

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

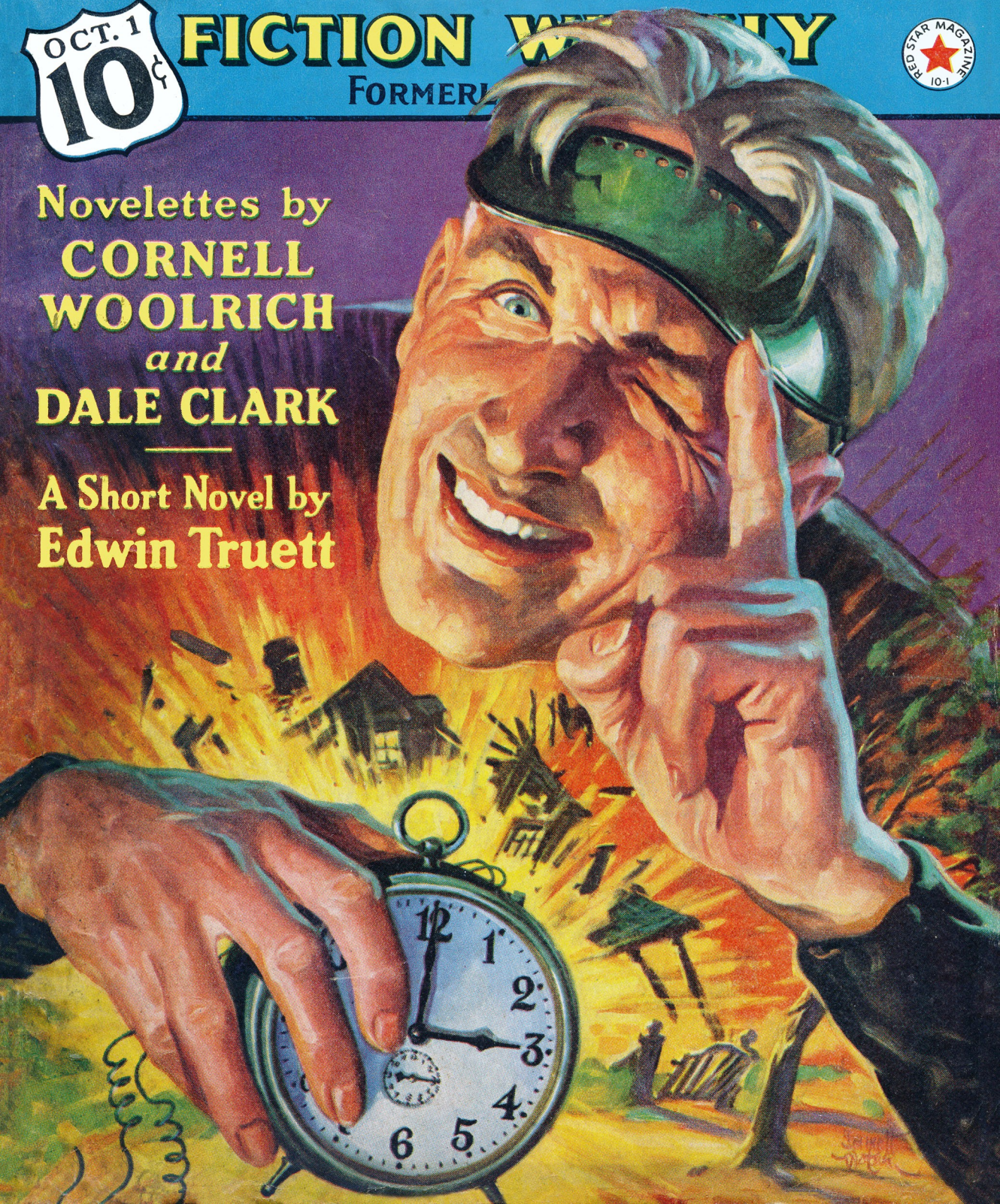
FORMERLY

OCT. 1
10
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Novelettes by
**CORNELL
WOOLRICH**
and
DALE CLARK

A Short Novel by
Edwin Truett





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 HOW THAT
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 GETS AFTER
TOBACCO
STAINED TEETH!

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 sweeps away surface stains and accumulations
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In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention **DETECTIVE FICTION**.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

VOLUME CXXII

October 1, 1938

NUMBER 6

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The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover Is On Sale Every Tuesday

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY, Publisher.

280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

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THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS LTD
8, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

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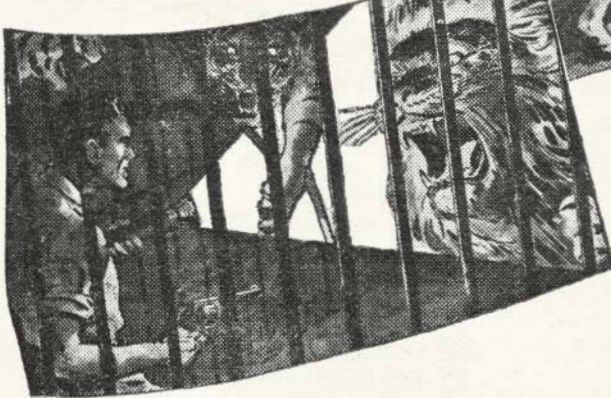
"MURDEROUS 'JUNGLE-FEVER' WAS IN THEIR EYES"

CLYDE BEATTY, CAGED WITH SNARLING JUNGLE CATS, FACES
BLACKEST MOMENT OF DEATH-DEFYING CAREER



① "It was one of those days when you know something's going to happen," writes Clyde Beatty, world-famous animal trainer and the only man who works with both lions and tigers at the same time.

pen," writes Clyde Beatty, world-famous animal trainer and the only man who works with both lions and tigers at the same time.



② "The animals had been sullen during the matinee. They came tumbling into the big cage for the evening performance with that murderous 'jungle-fever' still in their eyes, squalling, spitting and making passes. If they once drew blood it would be just too bad!

"And then, with that cage full of mixed cats raging at me and each other ... the lights went out!

③ "In the flicker of an eyelash the huge, glaring big-top went dead black! In the dark the snarls of the beasts sounded twice as loud. Green eyes glowed. In an instant they would leap for me!

"I jumped back, pressed hard against the steel bars of the cage. I whipped out my flashlight, flung the beam square in the startled face of the nearest cat, then gave it to another and another.

④ "In a moment (a mighty long moment), the trouble was repaired, the lights flashed on again and a tremendous sigh rose from the crowd. I was still alive. The power of *fresh* DATED 'Ever-ready' batteries had held at bay the fury of the jungle!

(Signed)

Clyde Beatty



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Unit of Union Carbide  and Carbon Corporation

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I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time* FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB



J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute
Established 1914

to \$500 a year—full time repair jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full time or part time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers, testers, inspectors, foremen, employ engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained at home have good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

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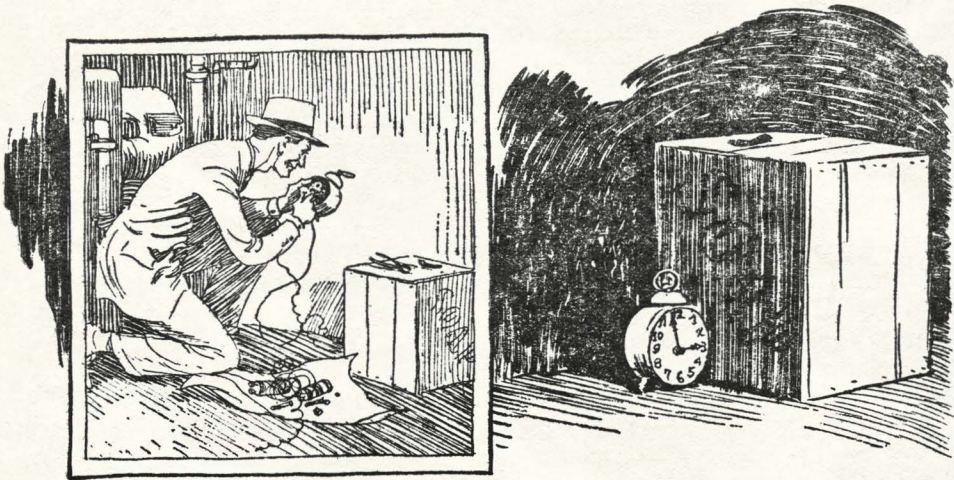


J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 8KK, Washington, D. C.

Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your method of training men at home to be Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME AGE.....
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In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DETECTIVE FICTION.



Three O'Clock

A Novelette

By Cornell Woolrich

Author of "Detective William Brown," etc.

*. . . and Paul Stapp with only seconds left to
enjoy the most beautiful day God ever made*

SHE had signed her own death-warrant. He kept telling himself over and over that he was not to blame, she had brought it on herself. He had never seen the man but he knew there was one. He had known for six weeks now.

One day he came home and there was a cigar butt in an ashtray, still moist at one end, still warm at the other. There were gasoline-drippings on the asphalt in front of their house, and they didn't own a car. And it wouldn't be a delivery-vehicle, because the drippings showed it had stood there a long time, an hour or more at least. And once he had actually glimpsed it, just rounding the far corner as he got off the bus two blocks down the other way. A second-hand Ford.

She was often very flustered when he came home, hardly seemed to know what she was doing or saying at all.

He pretended not to see any of these things; he was that type of man. Stapp, he didn't bring his hates or grudges out into the open where they had a chance to heal. He nursed them in the darkness of his mind. That's a dangerous kind of a man.

If he had been honest with himself, he would have had to admit that this mysterious afternoon caller was just the excuse he gave himself, that he'd day-dreamed of getting rid of her long before there was any reason to, that there had been something in him for years past now urging: Kill, kill, kill. Maybe ever since that time he'd been treated at the hospital for a concussion.

He didn't have any of the usual excuses. She had no money of her own, he hadn't insured her. He stood to gain nothing by getting rid of her. There was no other



There he sat while the minutes ticked by—slowly, relentlessly

woman he meant to replace her with. She didn't nag and quarrel with him. She was a docile, tractable sort of wife.

But this thing in his brain kept whispering: Kill, kill, kill. He'd fought it down until six weeks ago, more from fear and a sense of self-preservation than from compunction. The discovery that there was some stranger calling on her in the afternoons when he was away, was all that had been needed to unleash it in all its hydra-headed ferocity. And the thought that he would be killing two instead of just one, now, was an added incentive.

SO EVERY afternoon for six weeks when he came home from his shop, he had brought little things with him. Very little things, that were so harmless, so inoffensive in themselves that no one, even had they seen them, could have guessed—fine little strands of copper wire such as he sometimes used in his watch-repairing. And each time a very little package containing a substance that—well, an explosives expert might have recognized, but no one else.

There was just enough in each one of those packages, if ignited, to go *Fffft!* and flare up like flashlight-powder does. Loose like that it couldn't hurt you, only burn your skin, of course, if you got too near it. But wadded tightly into cells, in what had formerly been a soap-box down in the basement, compressed to within an inch of its life the way he had it, the whole accumulated thirty-six-days' worth of it (for he hadn't brought any home on Sundays)—that would be a different story.

They'd never know. There wouldn't be enough left of the flimsy house for them to go by. Sewer-gas they'd think, or a pocket of natural gas in the ground somewhere around under them.

Something like that had happened over on the other side of town two years ago, only not as bad, of course. That had given him the idea originally.

He'd brought home batteries too, the ordinary dry-cell kind. Just two of them, one at a time. As far as the substance itself was concerned, where he got it was his business. No one would ever know where he got it. That was the beauty of getting such a little at a time like that. It wasn't even missed where he got it from.

She didn't ask him what was in these little packages, because she didn't even see them, he had them in his pocket each time. (And of course he didn't smoke coming home.)

But even if she had seen them, she probably wouldn't have asked him. She wasn't the nosey kind that asked questions, she would have thought it was watch-parts, maybe, that he brought home to work over at night or something. And then too she was so rattled and flustered herself these days, trying to cover up the fact that she'd had a caller, that he could have brought in a grandfather-clock under his arm and she probably wouldn't have noticed it.

Well, so much the worse for her. Death was spinning its web beneath her feet as they bustled obliviously back and forth in those ground-floor rooms. He'd be in his shop tinkering with watch-parts and the phone would ring. "Mr. Stapp, Mr. Stapp, your house has just been demolished by a blast!"

A slight concussion of the brain simplifies matters so beautifully.

He knew she didn't intend running off with this unknown stranger, and at first he had wondered why not. But by now he thought he had arrived at a satisfactory answer. It was that he, Stapp, was working and the other man evidently wasn't, wouldn't be able to provide for her if she left with him. That must be it, what other reason could there be? She wanted to have her cake and eat it too.

So that was all he was good for, was it, to keep a roof over her head? Well, he was going to lift that roof sky-high, blow it to smithereens!

He didn't really want her to run off,

anyway, that wouldn't have satisfied this thing within him that cried: Kill, kill, kill. It wanted to *get* the two of them, and nothing short of that would do. And if he and she had had a five-year-old kid, say, he would have included the kid in the holocaust too, although a kid that age obviously couldn't be guilty of anything. A doctor would have known what to make of this, and would have phoned a hospital in a hurry. But unfortunately doctors aren't mind-readers and people don't go around with their thoughts placarded on sandwich-boards.

THE last little package had been brought in two days ago. The box had all it could hold now. Twice as much as was necessary to blow up the house. Enough to break every window for a radius of blocks—only there were hardly any. They were in an isolated location. And that fact gave him a paradoxical feeling of virtue, as though he were doing a good deed; he was destroying his own but he wasn't endangering anybody else's home. The wires were in place, the batteries that would give off the necessary spark were attached. All that was necessary now was the final adjustment, the hook-up, and then—

Kill, kill, kill, the thing within him gloated.

Today was the day.

He had been working over the alarm-clock all morning to the exclusion of everything else. It was only a dollar-and-a-half alarm, but he'd given it more loving care than someone's Swiss-movement pocket-watch or platinum and diamond wrist-watch. Taking it apart, cleaning it, oiling it, adjusting it, putting it together again, so that there was no slightest possibility of it failing him, of it not playing its part, of it stopping or jamming or anything else.

That was one good thing about being your own boss, operating your own shop, there was no one over you to tell you what to do and what not to do. And he didn't have an apprentice or helper in the

shop, either, to notice this peculiar absorption in a mere alarm-clock.

Other days he came home from work at five. This mysterious caller, this intruder, must be there from about two-thirty or three until shortly before she expected him. One afternoon it had started to drizzle at about a quarter to three, and when he turned in his doorway over two hours later there was still a large dry patch on the asphalt out before their house, just beginning to blacken over with the fine misty rain that was still falling. That was how he knew the time of her treachery so well.

He could, of course, if he'd wanted to bring the thing out into the open, simply have come an unexpected hour earlier any afternoon during those six weeks, and confronted them face to face. But he preferred the way of guile and murderous revenge; they might have had some explanation to offer that would weaken his purpose, rob him of his excuse to do the thing he craved. And he knew her so well, that in his secret heart he feared she would have if he once gave her the chance to offer it. Feared was the right word. He wanted to do this thing. He wasn't interested in a show-down, he was interested in a payoff. This artificially-nurtured grievance had brought the poison in his system to a head, that was all. Without it it might have remained latent for another five years, but it would have erupted sooner or later anyway.

He knew the hours of her domestic routine so well that it was the simplest matter in the world for him to return to the house on his errand at a time when she would not be there.

She did her cleaning in the morning. Then she had the impromptu morsel she called lunch. Then she went out, in the early afternoon, and did her marketing for their evening meal. They had a phone in the house but she never ordered over it; she liked, she often told him, to see what she was getting, otherwise the tradespeople simply foisted whatever they chose on you, at their own prices.

So from one until two was the time for him to do it, and be sure of getting away again unobserved afterwards.

II

AT twelve-thirty sharp he wrapped up the alarm-clock in ordinary brown paper, tucked it under his arm, and left his shop. He left it every day at this same time to go to his own lunch. He would be a little longer getting back today, that was all. He locked the door carefully after him, of course; no use taking chances, he had too many valuable watches in there under repair and observation.

He boarded the bus at the corner below, just like he did every day when he was really going home for the night. There was no danger of being recognized or identified by any bus-driver or fellow-passenger or anything like that, this was too big a city. Hundreds of people used these buses night and day. The drivers didn't even glance up at you when you paid your fare, deftly made change for you backhand by their sense of touch on the coin you gave them alone. The bus was practically empty, no one was going out his way at this hour of the day.

He got off at his usual stop, three interminable suburban blocks away from where he lived, which was why his house had not been a particularly good investment when he bought it and no others had been put up around it afterwards. But it had its compensations on such a day as this. There were no neighbors to glimpse him returning to it at this unusual hour, from their windows, and remember that fact afterwards.

The first of the three blocks he had to walk had a row of taxpayers on it, one-story store-fronts. The next two were absolutely vacant from corner to corner, just a panel of advertising billboards on both sides, with their gallery of friendly people that beamed on him each day, twice a day.

Incurable optimists these people were: even today when they were going to be shattered and splintered they continued

to grin and smirk their counsel and messages of cheer. The perspiring bald-headed fat man about to quaff some non-alcoholic beverage. The grinning laundress hanging up wash. The farmwife at the rural telephone sniggering over her shoulder. They'd be tatters and kindling in two hours from now, and they didn't have sense enough to get down off there and hurry away.

"You'll wish you had," he whispered darkly as he passed by beneath them, clock under arm.

But the point was, that if ever a man walked three "city" blocks in broad daylight unseen by the human eye, he did that now. He turned in the short cement walk when he came to his house at last, pulled back the screen door, put his latch-key into the wooden inner door and let himself in. She wasn't home, of course; he'd known she wouldn't be, or he wouldn't have come back like this.

He closed the door again after him, moved forward into the blue twilight-dimness of the house. It seemed like that at first after the glare of the street. She had the green shades down three-quarters of the way on all the windows to keep it cool until she came back.

He didn't take his hat off or anything, he wasn't staying. Particularly after he once set this clock he was carrying in motion. In fact, it was going to be a creepy feeling even walking back those three blocks to the bus-stop and standing waiting for the bus to take him downtown again, knowing all the time something was going *tick-tick, tick-tick* in the stillness back here, even though it wouldn't happen for a couple of hours yet.

HE WENT directly to the door leading down to the basement. It was a good stout wooden door. He passed through it, closed it behind him, and descended the bare brick steps. In the winter, of course, she'd had to come down occasionally to regulate the oil-burner while he was away, but after the fifteenth of April no one but himself ever came down here at any

time, and it was now long past the fifteenth of April.

She hadn't even known that he'd come down, at that. He'd slipped down each night for a few minutes while she was in the kitchen doing the dishes, and by the time she got through and came out, he was upstairs again behind his newspaper. It didn't take long to add the contents of each successive little package to what was already in the box. The wiring had taken more time, but he'd gotten that done one night when she'd gone out to the movies (so she'd said—and then had been very vague about what the picture was she'd seen, but he hadn't pressed her.)

The basement was provided with a light-bulb over the stairs, but it wasn't necessary to use it except at night; daylight was admitted through a horizontal slit of window that on the outside was flush with the ground, but on the inside was up directly under the ceiling. The glass was wire-meshed for protection and so cloudy with lack of attention as to be nearly opaque.

The box, that was no longer merely a box now but an infernal machine, was standing over against the wall, to one side of the oil-burner. He didn't dare shift it about any more now that it was wired and the batteries inserted.

He went over to it and squatted down on his heels before it, and put his hand on it with a sort of loving gesture. He was proud of it, prouder than of any fine watch he'd ever repaired or reconstructed. A watch, after all, was inanimate. This was going to become animate in a few more minutes, maybe diabolically so, but animate just the same. It was like—giving birth.

He unwrapped the clock and spread out the few necessary small implements he'd brought with him from the shop, on the floor beside him. Two fine copper wires were sticking stiffly out of a small hole he'd bored in the box, in readiness, like the antennae of some kind of insect. Through them death would go in.

He wound the clock up first, for he

couldn't safely do that once it was connected. He wound it up to within an inch of its life, with a professionally deft economy of wrist-motion. Not for nothing was he a watch-repairer.

It must have sounded ominous down in that hushed basement, to hear that *crick-craaaack*, *crick-craaaak*, that so-domestic sound that denotes going to bed, peace, slumber, security; that this time denoted approaching annihilation. It would have if there'd been any listener. There wasn't any but himself. It didn't sound ominous to him, it sounded delicious.

He set the alarm for three. But there was a difference now. Instead of just setting off a harmless bell when the hour hand reached three and the minute hand reached twelve, the wires attached to it leading to the batteries would set off a spark. A single, tiny, evanescent spark—that was all. And when that happened, all the way downtown where his shop was the showcase would vibrate, and maybe one or two of the more delicate watch-mechanisms would stop. And people on the streets would pause and ask one another: "What was that?"

They probably wouldn't even be able to tell definitely, afterwards, that there'd been anyone else beside herself in the house at the time. They'd know that she'd been there only by a process of elimination; she wouldn't be anywhere else afterwards. They'd know that the house had been there only by the hole in the earth and the litter around.

He wondered why more people didn't do things like this; they didn't know what they were missing. Probably not clever enough to be able to make the things themselves, that was why.

WHEN he'd set the clock itself by his own pocket-watch—one-fifteen—he pried the back off it. He'd already bored a little hole through this at his shop. Carefully he guided the antenna-like wires through it, more carefully still he fastened them to the necessary parts of the mechanism without letting a tremor course along

them. It was highly dangerous but his hands didn't play him false, they were too skilled at this sort of thing.

It wasn't vital to reattach the back of the clock, the result would be the same if it stood open or closed, but he did that too, to give the sense of completion to the job that his craftsman's soul found necessary.

When he had done with it, it stood there on the floor, as if placed there at random up against an innocent-looking copper-lidded soap-box, ticking away. Ten minutes had gone by since he had come down here. One hour and forty minutes were still to go by.

Death was on the wing.

He stood up and looked down at his work. He nodded. He retreated a step across the basement floor, still looking down, and nodded again, as if the slight perspective gained only enhanced it. He went over to the foot of the stairs leading up, and stopped once more and looked over. He had very good eyes. He could see the exact minute-notches on the dial all the way over where he was now. One had just gone by.

He smiled a little and went on up the stairs, not furtively or fearfully but like a man does in his own house, with an unhurried air of ownership, head up, shoulders back, tread firm.

He hadn't heard a sound over his head while he was down there, and you could hear sounds quite easily through the thin flooring, he knew that by experience. Even the opening and closing of doors above could be heard down here, certainly the footsteps of anyone walking about in the ground-floor rooms if they bore down with their normal weight. And when they stood above certain spots and spoke, the sound of the voices and even what was said, came through clearly due to some trick of acoustics. He'd heard Floyd Gibbons clearly, on the radio, while he was down here several times.

That was why he was all the more unprepared, as he opened the basement door and stepped out into the ground-floor hall,

to hear a soft tread somewhere up above, on the second floor. A single, solitary foot-fall, separate, disconnected, like Robinson Crusoe's footprint.

He stood stock-still a moment, listening tensely, thinking—hoping, rather, he'd been mistaken. But he hadn't. The slur of a bureau-drawer being drawn open or closed reached him, and then a faint tinkling sound as though something had lightly struck one of the glass toilet-articles on Fran's dresser.

Who else could it be but she? And yet there was a stealth to these vague disconnected noises that didn't sound like her. He would have heard her come in; her high heels usually exploded along the hardwood floors like little firecrackers.

III

SOME sixth sense made Stapp turn suddenly and look behind him, toward the dining room, and he was just in time to see a man, halfcrouched, shoulders bunched forward, creeping up on him. He was still a few yards away, beyond the dining-room threshold, but before Stapp could do more than drop open his mouth with reflex astonishment, he had closed in on him, caught him brutally by the throat with one hand, flung him back against the wall, and pinned him there.

"What are you doing here?" Stapp managed to gasp out.

"Hey Bill, somebody is home!" the man called out guardedly. Then he struck out at him, hit him a stunning blow on the side of the head with his free hand. Stapp didn't reel because the wall was at the back of his head, that gave him back the blow doubly, and his senses dulled into a whirling flux for a minute.

Before they had cleared again, a second man had leaped down off the stairs from one of the rooms above, in the act of finishing cramming something into his pocket.

"You know what to do. Hurry up!" the first one ordered. "Get me something to tie him with and let's get out of here."

"For God's sake, don't tie—" Stapp

managed to articulate through the strangling grip on his windpipe. The rest of it was lost in a blur of frenzied struggle on his part, flailing out with his legs, clawing at his own throat to free it. He wasn't fighting the man, he was only trying to tear that throttling impediment off long enough to get out what he had to tell them, but his assailant couldn't tell the difference. He struck him savagely a second and third time, and Stapp went limp there against the wall without altogether losing consciousness.

The second one had come back already with a rope, it looked like Fran's clothes-line from the kitchen, that she used on Mondays. Stapp, head falling forward dazedly upon the pinioning arm that still had him by the jugular, was dimly aware of this going around and around him, criss-cross, in and out, legs and body and arms.

"Don't—" he panted. His mouth was suddenly nearly torn in two, and a large handkerchief or rag was thrust in, effectively silencing all further sound. Then they whipped something around outside of that, to keep it in, and fastened it behind his head.

"Fighter, huh?" one of them muttered grimly. "What's he protecting? The place is a lemon, there's nothing in it."

Stapp felt a hand thrust into his vest-pocket, take his watch out. Then into his trouser-pocket and remove the little change he had.

"Where'll we put him?"

"Leave him where he is."

"Naw. I did my last stretch just on account of leaving a guy in the open where he could put a squad-car on my tail too quick; they nabbed me a block away. Let's shove him back down in there where he was."

This brought on a new spasm, almost epileptic in its violence. He squirmed and writhed and shook his head back and forth. They had picked him up between them now, head and feet, kicked the basement door open, and were carrying him down the steps to the bottom.

They still couldn't be made to understand that he wasn't resisting, that he wouldn't call the police, that he wouldn't lift a finger to have them apprehended—if they'd only let him get out of here with them.

"This is more like it," the first one said, as they deposited him on the floor. "Whoever lives in the house with him won't find him so quick—"

STAPP started to roll his head back and forth on the floor like something demented, toward the clock, then toward them, toward the clock, toward them. But so fast that it finally lost all possible meaning, even if it would have had any for them in the first place, and it wouldn't have of course. They still thought he was trying to free himself in unconquerable opposition.

"Look at that," one of them jeered. "Ever see anyone like him in your life?" He drew back his arm threateningly at the wriggling form. "I'll give you one that'll hold you for good, if you don't cut it out."

"Tie him up to that pipe over there in the corner," his companion suggested, "or he'll wear himself out rolling all over the place."

They dragged him backwards along the floor and lashed him in a sitting position, legs out before him, with an added length of rope that had been coiled in the basement.

Then they brushed their hands ostentatiously and started up the stairs one behind the other, breathing hard from the struggle they'd had with him. "Pick up what we got and let's blow," one muttered. "We'll have to pull another tonight—and this time you let *me* do the picking."

"It looked like the berries," his mate alibied. "No one home, and standing way off by itself like it is."

A peculiar sound like the low simmering of a tea-kettle or the mewing of a newborn kitten left out in the rain to die came percolating thinly through the gag in Stapp's mouth. His vocal cords were

strained to bursting with the effort it was costing him to make even that slight sound. His eyes were round and staring, fastened on them in horror and imploring.

They saw the look as they went up, but couldn't read it. It might have been just the physical effort of trying to burst his bonds, it might have been rage and threatened retribution, for all they knew.

The first passed obliviously through the doorway and out of sight. The second stopped halfway to the top of the stairs and glanced complacently back at him—the way he himself had looked back at his own handiwork just now, short minutes ago.

"Take it easy," he jeered. "Relax. I used to be a sailor. You'll never get out of *them* knots, buddy."

Stapp swiveled his skull desperately, so his eyes indicated the clock one last time. They almost started out of their sockets, he put such physical effort into the look.

This time the man got it finally, but got it wrong. He flung his arm at him derisively. "Trying to tell me you got a date? Oh no you haven't, you only think you have. Whadda you care what time it is, you're not going any place."

And then with the horrible slowness of a nightmare—though it only seemed that way, for he resumed his ascent fairly briskly—his head went out through the doorway, his shoulders followed, his waist next. Now even optical communication was cut off between them, and if only Stapp had had a minute more he might have made him understand! There was only one backthrust foot left in sight now, poised on the topmost step to take flight. Stapp's eyes were on it as though their burning plea could hold it back.

The heel lifted up, it rose, trailed through after the rest of the man, was gone.

STAPP heaved himself so violently, as if to go after it by sheer will-power, that for a moment his whole body was a distended bow, clear of the floor from shoulders to heels. Then he fell flat again

with a muffled thud, and a little dust came out from under him, and a half-dozen little separate skeins of sweat started down his face at one time, crossing and intercrossing as they coursed. The basement door ebbed back into its frame and the latch dropped into its socket with a minor click that to him was like the crack of doom.

In the silence now, above the surge of his own breathing that came and went like surf upon a shoreline, was the counterpoint of the clock. *Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick.*

For a moment or two longer he drew what consolation he could from the knowledge of their continued presence above him. An occasional stealthy footfall here and there, never more than one in succession, for they moved with marvelous dexterity. They must have had a lot of practise in breaking and entering, he thought inconsequentially. They were very cautious walkers from long habit even when there was no further need for it.

A single remark filtered through, from somewhere near the back door. "All set? Let's take it this way." The creak of a hinge, and then the horrid finality of a door closing after them, the back door, which Fran probably had forgotten to lock and by which they had presumably entered in the first place; and then they were gone.

And with them went his only link with the outside world. They were the only two people in the whole city who knew where he was at this moment. No one else, not a living soul, knew where to find him. Nor what would happen to him if he wasn't found and gotten out of here by three o'clock. It was twenty-five to two now. His discovery of their presence, the fight, their trussing him up with the rope, and their final unhurried departure, had all taken place within fifteen minutes.

It went *tick-tick, tick-tock; tick-tick, tick-tock*, so rhythmically, so remorselessly, so *fast*.

An hour and twenty-five minutes left—eighty-five minutes. How long that could

seem if you were waiting for someone on a corner, under an umbrella, in the rain—like he had once waited for Fran outside the office where she worked before they were married, only to find that she'd been taken ill and gone home early. How long that could seem if you were stretched out on a hospital-bed with knife-pains in your head and nothing to look at but white walls, until they brought your next tray—as he had been that time of the concussion. How long that could seem when you'd finished the paper, and one of the tubes had burned out in the radio, and it was too early to go to bed yet.

How short, how fleeting, how instantaneous, that could seem when it was all the time there was left for you to live in and you were going to die at the end of it!

NO CLOCK had ever gone this fast, of all the hundreds that he'd looked at and set right. This was a demon-clock, its quarter-hours were minutes and its minutes seconds. Its longer hand didn't even pause at all on those notches the way it should have. It passed on from one to the next in perpetual motion.

It was cheating him, it wasn't keeping the right time, somebody slow it down at least if nothing else! It was twirling like a pinwheel, that secondary hand. *Tick-tock-tick-tock-tick-tock.* He broke it up into "Here I go, here I go, here I go."

There was a long period of silence that seemed to go on forever after the two of them had left. The clock told him it was only twenty-one minutes. Then at four to two a door opened above without warning—oh, blessed sound, oh, lovely sound!—the front door this time (over above *that* side of the basement), and high-heeled shoes clacked over his head like castanets.

"Fran!" he shouted. "Fran!" he yelled. "Fran!" he screamed. But all that got past the gag was a low whimper that didn't even reach across the basement. His face was dark with the effort it cost him, and a cord stood out at each side of his palpitating neck like a splint.

The *tap-tap-tap* went into the kitchen, stopped a minute (she was putting down her parcels; she didn't have things delivered because then you were expected to tip the errand-boys ten cents), came back again.

If only there was something he could kick at with his interlocked feet, make a clatter with, but the cellar flooring was bare from wall to wall. He tried hoisting his lashed legs clear of the floor and pounding them down again with all his might; maybe the sound of the impact would carry up to her.

All he got was a soft-cushioned sound, with twice the pain of striking a stone surface with your bare palm, and not even as much distinctness. His shoes were rubber-heeled, and he could not tilt them up and around far enough to bring them down on the leather part above the lifts. An electrical discharge of pain shot up the backs of his legs, coursed up his spine, and exploded at the back of his head like a brilliant rocket.

Meanwhile her steps had halted about where the hall closet was (she must be hanging up her coat), then went on toward the stairs that led to the upper floor, faded out upon them, going up. She was out of earshot now, temporarily. But she was in the house with him at least! that awful aloneness was gone. He felt such gratitude for her nearness, he felt such love and need for her, he wondered how he could ever have thought of doing away with her—only one short hour ago.

He saw now that he must have been insane to contemplate such a thing. Well if he had been, he was sane now, he was rational now, this ordeal had brought him to his senses. Only release him, only rescue him from his jeopardy, and he'd never again—

IV

FIVE after. She'd been back nine minutes now. There, it was ten. At first slowly, then faster and faster, terror, which had momentarily been quelled by her return, began to fasten upon him again.

Why did she stay up there on the second

floor like that? Why didn't she come down here to the basement, to look for something? Wasn't there anything down here that she might suddenly be in need of?

He looked around, and there wasn't. There wasn't a possible thing that might bring her down here. They kept their basement so clean, so empty. Why wasn't it piled up with all sorts of junk like other people's! That might have saved him now.

She might intend to stay up there all afternoon. She might lie down and take a nap, she might shampoo her hair, she might do over an old dress. Any one of those trivial harmless occupations of a woman during her husband's absence could prove so fatal now. She might count on staying up there until it was time to begin getting his supper ready, and if she did—no supper, no she, no he.

Then a measure of relief came again. The man. The man whom he had intended destroying along with her, *he* would save him. He would be the means of his salvation. He came other days, didn't he, in the afternoon, while Stapp was away? Then, oh God, let him come today, make this one of the days they had a rendezvous (and yet maybe it just wasn't)! For if he came, that would bring her down to the lower floor, if only to admit him. And how infinitely greater his chances would be, with two pairs of ears in the house to overhear some wisp of sound he might make, than just with one.

And so he found himself in the anomalous position of a husband praying, pleading with every ounce of fervency he can muster, for the arrival, the materialization, of a rival whose existence he had only suspected until now, never been positive of.

Eleven past two. Forty-nine minutes left. Less than the time it took to sit through the "A" part of a picture-show. Less than the time it took to get a haircut, if you had to wait your turn. Less than the time it took to sit through a Sunday meal, or listen to an hour program on the radio, or ride on the bus from here to

the beach for a dip. Less than all those things—to live. No, no, he had been meant to live thirty more years, forty! What had become of those years, those months, those weeks? No, not just *minutes* left, it wasn't fair!

"Fran!" he shrieked. "Fran, come down here! Can't you hear me?" The gag drank it up like a sponge.

The phone trilled out suddenly in the lower hallway, midway between him and her. He'd never heard such a beautiful sound before. "Thank God!" he sobbed, and a tear stood out in each eye. That must be the man now. That would bring her down.

