tentatively, feeling out his cramped, almost paralyzed muscles. And then he abruptly flattened again.

There had come a sound, a sibilant movement in the hall. Someone was moving in there. Someone was calling in a low voice—just a whisper of a voice.

"Tracy Hill! Tracy Hill!"

It was a woman's voice!

She came into the room. Hill knew who she was now. Elissa Youree.

"Tracy Hill!" she called hoarsely. "Can you hear me? You're not dead?"

"No, I'm not dead," he said. "I'm very much alive. So don't try any tricks. I'm armed with your own fancy little gun."

He made out her figure in the dark. Hill got to his feet. She came close swiftly.

"You must save that child, Mr. Hill," she said tensely. "They are going to kill her. As long as Max Ugalt and Paul Oland were alive they wouldn't stand for that. But now they are both dead. The others will kill her."

"Wait a minute here!" Hill interrupted. "You helped to kidnap her, didn't you?"

Hill flashed the small light on her. He was shocked at the change in her. Her face was drawn, her eyes distraught. She was not the case-hardened woman who had captured him a while ago.

"Oh, I won't try to excuse myself," she moaned and she wasn't acting this time. "I helped to snatch the poor kid. I've stood for it all—well, because I'm a crook and also because there's a man in this that I'd go a long way to help. But I won't stand for wanton butchery of that little girl."

"All right," Hill said skeptically. "Now that you've turned out to have a heart of gold, who is this child?"

Elissa Youree's chin sank. "Dorothy Gill," she said in a low voice.

Dorothy Gill! Hill had read of the case, of course. A beautiful little ten-year-old girl kidnaped from her wealthy parents.

"Where is she?"

"She's held on a raft anchored in a slough. But she'll be moved if we don't hurry. That man with the machine-gun was guarding her. Your shots drew him away. They must be on their way back for her now."

"There's someone behind that closet door," he said. "Murdered, no doubt. I've got to see about him first. I've got to light a lamp."



She caught his arm. "Don't be foolish," she said in an earnest tight voice. "A light will bring them back here. They think you're dead. Hurry!"

Hill sensed the frenzied anxiety of the girl. He briefly examined the closet door. It was locked and it would take time to use force.

"Come on, then," Hill growled. "I suppose this will have to wait."

"Out the back way," she whispered, tugging at his sleeve.

She led him through the black hallway, the dining room, the old kitchen. Another window was broken out there. Elissa Youree crawled through it, dropped to the ground. Hill followed. She was off in an instant through the fog, leading him as fast as she could run.

The journey was a tortuous one. Hill could not see a dozen feet in front of him. Brush and branches seemed to rise up from everywhere to hamper them. But the girl fought through them.

They came to a sluggish slough. They followed its sodden, ragged bank for hundreds of yards. Treacherous bogs were underfoot. They ran into deepening mire. But they went on. At a broken water-blasted tree-trunk the girl came to a stop. Heedless of the mire she felt around the tree.

"There's a chain here," she said. "It leads out to the raft. I hope we're in time."


"Stay here," Hill said. "Let me—"

"Be careful, Tracy Hill," Elissa Youree whispered. "Black Hamon may be back guarding her with that machine-gun."

Hill nodded and stepped as quietly as he could into the water. He followed the chain, sloshing forward warily. He sank to his waist. Almost to his armpits. At last he reached the raft, an old rotting affair made of logs bound together.

He climbed aboard and used his flashlight. He found an automobile blanket, carelessly folded, damp and wrinkled. And on its edge was a little girl's slipper—a dainty little colored kid slipper, now wet and muddy and discarded.

## VII

 H—they're gone—I knew it!" The girl's tragic voice greeted Hill back at the bank. Hill, wet and bedraggled,

nodded without speaking.

A great blast of thunder sounded overhead and rumbled off through the corridors of the sky. With a splatter of great drops it began to rain.

"It's setting in for a downpour," Hill said. "Tell me, is there another shelter on the island besides the big house?"

"None. The wooden barns and out-buildings have long since crumbled."

The first splatter had been fair warning. Already the rain was slashing through the fog.

"Then there's no place they can go with Dorothy except to the house," Hill said. "They'll have to get in out of this rain. We'll go back there to head them off."

Elissa Youree was willing enough. She led him on the run, knowing the way better than Hill. It was raining harder than ever by the time the two had covered half the distance. They were nearing the house when something whitish loomed before Hill. At first he thought it was the Frog but then he saw it was only something hanging on the low limb of a tree. The girl had passed it by but Hill stopped for an instant's investigation.

It was the frog-suit, the disguise that the criminal of Swamp Island had used. A padded overall affair with its frog-head still attached. Hill threw it over his shoulder and ran on with it.

They gained the rear of the house. They climbed to shelter through the broken kitchen window. The rain took a last spiteful lash at them as they came through and beat down on the old house with unabated fury.

Inside the house was quiet except for the hollow chorus of the frogs. Hill felt comparatively certain that he and the girl were alone. He threw the soggy, green-and-white frog-suit on the table and turned his flashlight on it. The affair was well made of some shiny material. And behind the grotesque frog-mouth was a small funnel which served as a sort of megaphone and accounted for the hollow, croaking voice.

Someone had gone to quite some pains to construct this disguise. Was it just a madman's whim or was there really some meaning, some purpose, behind the ugly thing?

Hill quickly examined the bullet holes in the upper part of the garment. Only one was stained with blood and that

hole was exactly at the spot in the torso where Will Macomet had been wounded. The other punctures, Hill knew, were made by his own gun, in the fight out in the darkness.

Then Macomet *was* the Frog! Was the unkempt and scarred-faced old man a madman? What tenacity of life he must have possessed to keep going on his crime spree after that ugly wound he had received in the old cellar!

Hill turned to the girl. "Then it's Macomet, after all," he said. "What is he to you that you wanted so desperately to protect him?"

"I'm interested only in one thing, Tracy Hill. That's in saving Dorothy Gill's life. That's the only reason I have turned in to help you now. I won't help you to find out who the Frog is—and I won't talk. Do you feel sure they'll come back to the house—and bring Dorothy?"

"This storm will drive them in. They think I'm dead and that there's no one alive in this house. But right now, while we are waiting, I'm going to force the door of that closet and see what's behind it."

He strode through the dark rooms and hallway into the cavernous living room. The girl followed. Hill threw a flashlight glow on the closet lock. She held the light, while he took his pocket-knife and set to work. He inserted the blade between the door and the jamb, and probed for the plunger. It was tedious work and precious minutes passed before the plunger was forced back.

Hill stood up and stepped back a pace. He put his hand on the knob and turned it slowly. The splintered door yawned open. At first Hill thought the closet was empty. Then with a cry he snatched the flashlight from the girl and flung its rays on the huddled figure on the closet floor.

Bedraggled gray hair. Old dilapidated clothing. Hill knelt swiftly and turned the face up to the light.

It was the face of Will Macomet!

Hill's theories went glimmering. Here he was, convinced that Macomet was the Frog. Yet Hill had seen—or rather heard—the Frog himself stand in this room and order this closet riddled with machine-gun bullets. And the man behind that closet door had been Will Macomet!

"Then who," Hill demanded angrily, "is the Frog?"

"I'm inclined to think," Elissa Youree answered wearily, "that there is no longer any such person as the Frog."

HILL examined the old man. His hands were bound. A gag was in his mouth. But there were no other bullet wounds in his body except the one Hill had seen and examined early in the night. On his head was an ugly welt which accounted for the old man's unconsciousness.

Hill cut him free, removed the gag and sent the girl back to the dining room for whisky. He lifted Macomet to the divan and as he did so something fell from the worn clothing and jingled on the floor. Hill struck a match, found the thing, stared at it.

It was a small key on a tiny chain. Hill knew that it was the key to the motor boat. What a train of things that key meant! That Macomet had murdered Max Ugalt in the boat. With the bow and arrow! Then Macomet must have been the expert archer! That meant that Macomet must also have murdered Paul Oland, who had been pierced through with an arrow. And Denny McGrath! And Macomet must have been the one disguised as the Frog, the one who had tried to kill Hill himself with an arrow. But here Hill's mind paused.

Macomet—how strangely familiar! Archery—Will Macomet. And then Hill knew. The old man had twisted his name. It was not Will Macomet—but Mack Willomet—one-time archery champion of the Eastern States.

Hill remembered the tragedy of Mack Willomet. Five years ago the papers had been full of it. In a fit of rage he had killed a man whom he had discovered to be his wife's lover. With an indictment hanging over him Mack Willomet had disappeared.

That was why he, as Macomet, had been staying here on this island. A fugitive, he had taken up his abode here on this half-known and long-forgotten island in the House of the Frogs!

Tracy Hill picked the old man up and carried him bodily into the dining room. He left him there in the dark with the girl, asking her to bring him to. As Hill turned back into the hallway, he felt of his gun, for reassurance.

With that came a thought and an awful sense of goneness smote him. How many times had he fired that little .32?

In his excitement he had not counted shots. Frenziedly he held the gun close and examined it. It was empty!

Hill continued looking at the useless little thing, knowing that at any instant a stealthy step or a hushed word in the night might announce the arrival of Dorothy Gill's kidnapers—armed with a machine-gun!

Elissa Youree came close to him. "It's empty?"

Hill nodded without speaking.

She caught her breath. Then she felt in the pocket of her trim suit. She extended to him two cartridges. Hill chuckled grimly. At least they were better than an empty gun. He forced them into place, made ready. Elissa Youree caught Hill's arm. "I've been helping you, Tracy Hill, because I simply had to," she said. "But I want to ask you—don't kill Laval Mistrot if you can help it. I guess this sounds funny coming from me—but I love Laval. I still do. I've turned against him now because I just couldn't stand for the killing of that little girl."

Hill gave her a twisted grin. He had not been surprised at the mention of Mistrot's name. For he had already about pieced things together.

"I'm sorry I can't make you any promises," he said in a gentle voice.

He moved back into the dark hall. Hill took up his post in a well of blackness beneath the old stairway opposite the entrance to the living room.

Tense minutes dragged by. Hill began to doubt the soundness of his logic in waiting for the kidnapers here instead of starting out in the face of impossible odds to hunt for them. And then he stiffened. Over the sound of the rain, over the intermittent croak of the frogs, Hill caught the muffled sound of footsteps on the veranda. He bent forward, waiting, taut as stretched wire, senses acutely alert.

Someone swore, then there was a mumble of hushed voices. There was a long moment of suspense when Hill could hear nothing, could see less. Then there was a scratching sound at the broken living room window. The kidnapers of Dorothy Gill were coming in! A vague bustle of movement followed in the living room. Finally a match flared feebly in the foggy gloom, lit the wick of a brass lamp.

Hill could dimly make out two men

now. Laval Mistrot with a glistening automatic in his hand and beside him a smaller man, thinner, ratlike, with beady killer's eyes. And that man held the submachine-gun. Hill did not fire for fear he might hit the child. He could not endanger her life now.

Mistrot whirled and stared at the open closet door. Then he flung a glance behind the divan. In one frenzied sweep of his hand he smacked out the guttering blaze of the lamp.

"We didn't kill those two men!" he snarled. "Get ready for hell to pop, Black! They're both gone!"

But it was not the threat of danger in Mistrot's words that made Tracy Hill despair. It was something else more horrible, more tragic, which he had just fully realized.

The last two of the kidnap gang were in plain sight—and little Dorothy Gill was not with them!

## VIII

**J**UST across from Hill two deadly, desperate, heavily armed men crouched in the darkness. He had but two bullets. They probably had an unlimited supply. Only strategy could win for him and the odds against that were tremendous.

He took the little flashlight from his pocket, fingered it. Then with a backward flip he threw it up and over the stair-rail. Instantly he dropped flat on his stomach. The flashlight came down on a high step with a small thudding sound that was starkly dramatic in that heavy silence. A sharply indrawn gasp was the only reaction from the men in the living room.

Hill's heart sank: he had hoped for more than that. But then a weird thing happened. The little round flashlight started rolling down from step to step, and in that smothering hush it sounded very much like someone tiptoeing down the stairs.

Bedlam burst with hellish suddenness. From its steel throat the submachine-gun spewed stabbing flame and a noise that shattered all silence. Straight through the yawning door of the living room came the fire. Bullets chewed chunks out of the rotten wood of the staircase, high above Hill's flattened body.

Hill took careful aim directly behind those leaping jets of flame and squeezed

the trigger. Then he rolled over four times to the right.

The machine-gun ceased its obscene chatter. A high-screamed curse went up from the black living room. A curse and then a groan.

"He got me!" Black Hamon snarled.

Laval Mistrot spat out, "Give me that chopper. I saw his gunfire. I'm coming after you, Hill!"

The machine-gun roared out again, perforating the floor and woodwork all about the area where Hill had been. It flamed from the middle of the doorway now. But Hill had snaked himself backward from the stairs, down near the center of the hallway. He did not fire. He had only one shot left and he must be very very sure of his aim. His gun's flash would betray his position and Mistrot could spray him instantly with a dozen messengers of death.

Hill was slowly creeping backward on his hands and knees. Mistrot had ceased firing for the moment but Hill knew that his slightest stir would start the machine-gun chattering again.

Then there was someone there beside Hill. Someone who swayed and rocked like a man about to swoon as he crouched into the hall. Hill caught a reek of whisky and knew that it was Will Macomet—or, more rightly, Mack Willomet, one-time archery champion. Was the old man crazy? Didn't he know he was walking into the very jaws of death?

Willomet was not as crazy as he seemed. Hill heard something thud on the other side of the hall. He learned later it was nothing more than part of a sofa cushion. But it did a valiant job. Willomet had thrown it and it struck a small taboret. The taboret toppled to the floor.

Instantly the machine-gun came alive from up front, stuttering forth its blast, riddling the little taboret. Hill fired. But before he did he heard something twang from over where Willomet stood. A drawn bow! One of Willomet's deadly arrows had sped toward Mistrot at the same instant Hill's bullet had!

There was a peculiar, grisly *plop* up forward there, as the machine-gun ceased and silence swooped down on the House of the Frogs.

Shakily, Hill found a lamp and lit it, brought it into the hall. The scarred face of Willomet showed from where

the old man sat on the bottom of the stairs. He had an inane leer and Hill knew that he was alive on vitality bred on whisky alone.

Elissa Youree was bending over Mistrot's body, weeping, caressing him. But Mistrot was dead from an arrow in his stomach, just below his bullet-proof vest, and a bullet in his throat.

"Don't cry for him, girl," Hill tried to soothe her. She looked up at Hill with pain and scorn in her eyes, and he left her with her grief.

Black Hamon was dying from a bulletpierced lung. But Hill did not stop to examine him. From the stairway he recovered his flashlight and went out on the veranda through the broken living room window. He had to find Dorothy Gill if it meant searching all night in that lashing rainstorm.

He did not have to search far. On the veranda against the wall the feeble ray fell on a little figure, huddled in a wet bedraggled silk dress with half of one sleeve gone. Her eyes were closed and her face was still and white where tears and dirt had streaked it.

With his heart pounding, Hill knelt, felt her pulse. It was strong. She was breathing regularly, as if in sleep. A tide of relief swept over Tracy Hill as he leaned closer and caught the smell of chloroform. She was merely sleeping.

Hill carried the child in to where Elissa Youree, the woman of two natures, took her solicitously in charge and began caring for her.

Then Hill turned to Mack Willomet. "You killed Max Ugalt and Paul Oland—"

"I'm glad I did," Willomet answered with a racking effort. "They were mad dogs, nothing but mad dogs. They deserved to be destroyed."

"But you didn't kill Denny McGrath or the hunchback. Mistrot had them killed."

**W**ILLOMET nodded wearily. "Mistrot was another mad dog. I sent for McGrath first, the same way I sent for you later and for the same purpose," he explained. "McGrath landed but Mistrot killed him. Then he drove an arrow through him and laid him in an open grave. His idea was that if McGrath's body were ever discovered I would be suspected, being the archery expert."

"Laval Mistrot's kidnap gang con-

sisted of himself, Elissa Youree, Paul Oland, Max Ugalt, who was the 'contact' man, and Black Hamon, the gunner," Hill summed up. "Is that right?"

Willomet chuckled in a queer mirthless way. "They thought this place was deserted when they landed here with the little girl. They couldn't have picked a worse hiding place. I am probably one of the most outraged persons in the world at the kidnaping of little children."

The old fellow's voice broke a little and Tracy Hill solemnly offered his hand. Willomet took it in a firm grasp.

"Paul Oland killed Humpy, my devoted servant and bodyguard here on this island for the past four years. But he couldn't kill you. He had slugged you out on the grounds, where I came upon him about to finish the job, and put an arrow through him. Then I carried you up to my room to explain to you what I wanted to do."

"Let me get this straight," Hill interrupted. "You had already rescued Dorothy Gill from the kidnapers?"

Willomet nodded feebly. "I nearly scared those kidnapers to death in the west wing rooms, appearing suddenly in my frog-suit. I got the drop and ran them off, keeping the little girl. Then I locked up the house all around and guarded it with my bow and arrows, which I had taught them to fear. Then I sent Humpy for Denny McGrath. Humpy was a fugitive, too. He had belonged to some gang and the gang leader had cut Humpy's tongue out because he claimed Humpy had talked too much."

"But why didn't you tell me at first I was to take Dorothy Gill back to her parents?"

"Well, I had sworn I'd never go back to serve in prison. The man I killed, the man who stole my wife—he needed killing. A mad dog too. I even deliberately scarred my face when I first came to the island so that I'd be hard to identify. I'd taken lots of pains to hold my hiding place—this island here. Other fugitives and derelicts have come here, hoping to usurp it. That's why I fixed up the frog-suit a couple of years ago. One appearance in it was usually enough to scare them off the island."

"And you had the box fixed up so I could carry the girl back in it?"

"I didn't know how you'd take the whole business—if you knew who I was. Lots of detectives would turn me

in for the reward. I wanted you to be off the island before you discovered what was in the box and read the note which would explain everything yet keep my identity a secret."

"And you chloroformed Dorothy?" Hill asked.

"She was so frightened. She was hysterical. It was a kindness to put her to sleep. And it made putting her in the box easier."

Hill sighed as he began realizing the enormity of the thing. "I think I understand it all now," he said. "When you left me to go down in the cellar, Mistrot had broken into the house. He shot you down, took the frog-suit and your bow and arrow and left with Dorothy. After that he used the frog-suit himself."

"Yes. But I don't see why."

"Well, I do. He was a prominent business man in New Orleans, whom I might identify. The suit was a disguise. Also he figured the Frog and I were on some sort of terms—that the suit would not only draw me to him but protect him from attacks by me. Then, after Elissa Youree screamed out and I left you in the dining room, you recovered enough to slip out and go gunning for the kidnapers, eh?"

Willomet smiled. "Archering," he corrected humorously. "I hid in the boat and killed Max Ugalt, when he left with a tormenting, threatening message for Dorothy's poor, distracted parents. But Mistrot had on that bullet-proof vest. When I shot an arrow into that it only brought about the fight we had out in that thicket."

"You saw him beat me unconscious. He'd have killed me but he'd had to empty his gun at you. So he brought me to the house, gagged me and locked me in that closet. He went after another gun, I guess. I came to in time to hear machine-gun shots at the window and hear Mistrot order Black Hamon to throw a round into me in the closet. I flattened out so low that all the shots went over me. Then I passed out again until a few minutes ago."

Hill put his hand on Willomet's shoulder, cleared his throat. "Willomet, as far as I'm concerned, I've never seen you," he said earnestly. "But that wound of yours needs looking after. I know a doctor whose real sense of justice is greater than his regard for legal tech-

nicalities. May I send him out to fix you up?"

Willomet looked up, startled. "It—is it safe?"

"Of course it's safe."

Willomet caught Hill's hand in a jerky, tight grasp. "I guess I'm sort of an old fool," he said huskily, embarrassed. "I've been a hermit so long."

Elissa Youree came into the hallway with a very frightened, tear-stained, but beautiful little girl, who sobbed in a tired way.

"Dorothy, do you want to go home right now to your mother and daddy?" Hill asked. She came into his arms with a pitiful cry of delight.

Hill lifted her up and over her shoulder he saw the contrite face of Elissa Youree. The woman was weeping.

"Elissa," Hill said, "I guess I've got the heart of a boy scout. Get in the boat with us and go as far as it's safe. Then leave us and go your way. I guess I can forget there was a fifth member in Laval Mistrot's gang."



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My foot struck the hoodlum in the stomach  
and he went sailing over my head



# Family Affair

By **BOYD CORRELL**

**T**HERE was something peculiar in the air when I checked into the department that morning. The boys all said, "Hi, Sarge," but they didn't look directly at me.

I went on past the desk and into Captain Winkle's cubbyhole of an office and found him talking with Bill Callahan of the *Times*. I didn't miss the furtive motion Winkle made to Callahan when he saw me. I spoke to the *Times* man and then turned to Winkle. I said:

"The department acts like it's being

investigated by a Citizens' Committee, Winky. Has Homicide been voted surplus property and we're all canned?"

The captain's usually jovial face wasn't jovial. He slid a pudgy hand through his thinning hair and looked down at his desk. I saw his lower lip worry out a bit, then he cut his eyes up at me.

He said, "Jonathan Seamore is dead—murdered, Tom." His gaze slid back to the desk.

Seamore was publisher of the *Times*,

*Detective Sergeant Tom O'Toole is trapped in a roadhouse by the same gangsters who framed his brother for murder!*

the leading sheet in the city. He had been crusading against the wave of crime that had hit the coast, hiring private detectives and using his own newsmen to uncover rackets and gambling houses and organized gangs of hoodlums. With his help the police had dried up half the cesspools of lawlessness in the city in the past four months.

Seamore had become a sort of knight in shining armor to the law-abiding citizens, and had seriously been mentioned for governor at the next election.

I said, "When did it happen?"

"Last night, or rather early this morning." The stubby fingers went through the thinning hair again. The lip pursed further. Winkle became silent. I caught Callahan staring at me with a peculiar expression. I got irritated.

I said, "Look, fellows, you're treating me like a crusading preacher. Give me the details!"

I couldn't get it. Usually, Winkle called me in along with the lieutenants whenever a new case came up, and although my rank's sergeant, I expected a promotion to come through almost any day. Winkle had as much as said so a week ago. But now he was holding back information on the murder of one of the city's leading, if not the leading, citizen. I didn't like it.

**W**INKLE looked up at Callahan, jerked his head toward the door. The reporter scooped up a wad of paper he had been writing on and went out, closing the door softly behind him. Winkle waited a full half-minute after Callahan left before saying anything.

"We've got the murderer, Tom," he said finally. "He's down the hall in solitary. We're holding him incommunicado." He paused a long moment. "You know him, Tom," he added.

I stood there waiting for the captain to go on. It seemed like minutes went past.

At last I said, "Well, come on, who was it!"

Winkle jumped, then settled down again. He cracked his knuckles. He sighed. At last he said softly:

"It was Jerry, your brother."

Something twitched in my stomach and I thought for a moment I was going to lose my breakfast. I stared at red-faced, solemn Captain Winkle, sitting in his squeaky swivel-chair. There was the

picture of the commissioner on the wall behind him. Outside in the receiving room there was the low rumble of talk, and from beyond the window to my left came the city's traffic noises, mounting in volume as the day grew older.

No, I was awake. And I had just heard Winkle say that my kid brother had murdered Jonathan Seamore.

I leaned on Winkle's desk and heard myself shouting at him.

"Winky, Winky! Is this your idea of a joke?"

My brother, Jerry O'Toole, was as straight as they make 'em. He was a private detective who was as scrupulous in his work as a minister in his pulpit. He had a fine reputation in the city, and had always co-operated with the cops when he could help them. I knew of plenty of chances he'd had to make big money, but it meant sacrificing his standards, and he never would do that. And he had a swell wife and kid. I felt sick.

Winkle was shaking his head. "It's no joke, Tom. It's true. I'm sorry, downright sorry, but the evidence is too strong. We found him with the body and his own gun with one shot fired. Mac's already checked it and found it's the murder weapon."

I said, "Jerry's no murderer. He was working for Seamore!"

A couple of nights ago I'd been over to Jerry's for dinner and he'd told me about the publisher calling him in. And Jerry had been hush-hush about it—and pleased too, I could tell. I had had a hunch then that he was already on the trail of something big.

Winkle spread his hands. He said, "Look, Tom. I don't like to believe he murdered him but I can't get away from the facts and evidence. Listen to this:

"Jerry was found standing over Seamore's body in the publisher's office. Jerry's gun, with his prints and nobody else's on it, was on the desk beside him. One shot had been fired. The M. E. says Seamore had only been dead a short time—matter of a few minutes to an hour—and Mac, like I said, has already run a test on the gun—"

I interrupted. "How did the department get there at just the right time? I suppose Jerry called up immediately and confessed?"

Winkle said, "Jerry didn't call. We received a phone tip saying a shot had



been heard in the *Times* Building. We put it on the radio and a cruiser happened to be almost on the spot."

"And you don't even suspect a frame!" I said.

Winkle's eyes grew a little cold. He said, "Yes, I suspect a frame, but I'm also holding him on suspicion of murder. Until something definite turns up I'm going to continue to hold him."

I nodded. "Okay. But I'm going down and get the straight from him."

"I told you we were holding him incommunicado."

I said, "Look, Winky, I'm still on Homicide, aren't I?"

Winkle pondered a moment. Then, "All right. Go on and talk with him. But I'm holding you responsible to report to me any statement he makes."

I WENT out and down the hall to the jail in the back. Solitary was a cell set by itself and reached by a short corridor. At the entrance to the corridor a guard was stationed. He walked with me and opened the barred door and clanked it shut after me as I entered. I heard his footsteps move away as I looked at my brother.

I said, "Hi, kid. Looks like somebody stacked the deck against you."

Jerry's black, curly hair was mussed and his shirt collar open at the throat. His dark eyes were blood-shot from a sleepless night and he appeared to be wound as tightly as a spring. He said:

"Tom, I've got to get out of here, quick! This is a frame, but I won't be able to prove it if I'm not out by two o'clock. Can't you get a lawyer in with a habeas corpus?"

I said, "Not for twenty-four hours, Jerry. Can't I do it for you?"

Jerry shook his head and began pacing. "No, it's got to be me. Seamore had it fixed for someone to meet me at Paddock's Bar at two o'clock today." He pointed to the iron bunk. "Sit down and I'll give you the story."

I walked over and settled on the hard bed and listened while he talked.

It seemed that Seamore had called him in the middle of the night and told him to get over to the newspaper office at once. He had something so hot he couldn't mention it over the phone. In fact, he was suspicious of his phone being tapped. He did say however, that Jerry was to be at the Paddock Bar at

two o'clock today and that a man would approach him with information that would lead to the clean-up of the Carney gang.

Carney had been one of the big shots of the underworld before Seamore started his clean-up campaign. He'd disappeared from the scene and the premise was that he had pulled out of the city because it was getting too hot.

And Seamore had intimated over the phone that the reason Carney had escaped his net was that he was receiving tip-offs from someone close to the police department.

Anyway, Jerry had gotten over to the publisher's office at a quarter of one. He'd found the door unlocked and had walked in and discovered Seamore on the floor, a bullet through his head and powder burns around the wound. As he leaned over the man to see if he was dead, two cops from Homicide came in and collared him.

I said, "Your gun, kid. Winky said it was there with one shot fired."

Jerry nodded. "Yeah. It was on Seamore's desk, where a blind man couldn't miss it."

I said, "Any idea how it got there?"

Jerry's voice was bitter. "It's a frame, I tell you! I'm not a story-book detective who packs a rod everywhere he goes. Why should I carry one to call on Seamore? I hadn't touched the gun for three days. You know where I keep it—in the drawer of my dresser. Somebody did a prow through the house and got it, with my prints, and used it to kill Seamore. They used gloves and left the prints intact.

"Seamore said he suspected his phone was tapped. I claim it was. It's the only answer. Carney, or one of his gang, heard Seamore tell me to come over. They bumped him with my gun, then tipped off the police when they saw me enter."

I shook my head. "That sounds possible, kid, but you won't be able to sell it to Winky."

Jerry swung around with both hands spread. "Of course I can't! That's why I've got to get out of here by two o'clock and meet the guy Seamore arranged for me to see."

I studied his face and saw desperation there. The kid was really in a mess. His story was so thin the first breath of air from the D. A.'s cross-examination

would blow it to hell and gone. But I believed him. I also believed that he had deduced the way his gun was planted at the scene of the crime. But how to help him?

**S**UDDENLY I had an idea. How would it be if I took Jerry's place?

I stood up. I said, "How about me appearing at Paddock's?"

Jerry cut me short. "Tom, you're crazy. The guy knows me by sight and I'm the one he's to turn the info over to. You're a well known cop and he wouldn't approach you with a ten-foot pole. I tell you, I've got to get out!" He swung around viciously.

I said, "Take it easy, kid," and tried to think.

"Easy, bunk! I've a hunch that a man can clear me of a murder rap if I meet him, and they've got me held here where I can't even see a lawyer!"

I said, "In twenty-four hours," and watched his shoulders sag. He said, "Okay," and walked to the bunk I had gotten up from and flung himself on it. "Beat it. I want to rest."

I called through the griffed opening of the steel door and the guard came and opened it and stepped inside. As I started to leave, Jerry called to me. He pulled me close to whisper in my ear. He said, "Tom, what I'm doing now is temporary, and the chair is awfully permanent." I felt a quick tug at my coat. He had slipped my .38 from my underarm holster and stood leveling it at me and the guard. He said, "I hate to do this, but it's my only out. I won't fry for a murder someone else did."

That's all I remember him saying. He clubbed the gun and brought it down on the side of my head.

\* \* \* \* \*

The fog cleared and I was on the couch in Winky's office. I looked up into the face of the police medico who was rolling up a stray end of a cylinder of gauze. I hoped Jerry had made it. I had let my coat swing open so he might get the idea.

Winky was at his desk, studying me through almost slitted eyes. When he saw I was conscious, he pushed up from his chair and walked over. He said:

"A nice bit of collaboration, Tom. Jerry's made his getaway, thanks to you."

I put my hand to my head and felt a lump alongside my temple. I let the hand slide down to hide the suspicion of a grin I felt forming on my mouth.

I said, "What do you mean, Winky?"

"You know blistering well what I mean," he growled. "You let Jerry take your gun and then club you so it would look on the up and up. Hannigan, the guard, said you made no attempt to defend yourself."

I stared at him a moment. "What happened to Hannigan?"

"He got the same thing you did—a sock on the head. But his was a real one. He came to before you did, but he's got a three-inch gash in his forehead."

I said, "And Jerry?"

"He's still loose. He marched through the whole department to get out and not a single person questioned him." He smacked his desk with his palm. "But there's a general pick-up order out for him—as an escaped murderer."

I didn't like that part of it. If Jerry offered any kind of resistance, he'd probably be shot. I knew he wasn't guilty, and I also felt his jail break was justified so he could meet the mysterious man at Paddock's Bar. I wondered if Winky knew of the planned rendezvous, then I remembered that he did not. Jerry had said the story was too thin for the captain to believe, so he hadn't told him. I looked at my watch.

It was a quarter of one. The rendezvous was for two.

Winky had gone back to his desk and was writing. He finished and motioned me over. "You're suspended," he said. "If you didn't have such a good record I'd book you and toss you in the same cell you helped your brother escape from."

I gave him my buzzer and I.D. card and walked out without another word. An order was out to pick up Jerry as an escaped murderer. I had to find him before a slug of lead did.

**M**Y car was in the parking lot and I climbed in and headed for my apartment. There I changed clothes for an old suit that was baggy and worn. I slipped a .32 into my pocket, pulled a slouch hat well over my eyes and went out to the car again. Paddock's Bar was out toward the race track in county territory and I headed for it.

It was a typical joint, patronized by race track touts, small-time gamblers, and occasionally a big shot from the underworld. The building was white stucco with a bar and dance floor downstairs and rooms above.

I arrived at twenty minutes of two and found only a few cars in the parking lot alongside. I pulled up and sat for a few moments, looking the place over.

I heard an auto coming and looked around to see a prowl car from the sheriff's station driving by. Two cops were in the front seat and they slowed to a crawl as they passed, both men staring at the building. But they didn't stop, and neither did they notice me. The driver appeared satisfied with his scrutiny and gunned the cruiser. I watched it disappear in the distance.

As I started to get out another car drove up. I slipped back into the shadows. The other car parked in the rear of the lot and I watched a man get out, a man in plainclothes but with a familiar walk. As he passed I recognized him. It was Lieutenant "Barb" Wire, one of the Homicide men who had picked up Jerry in the *Times* Building.

He went inside the white building and I followed him. Inside, the windows were shuttered tightly and the only illumination was from dim lights over the bar. There were two men seated on stools talking to the bartender. None of them turned as I walked in and slipped into a booth. There was a table lamp in front of me but I didn't turn it on. I kept my hat pulled well down.

Through a swinging door that must have led to a kitchen, a tough looking man with a badly cauliflowered ear swaggered toward me with a wet rag in his hand. He swiped the rag across the table, then stood with arms on hips.

He said, "What's yours, chum?" and sucked his teeth.

I said, "A bottle of beer and a cheese on rye," and the man turned and disappeared through the swinging door.

I looked up at the partitions which separated my booth from the others and noted they reached the ceiling. The entrance to the booth was covered with faded curtains draped from a rod which ran the length of the room. I pulled one of the curtains half across so that I could see out but not be observed by anyone at the bar. Across from me and

farther down the room were three other booths. One of them had its curtains parted about like mine and through the opening I could see a man's shoulder. He leaned forward a moment and I saw his face.

It was Jerry.

The curtains on the booth next to Jerry's were pulled closed, but as I watched they were parted and a man's head was thrust out. He motioned to the bartender for another drink, then ducked his head back. But I recognized him. It was Lieutenant Wire.

I heard the front door swish open and slam. A draft of air slapped against the back of my neck. Footsteps approached my booth, hesitated, then passed it and entered the one next to Wire's. Just before the newcomer pulled his curtain across I glimpsed his face. It was Bill Callahan, the *Times* reporter who had been talking with Winky a short time ago.

The waiter came with my sandwich and beer, and as I poured a glass I noticed my hand was shaking. The stage was set; the actors had taken their places. I glanced at my watch. It was two minutes of two. Two o'clock was curtain time.

I shifted around so that I could look at the bar and the two customers seated there. One of them, I could only see his back, glanced up at the clock over the frosted mirror of the bar. Then he glanced toward Jerry's booth. He slid from his seat and started walking toward the rear of the room.

HE was a sleekly dressed character. He had a knife-edge crease in his slacks, a white shirt with long pointed collar, and a tightly knotted tie. From beneath a rakish hat I saw jet-burns against the pale color of his cheeks.

He paused a few feet from Jerry's booth and his hand went toward his inside coat pocket. And just as he was withdrawing it there was a sharp bark of a gun.

The noise cracked like a whip and shuttled around the room, bouncing from wall to wall. It was impossible to tell just where it came from. I watched the sleek man.

A surprised expression spread over his face, then turned to a look of pain. The hand, still inside his coat, moved over and started clawing at his left

breast. He bent forward slowly as his legs lowered him to the floor. When he was almost down he collapsed like a dropped puppet. His body jerked once and was still. Even in the dim light I could see a dark stain begin spreading from under his shoulder.

For a moment there was utter silence, like that which follows a car crash in the dead of night. Then a rustle of voices built up into a shout. The ugly man who had served me my beer came careening out of the kitchen. He slapped the swinging door before him and it cracked against the bar-end. He stopped as though by a stone wall when he saw the body, then began backing away.

Lieutenant Wire came out of his booth. He hurried straight to the figure on the floor and bent over it. The waiter who was backing away turned and scurried through the kitchen door again. Wire looked up as he disappeared and shouted, "Hey, you, come back!" just as all the lights in the room went out.

Though it was broad daylight outside, the place was pitch dark. The shuttered windows completely screened out the afternoon sun; the tiny chinks that did slip through only intensified the blackness.

Then there were thuds, and a grunt came from the direction of Wire and the body. I stepped blindly out of my booth and felt my way to the entrance door. At last I found the knob and jerked it open to admit a bright splash of sunshine.

At the same time someone had gotten to a window and stripped away the shutters. I glanced over and saw it was the bartender.

The stage was slightly different from what it had been before the lights went out. Lieutenant Wire was still near the body, but the body's position was changed. Instead of laying prone it was now on its back. The neatly buttoned coat had been jerked open, exposing a large sopping spot of blood on the carefully laundered shirt.

And there was blood on one of Wire's hands. He was mopping at it with a handkerchief as I looked at him.

I went toward the center of the room, keeping an eye cocked toward the booth where I had last seen Jerry. There was no sign of movement from within as I reached Wire's side. He looked up at me

in startled surprise. He said:

"Tom! What th—" then quickly, "I'm glad you're here. See that no one leaves while I call the sheriff's office." He started for a phone booth.

I said, "I'm just a bystander, Barb. Winkle's got my buzzer in his safe. Suspended because of the trouble about Jerry."

He came hurrying back. "Well, call 'em for me—use my name. I'll keep my eye on the door."

I nodded and walked toward the booth. As I reached it, Bill Callahan was hanging up the receiver. He was grinning delightedly. He said, "Boy, that's a scoop if there ever was one! I got the story in before the body's cold."

As I pushed on by him the lights came on in the room. I reached up to drop a nickel in the slot, then checked myself. Jerry was still in the building. He had not gone through the front door because I was the first one there to open it. He must be hidden, somewhere in the place. If I called the sheriff's office, there would be cops all over the place within three minutes. Chances would be they'd shoot Jerry and ask questions later. Jerry had slugged a cop, and he was a reported escaped murderer.

I GLANCED through the little glass door at Wire, who was still standing over the corpse. Although the lights had come on in the barroom they had not come on in the phone booth. I noticed the wires leading to the bulb were broken, which was in my favor. I couldn't be seen in the darkened booth. I went through the motions of phoning and came out and went to the lieutenant, who motioned me aside and into a service booth.

He kept his eye on the men outside as he talked. He said, "A fuse was blown in the kitchen. The bartender fixed it. When the lights were off, somebody frisked the body."

I said, "What were they looking for?"

Wire looked at me shrewdly. He said, "When we picked up Jerry, he told me he had an appointment here at two. Do you know if he was here?"

I stalled with a cigarette. I didn't know just how to play it. And I wondered why Jerry had told Wire about this meeting. He hadn't told Winky!

The lieutenant saved me from answering. He said, "If he was here, he hasn't

shown his face." He got up abruptly and headed for the booth where I had seen Jerry sitting. I held my breath as Wire yanked back the curtain.

The booth was empty.

Wire was an ambitious cop. He probably planned to play this alone as much as he could. If he cracked it before reinforcements came in it would be a feather in his cap—possibly a promotion. I looked up to see Callahan coming toward me.

I said, "How'd you happen to be Johnny-on-the-spot?"

The reporter grinned and took a cigarette from my pack on the table. Under his breath he said, "Quite simple. I saw a guy that looked like Jerry leave Headquarters in a hurry. I tailed him out here."

"You saw Jerry escape?"

Callahan glanced at me over a flaming match, his face a mask of innocence. "Did he escape?" he asked. "I wouldn't know anything about that. I know Jerry, and I don't believe he bumped off Seamore."

Wire had finished his checking of the booths and was now talking with the bartender. I pointed to them and spoke to Callahan. I said:

"Will you give me a little help? Keep Wire occupied while I look over this place."

Callahan winked. "I'm just the man to do it." He sauntered over to the bar.

I hoped the lieutenant wouldn't check on my supposed call to the sheriff's office until I had time to find Jerry. Because I *had* to find Jerry before the cops did. I had a feeling that he could supply a necessary string to the plot-net my mind was weaving. I thought I knew the murderer.

Toward the back there were some dim stairs. I patted my pocket where the .32 rested and hoped I wouldn't have to use it. Wire was talking with the bartender and Callahan as I disappeared down the hall that led to the steps.

I went up the stairs quietly. They carried me to a corridor of closed doors. I stopped at each of them, listened, then moved on. At the last door there was a soft murmur of sound, and I put my eye to the keyhole. Focused directly in my line of vision was Jerry. He was stretched out on the floor, his mouth gagged and his arms and legs bound up tightly. A man was leaning over him,

and as I watched I saw him draw back his foot and smash it into Jerry's side.

I recognized the man. It was Jim Carney, head of the Carney gang.

Someone else moved past the keyhole but I could only see his legs; and then still another pair of legs passed by. At least three men were in there. I wondered what chance I would have with them, especially as the door was locked and I would have to advertise my arrival. I figured the chances were slim.

I heard a flush of water and an idea struck me. If the floor plan was like most such places, the bath to this room was shared by the room next to it. I slipped back to the last door I had passed and tried the knob gently. It was locked.

**B**UT above me the transom was open. I grasped the edge of the opening and swung up, nosed in head first, then twisted and let myself down with hardly a sound. The shades were pulled and the room in semi-darkness as I made for the door to my right. I tried it and found it locked. I peered through the keyhole and confirmed my suspicions: the door led to the bath of Carney's room.

There was no key in the lock, and the lock was a simple one. I took a master key from my pocket and tried it. The lock turned almost noiselessly, there was only a dull *chuck* as the bolt withdrew. I put my weight against the door and eased it open a fraction of an inch, then pushed it wide enough to enter. The door leading to the other room was closed.

I took out the .32 and kicked open the door to the room where Jerry was held captive. I said, "All right, boys."

Carney swung around as though bitten by a snake. He started to lunge for me, then checked as I jabbed the gun at him. The other two men stood near the window. They could do nothing but raise their hands. I went to where Jerry lay and reached down and began untying him. He was conscious, and as I removed the gag from his mouth he let out a yell.

I had expected that, and I dived for the floor as a bullet whistled over my head and crashed into the wall beyond. My dive landed me at the feet of Carney. I yanked at his legs and he fell as I rolled to a sitting position and snapped two quick shots at the figure in the bath-

room doorway. The figure was that of Bill Callahan. Both shots caught him square in the chest. He dropped his gun and folded his arms tightly and coughed.

By then the two men by the window were practically on top of me. Instead of trying to get up I went on my back and raised my feet. I caught the first man flush in the stomach and his momentum sailed him over my head to land with a crash alongside of Jerry. The second guy was on top of me. He was swinging a sap and I jerked my head just in time to prevent getting the full force of the blow. It landed on my neck and shoulder and a paralyzing pain shot through that side. He was raising the sap again when I managed to get the gun in use. I held it against his stomach and pulled the trigger. He screamed and spilled blood all over me. I rolled from under him.

I was getting to my feet when an explosion of stars blossomed in my head and I pitched forward. I don't even remember reaching the floor. . . .

I woke up to stare at a white wall above me. There was a medicinal smell in the air and my head ached. I moved it experimentally.

I was in a hospital room and Jerry and Wire and a doctor were with me. The doctor looked pleased, and smiled, and went out of the room. Jerry came to my side.

He said, "How're you feeling? You've been out an hour."

I said, "Rotten. What happened?"

Jerry pointed to my head. "Carney clipped you with the butt of his gun. He forgot you'd untied me, and I got him with a chair after taking care of that other guy. Callahan and the hoodlum you shot in the stomach are dead," he added.

I said, "Good. I suspected Callahan when I noticed a wire disconnected in a phone booth he had just used. I thought he had done it to short circuit the lights so he would have a chance to frisk the corpse, but I wasn't sure. So I gave him a come-on when I told him I was going to search the place."

Jerry nodded. "You were right. He was the tip-off that kept Carney informed of the police's movements—the informer that Seamore was suspicious

of. He was the one who stole my gun and planted it in the dead publisher's office. He admitted it when I told him he was dying."

I said, "Did you get the information from the fellow you were to meet at two o'clock?"

Jerry laughed a bit grimly. "Yeah," he said. "Off the body of Callahan. Callahan knew about the meeting, but he didn't know who the party was. He had to stick around to find out. When he saw him heading for my booth he shot him, then doused the lights so he could get whatever evidence he was carrying. I found it when I went through Callahan's pockets."

He spread a blood-stained piece of paper for me to see.

**T**HE paper told that Callahan was the informer for the Carney gang, and that Carney was dealing in dope. It gave an address in another part of town.

Jerry said, "We raided that address and hit the jackpot. Three big lots of narcotics, almost a quarter million dollars' worth."

I said, "Swell. But how did you get tied up in that room?"

"When that fellow was murdered in the bar," said Jerry, "I beat it up the steps and ran squarely into them. Carney used the place as a hangout. They sapped me and tied me up, but they couldn't leave while all the excitement was going on downstairs. They had decided to skip out through the window when you came along."

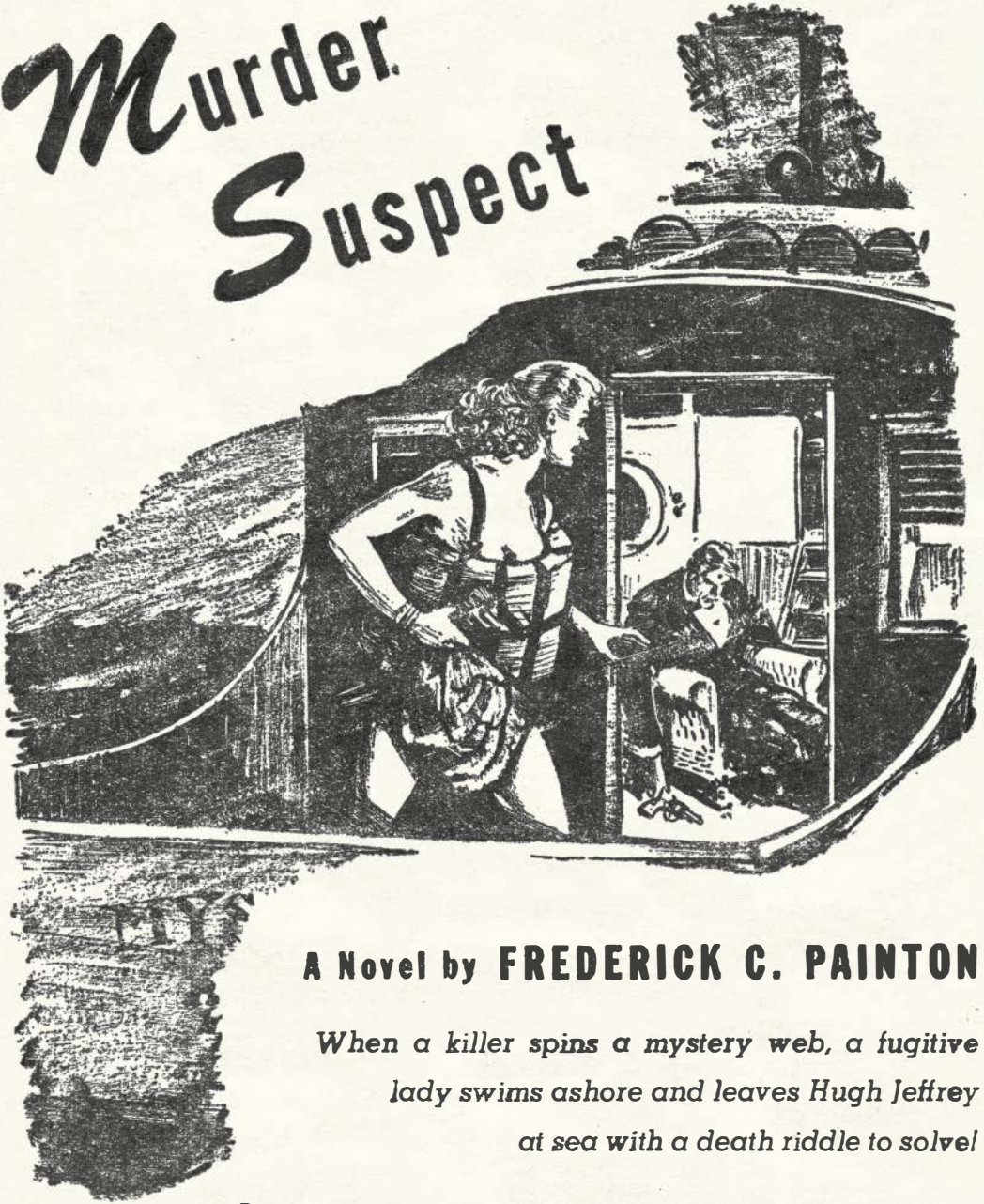
I said, "When I came along, bringing Callahan with me. Well, anyway, it turned out okay. It'll save the price of a trial."

Wire spoke for the first time. "But cost the city some extra money for your salary, Tom. If Winky doesn't recommend a lieutenantcy out of this, my name's not Barb Wire."

I said, "And get Jerry cleared of the jail breaking charge?"

Wire laughed. "What do you think? The Carney gang smashed; a quarter of a million dollars worth of dope captured; Callahan, a killer, taken care of— Gosh! They'll hang a medal on him!"

# Murder. Suspect



A Novel by **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

*When a killer spins a mystery web, a fugitive lady swims ashore and leaves Hugh Jeffrey at sea with a death riddle to solve!*

I

**A**BOARD the forty-two-foot motor cruiser *Mystic*, anchored three hundred yards off the Beachmont Yacht Club's dock on Long Island Sound, a desperate girl strove frantically to unlock a cabin door with a small nail file. The bunk light threw a yellow radiance

on her wavy yellow-gold hair and revealed her as being tall, boyishly slim, with the shapely figure of one who knows how to dress. Her blue eyes were dark, not so much from fear as from smoldering anger.

It was nearly midnight. Outside it was

bitterly cold, with a December gale blowing forty miles an hour out of the north. The moan of the wind in the rigging and the slapping thud of a sizable sea made noise enough to cover her labors.

She was not making much headway. Wedging the file point between the brass key and the lock in an attempt to turn it, the point slipped, the file bent and she bruised her fingers enough to bring blood.

"Darn!" she muttered furiously.

She stepped back, light falling on her oval face, her high cheek bones outlined under a clear ivory skin. The face wasn't just pretty. It held an inner, resolute expression that made it beautiful.

While she was straightening the file, preparatory to attacking the door again, she suddenly heard the irregular explosions of an unmuffled motor. The engine drone grew to a roar close by, and then, suddenly, was silent. She stood tense in wonder.

"That's an airplane," she thought. "What is it doing here?"

Presently she heard the splash of oars on the lee of the *Mystic*, and then the bumping of a small boat against the yacht's port side. A moment or so later she heard voices in the main cabin above. This puzzled and mystified her, and she strained to listen.

The voices, however, were only indistinct murmurs for five minutes, perhaps. But suddenly they rose in furious argument. She heard, almost instantly, a hoarse voice charged with venom and hatred.

"All right, then, you dirty double-crosser, here's where you get off!"

"No, no, don't!" That would be Maurice Tekele's voice. There were sounds of a struggle. Blows. "Don't!" Tekele screamed again.

The explosion of a gun was a sharp, deadly roar.

Silence, for perhaps five minutes. Then came the splash of oars, a retreating sound that was soon lost in the gale. This was followed by the roar of the airplane motor. The drone rapidly faded, and died away in the distance.

**F**OR THE first time, now, the girl moved. Her heart pounded, her breath came in excited gasps. But she didn't lose her head. Instead, she suddenly attacked the door with frenzied strength. And this time, she wedged the

file properly and the key turned.

She thrust open the door and raced up the companionway steps to the main cabin. She stopped, stared.

"Dear Lord!" she gasped.

Maurice Tekele was sprawled on an easy-chair, just where the bullet had knocked him. His head lay back and was slightly twisted. She could see the blue hole in the forehead just where the iron-gray hair began. A small hole there, but the back of the head bulged out like a disarranged toupee, and the chair back was a crimson mess that made her stomach jump.

His outstretched hands seemed to grope for a snub-nosed .38 revolver that lay just beyond his feet. She began to realize he was dead. Hers was the only breathing in the cabin.

Unthinking, gripped by her horror, she stooped and picked up the gun, held it at arm's length as if it were a venomous snake. She read the name on the gold plate, "Maurice Tekele." He had been shot with his own gun.

Silence, death, aloneness broke her now. With a sudden sob, she flung down the gun and buried her face in her slender hands, gave way to the turmoil in her heart. Then she lifted her head, dashed away her tears. Her red lips tightened with a new fear. What did this mean to her?

Instantly, she knew the dreadful truth—she would be accused of killing Tekele. Many people knew he had loved her. She had quarreled with him. She was alone on his yacht. Who would believe her story of an airplane roaring out of the night, bringing a murderer and sudden death?

At this realization, the impulse of panic made her race to the yacht's stern. But the *Mystic's* dinghy was not trailing astern. She remembered now, that it was ashore having a small leak repaired. There was no way to get ashore save by the Beachmont Yacht Club's tender which had brought her out. But if she summoned the tender, the murder would be discovered and she would be arrested at once. She was trapped here with the dead.

She began to tremble, pale as old ivory. After a moment, she lifted her head, thrust out her chin and battle lights gleamed in her eyes.

"Get hold of yourself, you silly!" she muttered. "There's a way out of this."





Jeffrey twisted in time to see Luke Ransome coming at him from the speedboat

She began to think hard. And as her head cleared, she saw clearly how the murder had been accomplished. In fact, she believed she knew who had fired the shot. As she reflected, she knew that the airplane had come from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and was doubtless winging back there now.

At this minute, also, in Fort Lauderdale, was the one man who could solve this case and clear her without the ignominy of arrest. Instantly, her mind was made up. At all costs, she must get to Fort Lauderdale and see Roderick Fanton.

She hurried back to the cabin where the dead man lay. Then she gasped in dismay. How could she get ashore without a boat?

Her eyes looked out at the ugly black waters and she shuddered at the implacable coldness of it. Yet, it was the only way, and with steady fingers she stripped clothing from her slim, white body. Nude, she ran like a sprite, brought back an oilskin slicker and carefully wrapped her clothes in it. She got a life-jacket and fastened it across her slender shoulders.

Then, deliberately, she opened the cabin door and stepped out on deck. The icy fingers of the wind assaulted her. Her skin tightened. The cold seemed to be seeping into her very soul. But she endured it. She knew she must become thoroughly chilled before she leaped into that icy water, else the shock would stun her. In less than a minute, it seemed, she must freeze.

But she closed her mind to fear and thought only of the shore off there, a few feeble lights marking its blackness. She flung back her head in determination.

"I can make it," she whispered. "I've got to!"

Clasping the bundle of clothes tightly, she dropped over the side. She struck the water with a splash, came up gasping, numbed, her heart pounding, the horrible cold closing on her soft flesh like a steel vise. She swam fast and hard to fight off the deadly peril.

**A**T HALF PAST SIX in the morning, in a room overlooking Beachmont Harbor, a red-haired, pleasant-faced young man of twenty-five or so lay sleeping with his mouth open. From him exuded the aroma of stale whisky.

Until five days ago, Hugh Jeffrey had been an ambitious feature writer on the New York *Sphere*. A blonde young radio singer, named Madge, had separated him from his job and his illusions in one swift sock to his soul. After telling Hugh she would marry him, she had up and eloped with a young playboy whose only attribute was a two-million-dollar bank account.

"After all, Hugh darling," she said when she came back, "I have to be practical, and you know you're getting nowhere rapidly."

Jeffrey got somewhere rapidly after that. He got tighter than a goat. It was the All-American jag.

"Drinking to drown lost love is old-fashioned," McClean, his city editor, said. "Sober up—or you're fired."

The next day McClean saw Jeffrey sitting on the curb outside the *Sphere* building, singing, "O Sole Mio," in a sad baritone.

"Okay, monkey," said McClean, "you asked for it. You're fired!"

Just when Jeffrey was seeing pink dragons and yellow elephants, Pete Hendricks, retired homicide dick and a warm friend, brought him to Beachmont to sober up. That process had been going on, now, for two days.

And it was now that Pete Hendricks, gray-haired man of forty or so, clattered noisily into the room and yelling excitedly.

"Hugh, get out of those feathers!" he shouted.

Hugh Jeffrey stirred, swallowed and moaned. "Can't you see I'm dead? Don't disturb the corpse."

"Crawl out," repeated Hendricks. "Here's your chance to get back your job and a brass medal, too. I've got a murder, and it's 'page one' from here to Shanghai!"

"Go 'way," cried Jeffrey crossly.

Pete Hendricks grinned, and with one quick jerk he stripped back the bed clothing and left Jeffrey's six feet and one hundred and eighty pounds exposed to the wintry blasts that boiled through the open window.

"It's Maurice Tekele, the jeweler," said Hendricks. "Snap it up. As elected chief of police of this fair village of Beachmont, I'm overdue now."

Jeffrey moaned. "It's below zero—" He broke off. "Did you say Maurice Tekele?" he yelled. "Good Heaven, not the noted

Fifth Avenue jeweler?"

"I don't mean Santa Claus," said Pete Hendricks, turning on the shower ice-cold. "And you get it exclusive, if you hurry."

Jeffrey knew what that meant—a chance to regain his newspaper job in New York. He leaped for the shower, howled in agony as the needles of ice beat on his skin. But by the time he was shaved, dressed, and had a cigarette going, he was something like the normal, charming, wise-cracking Hugh Jeffrey.

As they raced to the yacht club in Jeffrey's convertible coupe, Hendricks gave him what information he had.

"Tekele's Jap valet, Nichi, was rowed out to the *Mystic* at five this morning and found the body, a bullet hole in the skull. He says Tekele sent him ashore last night so the old boy could be alone with Pamela Wayne, his secretary. And beautiful, from all I hear."

"She went aboard about ten-thirty, according to the kid who runs the yacht-club tender," he continued. "She isn't there now. It looks open and shut, and I'll give you an hour's leeway before I call New York and put in a five-state teletype alarm for her."

"Boy!" breathed Jeffrey. "For a tabloid like the *Sphere*, 'Girl Murders Man' is sensational stuff!"

Maurice Tekele, as Jeffrey knew, was no ordinary jeweler. He was an institution with branches in London, Paris and other international centers. Reputed a millionaire, he was such an authority on gems of all kinds that on the witness stand in court his word was final.

As they rowed out to the cruiser, Jeffrey huddled down in his overcoat. "Why should a guy want to be on a yacht in December?" he muttered, his teeth chattering.

"Tekele liked to be alone," Hendricks replied, "and kept the yacht in commission the year around."

## II

**I**N THE cabin, around the dead man, the machinery of the law was already grinding. There was a district attorney taking copious notes, sensing the publicity break for him. Pete Hendricks' single detective was dusting this and that for fingerprints.

A cop picked up a piece of flattened gum.

"She chewed gum, Chief," he said.

It was old stuff to Jeffrey and he listened for a while, making notes. Then he drifted aft in the yacht, looking for local color.

It was then he found the bent nail file in the owner's cabin. It smelled vaguely of perfume. It had face powder in the grooves as if carried in a woman's handbag. He stared at it wonderingly, and then stooped to the door. There were fresh scratches on the brass of the lock.

"Old Tekele locks girl in cabin," he muttered, "and she busts out and takes a gun to him."

He grinned. A girl gunning her man for her honor would sell hundreds of thousands of *Spheres*.

Suddenly, Pete Hendricks burst in on him. "Is she here? Did you see her?"

Jeffrey looked shocked. "Pete, and you an ex-New York dick! Why, that gal is long gone from these parts."

"Yeah?" said Hendricks dryly. "Well, there was no dinghy on this tub, and the yacht-basin tender says he brought her out but he didn't take her back."

And thereupon he subjected the yacht to a futile search. He swore softly.

"Somebody helped her then," he said finally. "That yacht-basin tender said he heard the sounds of a motor last night around midnight, and the coroner figures that's when Tekele was shot."

"It fits," said Jeffrey, and showed him the nail file. "But maybe the boy friend who came to help her gunned Tekele."

"No, it's her fingerprints on the gun," said Pete. "We made a quick comparison with those found in the cabin. The guy helped the getaway." He paused, grinned. "Don't say I never did you a favor." With that, he pulled out of his coat two photographs mounted on black leather and handed one to Jeffrey. "Found them in the drawer of Tekele's apartment study. Isn't she a honey?"

Hugh Jeffrey looked at the clear-eyed girl with level brows and sweet lips that stared so steadily out at him. It was an arresting, lovely face, no doubt of it, and Jeffrey felt the impact of a personality.

"She has what it takes," he said, "but she doesn't look like a killer to me." He frowned. "Still, Madge didn't seem to be a chiseler to me, either."

He stuffed the picture in his pocket. It

would cover all the front page of the *Sphere*.

"Pete, I'll never forget this," he said.

"Then," said Hendricks, "scram out of here and phone in your story, because you've got just forty-five minutes to beat the town before I get out a fast alarm."

They went forward to the tender and Hendricks helped him in.

"I like fifty-cent cigars for Christmas," he grinned.

Ten minutes later, Jeffrey was ashore looking for a telephone. There was a service station open on the left and he barged inside. The attendant pointed out the public pay station.

"What goes on?" he asked.

Jeffrey told him, while he got a handful of nickels and dimes and quarters for a dollar bill.

"Say," said the attendant, surprised, "is there a girl mixed up in this?"

Jeffrey was instantly alert. "Yes, why?"

"Well," said the man, "Tekele leaves his car parked behind that washrack when he comes here. And about one o'clock this morning, a blonde dame comes in with the keys and says Tekele told her to take it back to town."

"Well, well," murmured Jeffrey, "isn't that ducky! What'd she look like?"

"A honey, mister! Only, she was pale like she was cold and afraid, and her hair was wet like she had been swimming."

"Swimming?" Jeffrey whirled and looked at the black, angry water and shivered at the mere thought of it. "No, it's impossible."

And yet she must have swam. This ditched the idea of a confederate in a motorboat, but that was all right, too. And then, suddenly, Hugh Jeffrey got a colossal idea, the idea of the century.

"What kind of a car was it?" he jerked out.

"A Fiat, built like a black submarine."

"Did she say where she was going?"

The attendant shook his head. "Only, while I was getting the car backed out, she monkeyed with those road-map folders. And when I came in, she was awfully sweet and nice. Said maybe she'd go up to the Adirondacks and ski. She said she loved winter sports." The attendant frowned. "She was awfully swell. Think she did it?"

Hugh did not reply. He was looking at the piles of road maps, and saw that there was only one of upper New York state that included the Adirondacks.

"How many of these did you have?" he asked.

The attendant stared. "By golly, I only had one. Those particular ones go fast this time of the year. I thought she took it."

Jeffrey saw that the pile of Eastern seaboard maps was disarranged. This one showed Route One in big red lines, and on the cover had the slogan, "To Florida. Quickest route from Pines to Palms." He burned with excitement and his idea.

JEFFREY dove into the telephone booth and raised a sleepy, angry McClean at his home.

"No, no, no!" howled the irate city editor. "You're finished—and I mean washed up!"

"Listen, you thick-headed Scot backscratcher," said Jeffrey sweetly. "I've got a murder by the tail—the killing of Maurice Tekele, no less—and if you don't hire me back, I'll peddle it and my story of the century to some other sheet."

"Tekele?" cried McClean, and all the sleep and anger was suddenly gone from his voice.

Rapidly, Jeffrey sketched the story. McClean's voice was quivering over the phone.

"Jumping Judas! That's worth an extra!" he yelled.

"I thought so," grinned Jeffrey, "and that's not all. I know where the little girl is, and I can find her before anybody else does. And it's my own thought, you sanctimonious Highlander, that I chase this dame down, hide her out where it would take a crystal-gazer to find her, and there get the story of her life. We could run it under some such title as 'Why I Killed Maurice Tekele, Pamela Wayne's own story, written by herself'. I could really go to town on that idea, Mac."

He heard McClean grunt in excitement.

"I'll give you a thousand to buy her story," he yelled finally, "and you can have five hundred bucks expense money, and a twenty-buck raise, and a job to your next drunk, if you bring that back!"

"Sold," said Jeffrey, "and it'll be a lifetime job. I drive the wagon from now on."

"But pull a double-cross on me," warned McClean, "and you go right out the same window you came in!"

"I can't miss," said Jeffrey confidently. "She's traveling south along Route One in an imported Fiat, and I hope to catch her somewhere along the way."

After McClean had the murder details and promised to meet him at the Holland Tunnel entrance with money, Hugh Jeffrey strode out to bribe the gas-station attendant to silence. If the man told the cops about the Fiat, a nation-wide radio alarm would pick up the girl before she reached Baltimore. Then all the papers would have her story. What Jeffrey earnestly needed was twenty-four hours to sew up the yarn. He fished out his roll, some sixty dollars.

"Look!" he said, holding it out. "I'm a special detective, and in the interests of justice we want to keep this girl and her car a secret for twenty-four hours, so she won't know she's being hunted. Could you lose your memory for sixty bucks?"

"For sixty bucks," beamed the gas-station man, "I could lose my mind!"

Jeffrey hurried out to his convertible. Here he suddenly stopped, a deep sense of guilt crossing his mind.

Was it fair to Pete Hendricks to hide out a murderess that would get Hendricks plenty of favorable publicity for a quick capture? This was a dirty trick to play, any way you looked at it. But Pamela Wayne's story was a national sensation—and meant Jeffrey's job lost again if he failed to get her. And the story came first.

He still felt guilty, until the thought came that as soon as he'd written her life story, he would telephone Pete and let him make the pinch.

He felt better then. But to square his conscience he ducked back to the booth and called Marge, Hendricks' red-headed wife.

"Tell Pete I'm scrambling in to write my story," he said, "and I may have something later. If I do, I'll call."

"Do," said Marge. "Pete comes up for reelection next month, and the arrest of a nice front-page murderess would silence a lot of these public enemies who'd like to get him out."

"Yes," said Jeffrey guiltily and a twinge crossed his mind. Hastily he hung up and dove into his car to head south.

**O**UTSIDE a little town in Georgia, when Jeffrey was making a good eighty miles an hour, a girl stepped into the headlight radiance and frantically waved her arms. She was tall, she was slim, and she was blonde. And Jeffrey could have shouted at his luck.

It was Pamela Wayne, he was certain!

He put the brakes hard to his convertible, which promptly broadsided and skated around on the highway like a skittish colt. But finally, just as the girl leaped to safety, Jeffrey pulled the car onto the shoulder and jumped out. He walked back to her, aware that she was a darned sight prettier than her picture, and pretty calm and cool about the whole thing.

"Trouble?" he grinned.

She returned his smile bravely. "Cow trouble," she said ruefully. "The darned thing came out of the darkness and my car did nip-ups. Look!"

She pointed to a huge black gap in the white guard railing that paralleled this section of the road. Jeffrey got out his flashlight and walked up to the broken space.

Beyond, surrounded by vast oaks dripping with gray Spanish moss, was a black swamp. Brown dirty water, out of which black stumps stood like decayed teeth, stretched away as far as his light illumined it. Out of the water came a few tired bubbles.

Jeffrey grunted. "Your car is buried in about ten feet of black muck and dropping through to China!"

"I'm afraid it is," she sighed, "and I'm due in Fort Lauderdale at noon tomorrow."

Jeffrey turned the flash onto the road shoulder. Plainly, on the grass, he could see the marks where her car had wheeled off. But he could not see any wedge-shaped prints such as a cloven-hoofed cow makes when it grazes.

He whistled softly, and knew the truth, then.

Evidently, that gas-station attendant hadn't kept quiet. The police had radioed a description of the car and she had heard the broadcast. Deliberately, she must have poised on the running board, steered the car toward the guard rail

and jumped off at the last minute. He thought then of the black waters of Long Island Sound, and his admiration for her grew.

"She's got what it takes," he thought.

But outwardly, he accepted her story and invited her to ride with him. She accepted gratefully.

"If you could only get me to a railroad station," she said, and smiled warmly.

For some queer reason, Hugh felt suddenly sorry for her and he drove some time in silence. To cover this, he said:

"Turn on the radio, will you, please?"

She leaned forward and clicked the button. When the set had warmed up, a voice charged with artificial excitement came through:

"Latest front page news from the Newspaper Radio Bureau, New York! Police tonight were still waging a nation-wide search for Pamela Wayne, missing girl suspect in the sensational shooting of Maurice Tekele, noted jeweler.

"With her, police say, are the internationally famous Marechal diamonds. The four magnificent gems are said to have been given to Marshal Ney by Napoleon Bonaparte, and are valued at half a million dollars. A reward of ten thousand dollars is offered for her capture.

"Police declared the theft of the diamonds is the motive behind the crime that has shocked the world. Miss Wayne is believed to be fleeing in a Fiat car which belonged to the murdered man, and is described as . . ."

With a click, the radio was suddenly silent. In the dashlight, the girl's face was pale and taut.

"Nice going, Miss Wayne," Jeffrey said softly. "If you'd stayed in the car, even these cops down here would have picked you up."

She gasped. "I—I don't understand," she faltered.

"I think you do," replied Jeffrey gently. "You're Pamela Wayne and you killed Tekele and you're running for it."

"Who are you?" she cried sharply, alarm in her eyes.

"The name is Hugh Jeffrey, and most of the time I'm a reporter for the New York *Sphere*!"

Pamela Wayne leaned back, fighting for her self-control. All the indifference had fled from her face now. A reporter!

She was stunned. During all those lonely hours, as she tore south, her hopes had gained, her belief that she could clear herself had strengthened. But now she was trapped, caught! Yet she must get to Fort Lauderdale.

Swiftly, she studied Jeffrey's pleasant, good-looking face. Maybe if she was feminine, clinging, he would have pity. She began to weep softly.

"Are you going to turn me over to the—the police?"

Jeffrey's pity grew. Being a reporter was rough business sometimes.

"No," he replied gently. "That is, not right away. Listen, Miss Wayne, you'll need money for a good lawyer. The *Sphere* wants to print your story. They'll pay a thousand dollars for it."

### III

**P**AMELA, obsessed with her problem, scarcely heard the offer. And hearing, she did not understand the notoriety implied—that she would be surrendered to the police with cameras clicking and banner headlines screaming. All she realized was that here was compromise, here was a chance to reach her goal.

"What if I refuse?" she asked.

"I'll have to surrender you," Jeffrey said quietly. "I'd be an accessory after the fact of murder, if I didn't."

"I've got to get to Fort Lauderdale," she said tensely.

"Boy friend?" Hugh asked.

"He means everything to me now!" she cried fiercely. "Everything!"

Jeffrey felt sad. She *would* be the kind of girl to fall madly in love with some heel and steal a handful of diamonds for him. She edged close to him, deliberately using her feminine allure to help her, now.

"Suppose I agree to let you write my life story," she said quietly. "In exchange, would you let me go to Fort Lauderdale, as fast as you can drive there?"

Jeffrey reflected. As long as he hid her well from the police and rival reporters, it didn't matter much which town he chose.

"If I hid you out for a week there," he said grimly, "I'd expect your word not to try to escape—and give me all the story."

She never knew until then how taut, how close to breaking she had been. She suddenly leaned her head against his shoulder and wept.

"You're wonderful, Hugh Jeffrey, just wonderful," she whispered.

Jeffrey shifted uncomfortably. He hated women's tears. They did things to him. At his movement, she lifted her head for an instant, as the car raced through the night, their eyes met. And Jeffrey felt the womanliness of her and knew he wanted to kiss her, and knew he wouldn't.

"What the devil!" he thought. "I loved Madge last week!" Then: "That won't get us anywhere," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?" She was startled.

"I chase my own girls," he said grimly, "and usually don't get 'em."

Miles went by in silence.

"This doesn't have to be a funeral," Jeffrey said finally, smiling. "Let's pretend we're happy."

She looked at him, her eyes thoughtful. Then she, too, smiled.

"Let's," she murmured, and leaned against him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hugh Jeffrey faced his first problem that afternoon. Where was he going to hide Pamela Wayne? The newspapers were shrieking her name and picture. One even hinted she had fled to Florida. So, to take her to a hotel was to invite disaster. He bought her some black hair dye, and while this was drying as they sat on the sand of a lonely beach, he debated.

Finally, beyond Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, he found an old boxlike garage apartment, painted a sickly green. It was hidden from the shore road by a screen of waving Australian pines. A perfect hide-out, but apparently the Mrs. Martin who owned it had a Puritanlike conscience and morality.

"Listen," he said at length to Pamela. "If I tell her that you and I are a honeymoon couple, she'll rent." He paused, and then added steadily. "You won't have to worry about me."

As he spoke, he was so like a little boy that at another time she could have been amused and tender. She nodded agreement.

"I'm sure of that," she said simply.

Jeffrey took off a gold ring. "It's the

International Order of Barflies," he grinned, breaking the spell. "Turn it upside down."

She put it on her ringless hand, and at dusk they moved in.

"I know you'll be happy here," Mrs. Martin cooed archly. "Newlyweds do like to be secluded."

Pamela needed desperately to get downtown, so she seized their first moment alone in the two upstairs rooms, separated by the kitchen, to speak to him.

"I can cook, and it's better than chancing a restaurant. But I'll have to market for groceries." She paused, "I won't hurt your car."

"Probably not," grinned Jeffrey, "but I'll drive you."

She winced but surrendered, and Jeffrey drove her to Las Olas Beach. Here, she entered the fish store conducted by a Captain John Angus. Jeffrey didn't go in because he could see her plainly through the big plate-glass windows.

Pamela bought a fish, all right, but she did more than that. She entered into a ten-minute discussion with the white-bearded Captain Angus which was punctuated with the old boat captain waving his arms and pointing. Then she used the telephone for five minutes and came out with a smile almost of happiness.

"Boy friend here?" Jeffrey asked.

"Yes," she said, with no further explanation.

While she did the rest of the marketing, Jeffrey thought about that motor sound the night of the murder. The man could have gotten down here by train, and if he knew Pamela Wayne she wouldn't implicate him. Jeffrey told himself he would have to do some digging before he got all of her story.

**S**HE was a good cook. The diced potatoes were just right. The pompano melted in your mouth, and the canned tomatoes didn't taste like canned tomatoes and he had never known a lettuce salad could be so tasty. The coffee, too, was just right. He leaned back, inhaled his cigarette luxuriously.

"Lady, you swing a mean frying pan. I'm grateful, I'll even wipe the dishes."

He did, too, and found that he was feeling pretty good. When the dishes

were put away he got out his portable typewriter, wrote a heading: WHY I KILLED MAURICE TEKELE, by Pamela Wayne, As Printed Exclusively in the New York *Sphere*.

"Now, lady, give," he said.

She talked readily but he was dismayed at the yield. Subway readers don't care largely about the details of a convent education in France, followed by an A.B. at Vassar. They wouldn't read avidly about a poverty-stricken winter in New York with no job until finally, just as she was desperate, Maurice Tekele hired her.

"Hey," he protested, "that's spinach! I want your love life. The boys who have pursued you madly, the passionate moments of caresses. That's the fodder for the readers."

"But I never loved anybody," she said. "I've been too much bent on a career."

Jeffrey looked skeptical. "Nobody ever kissed you?" he demanded.

She shrugged. "Of course. But those were just—er—moments without significance."

Jeffrey sighed. "You're either a sweet and lovely liar, or you've been raised in cellophane. What about you and Tekele?"

She did not reply at once. Then, suddenly, she leaned toward him, put her cool, lovely hands on his.

"Hugh," she said earnestly, "if I swear to come back, will you let me go out now, alone, for an hour?"

Jeffrey glanced at his wrist watch. It was nearly eleven. He reflected that, after all, she *was* a murderess, and if she tricked him and fled for her life she'd be only doing the natural thing. He felt sorry for her, but this was no dice. He tried to make his voice gentle.

"I can't, Pam. Honestly. This story means my job and I've got to deliver. I can't take chances."

"But I must!" she wailed.

She was thinking with clarity, however. He had softened before when she used her feminine allure; perhaps he would again. She placed her hands on his shoulders, her face inches from his.

"Hugh," she whispered, "you've got to let me go, and alone."

Once again his pulses hammered, and he knew he wanted to kiss her, and this time he knew he could. But that made no difference. Gently, he removed her hands.

"Scram to bed." He forced a smile. "I'll take you to see him some time tomorrow."

She knew, despite his gentle manner, that this was final.

"If you'll give me a chance to photograph the Marechal diamonds," he was adding.

Angrily, she shrank back. "Yourself and your job and pictures!" she blazed. "Did it never enter your thick skull that maybe I *didn't* kill Tekele?"

She flung herself into her own room and slammed the door. As soon as it was shut, her anger melted. She'd go despite him. She pretended to undress and made the bed squeak beneath her weight. Then she lay there, tense, waiting, listening.

Outside, Jeffrey moodily consumed a cigarette. "I'm a hell of a reporter," he thought. "I ought to be tougher-minded."

He went into his own room and began to wonder why the devil she had killed Tekele anyway.

At midnight, Pamela silently rose and tiptoed to the window. All of them were open and screened, and she could hear plainly in the night Hugh's steady, quiet breathing.

She nodded, tightened her lips and removed the screen. The extension of the garage roof was just below. She lowered herself to it, and as quietly dropped to the ground. To start the car would be to awaken him, so she set out resolutely to walk to the beach, where she could get a cab.

AT THE Oceanside Hotel, Roderick Fanton paced thoughtfully up and down his room. He was a tall, slender man of about thirty-five, with a great shock of premature white hair and a handsome sun-tanned face. He had a thin, resolute mouth and sharply alert dark eyes.

Every so often, these eyes would swivel to a copy of a Fort Lauderdale paper, which lay spread on the bed open to the screaming black headlines: "TEKELE MURDER SUSPECT BELIEVED IN FLORIDA."