Then fear again. Suppose it was only to tell her that he wasn't coming? Or worse still, suppose it was to ask her instead to come out and meet him somewhere else? Leave him alone down here, once again, with this horror ticking away opposite him. No child was ever so terrified of being left alone in the dark, of its parents putting out the light and leaving it to the mercy of the boogy-man as this grown man was at the thought of her going out of the house and leaving him behind.

It kept on ringing a moment longer, and then he heard her quick step descending the stairs to answer it. He could hear every word she said down there where he was. These cheap matchwood houses.

"Hello? Yes, Dave. I just got in now."

Then, "Oh Dave, I'm all upset. I had seventeen dollars upstairs in my bureau-drawer and it's gone, and the wristwatch that Paul gave me is gone too. Nothing else is missing, but it looks to me as if someone broke in here while I was out and robbed us."

STAPP almost writhed with delight down there where he was. She knew they'd been robbed. She'd get the police now. Surely they'd search the whole place, surely they'd look down here and find him!

The man she was talking to must have asked her if she was sure. "Well, I'll look again, but I know it's gone. I know

just where I left it, and it isn't there. Paul will have a fit."

No Paul wouldn't either; if she'd only come down here and free him he'd forgive her anything, even the cardinal sin of being robbed of his hard-earned money.

Then she said, "No, I haven't reported it yet. I suppose I should, but I don't like the idea—on your account, you know. I'm going to call up Paul at the shop. There's just a chance that he took the money and the watch both with him when he left this morning. I remember telling him the other night that it was losing time; he may have wanted to look it over. Well, all right, Dave, come on out then."

So he was coming, so Stapp wasn't to be left alone in the place; hot breaths of relief pushed against the sodden gag at the back of his palate.

There was a pause while she broke the connection. Then he heard her call his shop-number, "Trevelyan 4-4512," and wait while they were ringing, and of course no one answered.

Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick.

The operator must have told her finally that they couldn't get the number. "Well, keep ringing," he heard her say, "it's my husband's store, he's always there at this hour."

He screamed in terrible silence: "I'm right here under your feet. Don't waste time. For God's sake, come away from the phone, come down here!"

Finally, when failure was reported a second time, she hung up. Even the hollow, cupping sound of that detail reached him. Oh, everything reached him—but help. This was a torture that a Grand Inquisitor would have envied.

He heard her steps move away from where the phone was. Wouldn't she guess by his absence from where he was supposed to be that something was wrong? Wouldn't she come down here now and look? (Oh, where was this woman's intuition they spoke about!) No, how could she be expected to? What connection could the basement of their house possibly have

in her mind with the fact that he wasn't in his shop? She wasn't even alarmed, so far, by his absence most likely. If it had been evening; but at this hour of the day—He might have gone out later than other days to his lunch, he might have had some errand to do.

He heard her going up the stairs again, probably to resume her search for the missing money and watch. He whimpered disappointedly. He was cut off from her while she remained up there, as if she'd been miles away, instead of being vertically over him in a straight line.

Tick, tock, tick, tock. It was twenty-one past two now. One half-hour and nine scant minutes left. And they ticked away with the prodigality of tropical raindrops on a corrugated tin roof.

He kept straining and pulling away from the pipe that held him fast, then falling back exhausted, to rest awhile, to struggle and to strain some more. There was as recurrent a rhythm to it as there was to the ticking of the clock itself, only more widely spaced. How could ropes hold that unyieldingly? Each time he fell back weaker, less able to contend with them than the time before. For he wasn't little strands of hemp, he was layers of thin skin that broke one by one and gave forth burning pain and finally blood.

THE doorbell rang out sharply. The man had come. In less than ten minutes after their phone talk he had reached the house. Stapp's chest started rising and falling with renewed hope. Now his chances were good again. Twice as good as before, with two people in the house instead of only one. Four ears instead of two, to hear whatever slight sound he might manage to make. And he must, he must find a way of making one.

He gave the stranger his benediction while he stood there waiting to be admitted. Thank God for this admirer or whatever he was, thank God for their rendezvous! He'd give them his blessing if they wanted it, all his worldly goods;

anything, anything, if they'd only find him, free him.

She came quickly down the stairs a second time and her footfalls hurried across the hall. The front door opened. "Hello, Dave," she said, and he heard the sound of a kiss quite clearly. One of those loud unabashed ones that bespeak cordiality rather than intrigue.

A man's voice, deep, resonant, asked: "Well, did it turn up yet?"

"No, and I've looked high and low," he heard her say. "I tried to get Paul after I spoke to you, and he was out to lunch."

"Well, you can't just let seventeen dollars walk out the door without lifting your finger."

For seventeen dollars they were standing there frittering his life away—and their own too, for that matter, the fools!

"They'll think I did it, I suppose," he heard the man say with a note of bitterness.

"Don't say things like that," she reproved. "Come in the kitchen and I'll make you a cup of coffee."

Her quick brittle step went first, and his heavier, slower one followed. There was the sound of a couple of chairs being drawn out, and the man's footfalls died out entirely. Hers continued busily back and forth for awhile, on a short orbit between stove and table.

What were they going to do, *sit* up there for the next half-hour? Couldn't he *make* them hear in some way? He tried clearing his throat, coughing. It hurt furiously, because the lining of it was all raw from long strain. But the gag muffled even the cough to a blurred purring sort of sound.

V

TWENTY-SIX to three. Only minutes left now, minutes; not even a full half-hour any more.

Her footsteps stopped finally and a chair shifted slightly as she joined him at the table. There was linoleum around the stove and sink that deadened sounds,

but the middle part of the room where the table stood was ordinary pine-board flooring. It let things through with crystalline accuracy.

He heard her say, "Don't you think we ought to tell Paul about—us?"

The man didn't answer for a moment. Maybe he was spooning sugar, or thinking about what she'd said. Finally he asked, "What kind of a guy is he?"

"Paul's not narrow-minded," she said. "He's very fair and broad."

Even in his agony, Stapp was dimly aware of one thing: that didn't sound a bit like her. Not her speaking well of him, but that she could calmly, detachedly contemplate broaching such a topic to him. She had always seemed so proper and slightly prudish. This argued a sophistication that he hadn't known she'd had.

The man was evidently dubious about taking Paul into their confidence, at least he had nothing further to say. She went on, as though trying to convince him: "You have nothing to be afraid of on Paul's account, Dave, I know him too well. And don't you see, we can't keep on like this? It's better to go to him ourselves and tell him about you, than wait until he finds out. He's liable to think something else entirely, and keep it to himself, brood, hold it against me, unless we explain. I know that he didn't believe me that night when I helped you find a furnished room, and told him I'd been to a movie. And I'm so nervous and upset each time he comes home in the evening it's a wonder he hasn't noticed it before now. Why I feel as guilty as if—as if I were one of these disloyal wives or something." She laughed embarrassedly, as if apologizing to him for even bringing such a comparison up.

What did she mean by that?

"Didn't you ever tell him about me at all?"

"You mean in the beginning? Oh, I told him you'd been in one or two scrapes, but like a little fool I let him think I'd lost track of you."

Why, that was her brother she'd said that about!

The man sitting up there with her confirmed it right as the thought burst in his mind. "I know it's tough on you, sis. You're happily married and all that. I've got no right to come around and gum things up for you. No one's proud of a jailbird, an escaped convict, for a brother—"

"David," he heard her say, and even through the flooring there was such a ring of earnestness in her voice Stapp could almost visualize her reaching across the table and putting her hand reassuringly on his, "there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, and you should know that by now. Circumstances have been against you, that's all. You shouldn't have done what you did, but that's spilt milk and there's no use going back over it now."

"I suppose I'll have to go back and finish it out. Seven years, though, Fran. seven years out of a man's life—"

"But this way you have no life at all."

Were they going to keep on talking his life away? Nineteen to three. One quarter of an hour, and four minutes over!

"Before you do anything, let's go downtown and talk it over with Paul, hear what he says." One chair jarred back, then the other. He could hear dishes clatter, as though they'd all been lumped together in one stack. "I'll do these when I come back," she remarked.

Were they going to leave again? Were they going to leave him behind here, alone, with only minutes to spare?

THEIR footsteps had come out into the hall now, halted a moment undecidedly. "I don't like the idea of you being seen with me on the streets in broad daylight, you could get in trouble yourself, you know. Why don't you phone him to come out here instead?"

Yes, yes, Stapp wailed. Stay with me! Stay!

"I'm not afraid," she said gallantly. "I don't like to ask him to leave his

work at this hour, and I can't tell him over the phone. Wait a minute, I'll get my hat." Her footsteps diverged momentarily from his, rejoined them again.

Panic-stricken, Stapp did the only thing he could think of. Struck the back of his own head violently against the thick pipe he was attached to.

A sheet of blue flame darted before his eyes. He must have hit one of the welts where he had already been struck once by the burglars. The pain was so excruciating he knew he couldn't repeat the attempt. But they must have heard something, some dull thud or reverberation must have carried up along the pipe. He heard her stop short for a minute and say, "What was that?"

And the man, duller-sensed than she and killing him all unknowingly, "What? I didn't hear anything."

She took his word for it, went on again, to the hall-closet to get her coat. Then her footsteps retraced themselves all the way back through the dining room to the kitchen. "Wait a minute, I want to make sure this back door's shut tight. Locking the stable after the horse is gone."

She went forward again through the house for the last time, there was the sound of the front door opening, she passed through it, the man passed through it, it closed, and they were gone. There was the faint whirr of a car starting up outside in open.

And now he was left alone with his self-fashioned doom a second time, and the first seemed a paradise in retrospect, compared to this; for then he had a full hour to spare, he had been rich in time, and now he only had fifteen minutes, one miserly quarter-hour.

There wasn't any use struggling any more. He'd found that out long ago. He couldn't anyway, even if he'd wanted to. Flames seemed to be licking lazily around his wrists and ankles.

He'd found a sort of palliative now, the only way there was left. He'd keep his eyes down and pretend the hands were moving slower than they were, it was

better than watching them constantly, it blunted a little of the terror at least. The ticking he couldn't hide from.

Of course every once in awhile when he couldn't resist looking up and verifying his own calculations, there'd be a renewed burst of anguish, but in-between-times it made it more bearable to say, "It's only gained a half-minute since the last time I looked." Then he'd hold out as long as he could with his eyes down. But when he couldn't stand it any more and would have to raise them to see if he was right, it had gained *two* minutes. Then he'd have a bad fit of hysteria, in which he called on God, and even on his long-dead mother, to help him, and couldn't see straight through the tears.

Then he'd pull himself together again, in a measure, and start the self-deception over again. "It's only about thirty seconds now since I last looked . . . Now it's about a minute . . ." (But was it? But was it?) And so on, mounting slowly to another climax of terror and abysmal collapse.

Then suddenly the outside world intruded again, that world that he was so cut off from that it already seemed as far away, as unreal, as if he were already dead. The doorbell rang out.

HE TOOK no hope from the summons at first. Maybe some peddler—no, that had been too aggressive to be a peddler's ring. It was the sort of ring that claimed admission as its right, not as a favor. It came again. Whoever was ringing was truculently impatient at being kept waiting.

A third ring was given the bell, this time a veritable blast that kept on for nearly half-a-minute. The party must have kept his finger pressed to the bell-button the whole time. Then as the peal finally stopped, a voice called out forcefully: "Anybody home in there? Gas Company."

And suddenly Stapp was quivering all over, almost whinnying in his anxiety.

This was the one call, the one incident in all the day's domestic routine, from

earliest morning until latest night, that could have possibly brought anyone down into the basement. The meter was up there on the wall, beside the stairs, staring him in the face. And her brother had had to take her out of the house at just this particular time so there was no one to let the man in.

There was the impatient shuffle of a pair of feet on the cement walk. The man must come down off the porch to gain perspective with which to look inquiringly up at the second-floor windows. And for a fleeting moment, as he chafed and shifted about out there before the house, on the walk and off, Stapp actually glimpsed the blurred shanks of his legs standing before the grimy transom that let light into the basement at ground-level. All the potential savior had to do was crouch down and peer in through it, and he'd see him tied up down there. And the rest would be so easy!

Why didn't he, why didn't he? But evidently he didn't expect anyone to be in the basement of a house in which his triple ring went unanswered. The tantalizing trouser-legs shifted out of range again, the transom became blank.

A little saliva filtered through the mass of rag in Stapp's distended mouth, trickled across his silently vibrating lower lip.

The gas inspector gave the bell one more try, as if venting his disappointment at being balked rather than in any expectation of being admitted this late in the proceedings. He gave it innumerable short jabs, like a telegraph-key. *Bip-bip-bip-bip-bip*.

Then he called out disgustedly, evidently for the benefit of some unseen assistant waiting in a truck out at the curb, "They're never in when you want 'em to be." There was a single quick tread on the cement, away from the house. Then the slur of a light truck being driven off.

Stapp died a little. Not metaphorically, literally. His arms and legs got cold up to the elbows and knees, his heart seemed to beat slower, and he had trouble get-

ting a full breath; more saliva escaped and ran down his chin, and his head drooped forward and lay on his chest for awhile, inert.

Tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-tick. It brought him to after awhile, as though it were something beneficent, smelling salts or ammonia, instead of being the malevolent thing it was.

HE NOTICED that his mind was starting to wander. Not much, as yet, but every once in awhile he'd get strange fancies. One time he thought that his *face* was the clock-dial, and that thing he kept staring at over there was his face. The pivot in the middle that held the two hands became his nose, and the 10 and the 2, up near the top, became his eyes, and he had a red-tin beard and head of hair and a little round bell on the exact top of his crown for a hat.

"Gee, I look funny," he sobbed drowsily. And he caught himself twitching the muscles of his face, as if trying to stop those two hands that were clasped on it before they progressed any further and killed that man over there, who was breathing so metallically *tick, tock, tick, tock*.

Then he drove the weird notion away and he saw that it had been just another escape-mechanism. Since he couldn't control the clock over there, he had attempted to change it into something else.

Another vagary was that this ordeal had been brought on him as punishment for what he had intended doing to Fran, that he was being held fast there not by the inanimate ropes but by some active, punitive agency, and that if he exhibited remorse, pledged contrition to a proper degree, he could automatically effect his release at its hands.

Thus over and over he whined in the silence of his throttled throat, "I'm sorry. I won't do it again. Just let me go this one time, I've learned my lesson, I'll never do it again."

And on that the outer world returned again.

This time it was the phone. It must be Fran and her brother, trying to find out if he'd come here in their absence. They'd found the shop closed, must have waited outside of it for awhile, and then when he still didn't come, didn't know what to make of it. Now they were calling the house from a booth down there, to see if he had been taken ill, had returned here in the meantime. When no one answered, that would tell them, surely, that something was wrong. Wouldn't they come back now to find out what had happened to him?

But why should they think he was here in the house if he didn't answer the phone? How could they dream he was in the basement the whole time? They'd hang around outside the shop some more waiting for him, until as time went on, and Fran became real worried, maybe they'd go to the police. (But that would be hours from now, what good would it do?) They'd look everywhere but here for him. When a man is reported missing the last place they'd look for him would be in his own home.

The phone stopped ringing finally and its last vibration seemed to hang tenuously on the lifeless air long after it had ceased, humming outward in a spreading circle like a pebble dropped into a stagnant pool. *Mmmmmmmmm*, until it was gone, and silence came rolling back in its wake.

She would be outside the pay-booth or wherever it was she had called from, by this time. Rejoining her brother, where he had waited. Reporting, "He's not out at the house either." Adding the mild, still unworried comment. "Isn't that strange? Where on earth can he have gone?" Then they'd go back and wait outside the locked shop, at ease, secure, unendangered. She'd tap her foot occasionally in slight impatience, look up and down the street while they chatted.

And now *they* would be two of those casuals who would stop short and say to one another at three o'clock: "What was that?" And Fran might add, "It sounded

as though it came from out our way." That would be the sum-total of their comment on his passing.

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock. Nine minutes to three. Oh what a lovely number was nine. Let it be nine forever—not eight or seven—nine for all eternity. Make time stand still, that he might breathe though all the world around him stagnated, rotted away. But no, it was already eight. The hand had bridged the white gap between the two black notches. Oh what a precious number was eight, so rounded, so symmetrical. Let it be eight forever—

VI

A WOMAN'S voice called out in sharp reprimand, somewhere outside in the open: "Be careful what you're doing, Bobby, you'll break a window." She was some distance away, but the ringing dictatorial tones carried clearly.

Stapp saw the blurred shape of a ball strike the basement transom, he was looking up at it for her voice had come in to him through there. It must have been just a tennis ball, but for an instant it was outlined black against the soiled pane, like a small cannonball; it seemed to hang there suspended, to adhere to the glass, then it dropped back to the ground. If it had been ordinary glass it might have broken, but the wire-mesh had prevented that.

The child came close up against the transom to get its ball back. It was such a small child that Stapp could see its entire body within the height of the pane, only the head was cut off. It bent over to pick up the ball, and then its head came into range too. It had short golden ringlets all over it. Its profile was turned toward him, looking down at the ball. It was the first human face he'd seen since he'd been left where he was. It looked like an angel. But an inattentive, unconcerned angel.

It saw something else while it was still bent forward close to the ground, a stone or something that attracted it, and picked that up too and looked at it, still crouched

over, then finally threw it recklessly away over its shoulder, whatever it was.

The woman's voice was nearer at hand now, she must be strolling along the sidewalk directly in front of the house. "Bobby, stop throwing things like that, you'll hit somebody."

If it would only turn its head over this way, it could look right in, it could see him. The glass wasn't too smeary for that. He started to weave his head violently from side to side, hoping the flurry of motion would attract it, catch its eye. It may have, or its own natural curiosity may have prompted it to look in without that.

Suddenly it had turned its head and was looking directly in through the transom. Blankly at first, he could tell by the vacant expression of its eyes.

Faster and faster he swivelled his head. It raised the heel of one chubby, fumbling hand and scoured a little clear spot to squint through. Now it could see him, now surely! It still didn't for a second. It must be much darker in here than outside, and the light was behind it.

The woman's voice came in sharp reproof. "Bobby, what are you doing there?"

And then it saw him. The pupils of its eyes shifted over a little, came to rest directly on him. Interest replaced blankness. Nothing is strange to children—not a man tied up in a cellar any more than anything else—yet everything is. Everything creates wonder, calls for comment, demands explanation. Wouldn't it say anything to her? Couldn't it talk? It must be old enough to; she, its mother, was talking to it incessantly. "Bobby, come away from there."

"Mommy, look," it said gleefully.

Stapp couldn't see it clearly any more, he was shaking his head so fast. He was dizzy, like you are when you've just gotten off a carrousel; the transom and the child it framed kept swinging about him in a half-circle, first too far over on one side, then too far over on the other.

But wouldn't it understand, wouldn't

it understand that weaving of the head meant he wanted to be free? Even if rope's about the wrists and ankles had no meaning to it, if it couldn't tell what a bandage around the mouth was, it must know that when anyone writhed like that they wanted to be let loose. Oh God, if it had only been two years older, three at the most. A child of eight, these days, would have understood and given warning.

"Bobby, are you coming? I'm waiting!"

If he could only hold its attention, keep it rooted there long enough in disobedience to her, surely she'd come over and get it, see him herself as she irritably sought to ascertain the reason for its fascination.

He rolled his eyes at it in desperate comicality, winked them, blinked them, crossed them. An elfin grin peered out on its face at this last; already it found humor in a physical defect.

An adult hand suddenly darted downward from the upper right-hand corner of the transom, caught its wrist, bore its arm upward out of sight. "Mommy, look," it said again, and pointed with its other hand. "Funny man, tied up."

The adult voice, reasonable, logical, dispassionate—inattentive to a child's fibs and fancies—answered: "Why, that wouldn't look nice. Mommy can't peep into other people's houses like you can."

The child was tugged erect at the end of its arm, its head disappeared above the transom. Its body was pivoted around, away from him; he could see the hollows at the back of its knees for an instant longer, then its outline on the glass blurred in withdrawal, it was gone. Only the little clear spot it had scoured remained to mock him in his crucifixion.

THE will to live is an unconquerable thing. He was more dead than alive by now, yet presently he started to crawl back again out of the depths of his despair, a slower longer crawl each time, like that of some indefatigable insect buried repeatedly in sand, that each time manages to burrow its way out.

He rolled his head away from the window back toward the clock finally. He hadn't been able to spare a look at it during the whole time the child was in sight. And now to his horror it stood at three to three. There was a fresh, a final blotting-out of the burrowing insect that was his hopes, as if by a cruel idler lounging on a sandpile on a beach.

He couldn't *feel* any more, terror or hope or anything else. A sort of numbness had set in, with a core of gleaming awareness remaining that was his mind. *That* would be all that the detonation would be able to blot out by the time it came. It was like having a tooth extracted with the aid of novocain. There remained of him now only this single pulsing nerve of premonition; all the tissue around it was frozen.

Now it would be too late even to attempt to free him first, before stopping the thing.

Something deep within him, what it was he had no leisure nor skill to recognize, seemed to retreat down long dim corridors away from the doom that impended. He hadn't known he had those convenient corridors of evasion in him, with their protective turns and angles by which to put distance between himself and menace. Oh clever architect of the mind, oh merciful blueprints that made such emergency exits available. Toward them this something, that was he and yet not he, rushed; toward sanctuary, security, toward waiting brightness, sunshine, laughter.

The hand on the dial stayed there, upright, perpendicular, a perfect right-angle to its corollary, while the swift seconds that were all there were left of existence ticked by and were gone. It wasn't so straight now any more, but he didn't know it, he was in a state of death already. White reappeared between it and the twelve-notch, *behind* it now. It was one minute after three. He was shaking all over from head to foot—not with fear, with laughter. . . .

IT BROKE into sound as they plucked the dampened, bloodied gag out, as though they were drawing the laughter out after it, by suction or osmosis.

"No, don't take those ropes off him yet!" the man in the white coat warned the policeman sharply. "Wait'll they get here with the straitjacket, or you'll have your hands full."

Fran said through her tears, cupping her hands to her ears, "Can't you stop him from laughing like that?"

"He's out of his mind, lady," explained the interne patiently.

The clock said five past seven.

"What's in this box?" the cop asked, kicking at it idly with his foot.

"Nothing," Stapp's wife answered, through her sobs and above his incessant laughter. "Just an empty box. It used to have some kind of fertilizer in it, but I took it out and used it on the flowers I—I've been trying to raise out in back of the house."



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Murder At Hand



He hurried away, clutching the purse

By Hugh B. Cave

Author of "Scandal Sheet," etc.

Love came to Danny Phillips once in his life—and then it sent him to the Chair

"SURE, I seen it," Murdock said. "How could I help but see it, with him standin' right beside me when the gun went off? But so help me, Captain, I never dreamed he'd *do* a thing like that!"

Danny Phillips hadn't dreamed it either, exactly. With a brain like Danny's you don't elaborately plan things ahead of time, it would be a waste of effort.

Danny Phillips had a frail, sickly little body, an expert pair of hands, and a face freely decorated with pimples. Everyone knew Danny. He lived at Mrs. Macusker's rooming house on Everett Street (three dollars a week for a bed, a chair, a bureau and four walls) and made his living by picking pockets.

It wasn't much of a living. It could have been, of course, if he had worked at it, but unless there was a pronounced ache in Danny Phillips' stomach the idea of picking a pocket or two seldom occurred to

him. He preferred to hang around the boys at the Everett Street Social Club or take long aimless walks for himself down around the waterfront. Danny Phillips suffered vaguely from imagination.

He was merely out walking, for instance, the day he first saw the girl. He'd been down on Canal Street, watching a gang of husky stevedores at work, and as he ambled homeward his eyes had that faraway look in them and he was totally oblivious to his surroundings. He ran right into this stout lady with the armful of bundles.

Danny said, "Oops! Pardon me, lady," and stood there looking helpless. The lady cursed him out, so instead of helping her pick up the bundles Danny ducked, ran, and buried himself in the midst of a crowd of people in front of a store window.

He came up the way a cork bobs up in a whirlpool, and when he did so, there was the girl right beside him.

Danny took one look at her and was sunk.

You didn't run across girls like this one in the districts generally frequented by Danny Phillips. Most of *those* women were tough and looked tough. This girl was different. Oh, so different! She was just Danny's height, and couldn't have weighed an ounce more than he did, and she was pretty. Not just everyday pretty, but sweet and shy and lovely like something you'd see in the colored folders advertising the faraway places that Danny longed to go to.

Danny stood there beside her and sneaked looks at her. She had a faraway look in *her* eyes, too, he realized (people were always kidding him about the look in his own) and he wondered why until he saw what she and the rest of the crowd were staring at.

The store was a department store, and the big front window was made up to look like a country town in winter. There was snow on the ground, deep snow, and there were horses, miniature ones, pulling a sleigh, and there were kids walking along with skis over their shoulders. Off in the background there was a little pond where people were skating on the ice. It was all very real and peaceful. Looking at it, you almost didn't realize it was just a scheme to advertise winter sports equipment. You just felt sort of wishy.

The girl looked wishy, and she looked sad about it, too. Danny decided there was something wrong with her. He decided all at once, the way he decided almost everything, that he had to know her name.

He couldn't just ask her. If he did that, she would probably call the cops and have him pinched. But he had to know her name.

She wore a brown leather handbag draped from one wrist, and Danny's gaze fastened on it. He had snatched a pile of handbags in his time, and most of them contained cards bearing the owner's name and address.

All at once Danny had to have that handbag.

He snatched it. He ducked and ran before the girl even had a chance to get a look at him. Very fast on his feet was Danny Phillips, and very quick-witted when it came to emergencies. Before the girl had screamed twice, he was on the outer edge of the crowd, with the bag stuffed under his coat.

People on the outskirts of the crowd weren't interested in what was going on near *them*. They pushed forward to find out why the girl was screaming. Danny just strolled away.

Later, in his room at Mrs. Macusker's rooming house, he opened the bag and poured its contents out on the bed. He did that very gently, almost reverently, as if merely touching the bag were a privilege.

The little pile of stuff on the bed included a fifty-cent compact, a little ten-cent tube of lipstick, a soiled handkerchief, one dollar and thirty-three cents in cash, and a photograph. The photograph was tucked in a little inside pocket of the bag and might have been there for some time.

And, oh yes, a driver's license—a New Hampshire driver's license—with a name on it. The name was Dorothy Alton, the typewritten address was Ennis Falls, N.H., and in pencil under that was another address: 23 Dickson St.

But Danny was interested mainly in the picture.

"Why, hell," he said aloud, sadly, "she's just a tramp." It hurt him to say that, even to think it, but he knew it was the truth. No nice girl would carry a picture of Slick Merina around in her handbag, would she?"

Slick Merina was bad, all bad. You could forgive a man for making a living with his wits, for picking pockets and harmless stuff like that, but the kind of work Slick Merina went in for was unmoral. Only last week some poor guy over on Fanchon Street had been cut up and sent to a hospital by two of Merina's gorillas, just for refusing to pay for "protection" for his lunchroom; and a year

ago, or maybe two years ago, the Merina boys had tossed a pineapple into a South Side clothing store and killed two customers.

Slick Merina was smart all right, but he was no good. He had the wrong slant on life.

Danny could understand, though, why this girl, whose name seemed to be Dorothy Alton, had fallen for Merina. Merina was the kind of man a girl *would* go for. He was tall and husky and good-looking, with curly black hair and a face good enough for Hollywood. Lots of girls had sold their souls to Slick Merina.

Danny put the picture back in the bag, and the rest of the stuff with it, and lay down on the bed, feeling rotten. That was the way with all his dreams—they got punctured before he could even blow them up big enough to look like anything.

Well, it was tough, but this was the end of it. He'd forget her.

THE trouble was, he didn't. A couple of days later hunger took him into a crowded auction room on Dickson Street, and when he emerged—after acquiring a guy's wallet—he found himself walking down the street and looking at numbers on doors. Number 23 Dickson Street was where she lived.

He should have been in a restaurant somewhere, pushing food into his stomach, because he was cold and wet and hungry. But he hiked on, looking for 23 instead. He just had to get another look at her.

He wouldn't dare talk to her, of course. Not if she was Slick Merina's girl. But if he could just see her again, he'd feel better inside. That ache inside him wasn't all from hunger.

Number 23 was an apartment house, and he was disappointed. If it had been an ordinary tenement house, now, he might have seen her walk past a window—if she lived on the first floor. It would be dark pretty soon, and people would be turning their lights on, and he might have screwed up enough courage to sneak over

to a window—but instead of that, it was an apartment house.

Danny stood in a sheltered doorway across the street, out of the drizzle, and watched the door of the apartment house, and waited. He wasn't very hopeful, but he waited. She *might* come out.

After a while a cab drove up and stopped. The driver put his hand on the horn, then lit a cigarette. The front door of the apartment house opened and a man hurried down the steps and got into the cab.

The man was Slick Merina.

Danny felt a tightness in his throat when he saw that, for no reason at all he was angry. As if Slick Merina had no right to be coming out of the girl's apartment! As if she were Danny's girl! Anyway, he felt scared and sore and pathetically helpless all at once, and long after the cab had taken Merina away he just stood there, staring across through the drizzle at the apartment house.

Suddenly he was walking. He was walking across the street and up the steps, and he was looking at a list of names beside a row of bells.

Hers was there. Dorothy Alton. Apartment 27.

That was as far as his nerve took him. He didn't have courage enough to ring the bell, even though, with her bag in his possession, he could easily say: "I found this, Miss, and I seen your name in it, so I'm returning it."

He just stood there, looking at her name.

He didn't hear any footsteps, but all at once the inner door opened and a lady was in the vestibule with him. The lady was painted up something awful, and she was old, too. She had a white cat snuggled in the crook of one arm, and she was talking baby-talk to it. She hardly noticed Danny.

The door had a device on it to keep it from slamming. It swung shut, almost shut, and the air pressure stopped it, then let it close the last six inches very gently.

Danny got to it before the lock clicked.

He was scared then. Scared at his own temerity. But he was inside, so close! And he couldn't hold himself back, even though a little voice inside him kept warning him he would get into trouble. She was Slick Merina's girl, and Slick was bad! Don't be a fool, Danny!

He walked down the hall almost on tiptoe, went up the stairs, found the door marked 27—and knocked. Knocked quickly, because if he hadn't, his courage would have oozed out and left him quaking. No one answered.

He knocked again, and again, and still got no answer. He was angry then. She shouldn't be out. What right did she have to be out, after a guy screwed up his courage that way, just to look at her?

He tried the door and it was locked.

"Well, anyhow, I could leave her bag," he thought. "I could show her I ain't no cheap crook like the guy she runs around with."

It wasn't hard. He had the right tool in his pocket and knew how to use it, and the lock was old, anyway. No one interrupted him. The door was at the end of the corridor, way down at the back of the house, and it was dark down there, and kind of gloomy. And in three minutes he was inside the apartment.

A light was on in the living-room. And the place wasn't deserted, as he'd expected. *She* was there.

Danny Phillips looked at her and almost couldn't breathe, his throat got so tight. His mouth fell open and he felt cold, so cold inside that someone must have pumped ice-water into him. All he said was, "Gee!" and it was just a whisper, almost no sound at all. Then there were tears in his eyes.

He thought she was dead when he went down on his knees beside her. She looked dead. Her slim little body was draped over the end of a studio couch, with her head dangling over the edge, and her eyes were open, glassy, and her face was all out of shape. She'd been beaten up, and he thought she was dead.

She wasn't, though. Her heart was beating.

Danny found the bathroom and soaked a towel in cold water and squeezed the water over the girl's face. He didn't know if that was the right thing to do, but that was what they did to prize fighters sometimes, after a knockout.

He went back and forth to the bathroom four times, and the last time, when he returned to the girl with his wet towel, she was conscious. Not wholly conscious, but able to stare at him and say: "Who—who are you?"

Danny said: "It don't matter who I am, lady. All that counts is, we got to get you a doctor!" And he stood there wide-legged, staring at her, with the wet towel in his hands.

Up to that minute he hadn't realized what he was doing, exactly. Now he did, and felt a sort of electric shock all through him. He was able to look at her! He'd even touched her!

The girl said: "No, I don't want a doctor."

"But you been beaten up!"

"No." She shook her head, staring at him. "No. I—I was in an accident. I was—hit by a car—outside. I don't know just what happened, but I must have lost consciousness as soon as I came in."

Danny Phillips knew a beating up when he saw one, but he couldn't tell this girl she was a liar. He just couldn't.

"Who *are* you?" the girl said. "How did you get in here?"

"It ain't important," Danny mumbled. "I'll be goin' now."

She didn't tell him to stay. She just stared, not even thanking him for helping her. Anyhow, he didn't want any thanks. He'd had his reward, hadn't he? He'd—touched her. He'd been close enough to have her talk to him.

He went slowly down the hall, and out, and closed the door after him.

HE didn't have a chance in the world of getting her out of his mind after that. He went around all day, every day,

with her face in front of him, bruised and battered by Slick Merina's fists. He had no positive proof, of course, that Merina was responsible, but he would have gambled his life on it. Slick Merina had beaten up women before.

Danny couldn't keep away from 23 Dickson Street, either. For hours at a time he hung around, hoping for a fleeting glimpse of her, even though that inner voice warned him he was playing with dynamite. So finally he did see her, one night around eight o'clock, and followed her. And that was how he found out she worked at the Braydon.

The Braydon was a restaurant on Park Street, a high-class place where you could eat high-class food without listening to the screech of an orchestra or paying extra money to watch girls dance without clothes on. Danny had never been inside it, but had heard of it. The place was really high-brow. He had been told about it, often, by Angelo Pucci, who worked in the kitchen.

So after he saw the girl go into the back door of the Braydon that night, Danny made up his mind he would have a talk with Angelo, and he did.

The very next day he went over to Angelo's rooming house.

And Angelo told him about her.

"Why sure I know her!" Angelo said. "She work at the Braydon for two month now. Only her name is not really Dorothy Alton. That is just the name she work under: it was her name before she get married."

Danny felt queer. "M-married?" he said.

"Why sure. She is married to Slick Merina. I thought everybody knew that!"

Married to Slick Merina. It was like a kick in the face. It was like the time the boys at Noland's Gym had kidded Danny into putting on the gloves with Noland's best lightweight, and the first punch had jarred something loose in Danny's brain. He stared at Angelo but all he could see was the bruised face of the girl, and suddenly he was blazing with anger.

"If she is Slick Merina's wife why does he let her work in a restaurant?" Danny screamed. "He has money!"

"Sure, but you think she gets any?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look," Angelo said. "This girl, she is a good girl. She comes to the city only six months ago, from some little place in New Hampshire. She comes here to study at business school, nights, and she gets a job daytimes working as a waitress. Slick Merina, he gets a load of her and dates her up.

"Well, she falls for him. She is all alone in the city, and lonesome and how is she to know Slick Merina is the kind of man he is? After all, does he *look* like a killer? No! So she falls hook, line and sinker, and marries him—and *then*, when it is too late, she finds out the truth."

Danny Phillips nodded, tears in his eyes.

"So naturally, being a good girl," Angelo said, "she hates him. And he knows it. And it makes him sore. He says to her, 'All right; you hate me, you get no money; you want to eat you go to work.' So she gets a job at the Braydon, and that burns him up even worse. He abuses her. Only the other night he beat her up, and she comes to work with her face purple from bruises."