Below was a paragraph that he had read thoroughly many times. A reward of fifty thousand dollars was offered for the return of the Marechal diamonds, and an additional reward of ten thousand dollars had been offered by the Jewelers' Protective Association for the



capture of Pamela Wayne.

He smiled once, grimly. Then, as he turned, there was a knock at the door. He hurried to open it. Pamela Wayne burst in, seized his shoulders breathlessly.

"Oh, Rod, I had such a time getting here!" she cried.

With his hands holding her, she felt safe now. She knew Rod Fanton as a private detective who had recovered many stolen, insured jewels for his clients. She knew him as a man who had paid her some attention. She had gone out with him. She didn't love him but she respected him. She trusted him now.

"You poor kid," Roderick Fanton was saying. "What a spot to be in! Tell me everything."

As quickly as possible, she told him of the details on the yacht.

"He didn't entice me on the yacht in the manner they say," she said. "I went of my own accord." She paused, then went on excitedly, "Rod, Tekele was a crook, a fence to receive stolen jewels! The Marechal diamonds were stolen and he was going to cut them up and resell them."

Fanton's face expressed his amazement. "Are you sure? How do you know this?"

Breathlessly, she told him. "I found a secret drawer in his apartment desk, and in it I found this." She reached into a slim stockinged leg and pulled out a green notebook. "It's a diary, or record, in code. I've deciphered some of it but not all. I went to him on the yacht and told him what I knew. He got scared and locked me in his cabin. While I was trying to get out, somebody came in an airplane and shot him."

"You're certain it was an airplane?" Fanton queried.

"I ought to know the sound," she answered. "I've been up with you in your plane. And with the heavy tail wind that night, a plane could easily be back here in five or six hours. I remembered that you were down here trailing "Smooth" Blake, the jewel thief. You told me Smooth was an old pilot. And I saw Smooth's name in the green book. I think he killed Tekele and, flying with a tail wind, got back here in time to set up an alibi."

She paused, and then added resolutely, "They've got a case against me, Rod. Smooth's alibi has to be broken—and all

the rest of this won't do me any good unless it is."

He nodded. "Why do you think Smooth killed him?"

"Smooth Blake stole the Marechal diamonds and gave them to Tekele to sell or cut. Maybe Tekele was trying to double-cross him. You could prove that, couldn't you, with these leads?"

Fanton frowned. "Where did Smooth get the airplane?"

She shrugged. "I'm depending on you, Rod." Rapidly, she explained about Hugh Jeffrey. "He watches me like a hawk."

Fanton restlessly paced the length of the room while she watched him.

"Rod," she said, "can you help me? Can you clear me?"

He turned and smiled. "Sure I can help you, honey, but it will take time. That's a tough alibi. And, meantime, you're liable to be arrested any moment."

"No," she shook her head, "my hair's dyed, and Hugh has us hidden up the beach."

She explained about the garage apartment.

"But I'd feel better," said Fanton, "if you were in Nassau. Unless I can trace the diamonds to Smooth Blake—"

"But he hasn't got them," she said. "I have." Again she reached into her sheer stocking and brought out a chamois case.

Opening it, steel-blue fire glittered. Fanton's eyes widened.

"They were in the secret drawer along with the notebook," she explained tensely.

Fanton's fingers drummed nervously on a table while he thought. "Honey, this makes it tougher," he said. "But there is a way. Perhaps I could trap Smooth into a confession by using the diamonds and the notebook."

"Why, yes!" she cried eagerly.

"But," he went on, "I want you to go to Nassau. I can arrange it."

She shook her head. "I can't, Rod. I promised Hugh I'd not run away."

"Just a cheap reporter after a story," he said harshly. "In Nassau you'll be comfortable, and I won't have to worry about you."

"I'll do the worrying from now on," said Hugh Jeffrey from the door. He came into the room, pushing a snub-nosed .38 in front of him.

## IV

**R**ODERICK FANTON swore and his hand, which had gone to a shoulder holster, dropped heavily to his side. Pamela gasped, turned.

"Hugh!" she exclaimed.

Jeffrey favored her with a grim glance. "Nassau!" he muttered. "That's how much your word is worth."

As she started to protest, he waved his left hand.

"Save it, lady. Did you think you fooled me tonight? I made it easy for you because I knew you'd lead me to the lad that helped you kill Tekele."

"You're crazy," growled Fanton. "I'm a private detective and I've got a reputation."

"Hugh, you're wrong," cried Pamela. "Rod is going to help me. I didn't kill Tekele, and if you had any sense you'd know it!"

"I'm not arguing," said Jeffrey quietly. "Only we're going home—now." He gestured toward the door.

She looked helplessly at Roderick Fanton and the latter shrugged.

"He's got a gun, honey," he said. "As long as he's promised to hide you out for a week, go with him and I'll get busy at once."

Relief came to her face and she turned to go. But Fanton's voice swung her back.

"I'll need the package," and he gestured to the chamois bag and the green notebook.

"Of course," she said and started to hand them to him. But Hugh Jeffrey jumped forward and took them from her.

"She gives away nothing until I get the story," he said grimly.

Fanton swore again. Pamela leaped at Jeffrey.

"Do you want me to lose my last chance of clearing myself?" she blazed.

"That'll keep," said Jeffrey, and gestured. "Let's go."

He forced her from the room, still protesting.

Long after the door had closed, Roderick Fanton heard them arguing in the hall. Fanton's fingers dipped absent-mindedly into his righthand pocket, but he caught himself and swore heartily. Suddenly, he hurried to the elevator and downstairs. His car was parked outside.

He got in and drove at high speed to

the Royal Palm Apartments, which fronted on New River in Rio Vista. After looking cautiously around the soft, purple Florida night, he entered the building and rapped at a door. It was a singular rap—two short thuds, then a drumming sound.

The door opened and a short, thin man with chilled-steel eyes stood there. His right hand was concealed but Fanton knew he held a gun.

Fanton forced a laugh. "Take it easy with the gun, Smooth. I'm friends."

"You're a dirty crooked double-crosser," said Smooth Blake in a soft, almost feminine voice, "and I don't want any part of you."

"Lay off," growled Fanton. "You would like the Marechal diamonds, wouldn't you? Well, I know where they are."

This left Smooth unmoved. "I don't believe it. You're a crooked dick. You promised me twelve G's for the Markoff emeralds and clipped me out of six of it!"

"Listen," said Fanton, "and get it straight. Pamela Wayne has not got only the Marechal diamonds, she's also got Tekele's notebook that will send you to stir!"

For a moment, Smooth Blake looked incredulous. Then he stepped back, his face suddenly deadly.

"Come in, and talk fast," he said. "And Fanton, if this is another run-around, I'll put the slug to you right!"

"I want my cut," said Fanton, "and I'll tell you where she's stashed."

He went inside and Smooth Blake closed the door.

**H**UGH JEFFREY looked moodily over at Pamela. She was bent over the little green notebook, which, together with the diamonds, she had persuaded Jeffrey to return to her.

"They're mine," she had said angrily, "and no part of your story."

The story! Jeffrey sighed. An hour previously he had talked with McClean long distance. McClean had shouted at him furiously.

"Listen, I don't want the life of Joan of Arc," he had said. "I want some hot stuff, and this first installment reads like the story of a backward child!"

Jeffrey had promised to pep it up even if he had to draw on his imagination, but Pamela was proving perverse.

"You let me go out in a glass-bottomed boat with Captain Angus," she repeated a dozen times, "and I'll brighten up the account. Otherwise, no."

For the two days since he had taken her away from Fanton's hotel room, she had been reasonably tractable. But, this business of riding in a glass-bottomed boat!

"For Pete's sake, why?" he growled.

She shrugged. "Not to escape, surely."

He glanced at his watch. Ten o'clock. She'd be howling she was tired and wanted to go to bed in another hour. He shrugged and surrendered.

"Okay! Only, give me something a warm-blooded subway reader can get a spinal thrill out of."

She smiled, and he thought moodily that she was certainly a brighter girl since she had met her boy friend. He wondered about that, too. Was she really innocent, and was Fanton trying to prove her innocent? She interrupted his thoughts by sitting down close to him. She was warm and gracious.

"Well, let's start with my first crush," she began, and he felt her close to him.

"Hold it!" he said. "Your *first* crush, not the last. I chase my own women."

She ignored this and began talking and it was pretty good stuff, so neither of them heard a soft footstep on the stairway until suddenly somebody stood on the threshold. He was a deathly-looking man, with a thin, pale face.

"Put up your hands, both of you!" he growled. "I haven't got all night."

Hugh Jeffrey had been in the act of lighting a cigarette. He still held the matches as he raised his hands.

"So *that's* the way your boy friend works," he said bitterly. "Hiring gunsels to rescue you."

Pamela was pale, her red lips quivering.

"I—you must be Smooth Blake," she faltered.

"Right," said the deadly little man. "Hand me the rocks, and also that little green notebook."

"Oh!" she cried and embraced Jeffrey. "Don't let him, Hugh. Please!"

Jeffrey had heard a lot about Smooth Blake, the famous jewel thief, and suddenly things were getting clearer, making sense. He gave Pamela a queer look.

"You can't argue with a gun, beautiful," he said.

However, as he pushed her back away

from him, a way to beat this situation came to him. Desperate, but it might work. He waited, watching his opportunity.

"Gimme them rocks and notebook," Smooth was repeating.

His eyes were watching Pamela, so Jeffrey acted. He sighed, pretended to stumble as he took a step forward. His fingers scratched the match on the book, and the whole pack instantly flared into a quick blaze as he shoved the lit match in with the others.

He cursed, and dropped the flaming mass. He was closer to death than he knew, for Smooth Blake's face got that tight, white look that it had when he killed a man. But, as he saw Jeffrey standing there, arms still raised, though wringing his one hand, he relaxed.

"Come on, sister," he said. "Quick!"

"Th-they're in my room," she said, and turned to go.

"Okay, Luke, go with her," Smooth Blake called.

He stepped aside and a big scar-faced man, also with a drawn weapon, appeared from outside the door and thumped across the room.

"Say, Smooth," he cried, "this joint's on fire! Look!"

SMOOTH looked. The straw matting had spread the flames from the matches to the kerosene stove, which now erupted with a whoof and made a curtain of flame.

"Hey," cried Jeffrey, "let's get out of here!"

But as he spoke, he watched Smooth Blake narrowly. However, the man was not to be caught off guard.

"Bring the girl, Luke," he said. He turned to Hugh. "Get down the stairs."

Pamela came out, shoved by the hairy arm of Luke. Jeffrey was just going down the stairs when he turned deliberately.

"You'll burn in the chair, Smooth, for killing Tekele," he said.

"Shut up!" Smooth snarled, and gave Jeffrey a thrust.

Jeffrey was waiting for just that. He pretended to be off balance and stumbled backward, trying, apparently, to recover it. He grabbed at Smooth's legs and jerked. With a snarled oath, the man fell. It was a fool play against such a deadly killer, but it worked and Jeffrey plunged down the steps headlong.

A gun blasted out and the slug burrowed into the wall ahead of him. There was no time for a second bullet. He was out the door in a flash and running across the lawn. His own gun was in the glove compartment of his convertible, where he had carelessly left it. Jeffrey tried to get it now, but failed.

As he twisted toward it, flames broke out the apartment window and lighted him like a spotlight. A bullet nicked the sleeve of his coat. He dove into the pines, aware that somebody was thudding after him. He didn't stop running until he had crossed the beach road and was down in the protection of the sand dunes. Here he crouched, sucking air into his panting lungs.

He knew he had to go back. They had Pamela, and now he knew that she was innocent. He crawled along the dune toward the road that curved off the beach highway to the garage apartment. It was reddened now by the flare of the fire. But he was too late!

As he circled toward his car, another car boiled out of the entrance. It was driven by Luke, and in the rear Jeffrey saw Smooth Blake and Pamela. He turned, ran after them.

But the car was making fifty miles an hour within half a block. He finally halted, watched the twin tail-lights get smaller and then vanish as the car turned into one of the side streets of Las Olas Beach.

They had her and the diamonds and the notebook. Had captured her, so that Jeffrey was not only without a story but without clues as to who had killed Tekele. And what would happen to her now?

Suppose, in being aboard the yacht, Pamela had seen Smooth Blake kill Tekele? He went sick inside. If Smooth Blake was the murderer and Pamela had seen him, then she'd never come out of that mess alive.

"I'm a sap," he groaned, "the all-time, all-American one at that!"

Jeffrey ran to his car before a crowd gathered. Forgotten now were his story and his job. He was thinking only of Pamela.

He was parked on Andrews Avenue, a short time later, trying to make up his mind whether the police could help, when a steely hand grabbed his shoulder through the lowered car window and a harsh voice grated from behind him.

"Okay, doublecrosser, where have you got her hidden?"

Jeffrey looked up, stunned, into Pete Hendricks' angry face.

"Pete!" he gasped weakly. "How the devil did you find me?"

"You apparently forgot," growled Beachmont's chief of police, "that my sister-in-law is on the *Sphere's* switchboard. She took your long-distance calls." He suddenly exploded. "You ungrateful lush! Pulling a trick like that on me when—"

"I know, Pete," said Jeffrey dully. "I'm all you call me, and more. Only the point is, I haven't got her any more. She's been snatched."

"Quit the lying—" began Pete.

"I tell you it's true," Jeffrey cried desperately. Swiftly, he told Hendricks everything that had happened. "Don't you see?" he concluded. "The kid's innocent. She's been trying to clear herself. I've got to get her back safely, but I can't find Fanton. You'll have to help me."

"Like hell," said Hendricks, but he was no longer angry. "We'll call in the local law and comb the town."

"Not the police," protested Jeffrey.

"Why?" Hendricks wanted to know.

Jeffrey fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette. "Because, if you want to know, I *like* the girl."

Hendricks grinned sarcastically. "Yeah? You just fell out of love with one blonde."

"Listen," said Jeffrey earnestly. "Help me find Pamela. Smooth Blake is probably the killer, and she's in danger. And I swear, Pete, that if we break the case I'll give you the pinch, just as I was going to let you pinch Pamela after I got my story."

He finally pulled out of his pocket what he thought was cigarettes, and his jaw dropped agape.

"Good grief!" he gasped.

He was holding the little green notebook and the Marechal diamonds. When Pamela had embraced him, supposedly of fright, she had cleverly slid them into his pocket.

V

**W**ITH set lips, Hugh Jeffrey walked into Captain Angus' fish store. "I want to hire your glass-bottomed boat and I want to start right now," he said.

It was early afternoon of the next day. He had gotten no clue to Pamela's whereabouts. He had ducked Pete Hendricks, who had gone off trying to find Roderick Fanton. And Jeffrey, progressing on the theory that if Pamela had wanted to ride in a glass-bottomed boat, it must have something to do with Tekele's murder. He was going to follow this slim lead.

In his pocket he had the diamonds and the notebook. Four hours of study had yielded nothing from the notebook. But it was vital to the case. Of that, he was certain.

Captain Angus was proud of his thirty-eight-foot glass-bottomed boat.

"The strangest vegetation the world has ever seen, sir," he informed.

"So I expect," said Jeffrey, as the boat took a course out of Port Everglades. "What I'm more interested in what Miss Pamela Wayne wanted of you the other day. What did she talk about?"

"Why, sir," replied the skipper, "she wanted to know, was the wind blowing hard down here the night of the eighth, and I said it was. An' she asked if I heard any plane late that night, and I said I did."

"A plane?" repeated Jeffrey interestedly. "What did she mean?"

"Well, sir, that's ha'd to tell, it is. She asked if it crashed out here in the ocean, and I said it did. And it shore did! It cracked up out by the third reef, an' I been expectin' to read about men lost in the papers, but I ain't."

It all come together in Jeffrey's mind, then. The motor sound, the stiff wind. Pamela wanting to come here. Why, the killer had flown in a fast seaplane from here to Long Island Sound, landed there, killed Tekele and flown back. Probably had established an alibi. And what she wanted was to locate the sunken plane and haul it out as proof of the theory.

"Man!" he muttered. "Skipper, take me to where you heard that plane fall."

"Won't see nothin'," said Captain Angus cheerfully. "Beyond that third reef the water shelves off rapidlike, and I expect it's in five hundred feet of water now."

But none the less, he took the boat over the second and third reefs, and Jeffrey spent the afternoon gazing through the glass floor of the boat. But there was no sign of a plane. It was a bitter blow.

"Poor kid," he muttered, "Without that plane it'll be hard to prove her story."

It was now dusk, and the night was descending with tropic swiftness. He turned to tell Captain Angus to make one more swing before giving up. Captain Angus didn't reply. He was looking off to port and listening to a purr of sound.

"Where in tarnation does that feller think he's going?" he roared in sudden anger.

Jeffrey whirled. The ocean was smooth, save for a rolling ground swell, and across it was zooming the knifelike prow of a speedboat, riding two huge wings of white spray. It was headed right toward them. Angus was shouting for them to sheer off, but in sudden realization Jeffrey knew they would not.

Smooth Blake was coming for the diamonds and the notebook.

"Open her up, Cap'n," Jeffrey yelled. "Open, the devil!" shouted the captain. "I can't outrun her and, anyways, the darned fool knows I got the right of way."

The boat was coming fast, like an express train. Jeffrey knew that if he was going to do anything he must do it quick. Swiftly he looked around. There was a big lead weight for a fishing handline lying on the trunk locker. He picked it up, jerked out his oil-skinned tobacco pouch and rolled diamonds, notebook and lead into the waterproof covering.

He glanced downward. The glass-bottomed boat was inside the second reef now. The water was about thirty or forty feet deep and the sandy bottom was evenly ridged by the last storm. Jeffrey glanced at the speedboat, now not fifty yards away, and made his decision.

"I hope I can get it again," he muttered, and dropped the package over the side.

**T**HROUGH the glass bottom he could see the dark object whirl downward, saw it come to rest on the ocean floor. For an instant it was black and plainly seen, then the speed of the glass-bottomed boat whisked it from sight.

Anxiously, he studied the shore and used a mariner's old trick of locating himself by three points. There was the Las Olas Casino tower to the south, the Lauderdale water tower, already red-

lighted as a warning to airplanes, to the north, and directly off the bow were the stakes and ropes for the protected bathing beach.

Where invisible lines from these points intersected, lay the package. Unless a storm or currents swept it away, there was a chance of recovery.

Then the speedboat was alongside. In the bow seat, Smooth Blake leveled an automatic pistol.

"Stop that scow," he called. "And Jeffrey, put your thumbs in your ears and look like an elk!"

"Sure!" And he obeyed. If his hunch was right, they'd take him to Pamela, and after that he could think of other things.

But Captain Angus did not stop. He kept headed wide open for shore.

"You go plumb t'hell!" he roared indomitably. "You ain't got no right to stop a vessel on the high seas. I'll report you—"

The crack of the automatic was swept seaward by the wind. Jeffrey saw the flame of the gun, turned his head, and saw old Angus totter from the wheel, clutch at his chest and then slowly crumple up like a folding seat.

Jeffrey, who had seen death too often, knew from the flat, weary posture that the old man was dead. A wave of uncontrolled rage rose in him.

"You dirty murderer," he yelled furiously, "do you kill just for fun?"

"Keep your hands up," said Smooth. "Luke, get aboard and shut off the motor, and knock a hole in the glass bottom." He waved to Jeffrey. "Come aboard here, and be mighty careful how you do it."

Jeffrey looked again at the captain's body.

"I swear, I'll see you burned for it," he muttered thickly. But he had to obey.

"Listen, I'd shoot him and a dozen like him for what's in this," said Blake.

He gave Jeffrey a shove that tumbled the reporter into the leather cushions. Luke Rensome, Blake's gunman, leaped aboard and shut off the motor. Jeffrey heard the sounds of a fire-ax, the smash of glass. The boat began to settle by the stern. Luke leaped back to the speedboat, grinning.

"I touched off her engine room, too," he said. "They'll play the devil figuring out what happened."

Under cover of the darkness, which

hid them from shore, Blake whirled the speedboat and headed south and to sea. He was making a wide swing which would bring him in at Port Everglades, where, by canals, he could reach the New River.

"Frisk him, Luke," he ordered.

Luke did more than just frisk. He stripped Jeffrey to his tanned hide and searched even the seams of his underwear. Jeffrey bore this in silence.

"Smooth," Luke finally growled, "he ain't got 'em on him."

"He's got to have them," snapped Smooth.

"Have I?" inquired Jeffrey savagely. "Well listen, killer. They're at the bottom of the sea and you'll have a fine time getting them!"

Luke Rensome swore, struck Jeffrey a blow in the face that tumbled the reporter on his back. Hugh came up, fighting mad, and waded in, fists swinging. Luke jammed the gun muzzle into Jeffrey's stomach. His eyes and face were set to do the murder.

"Hold it, you fool!" ordered Smooth's deadly voice. "He knows where they are, and he can get them."

The gunsel relaxed, breathing hard through distended nostrils.

"Take the wheel," Smooth told Luke. "And take it easy after you get in the river."

The deadly little man moved over where Hugh was pulling on his clothes.

"You know what's in that notebook?" he asked in his soft feminine voice.

Jeffrey didn't, but this was no time to say so.

"Sure," he said jeeringly, "why wouldn't I?"

Smooth nodded. "That's all I wanted to know."

His hand flashed up and out so swiftly that Jeffrey had no time to duck. The heavy gun crashed against his skull. The world blanked out in a blaze of sparks. Smooth looked broodingly at the senseless figure.

"He thinks he isn't going to tell where he dropped 'em," he muttered. "But he is."

"Yeah," grinned Luke, "he will!"

**D**ARKNESS was pitchblack and heavy with perfume. Jeffrey stifled a groan. His head was pounding like a Chinese drum. His hands were numb from cords cutting into his wrists and

his feet felt like stumps from the ankles down. He muttered savagely.

"Hugh!" came Pamela's voice across the darkness.

A glow of warmth swept over him. She was unhurt! He tried to make his voice cheerful.

"What's left of me," he answered. "What have they done to you?"

"Nothing—yet," she whispered. "But they're not going to let us go." Her voice grew angry. "And just when I'd solved Tekele's code. Hugh, that notebook will clear the whole mystery!"

Jeffrey didn't say anything. Why tell her the notebook was in forty feet of water and the next storm would bury it forever?

"I can't understand," she went on, "why Rod Fanton doesn't do something."

"That lug!" growled Jeffrey.

"Don't talk like that," she protested. "Rod is a brilliant detective!"

Jeffrey's heart dropped. She loved the man. And he knew he, Jeffrey, loved this gallant, courageous girl.

"Okay, then, he's a brilliant shamus," said Jeffrey quietly. "But he's not here now, and we are. I'm going to roll across the floor. When I back up to you, see what you can do with these knots. The way they feel, Houdini would be stymied."

He rolled across the floor until he felt the warmth of her body. He felt her quick fingers at work on the knots.

"As long as we're both playing the same side of the street, why don't you quit being the female Lone Ranger and tell me everything?" he asked.

By some instinct, she accepted him now.

"I was a fool," she said, "a scared fool." And then, as she worked at the bonds, she told him everything. "The sunken plane and the notebook will clear me. Oh!" she gasped. "What *did* you do with it and the diamonds?"

Jeffrey told her. He heard her gasp again in dismay. "But Hugh, they're lost for good!"

"No," said Jeffrey grimly, "we'll have to get them. Because we can't locate the plane."

She relapsed into discouraged silence. Jeffrey's hands were now free. He rubbed some circulation into them. He untied his own feet and turned to work on her bonds.

He had just loosened her hands when

a key rasped softly in the lock of the door. Jeffrey sprang up and groped for the wall.

"Don't move," he whispered

"Oh, Hugh!" Fear gripped her throat, closed it.

Just as he reached the wall, the door opened in front of him. A man entered through a yellow rectangle of light. Jeffrey hurtled forward, one arm hooking for the neck, the other reaching for a gun wrist. He respected Smooth's deadly qualities with a gun.

But this was not Smooth Blake. Roderick Fanton's voice whispered huskily:

"Hey, lay off!"

Jeffrey fell back, and within him an emotion welled up that he knew was jealousy.

"So," he said bitterly, "you arrive in the nick of time!"

"Take it easy," snapped Fanton in a low tone. "I'm risking my life here. I came for Pamela and you."

"Oh, Rod," cried Pamela warmly, "I just knew you'd come!"

"Not so loud," said Fanton. "Here, I'll unfasten your ankles. We haven't got much time. You're in Blake's apartment. I've got Blake and his gunsels, Rensome, off on a wild-goose chase after the diamonds. But they're liable to return any minute."

"Very daring and noble," growled Jeffrey, "but what's in it for you?"

"Fifty thousand for the return of the rocks," Fanton told him coolly. "And I also happen to be fond of Pam."

Jeffrey shrugged and was silenced. But his mind was working swiftly. There was a story here yet to get and without a story he was without a job. But for the moment he let Fanton take the lead.

## VI

ONCE they were safely in Fanton's car and speeding towards Andrews Avenue, the private detective began talking.

"Where are the rocks and the notebook?" he asked.

In a discouraged voice Pamela told him. Fanton swore softly.

"But can you get them, Hugh?" Pamela queried.

"I hope to," Jeffrey rejoined quietly.

"Good," said Fanton. "At dawn, we'll hire a boat and—"

They had reached a dark, quiet section

of Las Olas Boulevard. Jeffrey leaned forward from the back seat.

"Stop the car, Fanton," he ordered.

Fanton slowed down. "What's the idea?" he growled. He brought the car to a stop.

"You've done your good deed for the day," said Jeffrey. "Get out!"

"Why, you dirty—" began Fanton, and his hand streaked to his left shoulder.

Jeffrey swung with all he had and caught the private eye square on the jaw. The punch felt good all the way up Jeffrey's arm.

Fanton's head snapped back, his eyes rolled whitely and he slumped down, out cold.

"Hugh!" gasped Pamela. "Why do you do that?"

"Listen," Jeffrey said, "I'm still after a story and this lug—"

He opened the car door and pushed the detective's body out. Pamela grabbed for it.

"Is that all you think of—your story?" she cried fiercely. "Rod was helping—"

"Let go," warned Jeffrey grimly, "or I'll start on you."

She shrank back and Jeffrey carried Fanton to a spot under a cocoanut palm and laid him out carefully, with his arms folded across his breast. Then he jumped into the car, threw it in gear and headed swiftly west on Broward Boulevard toward the Everglades.

Pamela spoke for the first time in minutes.

"Where are we going now?" she demanded.

"Hiding out from the police until daylight," Jeffrey told her, and then explained about Pete Hendricks.

"As soon as we get the notebook and diamonds, we'll find him and stop being amateur sleuths," he concluded.

She began to weep quietly, sobbed out, "Your silly mistakes have spoiled everything."

This didn't make Jeffrey feel any better. He drove glumly past the country club, through Dania, down the West Dixie Highway. It seemed dawn would never come. Pamela finally dozed in exhaustion.

But at length the sky in the east brightened and Jeffrey drove back to the Andrews Avenue Bridge over the New River, where the charter boats were moored. There was a heavy, white fog.

As he parked near the boat rentals, he failed to notice a big, tall man give a start of surprise and move stealthily to the dock.

The night man was in the rental office and Jeffrey dickered with him for a thirty-two-foot cruiser, paying extra to operate it himself. After inspecting the boat, he and Pamela followed the rental man back to the office, where Hugh got change for a hundred-dollar bill.

It was then the big, tall man ducked aboard the cruiser.

"Watch the weather," warned the rental man. "These fogs are followed lots of times by a good blow."

Pamela looked at Jeffrey. He grinned.

"We'll have time," he said.

He asked for and got a glass-bottomed bucket, and then helped Pamela aboard. He started the motor, put the clutch in and the single propeller sent them cautiously downriver through masses of floating hyacinth and an opaque fog.

Jeffrey told her his plan. "After we get the notebook and the jewels, we'll put in at Palm Beach and phone Pete Hendricks—"

"You won't have to call me!" a voice cried.

Pete Hendricks was coming out of a forward locker. His face was grim and set.

"Good grief," moaned Jeffrey, "where did *you* spring from?"

Hendricks ignored this. "You're under arrest for murder," he said sternly to Pamela.

She gasped and shrank back.

"You can't do this, Pete," Jeffrey said hotly. "She didn't do it. Smooth Blake is the man!"

"Listen!" cut in Hendricks. "I followed that fairy-tale lead. Smooth Blake was in a poker session at the Plantation for forty-eight hours and Honest John Biggers vouches for him. Rod Fanton was talking to the chief of police of Lauderdale at six-thirty on the morning of the murder! . . . Turn this tub around!"

There was no mistaking his determination. Jeffrey sighed. If a storm followed this fog—

"Okay," he muttered and turned from the wheel of the craft.

**H**ENDRICKS was bringing out a set of handcuffs. Near the wheel, hanging by a thong, was a club for kill-



ing fish. In a swift movement Jeffrey seized it, swung it up.

"Hold it!" yelled Hendricks, trying to dodge.

He was too late. The club caught him alongside the skull and he dropped in a senseless heap.

"May I be forgiven for that," Jeffrey said grimly. "My best friend, too."

But he lifted the body under the arms and started to drag it to the forward locker. Pamela, pale and shaken, saw Pete Hendricks' gray-ash face.

"Oh, Hugh, you've killed him!"

"It'll take more than that to crack his skull," Jeffrey grunted.

He got the locker door open and thrust the body inside. There was a crash of broken glass. Something had smashed, but Hugh didn't wait to find out what it was. There was no lock on the door, only a hasp, with a thick copper nail to hold it in place. This he affixed and returned to the wheel, which Pamela had taken over.

They didn't say anything for a long time. Then, suddenly, Hugh turned down the motor.

"More grief?" he muttered.

"What now?" cried Pamela.

"This fog," said Jeffrey. "I can't see my landmarks until it lifts. And the gale may be on, then."

The fog to landward lifted somewhat around eight o'clock, but by that time Jeffrey had been cruising futilely for hours and a moaning wind had sprung up. Pamela was hanging over the side, peering through the glass-bottomed bucket. There had been no noise from Pete Hendricks, but that didn't worry Hugh. He kept glancing anxiously landward.

Pam continued peering through the glass.

"It's crystal clear, but it's only rocks and some marine growth, and a lot of parrot and angel fish," she said.

"Never mind the fish," said Jeffrey. "We must be close. Keep looking."

Ten minutes later, he cried out in satisfaction. The inshore fog had lifted sufficiently now for him to make out the Lauderdale water tower and the thin spire of the Las Olas Casino. He found that he was slightly south. Quickly, he speeded up.

"Now Pam," he cried excitedly, "it has got to be somewhere around here."

She strained over the side. Minutes

passed. The breeze increased. Cloud banks rolled up from the horizon. The sea began to roil. Jeffrey knew there was going to be a blow.

Then, suddenly, Pamela cried out.

"Hugh! It's there—a little package! It's black."

Jeffrey exclaimed in satisfaction and reversed the motor until she told him he was right over it. Then he broke out the anchor and dropped it over the side. The grapnel took forty-two feet of rope.

"That's awful deep," he observed soberly. But he forced a smile.

"Turn your back," he said and stripped down to his shorts.

"Oh, Hugh," she cried, "are you sure it's safe with barracuda and sharks?"

Jeffrey looked through the glass-bottomed bucket, espied the black package, brought so close by water magnification that he could almost reach down and grab it. He didn't reply but jumped to the rail, poised there an instant, and dove down cleanly. With all his strength he swam downward.

He fought the water, feeling the pressure close in on his lungs like a vise, trying to squeeze the air out of him. It seemed he would never get there. And when his hand finally did touch the sand of the bottom, his strength was gone and he popped up to the surface like a cork, his ears pounding, his eyes bulging.

"Pressure's terrific," he panted. "I can't fight it!"

"Don't try it again," Pamela cried. "I'm—I'm afraid for you!"

"I've got to get it," he said grimly.

He found a second anchor, a small one without chain or rope. He clutched it under his left arm, and this time took in only a half lungful of air. The wind was whistling, the waves rocking the boat violently.

"Please stop, Hugh," cried Pamela. "You'll—"

He didn't hear any more. The green water closed over his head and he sank down, swiftly enough this time with the anchor dragging him. The water poured into the recesses of his ears. His lungs seemed on fire from the pressure. He wanted to go up so badly that he had to fight against the temptation to drop the anchor. The fear of unknown depths seized him. But he plunged on downward.

Then his knees hit the bottom. His eyes were agony from the pressure. But

paddling with his right hand, he twisted and peered and groped. His lungs became a sheet of pure pain. His stomach was in a knot.

He felt he must go up or die. Yet he crawled another few feet. His lungs felt as if they would collapse. He was getting faint. His head roared. But this time he saw something black through his pressure-fogged eyes. His fingers closed on it, felt the smoothness of the oiled silk.

He dropped the anchor and fought his faintness. But dropping the anchor was a mistake. His body shot up like an arrow through the pellucid depths and he bobbed out into the air, his body seeming to explode, everything black before his eyes. His senses failed, he had no strength, and he rolled helplessly face down in the water.

There was a flash of a white body through the air, a splash, and Pamela had turned him, cupped his chin with her hand to hold his head out of water.

"I got it, Pam," he whispered. "It's all right, now."

**S**HE CLUNG there with him to the side of the boat until his strength in some measure returned. Then she aided him and he clambered over the rail and sprawled, panting, on the cockpit floor.

Disregarding the fact that she was clad only in brassiere, silk panties and sheer stockings, she knelt over him and worked his arms to help his laboring lungs.

Presently he felt better and Pamela went into the cabin to dress. Jeffrey put on his clothes and started forward to raise the anchor.

"Let Hendricks out," he called. "We can explain now."

He heard her assent, but that was all. As he clambered onto the cabin to go forward, he ran his stomach into the outstretched gun of Smooth Blake.

"Thanks," said Smooth. "I'll take the jewels now."

Jeffrey was stunned and too weak to resist. He realized then that while they had been too occupied to keep a lookout, Smooth Blake had let his speedboat drift downwind and was now grappled to the cruiser's anchor rope.

But it was in Jeffrey to try one last trick.

"Jump, Pam!" he yelled. "Swim for it!"

Smooth Blake fell for it. He turned

his gaze into the cockpit. Jeffrey swung from his toes and followed up the punch with a leap for the gun. It went off, seemingly in his hands, but the bullet didn't touch him.

Blake went back and down from the punch, and as Jeffrey jumped after him he ground his foot on the gun wrist. Blake moaned in agony and his fingers loosened on the weapon. But before Jeffrey could seize it and jump to the cockpit, the man had grabbed him. They wrestled savagely.

"Rod, Luke! Quick, give me a hand!" Blake yelled at the speedboat.

"So it's Rod, is it?" said Jeffrey. "I thought that lug was a monkey!"

He twisted in time to see Luke Rensome coming at him from the speedboat, his gun leveled, his eyes squinting behind it to get the aim. He held his fire until he could get close enough to make sure he hit Jeffrey and not Smooth.

But before he could shoot, another gun roared. Luke reached for the pit of his stomach, a look of complete astonishment on his ugly red face.

"The dame got me," he groaned. "Can you tie that?" And he collapsed.

Jeffrey knew Pamela had gotten his gun from his coat.

"Good girl, darling," he muttered, and redoubled his efforts to overcome Smooth Blake.

But something must have gone haywire after that. Jeffrey couldn't see with Blake lying across his face. Suddenly Pamela whimpered in pain, and then Hugh was jerked backward by the heels and a slanting blow from a gun barrel half-stunned him.

When Jeffrey was aware of things again, he was on the cockpit floor. Blake was up, brushing off his clothes and panting curses, and Rod Fanton was standing there with a long-snouted Luger in his hand. Pamela was crouched by the rail, blood streaming from a cut on her forehead.

Jeffrey gritted his teeth.

"Nice going, Fanton," he jeered. "You were working with these monkeys all the time. You only pretended to release Pam and me, so I'd get the diamonds and the notebook, thinking I was helping a dick."

"It finally worked, anyway," rejoined Fanton thinly.

His hand reached for a pocket and pulled out a stick of chewing gum. He

rolled it up, thrust it into his mouth. Something clicked then in Hugh's brain. That flattened cud of gum on the floor of Tekele's yacht!

"You killed Tekele!" he cried. "You just pretended you were helping Pamela. You wanted that notebook because it showed you were a crook, that you stole the Marechal diamonds."

"I didn't steal them," said Fanton coldly. "But since you'll not be talking much after this, I don't mind setting your mind straight. I was to do the dickering to get them back for my insurance client. Tekele held out and didn't have them with him. How was I to know Pamela was down below all the time and *did* have them?" He turned to her. "Give me the package."

When she failed to move, he seized her roughly, tearing her waist and getting the waterproof package. He took out the notebook and the diamonds.

"I take 'em back, Smooth," he said, "and we'll split the reward. As for this—" He gestured to the notebook.

"Burn it," said Smooth, "before it burns us."

"You flew up North in your plane," Jeffrey accused Fanton, "knocked off Tekele and then flew back to talk to the chief of police and establish an alibi!"

"That's it," said Fanton, leering evilly.

"But they'll burn you," said Jeffrey softly. "You got socked on the jaw by Tekele and he knocked out a cud of gum you were chewing. The cops have it with your teethmarks in it, Fanton, and it's all they need."

But his bluff failed.

"They'll never take a cast of my mouth if you don't squawk—and you won't!" said Fanton calmly.

## VII

**F**ANTON looked around. "Cut that anchor rope, Smooth, and we'll go out to sea and give 'em to the barracuda."

"Okay," said Smooth. "Only, how come you didn't tell me you flew your plane up there and knocked off Tekele?"

Fanton gave him an icy look. "So you wouldn't know something that might hurt you."

And then, just as Jeffrey was losing hope, he remembered something.

Pete Hendricks! He was still in the forward locker. If Pete would only come

out quietly and sock Fanton, the private detective could still be beaten.

But as the motor purred and the vessel headed seaward there was no sound, no movement from within the cabin. Jeffrey groaned. Had he, after all, killed Pete when he'd clubbed him.

"How'll you explain this empty cruiser after what's gone on before?" he asked Fanton.

"Easy," grinned the private dick. "You rented this scow to help Pamela escape. You and she boarded a ship for Honduras, or some other place where they don't have extradition, and you're living happily ever after."

"You think of everything," muttered Jeffrey.

Where was Pete Hendricks?

The speedboat being towed astern slowed them up somewhat, but Fanton said finally, "Anywhere here is okay."

Jeffrey looked at Pamela. Between the shock of discovering Rod a murderer and the crack on the head, she still seemed half stunned. Jeffrey told himself that he was not going to sit by and get killed without making a fight for it. He looked into the entrance of the cabin.

There was no sign of Pete Hendricks. He braced himself, and as Smooth Blake turned and came to him, Jeffrey stood up. "Let's go!" he sang out, and raced squarely into the gun muzzle.

He should have died then and there, because Smooth Blake was willing and eager to give it to him. The man turned white and tense and his finger jerked at the trigger. But just as he would have fired, there was a gunshot from inside the cabin. And as Jeffrey charged in, he ran into the brains and blood of Smooth Blake spattering toward him. The spent bullet hit Jeffrey high on the chest.

He heard Smooth's dying scream. But it all came from far away, because he had slammed into Smooth's body as it was falling and it had fallen on him.

He heard Pamela cry out something. Then there was a shot, and another one. He scrambled up. Fanton was backing toward him. He saw Pete Hendricks wheeling dizzily from a wound and Fanton about to fire again.

Jeffrey rose up off the deck and hit Fanton hard. Fanton went down and in going down, he fired. As he slid across the deck on his side, Hendricks located him and stopped his staggering long enough to level his gun and loose a slug.

The slug slammed through Fanton's shoulder and hurled him to the deck. He lay there without moving.

Jeffrey sat down and began to swear.

"A fine dick you are!" he yelled furiously at Pete Hendricks. "Where have you been all my life?"

"You silly idiot," growled Hendricks, examining a bullet hole through his forearm, "in throwing me in that locker you knocked down a fire extinguisher. It's a wonder I didn't get killed!"

"After that sock I gave you," said Jeffrey feelingly, "no fire extinguisher could even make a dent."

"Yeah?" said Hendricks. "Well, this one was full of carbon dioxide for putting out fires. It broke in falling down and damned near strangled me to death." He coughed and sucked in deep breaths. "It's the last time I want to tangle with a fire extinguisher. They're dynamite!"

Jeffrey pointed to Fanton. "Did you hear what he said?"

"Plenty," said Hendricks.

"Then," said Jeffrey, "will you shake hands and forget?"

He handed Hendricks the diamonds and the notebook. Hendricks looked at

him and then grinned. "Why not? You were right about the girl!"

Jeffrey cried out and jumped to Pamela's side. She was trying to smile and she was going to have a black eye, but he felt all soft and tender toward her.

"Don't ever try any silly business like this again," he scolded.

"No," she said. "I'll be too busy hunting a new job."

"New job?" said Jeffrey. "Well, you've got one—taking care of a two-room-kitchenette apartment for a rising young reporter."

Despite her blackening eye she looked marvelous, and he leaned over now to take the kiss he had long wanted. But she drew back, rose and retreated toward the cabin. She was smiling, but her lips trembled.

"Didn't you say you always chased your own women?" she asked demurely.

"Yes," said Jeffrey. "It's what makes the game of love—"

"Well," she said from the cabin, "start chasing. I could be hard to catch!"

Jeffrey grinned and winked at Pete and strolled into the cabin. She was not so hard to catch after all.



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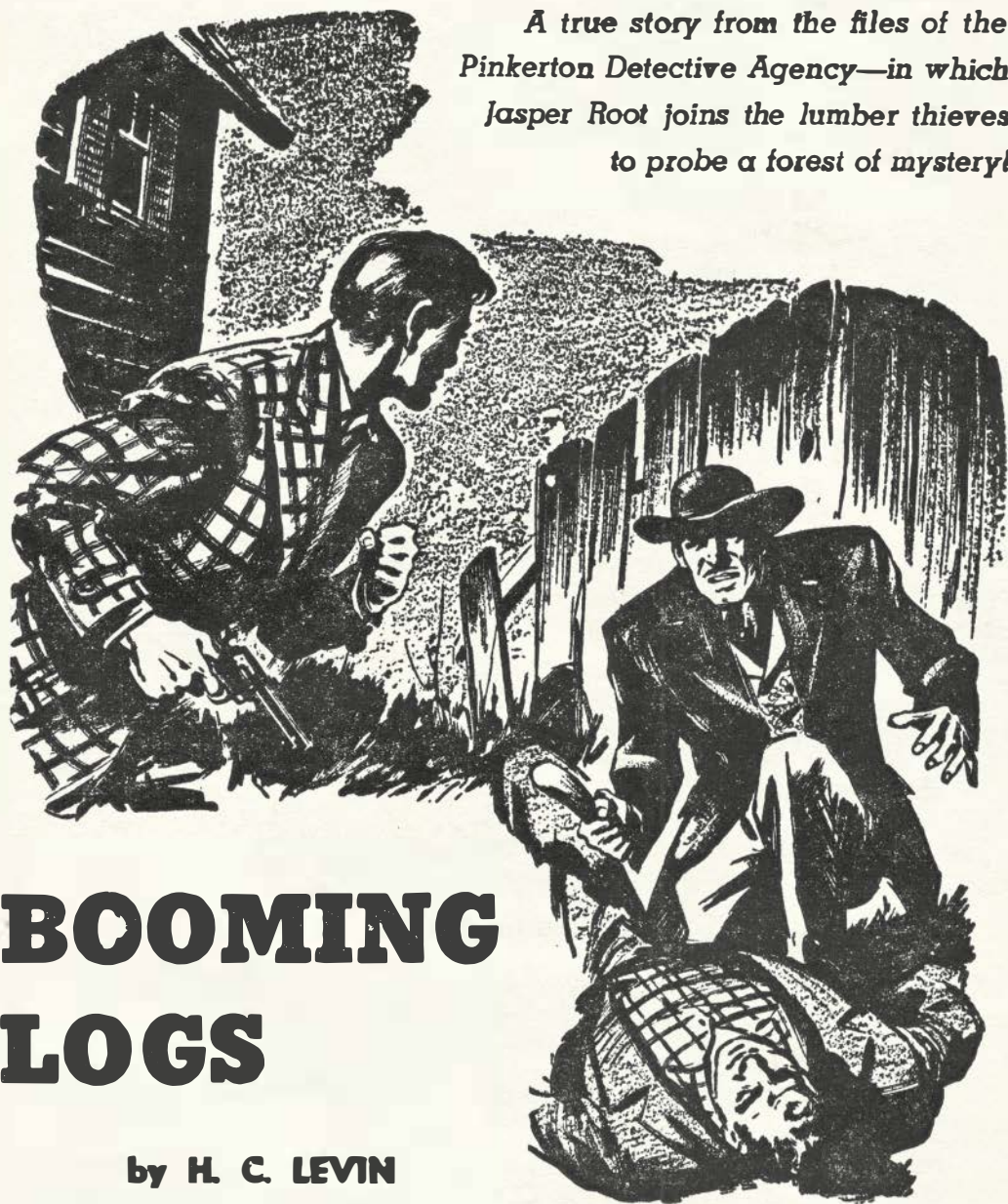
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*A true story from the files of the  
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to probe a forest of mystery!*



# BOOMING LOGS

by H. C. LEVIN

**F**ROM the window of the Pinkerton detective agency, a great golden eye stared out over Chicago and Lake Michigan, above the caption WE NEVER SLEEP. Reversed from left to right, it stared inside too, at Allan Pinkerton and his agitated visitor.

"You're proud of that trade mark, aren't you, Mr. Pinkerton?" the visitor

demanded heatedly, flinging out an arm toward the painted eye. "Then you can't turn down this job!"

The detective shifted uncomfortably, tugging at his massive gold watch chain. "Mr. Freesboro, what you're asking is entirely out of this agency's experience. We feel more or less at home with forgers and embezzlers, murderers and

bank robbers. But lumber thieves! Why if I turned every single one of my operatives loose on the job I couldn't blanket Wisconsin's forests! I simply can't do it!"

Freesboro tugged at his thick black beard. "Mr. Pinkerton," he said shrewdly, "that's pretty hard to believe from the man who transported President Lincoln safely into Washington for the inauguration." Pinkerton flushed, but Freesboro went on before he could interrupt. "There was patriotism as well as profit in that job. Would you do less for our veterans, for discharged soldiers and homesteaders who cannot buy lumber without being gouged by St. Louis speculators? Mr. Pinkerton, these rascals are milling logs stolen from me!"

Pinkerton was obviously impressed. "Soldiers and homesteaders! Freesboro, we'll take your case. And we'll save your logs if I have to put a man behind every consarned tree in Wisconsin!"

### Operation Timber

Allan Pinkerton, America's first, great professional detective, had built a brilliant reputation by his many "miracles." Operating in the days before technology and science streamlined law enforcement, his secret included hard work and a profound knowledge of human nature, especially when it came to crooks.

First Pinkerton dispatched one of his top operatives, Superintendent Warner, to case the town of Raceford, site of Freesboro's huge mill. Warner made elaborate notes on the pinelands where the logging was done, the water course down which the timber was rafted, and the various mill installations.

Twenty-six-year-old Jasper Root, an experienced agent, was then assigned to the case. He was to proceed to Raceford, find suitable work that would permit him to accumulate evidence, and to report often, using a cipher and a mail drop.

An ex-sailor, the detective quickly made friends with Captain Perkins aboard the ship taking him north.

"Root m'n'lad, how about signin' on? Grub's good, and you'll enjoy a taste of fresh water sailin'."

The Pinkerton looked furtively over his shoulder. "Delighted, Cap'n. But if I stick too close to water, Uncle Sam's

Customs boys'll grab me. Little matter of entry from Canada without duty." He gave a prodigious wink.

Captain Perkins chuckled. "Your secret's safe, son!"

Pretending to be a bad man with the law in frenzied pursuit was an old and highly successful Pinkerton device. And within a few hours of his arrival in Raceford, Root's infamy was being "safeguarded" in the proper places of notoriety.

### The Groom Boys

Meantime romance had entered in the person of Mrs. Buxton, to whose boarding house Captain Perkins brought Root as a lodger. The landlady, a widow with fiery red hair and a broad Irish brogue, was plainly impressed with the new tenant. Yet it foreshadowed a triangle almost disastrous for the Pinkerton agency.

Root quickly discovered that the slow season was at hand, and no logging or mill jobs available. So he began the second part of his assignment: to frequent saloons, poolrooms, and other locations where the unsavory gentry might be expected to gather.

At once he encountered the Groom boys, about whom the most complimentary epithets were "infamous," "notorious," and "ruffian-blackguards." Big Bill, oldest of the trio, was gray-haired, and of vast bulk. Jo, his brother, was much younger; slim, well-shaped, handsome, and regarded as more unprincipled and dangerous. Bringing up the rear, was Little Bill, a 20-year-old sawed-off cousin, whom the Raceford citizenry termed the most eccentric and unpredictable.

Root was soon to be convinced of the rightness of those labels, especially for Little Bill. So far the Grooms had covered their tracks, though a dozen fancy exploits, including a charge of murder, had been lodged against them.

Root, with that fine Pinkerton talent for "smelling" out the best lead, sensed that he had struck a blazed trail leading to the lumber thieves. Next step was to win the confidence of the Grooms. True, Root's fame as a wanted smuggler was now fairly well known among Raceford's lower depths.

But the Grooms shied away from the newcomer.

The first break came soon. Root was in a saloon when Big Bill staggered in, his face contorted with pain. The detective moved over to make room, but the giant only groaned.

"A whiskey for those aches, Big Bill?" the bartender asked.

"Can't stand the pain no longer. Goin' to kill myself. This ague . . ." The tormented badman reeled to go.

Root thrust him against the bar. "Hey, wait here a minute. I'll fix you up."

He hurried out to the druggist next door and returned with a mixture of quinine, brandy, and cayenne pepper. Even as Groom downed the drink, the tremors diminished. Root knew he had made the grade when the giant embraced him vigorously.

"Stranger, Big Bill Groom 'll never forget this. Any skunk who tangles with you 'll have to fight me. Now, let's have a drink!"

A few days later, Root again rescued Big Bill. He had been kibitzing a poker game in which the Groom brothers, quite drunk, had cleaned out a fancy-dressed stranger called Bates. The Pinkerton sensed something was up, and he discreetly followed as the trio departed and the Grooms separated. Root heard a cry and a thud. Rushing forward, revolver in hand, he discovered that Bates had sapped Big Bill, and was robbing him.

Jo Groom was even more grateful than his brother. The turn of events delighted Root, for he had decided that Jo, with his intelligence and coolness, would be in the most intimate friendship with the log-stealing ring.

"Root, you're O.K. And if there's anything I can do . . ."

"Forget it, Jo. Though maybe you might help me get a berth at the loggin' mill. Guess Boss Slayton doesn't like newcomers."

"Slayton? Just leave him to me, Jasper. I've got an 'in' there." The handsome Groom smiled with self-importance. All Raceford knew that Mrs. Slayton, with his help, had milled a fancy pair of horns for the mill superintendent.

Meantime Bates was brought before Magistrate Simmons, with Jasper Root in the witness chair. The battering gambler got short shrift. But the Pinkerton learned to his dismay that he had cre-

ated a formidable pair of enemies.

One was Bates' lawyer, a tough and eloquent hombre named Little. The latter discovered in the courtroom that Root was an expert and witty antagonist, and Little did not like being laughed at for ineptness. The counselor's resentment was doubly charged; for he had bored into Root as a special favor to a friend, Jones, a wealthy and aged Raceford grocer. The merchant, a longtime romantically inclined boarder at Mrs. Buxton's, felt Root was tough competition. Perhaps Root's humiliation at the trial might even matters up, Jones hoped.

First reprisal was the appearance of a federal revenue agent looking for Root. A half dozen ill-spaced days were wasted while the Pinkerton had to disappear into the nearby pineland. Root had no doubt that it was Little and Jones who had tipped off the customs man.

He chided himself for having dramatized his illegal past too convincingly. Impossible now, Root decided, to call off the masquerade without risking the chance that the Grooms would learn about his mission.

The problem was solved in vigorous fashion one night. The Pinkerton pushed a revolver muzzle under the law's trembling chin and the chase ended abruptly. Uncle Sam's boys don't scare so easily anymore, but this was the 1870's.

Root hurried back to the world of the Grooms. He was welcomed like a hero, and several evenings were spent celebrating the rout of the forces of law and order. Dividends for the detective were not long in coming.

## Death in the Sawmill

On a fishing trip, Little Bill explained the fine art of diverting logs from Freesboro's mill to one of the gang's. Soon after Big Bill played host on a duck hunt where he demonstrated how easily raft chains could be appropriated. And Jasper was all sympathy as the wheezing giant lamented the passing of the great days when real money was to be made in lumber.

"Bill, how about now? The West's buildin' up. Homesteaders and soldiers—folks who need lots of lumber."

"Right, Jasper my boy. But there ain't much for the little fellow. Now I

know a lot of big money men who . . . Well, that's another story."

Big Bill's eyes glowed as he went on to recount the great days. How the hijackers paid off uncooperative mills by "loading" the logs. The gang would enter the lumber storeroom by night, bring forward a medium-size log, then with a wooden mallet to avoid noise, hammer it full of steel files. The "loaded" log would then be pushed up to the mill chute.

"Ah, Jasper, there's nothing like watching a pine load kissed by a high speed saw." Root couldn't altogether hide his nausea. "C'rrect, my boy. 'Taint a pretty sight, and it's the fault of the owner when the millhands get killed. Costs him a heck more to close down and get new saws, 'stead o' makin' a deal." Big Bill grinned through tobacco-stained teeth. "Y'know, Jasper, ain't been a loaded log over to Slayton's mill in more 'n a year. Bad to get outa practice!"

### The Plot Quickens

Perhaps if Jasper Root hadn't been so queasy at the matter-of-fact description of the effect of loaded logs on human flesh, he wouldn't have had to ease his jitters with a prolonged stay at the saloon. Hence he wouldn't have seen that the back room of Grocer Jones' store was lit, a most extraordinary event for the penny-pinching oldster. As a result, Root was able to eavesdrop on a conference between Lawyer Little and the merchant that concerned his future, a \$10,000 insurance policy, and surprisingly, Little Bill Groom.

The Pinkerton stood rigid and alert below the open window. "What was young Groom doing with those two?" he pondered. A hunting cat scurried between his feet and the startled Root stumbled against the wall. Bad luck! He heard Lawyer Little cry out and come toward the window. Root made tracks, vexed that once again he would have to divert valuable time to stave off whatever the lawyer and the grocer might have in store for him. The unknown part Little Bill was to play in their machinations disturbed Root. Maybe Jo, or Big Bill might have a clew.

The Pinkerton found the handsome Groom in an affable mood, which became more expansive as the bottle con-

tents diminished. Jo brushed aside palaver about Little Bill.

"What's the matter with me, Jasper? I've done a lot more than the little runt." And he began a long recital of the most intimate details of stealing and marketing lumber. But the Pinkerton noted that Jo was careful to omit both names and dates, the only kind of evidence a jury would accept. Why was he being so cagey?

### A Little Arson

Well, he himself hadn't been too confiding, the detective reasoned. Set a thief to catch a thief. That was the ticket! There was that mythical lake boat Root owned, and used in his recent smuggling operations. How would Jo Groom like a piece? A ship could be mighty handy for any future jobs, wouldn't it?

Jo's handsome eyes gleamed with desire. "That's a mighty generous offer, Jasper. You know, I always said there was money to be made in shipping." He smiled in remembrance. "Just two years ago, a landlubber like me, with two pals, ran a raft of logs into a friendly store-room."

The Pinkerton's offer seemed really to excite the lumber hijacker's maritime fancy. "Jasper, why couldn't a steam tug just mosey along the Lotus river docksides and take away all those stacks of finished board just setting there?" Root whistled admiringly.

"Jo, you ought to be working the other end, down in St. Louis. You're too big for these Wisconsin backwoods!"

Groom stared at the detective with a mixture of shrewdness and joviality. "Now what's all this about Cousin Bill?"

Root knew that a curtain was being carefully drawn. The youngster, Jo insisted, was more misunderstood than mischievous. The runty incorrigible had rarely been asked to join the brothers in their labors. And the reason would make Jasper roar with laughter!

Little Bill suffered from cat-fear! Felines turned him into a gibbering idiot. More often, it sent the lad berserk with a double-bitted ax against every cat he met in the stumpy streets of Raceford. Hardly a suitable helper for Jones and Little, if they really were planning mischief against him, the detective decided.



He was vastly mistaken. And the mischief came with startling climax. One evening soon after, Jones' store was discovered burning furiously. As in every logging center, all able-bodied men were on tap as fire-fighters. Jasper Root was among the last of the volunteers to doff his helmet. He found himself greeted by Raceford's sheriff.

"Mr. Root, I'm mighty sorry, but you're under arrest for trying to burn down Jones' store. Folks say you've been sparkin' the old boy's gal. And Little Bill Groom saw you start the blaze."

Once again the unsavory reputation Root had devised proved disastrous. At the words of the sheriff, a group of muscular Raceford citizens moved on him in the best spirit of Judge Lynch. Root went quickly with the law. This was no time to shout frame up.

Allan Pinkerton in Chicago got the bad news fast. His well-oiled organization moved even faster. First, a so-called cousin, an operative named Gross, was rushed to the town to bail out Root.

The two detectives went into a huddle, and decided that the Groom brothers would substantiate an alibi, if the arson trial occurred. Gross was assigned to shadow Little Bill. Within twenty-four hours, he had trailed the dwarf to Lawyer Little's office. By an astonishing coincidence, the latter was situated on the other side of a thin partition from Judge Simmons' private chambers.

The good judge was a friend indeed, Gross soon learned. For years he had detested Little and his arrogance; and he had immensely enjoyed Root's courtroom duel. In the interests of law and order, the judge would be delighted to join Gross in listening to the dialogue coming through the partition. Judge Simmons heard plenty!

By nightfall Raceford's startled citizenry learned of the arrest of Jones, Little, and the cat-fearing half-pint. The charge: conspiracy to defraud the fire insurance companies of \$10,000. Little Bill was named as the actual firebrand.

The hearing in the court had some amusing aspects. First, Judge Simmons presided, having decided the drama was too engaging to disqualify himself. Little Bill sat proudly in the witness chair: here was one time that his cousins couldn't outshine him.

Detective Gross testified that he had seen and heard through a knothole,

Little Bill being briefed again and again by Lawyer Little. Every word of testimony by the prosecution was perjury.

### Little Bill Talks

The grocer and the barrister looked scornful, then turned pale. For in response to a beckoning finger, Little Bill had marched over to his cousins who whispered long, and made vigorous gestures.

"Your Honor," the dwarfish Groom clamored, "kin I talk some more?" Judge Simmons waved him back to the stand. He told his story quickly, corroborating Gross. Little Bill had been hired to do arson. But a stray cat had come along, and he had dropped everything to chase it! It was Grocer Jones himself who had started the blaze! The charge against Root was dropped.

In Chicago, Pinkerton decided that Root was now too well known to carry out the assignment alone. A larger strategy was needed, and additional manpower. Root was ordered to string along with the Groom boys. A second agent, Grover, was to find work at one of the suspect mills near Raceford, keeping tabs on illicit logs and brand marks.

Wescott, another operative, was ordered to open a saloon with "a small rear room for eavesdropping." It was a highly successful Pinkerton device that had trapped many an evildoer in previous cases. Within a few weeks the bar-room became the favorite habitat not only of the Groom boys, but of Slayton, and other lumber officials.

Action came quickly!

Jo Groom had learned from his lady friend, Mrs. Slayton, that the Freesboro mill strongbox now contained \$8000, the winter's payroll. A breath-taking haul. Would friend Jasper lend a hand?

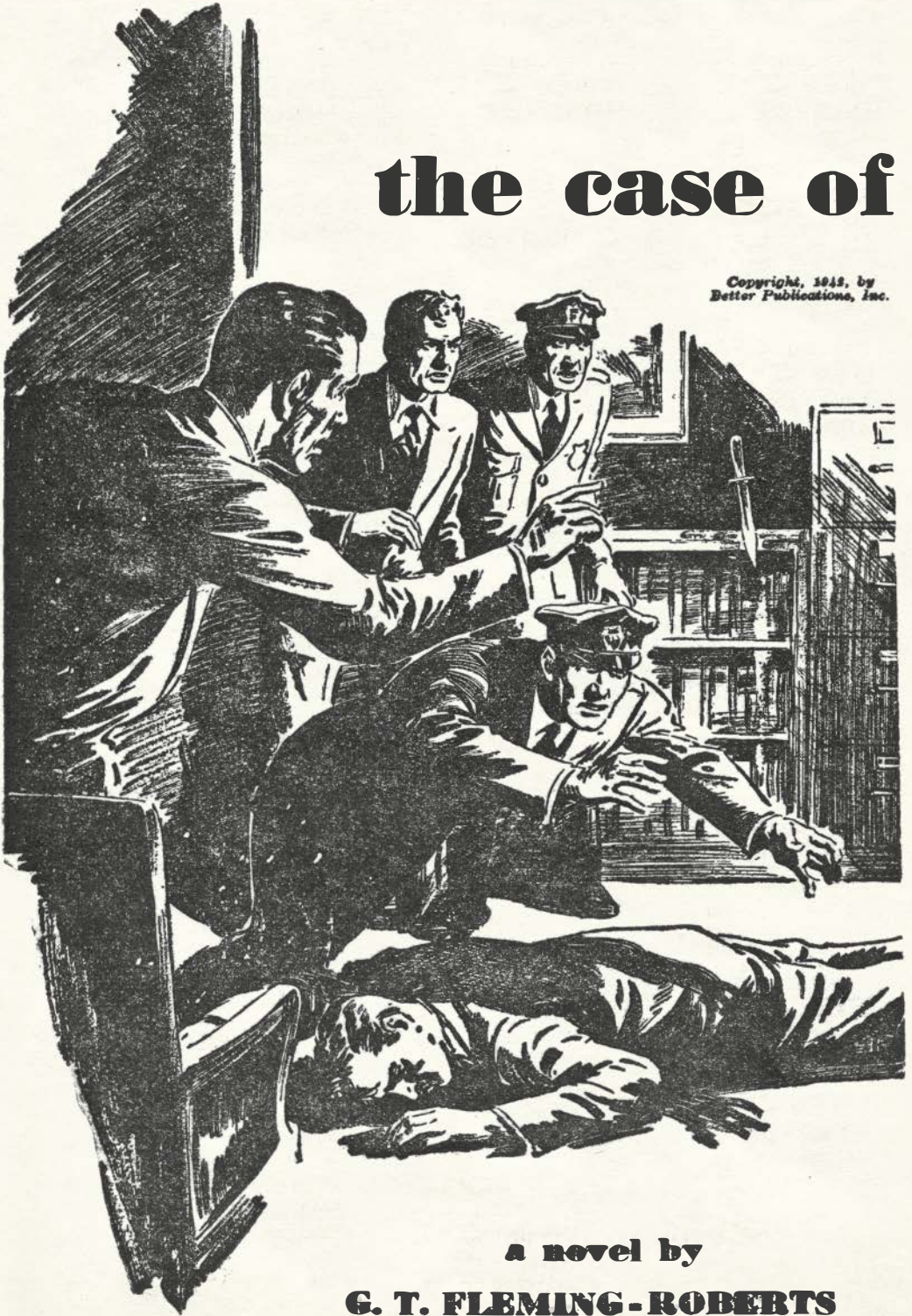
Allan Pinkerton pondered how far he should let Root go. Finally came the order to string along with Jo. Meantime, Slayton, Freesboro's mill boss, was briefed on developments, and introduced to the Pinkertons assigned.

The rest of the adventure of BOOMING LOGS is soon told. Jo Groom was caught red-handed, of course. He was grilled too, with such effectiveness that in exchange for a lesser charge, he rattled off names, dates, and quantities. It resulted in the arrest and conviction of

*(Concluded on page 113)*

# the case of

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**a novel by**

**G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS**

*The Green Ghost Detective pits his magic against that of a mysterious killer who can vanish into thin air!*

# the ASTRAL

# ASSASSIN



The knife had lifted thirty inches above the corpse and was moving across the room

I

**M**R. MONTY FOLKSTONE entered the office of the New York Police Commissioner with all the serenity of a cyclone passing through a Kansas farmhouse. He flattened Commissioner Standish's secretary who had protested his entrance. He slammed the door after him with such fury that some of the papers on the desk were fanned to the floor. He ignored the thin blond man who was sitting in the visitor's chair beside Standish's desk, crossed to the commissioner himself, his cigar puffing like a locomotive under full steam.

"Look here"—his voice had the musical qualities of a fog-horn—"do you realize I've been waiting to see you for half an hour?"

Edward Standish leaned back in his chair. His close-set gray eyes coolly surveyed Monty Folkstone—a short dark man somewhere in his fifties and carrying his years as lightly as he did his hat. Folkstone was a man of money.

Standish swiveled around to his lean blond visitor of the past thirty minutes. "We can count on an hour show from you for the Police Benefit Party then, George?"

"An hour or more, Ned. As long as the audience can take it I'll dish it out. I think I'll run along now since this gentleman's time seems to be a lot more valuable than mine."

Monty Folkstone was not in the least abashed. He sat down promptly in the seat vacated by George Chance.

"Benefit parties!" he snorted. "Time is money. And the money you're spend-

## George Chance, Conjuror and Sleuth, Fights

ing over such trivialities happens to be the taxpayers'."

Commissioner Standish continued to ignore Monty Folkstone. "No need to run off, George," he said.

The blond man paused. Mr. Folkstone had by this time reached a point where either he would blow up completely or gradually deflate. Commissioner Standish was well-known for his ability to put a man in his place with a glance. As it was the storm blew over and Mr. Folkstone had the grace to apologize for his outburst.

"My nerves," he explained. "I'm at my wits' end."

"I don't doubt it," Standish said. "You're Mr. Folkstone, aren't you? I recognize your voice from our conversation over the phone. You're troubled with—er—voices, I think you said. I recommended that you see a doctor, rather than the police."

**G**EORGE CHANCE came away from the door, sat down in a chair placed against the wall.

"No, I don't want a doctor," Mr. Folkstone was saying. "That's what Peter Creighton is doing—going to a doctor of psychology. He's also hired a private detective."

Standish's bushy brows bunched. "Does this Peter Creighton hear voices, too?"

"He does," Folkstone said. "Furthermore, he never sits down in his chair in the living room without first sifting flour all over the carpet. That is to catch Blackfore's footprints."

George Chance nodded gravely. "One of the more primitive methods of catching a ghost," he observed.

"Who is Blackfore?" Standish asked.

"I'll lay my cards on the table as soon as we are alone," Folkstone said, glancing at Chance.

"On the contrary," the commissioner said, "I'm inclined to believe that Mr. Chance can be of more help to you than I can. This is Mr. George Chance, the magician. Perhaps you've heard of him."

Folkstone nodded. "Seen him on the stage before he retired. And I don't think he can help me."

The magician said, smiling, "You've been consulting some spirit medium, no doubt, Mr. Folkstone?"

"I have not," Folkstone replied harshly.

"Mr. Chance can keep a secret better than anyone I know, if that's what is worrying you," Standish said.

Mr. Folkstone considered the lean magician for a few moments. "Hang it!" he said. "I'll talk, and heaven help both of you if this gets out. There are five of us all in the same boat—myself, Peter Creighton, Kenneth Deene, David Hurley and Charles Polk."

"All friends of yours?" Standish asked.

"We are scarcely more than acquaintances," Folkstone snapped. "No, we're not friends. We're victims of the same man—Herman Blackfore."

"A scientist, I believe?" Chance asked. "I've seen his name mentioned in the papers in conjunction with some developments in radio remote control or something of the sort."

"A genius," Folkstone said. "An unscrupulous genius. A thin dark man with a nose like a hawk's beak. I hate him, but I'd rather hate him while seeing him than know he's around without being able to see him."

Chance and the commissioner exchanged glances.

"He's dead then?" the magician asked Folkstone.

"He's not dead," Folkstone snapped. "And I don't believe in spirits. But I'm getting ahead of myself. David Hurley, Kenneth Deene, Charles Polk, Peter Creighton and I all invested money in Blackfore's most recent invention. I put fifty thousand dollars into the scheme myself and the others have spent more. That was over a month ago. A short while ago, Blackfore disappeared. Our money vanished with him."

"Why weren't the police notified at once?" Standish asked.

"Because we agreed to keep quiet about it," Folkstone replied. "We stand to make a great deal of money if we can find Blackfore and recover this invention which we were financing. The machine is of inestimable value. Suppose Blackfore and his ray were to fall into the hand of some persons unfriendly to our country?"

Standish smiled briefly. "Don't tell me this Blackfore has invented a death ray?"

## to Still the Voice of an Invisible Menace!

"Something more effective and less fictional than that," Folkstone snapped.

While Folkstone was speaking George Chance had taken a fifty-cent piece from his pocket. He toyed with it and in his long fingers the coin seemed endowed with life. Folkstone paused in his narrative, fascinated by the magician's rapid passes.

"No," he continued, "it's not a death ray. It's an invisible ray. As Blackfore explained it to us laymen, it's something



GEORGE CHANCE

like an X-ray in operation. But Blackfore's ray goes a good deal further than the X-ray. It can render the human body so completely transparent as to become invisible."

Commissioner Standish snorted. "Why not just admit you've been taken in nicely by a fraud, Mr. Folkstone?"

"Blast it all!" Folkstone exploded. "I wasn't born yesterday. I've seen the ray demonstrated in Blackfore's own laboratory! Blackfore simply stood in front of the contraption and slowly but surely faded into thin air. He walked among us unseen, moved objects in the room, talked to us. To cut it short, Blackfore vanished as I said. He vanished with our money. But actually he isn't gone. He's here in New York. He has been in my house, though I have not seen him. He has spoken to me. And guess what he wants?"

Chance tossed the coin, caught it, closed his fist over it. When he opened his hand the coin had become a cigarette which he lighted. Mr. Folkstone was annoyed.

"I wish you wouldn't do things like that, Mr. Chance. Makes me nervous."

"Sorry," Chance said. "What does Mr. Blackfore want?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," Folkstone said. "My money or my life."

COMMISSIONER STANDISH smoothed his black square mustache. "A little plain and fancy extor-

tion, I would say. But this invisible man business is a little hard to swallow."

Folkstone stood up, leaned across the desk. "You think I'm mad, don't you? What about Peter Creighton who sifts flour on his carpets and hires a private detective? I suppose he's a crackpot, too. Well, put this in your pipe and smoke it, Commissioner! Blackfore won't stop with the five of us who are convinced of the success of his invisible ray. When he's murdered us or milked us dry he'll give New York the greatest one-man crime wave it has ever known." Monty Folkstone slammed his hat on his head, turned on his heel, and left the office.

The commissioner turned to George Chance. "Well?"

Chance shrugged. "They laughed at Edison. Maybe we shouldn't laugh at Blackfore."

Standish snorted. "But say, you could see Edison!"

"Maybe you could see Blackfore if your eyes were sharp enough."

"Think the eyes of the Green Ghost are sharp enough?" Standish asked, smiling. He was one of the few persons who shared the vital secret that Magician George Chance and that famous crime fighter known as the Green Ghost were one and the same person.

"He could have a try at it, anyway," Chance said.

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than a clear voice spoke, seemingly from that portion of thin air to the right of the commissioner's desk.

"Ha-ha-ha, you can't catch me, but I'm right here as you can't see!"

Standish spun around in his chair and goggled at nothingness. He opened his mouth, gulped. Then he looked at the magician, and broke out laughing.

"As a ventriloquist, you're tops," he said. "Go on—get out of here with your tricks."

"Well," Chance said soberly, "if you're quite sure that was one of my tricks, I will."

## II

AT dusk George Chance entered his brownstone house on East Fifty-fourth Street and went directly to the basement. There was the little shop where many of his clever tricks and illusions

first took shape. A man worked at a bench, painting a Chinese production cabinet, his head wreathed in clouds of pipe smoke. He turned as Chance entered.

Only a few trusted friends were ever permitted to see George Chance and his assistant, Glenn Saunders together. They were identical doubles—the same height and build, the same wavy red-gold hair, the same high cheek-bones, the same deeply-set eyes. Years ago Chance had discovered Saunders sitting on a bench in Central Park and had been struck by the similarity of their appearance. He had approached Glenn Saunders with the idea of becoming his double and since Saunders was down and out he had promptly agreed. Plastic surgery had augmented the general likeness between the two men.

On the stage, when Chance had traveled with his own magical revue, the double had been extremely valuable in certain illusions. But since the famous magician had become interested in crime detection, Saunders' worth to him had tripled. Without Glenn Saunders the Green Ghost could never have been brought into existence.

In Glenn Saunders, the Green Ghost had a perfect alibi. For whenever the law required the services of the Ghost, Saunders could literally step into Chance's shoes. Saunders knew magic too. That now worked to the advantage of both men. For since the Green Ghost employed magic in his terror tactics against criminals it would have been no great guess for someone to conclude that the Green Ghost and Chance were one—except for Glenn Saunders.

George Chance said to his double, "I've got to haunt a man, Glenn—a man nobody can see if Mr. Monty Folkstone can be believed."

Glenn Saunders smiled. His voice, when he spoke, was like a recording of the famous magician's voice. "The Green Ghost is at it again, uh?"

"Somebody's putting unholy pressure on a group of wealthy men," Chance explained. "A voice speaks out of thin air, saying, 'Your money or your life.' A clever inventor has vanished. Sounds like a recipe for excitement, doesn't it?"

"A shade too exciting for me," Saunders said. "But every man to his own. I'll go upstairs, put on a suit of your clothes and become Mr. George Chance."

As soon as Saunders had left Chance went into a little dressing room which he kept under lock and key. It was make-up that he needed now. Under his skillful fingers the Green Ghost was born again.

Ovals of wire inserted in his nostrils elongated them and tilted the tip of his nose. Brown eye-shadow deepened the pits of his eyes and emphasized the hollows of his cheeks. He covered his own gleaming teeth with shell teeth of yellow celluloid. His ghostly pallor came from a powder box.

**N**EXT he changed to a suit of dead black material that had certain amazing properties. Not only was the suit reversible, but the snapped-in lining contained many secret pockets holding an assortment of tricks that had proved their worth against the thundering guns of the underworld. A black crushed hat pulled over his eyes and the Ghost could have passed unnoticed in a crowd. His make-up was simplicity in itself—and yet how tricky!

As he had frequently remarked to Standish, the Green Ghost was two-faced. He could be an obscure person with nothing to distinguish him—or he could instantly change into the laughing death's head which had brought terror to the underworld.

This change he accomplished through masterly control of facial muscles alone. His lips would peel back from the yellow shell teeth in a veritable skull's grin. A vacant deadpan stare would come into his hollow eyes. As a final gruesome touch, he could illuminate his skull-like face by means of a tiny green lamp bulb cleverly mounted in the scarf pin he wore that was connected to a flashlight battery in his pocket. Criminals who once saw that ghastly face, surrounded by an aura of green light, never forgot it.

Leaving the dressing room, the Green Ghost discovered Joe Harper looking over the stock of magical supplies that burdened the shelves against the wall. Harper was as much of a fixture in the Chance household as the plumbing. He had once found the magician's guest room a swell place to get over a hang-over, had liked it so well that he had forgotten to go away.

Harper was a bum, a gambler and an arch chiseler who knew Manhattan from

top to bottom—with particular emphasis on the bottom. He was a wolfish man with eyes that gleamed like a black beetle's from beneath the brim of a sickeningly green hat. His taste in dress ran to wild checks, gaudy ties and shirts that screamed.

He stood looking at the Green Ghost, a cigarette dangling from his thin lips. "I came down here looking for some dice you could talk to," he said in a nasal tone, "and saw the light under the door of your holy of holies. I figured you had something on the stove."

The Ghost looked at Joe Harper and shuddered. "Your presence didn't surprise me either," he said. "I heard your suit. I've got a job for you and Tiny Tim Terry."

"Listen," Harper said, "not me and that midget. There isn't any job which Tim and I could do which I couldn't handle better alone."

"Well, if you want to put on short pants and trade your cigarette for a lollipop you can have the job alone. Otherwise, we'd better ring in Tim."

"Okay. We'll deal Tim in. What's my part in the act?"

"I want you to lay your sap affectionately behind the ear of a certain private detective who is acting as bodyguard for a man by the name of Peter Creighton."

"With pleasure," Harper said. "Who's this peeper you want conked?"

THAT night Peter Creighton sat in his living room and trembled. He was built somewhat along the lines of Casper Milquetoast and some of his acquaintances entertained the belief that this resemblance to the Timid Soul was more than just a physical one. Like Monty Folkstone, he also had heard the voice of doom speaking from thin air. And like Folkstone he had come to the conclusion that his unseen tormenter was Herman Blackfore, the inventor of the invisible ray machine in which Peter Creighton had invested money.

The voice had demanded money—much money, even in the eyes of Creighton who had been quite fortunate in his business dealings. Three times the Unseen had demanded, "Your money or your life," and yet Peter Creighton had not raised a finger to obtain the money. That was because he was not quite sure of his own senses.

Dr. Leonard, a psychologist who had

introduced himself to Creighton, was inclined to believe that Creighton suffered from a persecution complex. Nevertheless Creighton had hired Steve Parkinson, a private detective, as a bodyguard. And then there was the moat of flour that he had been sprinkling around his chair.