Danny Phillips sat very still, except for his hands. His hands opened and closed, opened and closed, and were sweaty. "Why don't she go home?" he muttered.

"For one thing, it costs money. For another, she is scared he would follow her. This Slick Merina is bad. He says to her, 'You go home, you run away from me, and you'll be sorry. You and your folks, too. You go back to that jerk town in New Hampshire and I'll make you wish you was dead.' So she is afraid to go home."

Danny Phillips took all that with him when he left Angelo's rooming house. He took it back to his own rooming house and gnawed on it, brooded over it, almost as if the problem were his own. That night he slept with it.

For two days, Thursday and Friday, Danny thought of nothing else. He knew now the reason for that faraway look in the girl's eyes when he first saw her in front of the department store. He knew, too, why she had lied about being beaten up. A girl like that had pride. She wouldn't tell her troubles to everyone. All this information Angelo had, he had picked up piece by piece, over a long period of time.

Saturday afternoon Danny emerged from the subway with two fresh wallets in his possession, two wallets containing, together, over eighty dollars. He hadn't had an easy time getting hold of that money. For some strange reason—probably because he wanted the money so very badly—his hands had acquired a tendency to twitch, and he'd really been scared.

But he had it, and after getting rid of the empty wallets in a refuse can he headed for Abanico's pawn shop on Kelsey Street. It didn't matter that Abanico knew him and might wonder things.

He got what he wanted in Abanico's for twenty dollars and then did another errand, and returned to his rooming house. It was about five-thirty then. From Mrs. Macusker he obtained an envelope and a sheet of writing paper, and then upstairs in his own room, with the door shut, he composed a letter.

IT was hard work, writing that letter. Not only was it hard work spelling the words out so they could be read, but he had to be careful what he put into it. So it was almost six-thirty when Danny arrived at 23 Dickson Street.

You could have asked Danny Phillips then what his plans were, and he wouldn't have been able to tell you. Not in detail. All he really had was a vague idea of what he thought *ought* to be done, and a belief in his own ability to accomplish it. But he didn't know *how* he was going to accomplish it. His brain wasn't thorough enough to pigeon-hole a sequence of ideas and say, "This is step one, this is step two, this is step three and so forth." So when Danny arrived at the apartment

house he hadn't any definite idea of what to do when he got there.

So far, he had gone along step by step in a kind of groping fashion, not worrying about the ultimate consequences. Now, however, he saw the end in sight and appreciated the obstacles still to be hurdled. For one thing, he had to be sure that Slick Merina was not in that apartment.

Getting past the downstairs door was not difficult, even though the door was locked. He merely punched the bell marked Janitor and mumbled into the speaking tube: "Let me in, please. It is Mr. Merrill. I have forgot my keys." A man named Anthony Merrill occupied apartment number 4, according to the directory.

The door buzzed, and Danny went in.

When he approached the door of her apartment, though, he felt shaky. All he had to do was bend down and push under the door the envelope he had prepared at his rooming house, but he had to be sure Slick Merina would not get it. So he stood beside the door and listened, thinking that if Slick Merina *were* inside there would be some talking going on.

There was. And it was not ordinary talk, either. And it was not Slick Merina doing the talking; it was the girl.

And it was not Slick Merina doing the listening, because why would the girl be telling him about how she came to the city and got a job in a restaurant and so forth?

It was funny, but Danny Phillips could hear every word of it, almost as if there were no door in front of him. He put his left ear against the door and plugged up his right ear with a finger, and the words seemed to crawl right up inside the wood, as if they were coming out of a phonograph. That was because the girl was hysterical, sort of, and talking in a loud voice.

Then Danny heard a man's voice, deep and gruff, saying: "I don't care *what* Merina threatens! You're coming with me! You never should have left home in the first place!"

The girl started to cry then, and the

man's voice lost some of its gruffness, but still Danny could hear what he was saying. He said: "Listen, darling, you can't go on living like this. You just can't. You were *my* girl back home, and you loved me. I know you did. And you can learn to love me again, after this mess is cleared up. We were kids together, Dorothy. We grew up loving each other. What kind of a man would I be if I went back home and left you here, knowing what I know about the hell you've been through?"

The girl didn't answer. She just cried. Danny Phillips, listening, didn't know whether it was her tears or the man's words that made him feel so dry and tight and twisted inside. Most likely it was the stuff the man was telling her. He was her sweetheart. Danny hadn't counted on any such complication as that.

The man said then: "Dearest, you've got to give me an answer. *Will* you go home with me?"

"I—I can't, Jim," she sobbed.

His voice, answering that, was so loud all of a sudden that Danny actually jumped away from it. You could hear it out in the hall, even without putting your ear to the door.

"Then I'll settle one thing before I go home!" he shouted. "I'll rid you of that beast and his brutality! I'll kill him!"

Danny Phillips was pretty good at putting sounds together to form pictures, and by listening carefully he had a fair idea of what was happening. The girl was pleading with the man—with this Jim—and telling him he couldn't do things that way, and the man was refusing to listen. She probably had her arms around him, trying to hold him back, because when he came **toward** the door where Danny crouched, her voice came with him, sobbing and pleading with him. Then the door opened and they were out in the hall.

Danny got a look at the fellow then and was surprised. The voice had suggested someone big, fairly old, but this Jim guy was just a kid, no older than the girl herself. Just a kid, but flushed with anger and a little bit crazy.

"I tell you I'll kill him!" he stormed. "If I can't have you, I'm damned if *he's* going to torture you the rest of your life! I'll kill him!"

The girl clung to him, begging him to listen to reason, but he shook himself loose and headed for the stairs.

"And don't think I don't know where to find him!" he flung back. "I know a lot more about him than you suspect. I made it my business to find out!"

HE was gone then, and the girl sagged back against the door, crying her heart out. She loved him; you could see that. She wasn't afraid for Slick Merina. She knew Slick could handle himself. And she knew what would happen when this wild-eyed kid came up against Slick in a fight.

She didn't see Danny. Jim hadn't seen him, either. Danny was back in the shadows, flat against the wall, and didn't move.

He didn't move until the girl went back into the apartment. She went quickly, leaving a little sob behind her, as if all at once she had made up her mind to do something to save her Jim. She'd call the police, maybe, or go out looking for Merina and get him out of the way. Danny didn't quite know what she *would* do, or what he would do if he were in her shoes. All he knew was that the envelope in his pocket was no good any more, because the girl had a sweetheart.

He felt queer. He felt again the way he had felt that night when the boys at the gym coaxed him into the ring with that fighter. He put his chin on his chest and slouched down the stairs, out to Dickson Street. He thought maybe he would get drunk, good and drunk, and then go away somewhere. Maybe he would never come back.

He walked up Dickson Street to the avenue and along the avenue to the bright light district, because he thought it would be nice to hear a lot of people talking, and to hear automobile horns and noise. He was wrong, though. When the noise

swirled around him it made him feel worse. There were too many people, and some of them were laughing.

He turned into the first side street he came to, and it happened to be Melton Street. Slick Merina owned a night club on Melton Street, a place called the Crazy Club. The big neon sign over the club's entrance hurt Danny's eyes, and he crossed the street to get away from it.

Someone said, "Hello, Danny," and he stopped.

"Hello, Mr. Murdock," Danny mumbled.

Murdock, who was a cop, said: "What's eatin' you? You look like the bottom of the world fell out."

Danny didn't answer that because something was happening. A cab had pulled up and stopped in front of the Crazy Club, and a man and a girl were getting out of it. The man was Slick Merina, and the girl was a ravishing blonde, all wrapped up in ermines. The girl strolled toward the entrance while Slick paid the driver.

She was almost knocked over by the young man who ploughed from the doorway and strode toward Merina. You could see by the man's fists that he meant business, and nothing was going to stop him, not even a beautiful blonde.

He started shouting something, and Merina's name was part of it, and Merina turned quickly to face him. Merina must have realized, too, that the kid meant business. He stepped back and jabbed a hand to his coat pocket.

That was when Danny Phillips acted.

LATER, at Police Headquarters, Murdock wagged his head back and forth, back and forth, and said: "Sure, I seen it. How could I help but see it, with him standin' right beside me? But so help me, Captain, I never dreamed he'd do a thing like that! Imagine it, him standin' there lookin' like the bottom of the world had dropped out, and the next thing I know he's got a gun in his hand and he's pourin' lead into Merina."

"I don't get it."

"Nor neither do I. Nor neither are we ever goin' to, unless I'm sadly mistaken. I've talked to him, Captain. All the rest of the boys have talked to him. And you know what he does? He just looks at us, wise like an owl, and smiles. *Smiles*, with the chair starin' him in the face!"

"And the letter in that envelope. The letter and the railroad ticket to Ennis Falls, New Hampshire. He won't explain them?"

"I got the letter right here, Captain. All it says is: 'This will get you to where you want to go, and I promise you there won't be no trouble come after you.' Hali the words are spelled wrong, and it isn't signed. As for the railroad ticket, we gave it back to him. He begged for it with tears in his eyes, and after all—hell!—he's a nice little guy even if he did rub out that rat Merina. And you know what he did with that ticket, Captain?"

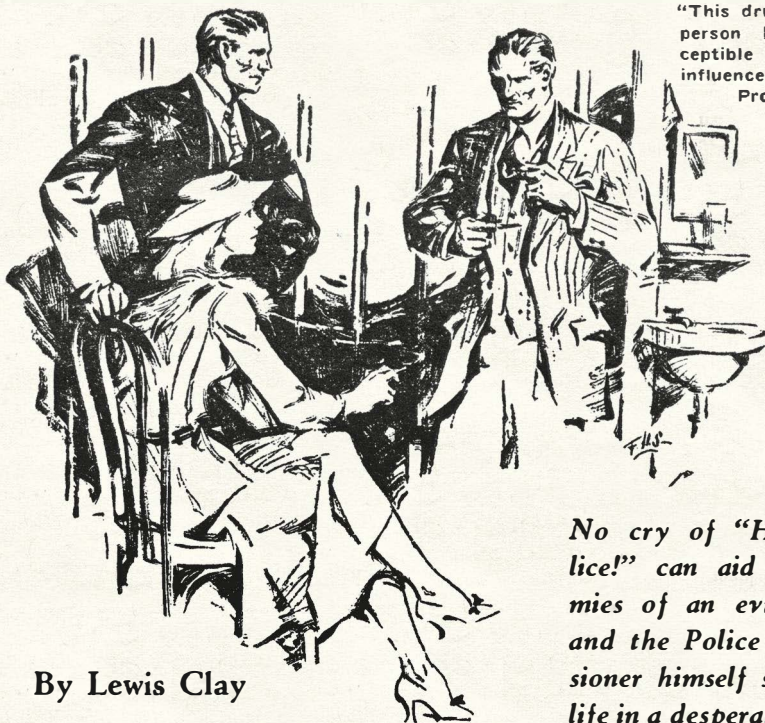
"What?"

"It's glued up on the wall of his cell, and he just sits there—just sits there—smilin' at it."



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Dr. Skull



"This drug makes a person highly susceptible to outside influences," said the Professor

By Lewis Clay

No cry of "Help! Police!" can aid the enemies of an evil genius, and the Police Commissioner himself stakes his life in a desperate gamble

AT THE time it all began, Bob Larkin was a copywriter in an advertising agency. His place was an humble one, but he looked forward to promotion and marriage to Paula Lansdowne. Paula was the only child of the widowed Professor Alfred Lansdowne, head of the Department of Applied Psychology at the University.

As so frequently happens before events of tremendous importance, no one recognized the first faint signs of what was to come. Even after two demonstrations of Skull's sinister power, only a handful of people realized that something out of the ordinary was occurring.

The first was an elevated train collision. No one was killed, but the motorman's statement was incredible. "When I came abreast of the stop signal," he said, "something happened to me. I guess I stopped thinking. But it seemed like something took hold of me and made me go through that signal. What I mean is, I couldn't help it! I couldn't!"

He had been employed by the company for fifteen years and had no black marks against

him. A test for drunkenness showed him to be entirely sober.

DISCUSSING it with Paula and Professor Lansdowne at dinner that evening, Bob succeeded in getting the Professor to give his views on psychic phenomena—but in a purely general way.

"You know, Bob, I once knew a couple of chaps in Tibet who could do things that would make you doubt your own senses. We Westerners have been very busy developing a purely mechanistic civilization, and we've been highly successful. But we've neglected sciences that are understood by inhabitants of countries we consider backward."

"If this knowledge were properly applied, it could do a great deal of good, eh?" asked Bob. "But if a man were to apply it the wrong way, he could do lots of harm, too, couldn't he?"

"Indeed he could," said the Professor. "It is because they fear the consequences of misuse that the secret brotherhoods of the Orient keep their knowledge so well hidden."

This story began in *Detective Fiction Weekly* for Sept. 17

"And let's hope it stays hidden," laughed l'aula.

The next circumstance was the affair of the Wall Street broker, Edward J. Walker, who handed ten thousand dollars in cash to a woman who said she was solicitor for a charity. Later, Walker told the press, he couldn't understand why he had done it. An even more baffling turn was given the case when the woman was found, a suicide.

Then one evening Bob Larkin got a phone call from Paula, and hurried over to learn the Professor had been taken off to jail on a charge of murder. They visited the Professor in his cell and he calmly admitted having killed in a frenzy of hate his best friend and associate, Dr. Amos Carter.

"Why?" demanded the anguished Paula. "I wish I knew," replied her father. His attorney, Norman Howard, hoped only for an insanity verdict.

The next morning Bob awoke to find sensational headlines in the newspapers: *Maniac Demands Control of City—Threatens Reprisals Unless Power Granted.*

THE newspaper article went on to quote a letter purporting to be from Dr. Skull. In it he warned the city officials that he would make his presence known at the meeting of the Board of Estimate in City Hall that afternoon.

Although some were inclined to ridicule any serious consideration of the threat, there was tension when the Board convened. Bob got in through his friendship with a reporter, Curly Smith. The meeting progressed in its usual dreary way until suddenly Mayor O'Hara began speaking in a soft, peculiar voice. He seemed to fancy himself as Dr. Skull, and when no one replied to his demand for power, he said that J. Homer Warren, well known city greeter and man-about-town, would die at midnight. Afterward Mayor O'Hara could give no explanation for speaking as he had.

Police Commissioner Gallagher and Inspector Tom Higgins commanded a heavy guard at Warren's home that evening, but at midnight Warren stabbed himself with a letter-opener and died.

"You and the other executives of the city have three days in which to come to your senses," said an open letter to the police which the newspapers received from Dr. Skull the next day. "If, at the end of this period of grace, there has still been no effort to meet my terms, your life, Commissioner, will be forfeit. On this basis, you may calculate the possible time of your death at between seven and eight p.m. Monday."

Bob Larkin continues the story:

2 D—1

CHAPTER VII

Madman on the Loose

I CALLED Norman Howard and asked him to make arrangements for me to see the Professor that same night, but, as might have been expected, the lawyer merely stated coldly that such a visit was beyond the bounds of possibility and that I would have to wait until morning. Even Inspector Tom Higgins could do nothing to help, so it was necessary for me to cultivate the gentle characteristic of patience until the next day. Paula and I spent the evening together, but I didn't tell her about the conviction which had without warning obsessed me, fearing to arouse a hope that might not be realized. The first thing next morning, I headed down to the Tombs and was soon in Professor Lansdowne's cell.

"Professor," I began, "I want to talk to you about Dr. Skull."

The scientist raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Indeed," he said, "and what about Dr. Skull?"

"You remember my asking you if you thought he could have anything to do with you and Dr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"Well, although I couldn't give you a motive for his action, I've not been able to get rid of the feeling that he did. Last night, when I read the letter he addressed to Commissioner Gallagher through the papers, this feeling—for some unaccountable reason—became terribly strong. Surely it can't be wrong! And here's something else I've also wondered if you have the same idea. Have you?"

"Suppose you tell me what makes you so sure about Dr. Skull before I answer your question," suggested the scientist.

"All right," I agreed, "but there are plenty of blank spaces in my explanation. Here goes: some time ago, an elevated motorman crashed his train into the back end of another one, although it was a clear day, the signal was plainly set against him, and his brakes worked per-

fectly. When the man was given a third degree, he had no idea why he hadn't stopped his train. He said something had come over him, or words to that effect. Later on, when he was examined, they couldn't find anything wrong with him, mentally or physically, which would account for his actions, and he wasn't drunk at the time. Check?"

Professor Lansdowne nodded.

"Okay. Next comes our friend, Edward J. Walker. He suddenly goes berserk and gives a perfect stranger ten thousand dollars in cash. Later, he can't explain why. You look him over yourself and can't find anything wrong with him. He just had an irresistible impulse to do what he did, that's all. Nobody knows why, least of all Walker.

"Then what happens? A guy who calls himself Dr. Skull writes a letter to the Mayor threatening disaster unless he's given New York City to play with. At the Board meeting Mayor O'Hara goes off his nut and talks like he never talked before. Why? He doesn't know. The words came to his mind and he had to say them. No other explanation, and so far as we know, he was neither drunk nor insane at the time.

"What next? J. Homer Warren—who looked like he was in his right mind to me—stabs himself. You can't make me believe he did that only because he was scared stiff. Something *made* him do it.

"And hold on a minute—I've forgotten the 'mystery woman,' Agnes Russell. She was found dead, supposedly a suicide."

"Well?" demanded the Professor. He was regarding me intently.

"Well," I echoed, "consider yourself. One evening you go to call on a friend of yours—a friend of twenty or thirty years standing. You have a discussion, the kind you've been having for years without even as much as a black eye exchanged, when all of a sudden, out of a clear, blue sky—you brain the guy. Why? You don't know. You had a sudden, irresistible impulse, nothing more. You're perfectly sane, too, presumably.

"The parallel is too obvious to mention. The motorman, Walker, O'Hara, and yourself are all possessed by crazy desires you can't control. I'll give you ten to one that both Warren and the Russell woman were, too. Assuming for sake of argument that I'm right about them, that makes six people obsessed. Skull appears in the picture with two of them—O'Hara and Warren. Why not with the others—the motorman, the broker, the mysterious woman, and yourself? Anyhow, that's the way it lines up to me. Of course, I can't prove anything. I can't even offer an explanation of why or how it's all happened. I don't know how this Skull creature works, and that's a big stumbling block in the path. I've thought of hypnotism and dismissed it because there was no one around to hypnotize you when you were with Dr. Carter, and I saw no one waving any hands at either the Mayor or Warren. If this were Haiti or some such place, I'd lay it to a voodoo charm. But I stand or fall with my belief that Skull is behind the whole mess."

AFTER which I had to stop for breath Professor Lansdowne was looking very serious.

"I think," he said quietly, "you're right, and it's up to me to plug up the holes in your theory. Perhaps you'd now like to hear my ideas on the subject in question."

I assured him there was nothing I'd rather hear.

"Then I'll start from the beginning," he said. "I haven't spoken about this for the very obvious reason that you can't expect anyone to swallow what appears to be sheer fantasy unless you're in a position to provide proof. I have not been, and still am not, in that position, but your own deductions make me feel I can confide in you." The scientist pulled a venerable briar out of his pocket and began filling it.

"I knew nothing of your elevated motorman until you told me about him, the evening after I'd seen Walker. So my first

contact with the current wave of inexplicable phenomena was the financier, Walker. As you know, the man feared for his sanity. Through a mutual friend, he was sent to me for examination. In the course of this examination, I could discover no mental ailment that would explain his unprecedented gullibility. But I did discover something, and I believe I mentioned it to you at the time.

"There were unmistakable indications that Edward J. Walker had recently been under a hypnotic influence of a most powerful nature. It was no ordinary post-hypnotic state that I found him in, but rather a state of severe nervous shock and psychic trauma. As you will understand later, I had reason to recognize these particular symptoms, though I could find absolutely no reason for their appearance here in New York City. When you told me of the motorman, my curiosity was again aroused, but by no means satisfied.

"Now, the circumstances of my killing Amos Carter were, as you pointed out, not without similarity to Mr. Walker's giving away his money. They were, in fact, even more similar than you could know. Besides the overwhelming lust for murder that came without warning, there was also an after-state of mental and nervous exhaustion which was very nearly identical with Walker's. After I'd recovered my balance enough to attempt an analysis, I noted this. Yet, the possibility which I could not fail to visualize seemed so remote that even to myself I attempted to explain my state by assuming it to be the natural consequence of remorse.

"With the peculiar behavior of Mayor O'Hara, and the appearance of the person known as Dr. Skull on the scene, my original fears were strengthened. I was not present to examine the Mayor, but from what you told me, I gathered that his affection was similar to mine, both in its initial and after stages. Although I told myself it was utterly impossible, another link was forged in the chain of my theory.

"The murder—for I believe it was murder—of J. Homer Warren—again indicated that the impossible had occurred."

Professor Lansdowne stopped talking and sucked at his pipe. I found myself sitting on the edge of my chair.

"What do you mean, sir?" I asked.

"I mean, Bob, that I agree with you. All of these queer occurrences have the same cause, and the cause is undoubtedly our friend, Dr. Skull. Had I not been included among his victims, this explanation might have eluded me altogether, but the opportunity to study first hand the methods this lunatic—I think he must be slightly cracked—uses cinched the case, in my own mind. Viewing the matter from a purely selfish standpoint, I'll have a great deal of proving to do before I can help myself, and that isn't going to be easy. From a larger and far more important angle, this entire city—perhaps the world—is facing a very ticklish problem."

I was entirely unable to follow him, but I tried. "You mean," I said, "that Skull is just a hypnotist?"

Professor Lansdowne shook his head, smiling.

"I don't mean that he's—as you say—*just* a hypnotist. That is a gross understatement. Let me go on with my hypothesis.

"As you know, certain mystical societies—I use the term, mystical, purely for convenience—are to be found in comparatively isolated sections of Northern India, along the Tibetan frontier. These societies have conducted researches along lines unknown to western minds, and they have made many strange and wonderful discoveries. As you may also know, I spent quite some time, many years ago, in a kind of lamasery which was located to the northeast of Sprinagar, in the Karakoram. This was known as the Lamasery of the Golden Throne, so named for the great mountain on whose slopes it was built, and it was maintained by initiates of the Three Brotherhoods. This organization is perhaps the most esoteric of the mystical orders, and its more profound

mysteries were never opened to me, nor, so far as I know, to any other white man. Their greatest knowledge, I've been told, is far too dangerous to be given to any ordinary mortal.

"However, the lesser secrets of the Golden Throne are open to certain selected students. By a devious path which I'll not outline now, I was fortunate enough to be chosen as one. I know of only one other white man who enjoyed the same distinction, and I have reason to believe that he went deeper into the mysteries than I did—that, in fact, he learned the secret of a peculiar and superior kind of mind control known only to the Three Brotherhoods. Because there have been unmistakable signs that my own experience with that organization enables me to recognize, I believe this man may now be in New York, using his great knowledge and power for wrong purposes. I think he calls himself—"

"Dr. Skull!" I finished for him.

"Exactly," nodded Professor Lansdowne.

"Then," I said eagerly, "you know who he really is!"

I THINK I do. You see, after I'd finished college, I spent two years getting practical experience in a mental clinic in Vienna. There I met a very unusual young man. His name was Franz Ehrlich, he was also doing clinical research and though he was about ten years my junior, his background was already better than mine. Never have I encountered, before or since, a mind with such potentialities. His ability was amazing, though he was considered rather eccentric by his associates. A few of them went so far as to believe him insane.

"One of the most remarkable things about him was his power over the minds of others. He was even then a hypnotist of almost supernatural ability, and when I think of this innate power coupled with the occult secrets of the Three Brotherhoods—but I'm digressing. Unfortunately, Ehrlich allowed himself to be embittered

by the jibes of his fellow students—jibes which came in large part from their envy. I dare say I was the only man in the clinic that he would talk to, and even that was little enough.

"It was some time after I met him that he disappeared, and I never heard of him again until I went to become a novitiate of the Golden Throne order of the Three Brotherhoods. There I heard of a white man who was also a student, but I never saw him. From descriptions of his appearance, I felt this man must be Ehrlich, but I didn't really know until years later I ran into him on a return trip to Srinagar. He remembered me, but talked very little. He told me of his being a *chela* in one of the Three Brotherhoods, and indicated that his studies were not yet completed. That was the last I ever saw of him. At the time, I decided he was quite mad."

"Then," I cut in, "you think Dr. Skull is this man Ehrlich?"

Professor Lansdowne nodded. "No native member of the Three Brotherhoods would dare to disobey their laws and break his vow of secrecy. He would fear the consequences of such sacrilege. Only a white man would have the necessary contempt, and that characteristic fits Ehrlich perfectly.

"Of course, there is always the possibility that it could be some other white man, but I feel that this is obviated by the fact of Dr. Skull's honoring me with his intentions. Since there is no logical reason for his singling me out, I feel there is only one explanation—Ehrlich, or Skull, wanted to renew an old acquaintance."

"But," I interposed, "what makes you so positive that this type of hypnosis is that of your Three Brotherhoods?"

"The signs are absolutely unmistakable," said the Professor firmly. "Absolutely so. In each case we have to consider, hypnosis was achieved without the necessity of the hypnotist being in the presence of his subject. Moreover, in each case, the hypnotist must have had a clear picture of his subject's surroundings—enough to direct the subject's conversation and

actions accordingly. Witness my behavior before Amos Carter, and the Mayor's conversation with Warren at the Board meeting. These things could not have been brought about unless the hypnotist could know what was going on around his subject, unless he could, in short, see through his subject's eyes, hear through his ears, and talk through his mouth. This knowledge is a monopoly of the Three Brotherhoods."

Struck by a sudden thought, I inquired: "Do you understand this hypnotism business yourself, can you do these things?"

"No," said the scientist, "I cannot approach the power of Skull, though, God willing, I may be able to oppose him—in time. My participation in the ancient mysteries was much less than his."

"Well," I said with heat, "it's a cock-eyed cinch that nobody else is going to know anything about him. They'll have to let you out of here, immediately. Why, there's no telling what may happen!"

"Hold on, now, Bob!" The Professor raised a restraining hand. "Not so fast! I've told you what I *think*. I do not feel certain enough, even yet, to say that I *know*. You can imagine what people would say if I advanced this theory without something to back it up. In order to clear myself, I would have to convict Ehrlich, or Skull. That's not likely to be simple. We first have to find him, and that's going to be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Having found him, it is not going to be easy to prove my charge. Skull undoubtedly has made his plans well, and we have a very formidable opponent to fight."

"Wait a minute!" I exclaimed. It was another inspiration. "Skull has threatened to kill Commissioner Gallagher unless his terms are met. You know they're not going to be met and that puts the Commissioner right on the spot."

"Yes?"

"So—there are only two days or so grace. You undertake to save the Commissioner in return for your freedom until you've proved your innocence."

Professor Lansdowne knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I appreciate your eagerness to help me, Bob," he said, "but your suggestion isn't very practicable for several reasons. Primarily, no police Commissioner, or anyone else, can turn loose a man charged with murder, whatever the inducement. In the second place, I haven't yet formed a plan for checkmating, or even opposing, Skull. I don't even know for a certainty that Skull and Ehrlich are one and the same person, although I have every reason to believe they are. I know a good deal of the sources of his power, but I need more time."

"Anyhow," I said, disappointed, "let me have a talk with the Commissioner. I certainly think he ought to know about your ideas. Do you agree?"

"It wouldn't do any harm," acknowledged the Professor thoughtfully, "although he's likely to consider me crazy. Which will strengthen my defense, if I have to use insanity as a plea." The scientist grinned at me. "Just one thing. Pledge him to keep absolute silence in regard to all that you tell him. I don't care to have this get out yet."

"I understand," said I. "I'll do as you advise."

While the jailer, thanks to strong influence, was lenient about Professor Lansdowne's visitors, it was apparent that I'd overstayed my time considerably, so I now got up to leave.

"Have you told Paula about your theory?" I asked.

"No, because I haven't felt certain enough about it. But I will now. Perhaps it will cheer her up a bit."

As I was about to pass through the iron door of the cell, Professor Lansdowne caught me by the arm.

"You might tell the Commissioner for me," he said in a low voice, "that if he's smart, he'll pretend to capitulate and play for time. If he doesn't, I feel that nothing on earth will be strong enough to protect him from Dr. Skull. A madman on the loose with powers which stagger the imagination is nothing to be taken lightly."

I saw that the Professor was very much in earnest.

"I'll tell him, sir," I said.

CHAPTER VIII

The Drug

THE office of the Commissioner of Police was, as might naturally be expected, in a state of wild activity that morning. Telephones jangled at about ten-second intervals, secretaries bustled from one room to another with official-looking documents, and over all hung the atmosphere of a fortress preparing for a siege. I made my appearance shortly before eleven o'clock, but it was ten minutes after one before Commissioner Gallagher found time to receive me.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, "that I'm bothering with you at a time like this only because you're a friend of Professor Lansdowne's. I take it you've read the papers and understand what I mean."

"Yes, I have, Commissioner," I said, "and as a matter of fact, that's exactly why I'm here. The Professor has some information directly pertaining to Dr. Skull which he feels you should have too. Since he couldn't very well come himself, he sent me as messenger."

Commissioner Gallagher pushed a pack of cigarettes across the desk within reach of my fingers.

"Is that so?" he said. "Suppose you continue."

As quickly as possible, I outlined the story Professor Lansdowne had told me, while the Commissioner listened with unwavering interest. In conclusion, I said:

"The Professor thinks your only safe course of action is to pretend to fall in with Skull's plans long enough to gain a few days' extra time. In those few days, it may be possible for him to hit upon a way of combating Dr. Skull. Professor Lansdowne believes that if you fail to do this, you're as good as a corpse right this minute."

Commissioner Gallagher blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"I wish it were as simple as that," he said.

"You mean you won't do it?"

"I mean," replied the Commissioner bitterly, "that I *can't* do it. Can you imagine what the public would think upon learning that the head man of their police department were carrying on negotiations pursuant to turning them over to the tender mercies of a madman? Why, there'd either be a panic such as the world has never seen, or else there'd be a lynching mob waiting downstairs for me. Very likely both. And this, mind you, if I had the power to carry on any such negotiations, which I haven't. Neither has any other single man, whatever his capacity. I even doubt if the whole cockeyed Assembly could do it.

"Besides, how do we know Professor Lansdowne is right? If anyone else had offered such a cock-and-bull explanation of what's been happening, I'd have called for the wagon. As it is, I value the Professor's opinion highly enough to give his theory the benefit of the doubt. Which doesn't mean that anybody else would, so if I tried to offer it as an explanation for fake conversations with Skull, I'd be laughed out of whatever room I was in."

"Professor Lansdowne," I said, "seemed genuinely concerned about your safety, Commissioner. Isn't there anything you can do?"

"Yes," he laughed shortly, "I can pray that the Professor is wrong, that we're dealing with a regular flesh-and-blood assassin, and that a bodyguard will keep him away from me. Beyond that, not very much.

"I don't want Professor Lansdowne to think I don't appreciate his help, because I do. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than following his advice to the letter. In fact"—he grinned broadly—"I'd like nothing better than to hop the first boat for South America. I'm no hero, and I've got a wife and two kids. But so what? My hands are tied."

"Well," said I, rather heavily, "I guess that's that."

"I'm afraid so. We'll have to continue as we've been doing, plugging along ordinary lines, trying to get the finger on this lunatic. Even so, be sure and tell Professor Lansdowne that I'm anxious to have every new idea he gets, and that I'll cooperate with him as much as I can, as long as I'm here to cooperate. Of course, under the circumstances, I can't appear to be conferring with him, so you'll have to continue as liaison man, if you don't mind. And of course, if there's anything I can possibly do to help the Professor, or to make his situation any more comfortable, tell him not to hesitate to let me know."

"I won't, Commissioner," I replied, "and thanks a lot."

"Now," said Gallagher, rising and extending his hand, "get to blazes out of here and let me go to work." As I went through the door, I heard him mutter, "I've got a will to write."

IN THE corridor immediately outside the Commissioner's office, who should come galloping at me with the momentum of a charging buffalo, but Curly Smith.

"Gangway, mug!" he shouted, breathing with difficulty, "I've got business to do!"

I stepped aside quickly to avoid being trampled under foot and turned my head to see him plunge through a group of men and disappear into the Commissioner's private office. Animated by an overpowering desire to see what all the excitement was about, I followed the reporter as rapidly as possible. Whatever made me think I could get into Gallagher's office again, I don't know. Probably the idea didn't enter my head, and that may have been why no one interfered with my progress. The Commissioner was putting down his telephone. He appeared to be angry.

"See here, Commissioner," Curly began, before the official had time to speak, "what have you got to say about the coroner's finding poison in Warren's stomach?"

Commissioner Gallagher's face had been red when he put down the telephone receiver. Now it became purplish.

"What the devil do you mean, running into my office like this?" he raged. "And who the hell are you, anyway? Get out, get out! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"C'mon, Commissioner," urged Curly. "I'm Smith, from the *Express*. Gimme a break on this, won't you? Everybody knows about it now, anyway. I got my dope from the coroner and now I want your comment. Have a heart, Commissioner!"

With apparent effort, Gallagher got hold of himself.

"Would you mind telling me, please," he said, between clenched teeth, "when you obtained your information?"

"Oh, half an hour ago. Why?"

"Half an hour ago?" echoed the Commissioner. Whereupon he began filling the air with a choice collection of invectives, aimed more or less at the absent coroner who talked to a reporter at least fifteen minutes before reporting to his own superior. Then his eyes fell on me. "You're in again, too?" he demanded, going on without waiting for a reply: "Now if we just had some tea and a fourth, what fun we could have!"

"Commissioner," began Curly once more, softly, "would you care to give me a comment? We got to print something, you know."

"All right, all right," said Gallagher, wearily. "I surrender, dear. What do you want to know?"

"The coroner says the drug found in Warren's stomach must have been taken only a short time before his death, and that it was a kind of drug that could have affected his brain. Do you think this accounts for Warren stabbing himself?"

"Now, look here," grated the Commissioner, "if you want to print something print this: the police department is making a thorough investigation of the latest developments in the Warren case. As soon as this is completed, a statement will be issued. Meanwhile, there's nothing I have to say. Now, get out—and the next time you come back, knock before you come in!"

"Aw, gee, Commissioner," wheedled the reporter, "don't you even want to say whether you think somebody deliberately put that stuff in Warren's drink so he'd kill himself?"

"I told you there'd be a statement when we've completed our investigation, not before. Now, scram, d'you hear? Scram!" the Commissioner yelled the last word, so Curly reluctantly started off, and I with him. Gallagher, however, called me back. When the door had closed on the reporter, he said:

"I guess it's just as well you came back. You heard the latest. I got it over the phone just as that guy busted in. The coroner had an analysis made of the contents of Warren's stomach, and he found this drug—never mind, I'd better write it down." He did so and handed me the slip of paper. The word meant nothing as far as I was concerned. "Tell Professor Lansdowne about it. I don't know whether it will shake his theory or not, but the coroner says this drug might have induced suicide. If this is an indication that Skull uses drugs in his dirty work, it puts a bit of a crimp in the Professor's explanation."

I'll admit to feeling slightly sick at the prospect of seeing the scientist's carefully constructed case threatened, and I must have shown it, for the Commissioner added:

"Of course, we have no proof, one way or the other. In any case, keep this under your hat. I don't know what good it'll do with the coroner blowing his mouth off to every Tom, Dick and Harry he sees, but keep quiet anyhow."