The doorbell rang and Creighton bounced in his chair as though somebody had pricked him with a pin. He looked toward Parkinson, who was on guard in the hall.

"See who it is," he ordered. "And don't let anybody in. Especially, don't let Nobody in."

Parkinson did not grasp the full meaning of the double negative. He flicked on the porch light and opened the door. Outside was a chubby little boy in knee trousers, a lollipop in his mouth, a huge stack of magazines under his arm.

"Hi, Mister," the boy piped. "How about buying a few magazines, huh? Got a mag here with the prettiest gals in it."

"Now, sonny," Parkinson chuckled, "ain't you a little too young to know about such things?"

"Sonny" nearly gagged on his lollipop. In spite of his knee pants the kid with the magazines was middle-aged. He was Tiny Tim Terry, formerly of the circus and one of George Chance's oldest friends. Though "kiddy roles" annoyed Tiny Tim he managed to hang on to his temper and carry out the Green Ghost's instructions.

He had been told to drop the whole stack of magazines on the Creighton front porch.

There was a breeze and the magazines scattered. Steve Parkinson took pity on the little magazine merchant and left the front door open long enough to help Tim recover his books. That was when a somber figure, which had been lurking in the shadows beside the porch, vaulted the railing and passed quickly and silently through the front door, unseen by Parkinson.

When Parkinson had finally piled the magazines into Tim's arms and returned to the door he found that it was closed. Furthermore, the night-latch seemed to be on.

That figure in black which had entered the Creighton house was none other than the Green Ghost.

## III

**P**ARKINSON did not have a key, so as Tim left the porch he started around the side of the house to see if he could get in the back door.

In the dark along the side of the house a second dusky figure waited. This second figure landed a sap directly behind Parkinson's ear. The technique was distinctly that of Joe Harper!

Inside the house the Ghost, a living shadow, moved soundlessly toward the door of the living room until he reached a point where he could see Creighton without being seen. He noticed the broad belt of flour which surrounded Creighton's chair and watched the nervous twichtings of Creighton's fingers.

"Parkinson!" Creighton called. "Are you there?"

Since he had heard Parkinson talking to Tim, the Ghost knew pretty well how the detective's voice had sounded. His impersonation was perfection.

"Yes, Mr. Creighton. It was just some kid selling magazines at the door."

"Well," Creighton said, "telephone for a cab for me. I have an appointment with Dr. Leonard for nine o'clock tonight. You're going with me."

"Okay," the Ghost replied.

He did not, however, immediately call a cab for Creighton. Instead, he went out the back door and to the garage at the rear of the yard. Tiny Tim Terry and Joe Harper were there, with the unconscious Steve Parkinson. The midget was sitting on Parkinson's chest.

"I could have handled this big palooka myself," he complained.

"Sure!" Joe Harper sneered. "You couldn't have reached any higher than the back of his lap. How'd you expect to sock him on top of the head?"

"Who socked him doesn't make much difference," the Ghost said, as he took out his pocket make-up kit. "The point is, will he stay socked while I impersonate him?"

"I'll renew the treatment any time he shows signs of insomnia," Harper insisted.

Using the unconscious original on the floor as a model, the Ghost's fingers hurriedly achieved a remarkable likeness of Parkinson's coarse features. Harper and the midget watched in awed silence.

"And now what?" Tim asked.

"You two just sit tight. I'll meet you

two and Merry White before morning at the usual place."

The Ghost returned to the Creighton house and there phoned for a taxi. Then he went to the door of the living room to test out his disguise under Creighton's critical gaze.

"What took you so long?" Creighton whined.

"The line was busy," the Ghost said.

"The cab will be here any minute now."

"Then I'd better get my coat."

When Creighton and the Ghost got into the cab Creighton carefully patted every vacant spot on the seat cushions.

"At least he isn't riding with us!" he said.

The taxi stopped in front of an office building on east Forty-fourth Street just off Fifth Avenue. Creighton nudged the Ghost.

"You get out first, Parkinson. What do you suppose I've got you here for, eh?"

The Ghost got out, then helped Creighton to alight. Creighton suddenly grasped the Ghost's arm with fingers that were terror-taut.

"What's that sound?"

Creighton's frightened eyes searched frantically. The Ghost looked over his shoulder and saw "Legs" Maloney, a familiar figure on the streets in the Grand Central district. Maloney's nickname was sheer irony because his legs had been amputated well above the knee. For locomotion, he depended upon a small wooden platform on rollers. Strapped to this, he propelled himself along the sidewalk by means of two short rubber-tipped staffs. Maloney was a vender of various items—pencils, shoelaces, candy bars.

"Pencils—c a n d y , gentlemen?" he asked in a shrill, quivering voice.

**C**REIGHTON paused, dipped into his pocket and took out a fifty-cent piece which he handed to Legs Maloney.

"Here," he said. "It's all profit. I never use pencils—prefer a pen."

Creighton grasped the Ghost's arm and together they hurried into the building. They found Dr. Leonard seated in the reception room of his office on the twelfth floor. His heavy growth of black beard, his shaggy hair had not been touched by a comb in a long time, apparently. But there his unkempt appearance ended. His tall, stooped figure was



clad in a well-tailored suit and his shoes were brightly polished.

"Feeling any better?" the doctor asked in a soft voice.

"No," Creighton complained. "In fact, I'm a bit more nervous."

"Nervousness is a state of mind," Leonard assured him. "I can help and advise you but a complete cure depends upon yourself. You are a man of intelligence. Surely you do not believe in the impossible?"

"I try," Creighton said. "But then, it's not impossible. Maybe the voices I've been hearing have been imagination. But somebody, seen or unseen, is after me. And I can prove it!"

"Hush," Leonard said. "You must not permit yourself to speak in this way. You are only contributing to your illness." Dr. Leonard continued to talk in a soothing, almost hypnotic voice. But after about half an hour of this monologue Creighton snapped to his feet.

"Stop it, stop it!" he demanded. "Isn't there somewhere we can go where I can be certain I won't be overheard? I am going to prove my point to you.

The doctor indicated his private office. Creighton grasped the Ghost's arm and shoved him forward.

"You first, Parkinson. What do you think I am paying you for?"

The consultation room contained a glass-topped desk, four chairs, a large steel filing cabinet placed against the wall in which the connecting door was situated. There was a second door which evidently opened on the hall but this was closed.

"Now, Mr. Creighton," Leonard said, "I shall proceed to prove that all this is in your mind."

"Is that so?" Creighton said. "How does it happen that I got a note in the mail this morning, demanding the sum of one hundred thousand dollars or I will forfeit my life?"

"A note?" Leonard said.

"Yes, a note. And the United States mail is not a state of mind, Dr. Leonard," Creighton said hotly. "The note referred to the repeated warnings which I have had from the voice, and said that this is my last chance. What can anyone do against a man you cannot see?"

"Please!" Dr. Leonard said. "There is no such thing as a man you cannot see. Have you the note with you?"

Creighton shook his head.

"I forgot to bring it."

Head to one side, Dr. Leonard eyed Creighton suspiciously.

"Wait a minute," the Ghost chimed in. "Can I ask a question? Have you heard this spook voice since I've been with you, Mr. Creighton?"

Creighton shook his head. "No. But that isn't any sign there isn't a voice that—" Creighton stopped.

Out of nowhere, from within the very room in which they were standing, came a hollow voice. "Hello, Creighton," it said. "Have you brought me the money?"

"He'll pay you," the Ghost said suddenly. "You've got to give him a little more time."

"You keep out of this, Mr. Wise Guy," replied the voice.

The direct answer to the Ghost's statement immediately precluded the idea of a concealed phonograph device.

"It's somebody in the reception room!" Dr. Leonard exclaimed and made a bound for the door.

#### IV

**T**HE Ghost was right on the doctor's heels. Leonard's lunge carried him to the middle of the reception room.

"It—he's not here!" Leonard exclaimed.

The only possible place of concealment was the high-backed sofa on the hall side of the room. The Ghost was on the point of moving it out from the wall when he was interrupted by the sound of some heavy object falling to the floor. He sprang back into the consultation room, pulling his gun as he ran. Creighton was on the floor—and a knife was protruding from between his shoulder blades. The Ghost sprang across the room to the hall door. It was locked, the key in place on the inside.

He returned to Creighton, who lay flat on his stomach, his head twisted to one side. With a handkerchief over his fingers the Ghost loosened the knife in the wound directly over Creighton's heart. Creighton was dying, his lips moving feebly.

"Get him!" Creighton gasped. "Get—Blackfore. He's right here—"

And that was Creighton's last breath. The Green Ghost straightened.

Three men stepped into Dr. Leonard's reception room—two uniformed police

and one private detective, whose name was Steve Parkinson. Something had gone haywire back in the Creighton garage.

Dr. Leonard turned to look at the men who had entered. He swallowed lumpily at the first glimpse of Parkinson, then glanced back at the Ghost. He uttered a most unscholarly grunt.

Parkinson had evidently known of Creighton's intended visit to Dr. Leonard. On regaining consciousness and escaping from Joe and Tim—however he had managed that—he had discovered Creighton gone. His first natural move had been to locate his charge.

The Green Ghost took advantage of this moment of surprise by making a couple of fast moves. His left hand rested for a moment high against the frame of the connecting door. Then he backed, stooped over the corpse of Creighton, his left hand describing a circular motion around the knife. He backed away from the body.

Parkinson came across the reception room and the Ghost saw that the private detective's arms were held by the two bluecoats.

One of them said to Dr. Leonard, "We found this guy trying to get into the front door of the building, Doc. He said you would identify him, but he claims somebody swiped his papers."

It was the Ghost who had taken Parkinson's papers. There was a chance now further to complicate the situation and stall for time by saying that the real Parkinson was an impersonator and that he, the Ghost, was the real Parkinson. But he doubted if he could run such a bluff for any length of time.

**H**ARDLY had Parkinson and the two police officers laid eyes on the corpse on the floor than a voice spoke, seemingly out of mid-air.

"You cops can't stop a man you can't see, can you?"

The two policemen stiffened and exchanged glances.

"That's it!" Parkinson blurted. "That's what Mr. Creighton was always babbling about—voices talking out of thin air!"

"Get out of the way will you?" the voice of the unseen said. "I want to go home."

Dr. Leonard hurriedly stepped away from the door.

"The—the invisible murderer!"

"The what?" one of the bluecoats asked.

Parkinson pointed to the Green Ghost who was standing with arms folded at the back of the room. "If you ask me, he's got something to do with this. He knocked me out, impersonated me—"

"Will you get out of my way?" That was the voice again. And then the knife which protruded from the back of dead Mr. Creighton was lifted into the air by an unseen hand.

"Good lord!" The Green Ghost pointed at the knife with his right hand. "He's recovering his weapon. Look out!"

The knife had now lifted to thirty inches above the corpse and was moving across the room, point down. One of the policemen began to get ideas. He launched himself in a flying tackle which would have caught the invisible killer around the knees—if there had been any knees to catch. The net result of his heroic move was that he slid all the way across the floor on his stomach.

The floating knife clattered to the floor. Parkinson and the second policeman waded into the attack against the man they couldn't see.

The Ghost did not wait to count how many times Parkinson and the bluecoat kicked each other. The way to the connecting door was clear except for Dr. Leonard, who was no great obstacle. The Ghost was out in the reception room before anybody in the consultation room knew about it. Entering the reception room door from the hall was a short fat man with a nearly bald head. He was carrying a large steel transfer file and apparently had just looked in to see what all the noise was about.

"Stop him! somebody in the reception room yelled. "Stop the murderer!"

The fat man promptly heaved the transfer file at the Ghost, who back-stepped, hurdled the file and stiff-armed the fat man from the doorway. The Ghost gained the hall, knew that there would not be time to wait for an elevator. He headed for the stairs, reached them as bullets started popping from the door of Dr. Leonard's office.

The Ghost covered the first flight of steps in a leap and a couple of bounds. It was then that he got something of a break. Looking down the hall of the eleventh floor, he saw a man with a briefcase standing in front of the open

door of the elevator. The Ghost raced to the elevator, his automatic in his hand.

"Step back from the car!" he warned.

The Ghost sprang into the elevator, slammed the door, shoved the starting lever to the down position. Seconds later he was in the clear!

## V

**I**N short order a cab took the Ghost, still in the Parkinson disguise, to East Fifty-fifth Street. From there fifteen minutes of walking brought him within the shadows of an old church. Beside the church was a square brick building of indeterminate age, which had formerly been used as a rectory. Now the windows were boarded, the rooms deserted, except for the ghosts which were reputed to haunt the place.

George Chance was the owner of this old rectory. He did nothing to discourage its bad reputation. In the basement he had fixed up a comfortable apartment—the secret sanctuary of the Green Ghost.

He entered the place by the basement door. Joe Harper, Tiny Tim Terry and Merry White were waiting for him. He noticed immediately that Tim had a lump on his head and that Harper had a black eye. Only Merry White, who had once been the feminine interest in the George Chance Revue, was her own charming self. The lovely little brunette skipped across the room, threw both arms around the Ghost's neck and kissed him. Then she struggled out of his embrace, examined his disguised face.

"Who am I kissing?" she demanded. "Sometime the ice-man is coming through that door and I'm going to give him a good smooch like that, thinking he's my own darlin' in makeup."

Chance looked over the soft waves of Merry's dark hair and fixed Tim and Joe Harper with a cold stare.

"If I thought you were the real Parkinson," Harper said, "I'd bust you one on the kisser."

"What happened, George?" Tiny Tim shrilled.

The midget had changed from his knee pants to a smartly tailored business suit. Cigar tilted at a jaunty angle, he stood in front of Chance, his legs wide spread and his hands clasped behind him.

"You should ask what happened!" the

Ghost scoffed. "Where did you get that goose egg on your head?"

Tim flicked his cigar ash airily. "A mere scratch," he said. "That's where I hit Joe."

Chance frowned. "So the two of you got in a fight, and you let Parkinson get away."

"G.G., you do us a grave injustice," Joe Harper said. "Just like Tim said, the lump on Tim's head is where he hit me."

"And your black eyes is where you hit, Tim, I suppose."

"Parkinson hit me in the eye," Harper said. "Tim was sitting on Parkinson's chest when you left. Parkinson came to but he didn't announce his return to this life over any public address system. He just picked up Tim and threw him at me. After that—the fireworks."

Merry White laughed.

"But of course Parkinson wouldn't have caught you boys napping if you hadn't been indulging in a little sport to while away the time," Chance said. "African dominoes, huh?"

"We didn't have anything to do, so we did roll the dice a few times," Tim said. "Anyway, that's not important. Suppose we hear G.G.'s story."

Chance went over to the couch and pulled Merry White down beside him. "Tell us all about it, darlin'," she murmured.

"Peter Creighton has been murdered," the magician-detective said quietly. "He was murdered by person or persons unseen."

Rapidly, but omitting no detail, Chance told them all that had happened, including Standish's interview with Folkstone and also his adventure in the office of Dr. Leonard. When he had concluded, Joe Harper fixed his black beetle eyes steadily on the Ghost.

"I think I see the fine hand of George Chance in that last demonstration of the unseen menace in Leonard's office. What about the knife floating in the air?"

**C**HANCE laughed. "I didn't see any other way out of my difficulties, so I employed ventriloquism to get across the idea that the unseen killer was there among us. And I used a simple levitation trick to make it seem as though an unseen hand had picked up the knife from Creighton's corpse. I pinned one end of a strong silk thread to the upper part

of the frame of the connecting door. The thread was attached to my spring reel. I had previously loosened the knife in the wound.

"I stooped over the body long enough to loop the thread below the guard of the knife. Then I backed away and when I wanted the knife to rise I released the spring reel. Moving to one side or the other, the knife also moved."

"And that was the trick that brought down the house," Merry said, laughing.

"We can skip your trivial comments, Frail," Tiny Tim said. "What's the explanation of Creighton's death, G.G.? Suicide seems out of the question because it's just as hard to stick a knife in your back as it is to scratch a bite that's there."

Chance nodded. "And you go 'round and 'round from there," he said. "Discounting the invisible presence of this Blackfore, what's left?"

"You think Blackfore really has some sort of a ray that makes people invisible?" Joe Harper asked.

"At least Creighton and Folkstone believe that. They and three other men invested money in Blackfore's device. Now, apparently, they are all afraid that the invisible Blackfore is going to kill them unless they can buy immunity. After tonight they'll be sure of it."

"What about that guy lugging the transfer file who looked in Dr. Leonard's door?" Harper asked. "That was kind of a silly hour for anyone to be making a file clerk work."

"I thought of that," Chance said. "But I didn't have time to ask questions."

"Listen," Tim Terry said. "If the killer was invisible, what about the knife? How come you could see the knife?"

"All you've got is a further complication," Chance said. "But the knife is worth some special consideration. I've seen a lot of knives and handled a lot, but none quite like this one. It had an unusual guard on it—a perfectly flat disk of metal about as thick as a silver dollar. That disk guard would have ruined the balance of the knife for throwing."

"What about motive for Creighton's murder?" Merry asked.

"George said it was an extortion racket, Frail," Tim said disgustedly.

"But that's silly!" Merry said, her eyes dancing. "Why would an invisible man want money. Look—I am an invisible woman. I go into a store to buy a

dress. Who's going to wait on me?"

Merry looked up at Chance. "Did I say something awfully dumb, darlin'?"

"Not at all. What *would* an invisible person be doing, stooping to extortion to get money? All he would have to do would be to walk into a bank, go behind the teller's cage, pick up all he wanted."

"So what's the conclusion?"

"That there isn't any such thing as an invisible man," Chance said. "Blackfore isn't invisible."

Joe Harper laughed mirthlessly. "That's a fine piece of reasoning," he said. "That brings us right back to where we started. Nobody was in that room besides Creighton. The hall door was locked on the inside. Dr. Leonard was in the other room under G.G.'s eyes all the time. Heck, if there wasn't any invisible man in the room with Creighton, what's left?"

There was no answer to that.

## VI

ON the following day, George Chance spent a portion of his time at the Creighton house, which was now deserted. He searched the place from attic to cellar. In the afternoon, he went down to Police Headquarters, this time as red-haired Detective-Sergeant Hammill, a disguise which he frequently employed to gain immediate audience with Commissioner Standish.

The police, he discovered, were as much in the dark as he was concerning the murder of Peter Creighton.

Inspector John Magnus of the Homicide Bureau, who had never had any great love for that mysterious amateur investigator known as the Green Ghost, was inclined to share Private Detective Parkinson's view.

"It could have been one of the Ghost's tricks," Magnus argued. "I've seen that guy pick a knife out of thin air."

"Dr. Leonard's testimony sort of squelches Magnus' theory about the Green Ghost's guilt, though," Standish commented now to the Ghost. "Leonard said that Parkinson's impersonator was in the reception room with Leonard at the time of the kill."

The Ghost nodded. "And it would have been a little difficult for me, or for Leonard either, to have tossed a knife backward and around the corner of the

doorway and landed it in Creighton's heart."

"You say you looked over Creighton's house this morning?"

The Ghost nodded. "I thought perhaps I would find something that would explain the mysterious voices which Creighton claimed to have heard coming out of thin air. But no go. Somebody had taken a soap impression of the back door lock, though, proving that our invisible killer hasn't yet acquired the knack of passing through a solid door without opening it."

"What's the next move?" Standish asked.

The Ghost shook his head. "Don't know. I've got Joe, Merry and Tim keeping an eye on the others who invested in Blackfore's machine—Folkstone, Charles Polk, David Hurley and this Kenneth Deene. That means I've had to spread my little army pretty thin."

Shortly after dark, George Chance returned to his haunted rectory and resumed the make-up which marked him as the Green Ghost. A little later the telephone in the basement of the rectory rang. It was Joe Harper calling.

"Folkstone just left in a taxi, G.G.," Harper reported. "He's headed for Kenneth Deene's place on Amsterdam. I heard him give the address to the driver. Two hours before that, he got a message brought by a Western Union boy."

"I'll head for the Deene house myself and see what's cooking," the Ghost said.

Just as Chance was preparing to leave the phone rang a second time. It was Merry White.

"This funny little Charles Polk I'm supposed to be keeping an eye on—he got a telegraph message a while ago and now he's gone somewhere in a taxi. I tried to follow in another cab but didn't make it."

George Chance left the rectory wondering if Charles Polk's destination was the same as that of Monty Folkstone.

The Deene house turned out to be an aristocratic and thoroughly dismal pile of rock. A group of three cast-iron deer had neglected to crop the grass at their feet. Keeping well within the shadows, the Ghost walked around the house, looking for a means of entrance which would alarm no one in the house.

**H**E came finally to the back porch which was shaded by an iron trellis strong enough to support a net-

work of vines that climbed upon it. The lattice creaked a little under the weight of his body but seemed staunch enough. He gained the sheet-metal roof above, tiptoed to a window, found it an easy matter to lift the sash and soundlessly crept into the room.

Somebody's bedroom it was—a nice place for somebody's rich uncle to die in. The Ghost located the door, switched off his flashlight, crossed the room. Beyond the door was a square hall with the stairwell in the center. A railing of carved oak surrounded the stair-well. The Ghost tiptoed to the rail and looked down. There was light in a room below, into which he could see. Four men were seated stiffly on chairs that held little comfort.

Conversation was lagging badly. Monty Folkstone brought up the subject of Peter Creighton's death. A red-faced man said it was a terrible thing.

"Ghastly," said little Mr. Polk. A thin dark man nodded and remained silent.

Polk coughed nervously, took from the pocket of his coat a deck of cards which he cut and shuffled expertly by the forced dove-tail method. "Since we are all here, why not gather around the bridge table for a few hands?"

"I wouldn't mind," said the florid man. "How about it, Deene? Got a card table here?"

"Yes," the tall dark man said. "It hasn't been used for a while and I may have difficulty finding cards."

"We'll use my deck," Polk said, "if you gentlemen have no objection."

No objection was made. The magician-detective waited only long enough for the men to get seated at the card table, then went to the head of the stairs and quietly down. The landing at the half-way point was as large as a small room. From there he could see the four men around the card table.

Deene's back was toward him. The florid-faced man was Deene's partner. Polk was on Deene's left, Folkstone on his right. Two hands were played in strained silence. Everyone seemed preoccupied except Charles Polk, who frequently pointed out mistakes made by the others.

It was through one of Polk's remarks that George Chance was introduced to David Hurley. Hurley was the bluff man with the red face. They were all here, then—four of the five men who had in-

vested in Blackfore's scheme. And playing bridge.

At the beginning of the third hand, the deal passed to Kenneth Deene. The dark quiet-spoken host of this strange party had quite a time with the cards. He couldn't toss them where he wanted them.

"New deal," Charles Polk snapped. "You've misdealt and I've seen the faces of three cards, Deene."

"What's the difference?" Folkstone's harsh voice cut in. "Just a minute, gentlemen. I'm sure Deene didn't ask us here to play bridge. Out with it, Deene. Why did you ask us here?"

**D**EENE put down the remainder of the cards. "I did not invite you here. I never invite anyone here."

The three men stared at Deene. "You mean," Polk said, "you didn't send me this message by Western Union?"

He took a yellow piece of paper from his pocket. Deene scarcely glanced at it.

"I did not. As long as you're here, though, I may as well tell you that I foresaw Herman Blackfore's treachery. Though I did not have time to save my own investment I have saved something for us."

"What?" demanded Folkstone.

"The invisible ray machine," Deene said calmly. "I have it. I intend that you men shall have it after I have employed it for my own purposes."

"And just what are your purposes?" demanded Hurley.

"To beat Blackfore at his own game," Deene continued coolly.

Folkstone leaned across the table. "You've heard his voice?"

The Ghost saw Deene's dark head nod. "He's trying to work something unique in the way of extortion," Deene said. "I think that's why Creighton was killed—because he wouldn't pay Blackfore his price."

"I know that was it!" Folkstone roared. "Blackfore has been after money from me, too!"

"And from me," Charles Polk whispered. "I've heard his voice, too."

"So have I," David Hurley said.

"And perhaps you have received a few notes such as this one," Deene said.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a folded sheet of paper which he handed to Polk. Polk opened it with trembling fingers and read aloud:

"This is to assure you that the little man who wasn't there is here. You will have the sum of one hundred thousand dollars in cash ready for me Thursday night—or pay me in blood."

"Say," Hurley said, "this is Thursday. Have you raised the money, Deene?"

"No," Deene said, "I don't believe I could raise that amount even if I were to sell this house. There's only one way out for me."

"What's that?" Folkstone demanded.

Deene shrugged. "If I were to turn the invisible ray upon myself, Blackfore would no more be able to see me than I am to see him."

"But can you operate the ray machine?" Folkstone demanded. "Suppose you vanish yourself and can't get back."

"A lot better to be invisible than dead, eh, Deene? Suppose you give us a look at this contraption we paid such a pretty penny for."

Deene got up from the table and once more the four men were beyond the range of the Green Ghost's vision.

## VII

**W**AITING until Deene and his uninvited guests had gone into the next room and closed the door, the Green Ghost tiptoed down the rest of the stair flight. The four men were closeted in a room closed off by double sliding doors. With the point of his knife, he pried the twin doors just far enough apart so that he could see into the room beyond.

It was a long, barren room with a sort of alcove at one end. The alcove had a window in the exact center at the back. In front of the alcove, a little to the left of center, stood the ray machine.

It seemed to be a black plastic cabinet supported by legs that were actually glass insulators. The cabinet itself was covered with knobs and indicators, and supported on the top was a series of metal disks and alternate plastic spacers. Backing this tower of disks was a concave reflector.

Deene had gone into the alcove and was sitting in a folding chair, approximately in the alcove's center. He was connected with the curious ray machine by means of a wire which was attached to a large black rubber handle, studded with switch buttons.

The ray machine was turned on. At

first it emitted a low, mechanical growl which gradually rose to a high-pitched wail. Giant sparks of artificial lightning leaped and crackled across the series of spaced disks, illuminating the room in weird blue light. And in the alcove where Deene sat a miracle was taking place. Deene's long thin body was gradually becoming transparent. At first the outline of the body only became indistinct. But in a few seconds the back of the chair in which Deene was sitting could be seen right through Deene's body. Only Deene's sallow face could be seen until finally even that vanished.

The invisible ray machine stopped its unholy racket. The three men in the chairs sat there and stared at the empty alcove.

"It works just as it did for Blackfore," Charles Polk whispered finally. "Say, Deene, can you hear us talking?"

There was no answer. "That's funny," Hurley said. "Just because he's invisible is no reason why he shouldn't answer."

"Deene!" Folkstone shouted. "Where are you?"

"You don't suppose—" Charles Polk began. He stopped. From the alcove came a sound—a choking, gagging sound. And then a half-strangled cry that was unmistakably Deene's voice.

"He's got me! Blackfore!"

David Hurley got to his feet. "We've got to help," he muttered.

The Green Ghost slipped into the room. His alert gaze jumped to a small oval-topped table that stood near the opening into the alcove. The table was moving, apparently of its own volition. Hurley noticed it and came to a stop. The table was lifted from the floor as by unseen hands, was tossed in his direction.

Hurley ducked. There was a hoarse cry from Folkstone. In the chair which had been occupied by Kenneth Deene the vague outlines of a man's figure developed from thin air, became the long, lank body of Kenneth Deene.

"Good lord!" Folkstone gasped. "Look at his face!"

From the roots of his dark hair to the collar of his shirt, the face of the man in the chair was a mask of blood. Then slowly the figure slumped forward to collapse on the floor.

"Blackfore killed Deene!" Charles Polk cried. "Blackfore's here. Run for your lives, men!"

THAT was when the lights went out. The Green Ghost stepped to one side, heard the three men as they rushed pell-mell past him. While they were stumbling over furniture in the room outside, the Ghost advanced steadily, cautiously, toward the alcove where the body lay. If Blackfore were invisible, why had the lights been turned out?

The Ghost listened to the sound of a door being quietly opened. Footsteps whispered. The piercing beam of a flashlight jabbed through the darkness, coming from the left side of the room.

The Ghost moved soundlessly toward the source of light, heart hammering excitedly, sensitive fingers thrust out before him to warn him against any piece of furniture that might be in his path.

Some sixth sense warned the man with the light. The beam jumped, and so did the Ghost. He was behind the man now, his left arm looping about his neck while his right hand put the point of his knife against the man's back.

"Not a peep out of you!" the Ghost whispered.

The man dropped his flash but the light remained on. There was sudden swift motion behind the Ghost. Too late he realized that the man with the light had been a decoy to occupy his attention while others struck from behind. They closed in on him from all sides. Something landed on his head like a truckload of brick. Oblivion. . . .

It would have been difficult for the Green Ghost to record the exact moment when he returned to consciousness. Oblivion was hardly less dark. His first thought was a particularly ugly one—"Someone has buried me alive!"

He was in some sort of a packing box that might have been a coffin, but as yet the box had not been planted in the earth. The Ghost could hear the steady thrum of a motor, feel the easy bounce of well-oiled car springs. His hands were tied behind him. Rope around his ankles had shut off the circulation in his feet. Legs sagging, his knees pressed numbly against the top of the box which was formed by two wide boards not too closely joined.

Through the crack in the top, he could see the steering wheel of the car. There was no visible person in the driver's seat of the car!

For a moment, he struggled with the

idea that an invisible Blackfore did exist. And then the truth hit him with overwhelming force. He had first heard the name Blackfore in conjunction with experiments revolving around radio remote control. That was it! The car in which he was being carried was operated by radio remote control from a car that followed.

Which could mean only one thing. The remotely controlled car would be deliberately wrecked! It would be driven into the path of a train or plunged over some embankment, spelling *finis* for the Green Ghost.

### VIII

**H**ELPLESSLY bound, the muscles of the Green Ghost's arms strained against the ropes that bound his wrists. But there was not the slightest play. The long fingers of his right hand felt the left cuff of his coat sleeve. What would have seemed to be some sort of tailor's stiffening beneath the surface of the cloth was actually a narrow blade of thin, flexible steel.

As soon as he had drawn it free, he brought the razor edge of the steel up against the rope that bound his hands. The last strand snapped, and the Ghost's wrists were free. He brought his hands around in front of him, flexed his fingers. Through the crack in the top of the box, he could see the long stretch of highway unfold before the headlights of the driverless car.

He reached his left hand into the inner pocket of his coat, pulled out what appeared to be an oversize fountain pen. From the barrel of the pen a collapsible steel jimmy dropped into his fingers. When he had screwed the three joints together he had a strong, finely tempered tool ten inches in length. With this he set to work on the two boards that had been nailed to the box to form a top.

Prying, gouging, he raised the two boards mere fractions of an inch at a time. Now and then he'd pound at the boards with the heel of his right hand.

The car was picking up speed. Through the ever-widening crack between the boards, he could see that the road rose steeply. The car was approaching a high bridge over an underpass. Was this the spot?

He attacked his job with renewed vigor, spurred on by sheer desperation.

The driverless car had pulled sharply to the extreme right of the wide stretch of concrete.

This was the spot! At the very summit of the rise the steering wheel whipped to the left. The Ghost dropped his jimmy as the car swerved. His clenched fists drove forward like twin hammers against the loosened boards.

And as the speeding car rocketed across the road toward the concrete railing of the bridge the Green Ghost exploded from what had been intended for his coffin. He dived over the back of the front seat. One hand cut the ignition. The other went to the hand brake. Then, as the motor died, he got both hands on the brake and hauled back on the lever.

The scream of rubber on concrete, the howl of brake lining burning against brake shoes, the grinding clash of bumper metal and grillwork against the rail—all were parts of the next split second. And then abruptly there was silence. Part of the bridge rail had broken away under the terrific impact. The right front wheel of the car juttled crazily out over the abyss. But the car had stopped.

The Green Ghost took a long breath, groped on the bottom of the box in which he had been confined, found the flexible steel blade with which he had cut the ropes that had bound his wrists. Swiftly he slashed the cords that held his ankles.

The radio control car, which had been bent on steering him into an early grave, made a loop turn and headed back toward the wreckage. The Green Ghost had neither knife nor gun. His hand closed on the steel jimmy to which he owed his existence at this moment.

The control car had come to a stop. A door opened and slammed and hard heels clattered across the pavement. The Ghost huddled and waited.

The door of the wrecked car was opened. Through lowered lids the Green Ghost dimly saw the full moon of a pale round face, saw the glint of narrow eyes over the barrel of an automatic.

"So you got out of this mess, Wise Guy," the man muttered. "There's one mess you won't get out of." He hauled the Ghost to a sitting position, propped him against the back of the front seat.

The Green Ghost came to life then. Both legs shot out like pistons through the open door of the car to ram the crook



at the belt line. The man reeled backward and the Ghost shot from the open door, jimmy raised above his head.

TWO wild shots from the crook's gun slammed into the silence of the night. The Ghost hacked down with the jimmy, connected with the crown of the hood's hat. The man stumbled backward. A long section of the bridge rail had been torn out when the driverless car struck it. The crook plunged backward into dark nothingness. His scream of terror made the night hideous.

The Ghost stood on the brink a moment, his body trembling. Then he turned quickly and walked to the idling control car. On the way back to the city, he stopped at a filling station and telephoned Commissioner Standish, to learn that the police had already taken over at the Deene house. Kenneth Deene's murder had been reported by Monty Folkstone . . .

The following morning Kenneth Deene's death was on the front page. Folkstone, David Hurley, and Charles Polk had been questioned by the police, and the entire story of Blackfore and the invisible ray had been made public. A columnist with imagination speculated wildly on just what an invisible man could do in the heart of Manhattan.

A news-wise book stall sold out all of its copies of H. G. Wells' "The Invisible Man" an hour after opening. And at noon Police Commissioner Edward Standish and the mayor both issued radio appeals to the public not to become panic-stricken.

Before nine o'clock that morning the Ghost arrived in front of the building in which Dr. Leonard, the psychologist, had his office. For the work ahead of him he had once more chosen the identity of Detective-Sergeant Hammill. At the door of the building, Legs Maloney squatted on his roller platform, whining out his wares to the various office employees who entered the building. Chance approached the legless beggar.

"What's selling today, Legs?" he inquired in a bluff voice which exactly suited his present appearance.

"It's pencils, and they ain't selling so well, Mister," Maloney complained.

Chance took a couple of pencils from the legless man and handed him a quarter, then asked, "You know Dr. Leonard

who has an office on the twelfth floor of this building?"

Legs nodded. "With whiskers. Sure I know him."

"Has he arrived yet this morning?"

"What's it worth?" Maloney asked.

"Two bits," Chance said. "And I could find out for myself by telephoning his office."

"He hasn't gone in yet. Usually don't arrive till late."

Chance tossed the legless man another quarter and went into the building. The doctor's office was locked but there were few locks which a magician of George Chance's ability could not handle in short order.

A moment later, he was crossing the doctor's reception room to the private office. There he turned to the big steel file cabinet that stood against the wall. He removed the drawers and examined the interior of the cabinet itself. On the cross brace of the roller track which would have supported the second drawer from the top, he saw a short length of dark string—a piece of fishline that was knotted to the brace.

He returned the drawers to the cabinet and picked up the phone. He called Joe Harper at the house.

"Joe," Chance said quietly, his eyes on the office door, "do you know a legless gent named Maloney?"

"Sure," Harper yawned. "What about him?"

"I don't know what about him. That's your job. Just keep track of the guy." Hanging up, Chance left for Commissioner Standish's office.

## IX

STANDISH carefully closed and locked the door to prevent any possible interruption. "Have you heard about the Deene killing last night?" the commissioner demanded.

"I was there," Chance said coolly. "I saw Deene demonstrate Blackfore's ray machine."

"And he really faded into thin air—became invisible?"

"Apparently so," Chance said. "And he came back as a corpse. I'm wondering if the corpse was really that of Kenneth Deene."

Standish went over to his swivel chair and dropped into it. "You can discard

your suspicions then," he said. "It was Kenneth Deene. It seems that Folkstone, Deene, Polk and Hurley had played some bridge previous to the demonstration of the ray. We printed Folkstone, Polk, and Hurley, as well as the corpse without a face. The four sets of prints we took corresponded with the prints on those playing cards. There were no other prints."

"You've talked to Polk?"

"Hurley and Folkstone, too. Polk had already paid one hundred grand to this invisible killer."

"How did he pay it?"

"Simply left it on his library table and went to bed. When he got up it was gone. He assumes that Blackfore got it."

"Blackfore's the invisible menace then?" Chance asked quickly.

"Who else?"

"I just wondered. I'm beginning to be convinced myself, after what happened to me last night. Somebody took me for a ride in a remote-controlled car. The idea was to eliminate me."

"So you're the guy who was mixed up in that business on the highway last night!" Standish exclaimed.

"Well, don't noise it around," Chance cautioned. He told Standish of his adventure in greater detail. When the commissioner had concluded congratulating him on his fortunate escape, Standish steered the conversation back to the killing at the Deene house.

"Have you any idea what became of this remarkable ray machine after Deene was murdered?"

"You mean the police didn't find it there?"

"They did not. They found nothing that would account for men vanishing into thin air. Nothing to explain tables that go flying through space. Folkstone, Polk and Hurley left the house in such a state that I don't think they stopped running until they reached Jersey."

"So you inherited a cold trail," Chance said. "I tried my hand at picking up a cold trail this morning. The night of Peter Creighton's murder in Dr. Leonard's office I was forced to leave in a bit of a hurry. Otherwise, I might have had the sense enough to grab Creighton's murderer."

Standish's eyes brightened.

"You've picked up something?"

"Only a piece of string and a hunch," Chance said.

"What's the hunch?" Standish asked.

"The hunch is—the man who knifed Peter Creighton was lying in one of those drawers in Leonard's filing cabinet."

Standish snorted. "That's wonderful! A child or a midget maybe."

CHANCE added, "Or a man without legs. And there was a legless man hanging around the building that night. I had a talk with him a while ago and there's a distinct similarity between the voice of the unseen killer who knifed Creighton and the voice of Legs Maloney."

"Maloney!" Standish gasped. "I know that beggar. But good lord, man, how would Maloney climb into one of Leonard's file drawers?"

"I think a certain fat man who was carrying a transfer file might have explained that better than I can," Chance said. "On my way out of the office—and I was in something of a hurry—I ran into this fat person lugging the transfer file. It struck me as rather an odd hour for a filing clerk to be working."

"But Parkinson and two cops were there," Standish said. "How did Maloney get out of the file?"

"Parkinson and the two cops weren't there while they were chasing me, were they?" Chance said. "And we don't know where Leonard was. So Fatso still could have made a switch."

"I still can't picture Legs Maloney getting that file drawer open, throwing a knife with such amazing accuracy and then closing the drawer before you and Leonard could turn around."

"He couldn't have thrown the knife," Chance said. "That knife didn't have the proper balance. I think he shot it from some sort of a device. Getting the drawer closed would have been a cinch if he'd had a piece of string tied to a brace at the back of the cabinet. He'd just have given the string a jerk."