Curly Smith was waiting for me as I emerged from the office, but there was little I could have added to the information he already had, even if I'd wanted to, so he soon gave up.

"So long," he said, when we reached the street. "Remember me to the Professor and Miss Lansdowne. The only reason I haven't been in to see him is because I've been up to my ears in this Skull mess. But as soon as it eases off

a bit, I'll be around." He flagged a cab and was whirled away in the sea of traffic. I smiled to myself at the thought of Curly's being too busy with the "Skull mess" to talk to Professor Lansdowne, the one person who could shed any light on it. Then I remembered the drug taken by Warren and sobered right up.

I WENT straight to the Tombs, and after a good deal of arguing, got in to see Professor Lansdowne. It was with mixed emotions that I discovered him chatting lightly with Paula and Norman Howard. However, after a few rather labored pleasantries, the latter got up to leave.

"Goodbye, Professor," he said, in his flat, clipped way. "The fact that, through our mutual friends, I've secured such an early date for the trial will greatly shorten these tedious days of waiting. Whatever the outcome may be—and I believe we can make out a fairish case—we will certainly be able to get you into more comfortable surroundings."

"Thank you, Norman," said the Professor, "I appreciate all you're trying to do for me."

"Oh, don't think anything of it," answered Howard. "It's all in the day's work, you know."

The lawyer bowed himself out and his short steps tapped themselves beyond hearing range. Then I opened up and told Professor Lansdowne what I had learned from Commissioner Gallagher.

"Dad!" cried Paula, alarmed. She'd evidently been told about the Professor's hypothesis. "This may mean you're wrong about Dr. Skull. If they prove that Warren killed himself because of a drug that was slipped in his drink—"

"Hold on a minute," I interrupted. "Give your Dad a chance to think it over. It may not mean so much." I hoped fervently I was right. Professor Lansdowne stared vacantly at nothing for a full minute, rolling into a ball the piece of paper the Commissioner had given me.

"As much as I hate to admit it," he

said heavily, "this new development may possibly upset my theory. If it is true, that is, that somnocephalaine was administered Warren, and if it is also true that the drug disturbed his mind sufficiently to make him take his own life. Also, if the same drug were given O'Hara and the others who were strangely affected, including myself."

"But, Professor," I said, puzzled, "how could any drug make a person commit suicide? That seems impossible to me."

"Somnocephalaine is a relatively new discovery," the scientist explained. "It has been used successfully to make a person amenable to suggestion, particularly those suffering from various forms of insanity. The drug has a peculiar effect on the brain, numbing to a large extent its natural impulses—those which come from within—and making it highly susceptible to outside influence. Thus, a patient suffering from delusions, say, of persecution, is given a small quantity of somnocephalaine. This is followed by a period during which the psychiatrist suggests the absurdity of the delusion, a suggestion which has a marked effect in restoring the patient's mental equilibrium—as long as the effects of the drug last. This is usually about two hours. There is more than one school of thought on the permanent benefits, if any, of the treatment."

"But," wondered Paula, "what could it do to a man like Warren?"

"This," replied her father. "With the surroundings as foreboding as they were, with all the guards on hand, and the possibility of sudden death within a short time, the drug could have greatly increased Warren's natural pessimism and fear. In fact, these emotions could have been emphasized to the point of profound mental depression which might have made him want to die."

I hauled a pack of cigarettes out of my pocket and passed them around.

"How would you account for the motor-man and Walker and the Mayor, though?" I asked. "Could this somnocephalaine explain their actions too?"

"It's within the bounds of possibility, yes. We really know very little about the potentialities of the drug and it may have more effects than we think it has. I can't give any explanation of how it could have been administered to any of the people in question, but if it was, then it could have had a lot to do with their actions. Though, come to think of it, it's pretty hard to account for that speech of the Mayor's except by my hypnosis theory. Still, I can't say for sure that somnocephalaine couldn't have been an influence."

"In your case, though," I pursued, "wouldn't you have been able to tell, with all your experience, that you were under the influence of a drug like that?"

"Not necessarily," was the reply. "My perceptions would have been dulled to a considerable extent. The after-effects of somnocephalaine and the kind of hypnotism practiced by initiates of the Three Brotherhoods are quite similar, I should say, though with much less shock resulting from the drug. It is this last factor that makes me continue to hope for my original theory. Walker, for example, was suffering from shock to an unusual degree."

"Oh, that's good," said Paula. "You can't let anything break up your case like that, Dad!"

The Professor patted her hand. "I'll try not to, dear," he promised. "I certainly can't afford to have it proved that Skull works with drugs and not with a kind of hypnotism superior to any ever seen before. It actually isn't possible that I was under the influence of somnocephalaine when I struck down Amos Carter. It couldn't possibly have been given me because the only food I take is at home and only you or Martha could have administered it.

"Therefore, as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't make any difference how many others may have been under its influence. I was not, and if Dr. Skull doesn't work with hypnotism, then I killed Carter as the direct result of a very real criminal

insanity that may return. So you see, my theory must not be disrupted. Frankly, I don't believe it will be. I don't believe that Edward J. Walker had been given any drug, or Mayor O'Hara either. Nor the elevated motorman nor the poor woman who was found dead.

"What I do believe is this:

"Franz Ehrlich, or Skull, developed a hypnotic ability greater even than that of his teachers themselves. Fearing death if he broke his vow of secrecy and used his power in India, he came to America. I can't say for sure, but I believe that that motorman may have been only a sort of proving ground for Skull. Before attempting anything on a grander scale he must have wanted to be sure. In the case of Walker, he may have needed the money. In my case—well, it may have been sentiment, or the desire to try his power on someone he thought might be rather difficult.

"With Mayor O'Hara and Warren, his real campaign has begun. I am very much afraid that it has *just* begun, and that we may be facing a reign of terror such as the world has never known—unless this maniac can be checked."

Professor Lansdowne stopped talking long enough to light his pipe. Then he added:

"I hope, more than I can say, that the man whom Skull has selected for his next victim — Commissioner Gallagher — may escape the fate which overtook Warren. But, as matters stand, I don't believe he will. In the manner of his death, we will surely find evidence, either to further weaken or greatly strengthen, my theory of hypnosis. There are now less than fifty-three hours to wait."

CHAPTER IX

Condemned to Death

PAULA and I spent that Saturday evening worrying over the latest developments in the Warren case. The fact that there was the barest possibility of Professor Lansdowne's not having been

the unwilling tool of Dr. Skull when he struck down Amos Carter was enough to cast a pall over our thoughts.

"Just think, Bob," said Paula that evening, "if Skull uses drugs instead of hypnotism to control his victims, that means Dad killed poor Dr. Carter because he really did go out of his mind. And if he did once, he might again. What if that should be true!"

"But it isn't, Paula," I said, and in my heart believed it. "The Professor is as sane as anybody in the world. If he went out of his head, it was because Dr. Skull had him hypnotized. Your dad wouldn't go crazy that way. He's no homicidal maniac."

"I hope and pray you're right, darling."

"I'm right. As your father says, we must keep our eyes on Gallagher. What happens to him, if anything does, may be the proof of our argument."

If it seems cold-blooded of me to take such an attitude toward the possible death of a fine man like the Commissioner, it should be remembered that the happiness—perhaps the lives—of those I loved best were at stake. At that moment, I think I would have been willing to sacrifice all the people in the world, if by doing so I could have saved the Professor from a lunatic asylum and Paula from the misery which gripped her.

The next morning as I sat down to breakfast at the restaurant over on Broadway, I rambled through the Sunday papers. The front page was full of the threat that had been made to the police official, and in another column appeared a statement that a thorough investigation into the cause of J. Homer Warren's death had been launched. Also on the first page, a smaller item announced that the selection of jurors for the Lansdowne trial would begin almost immediately. The article went on to say that the State would undoubtedly refuse to permit a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity, and that the prosecution would probably be conducted by District Attorney Harkness himself. The thought that anyone in the

world could be planning ways of putting Professor Lansdowne in the electric chair caused a chill to run up and down my spine. It came to me with a rush that the scientist would have to work fast to build up a satisfactory defense, in the short time left before the trial.

Professor Lansdowne had asked me to have another talk with Commissioner Gallagher, and to pass on to the official several last-minute suggestions. Although it was Sunday, the Commissioner was hard at work in his office when I telephoned for an appointment, and set a time a couple of hours away for our conference. Meanwhile, I dropped around to see Paula. A few minutes after I arrived, Curly Smith put in an appearance. After we'd discussed the forthcoming trial and Paula had thanked the reporter for several very sympathetic articles he had written about her father, Curly said:

"You won't be seeing me around for a while. I've been assigned to the Skull case on a full-time basis, and from the looks of it, that means twenty-four hours a day."

Paula and I exchanged a swift look, but said nothing of Professor Lansdowne's concern with the mysterious doctor. Curly went on:

"My paper is all set to offer a big reward for Skull if anything happens to Commissioner Gallagher and I don't mind saying I intend to have a whack at it."

"Better be careful," I warned. "Shrouds don't have pockets, you know."

"And live people don't have shrouds," Curly grinned back at me. A time was to come when I would remember that remark.

I REACHED the Commissioner's office a few minutes before the time of our appointment, but it was thirty minutes after the hour set before the door of the inner sanctum opened and I was admitted. I was pleasantly surprised to find Tom Higgins already seated in a deep, leather chair and puffing a cigar. We exchanged nods.

"All right, Larkin," said the Commissioner brusquely, "what do you know?"

"I had a talk with Professor Lansdowne," I said, "and he has some suggestions for you."

"Let's have them."

Whereupon I passed on a list of precautions outlined by the scientist: that at the zero hour, Gallagher should surround himself only by trusted men; that he should instruct these men to watch him every second, ready to stop instantly any effort on his own part to injure himself; that lethal weapons should be kept out of his reach. There were several other things, as well.

"Tell the Professor I understand perfectly and am grateful to him for his help," said the Commissioner when I had finished. "In view of what happened to Warren, I'd decided to take somewhat similar precautions myself, and I'm glad to hear that Professor Lansdowne agrees with me. Of course, the finding of that stuff in Warren's stomach may have changed the complexion of things materially, but we certainly don't know that the Professor's explanation has been disproved—not by a long shot. My own disposition should shed light on that question, and I have an idea Professor Lansdowne is quite interested in seeing what happens to me."

"As a matter of fact, Commissioner, he is," I admitted.

"Well," said Gallagher with a rather bitter laugh, "I can't say I blame him, but I'm going to do my damndest to see that nothing happens. Now, while you're here, I have a few things I want to say to you."

The Commissioner leaned back in his chair and appeared to think a few moments before continuing. Then:

"Should Skull get to me regardless of all we do to stop him, and should the way I die prove Professor Lansdowne correct, his importance in this case will be tremendously increased. In fact, as perhaps the only person in New York City who knows anything about the man we're

fighting, he will be the most important factor in the campaign. It's unthinkable that such a person should be in jail where he can't give us the greatest benefit of his knowledge, and if this case cracks his way, he won't be there long.

"Meanwhile, though, you can be the link between Professor Lansdowne and the police. It might even be better that way than for Skull to know the Professor is working with us. He might kill him. Be that as it may, Tom Higgins here is directly in charge of all operations against Skull. If I die, he will be the man for you and the Professor to work with. You two had better make arrangements to keep in close touch with each other. If things break the other way, and the Professor is wrong, you can forget about it."

Commissioner Gallagher rose, to indicate that the interview was closed. "Good luck," he said, "and tell that absent-minded Professor of yours that I expect to cheat him out of his proof by staying alive."

"Of course, sir," I replied, "and the best of luck to you, too."

"Thanks, son. I'll probably need it."

As I left the office in the company of Tom Higgins, I could not still the feeling of apprehension that swept over me, a premonition that I had seen that pleasant and capable man for the last time. The mental picture I had of the way he looked, standing there behind his desk, convinced me that he felt the same way himself. He wore the expression of a man condemned to death.

TOM and I were silent as we drove uptown together. He undoubtedly felt his grave responsibility, and must also have seen the grim expectation in his chief's eyes. We parted at the corner of 47th and Broadway after making arrangements to keep in touch with each other. I then continued northward to Riverside Drive and the Lansdowne apartment, where I had a dinner engagement with Paula.

That night we went to one of the so-called "concerts" that take place in New

York on Sunday evenings, when the regular theaters are closed. In reality a glorified variety program, these affairs provide an entertainment rather higher than the level of the average movie stage show, and are quite popular. We probably wouldn't have gone out at all except for the fact that Professor Lansdowne had been pleading with us to get a little relaxation. I was glad he'd suggested it, because the strain was beginning to tell on Paula. The Professor himself, strangely enough, did not now give any appearance of being under pressure. Rather, he acted like a man who is very much absorbed in an interesting experiment. There was nothing about the scientist's behavior to betray the fact that he, himself, was part of the experiment, and that failure might well mean death.

The concert was fairly good, and for a couple of hours we were able to forget the shadows that hemmed us in. We could even laugh at a well-written skit burlesquing Skull. When the show was over, however, Paula preferred to return home rather than go to a restaurant for a late supper.

It still amazes me that the lights on Broadway that night sparkled just as brightly as ever; that the same crowd of people could saunter up and down the famous street, looking in shop windows and at each other with the same expressions they'd always worn. Nowhere was there anything but the commonplace. There were, of course, occasional snatches of conversation about Dr. Skull. But these were carried on, for the most part, in tones of amusement or merely mild interest. Only in rare instances was there the faint tremor of voice betokening alarm.

Paula and I reached the apartment in time for the midnight news broadcast, to which we listened. I remember that the first item read was one concerning a hurricane in Cuba, and that not until midway of the fifteen minute bulletin was any mention made of Dr. Skull. Then:

"The attention of seven million New

Yorkers," said the announcer, "is focussed tonight on a mysterious person known as Dr. Skull, who has threatened to murder Police Commissioner Michael A. Gallagher unless negotiations are begun which would mean the virtual surrender of New York to him. With the zero hour—seven P.M. tomorrow—drawing closer, many citizens ask themselves, 'Will Commissioner Gallagher be alive at this time tomorrow night?' The Commissioner himself has refused to be alarmed by the threat, which he terms that of a madman, but he has admitted that special police have been assigned to guard him. So far, all efforts to locate Dr. Skull have been unavailing, but police officials state an arrest is expected momentarily. And now for news of the sports world. In Detroit tonight, the Interstate Basketball League has—"

At which point, Paula clicked off the radio.

All indications pointed to my having a restless night, but sleep came quickly and I even snored through an eight o'clock alarm to awaken not until twenty minutes of nine. Clouds had come up and the day was a dismal one, with a fine drizzle of rain which looked as though it would go on for the next week.

Instantly, my thoughts reverted to Commissioner Gallagher. This was the day, and there were ten hours and twenty minutes until the fatal hour, during which the Commissioner was slated to die. The dark sky impressed me as a gloomy omen, and my whole being was weighted with a feeling of dull foreboding. In thinking back to that morning, it is clear that nowhere in my mind was there the slightest doubt that Commissioner Gallagher would really be killed. I may have been concerned as to the exact manner of his passing, insofar as that would reflect on the Professor's theory, but I was absolutely sure he would die. Moreover, my faith in Professor Lansdowne's hypnosis idea was now stronger than ever. Such are the unpredictable ways of the human mind.

But to continue:

AT ELEVEN o'clock, Paula and I taxied downtown and, a few minutes later, we greeted the Professor and Norman Howard at the Tombs. Paula's father looked as though he had slept soundly, and not by so much as a flicker of an eyelash did he show any nervousness. Norman Howard was his usual bantam-y, meticulous self. Clearing his throat in his best courtroom manner, he pulled several sheets of foolscap out of a briefcase and handed them to the Professor.

"Here is a preliminary outline of the argument I expect to make," he said. "It is, of course, based on the premise that you were temporarily insane when you struck Amos Carter." He cleared his throat again.

"I see," said Professor Lansdowne, shuffling the sheets with his fingers. "It certainly takes a lot of material to make such a short argument, doesn't it?"

"Well," replied Howard, head cocked to one side, "this is an outline of the entire case. In a couple of days, I'll bring you the complete brief, but I wanted you to see this first, in case you have any suggestions to make. You see that I have indicated the line of questioning here. It is intended to establish the fact that you had no motive whatever for wanting Dr. Carter dead, and that for years you have been the victim of repeated attacks of insanity."

"I see," said the Professor again, absently.

"Not being familiar with the history of your earlier years, I have merely suggested incidents, the details of which you can supply yourself. Miss Lansdowne will, naturally, be the principal defense witness. She can testify that you've had—ahem—various flights of fancy, shall we say, during her own lifetime. You, being a psychologist, can hit upon any number of ways in which this unfortunate tendency manifested itself, I presume."

"I dare say," murmured Professor Lansdowne.

"I have been able," Howard continued, "to round up several disinterested wit-

nesses, including former pupils of yours, who seem willing, if not eager, to testify as to your insanity."

The Professor looked up and grinned like a schoolboy. "You should subpoena the Dean. He'd really clinch the case for us!"

"Dad!" reproved Paula. "Please don't joke about such a serious thing as this."

"You think I'm joking?" he shot back. "Why—"

Norman Howard was clearing his throat again.

"Now, Professor," he said, "the examination of veniremen will begin at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. We can expect to have a complete panel in a day or two. There's no reason why the State should waste much time in challenges. Thanks to a number of very influential people, all friends of yours, it is possible that the trial itself will get under way before the end of the week. That means that we'll have to round off our case between now and then, preferably at the earliest possible moment. I ask you to examine this outline carefully, you and your daughter together. We'll go over it tomorrow afternoon, late. Now let me see, is there anything else?"

Howard tapped his teeth with his fountain pen and gazed thoughtfully aloft.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I'd almost forgotten. Dr. Rudolph Kleinschmidt has also offered to testify that you are mentally unbalanced."

"You don't say?" Professor Lansdowne's tone was ironical. "Another friend in need, I see. I'll bet Kleinschmidt has waited twenty years for this chance. Anything else?"

Once more Mr. Howard contemplated the ceiling. "No, I believe that about takes care of everything for the present."

"I suppose, Norman," said Professor Lansdowne, "that you've gone to a good deal of trouble to get your brief and your witnesses all lined up, haven't you?"

"There has been considerable time involved, yes," agreed Howard, "but of course that's part of my work."

The Professor extended the papers to him. "Well," he said, "that's too bad, because I'm afraid you're never going to have a chance to use them. Here."

The lawyer drew back a step. He looked from the Professor to Paula, to me, and back to the Professor. "Why, what do you mean?" he demanded. "I assure you—"

"I mean," answered Professor Lansdowne, "that I have decided against letting you enter a plea of insanity in order to keep me out of the electric chair."

"But," faltered Howard, "There's no question of first degree murder in any case. I don't—"

"Of course you don't, Norman," said the scientist, kindly. "You just run along back to your office and come in to see me again tomorrow morning, first thing. At that time, I expect to present to you my real case. Or perhaps I won't. In any event, there's nothing further you can do at the present."

Howard looked as though he expected the earth to open up and swallow him.

"Why, why—" he choked, "you're running the risk of going to prison for the rest of your life. Yes, possibly the electric chair, at that! Temporary insanity is the only possible—"

But he was again interrupted.

"Norman, you stop trying to think. Run back to your office and stay there until tomorrow morning, like I told you. Get yourself interested in some other case. Now run along. I mean it."

The lawyer turned to Paula. "Miss Lansdowne. I want you to know that I can accept no further responsibility until you can talk some sense into your father. Apparently," he added maliciously, "it would be only too easy to establish insanity in his case!"

"I think you'd better do as Dad asks, Mr. Howard," suggested Paula. "I'm sure he'll have something quite rational to give you, when the time comes."

"Very well, Miss Lansdowne. But I wash my hands, you understand? I wash my hands! Good day!" With which he

picked up his briefcase, grabbed the outline out of the Professor's hand and marched off down the corridor.

"Now see what you've done!" said Paula, bitterly.

"Never mind, dear," her father soothed. "I don't think any great harm's been done. His pride is a bit dented, that's all."

"What do you intend to do, sir?" I asked, not sure of his purpose.

"For the present, some hard thinking, Bob," was the reply. "By tomorrow morning I may have arrived at something."

"You mean that by then, you may know more—about the Commissioner, and Skull?"

"Exactly. And now, I'd appreciate it if you two would kindly clear out of here. As I said, there's hard thinking to be done."

HE WOULD have it no other way, so we left. Although a bit nervous at the Professor's sudden dismissal of the one thing, the only thing, that was certain to get him off, we were both buoyed up by the confidence in his voice.

Shortly after one o'clock, I telephoned Tom Higgins from a public booth. Neither of us had anything new to discuss.

"I'm standing by downtown until after eight tonight," said Tom. "Tell me where I can get you then."

I gave him Paula's number and hung up. As I did so, a pall of deep depression and premonition of disaster fell upon me again. Quarter past one. Five hours and forty-five minutes to go. It was the Warren business all over again, and I didn't like it. Rejoining Paula, I piloted her into the subway, and it seemed like going down into a tomb. The express shot uptown to 72nd, 96th, 103rd, 110th, and finally, 116th Street. The big university buildings loomed up in the misty rain as we came out on the street. Silently, we walked down the hill to the Drive and crossed over to the parapet overlooking the broad Hudson. The river was a wide sheet of dismal gray. On the Jersey shore, the

Palisades pushed their bulk into the drizzle. From time to time, a dead leaf would fall to the ground, wet and sodden.

"It's a great day for a murder," I remarked.

Paula nodded, shuddering a little.

We stayed there a few minutes longer and then, pretty well saturated, we went up to the Lansdowne apartment.

Hour after heavy hour dragged by. We tried to talk, but couldn't. Nor were we in any mood for the radio. Try as we would to get our minds off it, our eyes kept going back to the electric clock on the mantel. Outside, the rain continued, the same constant drizzle that had lasted all day. Probably, I thought to myself, it would never stop. The little light that was in the sky faded. By five o'clock it was gone.

Paula turned on a lamp and sat down beside me, her cold hand in both of mine. very nearly as cold. We could think of nothing much to say, so we just sat there, smoking innumerable cigarettes. At six-thirty we mixed a couple of whiskey highballs.

"Did Tom Higgins say what time he would call you?" asked Paula, a few minutes later.

"Eight o'clock. When it's—settled."

"Oh."

Now it was seven.

"It's started." I said.

"Yes."

I wondered how Gallagher felt. I wondered if, like Warren, he was trying to pass the thing off lightly, trying to hide his natural fear, trying to face death smiling. I knew that no matter how many men he had to guard him, he didn't feel safe. No one could feel safe. I wondered if he were drinking highballs, and if there were any drug in the liquor—the same drug that had been found in Warren's stomach—the same drug that might send the Professor's theory crashing down.

"Seven-thirty," said Paula. "Do you think he's—"

"I wish I knew."

This was different from that night at

Warren's. If you have to die, it's nice to do it in style, with reporters, and good whiskey, pleasant conversation and a non-chalant air. Of course, that might be the way Gallagher was waiting, but here in this apartment, just the two of us, it seemed as though he must be as silent, as tense and alone, as we.

Seven-fifty. In ten minutes, it would be over. I swallowed to ease my dry throat.

"If he's held through this long," I said, "he's got a good—"

The sharp, electric ring of the telephone

cut me short. In the instant between the first and second ring, Paula and I stared at each other.

I took a deep breath and picked up the receiver.

"Hello . . ."

"Bob Larkin?" It was Tom Higgins.

"Right. That you, Tom?"

"Yeah." A pause.

"The Commissioner—" I began. "Has anything happened?"

"The Commissioner," said Tom Higgins, "is dead."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Was Harry's Face Pink!

HARRY SCHECK, a resourceful con man with a record reaching back to 1897, found himself recently in a spot where resourceful con men have a habit of finding themselves—the line-up at New York police headquarters. The reason was a new swindle formula, invented and perfected by Mr. Scheck.

The formula was simple, requiring only a lawyer, a jeweler—and Mr. Scheck's glib tongue. The *modus operandi* also was simple: Mr. Scheck entered a lawyer's office and secured his help in drawing up a will, a very elegant will, the will of a man of extreme affluence. The lawyer was appropriately impressed.

At the proper moment Mr. Scheck expressed a wish to leave a small token to his "niece in Chicago"—something in a diamond ring. And could the lawyer recommend a responsible jeweler? The lawyer could, and did—and the jeweler would part with a diamond ring in exchange for a check 99 44/100% rubber.

Finally came the tough jeweler who upset Mr. Scheck's apple cart. In the line-up Mr. Scheck admitted the charge. Where was the diamond? Mr. Scheck hung his head. Some pickpocket—the dirty crook!—had lifted it from his pocket.

—Perry Paul



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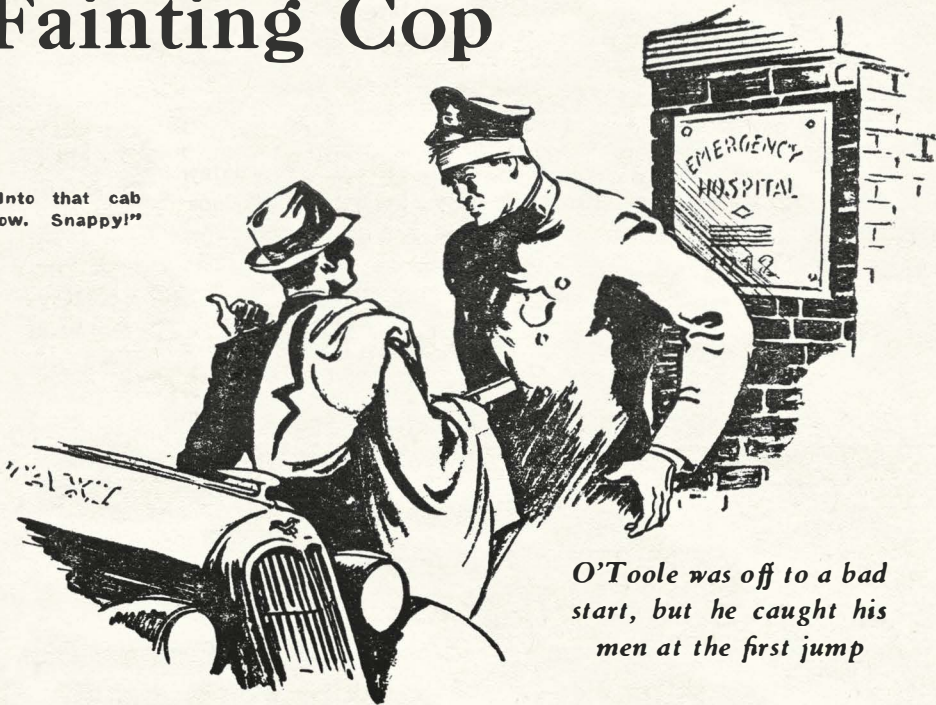
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2 D-1

Fainting Cop

"Into that cab
now. Snappy!"



*O'Toole was off to a bad
start, but he caught his
men at the first jump*

By Edward S. Sullivan

RED-HEADED Patrolman Tom O'Toole shook his head viciously, like a bull, but the splitting pain still hammered at his forehead and his eyes still winced from the searing daylight.

"Gee, are you lucky, copper!" the blue-coated ambulance interne was saying as he dabbed away with an iodine swab. "Shot at with a Tommy gun, and all you get is the tip of your ear clipped off and a few bruises. Look at that other fellow now—"

Tom growled deep in his throat and the interne shut up. No need to tell him he was lucky. No need to tell him about Bill Regan, lying there in the wrecked radio car with his throat and face shot away.

The crowd was pressing around, staring at Tom, murmuring. Beefy detectives were bustling about, importantly.

Tom closed his eyes as the interne worked on him. The red fog was lifting a little, and everything was coming back

to him with crystal clarity. The radio alarm—bank holdup . . . officer shot—that had come while he and his partner, Bill Regan, fellow-rookie, were loafing along in their patrol car, through the Northern Police District. The bark of the radio: "Tan sedan. They're heading east on Hayes Street."

The wild dash, skidding through traffic, to head off the bandits. The turn into Hayes Street on two wheels, and the speeding tan sedan, on the wrong side of the street, suddenly looming before them—

The rending crash that hurled O'Toole against the dashboard, as the two cars met head on. Then he was tumbling out on the street, clutching a shotgun. A fleeting glimpse of Bill Regan slumped over the wheel. The car tilted at a crazy angle.

Dazed from the crash, Tom had lurched against the car, drunkenly—and that lurch saved him. Bullets plucked at his sleeve.

The two bandits were out in the street, unhurt. One of them had a Tommy gun. Purple silk masks hid their faces.

Tom let go with both barrels of the shotgun, then ducked behind the car and blasted at them with his service revolver. The gunman must have been as dazed as Tom was from the shock of the collision; the deadly Tommy vomited orange flame but the bullets whanged into the asphalt, or into the side of the wrecked car.

The other man, clutching a black satchel, grabbed the machine-gunner's arm, yelled at him, ran down the street. The gunner hesitated, and Tom stared into his eyes—eyes aflame with murder-lust. His mask had slipped and yellow teeth were bared in a snarl. His nose, Tom noted irrelevantly, was only half a nose. One nostril had been torn away by some old wound.

Then Tom's gun clicked on an empty shell. The killer raised the black snout of the Tommy gun again. Flame spat. A bullet clipped Tom's ear—

Metal groaned suddenly, stridently. Something whammed into O'Toole's back and flung him flat on the pavement. A big shadow lay over him.

The gunman ripped out an oath, turned and ran, jerking the purple mask back on his face.

Numb from shock, Tom realized what had happened. The police car, that had leaned with its nose up against the other wreck, had fallen back on all four wheels and knocked him under it.

He clambered out, wiping blood from his face. Then he saw Bill Regan, lying in the seat with his face and throat a red pulp from the Tommy gun bullets. A hole right through the middle of his star—

He took one step, fumbled at his belt for cartridges. Then his stomach seemed to fall away. The street spun in a red pin-wheel.

THE next thing he knew, he was sitting on the runningboard of the ambulance, and sirens were wailing all around him, and people running.

He remembered the whole thing now—it all flashed in front of him like a colored lantern-slide.

“. . . Sure lucky,” someone was saying, behind him. “The other guy sure was blasted . . .”

Then a man was pushing through the crowd, leaning over Tom, grabbing his shoulder. The grizzled, hard-bitten face of Pete Winthrop, Captain of Detectives.

“They got away,” Tom managed weakly. “They ran west on—”

“We know that.” The captain clipped his words off short. “They commandeered a car and got clean away, with ten thousand dollars in that satchel. How do you feel?”

“I—I'm all right. But Bill—he's dead.”

“Yes, he's dead,” the captain nodded shortly. “It's a miracle you're not dead yourself. But we'll get the killers. Don't blame yourself, kid. You couldn't have done much better, in the face of a Tommy gun. Listen, can you describe either of the men? They both wore those purple silk masks when they robbed the bank.”

“One was short and thin—the one with the satchel—the other—he—” He was the one who'd turned Bill's face into that sickening pulp.

A wave of blackness surged over Tom suddenly. He closed his eyes tight, struck his head with his fist.

The captain shook him roughly. “You're in no condition to talk now. Let them take you to the hospital and fix you up. Then report to my office as soon as you can.”

O'Toole opened his eyes, looked into the gray-steel eyes of the captain. Those eyes regarded him quizzically, speculatively. Then Winthrop clapped him on the shoulder and wheeled away.

Dazed, he let himself be led inside the ambulance.

“. . . Sure lucky,” the interne was muttering.

SITTING like a wooden man, Tom O'Toole let the doctors work on him while he stared at the wall.

Bill Regan was dead. Regan, with whom

he had studied for the civil service and joined the force less than a year before. Regan, whose wife was sister to O'Toole's wife. The heart and face smashed out of him while he lay helpless, unconscious.

And Captain Winthrop blamed Tom for the escape of the killers. He had not said it in so many words. He had spoken kindly, clapped him on the back. But his eyes—the eyes of a nail-hard veteran of a score of gun battles, had betrayed what he could not but feel. One man dead, and the other with only a nick in his ear and a cut on his forehead. And lying in a faint, like a girl, while the killers got away.

Captain Winthrop would say nothing. O'Toole's buddies at the station would say nothing. They would shake his hand, slap him on the back. Lucky Tom. They wouldn't say what was in their minds, what was beating at O'Toole's tortured brain.

They couldn't know the cruel force of that first smash on his forehead, the crashing impact of the falling car on his back. It was too complicated to explain. They would look at him strangely when he told of that wave of blackness that swept up from his stomach—

And Kitty O'Toole—she would welcome him home hysterically, thanking God that he was alive—and all the while her sister, Molly Regan, would be sitting in the corner, tearing at a tear-soaked handkerchief, following Tom O'Toole with haunted eyes.

A strong hand lifted him to his feet. "You'll be okay now, young fellow. Boy, you were certainly lucky—"

TOM dusted off his blue uniform, stood for a moment blinking in the sunlight of the hospital steps. With the return of motion, of life and breathing in the open air, his mood of self-condemnation turned to white-hot fury against the killers. To get his hands on those rats!

They had both worn masks. But the Tommy gunner's mask had slipped, and Tom had seen his face. He would never forget that half-nose, those snarling lips. If he could pick it out from the pictures

at the B. of I.—at least describe it fully to Captain Winthrop.

There was a cab standing at the curb. Tom hurried down the steps.

"Say, just a minute, officer."

Tom scowled at the little man who had laid a hand on his arm. The fellow blinked up at him half humorously. He carried an overcoat slung over one shoulder. Another guy who thought he was lucky, probably.

"Say, ain't you the cop that was in that shooting?"

"Yes," the big redhead said, "and I'm busy."

"Take your time, big boy!" The little man smiled brightly.

Tom suddenly went cold. He felt the round muzzle of a pistol jammed against his ribs. The little man was holding it under the overcoat.

"Easy takes it, copper. Turn around and walk over to that cab."

Tom's muscles tensed. His mind raced. A lunge, a twist of his big wrist, and he stood an even chance of overpowering the little gunman.

Then the rising rumble of rage died in his throat. He relaxed slowly. This man, he told himself, was in league with the killers, somehow. Could he be one of them himself? He was the same general build as the man who had run off with the satchel. There had been plenty of time for him to have gone home and changed clothes. He wanted to take Tom somewhere. Would he lead him to the man with the half-nose?

"Okay." The voice didn't sound like Tom's own. He walked stiffly to the cab. The little man prodded him urgently with the gun, followed him in, seated himself on the cop's right.

"Drive out Lincoln Way, toward the Beach, then I'll tell you where to go," he told the driver. Then he slammed the glass partition. The cab slid out into traffic.

"Now what's up? Where are you taking me?" O'Toole demanded.

The little man's eyes danced. "Don't you know?"

"No."

"Well, you see, some friends of mine are in trouble. They might get in worse trouble, one of them especially, if they were picked up and you were around to identify them. You might even recognize their pictures. You saw one of them close-up, when you weren't supposed to see him. So they asked me to fix it up for them. Now do you get it?"

Tom's lips compressed. He felt the gunman reached over, take the service revolver from his holster. It was unloaded, anyway. He had not thought to reload. It wouldn't make any difference now.