"You mentioned something about a piece of string."

"A piece of fishline had been tied to a track brace at the back," Chance explained.

"We'd better pick up Maloney and give him a thorough going-over," Standish said.

Chance shook his head. "I haven't a thing against Maloney. I've merely pointed out that Creighton's murderer

had to be concealed in that filing cabinet in Leonard's office. Joe Harper is watching Maloney and that may lead to something bigger."

"And what are your plans?"

Chance was thoughtful a moment. "I may have a look at the Deene house, just to make sure your police didn't miss anything. . . ."

**T**HAT evening Merry White found Monty Folkstone's apartment without difficulty but she had scarcely located it before Folkstone came out of his door, dressed to go out. Her waiting cabby was willing enough to keep Folkstone's car in sight for the double fare which Merry offered.

She was much surprised when her trail led her to the suburban house of David Hurley.

"What with Tiny Tim spying on Mr. Hurley," she thought, "this ought to be quite a convention."

And she could not say that she was sorry that her midget friend was near at hand. Tiny Tim had arrived at the Hurley house several minutes ahead of Merry. He had entered the house through a coal-chute window that would have hardly admitted an adult of normal size. It was while he was trying to move quietly around in the basement in search of the stairway that Tim heard a voice directly over his head.

"I'm here again, David Hurley," the voice said.

To Tim's ears came the sound of Mr. Hurley getting out of a chair in a good deal of a hurry.

"Wh-what? W-who?" Hurley stammered. "Where are you?"

"Right here in this room," the voice said. "You can't see me but I'm here."

It dawned on Tim that the owner of the voice was the same invisible menace that had done for two men already. Clenching his teeth, he struck a match, found the stairs and started up. He had taken exactly three steps when the voice of the unseen spoke again.

"I will give you one more chance, Hurley. Tomorrow night at ten o'clock you will put one hundred thousand dollars in bills of large denomination in a packet on the dining table. If you do not do this I shall certainly kill you."

"I—I agree," Hurley gasped. "I promise!"

That was when Monty Folkstone rang

the front door bell. And the voice of the invisible killer spoke again.

"Don't let my presence prevent you from answering the door, Hurley."

Tiny Tim drew a long breath and continued up the steps. Near the top, he stopped, his heart hammering against his ribs. Footsteps in the dark behind him! He scrambled up the remaining steps, pushed open a door and dived into the kitchen.

The only light in the kitchen came from the dining room door. Tim sent a frightened glance behind him, then headed for the door of the nearest cupboard. He opened it, ducked inside, knocking over several bottles.

Footsteps whispered across the kitchen floor, moving swiftly, surely, toward the cabinet in which Tim was hiding. Close to his ear he heard a metallic snick. And then he heard the footsteps again, moving away. A door opened and closed.

It was not until some moments later that Tim realized that in his hurry to find a hiding place he had picked the one cabinet that had a lock, the one in which Hurley kept his liquor. And whoever it was who had followed Tim up the steps had turned the key in the lock of the cupboard door!

Tim heard David Hurley's footsteps returning from the front door. He was speaking excitedly to the man he had just admitted.

"I tell you, Folkstone, there isn't any way out! You can't fight something you can't see."

"This calls for a drink!" Folkstone said.

"I could do with a nip myself," Hurley agreed. "Come out into the kitchen. I've got some pretty fair Scotch in the cupboard."

## X

**F**ORTUNATELY for Tiny Tim, Merry White, prowling on the outside of the house had peeked through the kitchen window just as Tim was scampering for his hiding place. Merry had also seen Tim's follower—a tall gaunt man whose head was bent so low that his hat had hid his face. The man had carried something in his hand. It looked to be a small suitcase to which a length of wire and some strange round gadget was attached.

A moment later, she heard the back door of the house open. And then the tall gaunt figure moved silently across the back of the lot, to disappear in the shadows. Merry's heart was in her throat. Tim was in trouble! She hesitated only a moment, then ran around to the front of the house and rang the door bell.

Both Hurley and Folkstone answered Merry's summons. When the two men opened the door Merry looked from Folkstone to Hurley, then uttered a faint moan and collapsed into Hurley's arms.

"For heaven's sakes, what's that?" Folkstone demanded, staring at Merry. "Isn't it obvious?" Hurley snapped. "A girl. The poor thing's fainted! Possible some poor starved waif of the streets."

"She doesn't look like any waif to me," Folkstone said. "In fact, it seems to me I saw her coming down in the elevator when I left the apartment."

"Well, don't stand there gaping! What the poor girl needs is a glass of brandy."

In the liquor cupboard Tiny Tim heard this last remark and vowed that if he ever got out of this mess he was going to advocate the return of prohibition.

Hurley and Folkstone carried Merry into the kitchen and propped her up in a chair. Folkstone kept at her side while Hurley started toward the cupboard that concealed Tiny Tim. Tim drew a long breath, summoned all his courage and called out in as deep a voice as he could muster, "I'm watching you David Hurley!"

Hurley stopped in his tracks. He looked over his shoulder at Folkstone. Folkstone's mouth was open. More than that, Merry White's eyes were open. She was sitting bolt upright on the chair.

"He's still here," Hurley whispered.

"I—I think I'm going to faint again," Merry said.

Folkstone gulped. "G-get her some brandy. Maybe we'd better all have a drink."

"No, no!" Merry said. "Liquor makes me sick. Just some smelling salts or maybe an aspirin tablet."

"I'll get some aspirin," Hurley volunteered, and left the room, walking cautiously. Folkstone hesitated, then followed. Merry was left alone in the kitchen.

"Tim," she whispered, "you—you're

all right? You're not invisible?"

"I'm locked in here with this gold-durned brandy!" Tim snapped. "Get me out."

Merry went to the liquor cabinet, twisted the key. Tiny Tim popped out, his face smudged with coal dust.

"We got to scram," Merry said. "They'll be back in a minute."

"And we can't get out of here too quick to suit me!" Tim said.

IT WAS the following afternoon that George Chance, alias red-haired Sergeant Hammill, sauntered into Commissioner Standish's office, grinning broadly. Standish looked up from his desk.

"You've got something, haven't you?"

"Maybe so, Ned, maybe so.

Chance dropped into a chair.

"Anything on Legs Maloney?"

"Nope," Chance said. "Tim and Merry had quite a time of it last night with David Hurley and Monty Folkstone and our invisible killer, who seems to haunt basements. But I'll tell you about that later. First, I gave the old Deene house a going-over, and I discovered something."

"What?"

"That Deene's mother was Madame LaStrange, a medium in spiritualistic circle, a generation ago. Doubtless she held many a seance in that gloomy old mansion, which would account for the fact that underneath the room in which Deene demonstrated the invisible ray machine there's another, and secret room."

"In the basement?" Standish asked.

Chance shook his head in the negative. "This isn't in the basement. Where your men slipped up was in failing to compare the height of the basement ceiling with the height of the stairway leading into the basement. There's a six and a half foot difference, indicating the presence of another room. The only entrance I could find is in the stairway to the basement. Three stair treads and risers are joined and hinged so that they can be raised like a trap-door."

"And what was in that room?" Standish asked.

"Several things. One was a big electromagnet such as spirit mediums use for the levitation of so-called 'spirit trumpets.' Another thing was an oval-topped table that closely matched the mahogany table the police found in the

room where the killing took place. The difference between the two tables was that the one in the secret room was of feather-weight composition and had an aluminum plate under the top.

"Because of the propulsion effect of electromagnetic force on aluminum, a heavy jolt from the electromagnet under the floor would have kicked that composition table right up into the air—so it was the one that most probably was there."

"But Deene must have known about all that," Standish said.

"Wait," Chance said. "I'm not out of the secret room yet. It contained a few more things. There was a heavy blood-stained hammer which had been used to batter in the face and skull of the murder victim. Also quite a few blood-stains on the floor. And the invisible ray machine, which unaccountably disappeared, was also stashed in that room. It's quite a gadget."

"You mean it's a fake?"

"Exactly. It's an ordinary static generating machine. Start it up and it will give out current with high voltage and low amperage, shoot off deadly looking sparks, make a lot of noise—but is quite harmless and incapable of making anybody vanish or become transparent."

THE commissioner raised his bushy eyebrows. "Deene must have known about the machine. And the electromagnet, too."

"Exactly."

"Then he was in cahoots with Blackfore. He put on that show to impress Polk, Folkstone and Hurley."

"Interesting conjecture," Chance said. "But what say we go to the lab and have a look at your fingerprint evidence?"

A few moments later the commissioner and "Sergeant Hammill" were closeted in a little room of the police laboratory. There was the deck of cards with Charles Polk's monogram on the back; print photographs; complete fingerprints of Polk, Folkstone, Hurley and the murdered man; the threat note which Kenneth Deene had received as well as a photostat of the same showing developed fingerprints.

Chance's first move was to examine several of the cards beneath the low power lens of a microscope. After a few moments, he looked up.

"That's a queer thing, Ned. These cards have square edges."

"Nothing queer about that. Polk told us that the deck was comparatively new."

"But Polk uses the forced dove-tail method of shuffling," Chance said. "I watched him shuffle the cards that night prior to starting the bridge game. It is especially hard with a brand new deck, but after you've shuffled the new deck three or four times by that method it becomes easier."

"Well, so what?" Standish objected. "Polk would have shuffled the cards that way several times in playing solitaire."

"Exactly. And the reason the forced dove-tail method becomes increasingly easy with a new deck, is that the end edges of the cards break down. Yet this deck of cards is square-edged, clearly indicating that the forced dove-tail shuffle had not been used."

"What are you getting at?" Standish frowned.

"Simply that this deck of cards is not the one Polk was carrying in his pocket. It's the one used in the bridge game undoubtedly but it was not Polk's deck. Somebody switched the deck. But why—that's the point."

"You've got me," Standish admitted.

Chance next turned his attention to the examination of the print photographs which had been taken from developed prints on the cards. The commissioner pointed out the prints of Folkstone, Polk, Hurley and Deene.

"You'll find Deene's thumb print especially easy to recognize," he said. "The right thumb, that is. Notice the crescent-shaped scar."

Chance nodded. He picked up the threat letter which Deene had received.

"What prints on this, Ned?"

"Those are Polk's prints," the commissioner explained.

Chance nodded. "He read it aloud to the others. But where are our villain's prints?"

Standish snorted. "Naturally he must have worn gloves when he wrote the note."

"Of course," Chance grinned. "Well, Ned, tonight we'll get our hands on the astral assassin, hold him up to the light and see what makes him tick, eh? Merry and Tim discovered that he is going to come to the Hurley house and collect one hundred thousand dollars. You

know, one of the methods he uses to make his voice come out of nowhere—besides hiding legless people in file cabinet—is the old one employing a microphone, amplifier, and reproducer.”

“Where did you pick that up?”

“From Merry’s description of a man who came out of the Hurley basement last night. She didn’t get a look at his face but she did see what he was carrying.”

“You know who he is?”

“Of course. Don’t you?”

## XI

**B**EFORE ten o’clock that night George Chance knocked at the door of David Hurley’s house. Hurley opened the door a crack, beheld the green-glowing death’s head and was so completely upset that the Ghost had no trouble at all in wedging his way into the hall.

The Ghost motioned with the blunt muzzle of his automatic. Hurley went ahead of him to the French doors of the dining room. In the dining room Monty Folkstone took one look, then jerked the cigar out of his mouth.

“Great balls of fire, what’s that?”

The magician-detective bowed slightly. “At your service, gentlemen. I’m the Green Ghost.” His eyes fell on the fat package of money that lay on the dining room table. He picked the money up, looked at it, tossed it back onto the table.

He returned to the French doors and pushed them shut, noticing that the catch did not work. He went to the dining room window and pulled down the shade. Then he dropped into a chair.

“We may as well wait for our invisible friend,” he said.

“What is it you want of me?” David Hurley demanded.

“Not a thing. I’m here to help you.”

Hurley and Folkstone sat down uneasily, their eyes on the Ghost. They had not long to wait before the Astral Assassin indicated his presence. The French doors between the living room and dining room swung open slowly. A cool draft passed through the empty doorway.

“He—he’s *here!*” Folkstone whispered.

The Ghost was inclined to blame the breeze on the mysteriously opened doors. He had noticed one of those noiseless

electric fans standing on the living room table, undoubtedly Hurley’s own fan. Anyone who had prowled in the Hurley basement could have readily discovered the circuit that controlled the particular outlet to which the fan was attached.

Hurley and Folkstone stared in terrified fascination at the opening doors. And then came the Astral Assassin’s footsteps, pounding deliberately across the floor, moving toward the dining room table, where the hundred thousand dollars lay.

To the Ghost, the most remarkable thing about the footsteps of the unseen menace was that they sounded just as loud when crossing a rug as they did on the bare floor. Which led him to believe that the genius in the basement was simply knocking on the underside of the flooring.

To Hurley and Folkstone the unseen criminal seemed within a couple of yards of the money. Their eyes kept jerking from the spot where they supposed the assassin to be back to the money on the table. All this was nothing but misdirection produced by the sound effects man in the basement. Accordingly the Ghost anticipated the real danger to come from the kitchen door, not from the conspicuously open dining room doors.

The Ghost got to his feet. Neither Hurley nor Folkstone noticed this. But they did notice that the packet of money on the table suddenly acquired wings. In the swift moving course of events that followed they had no way of knowing that the Ghost’s silent-acting spring windlass with its invisible black thread had jerked the money beneath the Ghost’s black coat.

The Ghost whirled through the door connecting kitchen and dining room, his automatic in his hand. The door to the back yard was standing open, and in the dim night glow he saw the figure of a man. There was nothing transparent or invisible about him. He wheeled, ducked back through the door just as the Ghost’s little automatic barked.

**T**HE Ghost plunged to the back door and the sound-effects man, formerly of the basement, came barging out of the cellar door, butted the Ghost in his lean middle, upsetting the magician-detective and at the same time spoiling the bead he had drawn on the escaping criminal.

The Ghost bounced to his feet. His automatic was in his right hand, his knife in the left. Poised on the top of the short flight of steps that led into the yard, he hurled his knife at one of the two fleeing figures in the yard, shooting at the same time. The shorter of the two was hit. He stumbled, fell, did not get up as the Ghost approached.

The Ghost stopped only long enough to pull his knife out of the man's back and get a glimpse of his face. It was the fat man with the transfer file who had been standing outside the door of Dr. Leonard's office.

At the back of the lot was a brief flurry of gunfire. That would be Commissioner Standish who had taken up a position at the rear of the yard. The Ghost sprinted, joined Standish as the commissioner sprang from a clump of shrubbery.

"Missed!" Standish panted. "He's sneaked over the fence and I think there's a car waiting for him up the alley."

"Nose pointing which way?" the Ghost demanded.

"South. We'll get around in front and try to head him off in my car."

The two men pelted back toward the house, around the side and out into the street where the commissioner's car was parked. In the back seat of the car slumped the body of a man. He was not dead. He had been knocked out.

"Who the—?" Standish cried as he reached the car.

"Looks like Legs Maloney—if Maloney had a shave and had suddenly grown a pair of legs. Get in and drive, Ned. I'll hop in back and look this bird over."

The commissioner's car started, rocked from the curb and turned left at the end of the block, to brake to a stop at the mouth of the alley. "No car in the alley, blast it!" Standish growled.

"Straight ahead," the Ghost urged. "That car going like a house afire."

While the commissioner was busy following the fast-moving car ahead, the Ghost turned his attention to the unconscious man beside him. He pulled up one trouser leg, discovered a cork leg beneath. It was Legs Maloney. Who had conked him on the head, and why he had been stowed in the commissioner's car was not clear at the moment.

It was while he was examining the

man's artificial leg that he discovered a circular hole on the bottom of one shoe. This hole extended up into the hollow of the leg. Held in this by means of a small spring catch was a hollow tube of metal about a foot and a half in length. Removed, it resolved itself into one of the rubber-tipped staffs which Maloney had used to propel himself.

Closer examination of the tube revealed that it contained a strong spring. The Ghost had discovered the weapon which had been used to shoot that peculiar knife into the body of Peter Creighton. The Ghost tried to explain all this to Standish but the commissioner had all he could do to keep the car ahead in sight.

"Whoever is driving that car has a pretty nervous foot on the brake pedal," the commissioner growled. "Look at him flashing his stop light! I believe he's signaling us in Morse!"

The Ghost watched, translating the long and short flashes from the stop light of the car ahead.

H-A-R-P-E-R A-T W-H-E-E-L  
F-O-L-L-O-W M-E.

"Joe Harper?" Standish asked.

"Must be," the Ghost said. "Joe was following Legs Maloney, remember? Joe's knocked Maloney out and stepped into Maloney's job as chauffeur for the killer!"

## XII

**J**OE HARPER was in the car ahead and as it came to a stop in back of a big garage building he knew that the show-down was near. He was wearing the hat which he had taken from Legs Maloney but that was his only disguise.

The criminal was riding in the back seat and had paid more attention to the car which had been persistently following them than he had to Joe Harper. But Harper knew his luck could not hold out forever.

The criminal sprang from the car as soon as it had come to a stop. He ran to the door of the building.

"Come on down the basement, Legs," he said to Joe. "I'll pay you for your part in killing Creighton and then we'll separate until that Ghost gets off our trail."

The killer went through the back door, left it open for Joe Harper to follow. Harper took his time. He wished the Green Ghost would show up.

Just inside the door were stairs leading down into the basement. Joe Harper, with his right hand on the butt of his automatic, went down the steps into a long room which was apparently some sort of laboratory. The other end of the room was comparatively empty. It was toward this vacant end that the killer was walking. Any moment now the killer would turn around and—

Harper's lower jaw dropped. Right before his eyes the killer had vanished! The man had been walking along the side of the room, had taken a sudden side step toward the middle of the room, had disappeared into thin air.

Harper pulled his gun clear of his pocket. But even before he could pull the trigger the sound of gunfire rattled at the other end of the room. Harper did not see any flashes but raised his gun, pointed it at the section of thin air which had swallowed the man and let go.

The results were far greater than he could have possibly anticipated. There was a shattering sound such as a collapsing green-house might have made. A vast sheet of plate glass heretofore invisible because of its transparency was smashed into a thousand bits.

Now that it lay in glistening heaps on the floor Harper could see not only the one-time invisible menace but also the Green Ghost and Commissioner Edward Standish! The Ghost and Standish were standing at the end of the room and the assassin was stretched out on the floor.

Harper dropped his gun into his pocket and ran toward the others. The Ghost looked at him and shook his head.

"That shot of yours, Joe—you came awfully close to winging Standish."

"How was I to know you were fighting it out back of a sheet of glass?" Joe Harper asked.

Chance said, "This is apparently the laboratory where Blackfore first demonstrated his marvelous invisible ray. Of course the ray was a hoax on the part of Blackfore to get the others to invest money in his scheme—money which he intended to run out with."

"But why couldn't Joe see us?" Standish asked.

"Because the plate of glass was set out in front, placed at an angle. Notice this large opening in the side of the wall through which you and I came. Notice that beyond that big doorway is another room."

"Sure, sure, but what of it? It's just exactly like the end of this laboratory."

"That's the point. It is like it in every way—the same appointments and the same size. But you'll find that the back wall of the room is illuminated indirectly and with powerful lights while this wall has no illumination at all. Because of the lighting and the angle of the glass, Joe didn't see this end of the room at all. He saw the back wall of that empty room over there, reflected in the plate glass.

"And that's all there is to the invisible ray?" Joe Harper asked.

"That's all, except for the static machine and other trimmings, unnecessary to the illusion itself," Chance explained. "Deene worked the same thing in that alcove in his own house, I discovered."

"Wait a minute," Harper objected. "You said Deene worked the trick. Deene's dead, remember?"

Chance shook his head. "He's unconscious, with a couple of Ned's bullets in him but I don't think he's dead."

**S**TANDISH and Joe looked at the man on the floor. He was tall and thin. He had shaggy black hair and a heavy black beard.

"He looks like Dr. Leonard to me," Standish said gruffly.

The commissioner knelt, gave the doctor's beard a jerk. The spirit gum that held it in place gave way. The false beard came off in Standish's hands. The shaggy hair became a wig and close examination revealed an ample quantity of nose putty which had been used to change the shape of Kenneth Deene's nose.

Standish wheeled on George Chance. "You said you saw Deene murdered."

"I did not," Chance contradicted. "If I remember right, I asked you if you were certain the faceless corpse in the Deene house was really Deene. You and I both heard Folkstone's description of Herman Blackfore. Blackfore was tall, thin and dark. So was Deene. It was Blackfore's corpse you found in the Deene house, not Deene's corpse.

"You see, Standish, that secret room in the Deene house covered a multitude of sins. The way I figure it, Deene had decided that Blackfore's invisible ray was a fraud, and had decided that he could put on the same demonstration that Blackfore did by using a sheet of glass and some artistic lighting.

"Deene decided that Blackfore was



hoaxing Deene, Folkstone and the others out of a lot of money. So Deene snares Blackfore, brings him to his house, keeps him a prisoner in that secret room. He also steals Blackfore's fake ray machine and Blackfore's remote control automobile. And then, knowing he had to get Blackfore out of the way, Deene hit upon a plan for giving himself an alibi.

"Deene was already living a double life. He was working the psychology racket in the disguise of Dr. Leonard. He was a fake psychologist, just as his mother had been a fake spirit medium. There's a certain similarity between the two rackets, you'll agree."

"I get it," Standish said. "One of Deene's henchmen, possibly Legs Maloney or the fat guy, killed Blackfore in the secret room while Deene was doing his vanishing act. Then, behind the illuminated plate of glass in the alcove, the corpse of Blackfore was substituted for that of Deene. Blackfore's features had been nicely mangled with a hammer.

"Hey, wait a minute. What about those fingerprints? You can't tell me that Blackfore was sitting there at the card table, playing bridge with Polk, Folkstone and Hurley."

George Chance shook his head. "No, Deene played in the bridge game, all right. But he had covered his fingertips with clear lacquer or maybe nail polish. Which would account for the fact that he had a lot of trouble handling the cards. Whatever he had on his fingertips prevented him from getting any prints on the cards. But Polk, Hurley and Folkstone left prints on the cards.

"As I explained to you previously somebody switched decks. Deene was the

boy who did the switching. He bought a deck just like the cards Polk used, knowing that when he got his guests assembled Polk would suggest bridge. And of course Deene did invite Folkstone, Polk and Hurley to his house even though he denied it. He had compelled Blackfore, who was his prisoner, to plant his fingerprints all over the cards in that deck. Since Deene's fingers left no prints, that's how you were fooled into identifying the corpse of Blackfore's as that of Kenneth Deene."

"All right, pal," Joe Harper said. "I'll take your word for it."

"And another mystery to me," Standish said, "is how you hit on Deene as our criminal."

"It's like this," Chance explained. "Down at Headquarters, you showed me that extortion note which Deene claimed to have received. Actually he wrote that to himself to impress Folkstone and the others. Your men developed the fingerprints on that note, discovered that they were Polk's prints. Since Polk had handled the note that wasn't so odd. But I watched Deene take that note from his pocket and hand it to Polk. How come Deene's prints were not on it?"

"From that, I deduced that Deene had some invisible covering on the tips of his fingers, which would account for him dropping the cards. He had made the mistake of not putting Blackfore's prints on the note."

"Okay," Joe Harper said. "Let's leave the commissioner to his glorious triumph and go home. You realize I've been tailing that legless Legs Maloney for about forty-eight hours? I could sleep in a corner—but I much prefer a bed."

## BOOMING LOGS

(Concluded from page 89)

the lumber thieves, among whom were some of the most respected mill owners in the area.

The thefts ended abruptly. But Jo Groom reaped little reward for singing. Paroled within a few months, he tried to resume with Mrs. Slayton. Her long suffering husband objected, using shotgun slugs for emphasis. Exit permanently Jo Groom.

Jasper Root took on another assignment, but the Raceford pinelands and a certain Irish landlady soon

persuaded him to turn in his agency badge.

Allan Pinkerton smiled in his Chicago office as he slipped a final report into the BOOMING LOGS case file. It was commendably brief:

"Concluding my assignment, I have closed down the saloon, after disposing of the stock." Signed: J. R. Wescott, Op.

Civil War veterans and homesteaders were free to buy lumber for new homes at reasonable prices. And the empire marched ever westward.

# TOO CLEVER



Vaguely the thought came  
that there was still time  
to stop

*Bressler had rehearsed the murder a thousand times,  
and for its performance he invited — a police chief!*

**H**ENRY BRESSLER turned the door handle, paused a moment and looked to the left. Kate's window was partly raised, shade drawn. His timing was perfect.

He took one last look below the window, observed for the thousandth time the thick foliage of climbing ivy under

the window ledge, which was now bathed in moonlight. Somewhere in his neck he felt a rhythmic pulse beat. He took a deep reassuring breath. Nothing could go wrong. It was too cleverly arranged. Behind him was one year of careful planning, twelve months of the most minute scrutiny of detail, living

**By CALVIN J. CLEMENTS**

and breathing daily what was to follow in the next ten minutes.

He hung his hat and coat carefully on the hall rack, dropped the overnight bag in the corner and walked into the living room. George Larsen was there sitting in the deep sofa by the fireplace—big, beefy, red-faced Larsen, looking ridiculously uncomfortable in his tight shiny tuxedo. He walked over and shook hands, as Larsen, his dull gray eyes questioning, awkwardly arose.

"Why, hello, Henry," Larsen said. "Thought you wouldn't be able to make it tonight?"

"Sit down, George, I didn't think so myself." Bressler walked to the tall celarette against the wall, came back carrying tray, bottles and glasses. "Knowing how Kate hates to go to these affairs alone, I sent you the wire when the contract I was working on looked as if it might hang fire over night. Sorry if I put you to any trouble."

"That's all right, Henry. No trouble. A pleasure." Larsen sat down, opened the single coat button, sighed as his comfortable pouch expanded. "I'm practically a one-man escort bureau in this town anyway. The penalty for being a bachelor, I suppose. Even bald, fat and forty, a man's still not safe."

Bressler passed a glass to Larsen and felt like smirking. The scene was unfolding like the methodical movements in a play. Larsen and Kate were mere puppets, characters being led unknowingly through a precise routine—going through motions that had been visualized and timed a hundred times. He, Henry Bressler, was the director, controlling the lines and tempo of the performance.

**P**ICKING up the seltzer bottle, he held the chrome spout over Larsen's glass, pressed the handle. "Heavy or soft—say when, George."

In a way, he felt sorry for Larsen. Good old fumbling George. To commit a murder right under your best friend's nose was bad enough, but when said friend happened to be the local police chief—well, even in Ridgeville there were bound to be repercussions. Poor George would catch it.

Larsen raised his hand. "Good enough, Henry. By the way, I wonder what's keeping your missus?"

Bressler filled his own glass. "Oh, you

know how women can take a long time with their primping, especially for a social like the Rotary's annual." He set the bottle down on the tea table in front of the sofa and stared at the cracked, worm-eaten veneer. Kate had paid sixty dollars for the piece of junk and called it her birthday present from him. It was more practical buying your own gifts she had said. It had represented their first real break. From that time on they had bought their own gifts whenever the occasion warranted. He took a seat in the low wingchair opposite Larsen. The splash of running water came clearly into the living room.

Larsen looked at his watch in surprise. "Looks as if you'll be more than a few minutes late for the party if Kate's just taking her shower now."

Bressler sipped his drink and said nothing. Yes, she was just taking her bath. He could picture the flat, drab figure, the faint purple lines webbing under the tight, translucent skin. For the last ten years all pretense had been dropped and they had maintained separate rooms. In contrast, he thought of Ina's bold, insinuating way, her soft, tantalizing curves, and his hand holding the glass shook. They wouldn't wait a year. Six months was enough, perhaps five.

"Why so quiet tonight, Henry?" Larsen asked, placing his empty glass on the table.

Bressler started, hesitated a moment. "I was just thinking of a juicy contract coming up." He grinned at Larsen. That was the word. Juicy.

Larsen pulled out his pocket watch again, looked at it thoughtfully a moment. "Well, Henry, in ten minutes you'll be missing the mayor's speech on the fine work performed by our good ladies of the Auxiliary." He rose and buttoned his coat. "There's nothing I'd enjoy more than to sit that speech out with you here, but I must be going."

Bressler was on his feet. "No!"

"Eh?"

"I mean—" Bressler flushed and looked at his own watch to hide his confusion. It was ten minutes after eight. He could feel the shirt clinging to his armpits. "I mean I hate to see you going, George, when if you wait just a few minutes more we can all go together. We'll have one more drink, than I'll get Kate. She should be about ready then."

Larsen shook his head regretfully. "It's better if I show up on time, Henry. You know politics—it's a twenty-four hour job. As long as you're here to escort Kate's there's no urgent reason for my staying."

Bressler put his hand on Larsen's shoulder, pressed him back into the sofa. Larsen looked up, frowning a little.

"As a matter of fact, George—" Bressler smiled down engagingly—"a few days ago, Kate had suggested asking you over tonight for a champagne cocktail—the three of us leaving together." It sounded lame, and Bressler flushed again. He went on, lightly. "You know tonight's our fifteenth anniversary. You being our best friend and all that—well, she thought it would be nice."

Larsen unloosened the coat button again. "O.K., Henry, I'm convinced. When it comes to choosing between comfort and duty, I'm a weak character anyway." He patted his straining middle. "So I'll take it easy here with you."

**HENRY BRESSLER** refilled the two glasses, handed one to Larsen and walked to the window. His hands were moist. He was trembling again. From behind his back, Larsen spoke.

"As you say, she must be almost ready anyway."

Bressler listened. The sound of running water grew fainter, then stopped. His mouth twitched. Kate ready? George didn't really know Kate then. After fifteen years she had the grand entrance down to perfection. The party's program would be underway a full half hour, and then with a flourish she would sweep in, dropping a nod here, lowering her head a trifle there. He looked at his watch. Eight-fifteen. There was still time. Everything must be exactly right.

"By the way, Henry—" Bressler didn't turn around and Larsen continued, "It's none of my business, but are things shaping up any better between you and the wife?"

Bressler pressed his face against the window. The moon passed behind a cloud and the green shrubbery on the wide lawn blurred into dark lonely shadows. He dropped his hand to his side pocket, felt the contours of the flat automatic, the telltale lump of the cloth bag.

"No," he said without emotion,

"nothing has changed." There would be no pretending tonight. Everything must be normal. Larsen knew the whole story well.

"None of my business again, Henry, but are you still seeing the Jensen girl? What's the name—Ina?"

The truth again of course. No amateurish evasions. "Occasionally."

"It would strike me she's not exactly the wifey sort, Henry."

The short ugly laugh he shot out was involuntary. He turned from the window and sat down facing Larsen again.

"I've had the wifey sort for fifteen years," he said, and sipped his drink.

"I don't know, Henry." Larsen pulled out a cigarette, lit it and leaned back. "You've got everything. You're Ridgeville's leading insurance broker, not to mention one of its more prominent citizens. You've got a nice car—two cars, in fact. A beautiful home. What more can you ask?"

"A divorce."

"She's refused?"

"A hundred times."

George Larsen smoothed his thinning hair with thick stubby fingers. "Can't you agree on a settlement?"

Bressler stared moodily into his glass. "I wish it were that," he said. "No, blast it! She wants the things I stand for—position, respectability!" He looked at Larsen and grimaced. "Says she doesn't want the taint of divorce on her name."

Larsen changed the subject abruptly. "How was your trip to Phoenix, Henry—profitable?"

"So, so."

"I like your idea of 'so, so.'" Larsen looked around the room and Bressler followed his gaze. The severe modern furnishings were plain, but just as plainly shouted their opulence. He knew the cost of each item. He and Kate had squabbled over most of them. Anyone might think he owned the town the way Kate threw his money around.

"You know, Henry," said Larsen, "I don't think it's good being on top all the time. You miss the satisfaction you gain from the little things that come your way."

Bressler rose and walked to the window again. He wished Larsen would stop chattering. He wanted time to think. Suddenly, he noticed the house was quiet. She was out of the bathroom and at the vanity.

He ran over the main points of his plan swiftly. First, there had been the thousand mile trip to a place where guns were bought and sold unregistered. Then his recent trip to Phoenix, the wait in the shadows by the school, the screaming children spilling into the street. Bressler smiled, recalling the amazed lad who had picked up the carefully cleaned gun, turning it over and over between grimy hands. Then the scramble for the handful of coins after he had gently lifted the weapon from the boy's fingers. That was really the clever point, the masterstroke in the entire plan.

What a pretty run-around George Larsen would have checking the criminal files for fingerprints!

A CHAIR being lightly pushed back sounded through the house. Henry Bressler turned from the window. It was time. He would have to act fast. She was finished with the makeup. Next would be the dress, then the jewelry. It would be more than awkward if she put the jewelry on. He looked at his watch again. It was eight-twenty.

Larsen spoke up from the sofa, apologetically. "If we get there too late Henry, it might be in bad taste."

Bressler grunted silently. Bad taste was Kate's middle name.

He walked to the hallway and stood under the arch. "I'll see if she's ready. I had phoned I wouldn't be able to make it, so she'll be surprised to see me. By the way"—he spoke evenly and carefully—"I should have thought of it before, but would you mind putting that champagne on ice? Perhaps we'll save it until after the affair. You'll find it on the top shelf in the cellar wine crib."

Larsen rose. "Sure, Henry."

"And watch yourself going down the steps. Something's wrong with the light switch."

Larsen walked down the hall to a rear door. "I'll manage with my lighter," he called back. "I should know my way around your cellar by now." His voice trailed off, and Bressler listened to the descending footsteps. He hadn't counted on George using a lighter. Well, it meant a few seconds less.

Bressler's movements were now a device of reflexes—every step, every gesture had been practiced and timed to the second. He opened the bedroom door,

closed it softly. He walked to the wide mirrored vanity, his eyes fixed on the red leather, gold tooled, jewel box. He took the green cloth bag out of his pocket and he flipped the lid of the box open.

Ignoring the disdainful look on Kate's thin pale face, he drew out a fistful of glittering rings, watches and ornaments, placing them in the bag. He drew the drawstring tight, cursed softly when he saw a gold pin sparkling on the bottom of the box. Picking it up, he glanced curiously at its leaf design, the blaze of fire from the crescent shaped ruby in its center, then he dropped it in his bag.

"You might have knocked on the door." Her voice, sharp, hateful, domineering. "And if you don't mind, you might tell me what you are doing"

He said nothing. There was nothing to say. He walked quickly to the window and in a moment the bag, secured to a thick vine, was being thrust down beneath the window ledge to lie deep and snug between the rambling ivy and the gray stucco wall.

He turned to face Kate, the automatic in the palm of his hand, its butt wrapped with his coat handkerchief. He stepped to within three feet of her, his actions that of a mechanical robot—quick, sure and confident.

Holding his arm and gun in a straight, deadly line, he sighted carefully under the lace above her heart. He heard Larsen in the cellar stumble and curse. His eye, aligned along the gun sights, saw the mounting terror in Kate's drawn, tired face, her body stiffening with fear.

From quivering lips came trembling words. "Please, Henry, please—"

Vaguely the thought came that there was still time to stop, time to change his mind. The flat patch of lace moved under the glint of the gun and he remembered another patch of lace—full, boasting, capable of shivering with wanton delight, and he squeezed the trigger as she screamed.

HE DIDN'T wait for her to fall. Each second was now as precious as life itself. He stepped to the vanity, swept the jewel box to the floor to lie there lid open, conspicuously empty. Leaping across the room he sent the heavy, onyx-base floor lamp crashing to the floor. Ripping savagely at his coat, his tie, his shirt, he lunged at the window dra-

peries, tearing them to the floor.

Larsen's lumbering feet could be heard hammering on the cellar steps. The white handkerchief was tucked back in Bressler's pocket now, and he held the gun wrapped in the soft silk folds of the drapes. He placed the gun's bore against his chest, directly over his heart and twisted it to a carefully calculated angle. His hand trembled violently. Sweat broke from every pore of his body. Larsen's bouncing feet came echoing through the hallway.

*Pull it! Pull the trigger, curse it, or hang!*

He squeezed his finger, felt the tug at his chest, the acrid powder catching at his nostrils. He noted with satisfaction his hands spreading, the gun sliding from his fingers to fall noiselessly among the soft folds of the drapes, the last unknown factor solved.

He felt the floor smash against his face, but there was no pain. Larsen's big feet again was the last sound he heard. Poor fumbling old George. . .

Henry Bressler opened his eyes. His chest hurt. The white starched uniform moved away and he saw Larsen at the foot of the hospital bed. Behind him a policeman lounged by the door. He closed his eyes, kept them closed, gaining time to think. He was alive—but now there must be no mistakes. Would his nerves hold together? Would a man who chanced death be likely to break down under police questioning? He didn't think so.

"Henry, can you answer a few questions?" George Larsen was speaking. His voice was very quiet.

Henry Bressler opened his eyes slowly, looked at the police chief's somber face which was lined now with exhaustion. He nodded with effort.

Larsen went to the door and came back with a dark-haired girl who became all poise with notebook and pencil.

"Now, Henry," said Larsen, "try to tell me as nearly as possible all you remember."

Bressler nodded again and, turning his head on the pillow, looked over to the window where a dull light slanted through the Venetian blinds. It was either early morning or twilight. He heard the impatient shuffle of Larsen's feet against the floor.

"You've been unconscious for about twenty hours, Henry. The doctor said

you were well out of danger. Now, would you tell us what happened?" His heavy voice reflecting fatigue, he added, "We've been waiting a long time."

"Well, George," the calmness in Bressler's voice strengthened him and he went on easily through the memorized passage. "When you left for the cellar, I went directly to the bedroom. I was inside the room and had the door closed before I saw him. He was standing in front of the vanity, this side of Kate. He motioned me over near him with the gun. I knew he had just emptied the jewel box because it was open, empty. He pulled out the vanity drawer, when—I'm not sure what happened—but I think Kate moved a little. Anyway, he turned toward her and his back was to me for a fraction of a second. I leaped at him, catching his arms. I heard the shot and saw Kate fall. We struggled over to the window. He was trying to get away. I guess he slipped from my grasp, and—well, here I am." He closed his eyes again and sighed. "Poor, Kate."

"Why do you say 'poor Kate', Henry?"

Bressler opened his eyes and stared at Larsen's big drooping head. She *couldn't* be alive. He wet his lips.

"I—I saw him shoot," he stammered. "I saw the blood on her slip. I thought—well, I thought—"

GEORGE LARSEN came around to the side of the bed. "Yes, she died instantly, Henry," he said. "I just wondered how you could be so sure she wasn't merely wounded. You were struggling and—well, never mind, it's not important."

Larsen drew up a straight-backed chair and sat down. "Did you touch the gun in your struggles?" he asked.

"Yes—yes, I think I grabbed the muzzle at one time."