"You mean the man with the half-nose is afraid I got too good a look at him?"

The little gunman nodded. He held the gun steadily, pressing into Tom's side.

"That's it. You're smart. The job went off okay, except that you got a look at my friend's face. My other friend had sense enough to keep his mask up."

"So you're taking me for a ride. Then I'm the only one that can identify—"

The little man giggled.

"That's just it. Exactly. Too bad, but my friend doesn't like to take chances."

BLOOD pounded in Tom's temples. He cursed himself for a fool. He had had his chance to battle this runt on the hospital steps, and he had passed it up. Now he had bungled things worse than ever. He was the only man who could identify the killers and he was riding to his death.

"What are you going to do?" he asked the gunman finally.

The little fellow's eyes danced.

"No harm in your knowing. I'm going to find a nice quiet sand dune, out by the beach, where we can be all alone, and let you have it. We'll be all alone. The driver, here, is a good friend of mine."

O'Toole looked out the window. They had just cut through Golden Gate Park, and were whizzing along Lincoln Way's broad pavement.

"We're getting near there," the little man said. "Quiet, now."

He leaned over and slid back the glass partition, keeping his eyes on O'Toole.

"You can take us to Fortieth Avenue and Quintara," he told the driver.

The cabby nodded vigorously. The talkative gunman settled back in his seat. He glanced at Tom's set face, opened his mouth, then closed it again.

O'Toole was staring out the window with unseeing eyes. His brain was racing furiously. There was a chance—he had once been on radio patrol in this neighborhood—

Where Lincoln Way crossed one of these outlying avenues, there was a bump, a sizeable bump. Tom remembered it well. It was a deceptive bump, that you couldn't see till you were on top of it. Tom recalled with a pang the time he had been riding along here with Regan, and he had almost gone through the top of the car when they hit the bump at full speed. Bill Regan had laughed over it for a week. Thirty-fifth Avenue, that was it.

Tom looked at the blue street-sign as they flashed past a corner. Twenty-eighth.

He turned to his captor. "Can't you tell him to step on it?" he said hoarsely. "If I have to take it, I want it quick."

"Don't worry," the gunman smiled. "We're going fast enough. We don't want to pick up any motor-cops."

The gun was still jammed against Tom's ribs. He edged sidewise, to ease the pressure a trifle. The gunman did not notice the movement.

Thirty-first—Thirty-second—the street-signs flashed by. Tom O'Toole tensed his muscles, braced his feet against the folded extra seats. Thirty-fourth—

TOM drew his head low between his shoulders. Blood was pounding in his temples. He looked ahead, saw the deceptive undulation in the pavement.

"Hey!" he yelled suddenly. "The driver! What's he—"

Jerking forward, the little man automatically put his hand to the glass partition.

"What the hell—" he snarled.

The driver half-turned his head, took his eyes from the road. Tom braced his

legs. The speeding cab lurched, dipped dizzily, leaped into the air.

The gunman, with a hoarse gasp, sank deep in the seat, then bobbed up like a jack-in-the-box. Tom, braced for the bump, threw himself to the left and clamped his hands on the little man's gun-wrist.

There was a crashing explosion, a shattering of glass. The bullet had gone through the window. Brakes screeched. Wriggling like an eel, the little man jerked the pistol up. Tom let go of the wrist with one hand, jammed the barrel down and back.

A bone cracked in the little man's hand. He screamed like a woman. There was another smashing report. The little man's eyes bulged. He opened his mouth again, snapped it shut, and slumped in the seat.

Tom looked down. The slug from the reversed gun had torn a bloody hole in the man's stomach.

Tom grabbed the gun, whirled around. The cab had stopped now. With a startled cry, he jerked his head back, flung himself flat, just as a rattling roar blasted his eardrums.

The driver had turned his full face, and he was the man with the half-nose. The tommy gun, balanced on the back of the

seat, belched fire. Madness flared in his eyes. He shifted the gun—

Tom jerked up the little man's pistol, fired point-blank at the snarling face.

The tommy gun stopped abruptly. The killer, eyes still wide, tipped slowly forward. Where his half-nose had been, there was a crimson welter of blood.

He tumbled slowly over the seat, lay in a heap beside Tom. The Tommy-gun fell and cracked against the dead man's skull.

Tom turned to the little man. He was dead: a red rivulet trickled from his mouth. Something caught Tom's eye. He dipped a hand in the little gunman's breast pocket, drew out a bright purple silk handkerchief.

The little gunman, then, was the other Purple Mask bandit. They had hidden their identity, figuring shrewdly that Tom would come quietly, thinking they would lead him to the actual killer.

Tom leaned over the front seat. On the floor was the black satchel.

As he climbed out of the cab, he grinned crookedly, blinked and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"How Bill Regan would have laughed if he'd seen the little guy hit that bump," he said aloud.



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Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 Miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. Most people pass about 3 pints a day or about 3 pounds of waste.

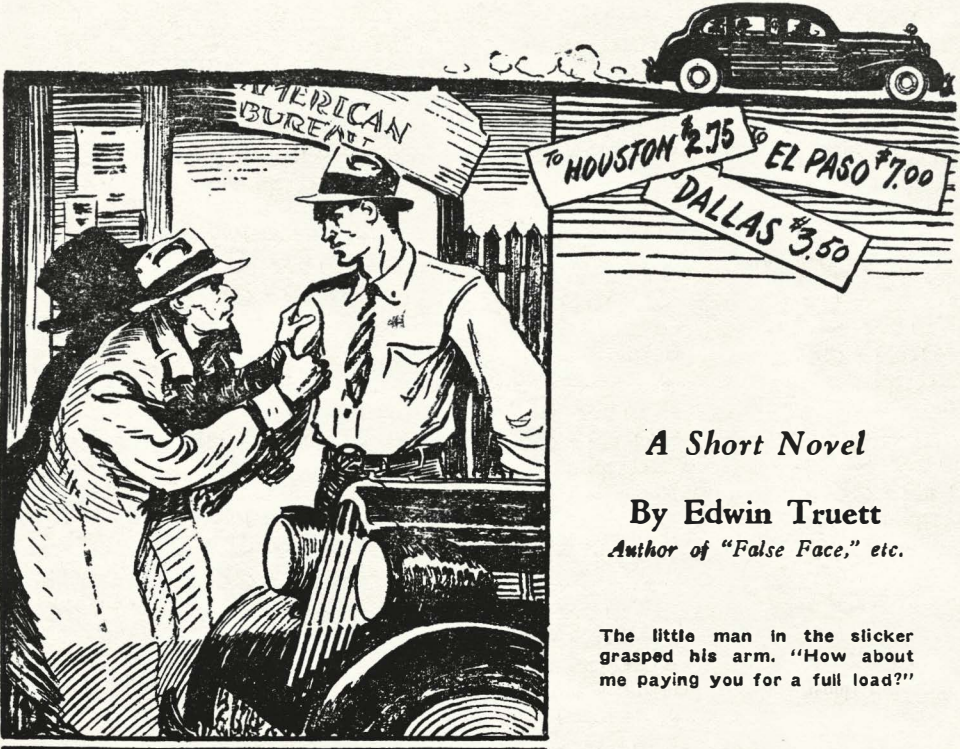
Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning shows there may be something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the beginning of nagging

backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 Miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)



A Short Novel

By Edwin Truett

Author of "False Face," etc.

The little man in the slicker grasped his arm. "How about me paying you for a full load?"

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Almost every city of any size in the Southwest—and many other sections of the country as well—has one or more "Travel Bureaus" or "Travel Exchanges," although such businesses are against the law. However, as they provide a means of cheap transportation (lower even than bus fares) the police of these various cities choose to disregard the bureaus unless a definite complaint is made. The theory is that such low-cost transportation does away with a certain percentage of hitch-hikers.

The man who drives the car may be a salesman, covering a certain territory regularly, carrying passengers to make his own expenses. He may be a car owner who is temporarily out of work and wants to make enough cash to meet that next car payment. He may be a man who wishes to make a certain trip himself, and who, lacking funds, carries passengers for pay in order to reach his destination. Or he may be a dyed-in-the-wool wildcatter.

A wildcatter is a man who drives regularly for the Travel Bureau, who makes a profession of these trips. It is not at all unusual for a wildcatter to keep his car on the road from sixteen to twenty hours a day. "Keep moving" is his slogan, for he fully understands that he can make no money laying over.

The driver gets the greater amount of the fee paid by the passenger. The passenger pays the Bureau approximately 25 or 30 percent for "registration," and the remainder of the listed fare to the driver, usually before he leaves the city.

A deadhead, of course, is one who rides for nothing.

I

THE black sedan, dappled with the dust of many highways, stopped at the curb. The driver flicked off the motor, peered at the dimly lighted window of the little shack that cowered on the corner of the parking lot. An easel sign before the shack read, PAN-AMERICAN TRAVEL BUREAU. SHARE EXPENSE PLAN. CARS TO ALL POINTS DAILY. The windows were lettered with whiting, announcing that a ride could be had to Dallas for \$3.50, to Houston \$2.75, El Paso \$7.00 or Los Angeles \$12.00.

"Why Pay More?" demanded the stumbling letters. And as a last word of advice, "Share Expenses!"



Deadhead for Dallas

Four passengers in that ill-fated car! Four with a wildcatter! Four and a deadhead who rode for nothing—and his name was Death!

The man behind the wheel glanced cautiously at his wife's face, winced at the thinness of her lips, the stern set of her jaw. Twenty times in the last two months it had happened like this, just as it was happening now. He couldn't explain it to her; he didn't have the words. She's sore again, he told himself angrily, sore because I'm taking out another load, sore because I keep on wildcatting!

Sometimes, as he pushed his car along the highways, carrying passengers here or there or somewhere else, Lucia's accusing face danced on the windshield before him. Maybe, he often thought, maybe I *could* get a steady job some place. People aren't so hard on ex-cons as they used to be. And then he'd think of four walls shutting him in and a cement floor beneath his feet and a bare ceiling over his head, the whirl of machinery, the hum of belts, the monotonous rhythm of punches and stamping machines. The sameness of it! Just like—well, just like a man was back in

the Big House. The same thing, day after day, week after week! That's what a job was.

But how could he explain it to her? How could he tell her, with his faltering speech, what it meant to him to go on and on, over broad highways, to see green fields flowing by, and things growing, and birds flying, and trees, and culverts and—and everything? A man has to be locked away for two or three years to really appreciate those things. He has to listen to bolts falling in place and locking him in every night for endless months to know what it means to be able to get up and go whenever he pleases. To get into a town and stay there a couple of hours, maybe, and pick up a couple of passengers and go on to the next town, and the next, and the next!

Lucia said, "Hugh, if you've made up your mind to go, why not wait until in the morning? You just got in from Houston a few hours ago. You must be tired."

He *was* tired, he admitted to himself, but he answered her doggedly. "Aw, hon, maybe I can get a short haul. Dallas, or back to Houston. Somebody waiting to go some place now."

She leaned forward, the better to peer past him at the dumpy little building. A man stood looking out the door. A woman was at the battered desk arguing with Schultz, owner of the travel bureau. On a converted bus seat in a corner, a brown-faced Mexican dozed, his head on his chest. Passengers to somewhere!

Hugh Mackey opened the car door, mumbled apologetically, "I'll just see what Schultz has got lined up, honey."

"Some of these days," she shot back at him bitterly, "you're going to get in trouble with this wildcatting. You know it's against the law! You know what the cops would say if they caught *you* doing it!"

He closed the door. From outside the car he answered, "Aw, nobody bothers the wildcaters. They do it in every town. I'll just see where they're going."

He took his hand off the door handle, turned toward the bureau. Off in the distance he heard a flat crack, like a tire popping suddenly, like an engine backfiring. Maybe like a gun. From out of the shadows next to the little building, a man's hat came sailing, rolling over and over on the sidewalk. The man followed the hat, in one convulsive leap, crouched in front of the door, his face intent, twisted, his right hand out of sight beneath his coat. Across the street, lead struck brick and ricocheted into the night in crescendo, screaming defiance.

Dumbly Mackey looked at the man who had leaped from the shadows. He said, stupidly, "Hey, that was a bullet! Was somebody shooting at you?"

In the dimness of the reflected window light Mackey could hardly make the little man out. Hatless, his head seemed out of proportion, too large for his body. He wore a yellow slicker, the collar turned high about his cheeks and chin. Mackey repeated his question as the little man reached down for his hat, examined two

neat holes in the battered felt, snarled, "Shooting? Hell, no! Why should anyone shoot at me? Must be some darned kid popping wild at a cat or something."

Mackey said, "Yeah," started to push past into the bureau. The little man in the slicker stopped him.

"You wildcatting? You driving this heap willy-nilly?"

"Why?" Mackey wasn't quite sure about that willy-nilly. He was a little belligerent.

"Because I want to go to Dallas and I want to go right now," snapped back the little man. He slapped the ruined hat on his too-large head, tugged it well down over his eyes. He moved three steps to his left, peered around the corner of the building, back into the darkness—where the bullet had come from.

Hugh Mackey said, "You can ride with me if I get 'a load. Let me find out where the rest of these people are going."

The little man in the slicker grasped his arm. "Look, mister, I got to get to Dallas and get there in a hurry, see? Maybe some of these folks in there won't like driving fast. How about me paying you for a full car and a bonus for burning up the road?"

He kept glancing over his shoulders, both to right and left, as if expecting more bullets at any minute. He was so close to Mackey their bodies almost touched. Mackey's brain wasn't noted for fast working. Yet the proposition was so strange, the man's fear so evident, that he was immediately suspicious. He started to ask a question, but the door of the bureau opened abruptly, Schultz's thick voice boomed, "Hey, Mackey, come in here. Good thing you showed up. Jordan broke an axle and these folks are waiting to go to Dallas. Come on in."

The little man in the slicker gibbered something about money in Hugh Mackey's ear. Mackey shook his head sternly. He said, "I got to take them all, mister, or Schultz won't load me out no more."

THE three people inside, the fat man with the dark glasses who had been peering out the door, the lady with the

sloppy, badly fitting clothes who had argued with Schultz, the dark-faced Mexican who dozed in the corner, all were waiting for a ride to Dallas. Four for Dallas, and his share of the fare would amount to ten dollars! Yeah, he told himself, it was a smart hunch that sent him down tonight. He could make it in six hours, with luck, and clear better than six bucks on the trip. A buck an hour. That beat working in a shop!

Schultz's hoarse instructions broke him from his figures. He handed Mackey a card with a written address, his thick thumb pointing out the blank-faced Mexican. "This *pelado* don't speak no English, Mackey. You got his money, though, and you're to deliver him to this address." Mackey nodded, thrust the card in his shirt pocket and led the way outside.

A hand gripped his arm. The little man in the yellow slicker whined, "Listen, pal, I got to get to Dallas, fast, see? I'll pay, I'll pay for the whole car and a bonus. Take me by myself?"

Mackey answered, "I ain't at all sure I'll even take you. Who you running from? What's your hurry? How come somebody takes a shot at you?"

He looked as if he were on the verge of apoplexy. "Shot at me, hell! Don't you know if I had more time I'd stick around and make a complaint to the cops about that shot? I got to get to Dallas quick because I got a sick wife, that's it, a sick wife. No plane leaving till morning, train leaving at eleven and taking eight or nine hours to make the trip. Now listen, pal—"

Mackey pulled away. "Get in," he said shortly. "I'll take you, but I'm taking the whole load." He turned to the trio that was coming from the office. "Baggage?" he queried.

The only baggage in the group was the paper suitcase the Mexican carried. He made no protest as Mackey took it from him, put it in the trunk on the rear. Mackey loaded the colorless lady in the far corner of the back seat. The fat man with the dark glasses came next, the Mexican with the liquid brown eyes in the

near corner. To the man in the yellow slicker he said, "Slid in up front, mister. I'm dropping my wife off at home. She ain't going."

Lucia Mackey sniffed audibly, shoved over, holding her skirts primly.

Hugh knew she was angry, both by sniff and gesture, and wisely, doggedly, held his peace. How could he tell her his heart was already filling with peace and contentment at the very thought of six hours on an unwinding strip of macadam, six hours, during whose passing, nobody could put four steel walls and a concrete floor and a cold ceiling about his fast moving car!

Four for Dallas! Four for ten bucks! Four and a deadhead, one who rode for nothing, all unbeknownst to Hugh Mackey! A deadheading passenger who rode the trunk at the rear and waited his time, whose face and frame were fleshless, whose head was a death's head with gaping eyesockets, whose hands were fleshless talons, reaching, reaching! Death! Death, deadheading for Dallas, and his bony finger stretched forward to tap an unwilling shoulder!

Maybe Lucia sensed that passenger, maybe woman's intuition told her. They stopped before the shabby apartment house, and she and Hugh slid out and walked together up the cracked concrete that was the walk. "Look, hon," he said guiltily, "ten bucks is ten bucks and—"

She stopped him by throwing her arms about his neck. Her voice was strained. "Oh, Hugh, I'm not angry! You know I'm not! Haven't I always stood by you, and—look, Hugh, I'm just afraid for you, that's all. You mustn't get in any trouble of any kind, any kind whatever! Why, if they'd take you away from me again I'd die!"

He kissed her, was a little startled at the vehemence of her caress.

"Hey," called a voice from the car, "the lady left a package."

Lucia said, "My toothpaste, Hugh." He went back to the car and got it from the little man in the slicker.

Presently he was back in the car sliding beneath the wheel, sticking his little kitbag beneath his calves. No one spoke. He threw the car in gear, pulled away from the curb, said, to no one in particular, "Tank's full and we're Dallas bound. First stop, Waco."

The little man in the yellow slicker growled, "Stop by a package house, I want to buy a bottle."

Mackey's face clouded. He hadn't had a drink for years. In way of admonishment, he said, primly, "We're hauling a lady, mister."

"Okay," snarled the little man, "I'll buy her a bottle, too."

Mackey glared, turned to the woman in the back seat. "Lady, I'm just the driver, that's all. Do you mind if—?"

"Let him drink his empty head off," she snapped, "but don't stop too long!"

II

MUCH to Mackey's disgust, the little man sucked at his bottle every ten or fifteen minutes. New Braunfels, San Marcus, Kyle, Austin. The highway was traffic-crowded, but Mackey, holding the big car at a religious fifty, passed most of them, their headlights dropping behind. He slowed for Austin, rolled through without stopping, and on the far side, took note of the little man's actions. The little man's eyes were wide and staring in the yellow oval of his face, his lips were twisted back from his prominent teeth in a snarl. He peered into the rear view mirror, turned to growl at the fat man.

"Move over, you dope, I want to see behind us."

"Listen, mister," said Mackey indignantly, "you can't—"

The little man interrupted: "There's a monkey following us. How fast will this hack go? I got ten bucks for you if you lose him."

Mackey looked in the rear-view mirror himself. They passed a highway junction with an overhead light, well illuminated filling stations on either side as well. He slowed up, rode through easily. The lights of the car behind stayed back. When it

finally slid through the illumination, Mackey saw it was a coupé. He breathed a sigh of relief. Cops didn't ride in coupés very often. Still—

He speeded up; the pursuing lights kept the same distance. He slowed. They slowed. He began to worry. Wildcatting is against the law. Still, nobody pays much attention to Travel Bureaus.

"You going to lose him?" snarled Yellow Slicker. "Or are you playing tag?"

"Maybe it's the cops," said Mackey doubtfully.

"The cops!" This from the fat man in the back seat. He turned to peer through the glass. He grunted. The dowdy woman was silent. The Mexican said nothing.

Mackey hurried on. "Hey, if they stop us, all of you be good sports, will you? Don't say you paid me, just say you're friends of mine. If they can't prove anything it'll be all right." Already he was wondering what he'd tell the cops about the Mexican.

Yellow Slicker half rose, unbuttoned his slicker, unbuttoned his coat. "It ain't cops," he said grimly. "Step on it, bub—I'll take care of everything." He tipped the whiskey bottle to his lips and Mackey, staring at him, was fascinated by the little black hole in his crushed gray hat. He remembered that shot, back there at the bureau, remembered the little man's anxiety to get out of San Antonio. Were the one or ones in that coupé after Yellow Slicker? They wouldn't get him in Mackey's car! Not while the gas held out. He'd stop at Waco, give things time to happen. What did he care about Yellow Slicker? If somebody wanted him they could have him—at Waco. But not out here on the highway, when Mackey was carrying three other passengers.

His lights cut a silver swath in the darkness, the road was a fishline from a gigantic reel, and a ten dollar bill, well earned, was the sounding fish on the other end of the line, Dallas.

He heard the fat man with the dark glasses and the dowdily dressed woman exchanging a few remarks in the rear seat.

The coupé behind kept its distance. Mackey settled down to the grind. Mile after mile paid off the reel that was his speedometer. Weariness began to overtake him. He forgot about the coupé. The ball of his right foot on the accelerator burned and throbbed; even his left foot felt hot. He blinked, glanced at the dial, saw that, including his Houston run, he had made well over eight hundred miles since early morning. He hunched his shoulders doggedly. Hell, a man had to make a living when he was married, didn't he? This was better than nothing. Better than a shop or factory with four bleak walls and a door that locked! Almost he dozed. The right front wheel sheering off the pavement and sinking in the soft shoulder aroused him.

At Waco, he decided to have coffee, coupé or no coupé, hurry or no hurry. He pulled to a stop at a suburban filling station and restaurant, told his load what he intended doing, told the attendant to fill the tank. He stepped out of the car, headed for the door marked *Eats*. From the corner of his eye he saw the fat man and the dowdily dressed woman crawl over the Mexican and leave the car. One went one way, one another, to either side of the filling station. The man in the yellow slicker was motionless. A second later the Mexican got out, went in the same direction the fat man had taken.

THE coffee wakened him, and the miles flew beneath the wheels. The pursuing coupé seemed to have disappeared completely. The man in the seat beside him had his head well down on his chest. Mackey, teetotaler, glancing at him occasionally, observed the sagging lips, the yellow, stained weakness of his face, and Mackey grew more disgusted minute by minute. Damned drunk! Passing out, and a lady in the car! Something bounced against his ankle. He reached down, picked up the half-filled bottle of whiskey, and as they passed over a small concrete culvert, tossed the bottle from the car. Feeling virtuous, he drove on into the night.

Wildcatters deliver their passengers at

destinations. The badly dressed woman got out at a second-rate hotel. Strangely enough, the fat man with the dark glasses also left at a downtown street corner. Mackey pulled out the card Schultz had given him. Not knowing the address he turned to the man by his side. This one, Yellow Slicker, slept on, dead to the world.

Mackey pulled off the main drag, stopped in front of a drug store. "Back in a minute," he grumbled, to no one. Inside, a sleepy clerk told him where to find the address on the card, where he was to deliver the Mexican. Fatigued, worn out by too much driving, he went back beneath the wheel, wound the car through deserted streets.

Ten minutes later, puzzled, parked before a vacant lot, he began to curse. The address written on the card was a mistake. There was no such number! And his passenger couldn't speak English.

"Damn," he breathed, and turned around to glare at the back seat.

It was empty. So was the street, as devoid of life as when he had driven in to it.

"Now what do you think of that?" he snorted to the man beside him. "Did you see where that *pelado* went?"

The man in the slicker didn't answer. Mackey nudged him, hard, nudged him again. "Aw, to hell with him. Where do *you* want to go? You sober enough to tell me?"

The man in the yellow slicker rocked over against the closed door, began to slump down, an inch at a time, toward the floorboards. Mackey grabbed at his shoulder, missed. Stupidly he held his palm to the dashlight. It was crimson and sticky with blood!

"Naw, naw," he breathed, shaking his head, peering closer.

The man in the yellow slicker was dead. The upturned collar of his coat had hidden the gaping wound on the right of his throat.

III

MACKEY knew a moment of utter, unreasoning panic. He stepped on the starter, whirled the car with a scream

of protesting rubber, was halfway to the corner before shock drove panic from his brain. The shock was caused by the body of the dead man. The turn had thrown him against the door, the jerk straightening out had tipped him the other way. Now he settled, an inch at a time. Mackey, blinded by fright, didn't see him at first. The car hit a rut, jolted. Something touched Mackey's shoulder, came to rest there. Horrified he looked at the head of the dead man, resting on his shoulder, and automatically put on the brakes. The dead man grinned at him, his lips seeming to draw back sneeringly from his yellow teeth. His glazed eyes stared directly into Mackey's. And Mackey knew he couldn't ride around with a dead man in his car.

His fingers tingled as he pushed the corpse back into its own corner, pulled the hat down over its eyes, turned the slicker collar up again. He sat there staring at it for split seconds, coated with perspiration, yet trembling as if it were sub-zero weather. There'd been something phony about this guy right from the start. That shot back there at the bureau. Wanting the whole car to himself. Getting high as a kite. Knowing there was being followed. And now—there he was dead! Dead! Sitting in the seat beside Hugh Mackey, ex-con, who'd already done time for manslaughter.

The police? Sure, he knew he ought to roll right down to the police station. And say what? Say, "Hello, coppers, I'm Hugh Mackey, ex-con, ex-killer. I been breaking the law by wildcatting out of San Antonio. Started to deliver this punk and found out somebody had stuck a shiv in his neck." Wouldn't that sound like something! Why he'd be in the clink the rest of his life. What if nobody could find the fat guy with glasses, the dowdy woman with the lousy clothes. And the Mexican!

The Mexican! There it was, find the Mexican, knife artist! The Mexican must have stabbed him while Mackey was out trying to find that address. In the all night drug store! But wait a minute. Look how the blood had already dried. Maybe he

stabbed him at—hell! The little man in the slicker could have been stabbed as far back as Waco! He'd slumped there in the seat with his head down on his chest from Waco all the way in. The collar would have hidden the wound.

Find that Mexican! How? Find one Mexican in twenty thousand? One Mexican whose blank, expressionless face Mackey couldn't even remember? Why, Mackey didn't even know where he'd left the car. Maybe at the downtown street corner with the fat man; maybe before that, at the second-rate hotel. Even when they stopped somewhere in late traffic he could have slipped out. But Mackey *had* to find that Mexican.

A ring of white was about his mouth, his eyes were wide, as he stared at the corpse. How could he find the Mexican, how could he drive around town well after midnight with a dead man in the seat beside him? Panic, utter and complete, returned, swept over his big body like a surge of enveloping fever. A voice within him shouted, "Get rid of the body, get rid of it quick, before you get caught! They'll burn you for it in spite of hell and high water! They'll never believe the Mexican story! The fat man and the dowdy woman will keep out of it—they won't help you. They'll hang you! Get rid of this guy, dump him, *quick!*"

Fascinated, he sat there gazing at the dead man, all lights out. The man's face was a dull gray blurb in the bleak blackness. Mackey shuddered. He began to reason. It wouldn't do for the police to find the guy's receipt from Schultz for his fare to Dallas. He must search the stiff.

He pulled back the raincoat. A wilted red rose dropped from the dead man's lapel. Gingerly he slid a hand into the coat. It touched something cold and hard. A gun, in a shoulder holster. It took long moments before Mackey could force himself to try again. This time, the breast pocket. A wallet. He drew it out. It was of pigskin, well filled with currency and papers. It bulged peculiarly in the center, near the first fold.

With fumbling fingers he leafed through the papers, found the receipt he wanted and thrust it into his breast pocket. That bulge bothered him. It was something pinned to the lining of the wallet. Wallet empty, he turned it wrong side out, looked at the badge that made the bulge and dropped the whole thing to the floor with a groan.

His trembling hands gripped the wheel until his knuckles gleamed white. He laid his head on his hands and groaned again. It wasn't enough that a guy would get himself killed in his car. No! The guy had to turn out to be a private detective working for a big office right here in Dallas, a national agency. Why, handling that corpse was like handling so much TNT.

HE STARTED the car, turned on the lights, lost his nerve. Frantically he flung the door wide on his side of the car, stumbled like a drunken man into the glow of the headlights. He caught himself, re-circled the car and flipped off the blinding glare. This time, like a murderer, he crept behind the car, eased the door open on the right hand side. The body of the dead man in the yellow slicker tottered out into his arms.

Behind him, he saw the vee made by two touching billboards. Sweating and stumbling, he carried the body through the weeds and bushes, dropped it behind the boards, ran back to the car as if the Devil himself were in pursuit. He made the corner, still without lights, whirled around it for the northeast section of the city.

The window was down, the wind was cool and sweet and reviving in his face. Consequently, five minutes of fast driving brought back a touch of reason. This wouldn't do at all! The body would be found, there'd be a picture in the paper. The fat man with the dark glasses, or the lady with the dowdy clothes would see that picture. Probably the detective agency would offer a reward. One of his two orthodox passengers would step forward and tell the whole story. Police would trace him, Mackey! And how could they be

expected to believe the story of the disappearing Mexican? It sounded silly! Suddenly he remembered something. The cardboard box.

Brakes screamed, the car rocked to a halt. He was out the door, fumbling at the trunk. His heart bounded as he withdrew the suitcase, hurried back into the car, flipped on the dome light. He broke the string, tore off the lid.

The box was crammed full of newspapers.

The Mex was a fake! He'd been after the detective! Why? Only the Mex and God knew, and the Mex had disappeared and God was pretty far away.

He drove until the dashclock read three o'clock, still wondering dumbly what to do. Subconsciously he rolled through the near deserted streets, and somehow, in those early hours of the morning, when his brain was a dull, unreasoning thing in the cup of his skull, he found himself back before the two billboards, on the deserted street where he had left the dead man.

Afterward he cursed himself for that returning, wondered why he had come back. Had he had some screwy hope of going through the guy again in search of a clue? Had he meant to put the dead man back in the car? Had he some vague idea about carrying the corpse to the police and making a clean breast of the whole thing?

He found himself stumbling through the same bushes and weeds, found himself behind the billboard, peering vacantly at the ground, unwilling to believe his own eyes. The morning moon was cold and serene, dropping gently at the edge of the sky-bowl, lighting the trampled grass with lemon-silver.

Hey, this was the wrong billboard! There was no one here! No body! No dead man! He'd made a mistake!

Something gleamed on the ground. He stooped. It was the pigskin wallet. Still full of bills, papers, the badge. Then he *had* left the corpse here! But where in the name of—

A woman stepped around the corner of the billboard. Lemon-silver gleamed on the gun in her hand. Slowly she advanced, slowly he retreated. The only sound was the wild tomtom of his own heart, the roar of blood surging at his temples. She came on—he went backward.

He heard the swish, half turned his head, glimpsed a black figure swinging something that flickered and gleamed, toward his skull. It crashed against bone, and all the colors of the spectrum seemed to riot in one mad flash before Mackey's eyes as his knees let him down.

IV

HUGH MACKEY groaned, and his big body twitched, twitched again echoing the pain that swept along his sore muscles. His breath was a rumbling hoarseness, burning its way out through cracked lips. When he opened his eyes, he saw nothing, nothing at all. He tried to raise his hand and arm. Something held it, allowed him to move it but scant inches.

"I'm dead," he thought. He groaned aloud. He lived over all the mad happenings of the night before. The Mexican, the dead man! The hiding of the body, the return to find it gone. The woman who stepped from the shadows, the moon gleaming on the lemon-silver gun, the dark shape behind him that had hit him so viciously.

Just for a split second he had glimpsed the man that swung the blackjack. The man was big and fat and he wore dark glasses. Exactly like the fat man that rode with him from San Antonio! Again he groaned aloud.

Voices. Someone said, "Yessah, I tell'e he's a man! He ain't no old clothes, brothah!"

The darkness started to work its way from his eyes, and light filtered in to take its place. Suddenly he realized that he was lying deep in the thorn bushes, that his own coat had been tossed over his face. The coat lifted, an inch at a time. He looked up into the eyes of two very frightened little Negro boys. He tried to grin, but

his grin was a grimace and his two discoverers dropped the coat and fled, shrieking. Hugh lay there and thanked God he was alive.

Something within him persisted, "You've got to get out of here! Those kids will tell a cop or their mothers or their fathers! Get up, you fool, get under way!"

Groaning at the effort, he struggled to his feet, fought the thorns that tore his shirt, the tender skin of his forearms. He staggered out into the trampled clearing, gazed about bewildered. Something yellow caught his eye over on the opposite side, next to a stone. It was the pigskin wallet that once had belonged to the dead man. Stooping quickly, he retrieved it. Its contents were intact.

Take it? Another quick glance showed him that his own few dollars were still in his pocket, but the way the rest of the contents had been stuffed back in proved that he had been thoroughly searched. The wallet was the only thing that he could see that proved the presence of the dead detective. Better take it, better—

He heard the wail of a siren off in the distance, knew then, for certain, it was time to go. The Negro boys had reported finding him, the police were on their way. The thing to do was hop in his car and get away from there—fast! He fumbled in his pocket as he ran, found his car keys. He hit the sidewalk running, stopped in dumb surprise.

His car was gone.

The siren wailed its way nearer. He turned, scuttled up the hill. At the next corner he plunged into a weed-grown vacant lot, and crouching low, made his way to the next street. He kept hurrying away from the vicinity for the next ten minutes, found a Mexican restaurant on McKinney and went in for coffee. He was dead on his feet. The advertising clock in the front window read eight-fifteen. The Mexican waiter looked at him curiously, but served his coffee and rolls without comment.

The coffee revived him, though his head still raged and throbbed. "Look," he told himself, "you've got to think. You've got

to report your car stolen, you've got to get it back." His face went white beneath the beginning beard stubble as he thought of something else. Blood! He'd been so excited the night before he hadn't thought of blood! The little man in the yellow slicker had bled profusely. There was sure to be some blood on the seat, on the floor! If he reported loss of his car to the police, what would they say about that blood? On the other hand, if he didn't report it, and it was recovered, they'd pick him up through his San Antonio address, find out he was an ex-con, and hang the book on him. An ex-con with a bloodstained car! They'd even stick him for the assassination of Lincoln!

Aimlessly he wandered down the hill, trying to make up his mind what to do. A sign across the street read, *Carta Blanca Hotel*. He went across, paid for his room in advance, went back downstairs to buy papers and returned to flop on the bed. With trembling fingers he turned the pages of the morning paper. There was no mention made of the finding of the body.

BACK and forth he paced through the room, back and forth, running nervous fingers through his hair. He saw his reflection in the glass, got a grip on himself and paused at the lavatory long enough to wash up. "Look," he spoke aloud, "this is screwy. You've got to hold yourself, tight, and try and put it together. To keep out of trouble yourself you've got to find out what it's all about."

He found the stub of a pencil in his coat pocket, tore open an envelope. Slowly and laboriously, he wrote:

1. The Mex must have killed Yellow Slicker. He could a done it at Waco, or here in Dallas. The Mex was a fake. I'll betcha he could speak English better than me.

2. Why was he after the detective? He couldn't have been the one that took a shot at him at San Antonio because he was sleeping inside the bureau. Who took a shot at this detective?

3. The fat man that rode with me from S. A. is the lug that busted me behind

the billboard, sure as hell. **Why** would he bust me? Who was the woman with the gun?

4. What happened to the detective's body and why was it moved? Why didn't they take his money, his wallet? Why didn't they roll me?