"It checks." Larsen nodded absently, then continued, as if thinking aloud, "What was a housebreaker doing in a fully lighted home? What person except a moron would attempt a holdup with two men not forty feet away? And how the devil could he make his escape so fast?"

"Are you asking me or yourself?" Bressler snapped.

Larsen lit a cigarette and regarded Bressler with flat gray eyes that seemed disinterested in the proceedings.

"If you can supply the answers, Henry," he said, "I'll listen." He rose, walked to the foot of the bed. Suddenly, he whirled, and snapped a finger across the bed.

"What'd he look like, Henry?"

The question came so fast Bressler jerked and stumbled over the words he had written and rewritten a hundred times. "B-Big. About six feet, say. His face was covered. Ch-cheap clothes. He had an ac-ac-accent."

He stuttered on the last word so badly he gasped for breath in pure rage. Questions! They were asking questions when they should be asking how he felt. This big clod-hopping cop—

Larsen had the gun in his hand, and kept turning it over thoughtfully. Finally, he looked at Bressler.

"Everything cheap but the gun," he said. "It checks. It all checks."

"What checks?" Bressler struggled to raise himself higher on the pillow, stopped and settled back as a sharp pain pulled at his side.

Larsen turned to the policeman leaning against the door. "Wait outside a moment, Bill. You, too, Miss Cleary."

They left, and Larsen placed his big hands on the white bed railing and stared intently at Bressler.

"Of course, I know who the killer is," he said.

Bressler's chest tightened. The sharp pain was back. There couldn't have been any slip-up. There was not one shred of evidence pointing his way. On the contrary, it all pointed from him.

"Fine, George, fine," he said, aware of the moisture rolling down his cheek. "I have to hand it to your department. Quick work."

George Larsen's dull, gray eyes were staring at him again and Bressler wondered how he had ever seen any intelligence in that thick, stupid face.

"It all checks," said Larsen. "The cellar lights that wouldn't work—

"The switch is broken!"

"And the champagne that wasn't there."

"It's there somewhere!"

"Yes, I know. I found it this morning—behind a gallon can of screen paint."

Bressler glared. "So it was misplaced!"

Larsen came to the side of the bed and sat down again. "You were skittish as a kitten when you came home last

night. By the way, just when did you start being concerned whether Kate was escorted to socials or not?"

His face, dark with anger, bent forward. "And another thing, since when did Mr. Henry Bressler acquire the nerve to tackle armed gunmen?"

Bressler was silent. Larsen rose and walked to the window, his back to the bed.

"Don't start telling me I have no evidence, Henry," he said. "I know that. You've been very clever. I'd be out on my ear even suggesting that you were the killer—if I'm not out already!" He turned from the window, his voice loaded with contempt. "Police chief practically in the next room while burglar loots and murders. Oh, yes, the papers didn't miss a trick, Henry."

He lowered his voice. "But, Henry, I'm going to get you. Somewhere you've made a mistake—or will make one. That, I know. It's the murderer who is sickeningly clever that gets caught, and I'm going to catch you."

**B**RESSLER pressed his lips tightly together. Let the fool blab. When City Hall got through with him, he wouldn't be able to get a job sweeping streets. Play it out to the end—like any innocent man.

Larsen came over to the bed, stood towering over him, blotting out the light from the window. "For the murder of your wife, Henry, I could forgive you—even sympathize with you. To put it mildly, she was everything a wife shouldn't be. But to rope me in as part of your alibi, to use me—your friend, and a police official—for a clumsy fool who permits a killer to escape under his nose . . . Well, I'll do everything in my power to bring you to justice!"

When Bressler spoke, the power in his voice, the quiet even tone, delighted him. "Do you think I would shoot myself?" he asked.

Larsen laughed with his lips alone. He held up five fingers and began checking each off as he spoke.

"First," he said, "they started out firing near the arm, scorching their shirt or coat. Then, they nicked the arm—not too much, but enough to draw blood. Then, they figured to make it more realistic by putting the bullet squarely through the shoulder. After the files got jammed with these cases, they began to

use other parts of the body where it wouldn't be fatal. Then, rather recently, they began to get even more daring. Above the heart, below the heart—"

Larsen took time to light a cigarette, and his voice continued bitingly.

"Henry, surely you didn't think you were original? Why, you may not believe this, but there have been cases where they fired directly into the heart, taking the thousand-to-one chance of survival. There was one case where the poor fool, after planting phoney clues and killing his wife, turned the gun squarely against his temple. He had read somewhere that bullets bounced when a gun was pressed against a hard surface. And what do you think? He actually lived! Yep, he lived a whole year before he died—at the end of a rope."

Larsen walked to the bed table, ground out his cigarette and cocked his head down at Bressler. "But, they were block-heads, Henry, not smart like you. None thought of inviting a cop to the house for a grandstand seat. No, they didn't think of that. That's the point that would make any prosecuting attorney tear his hair out. What twelve men—or women—would convict you?"

Larsen pursed his lips. "There's only one thing that will trip you."

Bressler stiffened again, the pain returning to his side.

"The mass of detail, all the little odds and ends." Larsen shook his head slowly. "No crime is committed, which involves laborious planning, that remains perfect for long. Somewhere you've miscalculated. Somewhere you've been too clever. Perhaps, it will be the jewels. Where in Heaven's name you've managed to hide them, I don't know. I've been over every inch of the place. I know you didn't take them before you left for Phoenix. Kate would've missed them—in fact, she'd have been wearing them."

Bressler's head relaxed against the pillow. This chatterbox cop had not the slightest fragment of evidence. Play it out to the end as planned.

No matter what Larsen thought, play it out.

"You're crazy, George," he said. "I didn't do it. Why, I wouldn't have the nerve to shoot myself."

Larsen nodded agreement. "I didn't think you would myself. That's what threw me off from the beginning. But after barking my shins all night on your

phony plants, such as the prints on the gun—" There was genuine admiration in his voice. "Henry, I have to hand it to you. That was really a masterpiece. Who the devil was so cooperative as to leave you a set of fresh prints all over the butt? Until six o'clock it had me thinking you were innocent."

**H**IS chest was hurting terribly. His mind was becoming hazy. Put a stop to this chattering! Raising his hand, he shook a trembling finger in Larsen's face.

"I've had enough of your nonsense! You can ask my lawyer the questions!"

Larsen lifted his eyebrows. "Why, Henry, you don't need a lawyer. I'd be crazy if I placed you under arrest now, when I personally would have to testify to how you invited me to your home, how close the shots were fired, the condition of the room showing the struggle. No, you don't need a lawyer—not yet!"

Should he ask? He had to know. "What happened at six o'clock?"

"Oh, that." Larsen shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing to hang you with. I sent McCarthy to Phoenix to check your business there. Your client, Silvers, gave him the story—how you fussed around all day making arrangements for him to have a physical the next morning, then you make the startling discovery—at the proper time, of course—that it wouldn't be necessary. Fancy a smart insurance broker like you, thinking a physical examination was necessary to write an annuity policy." Larsen waved his hand. "Sure, I know—you forgot! Everybody forgets once in awhile."

"I want my lawyer here!"

Larsen sat down in the chair again. "I said you didn't need a lawyer, Henry."

"Well, stop your infernal questions!"

Larsen looked surprised "I haven't been asking any questions."

"Then stop your infernal talking!" shouted Bressler, his face reddening.

Larsen rose, walked to the door, turned. "Why, didn't you just throw the jewels on the floor, Henry? That would have been the smart thing to do. Now, you're stuck with something you've got to keep hidden, or get rid of."

Bressler started to open his mouth, but closed his lips tight when Larsen opened the door. The girl came in, followed by the policeman. Larsen moved to the foot of the bed again.



"Henry, we'll need a description of the stolen jewels. Mind giving it to Miss Cleary?"

Bressler was quiet a moment. The play was complete, ended. Every piece fitted snugly together. He and Ina needn't wait five months. They would go away somewhere.

"Henry," Larsen's cold voice interrupted his thoughts. "Miss Cleary is waiting. You have some idea of what your wife's jewelry looks like, don't you?" He lowered his voice. "Or, do you need a lawyer for that?"

George Larsen turned his broad back to the bed and Bressler scowled at the heavy, sagging shoulders.

"I can't recall everything she owned," he said, "but there were the usual rings. An engagement, single diamond, about four carats. A wedding band, platinum, circled with diamonds—eight, I think." Over five thousand those two rings had cost him. What a chump he had been. "A gold watch, Hamilton, I believe, four small diamonds on each side." She had bought that for herself the Christmas before. "A gold pin, leaf shape, a ruby stone in the center, crescent shaped." He tried to recall where he had seen it before. It was probably a birthday gift to herself.

"Is that all?" asked Larsen.

"The rest was the usual assortment of costume trinkets."

"Miss Cleary, write that list out in longhand," Larsen ordered.

THE girl scribbled on the pad a moment, then handed the sheet to Larsen who turned around and walked to the bed. He handed the paper to Bressler. "If this checks, Henry, we'll send it out."

Bressler glanced at the paper and nodded. Larsen held out a pencil.

"Sign it," he said.

He looked up at Larsen suspiciously. "What for?"

"Usual procedure," Larsen said. "Descriptions of stolen goods have to be double checked."

He scrawled his signature below the items. Larsen took the paper and read it carefully.

"Henry, what did you give Kate for your anniversary?"

"Nothing. She bought her own gifts—as you well know."

"What did she buy for this last anniversary?"

"I don't know." These were more questions that were not in his plans. Curse this red-necked cop, anyway!

"One more question, Henry." Larsen's voice was smooth and quiet. "You said the killer had rifled the jewel box before you came into the room?"

"Yes," warily.

"Then of course you couldn't see each item?"

"Certainly not!" Bressler snapped out defiantly. "But you asked me to list the jewelry I know of. I did. I know she had more, but I can't remember exactly what they were." He added heatedly. "Am I supposed to remember every article?"

Larsen almost danced to the foot of the bed. He waved the paper around. "Of course, you can't remember all she had! In fact, Henry, you remembered too much! You remembered a gold pin, described it perfectly—a gold pin that Kate had selected yesterday afternoon—while you were in Phoenix. It was delivered last night to your home by messenger while I was there. I can remember Kate's words distinctly. She had said, 'Wait until old pinch-penny sees this. He'll have kittens!' And you saw it, Henry, when you yourself emptied the box. Clever and observant man that you are, you remembered the piece and described it—over your signature."

"You're crazy, George," said Bressler thickly, "I didn't do it." He noted the idiotic expression on the girl's face, the I-thought-so-all-the-time written all over the policeman.

Larsen was shaking his head. "You're sharp, Henry. You almost had me believing you." He swung to the policeman who became all attention.

"McGowan!" he bellowed. "Take two men and search that bedroom again! Rip up the outside grounds a stone's throw from the window! Take that shrubbery apart leaf by leaf, and—" his voice became ominous—"if those jewels don't turn up, someone will be pounding a night beat again."

The blue uniform was half out the door when Larsen called, "And tear down that blasted ivy under the bedroom windows! There may be a loose brick there—" he jerked his head to the bed at the long drawn-out groan.

"—a loose brick or something," he finished softly.

# Murder

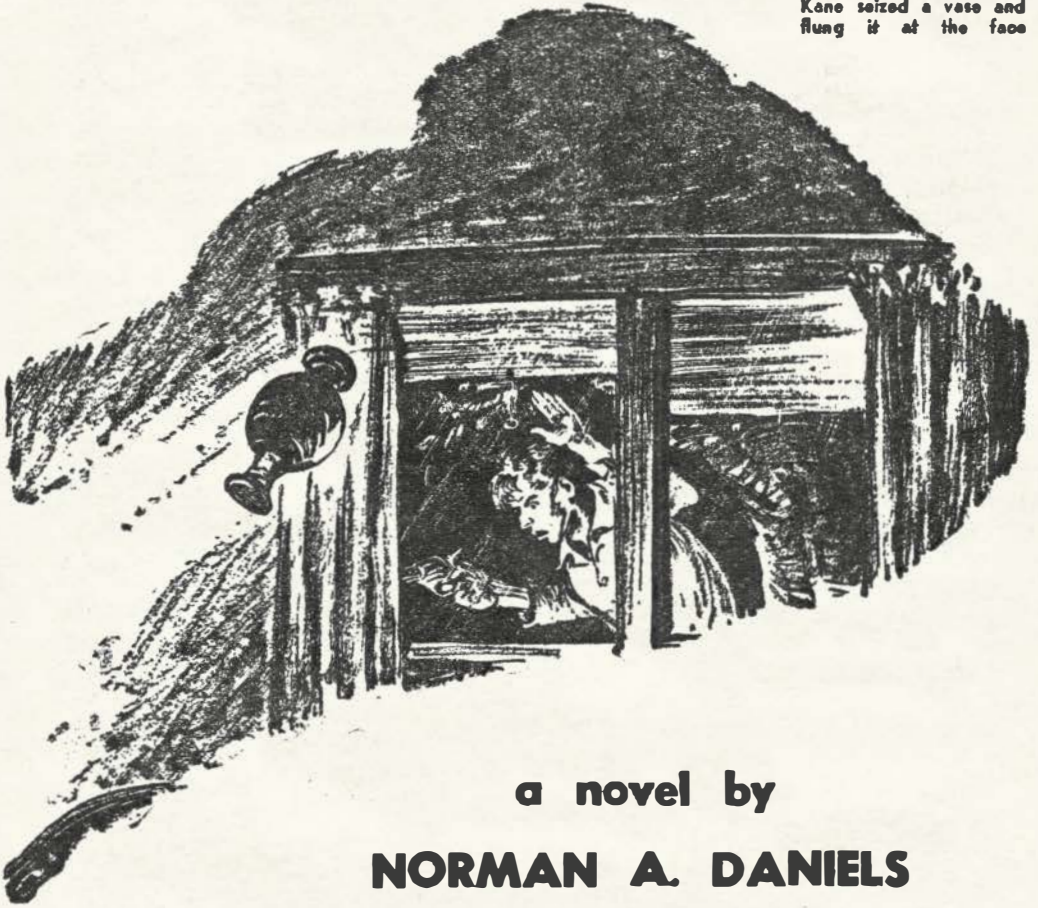
## UNDER WRAPS

Lawyer-detective Leslie Kane plays hide-and-seek with death as a grim and baffling mystery stalks a palatial mountain estate in Maine!



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Kane seized a vase and  
flung it at the face



a novel by  
**NORMAN A. DANIELS**

I

**T**HE ticket office in the railroad station at Port Royal wasn't meant for privacy. Its low windows commanded a full view of the train platform. Leslie Kane pretended to study his newspaper until train time, but his eyes were on the girl who paced up and down outside the waiting room.

She was agitated about something, but that alone wouldn't have aroused Kane's interest. He was young, single and susceptible. The girl was definitely attractive and neatly dressed, although Kane imagined she must be cold because of

the lightweight tailored suit she was wearing.

Another pair of eyes also watched her—those of a portly, bald-headed man with a ruddy complexion and little eyes. Kane and the portly man both had purchased tickets, but so far the girl had not.

The train to Rumford rolled in, twenty minutes late, but Kane didn't care much about that. He had plenty of time and the Maine air was pleasant. Kane picked up his bag, followed the portly man aboard the train and seated himself. The

# When a Beautiful Girl Pilfers a Train Ticket,

girl just stood there, apparently trying to make up her mind whether or not to get aboard.

As he waited for the train to pull out, Kane thought of his mission. When old man Dan Lawrence yowled for his attorneys, they jumped. As junior member of the firm, Kane jumped highest. Lawrence specifically had asked for him, probably because Kane had a mild reputation for ferreting out problems not altogether concerned with law work. In fact, he was considered something of a detective and trouble spotter.

Then the girl swung aboard at the last minute. The train was traveling fairly fast when she lurched down the aisle. The swaying of the coach made walking difficult. As she came abreast of the portly man, she lost her balance and practically fell into his lap.

She smiled and apologized, walked to a seat across the aisle from Kane and sat down. Kane knew the portly passenger had stuck his ticket into the slot of the seat ahead of him. Now that ticket was gone.

Kane saw the girl glance around covertly and then slide a ticket into the slot of her seat.

"Well, I'll be—" Kane muttered. "She swiped that ticket and is using it herself. Just shows you never can tell about appearances."

**J**UST then, the conductor entered the coach and started collecting tickets. The portly man was unaware of the theft until the conductor spoke to him.

"Ticket?" The portly man bent forward to examine the slot. "I put it right there a couple of minutes ago. It couldn't have fallen out. I— Wait a minute. That girl back there, she stumbled against me. I saw her at the railroad station and she didn't buy a ticket. I'll bet she took mine!"

Kane saw the girl flush, and her hands tightened into fists.

Kane bent down and sent his own ticket skittering along the floor of the car. Finally he arose and ambled forward.

"You need glasses, friend. I was at the railroad station, too. I'll bet you'd say you saw me buy a ticket also."

"You did. I watched you. You're just

sticking up for that girl. She stole my ticket!"

"Look here," Kane said frigidly. "I'm an attorney. Your accusations can get you into trouble. She *did* buy a ticket, and I didn't. I forgot all about it. And before you go leaping at conclusions, why the blazes don't you look on the floor? You might have dropped it."

The conductor reversed a couple of seats, stooped down and came up with the ticket.

"Looks like you made a mistake, mister," he said. "I'd apologize to that girl if I were you."

"And I'd sue you," Kane said.

He glanced at her just as he settled back into his own seat. She'd lost that strained expression and was attempting to smile. Kane paid his fare in cash, took a receipt and then pretended to look out of the window.

When a waiter announced dinner, the girl remained seated. Kane could tell that she was hungry. He arose, walked over beside her and bowed.

"I'm sorry about all that nonsense," he said. "My name is Leslie Kane, from New York. Under the circumstances, our fat friend should have asked your pardon and taken you to dinner. Because he didn't, and due to the fact that I respect my own sex, I'd like to make up for his deficiency. Will you have dinner with me?"

She looked up at him. "Thank you. I'm from New York, too. Also, I'm broke and I did steal that man's ticket. I know what you did for me and I'm grateful."

"That's better," Kane smiled. "Confession is good for the soul. We'll forget all about that. The dining car is forward."

An hour later, Kane escorted her back to her seat. He had been unable to learn her identity, why she was broke, and why her trip was so important that she'd resort to theft to accomplish it.

When darkness descended Kane closed his eyes. When he opened them again, they were at Rumford. The portly man was alighting. The girl was not in her seat.

Kane glanced through the window at the deserted wooden station, and hoped to thunder old man Lawrence hadn't forgotten to send a car.

# the Destination's Murder—Full Steam Ahead!

As he swung onto the platform he saw a flash of trim ankle, heard the slamming of a car door as the girl was driven away. Kane sighed and headed for the other side of the depot.

There was a car parked there, but no one was in it. He waited five minutes and watched the portly man trudge down the road in the opposite direction. Then he saw a tag tied to the wheel of the automobile. It read:

Attorney Kane:  
Sorry can't supply driver. You know where my place is. Come up.

It was signed in Old Man Lawrence's crabbed handwriting. Kane got his bag, started the motor and pulled away from



LESLIE KANE

the station. The left headlamp was dark.

Kane knew the roads fairly well and as he continued to drive, recognition of landmarks became even clearer. The car started to climb now, negotiating the high mountain at the top of which Dan Lawrence's estate sprawled. There was even a private lake there, with some of the best fishing in the world. Kane looked forward to that.

On his left was a flimsy highway fence and beyond it a drop of about two hundred feet into a valley. On the right-hand side a cliff rose, stark and jagged.

If Kane had not rolled down the window he might not have heard the start of that avalanche.

**F**IRST there was a loud cracking sound, like a tree being mowed down by a heavy tank. Then bits of loose stone and earth rained on the roof of the car. Kane squirmed over to the right and peered up. He saw a gigantic boulder roll off the edge of the cliff.

There was not time to manipulate the car. Kane threw the door wide and crouched in the comparative safety of the cliff. The huge rock hit the rear end of the car, dragged it through the fence and both plunged over the precipice.

Kane shivered, then frowned. Had it really been an accident? A killer, planted high up on those cliffs, could have dislodged the boulder at a given moment. He'd have known too that Kane was in that car—by the darkened headlamp.

Kane risked his life to go down the almost sheer wall and reach the smashed car. His bag was intact. He opened it, reached to the bottom and brought out a flashlight and a thirty-eight caliber automatic. The gun felt comfortable and reassuring in his grasp.

He heard a car come to a stop on the road above.

"Don't leave," Kane yelled. "I'm coming up and I need help!"

He looped the grip around his neck, using his necktie to do so. This left both hands free to scale that wall.

A slender young man with an ashen face and wide, staring eyes met him. He was about twenty and there was something akin to terror in his eyes.

"There was an accident," Kane explained. "A boulder took my car over the cliff. I have to reach Lawrence's place as quickly as possible. I'll pay you five dollars for the ride."

"Don't have to pay me," the young man said sullenly. "That's where I'm going. Get in."

Kane watched the lad narrowly during the ride and kept his left hand buried deep in the side pocket of his coat, where he could caress the gun. It seemed to him that this boy had come along almost too coincidentally.

"Were you in town?" he asked.

"Yup!"

"Funny that I didn't see you," Kane went on. "In fact, I didn't see another car, and everything in town was closed up tight."

"I was seeing a friend."

Kane was far from satisfied. It was possible that the young man had hidden his car, climbed to where that boulder had been previously prepared for an easy push that would send it down, and then hurried back to his car and stopped to see what actual damage his murderous act had accomplished.

The winding road passed between tall rows of birches and cedars. The smell of them had long since gotten into Kane's soul.

He was glad to be back, despite the grim welcome he'd received.

His driver brought him directly up to the front door. The car immediately pulled away toward a servant's cabin about half a mile to the rear.

A light flashed on the porch. The door opened and a woman admitted him. She was tall, straight as one of the birches on the estate, and there was no sign of welcome on her face.

"You must be the lawyer. We expected you long ago. I kept something warm for you. Come in."

Kane walked down the long, wide reception hall. This was a two-story log building containing sixteen rooms.

Ted Essex, Lawrence's confidential secretary, came out of the study. Essex greeted him with outstretched hand and a broad smile.

Kane immediately told him about the accident.

"Rock? Car left for you?" Essex looked puzzled. "I don't get it. I assigned the housekeeper's son to go after you. He's a skinny, pale kid."

"Well," Kane grunted, "he did bring me here, but I didn't meet him until after the accident. I could have sworn the note had been written by Lawrence. There must be a mistake. How is the old boy?"

"Not particularly good," Essex said. "He and I were out driving yesterday morning, when he crashed against a tree while making a sharp turn. The car caught fire. I dragged him out, but he's badly burned. There's a doctor from the village with him now. Lawrence looks like a mummy. He's swathed in oil and bandages. Lucky, though. If he'd been alone, he'd have roasted to death. Look

at my hands and my arms. That is just a small sample of what Lawrence got."

## II

**E**SSEX carefully pulled up his sleeves and exhibited raw, sore-looking burns. "Lawrence has been afraid he might die, and there are some changes to be made in his will," the secretary went on. "That's why he called for you. Supposing you eat while the doctor finishes up. Then I'll take you to see him. After that, you can meet the twin vultures."

"Exactly who are they?" Kane laughed.

Essex shrugged. "Lawrence's step-daughter is one. Probably you never met her, but we let her know about the old man's condition and she flew here, landing at the nearest airport. The other is the old man's niece, equally attracted by the savory thoughts of his death and the estate he'll leave. She arrived a short time ago."

Kane ate in a small alcove. The dour housekeeper served him with food. She answered Kane's every comment with a curt yes or no.

She stiffened suddenly and seemed to almost flee from the room. Kane looked around. A tall, slender girl in a brocaded housecoat and elaborately designed slippers, approached.

"Hello," she extended a slim hand. "You must be the lawyer whom Daddy sent for. My name is Ann Deering."

Kane motioned to a chair on the other side of the table. "Won't you sit down?"

Kane knew a great deal about Ann Deering. Lawrence had married her mother and the union lasted about a year. Then Lawrence settled a sum on her. Kane's firm had handled the divorce. The mother died and Ann Deering went on to become a second-line chorus girl, a hat-check girl, a restaurant hostess, and in the process managed to attain an unsavory reputation.

"We were so afraid Daddy might die," Ann said, watching Kane.

"I understand he's much better now," Kane said. "Where is Lawrence's niece?"

"You mean Margaret Stanforth? Oh, she's around, figuring what she'll do with the things she falls heir to when the old—when Daddy does leave us."

Kane patted his lips with the napkin, arose and helped Ann from her chair.

They walked across the hall into the living room.

"Margaret, you know, she's filthy rich."

"She's pretty, I suppose?"

"Well, in a way. I suppose you might call her that," Ann answered.

Kane consequently prepared himself to meet a ravishing beauty. Yet he didn't steel himself enough—because Miss Margaret Stanforth turned out to be the penniless girl who'd stolen a ticket on the train!

She extended her hand to Kane as though he were a perfect stranger.

"So glad you're here," she said coolly.

"Mr. Essex told me to find you. Mr. Lawrence is ready now. He's upstairs. Dr. McCormick will show you where. He's waiting at the head of the steps."

Kane grinned at her and climbed the stairway. Dr. McCormick was a burly, bearded giant of a man and his handshake felt something like the grip of a bear.

"You may talk to the patient for ten minutes and no longer. He isn't completely out of the woods yet, but I suspect we'll have him around again soon. He can talk only in a whisper and he mustn't do too much of that."

Kane knew he'd find something rather grim-looking in that bed, but Lawrence's appearance shocked him profoundly. The elderly millionaire was swathed in so many bandages that only his eyes were visible. He raised a thickly bandaged hand and Kane just touched it.

"Shut the door," Lawrence whispered and the bandages muffled the words. "Nosy doctor. Don't trust him. Don't trust anybody!"

Kane closed the door. Lawrence certainly hadn't changed much.

"Now keep quiet and listen," Lawrence whispered. "There's a lot going on around here I don't like. I think the accident wasn't quite that. Somebody tampered with the steering gear. I don't know who it could have been. I'm pretty bad, Kane. Worse than you think, or that fool doctor lets on. They can't trick me. I know!"

"I'll have Essex get my will. I wrote a new one myself and I want you to be sure it's airtight. Essex is all right, trust him. When you've finished with the will, find out who monkeyed with my car. You have a reputation as a detective of sorts."

KANE left the room and walked slowly over to the stairs. He was halfway down them when he heard a wild shout. It came from Lawrence's room.

Reversing his steps, Kane rushed to the door, threw it wide and saw the face of the pale, skinny youth who had driven him to the house at the window. The boy held a gun in his hand. Lawrence was propped up on one elbow.

Kane seized a vase and flung it at the face. It missed, but the youth disappeared. When Kane looked through the window, he saw that the boy had climbed a tree and crawled out on a thick limb to reach the window. To make his escape, he merely dropped to the ground and scampered away.

Lawrence whispered hoarsely: "He had a gun. He was going to kill me. His mother—Mrs. Webster, the housekeeper—told him to do that. As soon as I get better, I'll kick both of 'em off the place! Kane, I'm probably the most hated man in this neck of the woods."

"Bosh!" Kane locked the window and lowered the shade. "Why would anybody be sore at you?"

"Because I won't be a good fellow and die, that's why!" Lawrence said grimly.

Downstairs, Kane met Margaret Stanforth again. She was alone. He took her arm and piloted her into the study.

"You can imagine my surprise at seeing you here. Who brought you up?"

"Bruno came for me," she said. "He's the caretaker. If I'd known you were coming here, I'd have certainly asked you to ride with us. After all, you are a friend."

"Would you mind taking a little walk with me—friend?" Kane grinned.

They strolled around the north wing and paced the driveway heading to the servant's quarters. He held her arm, drawing as close as he dared.

"Just between the two of us," he said, "a couple of strange things have occurred tonight. First of all, I'm certain somebody tried to kill me. Then, a few minutes ago, Mrs. Webster's boy tried to take a pot-shot at your uncle."

"Is—is Uncle all right?"

"Yes, but that boy had murder in his eyes. Why should he hate your uncle?"

"I don't know, Mr. Kane. I've known Joey—the boy—about three years and he's always been very shy. Uncle treated him well."

"And while we're on this deep investigation," Kane said, "why not tell me how come you're considered a very wealthy young lady, yet you were obliged to chisel a railroad ticket up here."

She lowered her head slightly.

"I suppose you think I'm a thief. I had to get here tonight because I feel that something is going to happen. But I'm not rich. I work for a living, and when Uncle Dan Lawrence sent for me, I happened to be dead broke. The boss was away and I couldn't even get an advance."

Kane smiled. "It's rather refreshing to find someone who will tell the truth. Such instances are rare in my profession. Now supposing you tell me why Lawrence sent for you."

Margaret never had to answer that question. The complete silence of the mountain was broken by a single shot. It came from the vicinity of the lake.

Kane seized Margaret's wrist.

"Come on!"

They reached the lake and made a futile search of the south shore. Kane went to the first boathouse, stepped inside and lighted a match. There was nothing. With Margaret beside him, he went to the second, scraped another match, held it high and instantly blew it out. But Margaret had a glimpse of the grisly object that stared unwinkingly, unseeing up at the roof.

It was Mrs. Webster, the housekeeper. There was a bullet hole in the middle of her forehead.

"Go outside and be on the alert," Kane told Margaret.

Kneeling beside the limp figure, Kane felt for a pulse he knew wouldn't be there. He looked around the place, using one match after another. There was no gun.

Then Kane heard Margaret's shrill warning. He snuffed out the match and dropped flat. There was a sound of breaking glass and two shots rang out. Both bullets plowed into the worn floor at Kane's side.

"You killed her! You're a big city gangster and he sent for you to kill her!"

**I**T WAS the sobbing voice of Joey, the son of the dead woman. There was frantic bitterness in his grief-stricken words. His emotions were running riot in blind revenge.

Kane cursed himself for not carrying his automatic. He felt pity for the boy, but realized the youth might murder anyone he met. He had to be restrained.

Margaret was crouched against the outside wall. Kane went up to her when he heard Joey flee through the underbrush.

"It's all right," he whispered. "He's gone. The poor kid saw me kneeling beside the body of his mother and thought I'd killed her. Now why should he think Lawrence would even consider doing a thing like that?"

"I don't know." Margaret clutched his arm tightly. "Let's get away from here. I'm afraid. He might return and—kill you!"

Ted Essex, carrying a baseball bat in one hand, ran up.

"What the devil—" he panted.

"The devil is right," Kane said. "Mrs. Webster was murdered. She's inside the boathouse. Her boy just took a couple of pot-shots at me, too. We'd better round him up before he goes berserk in his grief. Also, it might be a good idea to notify the police."

"Police? There aren't any. Just the State Troopers about fifty miles away. We can't even phone them. Lawrence wanted phones installed, but the telephone company asked the price of a new power plant to put them in up here. Unless we send someone—"

"Not on your life," Kane snapped. "It would be just our ill luck to send the murderer. Dr. McCormick had better come down here and take charge."

Margaret clung tightly to Kane's arm as they followed Essex to the lodge.

"This Bruno—the caretaker who met you at the train," Kane said. "I'd like to meet him. I know he's been here a long time and Lawrence must trust the man, but Bruno may know something to help us."

"Bruno is as faithful as an old watchdog. I'd trust him anywhere. He likes me, too. May I see him first and arrange things? He isn't fond of strangers and their questions, but I'm pretty sure I can make him listen to you."

"That will be fine. Just one thing, Margaret. Be careful. There's a killer loose on this estate and he won't stop at one murder."

He watched her hurry away into the darkness. Bruno's dark cabin was illuminated. Kane hurried to the lodge.



Ann Deering was in the library idly thumping a book. "Essex told me what happened. Who do you think killed that nice old lady?"

"Why do you speak of her like that?" Kane asked bluntly. "She hated you. I could see it on her face when you walked into the dining nook."

Ann's smile faded.

"I—well, just because she didn't like me is no reason why I should've hated her. Truthfully, I don't think Mrs. Webster liked any of us."

"Maybe," Kane agreed. "You've been in the house all of the time?"

"Right in the study. Nobody seems to care much whether I'm lonesome or not."

Kane went upstairs. Dr. McCormick sat beside Lawrence's bed and he motioned Kane that it was all right to approach.

"Stay with him until I return," he said. "Essex told me about Mrs. Webster. I'll go right down. He's waiting for me at the back door."

Kane took the doctor's chair. Lawrence turned his head slowly in Kane's direction. A hoarse chuckle came from his throat.

"So the old hag is done for at last, is she? Good! Excellent! Find the man who killed her, Kane."

"I intend to. It was a brutal murder. The man who did it must be punished."

"Never mind the punishment," Lawrence whispered. "Find him and give him ten thousand dollars with my compliments. The old woman got what she deserved. Listen to me, Kane. You don't don't know what she was. Domineering, sly and clever. She used to examine all my books, read my mail. Do you suppose that alabaster-faced kid of hers came to kill me of his own volition? Not so you'd notice it. *She* sent him! I'm glad she's dead! Now get out of here and let me get some sleep."

### III

**L**AURENCE didn't sleep and Kane didn't leave. The old man kept muttering her name, interspersed with some of the vilest curses Kane had ever heard.

When McCormick returned Kane went with him into the doctor's bedroom. He closed the door, lighted a cigar and then took a hypodermic needle from his kit.

"I'm going to give Lawrence something to make him sleep," he said. "Excitement is bad for him. About Mrs. Webster—a very gruesome piece of business. She was throttled into unconsciousness first and then shot. Whoever did it was a very strong person—her neck was almost broken. I covered the body, but of course I didn't move it."

"Fortunately the law is taken care of, because I happen to be the medical examiner for this district. In fact, I'm pretty much of everything, including health officer, keeper of vital statistics and even a justice of the peace. We have a tendency to concentrate authority in these parts."

Kane watched McCormick depart and leaned back in his chair, thinking.

Downstairs, Essex was sprawled in a chair talking with Ann. He arose when Kane came down and asked him to lead him to the study. There he moved back a sliding panel in the wall, exposing a small safe. He spun the combination expertly. From the safe he removed a long, sealed envelope and handed it to Kane.

"Lawrence gave this to me a couple of days ago. It's his revised will—the one he wants you to check over. I'll go out if you want to be alone."

Kane slit the seal. "You're practically in charge here, and Lawrence trusts you. He told me so. Now, let's see . . ."

Kane whistled long and softly as he laid down the one-page document. "He certainly made some changes. I know the contents of his original will. In fact, I have a copy in my bag. He had provided for Mrs. Webster and Bruno, but this new version never even mentions them. Nor you, Essex. And he originally left you ten thousand if you were still in his employ when he died."

Essex grinned. "I had an inkling of that. Lawrence is a very changeable person. He pays me well, and he mentioned the other day that I was a fool if I expected to gain by his death. If it's not too confidential, who does get the money?"

"Margaret is mentioned. Twenty-five thousand dollars goes to her. He maintains she has enough money and more would only burden her. The bulk of his estate goes to Ann Deering—and I'm appointed executor. Well, I guess that's that. I'll have to make a legal version of this and have him sign it first thing in the morning. Now, tell me about Mar-

garet Stanforth. Where did she get this wealth of hers?"

Essex lit a cigarette and leaned back.

"Well, her mother and the old boy upstairs were sister and brother. She married some rather insignificant scientist. The old boy didn't like it, but he was mollified when he learned that his sister was well off financially. Seems this scientist made a pot of money. He died, and so did his wife. Margaret inherited their estate. I think the old boy is rather fair about it all, don't you?"

"I suppose so," Kane said, going outside.

Ann started to arise when he passed the library door, but Kane kept on going. He wanted to see Margaret, find out about Bruno and other things. She had a little explaining to do, however. Everyone believed her to be rich, and Margaret maintained she wasn't.

But Margaret was nowhere in sight. Kane frowned and hurried toward Bruno's lighted cabin. He stepped up on the tiny porch. From it he could look into a window and see half of a room. A big, ungainly man sat in a chair and ran a cleaning rag through one of the biggest revolvers Kane had ever seen.

This must be Bruno, but Kane decided he'd hate to meet him in the dark. He looked big enough to handle any two ordinary men.

Kane rapped on the door. Bruno started up and Kane heard him fussing around for a minute or two. Then he opened up and greeted Kane with a scowl.

"I'm Mr. Lawrence's attorney," Kane said. "Margaret told me she was coming to see you and I thought, after what happened near the lake, that I'd escort her to the lodge."

"She left ten minutes ago," Bruno declared.

**H**E STARTED to close the door, but Kane put a firm hand against the panel, slipped inside and walked into the room where Bruno had been working. There was no sign of the revolver. Had he been cleaning it because he expected to use the gun, or to remove all traces that it had been used recently? Kane wondered about that.

"Well?" Bruno growled.

"Look, Bruno," Kane said softly.

"There's been a murder. The killer is still loose and everyone is open to suspi-

cion. I've questioned the others and they've accounted for themselves. What about you? Where were you?"

"Right here, where I belong. I know my place, which is more'n that old witch did. I ain't sorry she's dead, but I didn't kill her."

Kane's eyes roved over the room. In a back corner he spotted a leather jacket, much too small for Bruno's big shoulders and exactly the type which Joey Webster had worn.

Kane said nothing. He went to the door, murmured an apology and walked out into the night. Twenty yards from the cabin he ducked behind a bush. Bruno had been too anxious for him to leave. A murder suspect who is innocent courts an investigation, is eager for it and will answer questions. Bruno had been highly reticent, and now—it seemed that young Joey was hidden in the cabin.

Minutes crawled by and then all the lights in Bruno's cabin winked out. Kane moved forward. Someone emerged, who moved softly toward the servants' quarters.

Kane was no woodsman, but he maintained an even, steady stride and made little sound. He got ahead of this mysterious person and, selecting a dark spot beneath the concealing branches of a birch, prepared to leap on Bruno's visitor.

He saw a shadow emerge from the gloom. All his attention was directed at the man who came down the path. Kane didn't hear a sound from behind until a man fell upon his back. Kane, dropping under the impact, twisted his head as he fell. He had a glimpse of an arm raised high and there was a dagger clutched in the hand.

Desperation surged strength into his muscles. With a mighty effort he dislodged the man, wriggled from his embrace, and attacked.

Instead of waiting for Kane to reach him, the knifer dropped to all fours and rolled toward Kane's legs. The lawyer went upward and forward and fell with a thump that shook the breath out of him.

He started to arise. The killer snapped his arm forward. The knife went wide of Kane by a foot as the killer melted into the darkness.

Kane cursed his luck bitterly. Now both mystery men had escaped. Certainly Bruno hadn't seized him, because

nothing short of dynamite would have dislodged that brute. Then who could it have been? Essex? Dr. McCormick? Joey?