Wallet? Wallet? He went to his coat, drew the pigskin wallet from the pocket and brought it back to the bed. There was something about the very feel of the thing that chilled him. That dark spot near the outer edge? Dried blood, black and gruesome! He shuddered. The man that owned this wallet was dead! Never again would he open it and take out a bill. Never again would his fingers extract a letter, exhibit that badge. Death had deadheaded through from San Antonio. Death had ridden the trunk, and at an opportune moment, reached out a bony arm and laid a glistening forefinger on the little man's shoulder!

Slowly he counted the money. It totaled \$126.00. Five twenties, two tens, six ones. Belonging to a dead man. The badge was cold and dank in his hand. It was small, gold inlaid. Even Hugh Mackey knew it for what it was, a presentation badge. The back was engraved.

Presented to Preston Fuqua,
August 3, 1934
In appreciation of valor
under fire.
International Assurance Co.
October 10, 1934.

So his name was Fuqua, Preston Fuqua, and he was a hero. He wasn't a hero now, he was a dead man. A missing dead man.

Mackey fumbled through the letters. Three of them he read before he found one mailed from San Antonio, Texas. It was typewritten, bore no signature. It was addressed to the International Assurance Company.

"Not long ago you paid off on the theft of the Criswell necklace in this town. My brother and I stole this necklace. For reasons which will surprise you, we can't dispose of the damned thing. Also we re-

cently found that you have a standing reward for the conviction of anyone who defrauds your company. We are pretty interested, my brother and I. Send a man to the Houston Hotel and have him sit in the lobby wearing a red rose in his lapel until someone speaks to him. When someone asks him for a light, he's to say, 'Is this your home?' If the guy says, 'Nope, I'm from Criswell,' it's me or my brother. Not only can you have the necklace at a figure that will surprise you, but you'll get deadwood on Criswell."

Hugh Mackey scratched his head. His brain, none too active to begin with, couldn't grasp the thing. Stolen pearls? Yeah, he remembered reading something about that a few weeks ago. This Criswell, now? A retired army man who had come into a fortune just before retiring. A guy, if Mackey remembered right, whose marriage to a woman thirty years younger than he had caused quite a furor.

But what did these crooks, these fellows who wrote the letter, mean by getting in touch with the insurance company that paid off on the theft? Mackey in spite of his inexperience didn't know that many jewel recoveries are made direct from the criminal by the insurance company—and that no prosecution follows. And what did they mean by getting the deadwood on Criswell? None of it made sense to Mackey. Until he closed his eyes and envisioned the dead man again, and remembered that withered red rose in the little man's lapel.

This guy, Fuqua, was a dick sent to recover those pearls. And somebody else wanted them, too. Somebody took a shot at him at the travel bureau, somebody killed him in his, Mackey's car. Who? The Mexican? What would a Mexican *pelado* know about the Criswell pearls? What about that coupé that followed them from Austin to Waco then disappeared? Could somebody in that coupé have killed Fuqua while Mackey was getting coffee at Waco? Mackey groaned aloud; it was too much for him.

"Nuts to all that," he muttered. "My

car's gone and I got to get it back." He figured up a likely story to tell the police, went downstairs and to a telephone, dialed headquarters.

"Look," he said anxiously, "my name is Mackey, Hugh Mackey, from San Antonio, Texas." He launched into his story, the story he had decided to tell, how he had come to Dallas on business, gone in a bar the night before for a nightcap and got to talking to two affable strangers. How they'd gone for a ride, how he had been held up, hit in the head and dumped in a vacant lot, regaining consciousness this morning to find his car gone. He gave the license number, the engine number and a general description. He even promised to come to headquarters a little later and look through the gallery in order to try and identify the mythical two men. Satisfied, a little pleased with his glibness, he hung up.

Now what? Fuqua, what had happened to Fuqua? He could just about figure now why the body had disappeared. Somebody wanted to search that body completely, at their leisure, and just as they had stowed it away, he, Mackey had popped up. He rubbed his head ruefully. "Well," he asked himself, "what about Fuqua?" The wisest thing to do was wait until the police got a line on his car, go to headquarters and pretend to search through Rogue's Gallery for his two mythical men, then get on out of town, quick! Before the body popped up, before the picture was published and the dowdy lady or the fat man with the glasses came forward to identify it.

The fat man with the glasses. Perhaps it was a hunch, perhaps that split second view had been sufficient for identification, but Mackey was positive it was the same fat man who had ridden with him from San Antonio that had hit him in the head behind the billboards. Where did that jigsawed section fit? He thrust the thought from him. Looking out the window into the squalid street the face of Fuqua danced before him. He was sorry now that he hadn't taken the little man's money for a load and driven him to Dallas alone.

It might have saved his life. Hell, maybe the guy was married, maybe he had a nice wife like Lucia.

The thought of Lucia made him wince, inwardly. What had she said? That she didn't feel right about this trip, that something was sure to happen. Only woman's intuition, hanh? Intuition hell! Lucia knew! She knew about the guy with the bony finger, deadheading to Dallas. She *knew*, damn it, she knew! Maybe she couldn't say it in so many words, but she had felt it. She had known something was going to happen to the man she loved.

Yeah, maybe the guy Fuqua had a wife. Mackey picked up the letters and the money and the billfold, leafed through them again. Sure enough, tucked deep in a pocket beneath the identification card was a little snapshot. It was Fuqua, all right! Mackey would have known that overlarge head on those narrow shoulders anywhere. And there was a little blonde dame looking up at him admiringly. Laughing and happy, and in between them was a kid, maybe two, maybe three years old.

"Look, Mackey," he spoke aloud, pacing the floor. The palm of his left hand was a cup to catch the balled fist of his right hand, smack, smack, smack. "Look, Mackey, suppose it was you. Lucia would want to know." But how, he asked himself, could he tell police or Fuqua's wife or anyone else that the man was dead, without involving himself in a labyrinth of difficulties? He eased his bulk into a chair, stared out the window with unseeing eyes. He gnawed the nail of his left forefinger, gazed at it abstractedly, considered his thumb. Slowly he got up, donned his hat and his coat, emptied the billfold completely on the table. After a moment he put the papers and the badge back in. He considered the little stack of bills, picked up a ten and two ones, tucked them back with the papers. He pursed his lips, gnawed at his thumbnail. The letter from the jewel thieves, he withdrew again. He found the Travel Bureau receipt and the card bearing the Mexican's fake address in his short pocket. These, he slid

far back beneath the cheap carpet. He folded the \$112.00 he had decided to keep, put it in his pocket, dropped the wallet in his coat pocket and went out.

THE International Assurance Company looked more like a law office than a detective headquarters. Mackey, dogged and ill at ease, sat in an anteroom half an hour before being admitted into the august presence of Sam Dillon, head of the agency. Dillon was tall and lank, with cold, appraising eyes and a buttonhole for a mouth. His skin was muddy, discolored by a liver ailment, and his characteristic attitude was that of a jackknife folded into a swivel chair. He eyed Mackey with disapproval, put his elbows on the corner of his chair, formed a steeple with his fingers and gazed over it at the nervous wildcatter.

"Yes, we have a Fuqua with this organization." His voice sounded as if he were sorry he had ever heard the name. "What about him?"

Mackey flushed, shifted, fumbled for words. Eventually he leaned forward and said earnestly, "Look, Captain, maybe nothing about him. But take a look at this." He tossed the billfold upon the desk. Dillon kept his position, glanced sharply at the wallet, back at the man before him. His voice grew soft and suave, his eyes flickered a little with interest.

"That's Fuqua's wallet. I'd know it anywhere. Where did *you* get it?"

Stumbling, fumbling, flushing and stuttering, Mackey went into the same song and dance he had handed the police. A strange bar, two strange men, a stickup, a bust in the head. Coming to in a vacant lot, and there beside him on the ground, this billfold! Fuqua's billfold.

Dillon's voice was brittle. "You mean you think Fuqua was one of the guys that knocked you over? Brother, you're crazy. Pres Fuqua is one of the best men I have. He never took a drink in his life! He works for six grand a year! His rewards usually double that. Why would he knock you over for chicken feed?"

"Naw," said Mackey, troubled, "I didn't say he knocked me over! Hell, I just brought his stuff to you. I saw that picture of his wife and kid and thought they ought to know I found the wallet." He considered his thumbnail again, bit at it tentatively, tried to look unconcerned as he rose. "Maybe something happened to the guy, like happened to me." Dillon said nothing. At the door Mackey shot back lamely, "I just thought you ought to know."

"Wait a minute," said Dillon coldly. "Did you tell the police this story?"

Mackey was uneasy beneath the stare in those eyes. "I told them about my car, yes. About this here Fuqua, no. Me, I don't think much of coppers." He almost added, "Or private dicks," bitterly, but he held the words back. Going out, he thought, the fool! I try to help, try my best and he ain't even interested.

He didn't see the little man in the blue serge suit that got in the elevator with him, that rode down in the elevator, cupping his hands over his face while he lit a cigarette. There was nothing unusual to draw attention to the man in the blue serge suit—which was the reason he was so successful as a shadow. Hugh Mackey didn't even notice him in the café where he stopped for coffee, didn't even look at him as he lingered fifty yards behind all the way to the Carta Blanca Hotel.

He went up the stairs wearily, without looking behind. The man in the blue serge suit lingered below, looking in a window, but keeping his eye on the steps where Mackey had ascended. Mackey went through the hall, inserted his old-fashioned key and twisted. The key didn't twist. The door was unlocked.

TWO men were awaiting his arrival. One wore a hard-rimmed straw, the other a misshapen panama. The man in the sailor sat on the small of his back by the window, twisting a dead cigar around and around in his mouth. The other turned from the empty dresser, slammed a drawer shut. He was tall, thin, with a bony face and cold, blue eyes.

He said, "Damn if you don't travel light, mister. You Hugh Mackey?"

Mackey nodded dumbly, leaned against the door. The thin man said, "Me, I'm Grimm." He pointed a thumb at the morose man in the chair. "That's Bailey. Police. We found your car."

Mackey gulped in relief. "That's swell. When can I get it? Where is it?"

The sad detective arose. "Come on, we'll show it to you. We got it in the pound."

The three of them went out, got in a squad car parked around the corner and drove away.

The man in the blue serge suit hailed a taxi and followed.

At the city pound they were joined by another detective, introduced as Jones, a sergeant. Together they viewed Mackey's car. Mackey's heart sank.

The interior of the hack was a wreck. The front cushion was missing. All upholstery had been ripped to shreds, both front and rear. Even the top lining had been cut into strips, hung down in discouraged ribbons. Mackey, wide-eyed, began to curse beneath his breath.

Jones said, "Wonder what the thieves were looking for, Mackey?" Three pair of eyes were in Mackey's red face, none of which he dared to meet. He *knew* what the thieves were looking for! The Criswell pearls! But tell the police? Get himself mixed up in that murder? He shook his head.

"Looking for?" he repeated dumbly. "Wonder what they did with my front cushion?"

"We got it inside," said Jones, and turned heavily away. Grimm prodded Mackey along behind the sergeant, and Mackey's heart began pounding as they went into headquarters. Pounding ceased. It began to roar as he recognized the room into which they were taking him. A straight-backed chair sat in the middle of the floor. Over it hung a solitary light with a cone-shaped shade. A small desk sat in the corner. A man in uniform was sitting there sharpening a pencil. He didn't

look up. Jones said heavily, "Sit down over there, sweetheart."

Mackey said, "Like hell! What you want from me?"

MACKEY sat down, bit his lips. Bailey went to the desk, opened a drawer, took out two lengths of rubber hose. They fascinated Mackey. He couldn't keep his eyes away from them. Jones said, "What's your real name, fellow?"

"Hugh Mackey."

"Okay. You're Hugh Mackey. You live on University in San Antonio, Texas. You're a wildcat driver for the travel bureaus. Right?"

Mackey gulped. They'd checked him. Police keep an eye on ex-cons. No use to deny it. He said, "Yeah."

Jones continued, "You brought four passengers from S.A. last night. And you left them where?"

Mackey haltingly lied, said that all four had gotten off at downtown street corners. At Jones' prompting he repeated the story he had told the police before. How he had met two affable strangers in a bar, how they had taken him out, hit him in the head and stolen his car.

Jones interrupted, "How much time did you do in Huntsville, Mackey?"

No use to lie now, he said to himself dully. "Three years and nine months." And as an afterthought, "For manslaughter, but it was a frameup!"

He was in it now. But what had made the police suspicious? Had they found Fuqua's body? Had they located the dowdy woman or the fat man with the dark glasses? He bit his lips and waited.

Jones said, "Sure, it was a frameup. I never see a con yet that was guilty." He took out a handkerchief, blew his nose noisily, glared, put the handkerchief away. "We found your car, Mackey, abandoned in Oak Cliff. There were plenty of bloodstains in the front seat. What would you know about them?"

Mackey shook his head stubbornly. Bailey advanced, his mouth twisted down,

a sad look in his eyes. He slapped the hose against the palm of his hand, looked inquiringly at Sergeant Jones. Jones shook his head, almost imperceptibly. Bailey looked even sadder.

Mackey swallowed in relief. "Honest, Sergeant," he gulped, "I don't know a thing about any bloodstains. I don't even know why they cut my car up, what they were looking for."

Jones went to the steno's desk, opened another drawer. He came back to Mackey, unwrapped the towel, held something out in his hand. "You ever see this before?" he asked. Three pairs of eyes were once again on Mackey. His own eyes bulged slightly, he breathed heavily through his open mouth. The towel disclosed a clasp-knife with a five inch blade, a long slim, narrow blade, covered with something that had dried black. He gulped, closed his eyes tightly. Blood! The murder weapon!

"I never saw it before, Sergeant, honest! Where did you find it?"

"Behind the rear seat of your car, Mackey. All right, boys, get a print man. Mackey, you're an ex-con, a killer. I never believe ex-cons, just as a matter of principle. It'll be tough if your prints match up with the ones on the knife. Or if we turn up a stiff with knife holes!"

Mackey's heart bounded. They had nothing on him! What if the car was bloody, what if they did find a knife behind the back seat? His story wasn't so hot, but they could prove nothing against him. He knew well enough his prints wouldn't be on that knife. And the corpse was missing.

They took his prints, Jones busying himself in the outer office, Bailey watching him glumly, Grimm swishing the hose against his leg. Finished, Grimm said, "You're lying, Mackey. Something is screwy, but don't worry, we'll find out."

Mackey said, "There's nothing to find out. Can I go now?"

"You can go to a nice, cool, quiet private room, fellow, until we do a little more checking up. Until we turn up a corpus delicti. Come on."

Forty minutes later the jailer unlocked the door of the cell, said, "Come out, dearie, there's a guy here with a writ for you."

A pudgy little man whom Mackey had never seen before was waiting for him. He grinned all over his face. "You're a free man, Mr. Mackey. These cossacks can't hold you any longer. And your car's waiting for you."

Things had moved to fast for Mackey. The bewilderment on his face was ludicrous. The pudgy little man laughed, clapped him on the shoulder. "Don't worry about anything. You don't owe me a dime. I'm all taken care of. Your car's half a block down the street. In case you'd want new upholstery, here's the address of a friend of mine. He can get it for you wholesale."

V

OUTSIDE the station Mackey blinked in the sunlight, looked up and down the street. The door opened behind him, Grimm and Bailey came out. Bailey looked at him sadly, Grimm tapped his shoulder. Instinctively Mackey's hand flew to the knot behind his ear, his face went bleak with anger.

Grimm sneered, "You got a break, buddie, but you're still a liar in my book. Don't leave town or I'll come down to S.A. and drag you back by your heels."

Rage welled up in Mackey. He clinched his fists, stepped forward. Grimm met him, chest to chest, his eyes cold and venomous. His right hand was on his hip pocket. "Go on," he urged, "take a poke at me. I hate ex-cons. The only thing I like about you is the idea that one of these days I'll get a chance to take you apart."

Mackey turned around and walked down the street to his car. There was a man in a blue serge suit sitting in the driver's seat, cleaning his nails. Mackey opened the door, said coldly, "Bud, you made a mistake. This is my heap."

"No mistake," the little man in the blue serge grinned. He had two gold teeth

in front. "My boss sprung you, pal. He wants you should come down and talk to him."

Mackey grew darkly suspicious. "And who's your boss?"

"Sam Dillon. International Assurance. Get in, I'll drive."

"You will like hell. Get out. I'm leaving this town before I get in any more jams. What if he did spring me? I didn't ask him to do it. I'd have been out in a few hours anyway. The cops had nothing on me."

"Cops in this town don't need anything on you, Bud. They make something. Sam says in case you don't want to come up and talk I'm to walk back to the station and file a charge against you for lifting Pres Fuqua's wallet."

Again Mackey's fists clinched. He gulped, swallowed a couple of times and got in the car.

Ten minutes later he was facing Sam Dillon across the desk again. Dillon was as liverish, as complaining as ever. Mackey said sullenly, "Thanks, for getting me out. How'd you know they had me?"

"We know everything," complained Dillon. "I had a man on you ever since you left here. Your story is screwy." He leaned forward, put an elbow on the desk, laid his long chin in his cupped hand. "Look, Mackey. I did you a favor. I expect the boys were getting ready to wrap a hose around your neck." Mackey felt the knot behind his ear, frowned. "Now you can pay me back. That story of yours about Fugua is phony. I been in this racket a long time. Tell me the truth, will you? Where is Fuqua? He's overdue reporting."

Mackey said, stubbornly, "I don't even know him. I never saw him. I just found his wallet, that's all."

Dillon said, "Tsk, tsk! Then why did you take this letter out of the wallet and hide it under your carpet at the hotel before you returned the wallet? Why'd you hide a card with an address and a receipt for one ride from S.A. to Dallas? What happened to the rest of Fuqua's expense money? A thief wouldn't take part

of it and leave the rest. You sure Fuqua didn't ride into town with you? We can check in San Antonio, you know."

He tossed the letter on the table, the letter addressed to the International offering to deal for the Criswell pearls. The card followed. The ride receipt was next. Mackey's forehead became covered with sweat. He shifted uneasily in his seat. He shook his head.

Dillon's voice was implacable, even. "We're pretty well wired in at headquarters, Mackey. I know who you are, I know you're an ex-con, I know you're a wildcatter. You said you brought four passengers from San Antonio. Your car was taken from you, ripped to pieces, there was blood on the front cushion, human blood, and a shiv with a five-inch blade was found tucked behind the back seat. Look, Mackey, whose blood was it? Whose knife was it?"

Mackey shook his head. "Not mine," he managed. "My prints didn't match!"

Dillon shook his own head sadly. "I hate to do this, Mackey. You got a record. It'll be tough with you." He punched a buzzer. The man in the blue serge suit came in, leaned against the door, his hat on the back of his head. Dillon said, "Take this guy back to headquarters, file a charge of robbery against him. Tell the sergeant he rolled Preston Fuqua, probably killed him, and that I'll be down in a few hours to see it sticks."

Mackey jumped to his feet so fast he overturned his chair. His face whitened. A gun appeared miraculously in Dillon's hand. His liverish face was cold and hard. Slowly Mackey turned his head toward the door. Blue serge had stowed away his nail file. He, too, held a gun in his hand. He motioned with his head. Mackey sat down weakly. He said, "I'll tell you all about it."

Dillon put the gun away. "Start at the first. And don't skip a thing."

HE STARTED at the first, did Mackey. He told of the bullet that blasted the darkness and tore the hat from

Fuqua's head. Dillon was properly impressed. He told of Fuqua's demand to be the only passenger, told of the fat man with the dark glasses, the dowdy woman, the Mexican who supposedly spoke no English. He told of Fuqua's stopping for a bottle, of his drunkenness, of the pursuing car, of the stop for coffee at Waco, how he had let the fat man and the dowdy woman out in downtown Dallas, how he had stopped at a drug store to ask directions, arrived at a vacant lot to find the Mexican gone, Fuqua dead and the suitcase stuffed with paper.

"Look," he said desperately, "I'm an ex-con. I been wildcatting, and that's against the law. I lost my head. Suppose I'd a driven up to the police station and said, 'Gents, here's a stiff I found in my car.' What would happen? You don't think for a minute they'd believe that story of mine, about the disappearing Mexican?"

Dillon said, "It's so screwy I believe it. You're too dumb to think up one like that, Mackey. Go on."

He told of dumping the body—after having gone through it. He told of his panic, his later return to find the body gone from behind the billboard. How a woman had stepped out and held a gun on him, while a man had slugged him from behind. And he told Dillon he thought the man was the same fat man he had hauled from San Antonio.

Dillon snapped, "Describe him!"

"He was fat," said Mackey slowly, "like any other fat man, and he wore dark glasses. I never even looked at him more than once." Silence. Dillon glared at him. Mackey said, "That's the story. You got it all now. Where Fuqua is I don't know, only he's dead wherever he is. Where the Mexican went I don't know, or who followed us in a coupé or who the woman was that held a gun on me. Can't you see I don't know anything? It's just one of those things that happen. What are you going to do with me?"

Dillon shrugged. "Strangely enough, I believe you. You've read that letter, you know what happened, so you've probably

figured a little of it out. I don't know myself how it all fits. This Criswell is a retired army major with a young wife. A year ago we paid him \$38,000 insurance on the theft of a bunch of jewelry. He buys pearls at a bargain with the insurance money, gets them insured for \$35,000. Then they get stolen. We pay off again. You saw the letter from the thieves. Evidently Fuqua contacted the thieves, the brothers, and started back with the pearls. Somebody didn't want him to get here with them. Who? Did thieves fall out? Was it another set of thieves? Hell, I don't know."

Mackey thought Dillon was going to cry. Again he said, "What about me?"

Dillon said, "Go out and eat or get shaved or go to a show or something. Come back this evening. In the meantime I'm putting out a missing bulletin on Fuqua."

MACKEY went out. He got in his car, drove away. Ponderously his brain was functioning. He didn't trust Dillon. Why had he told him everything? The police would find Fuqua. Some way, somehow they'd tie him, Mackey, up with the body. Maybe Dillon would tell. It was high time Hugh Mackey eased out of the picture. It wasn't too late. Why not beat it? Where? Home! Snatch Lucia, tell her he was in a murder jam, head for the border. Anywhere! They couldn't get him and send him to prison again. He couldn't sit hopelessly within a cell, with bare walls and ceiling and a cold floor. Not that. Anything but that.

Mackey was beginning to grow wise. He didn't think for a minute that Dillon was letting him out of sight. He knew that cab, four cars back, was trailing him, knew somebody that worked for Dillon was in that cab. He pulled on out of town to a community center, parked his car, got out and began sauntering along the street, looking in windows. At first he saw no one. Then, in a window, he saw the reflection of the little man in the blue serge suit. He had kept his cab, made a

hairpin turn at the corner and was parked across the street, headed back toward town.

Mackey sauntered into a barber shop, relaxed in a chair, squirmed beneath a hot towel, felt better. Lighting a cigarette he hit the sidewalk, saw that Blue Serge was still watching, pretending to read a paper in the rear seat of the cab.

Down the street, half a block farther on, loomed an apartment house. Mackey, brow corrugated, walked toward it. From the sidewalk he could see directly through the lower hall and out the open back door. Made to order! He played his role well. He looked hurriedly up and down the street, tugged at his hat, flipped his cigarette into the gutter and almost ran into the house. Straight through the hall he hurried, and out the back door.

The courtyard in the rear was deserted. He turned left, went to the corner of the house and waited. Blue Serge, he knew, was an old head. He would figure immediately that Mackey was trying to lose him, that he had been discovered. A less experienced tail would sit and watch the front door of the apartment house. A man like Blue Serge would take no chances. Mackey waited, his hot breath filling his lungs painfully.

It would be hard to tell who was the more surprised, for Mackey did not hear Blue Serge's soft-footed approach. There was the courtyard, empty save for Mackey, flattened with his back to the wall, his arms outspread, his head cocked to one side listening for sounds he failed to hear. Then suddenly there was Blue Serge, crouched, coming swiftly around the corner. Both faces were ludicrous as they regarded each other in amazement. Blue Serge started to grin, read the threat on the larger man's face and reached for a gun. He didn't make it. Mackey's big fist lashed forward, crashed against Blue Serge's chin. Blue Serge bounded back against the wall of the house, his eyes glazed. His hat rolled off his head as he slid slowly down.

Mackey stared at him dumbly, flexed

his fist, sucked at a knuckle. He heard a door slam upstairs, waited with bated breath for discovery. A Negro maid flipped a rug over the second floor porch. Mackey could hear her singing, hear the rug crackling in rhythm. Then she was gone. Mackey stooped, picked up Blue Serge and trotted across the courtyard. A garage door stood open a foot. Mackey pushed it wider, stepped into the cool darkness, lay Blue Serge on the floor and went out. He snapped the open padlock that hung in the clasp.

Six hours later he was in San Antonio.

VI

MACKEY congratulated himself on his smartness. True, he didn't have much money for flight, but a man could always get by some way. Maybe Mexico wouldn't be so good. Too much red tape about it, too many questions asked and all that. California, then. Maybe Florida. A man could get by if he set his mind to it. Hadn't he outsmarted Dillon in Dallas? And wasn't he too smart to go right to his house? Sure, he'd get by.

He parked and went into a drug store phone booth. Mrs. Scott, the landlady, answered the phone. He disguised his voice, asked for Lucia. He heard Mrs. Scott's sloppy shoes going down the hall to the housekeeping apartment, waited for Lucia's voice. Lucia wasn't going to like this—not any. But she'd stick. Hadn't she always stuck?

The voice that came over the phone wasn't that of his wife. It was Mrs. Scott again. She said, "Mrs. Mackey ain't in. Don't appear to me like she's been in all day. The milk is outside the door and the morning paper and the evening paper is stuck behind the screen. Will you leave your number?"

He hung up instead, stood there in the phone booth and gnawed his nails. Lucia wasn't home. Now, he reasoned, she might have stepped out to a movie. But a movie wouldn't take all day. Why hadn't she picked up the milk, the papers? Premonition clung to his shoulders, fear haunted

his eyes. He was positive that something had happened to Lucia. Were the police looking for him? Had they come out to the house to question her? Had they taken her down to headquarters?

He drove slowly, trying to think, but his head was filled with one thing alone, black fear. Lucia's face danced on the windshield before him; his heart was like lead in his breast. Something had happened to Lucia!

But he kept his head. He took a round-about route to University, parked at the end of the alley that led behind the converted mansion where he and Lucia rented two housekeeping rooms. He skulked down the alley in the deepening shadows, stood at the back gate for five full minutes, watching, watching. He saw no movement in the back yard, no one came out of the back door. A second later he opened that same back door, went noiselessly up the rear steps, tiptoed down the hall to the front apartment, his and Lucia's. The milk was there. The two newspapers were there. His heart throbbed, and although he sweated, he shivered. Cautiously he tried the door. Locked. From his pocket he fumbled a key, inserted it, twisted. The door swung open an inch. He stood there trembling, afraid of what he might see once he entered. Swallowing deeply, he stepped through, switched on the lights.

The room was a shambles. The rug had been pulled from the floor, lay in a crumpled heap in the corner. Pictures were askew. The shades were down, all the way, the drapes were ripped. Cushions from the overstuffed set were slashed apart, debris covered the bare floor. Three legs were broken from the overturned table.

Dumbly he walked through the litter to the kitchenette. There he found the same mad scene of desolation. The sugar container had been upended on the sink. Flour covered the floor. The empty sack was wadded in a corner. Cereal boxes were emptied. Pots and pans were everywhere. Somehow he got out of there, walked to the tiny bathroom. Lucia's bath powder covered everything. A flattened toothpaste

tube lay in the bathtub, the paste curled about like a long white worm. He went back into the shattered living room, sat a chair on its legs, sat down stiffly. He lit a cigarette, tried to think, and all that came was, Lucia's gone, Lucia's gone! They've got Lucia.

Who had Lucia? Who were *they*? Why would anyone take Lucia? Maybe—and the thought was terrible—maybe she'd been sore with him for this last trip—maybe she'd packed up and left him. Maybe after she left some prowler broke in. He got up, went to the closet where Lucia kept her clothes. If her clothes were gone now! He opened the door of the shallow closet.

HE WAS so frightened he couldn't move. A man stood there, a Mexican, dressed in a gray suit. His lips were purple in his coffee face, twisted away from snow-white teeth. His eyes were bulging, rolled upward, so only the whites were visible. A jagged white scar streaked his left cheek. As Mackey stood there, frozen, the man swayed. He swayed forward, fell against Mackey, who, galvanized into action, leaped back.

The corpse thudded to the floor and lay still.

Somehow Mackey forced himself to lean over the dead man. There were two gruesome stab wounds in his back, matted and clotted with dried blackness, grisly and horrible.

He had to do it, had to find out something! His fingers were numb, as if they were freezing, but he went through the man's pockets. They were absolutely empty. So, he stood there staring down at the dead man, and it came to him that that contorted face was vaguely familiar, yet rack his brain as he might, he could not place the man. Had he ever seen him before? How did he happen to be in Mackey's closet? Who had stabbed him?

Where was Lucia? Had she come upon this man rifling the apartment for some unknown reason, had she fought with him, killed him, become panic-stricken and fled?

That wasn't very sensible. And it suddenly came to him that he, too, would be in a fine predicament were he found here with this corpse, after all that had happened in Dallas! But Lucia, where was Lucia?

He turned out the light, closed the door and stepped into the hall. He started back the way he came, when suddenly the door of the last apartment opened, a woman came out. She paused there for a moment, locking the door with a key, and Mackey knew he could hardly tiptoe by her. He turned, put on a bold front, walked to the end of the hall, down the steps and out the front door.

A woman was leaning over the open hood of a car at the curb. She glanced up as he came out of the house, her eyes grew purposeful. As Mackey turned, started away from her, she called in a low voice, "I wonder if you'd tighten this for me, please, sir?"

He started to go on, as if he had not heard her, and she called again. The other woman was now coming out of the house. His befuddled brain worked quickly for once. He mustn't act suspicious, nervous about anything! Later on, if anything came up, he wouldn't want the woman of the rear apartment to identify him. So he walked over to the machine parked at the curb, where the woman waited. Her voice was low when she said, "Here's a wrench—Mackey." His eyes grew large. He looked at the thing in her hand and saw that it was not a wrench.

It was a gun.

"Put the hood down and crawl beneath the wheel," she said. "I'll tell you where to drive."

It was the second time he had seen this woman, and on both occasions she had held him up with a gun! The first time was in Dallas when she had stepped out of the shadows of a billboard and marched him back, a step at a time, until the fat man with the dark glasses had knocked him unconscious with a blackjack. He knew better than to disobey. He crawled behind the wheel without speaking, and

he drove without speaking, knowing that the gun in her lap, covered by the big purse, was pointed in his direction.

SHE kept him on the side streets until they reached the city limits, made him turn off the highway onto a graveled road that led to a grove of trees. He slid from beneath the wheel at her command, took two steps forward, his hands raised, conscious of the fact that she, too, was sliding from beneath the wheel. He heard the sound of her shoes in the gravel, heard the swish of the gun slicing the air, let loose an involuntary cry as it crashed on his head.

How long he was out he never knew. He regained consciousness to find his hands taped behind him, his lids taped shut and a pair of glasses over his eyes to hide the tape. He could feel the glasses on his nose, over his ears. He heard the engine, sensed movement, knew he was still in the car. He groaned, moved his legs, which were unbound. The woman's voice, cold, harsh, said, "Sit still, it won't be long now. I've got the gun in my lap. I've waited for you since noon, mister. I don't intend to lose you now."

He heard the passing of cars, trucks, busses, knew they were back in the city again. And presently they turned a corner, another. A few moments more and they ran up an incline, stopped. He felt her lean across him, felt the wind as she opened the door. "Get out," she said. "Step easy and don't try to raise a fuss. No one will hear you."

He got out like a blind man, feeling cautiously, uncertainly with his feet. His whole body was tense, he expected another blow. Instead a hand took his arm, the woman said, "Step up. We're here." He stepped up, felt concrete beneath his feet, knew they were walking across a porch. They paused, he heard a bell ring four short rings, heard a door squeak open, a man's thick voice saying: "Well, it took you long enough."

"I did the best I could," she answered, and to Mackey: "Up again."

Up a flight of stairs, still wondering what they were going to do with him, why they wanted him, what this woman was doing in San Antonio when he had last seen her in Dallas. He heard a key in a lock, a hand pushed him, he stumbled forward, heard the door close, the lock click. Footsteps diminished from the opposite side of the door.

Dumbly he stood there, whipped, beaten, worn out, wondering what was going to happen next. He heard a gasp across the room. Someone cried, "Hugh!" Feet flew toward him, the glasses were jerked off, the tape was torn from his eyes. He blinked, the sudden light blinding him, felt hands on his shoulders, a body pressed against his. Hands tore at the tape that bound his lips, and suddenly vision returned to his eyes.

"Lucia!" he took her in his arms, held her shivering body tightly as if he were afraid someone would break through the door and take her away from him.

It was long moments before they could talk coherently, and Lucia told her story first, gathering speed as she went.

The doorbell had gotten her out of bed that morning. A blonde woman had been there. She had asked for Mrs. Mackey, and then assured that she was in the right place, pushed in, followed by a fat man who wore dark glasses.

"That guy," interrupted Hugh bitterly, "certainly gets around!"

The blonde woman accused Lucia of having a pearl necklace that had been stolen from some people named Criswell. She said that a little thief who rode to Dallas with Hugh Mackey, had cunningly put it into a package, had given the package to Lucia before the very house the night before.

Mackey got it! Lucia's toothpaste! The blonde woman and the fat man had searched everywhere else, had decided that Lucia's toothpaste had been the pearls! He almost laughed aloud, but remembered the dead Mexican in the closet and did not. He listened intently. Lucia did not mention the dead man. When she convinced them

that the package had in reality been an innocent tube of toothpaste, the woman had taken her to the car, where she had been blindfolded and driven to this house.

Mackey heaved a sigh of relief. Lucia didn't even know the apartment was torn up, she didn't know the Mexican was dead.

"Look," he asked her, "just who is the dame and the fat man?"

Lucia shook her head, her eyes puzzled. "I don't know, honey! They've kept me here all day."

In ten brief moments he told her all that had happened since he saw her last. Her face whitened as he told of the dead Fuqua, how he had lost his head, how the body had disappeared. From beginning to end he tried to explain it all.

"And the man in the dark glasses, the fat man," he ended, "is the one I hauled to Dallas. The woman that brought me here is the same one that hit me over the head behind the billboard."

"Don't you see then," said Lucia, "those pearls are still missing! Look, this Fuqua, this little detective, got those pearls from the thieves. Someone else, this fat man, knew he had them and wanted them. Maybe before he could get them this Mexican killed him for some reason. So now the point is, where are those pearls? These people must think you and I were in cahoots with this Fuqua, the detective! That's why they have us here!"

MACKKEY'S cigarettes were still in his pocket. He drew one out, rolled it between his palms and lit it carefully. "Damned funny," he said, gazing around suspiciously, "they'd put us in here together like this to talk it over. How come they let you untape me and everything? Of course the windows are shuttered and we can't see a thing from in here, but—"

His brows knit. Constant danger had made his wits more subtle, had sharpened them. He began looking around the room, beneath the table, about the baseboards, under the edges of the rug. He found the wire. His heart leaped as he traced it. A shaded lamp stood on the table, and

cunningly concealed in the ornate base was the dictaphone which he had suspected.