Kane fumbled around in the darkness and finally found the knife. It was a peculiar weapon, curved slightly and with its keen edges notched to inflict a ragged wound. The fact that it wasn't perfectly balanced probably had saved Kane's life.

Dan Lawrence had two of these blades as ornaments in his study. They came from some little-known tribe on an island off Africa. Lawrence was a collector, and knew how to throw knives.

Kane found a stump and sat upon it. His mind was confused with conflicting ideas. Lawrence himself had come into the picture. What if he wasn't quite as badly hurt as he pretended? No one seemed to hate Mrs. Webster more than Lawrence did—excepting, possibly, Bruno.

Kane shoved the knife between his belt and trousers. Still contemplating this strange turn of events, he headed toward Mrs. Webster's quarters in the servants' building behind the lodge. Joey might have fled there.

The door was wide open. Kane drew the knife and felt a little better with some sort of weapon in his hands. He made up his mind not to venture out again unless he had his automatic along. He moved into the place and frowned in puzzlement. The state of wildest confusion existed.

Drawers had been opened and their contents spilled on the floor. A sewing basket was inverted. Even the small bookcase had been practically torn apart and the volumes lay in a heap, each one apparently examined to see if it contained what the intruder sought.

Kane started toward the rear of the place and then stopped in his tracks. The floor had squeaked some place near the kitchen.

**D**ETERMINEDLY, Kane approached the kitchen door, which was of the swinging type. He gave it a kick, banging it open, and leaped into the room. Someone crouched in a corner.

"Come out of there," Kane snapped.

Then Margaret moved forward and stopped a few feet away.

"Great heavens!" Kane cried. "What in the world—"

The friendly expression on her face was gone. Open animosity shone in her eyes.

"I—was afraid," she said hesitantly. "I—I have felt you were my friend, but I—I'm not so sure now. Put that awful knife down."

Kane thrust the blade into his pocket. "Margaret, what on earth is the matter? What are you doing here in this house? Who tore the place apart?"

"I don't know," she said. "I looked in to see if—if Joey was here. I wanted to help him. Someone came and I hid. Whoever it was searched every room but the one where I was hiding. Then something frightened him away. I was afraid to move. I thought you were the same man coming back."

She turned suddenly and fled out the back door.

As Margaret crossed the front porch of the lodge, Essex and Ann Deering stood up. They stared after Margaret and looked puzzled when Kane approached them.

"She looks as though she's seen a ghost," Essex said. "What's wrong with her?"

"Nerves," Kane soothed the pair. "Been on the porch very long?"

"Since about five minutes after you rushed out," Ann said with a pout. "I didn't think I was quite such bad company."

"Of course you're not." Kane sat down beside them. "Our killer just tried to hurl this knife into my heart."

Essex looked at the knife Kane balanced in his hand. "With that?" he gasped. "Why, that belongs to the old boy! He'd have a fit if he knew it had been taken. Ann," he faced the girl, "you'd better go inside. Please."

She didn't like it, but she went. Essex sat down with a grunt and studied Kane's features.

"There's something running through that brain of yours," he said. "I wonder if I'm smart enough to be thinking the same thing."

"About Lawrence?" Kane queried. "And this knife of his? Yes, I'm wondering about him along those lines. I'd like to be sure he's as sick as Dr. McCormick indicates. Just how bad was he after the accident?"

"Half conscious and—well, you've seen the bandages. And as for Dr. McCormick, he's been in practice at the vil-

lage for years. Holds about every public office there except town warden. Of course, the doctor may be perfectly on the level and Lawrence is putting one over on him, too. He's a rugged soul, the old man. I've seen him tear a deck of playing cards in half, and he swings an ax like a born woodsman."

"I'm going up and have a look at him." Kane arose. "Just to satisfy myself."

Ann Deering blocked his way in the hall and led him into the library.

"Maybe you wouldn't mind telling me what's the matter with Margaret?" she asked. "I just went into her room and she practically ate off my head."

"She's just upset." Kane was unaccountably bothered that he had not immediately been able to see Lawrence. Perhaps Ann had deliberately drawn him into the library for a purpose.

"Look, attorney, do you have to treat me like dirt? Haven't I the littlest bit of appeal for a guy like you? Essex seems to think I have, but you pass over me as if I were just a blank space."

"I'm sorry," Kane said. "But things have happened so darned fast I—well, frankly, I've been more interested in trying to protect people's lives on this estate. We're all in very grave danger, Ann."

Ann stepped back and he went upstairs. He found Dr. McCormick occupying a chair tilted back against the door to Lawrence's room. The doctor was dozing, but he jerked to attention when Kane walked toward him.

"Oh," he blinked sleepily, "it's you again. Don't worry about Lawrence. He's sleeping like a baby. They can be tough as ancient oaks, but a needle full of morphine puts them away."

"I'd like to look in on him," Kane insisted.

McCormick removed the chair, opened the door and Lawrence's monotonous, loud breathing filled the room. He lay on his back, bandaged face carefully propped against the pillows.

Kane went out on tip-toe, closed the door and asked:

"In your opinion, could Lawrence get up and walk around, exert himself physically?"

McCormick wagged his head solemnly from side to side. "I don't know what you're getting at, but Lawrence is a mighty sick man. I doubt that he could leave his bed."

KANE walked down the hall to the last door and rapped softly on the panel. When it was opened, Margaret tried to close it in his face. Kane wasn't to be put off now. This affair had reached a state where he had to know the entire truth.

"Please sit down," he told her. "First, I want to know what made you change your attitude toward me. You saw no one but Bruno and, possibly, young Joey, because he was in Bruno's house."

"No, you must be wrong," Margaret said. "Bruno was going to look for Joey. He thought he'd gone crazy. Joey wasn't there."

"All right, he wasn't," Kane answered. "You still haven't told me why I'm suddenly poisoning the atmosphere when you're around."

She looked at him and there was no fear in her eyes, just reproach.

"I've been told you're not exactly what you pretend to be. I can't forget how you watched me at Port Royal, how you interceded for me about the ticket. You took me to dinner and cross-examined me as though I were on the witness stand. You watched me get off the train. I've wondered if all that came about by sheer accident or whether you knew who I was and deliberately seized an opportunity to ingratiate yourself."

"Of all the fool ideas," Kane blurted. "I'm Leslie Kane, New York attorney. I came here because Lawrence trusts me, knows me. What more proof do you want?"

"That still doesn't make you Leslie Kane. I heard what Joey shouted when you were kneeling by his mother's body. He called you a gangster sent to kill Mrs. Webster."

"Look, Margaret, use your head. When Mrs. Webster was shot, I was standing right at your side, hundreds of yards away from the boathouse. Now how could I have murdered her? You and I happen to be the only two persons here who have a perfect alibi."

Margaret was silent, her eyes expressionless.

He walked to the door and said stiffly: "If you should need me, call. Goodnight."

Essex still was sitting on the porch, puffing a pipe and deep in thought. Kane didn't bother him. He went to the study, locked the door and tackled his job of

making a legal document of Dan Lawrence's hand-drawn will. He typed steadily for almost an hour, filling in the whys and wherefores until he'd converted the one-page letter into a five-page document.

His task completed, Kane placed both documents into the still-open safe, closed the door and spun the dial. A glance at his watch told him it was two-ten, but he felt no fatigue. There was a growing anger in his heart.

All that he had learned so far was that Lawrence hated the murdered woman. Bruno hated her, too, but not with the complete venom that Lawrence displayed.

Kane put his cigarette case away, went up to his room and transferred his automatic from valise to hip pocket. He donned a topcoat and hat, and softly made his way along the reception hall.

He glanced in the study and almost gave himself away by his start of surprise. Essex and Ann Deering were deeply engrossed in one another and in a tight embrace.

Margaret's room was illuminated, he saw, and was glad. He didn't mind things half so much when he knew she was safe. He wondered if that could be love.

Joey had to be found and Kane realized that this pale, wan boy probably held the solution to the whole affair. Despite his obviously weak body, Joey Webster still was dangerous. There was nothing fragile about that gun he possessed.

Kane tramped through the night, one hand gripping his automatic tightly. He had no idea where Joey might be. There were dozens of good hiding places on this estate and Joey must know every one of them. He might shoot from around any tree or gully.

Kane searched the garages behind the house first; and to insure against anyone's leaving stealthily, he removed the keys from the three cars.

The obvious thing to do was to ask someone in the house to drive for help. A detail of State Police would round up Joey and Bruno in jig time, but Kane was by no means satisfied that the murderer of Mrs. Webster wouldn't seize an opportunity to run for it. He discounted the theory that Joey would have slain his own mother. And Bruno, from what Kane had observed of him, didn't seem

the type to kill a woman he'd worked with for years.

**B**RUNO'S cottage was unlocked. Kane searched the place. In the tiny kitchen he found a table which had been set for two people. Obviously Joey had been fed here and Bruno's denial of his whereabouts was a lie.

Mrs. Webster's house was in darkness when Kane entered. Some attempt had been made to straighten up the place. Books had been replaced, a table turned upright and the contents of the sewing basket gathered and carefully placed in a corner of the davenport.

Kane heard a noise like someone moving a chair. It came from one of the bedrooms at the rear of the cottage. He kicked open the door, pressed an electric light switch and kept his gun ready.

Joey Webster stood in the middle of the room. One hand pressed down on the back of a chair and the other held the big gun Kane had last seen in Bruno's possession. Joey had a peculiar smile on his lips and he seemed paler than ever.

"Put your gun down, Joey," Kane snapped. "Put it down! I'd hate to have to shoot you!"

Joey's fingers relaxed their grip on the huge pistol. It clattered to the floor. Joey let go of the chair too and took a couple of slow, hesitant forward steps.

"I . . . was . . . wrong about . . . you," he said thickly. "Very wrong . . . Should . . . have . . . known . . . better. Glad you . . . weren't . . . killed by . . . the stone."

"Good," Kane said. "I'm glad you're finally admitting your guilt. Now, keep on talking. Why was your mother killed? Who murdered her? You must know!"

"Sure . . . I know." Joey's face was beaded with sweat. "Should have known . . . all along. Found out . . . too late now. Fine stepfather . . . fooled everybody. Hated my mother. Hated . . . me . . ."

Joey stumbled closer, and then his knees seemed to buckle under him. He pitched forward into Kane's arms. The attorney dropped his gun, slid his arms around Joey to pick him up and then he felt his fingers become wet—wet with blood.

Kane eased him to the floor. Joey had a sardonic grin on his face. He'd been stabbed in the back. He tried to explain what had happened. Perhaps his mind wasn't properly oriented, because his

agony must have been excruciating. He'd done his level best, but Joey had been racing with a contestant who never loses.

He'd learned that Kane wasn't a gangster hired to commit murder. How? Who had finally convinced him? And who had driven the blade into his back? Kane took a closer look at it. This was the twin of that knife that had been hurled at him only a short time before. Lawrence's knife!

Stepfather!

That was the answer. Old Man Lawrence must have married Mrs. Webster. It wasn't in the least unusual. Lawrence had spent many months on this lonesome estate. Perhaps she'd used her feminine wiles on him, with his money as her ultimate reward. Then he'd become aware of what she was really after, and Lawrence's love became hate.

Perhaps that hatred had been mutual. Could she, with Joey's help, have rigged that car to crash? It was possible.

"The answer," Kane told himself half aloud, "rests with two men—Bruno and Lawrence himself."

Kane picked up his gun and Joey's and headed for the house. It would soon be daylight. The case must be closed by then.

Essex and Ann Deering were still in the study, seated side by side now and holding hands. Ann actually seemed to have lost her harshness of expression.

"Come in, Kane," Essex welcomed the attorney. "Be the first to know that Ann has promised to marry me."

"I'm glad. But would you mind," Kane asked, "if I broke it up for the moment? Something has happened and Essex should know about it. I need his help."

"Not if you'll both escort me upstairs," Ann countered. "This has been a rather g h a s t l y—and wonderful—night." She held Essex's arm. "Just the same, I'm still terribly frightened. Haven't you caught that foolish boy yet?"

They walked upstairs. Kane said: "Don't worry about him. I promise you he'll not harm anyone."

**D**R. McCORMICK, parked against Lawrence's door, blinked owlishly. Kane let Essex take Ann to her room while he stopped to talk with McCormick. "How is he?" he asked, and pointed at the door.

"Sleeping like a child," McCormick answered. "I looked in on him about half an hour ago. Good heavens, man, what's that on your left hand?"

Kane glanced down at the dark stain across the back of his hand.

"Blood, Doctor. Joey Webster's blood. He's dead!"

"But I thought—"

"So did I. Joey was our best bet as the killer, even if the victim was his mother. The boy seemed mentally unbalanced to me. He confessed that he was the person who dislodged that boulder which almost finished me off. Now it seems we were both wrong and there is another killer on the loose."

"What about Bruno?" McCormick queried. "I've seen the man once or twice. Looks like a slow-thinking brute and perfectly capable of any outrageous act."

"Bruno is missing, and that's what worries me. He's powerful enough to handle any two men like you and me. Keep a sharp eye open, Doctor. By the way, have you seen Miss Stanforth?"

McCormick jerked a thumb in the direction of Margaret's door. "She's been in her room since the last time you were up. I'll watch out for her, too. You'd like that, I think, judging from the way you're so concerned about her welfare."

Essex came back then and he and Kane went down to the library. Kane walked straight over to the wall where the knives had been hanging. They were both missing, but what interested Kane mostly was an oil smear on the wallpaper. He put his nose close to it and sniffed.

"Not petroleum, anyway," he said. "It's quite odorless. Essex, Dan Lawrence was smeared with oil, wasn't he? That's one treatment for burns."

"Covered with the stuff. Sweet oil, I think it was. Why? Don't tell me you believe the old boy was down here and smeared some of the stuff on that wall. It's impossible! Kane, both those knives are missing. You had one of them. Where is the other?"

"In Joey Webster's back," Kane replied. "Sit down, Essex. This thing is getting out of hand. As soon as it's daylight and I consider it safe, you'll have to take one of the cars and drive to the village for help. Joey was murdered, but when I reached him there was a spark of life remaining. He made it fairly clear

to me that the killer was Joey's step-father. That could mean only one man—Dan Lawrence!"

Essex stared, eyes wide and mouth hanging slightly agape.

"I don't believe it," he said flatly. "It isn't possible. The old boy would have told me. Somebody got next to Joey and convinced him that was true, but I'm not convinced. Why, Lawrence detested the woman."

"Then why didn't he drive her off the estate, fire her?"

"I don't know, Kane. I suggested that to him once a while back and he nearly bit my head off. I wonder if there could be a germ of truth in what Joey told you? But no—it's utterly fantastic!"

"Well, he's going to tell us," Kane said with determination in his voice. "Things point to him as the killer. I don't believe he's quite as badly hurt as we think. It's even possible that Dr. McCormick is being paid a little something to lend a helping hand. I intend to find out about that—"

Kane stopped short, for he heard soft footsteps descending the stairs. "Who's that?"

"Relax," Essex smiled wryly. "It's just some of Ann's work. She thought that because she's so darned happy, everyone else should be, too. She went to Margaret's room and sort of squared things up for you. She told Margaret you had asked her to come down."

## V

**M**MARGARET came in slowly. She nodded to Essex, sat down in a deep leather chair and smiled at Kane.

"Ann said you wanted to see me."

Essex left so unobtrusively that Kane wasn't even aware of his departure for a couple of minutes. He walked over and stood in front of Margaret.

"I didn't ask to have you sent down," he said. "That was Ann's happy thought, but I'm glad you're here. Things have happened. Joey's dead."

Margaret's face became pale and one hand clutched at the smooth leather arm of her chair. Kane went on:

"He was murdered, but before he died Joey told me a few things. Among them was the fact that he thought of me as a killer—"

She arose quickly. "Bruno intimated you might not be Leslie Kane, but of

course you are. Otherwise, Uncle Dan wouldn't have accepted you. I think that Joey told him. Joey was in his house that night. Bruno was hiding him."

"Now, there is another thing. I have recently prepared Lawrence's will. His original left you the bulk of his estate—a great deal of money. The new will provided that only twenty-five thousand be granted you because Lawrence indicates that you are independently wealthy and not in need of his fortune. That doesn't quite jibe with what you told me, and I've got to learn the truth."

"Yes," she said slowly. "I understand that and I'll tell you. My mother married a scientist, who worked in a research laboratory for small pay, but he was always on the verge of discovering something. All he ever developed was hope.

"Mother was extremely proud. She didn't want Uncle Dan to know she'd married a failure. She'd have spurned Uncle Dan's efforts to help us financially. And there would have been trouble. So you see how it was. Uncle Dan was given to believe that we were wealthy and, of course, he thinks I was left a sizable fortune. The truth is, it took every penny I could manage to scrape together for funeral expenses.

"I'm going up to see Lawrence now," Kane said. "If he really did murder Mrs. Webster and Joey, he must be out of his mind and therefore any new will he has made can probably be contested."

Dr. McCormick was still on guard duty. Kane took his arm and piloted the physician into his bedroom.

"Just to be certain about things," he said, "supposing we take a look at your medicine kit, especially the bottle of morphine with which you drugged Lawrence."

McCormick bristled. "Are you insinuating that I—"

"Doctor, I'm looking for facts. Now, are you going to open that kit, or must I do it myself?"

McCormick shrugged and obeyed. Kane picked up the slim vial labeled *Morph. Sulph.* 1/4 gr. He unscrewed the top and poured several tiny pills into his hand. Kane moistened one finger, permitted it to rest for a moment against one pill and then touched it to his lips. He grimaced.

"I thought morphine had little or no taste, Doctor."

"It's slightly bitter."

"Then you were bamboozled," Kane grunted. "This stuff tastes sweet. Do you carry saccharin?"

"Yes—yes, of course. There's a bottle of quarter-grain pills . . . Kane, has someone switched medicines? Let me taste one of those pills."

McCormick did.

"Saccharin!" He gasped. "Why, that means I gave Lawrence an injection of saccharin! It wouldn't make him sleep, yet he's been snoring away in there making more noise than an army barracks. Let's go in and have a look at him. Nobody is going to trick me and get away with it!"

"You stay in the hall," Kane said tartly. "I'll look in on Lawrence alone. What's the best way to test him and see whether or not he's feigning a drugged sleep."

McCormick passed over a small surgical flashlight. "Open his eyelid and shine this right on the pupil. You can tell by its dilation whether or not he's drugged."

KANE took the light and walked briskly into Lawrence's room. The man, thoroughly swathed in bandages lay on his back, breathing deeply and regularly. Kane bent over him, reached toward his right eyelid and turned on the flash. Instantly, the eyes opened.

"What kind of a silly stunt is this? . . . Oh, it's you, Kane. What's up?"

"You've been up—or I'll surrender my reputation as a legal detective," Kane retorted. "Look here, Lawrence, it's time to put an end to all this nonsense. You're not as sick as you pretend to be. You've been out of bed. You went downstairs and got those knives of yours. There's a smear from your oil-soaked bandages on the wall. I'm warning you—talk to me or to the State Police."

Lawrence must have realized that all necessity for pretense was gone. He sat bolt upright.

"All right, Kane. Supposing I *have* been shamming. What of it? I'm privileged to do as I please. I've been badly burned, yes—and hurt, too. I faked my true condition to you. Even that fool McCormick thinks I'm worse than I really feel.

"Why? To see how these doting relatives and employees of mine would take it. I wanted to find out if they'd fight among themselves for a share in my

estate. Well, nothing happened. I'm satisfied. I'll make a complete explanation to anybody."

"Even about the murder of Mrs. Webster and her son Joey?"

Kane expected that Lawrence would be speechless with surprise, but the old man just waved a bandaged hand.

"There's just one stipulation. First of all, you're to go downstairs and open my safe. Remove the new will you typed. Bring it up here and I'll sign it, make the thing legal. You'll also find an envelope containing twenty-thousand dollars. I want that, too. Get them, do you hear me? Or I'll freeze up on you and every policeman in the country!"

After hesitating, Kane decided to take a chance. Lawrence gave him, verbally, the combination of the safe.

Kane opened the safe, found the will and the envelope of currency and returned to Lawrence's bedroom.

"Where's that idiot of a doctor?" croaked Lawrence.

"Outside, near the head of the steps," Kane said. "Here is the will, my fountain pen and your money. Now sign it, and give me the whole truth about this affair. Remember, I'm no prosecutor or police officer. I'm here in the capacity of your lawyer. I want to help you, but I can't unless I have the truth."

Lawrence managed to wriggle the fountain pen beneath his bandages as he scrawled his signature on the will. Kane glanced at it. Hardly much question about the writing. Few people had such a crabbed hand.

"Now help me up into a better sitting position," Lawrence said. "Put your arms around me, you nitwit! Now hoist me up."

Wrapping both arms around the man, Kane gently raised him.

Suddenly one bandaged fist drew back, snapped forward and collided with his jaw. Kane slumped across the bed, trying to dust the cobwebs out of his brain. He was vaguely aware of Lawrence shoving him aside, quietly getting out of bed and seizing a flower vase. The vase smashed across the side of Kane's head.

A door banged. Someone shouted and then a man screamed. The sound of someone rolling down the steps forced Kane to get to his feet.

He found McCormick at the bottom of the steps. Margaret was kneeling beside him.



"It was Uncle Dan," she cried. "He went out the front door and he took a rifle with him. He's gone mad, Les! He's stark crazy!"

Kane tried to walk to the front door, but his legs were as uncertain as cooked spaghetti strips. He sat down, cursing his futility.

"How is McCormick?" Kane mumbled groggily. He felt for his gun and Joey's. Both were gone.

"He'll be all right. Uncle Dan pushed him down the stairs. He's waking up now. Les, don't go after him. He'll kill you!"

Kane, reeling slightly, was walking to the open door.

"Warn Essex and Ann to be on guard," he said, and disappeared into the night.

**L**AURENCE, with all his bandages, should be an easy mark to spot, but Kane didn't see him. It would be light in half an hour, but a lot of things could happen in that short space of time.

Kane searched until the sky was hazy with light. He stood on the banks of the big lake. There was something afloat about a hundred yards offshore.

Then Kane saw what looked like an arm suddenly jut up. It took him less than a minute to remove his clothing down to shorts. He waded into the icy water until he was chest deep and then he plunged forward.

Swimming with long, powerful strokes, Kane rapidly overhauled the object he'd seen. It was a boat, down to the gunwales and in danger of sinking. Kane reached the side of the craft and looked into it.

Burly Bruno lay there, his arms and legs securely tied. He'd been placed in a rowboat and huge rocks piled on top of him. The sides of the boat had been stove in to admit water slowly. It wouldn't take much more ballast to sink her.

Kane clawed at the ropes and had loosened Bruno's arms, when he heard the sharp crack of a rifle. A bullet smacked against a rock. Another followed and sent several chips of wood flying.

Whoever the marksman might be, he  
*[Turn page]*

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was good. He had the range and the next bullet might do the trick. Kane took a quick look shoreward. It was light enough now so he could plainly see an overcoated figure standing on a huge stone and taking aim with a rifle.

There was only one thing Kane could do. He seized the boat and deliberately tipped it over. Then he dove, down and down until he thought his lungs would burst. When his head bobbed on the surface the same crack of a rifle reached him and he went under again.

The whirling eddies caused by the sinking boat, rocks and men smoothed themselves out after a short time. It seemed that the lake had taken its full toll.

As Kane reached the surface again, he heard a shout. Essex, McCormick, Ann and Margaret were on the landing, waving frantically. Essex was peeling off his coat.

Kane started to swim toward them. Willing hands pulled him ashore and he stood there shivering until Margaret brought his clothes. Essex wrapped a topcoat around his soaking body.

"Bruno may have drowned," he panted. "Lawrence must have known just where to find him, sneaked up on him and clubbed him. Bruno's head was bloody."

"Listen!" Essex barked. "It's a car—in the garage."

Essex began running madly toward the house, with Doctor McCormick at his heels. When Kane and the girls reached them, Essex stormed out of the garage.

"The limousine—it's gone! Lawrence must have been watching us and seized the opportunity to escape."

Kane groaned as they heard this discouraging information.

"Of course it must have been Lawrence! I removed the keys from all the cars in the garage, but he probably had another one. We'll have to go into the house to get the ones I left there. I need a change of clothing, and besides, *if that was Lawrence*, he's got the fastest car and a mighty good start on us. Still, he'll never get away."

Essex dropped into a chair and mopped his forehead. McCormick and the two girls were downstairs. Kane swiftly changed to dry clothing.

"What did you mean," Essex queried, "when you said 'if that was Lawrence' getting away in the car?"

Kane shrugged.

"Nothing. Of course it was Lawrence. Who else could it be, unless there was someone on the estate nobody knew about? Mrs. Webster is dead, Joey is dead, Bruno is in the lake and Lawrence has run out. There's you, McCormick, Ann, Margaret and myself left."

"How do you think you can stop that man?" Essex demanded. "Don't forget, we're not so far from Canada."

"If he goes that way," Kane slid his knotted tie into place, "he'll be caught in no time at all. The Border is watched carefully these days. He won't have a chance. Here's my idea. We'll take the other cars, head for town and notify the State Police to set road traps all over the area. They'll also send out a nine-state alarm which ought to hem Lawrence in pretty well."

Essex got up.

"Well, I'm not content to sit here doing nothing while that killer gets clear. Where are the keys to my roadster? I'll take Ann and McCormick, too, if you like, into town. We'll meet at the post office. By the time you get there, I'll have State troopers functioning."

## VI

**K**ANE opened a dresser and handed Essex two keys. "Take your pick. I've forgotten which is which."

Essex took the proper key, laid the other on the dresser and fled. Kane went downstairs to find Margaret waiting for him.

[Turn page]

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"Come to think of it," he said, "that note on the car in town was an odd piece of business. I could have sworn it was written by your uncle."

"How could it have been?" Margaret challenged. "He wouldn't know what Joey was up to."

"Granted," he said. "That note is still to be explained. When Joey's little trick didn't work, he decided he'd better take me to the estate, especially when he knew I had a gun in my pocket. Later, he tried to gun out your uncle and he darned near succeeded, too."

"Don't you think we ought to hurry, Les? Essex will be furious. And what will the State troopers think?"

Kane grinned.

"They won't get there for a while yet. Anyway, Essex will take care of the details—about the alarm and such. You know, Margaret, there's a brand-new angle connected with this case. Before I explain it, I want you to know how I feel about things. You, I mean. I—well, hang it all, I'm not going to let a thing like this prevent us from seeing each other. Not unless you wish it that way."

"I don't, Les. Of course I don't. I was an impressionable halfwit to have believed you weren't what you said you were. Now, what are those new angles?"

"Simple, my dear. You see, if your uncle is insane, then this new will which he signed before he bopped me on the head is invalid. No court would hold it the act of a sane man, and so the original will is still good. That leaves the most of your uncle's fortune to you. Of course, Mrs. Webster—or Mrs. Lawrence, as you will—was plentifully provided for, but she and her logical heir are both dead, so you get it all. The figures are going to make you dizzy. That's why I wondered about you and—me."

She sat very close to him as he nursed the sedan along that narrow, winding road. Kane didn't say much. He was on the alert for trouble and save that it might have worried Margaret, he would have put his gun on the seat beside him.

They rolled into town to find the whole village clustering around the post office. Four State troopers, three in uniform,

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were there, talking to Essex and Dr. McCormick. Essex saw Kane approaching and his features grew dark with anger.

"What did you do on the way down—park?" he growled. "Can't you realize this is a murder case?"

"I saw the bodies," Kane reminded him. "Hello, officers. I'm Leslie Kane of New York. This young lady is Dan Lawrence's niece."

"Sergeant Grogan." The trooper in civilian clothes nodded. "I'm technically off duty. For a guy who has just seen three killings, you're certainly calm and collected, Mr. Kane. But then I guess that's just your training, eh? Heard about you. Regular big city trouble-shooter, aren't you?"

Ann Deering approached Essex rather timidly and tried to insert her arm beneath his. Essex pushed her away. Ann looked as though she was ready to burst into tears.

Kane grinned at Essex. "Well, looks as though you might not marry an heiress after all, Essex. Tough going—to win a fortune and lose it all in the same few hours."

"I know what you mean," Essex snapped. "Lawrence will be adjudged crazy and the first will stands. Well, at least I'll get ten thousand he willed me there."

"I don't know," Kane said slowly. "It's a point of law. We'll get around to that later on. I—What's wrong, Essex? You look as though you're staring at a ghost."

"Les," Margaret huddled close to him. "Les, it's Bruno! I—I thought he was—dead!"

LESLIE Kane patted Margaret's hand and moved over toward the hulking form of Lawrence's caretaker. "Strange things will happen," he said. "New ones every day. Last time I saw Bruno he was in the water. Have any trouble, Bruno?"

"Hey, what is this?" Sergeant Grogan elbowed his way closer. "I thought you said this bird was on the bottom of the lake."

"Oh, yes, so I did," Kane turned his most disarming smile on the sergeant. [Turn page]

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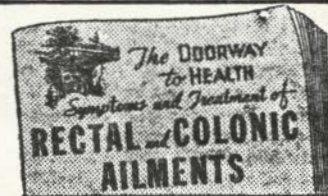
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"Seems I made a slight mistake, but all in good faith, Sergeant. Bruno, you haven't answered my question."

Bruno handed over a piece of folded paper. "I got it all right, sir, like you told me to do when we were in the water. Had a bit of trouble with Dr. McCormick's hired man. You'd better send someone out there. You can find him tied up in the hen house. I took Mr. Lawrence's limousine, went right to the doctor's and broke open his desk. I found it, all right, but I don't understand what it's all about."

"What's the meaning of this?" McCormick howled. "Why did you tell this man to invade my home and break into my desk?"

Kane went back to Margaret's side. "I'm afraid, my dear, that you'll have to face something. Your Uncle Dan is dead. Has been for a couple of days. He didn't survive the accident. McCormick buried him, filed a death certificate—a copy of which Bruno got for me.

"He stated that a tramp had been burned to death in a shack well out of town. Everyone knew the shack burned down and a corpse was found in the ashes. That was—Dan Lawrence. Bruno told me what he knew while I cut him loose in the boat. So I sent him to town to look through McCormick's records. The doctor had to account for the corpse in some way."

Suddenly Essex lowered his head and tried to drive through the crowd. Like a flash Sergeant Grogan was after Essex, leaping past the excited men and women.

Essex reached for his hip pocket, but holsters were made for fast draws. Grogan's big service pistol barked once and Essex fell against a tree near a car, with a bullet through his knee. Grogan kicked the gun out of his hand.

"And there you have your complete confession," Kane said softly. "Essex was behind it all. He simply took advantage of the accident which killed Dan Lawrence. McCormick helped him, seeking a nice juicy cut in the fortune Essex would get. First of all, Essex showed up at the estate and told about the accident to satisfy Mrs. Webster, Joey and Bruno.

"Then he slipped back to the village and McCormick fixed him up with bandages that could be quickly removed.

Like a cast with hinges, I suppose. Just open it up and there you are in the flesh. Ann Deering always had been sweet on Essex, so he knew she'd be a pushover. He returned to the estate as Dan Lawrence, but so bandaged that he couldn't be recognized. However, Mrs. Webster had her suspicions and for that reason she was murdered."

"And he told Joey that Mr. Lawrence was sending for a professional killer to do away with Mrs. Webster," Bruno added. "Even I fell for it. And believe me, Mr. Kane, I was set to wring your neck more than once!"

Bruno's grim face almost managed a smile.

"Thanks," Kane grinned, "for not trying. Anyway, Essex sent for me so I'd be there when things happened and I could draw up a new will which left everything to Ann instead of Margaret. I noticed that whenever I saw the bandaged man, Essex was never there. It made me wonder, but naturally, I didn't dream he was taking Lawrence's place. Not until he signed the will—a perfect forgery. He must have practiced Lawrence's handwriting for days.

"Well, he gave himself away when he signed that will. He had to use a pen and he loosened the bandages. They fell away from his forearm a bit and I noticed a peculiar burn mark. I'd seen it before, on Essex's arm when he showed me how he'd been burned in the accident, too.

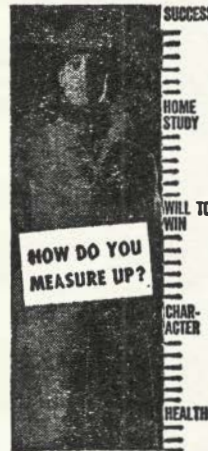
"Essex had a perfect idea. He'd kill Mrs. Webster and Joey to prevent them from claiming any part of the estate, which would have been large because Mrs. Webster was really Mrs. Lawrence. He also tore her house to pieces looking for a copy of the marriage certificate. I presume he got it. McCormick issues licenses here and I'll wager he drew up the one for Dan Lawrence. Probably married them, too, so Essex needed his services badly.

"Bruno got in the way, so he was staked out for a rough finish, too. Essex planned to let me watch him sign the will, hand over twenty thousand dollars in cash. Then he slugged me, ran out of the house and removed the bandages temporarily. He got rid of Bruno easily enough."

[Turn page]

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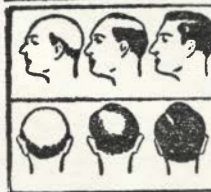
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"Sneaked up on me when my back was turned, he did," Bruno affirmed, with a malignant glance at Essex.

"Yes," Kane said. "Then it would appear that Lawrence had committed the crimes and run out with money enough to hide forever. Later on, Essex would have married Ann, claimed Lawrence's fortune according to the new will, and after he made sure all the estate was in his hands, Ann would have gotten the bounce.

"Only, Essex was not an attorney. He didn't look forward. And when the thought struck him that Lawrence might be adjudged insane and the will invalid, he showed his true colors by thrusting Ann aside. Everything he did was calculated to be the work of Dan Lawrence—who would never be found, of course, because he was buried in an unnamed grave. Well, I guess that's about all."

**T**HERE was an express running through Rumford and an excited and obliging station agent flagged it down. Margaret and Kane occupied a drawing room on the way back to Boston, headed for New York.

"You know," Kane said thoughtfully, "Essex made a very sane and lucid statement back there in the lodge. He said that Lawrence decided not to give you all that money because a big fortune and one small girl are dangerous. Now we can't let a situation like that go on forever. You'll hold the moneybags, but I'm a smart lawyer. I'll hoodwink you every time you turn around, and pretty soon that fortune—"

"You can have it." Margaret put her head on his shoulder. "Every penny! I'll trade it for—you!"



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(Continued from page 8)

ly plotted novel, written by C. K. M. Scanlon.

Number five in our array of all-star novels for the next issue is—**THE CRIMSON CURSE**, by Frederick C. Painton. . . .

Dan Powers, State Policeman, turned the rubber throttle-grip and his Harley motorcycle spurted ahead through the thickening fog. He listened to the ripping purr of the exhaust and swore fervidly. He wanted to sock somebody and hit hard. Any way you looked at it he had been given a raw deal.

Dan Powers was twenty-six years old. He weighed one hundred and seventy pounds of good beef and muscle, and any of the girls in the lunchrooms along the Post Road would tell you he had what it takes. He had been a cop for three years. He wanted to be a detective.

He had worked like a fool to learn things. He had learned from detectives in New York on his days off. Studied poisons with Dr. Bill Scanlon. Handwriting with Professor Rexford. He had a photographic memory. He never forgot a face or picture of prints. He read monographs on different kinds of soil and ashes. He read psychology. And what had it got him?

Only two weeks ago he had taken the examination for detective. Jerry Lannigan, son of the political boss, took it too. The examination was a laugh.

"Who," asked the paper, "is the king of Abyssinia?"

"And who the devil cares?" Dan muttered.

Instead of asking something about dope-peddling, counterfeiting, or what to do when you take on a murder investigation, they asked him, "How much insurance is in force in the United States?"

Jerry Lannigan, who hated Dan, got

[Turn page]

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the berth. The son of a political boss always did.

And then both Jerry and Dan were thrown right smack in the middle of a murder setup. What happened, of course, was—dynamite!

So here is the way they line up for the next issue: **MURDER MONEY** by George Bruce, **CORPSES CAN'T TALK** by James Donnelly, **TALENT FOR TROUBLE** by Sam Merwin, Jr., **MURDER ACROSS THE YEARS** by C. K. M. Scanlon, and **THE CRIMSON CURSE** by Frederick C. Painton.

And now for a look at a letter typical of the countless ones we have received the past few weeks:

Dear Editor: I wish to compliment you on your new magazine, **FIVE DETECTIVE NOVELS**. I think this is the finest move any publisher has made for a long time. I cannot tell you how pleased I was to read of The Green Ghost's reappearance—I followed him avidly when he was in a magazine of his own and later in the old **THRILLING MYSTERY**.

You are reprinting novels by the finest of authors. I remember the old days when I thrilled to the magnificent air novels of George Bruce. He's almost as good in the detective field. Keep publishing his novels, please.

And a suggestion. Since you are bringing George Chance, The Green Ghost, back, why not run some of the old Crimson Mask novels of Frank Johnson? And The Candid Camera Kid, by John L. Benton?

Above all, keep up with the very high standard set by your first issue. Do this, and you'll have the finest detective magazine published today.—*R. Eugene Ward, 305 East Maple Ave., El Segundo, Calif.*

We appreciate those kind words, Gene, and all of your fine suggestions. What do you other readers think of them? We'd like to hear from you!

Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **FIVE DETECTIVE NOVELS**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16; N. Y. Thanks to everybody—and see you next issue!

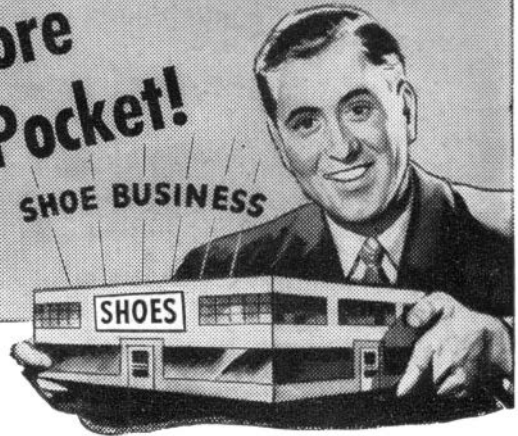
—THE EDITOR.

P. S. Here's a tip for thrills—see "The Big Wheel," the new United Artists movie about the Indianapolis auto race classic. Starring Mickey Rooney, this picture is packed with action and excitement from start to finish! We recommend it heartily!

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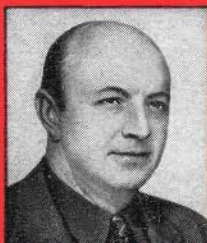


Earl Gray, Dallas, Texas, enjoys Calvert in moderation, likes its lightness.



Charles W. James, Drexel Hill, Pa., switched to milder, smoother Calvert.

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Richard S. Reed, Spokane, Wash., switched to Calvert for today's best buy.



Edward W. Hanna, Cairo, Ill., switched to milder Calvert—and is glad he did!

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