He put his finger to his lips, showed it to Lucia, put his lips close to her ear and whispered what it was. For seconds they gazed at each other, wide-eyed. So the fat man and the blonde woman still suspected him of having the Criswell pearls! This had been a scheme to get them together in supposed privacy. Somewhere, perhaps in the next room, one of them sat with a pair of earphones, listening to every word the Mackeys uttered. Lucia's face was white. Hugh's was red with anger. He was beginning to get a little sick and tired of the whole thing, of being pushed around, abused, juggled about by the Fates and a bunch of dumb crooks. Deliberately he went to the lamp, deliberately he raised his voice.

"I'm glad about one thing, honey," he said, winking at her. "I'm glad you weren't in the apartment when the Mexican was killed."

Her eyes were mirrors of horror. "Killed? The Mexican?"

"I opened the closet door," he went on solemnly, "and the poor guy's dead body nearly knocked me down. Someone had killed him and stuck him in the closet. I called the police right away, and didn't want to stay in the apartment with the stiff, so I went on out front. Then that blonde picked me up."

"And the police are—are at our house?"

"You bet. And the police are plenty smart. They'll get that fellow identified, they'll find some clue or other. There never was a killer smart enough to pull a perfect murder. And they'll find out about that fat man with the glasses, believe me, honey. Just wait and see. We're not so bad off."

His voice went on and on. He exulted, threatened, schemed, planned, plotted. And nothing happened.

After twenty minutes he was hoarse. He sat down beside Lucia, put his arm around her shoulders and waited. They talked in whispers, with only an occasional

sentence aloud, for the benefit of whoever might be listening. But now Mackey's heart wasn't in it. The very childishness of his scheme struck him. How could a lot of bombast frighten hardened criminals like this? Once he went to the door and tried it. It was locked. A few moments afterward he unlocked a window, raised it noiselessly. The shutter was of sheet steel, bolted on the outside. It was hopeless. His shoulders sagged, he ran his great fingers through his hair, his eyes were burning with disappointment. Only Lucia's comforting hand on his shoulder kept him from mad anger, prevented him from breaking up the furniture, roaring at the top of his mighty voice.

A key clicked in the door. Mackey froze, tensed to spring at whoever entered. Again Lucia's hand on his arm clawed him back. The door swung slowly open. The blonde woman entered, closed the door and leaned against it. Her face was drained of color, the spots of rouge on her face stood out like red on clownwhite. Her eyes were wide, bright, desperate, and the right hand that dangled at her side held a gleaming gun. She looked into Mackey's face, and the words she uttered were a question rather than an accusation.

"You lie, damn you," she said. "He isn't dead! He couldn't be!"

MACKEY didn't answer, though his mouth dropped open. He turned his head, saw the questioning, frightened eyes of Lucia, shook his head slowly. "I don't know what you're talking about," he finally mumbled.

"The man in your apartment, the Mexican! You say you found him dead." Now the voice was challenging, the gun came up, pointed directly at Mackey. He was very near death himself, and knew it.

"I'm not lying." Was that his voice? "The man was dead. I opened the closet door and he fell out into my arms. He had been stabbed twice—in the back."

The blonde lowered the gun, leaned back against the door and caught her breath convulsively. Her eyes grew fever-

ish, her breasts rose and fell. Her voice was only a whisper. "And his face? He had a white scar on the left cheek?"

Mackey nodded. He was conscious of Lucia trembling against him, knew part of the blonde's excitement had somehow leaped through space and entered his wife's body.

The blonde whispered, "Dead! He did that! Jose, dead! Stabbed in the back!" She whirled and was gone before they knew it. They heard her clattering feet in the hallway—then silence.

Side by side they sat there, gripping hands. Mackey pulled his handkerchief, wiped perspiration from his brow. Lucia whispered, "She must have loved him, that Jose! God pity the man that killed him. Did you see her eyes?"

Minutes were eternities for the Mackeys, hopeless, fraught with terror. The first few passed tensely. The strained, waiting for the sound of a shot, the noise of struggle. Nothing happened. There was no clock in the room. They marked time by the rapid beating of their hearts.

Mackey realized one thing, only one thing he was sure of in this whole gruesome mixup. He was knee-deep in murder, and nothing could help him. A man with his record had no chance. No matter which way the pendulum swung, Hugh Mackey was due to go back behind the bars. He pictured the jute mill, the laundry, the machine shop; saw the blank ceiling above his head, heard the mutter of the caged beasts as the lights went out each night. Lucia too must have realized that no matter what happened his days of freedom were numbered. She sat silently beside him, her fingers clutching his as if she could hold him there beside her forever. What chance to explain to police? Even if they got away, who would believe a crazy story like this? Surely not police.

Again that key in the door, the click of the lock, the sudden flood of breathlessness sweeping them both, leaving them tense. Slowly the door swung open. The blonde? With gun in her hand, a tale of murder in her eyes?

It was a man who stepped into the room, the blonde woman behind him.

The man was Mexican. He was young, he was well dressed, his eyes were glowing coals of fire, the lips that pulled away from his white teeth were thin and cruel. Hugh Mackey half rose, in spite of Lucia's restraining hand.

"You!" That was all he could say.

"You know me, *señor*, you remember me?"

Mackey gulped, his face white. "Remember you! How can I ever forget you? You're the one started all this trouble. You're the guy I hauled to Dallas, the guy that knifed the little detective and got out of the car somewhere. You're—"

He started to hurl himself forward. The gun in the Mexican's hand stopped him. The Mexican said, "I am the man that rode to Dallas with you, *señor*, it is true. I did not kill Fuqua, but I saw Fuqua killed. This game grows bitter. You told my friend"—he nodded his head at the white faced blonde—"a story about a dead man, in the closet of your apartment. A dead man with a scarred left cheek. You will tell me, no?"

Again Mackey repeated the story. And as he told of the knife wounds in the man's back, the blonde drew close to the Mexican. His left arm went about her shaking shoulders. Tears came from her feverish eyes, trickled unheeded down her cheeks. Mackey finished with a shrug. "That's all."

"You were heard to tell your wife that you called the police before you left."

"I lied. The last thing I'd want would be to be around when the police found a dead man in my apartment. After all that happened in Dallas—" His voice was hopeless.

The Mexican studied him intently for long seconds. Thoughtfully he pushed the blonde away from him, flashed her that thin-lipped, cruel smile. "If he lied once, he will lie again, *querida*." He whirled again to Mackey. "You and I are going to your apartment. Your wife is to stay here. If you have lied about this, if we

walk into a trap, or if there has been no killing as you claim, Nan will know what to do with your wife." There was death in his voice, death in the brilliant hard eyes of the woman.

THEY taped his eyes, they put the glasses on him, but they did not tape his wrists this time. As they left the room, the Mexican said softly, "Forty minutes, Nan. If we are not back in forty minutes, you know what to do."

Mackey went cold. Should he swing at the man once they got in the car? What chance did he have, blinded like this? They entered the car and Mackey's tired brain worked feverishly. Perhaps the body hadn't been discovered. Perhaps it was still there where he had left it. But forty minutes! Why, they couldn't even drive very far in forty minutes, let alone return! Once he started to protest. The Mexican's venomous voice cut him short, and he subsided.

Afterward he knew they could hardly have driven ten blocks. The glasses were jerked from his eyes, he winced as the tape took part of his brows. And with a start of surprise he saw they were on University, scarcely two blocks from his own apartment.

Twice they circled the block. There was no sign of police activities, no parked squad cars, no obviously planted spies about. They stopped at the alley, exactly where Hugh Mackey had parked earlier. His car was still there, standing dejectedly against the curb. The Mexican's left hand grasped his wrist with fingers of steel, his right hand was deep in his coat pocket. Mackey said, "There's my car." Subconsciously he took a quick step toward it, but the Mexican snarled something and jerked him back.

But not before Mackey had seen the face that dodged down from the back window. It was a long face, liverish, with a buttonhole mouth. It was the face of Sam Dillon. Dillon had followed him from Dallas.

Mackey's heart pounded as they went in

through the alley. Dillon had the place staked out! Did Dillon know about the corpse, had he searched the apartment, had he told the city police? Perhaps there was a trap laid, even now, in the apartment, coppers with guns to start blasting the moment they stepped in the door. Should he tell the Mexican, warn him? Before he could make up his mind they were through the back door and tiptoeing up the steps. Seconds later they paused before the door to the Mackey apartment. A gun dug into his back.

He inserted his key. If there were cops inside they had him now. There was nothing he could do about it. The door swung open. "Shoot the works, Mackey," he told himself. "Play it across the board." He reached around the door and turned on the lights.

The body was sprawled face downward, exactly as he had left it.

With a cry of grief the Mexican brushed past him, dropped on one knee beside the dead man. "Now! Now!" a voice shouted within Mackey. He knew he could go through that door, escape before the Mexican could pick up the gun he had dropped. The Mexican crouched there beside the corpse, his face contorted, Spanish flowing in a torrent from his lips. He reached, turned the dead man, slid his arms beneath him, pulled the stiffened body to his chest.

"*Madre de Dios! Mi hermano! Pobre-cito!*" He kissed the cold cheeks, the cold, blue lips. Tears ran down his face.

"Now! Now!" screamed that voice inside Mackey again. Run away? Into the arms of San Dillon? Where was Dillon, why didn't he come on, why didn't he make his pinch? Hell, Mackey couldn't run away! Not when the blonde with the feverish eyes was holding Lucia. The minutes passed on leaden feet, and still the Mexican gave vent to his grief over the corpse.

Mackey touched his shoulder. "Listen, fellow," he said, "we got to be back in forty minutes or that blonde will do something to my wife."

The Mexican rose, his shoulders drooped. He picked up the gun and thrust it in his pocket. "There has been enough killing," he said. "We must get back." And it suddenly came to Mackey that at least half of their time was up, that if they were delayed by Sam Dillon the blonde would kill Lucia, do something terrible to her at least.

THEY went down the way they had come. What should he do? Tell the Mexican that Dillon was hiding in that car? Would there be gunplay? What if the Mex were killed? How would they ever find the house where Lucia was, where they both had been held prisoner?

Out through the back way, into the narrow alley. He had to risk it. He said, "Mister, when we came in I could swear there was a man hiding in the back seat of my car."

The Mexican stiffened. "A man?"

"A detective from Dallas. Looking for me."

They trudged on softly. "We cannot be stopped by detectives now, *amigo*. Walk slowly past your parked car. I will do the rest."

Mackey's heart beat a tattoo against his ribs as they neared the mouth of the alley. "Please God," he prayed, "don't let the Mex get gunned. I've got to get to Lucia. Please God, I'm not so much, maybe I don't set so well up there, but it ain't for me I'm asking. This mess is all my fault. She had nothing to do with it. Please God, take care of the Mex, even if he is a killer."

Then it happened.

They were almost past the sedan when the Mexican leaped. Mackey stopped, paralyzed, heard the tinkle of glass as the Mexican knocked out the window, heard the quick roar of the gun as he fired into the tonneau of the car, once—twice—three times.

The Mexican came running, seized Mackey's arm, pulled him into their own coupé and stepped on the starter. They whirled down the dark street and turned

the corner before the wisp of blue smoke died away entirely from the muzzle of the hot gun in the Mexican's lap.

"Look," said Mackey desperately, "look! Did you kill him?"

"There was no one there," snapped the Mexican, and Mackey's sigh of relief was ecstatic. He had pictured tall Sam Dillon, sprawled there in the back seat of *his* car, with three bullet holes letting the life drain from his skinny body. Which, he told himself, would have been something. One corpse in his car, another in his apartment, half a murder rap waiting for him in Dallas and—a thousand years in the pen! No more highways to unroll beneath his wheels, no more fields flashing by, no more blue sky above him, and birds and dogs and cats! Just—the pen.

VII

"WE ARE going to see Criswell," said the Mexican. Criswell! The man that owned the pearls in the first place! But what about Lucia, and the hard-eyed, feverish blonde! The Mexican paid no attention to his protests. Should he seize the gun, *make* the Mex take him back to where Lucia was held captive? The forty minutes were nearly up, he knew.

Before he could make up his wavering, fear-filled mind, the Mexican wheeled the car from the street, ran up a cement drive and stopped. "Out," he said. "We are arrived."

Mackey got out. He stepped up from the drive, went across the porch. The Mexican rang the bell, four short rings, and Mackey knew where they were. If this was the Criswell house, it was the same spot where he had been brought, where Lucia was held prisoner! Then, Criswell was—?

The door opened. In the dim hall light Mackey made out the blonde. She whispered, "It was—?"

"It was Jose!" The Mexican's voice was hard and cruel. "Stabbed—in the back."

A gasp from the blonde. She stiffened as a voice called, "Nan, if that is Garza

and that driver, bring them in. We will settle this now."

Mackey stepped in, prodded from behind by the gun. He walked straight ahead, through velvet hangings into a library. He, too, gasped, for a fat man was sitting at the table, smiling ponderously, his left hand on the table, his right toying with something in his vest pocket. He smiled at Mackey.

"Know me?"

Mackey nodded. It wasn't necessary for the fat man to wear the dark glasses. Mackey would know him anywhere in the world. It was the fat man who had sat in the back seat on that madcap trip to Dallas, when Death itself deadheaded, clinging to the trunk behind, his bony finger outstretched to tap the shoulders of the little detective, Preston Fuqua.

"If you'll sit over there beside your wife," smiled the fat man, and for the first time Mackey saw Lucia cowering on a leather divan. His legs were stiff as he walked toward her, dropped down beside her.

So, the fat man was Criswell!

Criswell said, "Come in, my dear helpmate, and you, Garza, also. We must settle this thing. And you might as well put your gun away, Garza."

Garza didn't put his gun away. He fell into a half crouch, his eyes blazed, his feet made no sound on the thick rug. "You killer," he spat venomously, "you knifed Jose, my brother! You knifed him in the back. You didn't give him a chance! Why should I listen to your oily talk? I'm going to shoot you like the dog you are."

"Wait. Garza. Watch carefully unless you wish to die yourself. Keep your trigger finger steady."

Fat fingers came out of a vest pocket. Every eye in the room was on that hand. Those fingers bore a small vial, filled with an amber liquid. Slowly, slowly he stretched out his fat arm. He cupped his hand, rolled the small vial back and forth, his eyes on those of the Mexican.

"You know what that is?" he boomed.

almost jovially. "Garza, I am a desperate man. I have killed, twice, in the last twenty-four hours. I am willing to kill again, ready to kill. The innocent amber fluid you see in that bottle, my dear Garza, is nitroglycerine. You may shoot me, most certainly. And the bottle will drop!"

The silence that filled the room was thick and heavy. Mackey heard most of all the pounding of his own heart. He heard the quick deep breathing of Lucia. Somewhere a clock ticked off the pregnant seconds. Then Criswell's laugh broke the tension.

He said, jovially, "So let us talk, Garza, let us go over everything and see just where we stand. Will you lay the gun on the table and sit down—like a gentleman?"

GARZA moved like an automaton. The gun made a tiny thump on the table. His eyes protruded, his face was ash-gray. He could not jerk his fascinated gaze from the bottle of nitroglycerine, rolling in the fat man's palm.

"And you, my dear wife," purred the voice, "will sit beside friend Garza. Now, that is better."

Again silence. Tick-tock—tick-tock, went the clock. Mackey felt, in his heart, that none of them would leave that room alive. He knew nitroglycerine, knew there was enough in that small bottle to wreck the house, to blow them all to smithereens.

"Nan, you haven't fooled me in the past three months, I knew you were having an affair with Jose Garza, this man's brother."

Nan Criswell looked at her husband sullenly, said nothing. The deep voice purred on, "When I saw how easy it was to get money from the insurance company, it was you who suggested having the Garzas steal your necklace. You even brought your lover in on that, didn't you?"

"You killed him, you killed him," she said dully.

He nodded. "I killed him. It was too good an opportunity to overlook. While I was searching this gentleman's apart-

ment"—he nodded at Mackey—"Jose Garza evidently had the same idea. I heard him picking at the lock. So I simply stepped behind the door and waited. He entered. Ah, said I to myself, it is Lothario, the man who has made a cuckold of me, my wife's lover! So I stabbed him. Very simple, was it not? And it will be very hard to prove, won't it?"

Garza snarled, "Just as you killed the detective, Fuqua, the man who had the pearls that would send you to prison!"

"Can you prove that, Garza?"

"I saw you! I'd gotten out of the car and headed for the washroom there at Waco, damn you! You didn't go to the washroom! You circled the filling station. You came up to the car from the back, and you held a gun on Fuqua. You stabbed him with a knife in your other hand, and you started to go through his clothes. You didn't know me, you only knew my brother. So I came back to your car and you saw me coming, straightened him up and sat down in the back seat to await your opportunity. In Dallas I saw that it was your wife who had been trailing us in the coupé. I was frightened. I'd come along to keep an eye on Fuqua until he could deliver those stones, and I'd failed. When you got out and your wife picked you up in that coupé, I decided it was no place for me, riding with a dead man, disguised as a *pelado*, pretending that I couldn't speak English. The driver stopped at a drug store, and I got out. But you killed Fuqua! They'll pin that one on you all right, with my testimony!"

"Your testimony," jeered Criswell. "The testimony of an admitted thief!" He was enjoying himself! He purred, "They may never find this Fuqua!"

The words sprang out before Mackey could prevent them. "The police in Dallas have got the knife," he cried jubilantly. "It's covered with prints, and they'll check with yours, Criswell. And they'll find the body!"

Criswell laughed again. "How will they ever connect me with it, if there's no one to tip them off?" Mackey's heart sank as

he grasped the fat man's meaning. "I think," went on Criswell, "it is time we brought this farce to an end. The necklace, as you probably know, contained but twenty-four pearls. I have here, sixteen of them, which I found on the detective, Fuqua, loose in his coat pocket."

He took them from his own pocket, laid them on the table before him. He sighed. "Garza, we made a bargain. If you had kept the bargain all of this would not have happened. The agreement was that you and your brother were to have the pearls and no questions asked. I was to get the insurance. Instead, you got the pearls, tried to blackmail me, and failing to do that, contacted the insurance company."

Garza swore, half coming to his feet. "You know why we did that! You didn't play fair! After we took them you thought we wouldn't have nerve enough to squawk, to— What are you doing?"

Criswell's jowls quivered with merriment. He held his right hand outstretched, the bottle of nitro clutched but lightly. His left hand grasped Garza's automatic by the barrel. It flashed upward, the butt descending on one of the sixteen pearls before him. He repeated the blow and the pearl crumpled to dust there on the desk. The next—the next—the next. Thump—thumpety—thump—thump!

Mackey's eyes bulged. Pearls that crushed to powder! What the hell?

AND presently Criswell said, "There lies all that remains of sixteen pearls. No one—not even the insurance company—can prove a thing against Major R. R. Criswell, late of the U. S. Army!" He laughed until his entire body was a quivering mass of flesh, until the bottle of nitro shook and trembled. Every eye in the room watched with horror. Suddenly the laughter died away. His face hardened.

"The farce is over. I am willing to take a chance on the other eight never being found. You, Nan, played your part well! You even took a shot at Fuqua at the Travel Bureau, just as I instructed you

to do. You were willing to play along with me to keep the insurance company from finding out. But when I exacted just retribution from your lover, you changed sides. For that, Nan, you are going to die. And you, Garza, because you know too much. Likewise, you, driver, and your very charming wife. It is sad, but it is necessary. It is the only thing left for me to do."

Over the fat man's shoulder Mackey saw him. First the curtain moved. Then, an inch at a time it swayed completely aside. He saw Sam Dillon standing there, gun in hand, his liver-mottled face screwed grotesquely with the intensity of his emotions. Behind Dillon he saw the little man in the blue serge suit, the little man he had knocked unconscious and left in a garage in Dallas! Good old Dillon! God bless Blue Serge!

"Do something!" shrieked Mackey inside himself. "Keep Criswell's attention."

Step by step Dillon came into the room. His shoes were off, he was in his sock feet.

"Listen to me," screamed Mackey, leaping to his feet. "I don't want to die! I'm afraid to die, I tell you! Let me go. Criswell, let me go! I won't talk! I'll leave the country! I'll go any place you say. do anything you say. Only don't kill me! I'm afraid to die!"

He was blubbering, he was on his knees, and Lucia was watching with horrified eyes. He tried not to look at Dillon, tried to look only at Criswell, to hold his attention with his own frantic gaze. But Nan Criswell saw the man, Garza saw the man. Garza kept his head, he looked away. But the eyes of Nan Criswell followed Dillon's movements like filings follow a lodestone.

The little bottle of nitro rolled malignantly in Criswell's hand. He beamed at the cringing Mackey, actually beamed. He beamed around the circle of tense faces, as if inviting them to enjoy the show, and he saw his wife's white face and protruding eyes, her twisted mouth. He turned his head quickly just as Dillon leaped.

The detective's long fingers closed on Criswell's wrist, gripped the fingers shut, closed them over the bottle.

Criswell bellowed, snatched the gun from the table, lashed out at Dillon's head. Dillon rolled away from it, screamed, "Shoot him, Roberts, shoot him!"

Roberts, the little man in the blue serge suit, raised his gun and shot Major Criswell, retired, through the shoulder.

THIRTY minutes later, Major Criswell, still beaming as if entertaining guests, said, "Tsk! Tsk! So they found poor Fuqua. Can you prove I killed him?"

Dillon looked glum. Criswell went on, "Who saw me kill Fuqua? A jewel thief. What good is his testimony? What good are the notes you took down as you hid behind the curtain there? My wife can't testify against me! I have a good record. I can swear in court that I was egging these people on, to obtain information. As for the knife in Dallas, what if my prints *are* on it? Certainly, it was my knife. I lost it. It worked its way out of my pocket there in the car. Someone else found it, killed Fuqua with it, Perhaps Garza, the thief! The driver, an ex-convict! What are you going to prove? Crimes are not committed without motive! Those two had motives! But why should I run around murdering Mexicans and cheap private detectives, pray tell?"

Dillon glowered.

"Because you swindled the insurance company, because once we got hold of that necklace we could prove you swindled us!"

Mackey said nothing. There was nothing to say. None of it made sense—to him. He was thinking of Grimm, and Grimm's blackjack! Fuqua was found!

Garza started to speak. Criswell held up a fat hand. "Garza, if I go down, you go with me, do not forget that. Keep your mouth shut and I will beat these silly accusations. The driver killed Fuqua undoubtedly!"

So Garza subsided. Mackey couldn't speak for the chattering of his teeth.

NEAR dawn, from his hotel room, Hugh Mackey called Sam Dillon. "Look," he complained, "I can't sleep. I been thinking about this, like you said to do. If you could find those other eight pearls you mean you could pin all this on Criswell? And that lousy cop Grimm couldn't touch me?"

Dillon said, "I'd have a motive then."

"What motive? Gee, Mr. Dillon, I don't understand what all this is about."

"Don't try to understand," sighed Dillon. "But I'll tell you this, I'd pay five thousand dollars for those eight pearls. Now I got to get some sleep."

"Look, Mr. Dillon," said Mackey, "did you say this here Fuqua never drank?"

"He's worked for us seven years, and he's always rode the wagon."

"Then I know where those eight pearls are."

OUTSIDE Waco, three hours later, Mackey made Dillon stop the car. He spoke slowly: "I may be wrong, Mr. Dillon, but I think I'm right. You said something about a reward, but I don't want no reward. But if I get those pearls for you, will you see I get in no trouble?"

"Absolutely. You're clean as a whistle anyway if I can prove all this on Criswell. The pearls will establish his motive."

"Well, I hate to ask you, but you know how coppers are. I'm going to ask you to do two things for me and you got to promise before I make a move. First, I got to have a job. The cops won't ever let me wildcat any more. And you got to keep that Grimm off me. Gee, I hate cops!"

Dillon nodded. "I'll give you a job myself, Mackey. What's the second stipulation?"

Mackey's eyes grew desperate. He said, "You got to tell me what the hell this is all about!"

Dillon grinned. "You get them pearls, buddie. I promise."

Mackey got out of the car. Dillon, following him, heard him muttering to himself, saw him eying the cement culvert.

He followed him across the ditch, over the barbed wire fence into the cotton field.

"By damn," said Mackey a moment later, "it didn't even break." He stooped and picked up a whiskey bottle. He unscrewed the cap, formed a strainer of his fingers, let the amber liquid trickle through. He shook his hand, flipping the whiskey from it, extended it to Dillon. It held eight pearls. Mackey grinned.

"You kept claiming Fuqua didn't drink," he explained, "so I got to wondering. Mr. Criswell found sixteen loose in Fuqua's pocket, so I figured Mr. Fuqua must have been putting a pearl at a time into his mouth and spitting them into the whiskey. He wasn't quite finished when he was killed."

HIGH noon. Hugh Mackey pacing the floor of the hotel room talking to Lucia, whose eyes were big and bright. "And you found the other eight," she said, awe in her voice. "Ten thousand dollars worth of pearls in a whiskey bottle."

"Naw," said Mackey, disgust in his voice, "they was worth about two bucks apiece. They was imitations."

Lucia looked her bewildered. "It was like this," explained Mackey. "Criswell was short of cash. His wife suggested getting the pearls stolen so they could

collect the insurance. Criswell made the agreement with the Garza brothers, them to get the pearls, him to get the money. Only he had a string of phonies made and let the Garzas steal them! When he laughed at their squawking they got in touch with the insurance company. The insurance company sent Fuqua down to contact them, and he started back with the fake pearls to see Dillon. Criswell was watching the Garzas, see, and knew Fuqua was an insurance dick. Heck, he couldn't let those fake pearls get back to Dillon! So he rode in the same car with him, my car, and had his wife trail him in the coupé. It was his wife that took a shot at Fuqua at the travel bureau, too. She was playing both ends against the middle."

He lit a cigarette. "So we got the whole gang, and they're all talking against each other now. Dillon only needed the fake pearls to establish a motive for Criswell's murders."

Her eyes were filled with admiration. "I don't see how you figured it all out, honey."

"Oh"—he thrust out his chest, pointed his face at the ceiling and shot a stream of smoke high into the room—"oh, us detectives get around, babe."

Silence. "Us detectives?"

"Sure, didn't I tell you? Dillon gave me a job with International. No more wild-cattin', honey. Think of it! Me, copper!"



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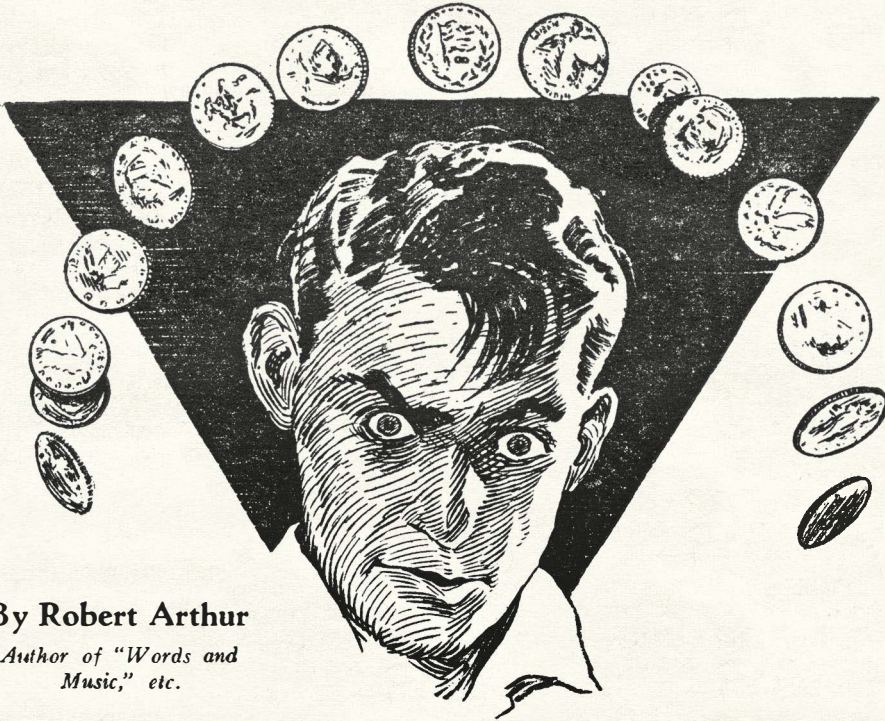
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THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

Money on His Mind



By Robert Arthur

Author of "Words and Music," etc.

Money killed Johnny English. Not the want of it, nor the having too much of it, but the wanting of it too much

JOHNNY ENGLISH must have been born with money on his mind. Certainly he had not learned to want it from anything around him. His father's three hundred acres produced no luxuries. His father and mother and brother Thomas were sober and hard-working, and coveted nothing.

But Johnny English was not like them. There was money on his mind even as a boy, and he would sit and dream of the things he would someday do, when all the gold that was now only in his head would be in his pockets.

"Money!" Johnny used to say, and his dark eyes would flash and see far beyond the limits of Daleville, with its single business street and farmers' market, its

two small banks, its handful of stores, and its surrounding countryside sleepy with the heaviness of ripening crops.

"Money!" Johnny English used to say. "It'll get you anything. Someday I'm going to have lots of it. I can close my eyes and see it—thousands of shiny gold pieces glittering there, as if my head was full of them. Soon I'm going out to get them. They're waiting for me somewhere, and I'll not come back to Daleville until I can bring them with me."

When he talked like that, his dark eyes bright and feverish, his black hair falling unregarded down his forehead, a little muscle twitching unconsciously in his temple, his mother would look troubled and his father frown blackly.

"There's nothing in your mind but nonsense," Jonathan English would say severely then. "On a farm the only gold to be had is the gold you see in the pumpkins and the corn. That's gold enough for an honest farmer. Now take a team and hitch it to the haying rake, for the whole lower pasture must be cut today."

But often as not Johnny English would forget and wander off into the woods, his mind filled with bright schemes whereby he was going to fill his pockets with gold and have all the lovely things of life that he read about in books.

"It's in my head," he would tell you earnestly. "My head is full of gold pieces, I tell you. I feel them there like I feel the clothes upon me and the earth beneath me. When you feel a thing so hard, it's going to be so. It has to be. There can't be any other way about it. I'm leaving the day I'm twenty-one, and I'm not coming back until I have that gold."

THE same trouble that showed in his mother's face when Johnny talked so mirrored itself in the eyes of Susan Relling as they sat together in the soft dusk on the bank of the stream that flowed through Johnny's father's lower hundred.

"Johnny," Susan Relling said softly, fearfully, "Johnny forget about money. There's gold and silver enough in the world for you without ever moving a step from Daleville. Look at the stars tonight, Johnny, and drink in the gold of them. Look at the moon on the water and know you own its silver, and no one can take it from you. To want more is foolish. That's gold and silver enough for me if it's you I'm sharing it with."

But Johnny English did not think so.

"It's not in Daleville that the money is," he said feverishly, hunched forward, his hands on his knees. "And I'm going out to get it. Nor am I coming back until I bring it with me."

"You've never even seen gold money, Johnny," Susan Relling said presently, wonderingly. "How can you dream about it so and want it so much, then?"

"Maybe I've seen it and maybe I've not," Johnny said mysteriously.

"But it takes money to go to the city," Susan said persuasively. "And it takes money to make money, Johnny. And you have none."

Johnny laughed like a man with a secret.

"I'll get it," he said. "And when I get it, I have a thousand schemes in my head to make it grow. I've saved enough, one way and another. Enough to go. Enough to go day after tomorrow, when my birthday comes. For one thing, Silar Brent paid me off today for helping cut in his woodlot the wood for the fuel company—a hundred cords of it. And beside that, there's ways. There's ways."

And so he did, the second day after, taking the train while his mother and father and brother Thomas and Susan Relling stood on the platform in silence and watched the last car till it vanished round the bend. And some of the neighbors laughingly told them not to worry, that Johnny would be back within the week, finding it harder to get the gold he wanted than he thought. If it was his savings he was depending on to get him started, they said, he was bound to return soon, for it was not possible for him to have enough money to stay away for long.

But they were wrong.

For Johnny English had a scheme—a bright and glittering scheme for taking to the city with him the gold he needed to make more and yet more gold.

The scheme was simple. Though he did not have what he needed himself, he knew who did have it, and from him Johnny English meant to take it.

JOHNNY ENGLISH remained in the city ten days. Then he took an evening train that let him off ten miles short of Daleville. He had said he was not returning until he brought gold with him, and he wasn't. This little trip would bring him within a mile of his home, but no closer. And no one would ever dream that he had been that close.

From the obscure waystation, without even a stationmaster, where he descended from the train, he walked nine miles through familiar back roads. Unseen and unrecognized, he reached the farm of Silar Brent shortly before midnight.

Silar Brent was a farmer, a bachelor, and a New Englander—that is to say, thrifty. He was lean, suspicious, and unneighborly. He had lost a thousand dollars in a bank failure in 1907, and had never trusted a bank since. He had a good farm and a well-cared for woodlot, and he had both gold and silver—not merely money, but the metal itself, the accumulation of thirty thrifty years.

Silar Brent's bank was the commodious interior of a hot-air pipe that ran from his furnace to his never-used parlor. A locked metal box that could be slid into it and out of sight, almost out of reach, was to his mind safer than a bank that might fail. Besides, there was the dog outside and the loaded large-gauge repeating shotgun that adorned the wall above his bed.

He had said more than once that if anyone got past the dog, he would have six loads of buckshot to deal with—no light threat. Silar Brent was an uneasy sleeper, and he had no fear of being robbed.

Johnny English knew the location of the money wholly by accident. He had seen Silar Brent one day get out the box to pay off the crew of men Johnny had worked with in cutting the hundred cords of logs on Silar Brent's carefully tended woodlot.

Besides Silar Brent, Johnny English was the only one who knew that hiding place—and no one knew he knew. Nor did anyone but Johnny English know the ease with which the dog and the shotgun could be circumvented by a clever lad with his head full of bright schemes as to what he could do with the money if only he had it.

Johnny had worked for Silar Brent several weeks a year for several years in succession now. And he had made friends

with the ferocious mastiff that was Silar Brent's watchdog. Johnny English had a knack for making friends with animals.

The shotgun was even easier. Johnny had just slipped into the house a day or so before the job was over, while Silar Brent was out in the yard superintending the loading of the wood for hauling to town. And Johnny had emptied all the shells from the repeating shotgun, to replace them with others from which he carefully extracted all the shot. Silar Brent was not a hunter. He knew the gun was loaded and in good working order. There was slight chance of his looking closer and discovering the deception.

So if he should wake and attempt to interfere—well, Johnny English would be in no danger.

JOHNNY ENGLISH slipped down the road beneath the row of towering elms and entered Silar Brent's farm yard. The smell of horses and chickens hung pleasantly acrid on the still, cool air.

The mastiff came charging up, deep and ominous rumbles in his chest. Just before the rumbles became warning barks, Johnny spoke soothingly.

"Here, boy, good boy," he whispered softly. "You know me, boy. I'm Johnny. I'm your friend."

The dog caught the familiar scent and sound, and the rumblings subsided. Johnny gave him a playful slap in the ribs and slid on past him up to the house.

It was still and dark, a vague black blur against the starlit sky.

Johnny got inside without more trouble than he had had with the dog—through the back door, with a key made from an impression taken while he was working for the farmer.

Once inside, getting into the locked parlor was not difficult. The lock stuck, and the key, made the same way the rear door key had been, proved hard to turn. But presently it gave, and Johnny English opened the heavy oak door with due regard for its tendency to creak. A moment later he was inside, in the musty darkness

of the never aired room, bending over the hot air register.

It lifted out easily and he laid it aside. Then, on his knees, he reached far into the pipe and with extreme caution drew out the heavy cash box, sliding it along the level pipe until he could get a grip on it and lift it to a convenient table. It was so heavy.

He should have carried it outside before he forced it open, but there was a fever in him to see what was inside, to estimate his takings, and he could not resist the temptation.

In his pocket he had a narrow-bladed chisel, as sharp as a knife, brought along for this. He inserted the sharp edge beneath the lid of the japanned metal box and slowly lifted, his left hand holding the box down against the pressure.

There was a sharp snap, like a stick of wood breaking, and the metal tongue of the lock slipped from its seat. The box was open.

Johnny threw back the lid and played into it the light of the fountain-pen flash he had bought in a city drug-store. A fever seemed to sing in his veins as the yellow metal there caught the light and threw it back at him.

Silar Brent was a methodical man. The top tray of the box was divided into compartments, and each compartment held a different denomination of coin. There was a section of silver dollars and halves, but Johnny scarcely saw these. His eyes were riveted on the eagles and double-eagles, half-eagles and even quarter-eagles, glinting with a dull gold burnish in neat stacks in compartments that between them took up half the tray.

Silar Brent was not the man to surrender gold money to a government merely because the government asked for it. Most of that gold had been in his possession for twenty years or longer, and probably would have been there for twenty years more if he had been allowed his way in the matter.

Beneath the top tray was paper money, in neat bundles—much of it the old, large

blanket bills that had not circulated for years.

JOHNNY ENGLISH drew in a deep breath. There was probably ten thousand dollars here—maybe more. Enough to start a clever lad on the road to fortune that would fill his pockets with as much more again a dozen times over.

Johnny English drew another deep breath—and whirled about. A floorboard had creaked.

There at the doorway, half visible in the moonlight creeping beneath the lowered window shades, Silar Brent stood with his shotgun in his hands.

Neither of them said a word. Johnny English had tied his handkerchief over his face, and above it his dark eyes flashed and glittered with an ugly light that seemed to rise suddenly from the depths of his soul, as if it had been waiting there all these years to show itself.

Johnny backed slowly away from the menace of the held shotgun, felt the carving of the fireplace behind him, reached around for the brass-handled poker.

His fingers wrapped about it. Johnny English began to move stealthily back toward the open box of coin and bills.

"Thief!" Silar Brent said nasally, and pulled the trigger of the shotgun.

The gun leaped and roared. Echoes crashed through the room. Gold and scarlet burst from the muzzle. But the shell was empty of shot, and Johnny went unharmed.

Silar Brent seemed thunderstruck for an instant. He fired again. Johnny ducked, automatically, but again there was no whistle of shot to accompany the thunder of the powder charge.

Johnny was back beside the cash box now, and something seemed to snap in Silar Brent's mind at the sight of the thief still unharmed, and about to loot his precious store. He dropped the shotgun and with a squall leaped for the cash box.

One hand scabbled in the coins, snatch-

ing up a handful of gold pieces from one of the compartments. The other pummeled Johnny in the face.

He had had no time to raise the poker. But the narrow-bladed chisel was still lying on the table, and Johnny snatched it up with his other hand, and as he snatched it, struck out with it.

It met resistance, but not much. Silar Brent reeled away, half fell to his knees, and Johnny saw blood on the blade of the chisel.

"You old goat!" Johnny snarled, his voice rasping through the handkerchief that covered his mouth. "I guess I'll have to kill you!"

Silar Brent stared up at him with an ashen, stricken face. He put out his right hand for support and it came down on the breech of the shotgun he had dropped.

Something like a wave of comprehension washed across the pinched white face of the farmer. Desperation glittered in his eyes. With his right hand he snatched up the gun and with his left he clawed at its muzzle. Something dropped to the floor with a tinkle and rolled away from him—a coin of the handful he had grabbed blindly out of the cash box in his lunge.

"Thief!" he panted hoarsely. "Thief! Ye took th' shot out of my shells, did ye?"

He raised the shotgun. Johnny English leaped forward with catlike agility, swerving to one side to avoid the flash of the empty shell if the farmer managed to pull the trigger again before he reached him. He had dropped the chisel, and had the poker raised high over his head with both hands.

His arms contracted. His face, hidden beneath the disguising cloth, was twisted in a way no one seeing it now would have recognized. The poker began to swing down toward Silar Brent's high-domed skull.

Silar Brent, still on one knee, pressed the trigger. The gun flamed and bucked. Johnny had turned his head to avoid the flash and the wadding, and he did not see it. Nor did he see when Silar Brent dropped back to the floor and lay gasp-

ing as the life ebbed out of the hole in his chest where the chisel had driven deep.

Johnny English saw nothing—not even the poker falling from his hands or the floor as he pitched toward it.

He had seen only a fearful light, all golden flame, within his brain for an instant as a solid mass struck him in the face. He had seen that golden flame and felt the lightest of feather blows as the hurtling charge from the shotgun muzzle struck him. Then he saw nothing and felt nothing.

He lay dead on the floor, and Silar Brent, half-beneath him, was dead too when they were found.

THE country coroner in Daleville went about his examination half-heartedly. for the story was plain to read. The farmer had died of a chisel blow that had touched the outer covering of the heart. The unknown thief had died of a shotgun charge received in the side of the face.

A little reluctantly, the coroner took up his instruments and began his probing. And then after a moment he stared incredulously at the objects he had removed from the horrible wound in the dead thief's head.

They were gold pieces—tiny two-and-a-half dollar gold pieces, quarter-eagles. part of the handful Silar Brent had had in his hand and then, in desperation, had poured into the muzzle of his shotgun in that moment on the floor when he saw his opponent advancing on him and realized his shells had powder but no shot in them.

"Mother of God," the coroner, who was a religious man, said presently. "Mother of God! The boy's head is as full of gold pieces as a rice pudding is of raisins."

And then, looking closer, he recognized who it was, and knew whom he must call to impart the dreadful news.

Johnny English had come back to Daleville, as he had left it—with money on his mind.

ILLUSTRATED

THE CLUE OF THE ARMY COAT

BICYCLE POLICEMAN SAM CUNNINGHAM, INVESTIGATING A CAR BEARING A STOLEN LICENSE ON PRESCOTT AVE., NEW YORK, ON MAY 25, 1927, WAS MET WITH A FUSILLADE OF SHOTS. THE OFFICER FELL MORTALLY WOUNDED. THE MACHINE, WITH A MAN AND A GIRL IN A RED SWEATER, SPED AWAY

IT WAS FOUND LATER, SMASHED AGAINST AN EL PILLAR. IT YIELDED AN ARMY COAT WHICH POLICE TRACED TO A PRIVATE IN THE ENGINEER'S CORPS. THE SOLDIER, WHO BORE AN EXCELLENT REPUTATION, SAID THE COAT HAD BEEN STOLEN AND NAMED A SUSPECT—GEORGE STIVERS—21 YEAR OLD FORMER COMPANY COOK.

WHEN A WOMAN REPORTED THAT HER DAUGHTER HAD DISAPPEARED WEARING A RED SWEATER, POLICE PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER AND PICKED HER UP AT AN ADDRESS FOUND IN THE ABANDONED CAR.

THE GIRL, WHO WAS ONLY 13, SAID SHE HAD GROWN TIRED OF SCHOOL AND ELOPED WITH STIVERS IN HIS FATHER'S CAR. IT BROKE DOWN AND THEY STOLE ANOTHER. STIVERS HAD WITH HIM TWO SERVICE REVOLVERS TOLEN FROM THE ARMORY.

Coming Next Week—

CRIMES



THE TRAIL OF THE FUGITIVE KILLER PROVED A LONG ONE. POLICE TRACED HIM TO PLATTSBURG, WHERE HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO JOIN THE ARTILLERY, THEN TIVOLI, AND FOR 7 MONTHS HE MANAGED TO KEEP JUST AHEAD OF THEM. THEY FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH HIM IN A NEWARK, N.J. HOTEL.

SURROUNDING STIVERS' ROOM, TWO DETECTIVES ENTERED AND SHOOK HIM AWAKE. SEEING HIS ESCAPE WAS CUT OFF THROUGH A WINDOW AND DOOR, NEVERTHELESS HE GRABBED HIS GUNS AND MADE A FIGHT OF IT. THEN, EVADING A HAIL OF BULLETS, HE DODGED UNDER THE BED AND HELD THE OFFICERS AT BAY UNTIL THEY CLOSED IN AND SUBDUED HIM WITH THE BUTT OF A REVOLVER.

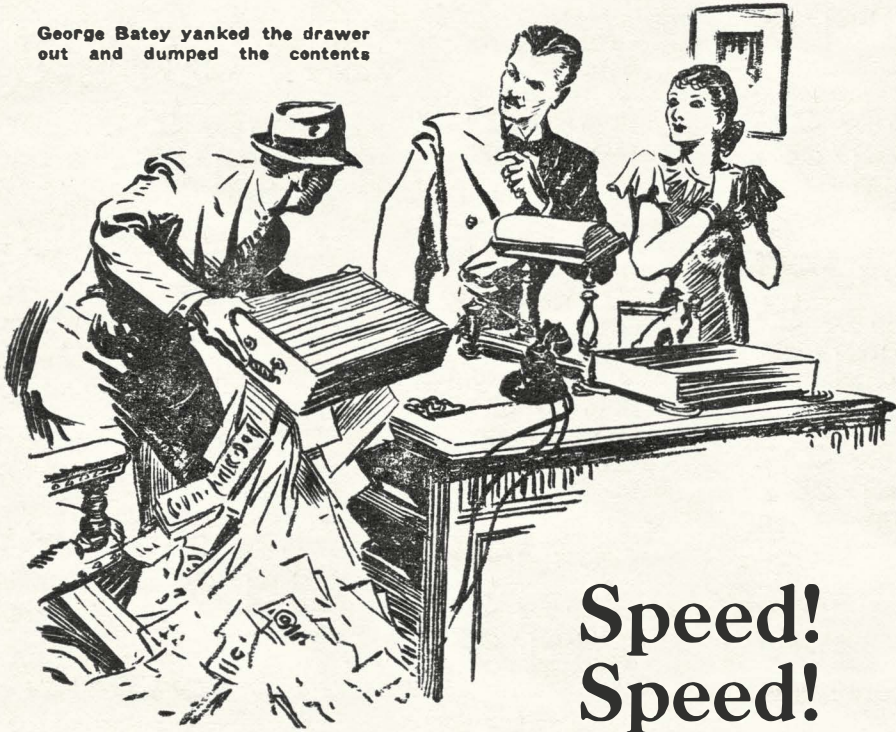
AT HIS TRIAL, COUNSEL SOUGHT TO SHOW THAT THE POLICEMAN HAD DIED OF PNEUMONIA INDUCED BY EXPOSURE RATHER THAN THE GUNSHOT WOUND, BUT STIVERS WAS FOUND GUILTY AND SENTENCED TO SING SING FOR LIFE.

George
STIVERS



Cherchez la Femme

George Batey yanked the drawer
out and dumped the contents



Speed! Speed!

By Edgar Franklin
Author of "The Emerald Passes," etc.

*George Batey's formula for success is simple: Hew to
the line and let the diamonds fall where they may*

MR. VANCE ATTERFORD—six feet, three, of him in his impeccable dinner togs, impressively gray at the temples and so very high-hat that if you were just an ordinary mortal you experienced a marked chill whenever you got within five yards of him—stepped back from his vest-pocket conservatory at the south side of the house, whither he had gone for one of his pet carnations, and into the softly-lit reaches of his baronial study.

Althea, his niece, a beautiful Schiaparellied twenty-five, was apparently just entering the study from the hall door at the far end. Mr. Atterford favored Althea with one of his dignified, iceberg smiles and

then, glancing at his great desk, he started perceptibly and asked:

"What became of it?"

"Became of what?"

"The diamond, of course."

"Is it a riddle?" Althea asked blankly.

"By no means!" Mr. Atterford rapped out. "I'm speaking of the stone I had Van Zoon send me from Amsterdam, a month or more ago. It was lying in the center of that blotting-pad a moment back."

"Well, it's obviously not lying there now," Althea shrugged delicately. "You put it in one of the drawers, perhaps?"

"It's several days since one of them have been opened."

"In one of your pockets, then?"

"It is not, I assure you," Mr. Atterford said, after a hard stare at the girl, "in any of my pockets."

"You didn't swallow it?" Althea asked mildly.

Another long, hard stare at her, and Mr. Atterford sat down rather suddenly behind his desk and addressed the empty blotting-pad—oddly, too, as if he were giving the girl all the time possible.

"Althea, a few months back, when times promised to be better, I imported that huge stone, meaning to have it made up as a tiara for my wife—for your Aunt Edith, that is—should she ever decide to return from Paris. Under present conditions, that is out of the question, and so it has been in the burglar-proof compartment of this desk, while I have tried to find some way to avoid pledging it for the two hundred thousand dollars it will bring. There is no way. Baldly, then, I am depending absolutely on that diamond to bring me nearly a quarter of a million dollars before the week is out. Failing that rather forlorn sum, Atterford & Kayle will be thrown into bankruptcy. You quite understand?"

"Well, of course I understand, but why go through all that again?"

"In case, my child," Atterford said very quietly, "that you might have succumbed—shall we say?—to the impulse of a rather insane moment. I know that you, too, have been sorely pressed for cash."

A second or two, Althea's eyes flashed and she breathed heavily—and then she laughed helplessly.

"I didn't steal your diamond, you poor, distracted idiot," she said. "That's what you mean, isn't it? And suppose we be just a little less melodramatic, Uncle Vance? If you're sure you didn't swallow it and it's not in a pocket, it must have rolled to the floor. Let's have some light here and find it."

She moved about the room, snapping switches until the whole place blazed with light. She stifled a giggle, too, for Vance Atterford, crawling around on hands and knees, with his nose blood-hound fashion, almost on the rugs, was a trifle less than

impressive; but a full ten minutes later there was never a sign of a giggle on Althea. She and Vance Atterford were staring at each other in sheer bewilderment.

"And every inch of that floor is visible!" Atterford said, with a perceptible shake in the crispness of his voice. "I was not in the conservatory for more than two minutes at most, so that if we—er—assume the impossible and say that a sneak-thief was in here, I should most certainly have heard him moving around. Further, he'd have had to disappear somewhere, don't you see, and there are just the two doors to this room and—"

"There's the window," Althea suggested.

"By Jove! there *is* the window!" Atterford hurried to it and drew back the curtains, and at once relaxed. "It's tightly locked, Althea."

"You couldn't possibly have carried the thing into the conservatory and laid it down?"

"My dear," Atterford said grimly, "when a man sees the firm he has labored thirty years to build, going to smash for want of a mere quarter of a million, he's not likely to drop that quarter of a million into a flower-pot and forget it. However . . ."

HE STRODE away and lights blazed up in the conservatory, too. He was back within five minutes, though, with a dismayed:

"There's no sign of it there." He frowned at Althea again—and then his eyes popped as he cried: "Althea! What in the name of Heaven are you doing?"

"Slipping out of my gown," Althea said calmly and stood before him rather sensationally clad in stepins and brassiere. "No, I haven't gone mad, Uncle; but there's something in your eye and I know the state your poor head is in at present. I want it most definitely settled that *I* didn't take your infernal diamond. Catch!" She tossed him the gown. "There are no pockets in it, you know, but shake it out thoroughly and be sure. Do you want to feel over the rest of me?"

"I do not!" Atterford puffed.

"After all, Uncle," the girl said, and her eyes snapped again, "if the stone was here at all I must have been alone with it for five or ten seconds. Satisfied?"

"Perfectly!" Atterford said. "Put on your clothes!"

He turned his back while she did so and stepped over to the corridor door. There were just the wide, empty basement stairs of this old-type house in the upper Sixties and there was the corridor itself, with not so much as one yard of drapery that might have concealed a mouse.

"Althea, before you came in here, how long were you out there in the hall—with in sight of this door, I mean to say?"

Althea thought for a moment.

"All of two minutes—maybe three. I came down from my room and stopped before the long mirror there to look things over."

"And which of the servants passed, going up or down?"

"Which of them? None of them. Nobody at all passed."

"Then—er—well, when you came in here, did you happen to be looking in the direction of this desk?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. I'm all out of cigarettes and I had some idea of stealing one from your silver box, which usually stands just by the blotting-pad. Uncle, your diamond was *not* there," Althea said, suddenly compassionate. "You've simply put it somewhere else and—"

"I put it nowhere else!" Vance Atterford shouted, and one of his own circle must have been utterly horrified at the complete absence of his usual frost-bitten repression. "It lay there, I tell you—right *there* in the center of the blotting-pad!" he cried wildly, stabbing at the pad itself with a long forefinger. "It lay there when I went in for that damned carnation, and diamonds don't walk off by themselves and they don't evaporate. That stone was stolen!"

"It wasn't, of course, unless a ghost came in and stole it," the girl said mildly, "and—good gracious! don't smash that bell, ringing for Paynter, Uncle! At least

he couldn't have taken it, you know; he's been below stairs for half an hour."

Mr. Atterford, lips tight, merely drummed on his desk until the chunky form of his elderly butler hove into sight.

"Paynter!" he said. "I've lost something—a valuable diamond, in fact. Nobody is to leave this house, for any reason whatsoever, until it has been found. I said, *nobody!*"

"Nobody, sir. Quite so. Thank you, sir," Paynter murmured imperturbably.

"And now," Mr. Atterford gritted and dabbed the beads of sweat from his brow, "*the house is going to be searched!*"

BREAKFAST was over and Sugar, lovely bride of that rosy-cheeked and capable young private detective, George Batey, had melted into his arms for the score or so of farewell kisses.

"Georgie, do you really like the cigarette case I got you for your birthday?" Sugar purred.

"Do I like it?" Mr. Batey said indignantly. "Am I a nut? Why, that's something a king could be tickled pink to be carryin', always supposin' any king has the price of a pack o' stinkies left these days!" He got it out and polished it even again; and it was, no kidding, something any king could be proud of, all shiny gold, with "G. B." carved up in one corner. "Well, I gotta get goin', baby. I'm hittin' the front page this evenin'."

"Those stolen Ewing bonds, George?"

"Them Ewing bonds, absolutely. Around three this afternoon I'm puttin' the finger on the slug that lifted 'em."

"And there's no women mixed up in this, Georgie?" Sugar asked anxiously.

"Not a skirt in a carload!" Mr. Batey chuckled comfortably, "and the reward is one grand and the same as in my pocket at this minute. And, listen, kid! We will now trade in the old jalopy and use that wad to buy you that crate you're so dippy about."

"Not the blue one, with all the shiny stuff up front?" Sugar cried rapturously.

"With hot and cold runnin' upholstery

and also have 'em put in one o' them television sets, baby. And when you get that picked out and ordered, go do a little house-hunting, know what I mean?"

"House-hunting, Georgie?"

"Oh, we been very comfortable in the little dump here," Mr. Batey said condescendingly, "but now I think we gotta have somethin' with a doorman as well as an elevator, and an extra room I can use for a study, on account of I'll be havin' some extra homework and—"

"What's the matter with you this mornin', George?" Sugar asked quickly and laid a hand on his forehead.

"Well, I wasn't goin' to spill it yet, baby, but the old prune has been hintin' lately," Mr. Batey grinned happily. "Y' see, the Chief now has one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel, and he ain't the man he once was, and he knows it. So puttin' this and that together, what he's been sayin' lately, we're gonna have an assistant manager. I mean, that's what he'll be called, only he'll practically run the shop."

"*You*, Georgie?" Sugar gasped.

"Well, who else?"

"Oh, Georgie, you're wonderful!" Sugar cried, and threw her arms around him.

"At that," George Batey admitted modestly, "I am."

And at that, he reflected complacently as he strolled to the subway, he was. Not that he was kidding himself, understand, or throwing any bunches of peonies where they could fall on him; only when a guy is a very high-class operative and extra good in every way, he knows it himself and—well, it was like that with George Batey. Yeah, and it was very lucky for the agency that things were breaking this way, too. What he meant, just a few weeks now and the old prune could go sit on his porch, up there in Westchester, and smoke his pipe till they got ready to blow taps over him, while George Batey sort of reorganized the works and . . . oh, it seemed he had already reached the office.

"Morning, Georgie," the Chief's secretary sighed, in the outer room.

"Good mornin'!" George Batey said stiffly and looked her over. In maybe another week she could lay off that "Georgie" stuff and make it "Mr. Batey." "The Chief is inside, huh?"

"He's out of town for the day. Mr. Lavery—"

"I gotta get them Ewing warrants out o' the old pill's desk," George stated and hurried on to the inner office—and stopped short, on account of he could feel the eyes bugging out of his face, like they were about to roll down his cheeks!

What he meant, maybe you can go into Buckingham Palace and lie down for a nap in the King's bed and get away with it, only for anybody but the Chief himself to be sitting behind the old prune's desk was the same as stabbing your mother to death with a nail-file!

Yeah, and the front on this guy in the Chief's chair, like he owned the whole shop! He was long like a string-bean, dressed very nifty and with black hair slicked back, but it was the eye on him that got you. The way he looked at you down his long nose, you might think you were something the cat had just dragged in.

"You're another of the operatives?" he said.

"The name is Batey," George Batey said, finally catching his breath, "and who the hell are you?"

"The name is Lavery, lately of the Dykfeld Agency in Chicago, and any more of that language from you and you'll be fired on the spot—and you're three minutes late, by the way. I'll make a note of that," said this long one, if you could believe your ears. "Your Chief—ah—met my terms and brought me on here to be his assistant manager and whack the place into some kind of shape. Here! Read this, my man."

"Listen!" George Batey wheezed. "One more o' them 'my mans' and you'll get a slap in the puss that'll start your back teeth droppin' down through your lungs."

"Not really?" Mr. Lavery sneered, and you could tell right off that they were going to be great pals. "Well, one more

crack like that out of you, and I'll kick your pants through that window so hard they'll be mopping you up on the other side of the street! I told you to read that notice."

THREE times George Batey swallowed; then, no matter if the typewritten lines were doing the shag and jumping this way and that way, it seemed that he was reading them, and it was like something you'd run across in a nightmare.

"To all operatives;" it said. "Be advised that Mr. George B. Lavery is now assistant manager of this agency and in full charge, at any time, in my absence. You will take any and all instructions, of every description, from him and follow them to the letter, exactly as if they were my own."

And, believe it or not, whether the old earache had taken to puffing marijuana or somebody had hypnotized him, the Chief had signed his name to that one; and maybe for the first time in his life George Batey was struck absolutely dumb. The string-bean was sneering.

"Got it, Batey? I didn't know if you could read or not. Now listen to me!"

And still George Batey was struck dumb. What he meant, suppose the dump had to have an assistant manager, *why the hell*—well, what had got into the string-bean now? He was walking up and down in jerks and waving his arms and snapping his fingers as he talked, like one of these violent cases you see in the booby-hatch.

"Too much dead wood around here, Batey! I'm cleaning it out. Let you know in a day or two if I'm keeping you on or not. Meanwhile, there are probably a lot of things about the business you don't understand. Batey, what's the very essential of a good detective—or don't you know?"

Maybe ten seconds, looking at this St. Vitus case, George Batey felt that he was about to make a power-dive, belt the dome off Mr. Lavery in one hunk and then pick the rest of him to pieces like when you take a daisy and start saying "he loves me

—he loves me not." Then, suddenly, he was calm again. What he meant, *even* supposing a clot of cheese had worked its way into the old Chief's brain and started this Lavery thing, there are times when a person draws a percentage by keeping his shirt on.

"Why, findin' out things, Mr. Lavery," George said sweetly.

Lavery paused and stared at him for an instant.

"That, of course, but before that—speed! *Speed!* You hear me? *Speed!*"

"Yes, Mr. Lavery," George Batey said.

"Here! An example of what I mean! You're questioning a client about the case. Well, give it speed! Make it snap like a machinegun! Let him see he's hiring a live wire and not a hophead, Batey! Cut your questions short and shoot every one of 'em right through him. Another example! You're searching a place for clues. Give it *speed!* Store or bank or whatever it is, tear it to pieces! Don't leave so much as an envelope unturned! Let the customer see he's getting his money's worth. In a word, Batey," Mr. Lavery said, slowing down a little and favoring George with his mean smile, "always put on a good show! Get the idea? And always speed! *Speed!*"

"Yes, Mr. Lavery," George Batey agreed, "so now if you'll move over and lemme get into that second drawer, there's a couple o' warrants I gotta have for—"

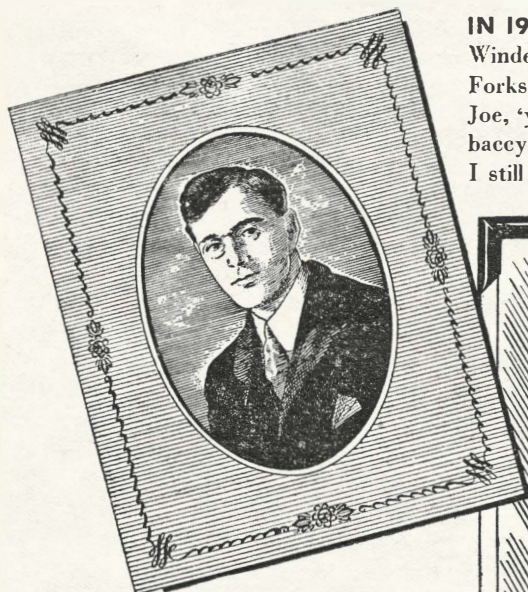
"For that Ewing case? Don't bother; I'm taking that over myself. I have all your reports. You're to go to this address here—wealthy party named Atterford thinks he's lost a diamond and—"

"Hey, wait a minute, punk!" George Batey cried, and it appeared that his shirt had suddenly come off. "Them bonds are my meat! There's a one grand reward for—"

"That's why I'm taking it over," Lavery said. "Now skip along to this Atterford and, remember, speed! Always speed, and always a good show. You may go."

"Says you!" George Batey thundered. "Look! I been workin' on them bonds since last—"

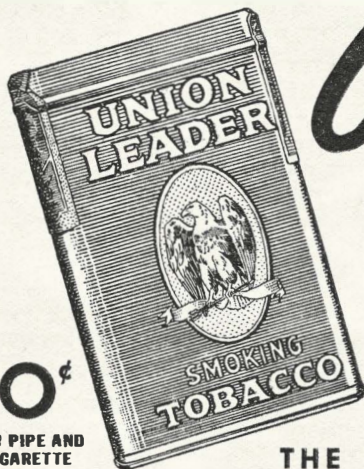
A kind friend Then..and now



IN 1910—"I first smoked Union Leader when Joe Winders, who ran the general store over at the Forks, gave me some to try. 'Long as you live,' says Joe, 'you'll never meet up with a sweeter pipe tobacco.' And after 28 years of smokin' Union Leader, I still think Joe was right."



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THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DETECTIVE FICTION.

"'. . . and follow them to the letter, exactly as if they were my own,'" Lavery quoted from the Chief's bughouse document. "How'd you like to be fired for questioning orders, Batey?"

"How'd you like to go to hell?" Mr. Batey shrieked, as he departed.

THERE are at least two kinds of mad. You get ordinary mad and slap the other party a couple of swift ones on the snoot and then you get glad again. Or you get crazy mad, and in that case are in great luck if some slug does not speak out of turn and win you a ticket to the hot seat for tearing the spine out of him and breaking it over your knee like an old stick—and George Batey at present was crazy mad. What he meant, even by this time the kid had on her glad rags and was picking out a new car and probably ordering a radio set for it and a couple of extra horns, saying nothing about how she'd be renting five-and-two-baths before he could catch her; and the jack to pay for all that had been sopped up by this bad smell named Lavery!

And you had to obey the half-starved mug to the letter, no less! You had to put on speed—*speed!* Okay, then! Mr. Batey bared his teeth as he looked up and down the four stories of Mr. Atterford's elegant old home. Mr. Batey then jammed one finger into the button and kept it there, hammered on the heavy glass pane and kicked hard on the panel below, until—

"God bless my soul!" Paynter gasped, as he dragged open the door. "Is there a fire or—"

"Out o' my way!" Mr. Batey snapped, dashing in. "Atterford! Where is he? Quick! Make it snappy!"

"Why, Mr. Atterford is—is back in his study, but—"

"Okay!" George Batey said and thudded down the corridor; and it seemed he must be putting on some quite good sound effects with his speed, too, on account of this swell-dressed party, who looked like a Duke, was scrambling out of his chair and yelling:

"I say, there! What on earth's the row? Who the devil are you and why—"

"Batey—detective! You sent for me. You're Atterford?"

"Naturally, but—"

"You had a diamond stole?"

"Either that or—at least, it's missing and—"

"Where was this diamond when last seen?"

"What? It was right *there!*" Atterford puffed and stabbed at the blotting pad again. "I had stepped into the conservatory and—"

"When was this?"

"Last night, of course, and—"

"Okay! What time last night?"

"About twenty minutes past six, I should say, and—"

"Just where was you when this diamond was stole?"

Mr. Atterford's lips tightened.

"Mr. Batey," he said, "will you kindly be a trifle less spasmodic and allow me to finish at least one sentence? I assume that this is an act, but I find it most annoying."

George Batey glanced at his watch.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Atterford, but I'm workin' under instructions and usin' speed. Get it? *Speed!* So gimme all the circumstances and don't take no more'n a minute, on account of we've wasted a great deal o' time already."

"I'll take as long as I damned well please," Mr. Atterford stated, and settled back.

At that, George Batey observed, the guy was trying to make it snappy himself—and giving nothing at all you could tie to. He drilled a neat hole through Mr. Atterford with his left eye.

"Cuttin' out the comedy, brother, how much did you have this rock insured for?"

"What's that? It wasn't insured at all, worse luck," Atterford said sourly. "If it had been, one of the company's—presumably sane—detectives would be here now instead of you, you—"

"Leave that lay! I gotta see your niece at once."

"She happens to be standing right behind you," Atterford snapped. "Althea, this is Mr. Batey, the—the alleged detective I sent for and—"

"Listen, lady!" George Batey exploded, as it were, under her nose. "We got no time to be polite. Why did *you* lift this rock?"

"Well, you blithering jackass!"

"Okay. Then we got that settled, too. You didn't lift it, either. Now I gotta see your butler. Make it snappy!" He walked back and forth, breathing hard, until Paynter appeared. "You! Where was *you* when this diamond was stole?"

"If it happened between six and six-thirty, sir, I was below stairs. But I'd like to say—"

"Okay. You got other servants here. Who are they?"

"Well, we're under-staffed at present, sir. There is only Mary, the chambermaid, and Felice, Miss Atterford's personal maid, and Anna, the cook and myself. But if I may say—"

"Where was all these parties when the diamond was stole?" George Batey pounded on.

"The two maids were upstairs, sir, and Anna, naturally, was in the kitchen, but if I may be allowed—"

"Which o' these parties left the house after six-twenty last night? Quick! Come clean!"

"None of them left it, nor did anybody else, and it happened that we had no visitors last night," Atterford put in energetically. "And I'd like to say, Mr. Batey, that unless you can calm down I shall phone your office and have another man—"

"The rock has not left the house. Consequently, it is still in the house. Consequently, I gotta search the house," Mr. Batey deduced in his speedy way. "Kindly get away from that desk, brother; I'm startin' there."

"You're doing nothing of the sort! This house has been searched from top to bottom and—"

"Not professional, it ain't been searched," George Batey said, and suddenly whirled

on Paynter with: "What's that you're concealin' in your hand?"

"I—I—God bless me, I'm concealing nothing, sir," Paynter said dizzily. "But, if you're really a—a detective, I'm trying to show you this cigarette butt, which I found just inside the front door early this morning. It may mean nothing at all, but I'm positive it was not there when I locked up last night or—"

"Okay—okay! Give it here!" George Batey said, and snatched it and peered hard at it. "Some guy that has his monogram printed on 'em. A. K. Who is A. K.?"

IT SEEMED that, in some very funny way, something had started here. You could feel it in the air; you could get it from the way this Atterford suddenly scowled, and the way his niece started and then froze up again. Then, whatever the answer might be, Atterford addressed Althea directly:

"What was Adrian Kester doing in this house last night?"

"He wasn't in the house last night; you know that perfectly well," the girl threw back at him, angrily. "He has not been in this house for months."

"That's the butt of one of those filthy fat Turkish cigarettes he smokes."

Crazy mad as he was, George Batey was getting quite interested. What he meant, the way these two very high-hat parties were giving the eye to each other, like somebody's ear was about to get bit off. The doll was now pulling herself up till she looked like a frozen telegraph pole.

"Adrian gave me a hundred of them long ago, because I like them, Uncle," she said. "I was smoking the last one last night; I'm sure I don't know how I came to drop the end on the floor."

"If memory serves, Althea, you were complaining weeks ago that your supply had given out."

"I found one in the back of my des'."

"Well, begging pardon, Miss," Paynter persisted, "but this was not on the floor at midnight when I locked up, and you'd retired an hour before that."

And now the doll's nostrils were getting large and round, as her eyes poured ice-cubes all over the fat butler.

"Paynter," she said with difficulty, "I could not sleep and I was smoking it when I came downstairs to look for a book, about two o'clock, it must have been. Must I furnish an affidavit and produce witnesses, or something of that sort?"

"I humbly beg your pardon, Miss, but—"

"Okay! Okay! We're wastin' more time," George Batey interrupted. "Just one question to you, lady: what brand rouge and face powder and lipstick and mascara do you use?"

"*What?*" Miss Atterford stared at him and then laughed shortly. "Well, if you're really interested, you little idiot, I'm a freak of nature. I use no makeup of any description. What has that to do with the disappearance of a diamond?"

"Maybe nothin', lady; you never can tell," George Batey said, and thrust the cigarette butt into his vest pocket. "I'm searchin' the house now, beginnin' with that desk."

"You lay one finger on that desk—" Atterford started, quite hot.

"Listen, Mr. Atterford," George Batey said, dumfoundingly, "I'm workin' under instructions I gotta follow to the letter. I don't wanna get tough, only I'm a much younger man than you and if you get in the way you might see the inside of the accident ward. And as for *you*," he added to the pale butler, "try and stop me!"

It seemed they both got the idea. Paynter was trying to back out through the wall; Atterford was white and stammered:

"Look out for him, Paynter! Man's de-ranked, of course. I'll get his agency on the wire and have this attended to and—"

"When I'm through with your desk, brother," George Batey snapped impatiently and yanked out the top drawer and dumped it on the floor—and the second and the third drawer as well and then, passing to the other side, dumped three more drawers and looked over the result. It was quite good; maybe five hundred fil-

ing cards kicked around every which way, and a few dozen letters and a ream of stationery and some fountain pens. Mr. Batey rose with a satisfied grunt.

"No diamond there!" he said swiftly. "I'm startin' at the top floor and workin' down. It'll take some time to search this floor, with all the rugs and cushions and curtains that have to be tore up and down."

"You won't get far!" Atterford thundered, and from the face on him you might think he was going to have a stroke. "I'll have your agency remove you and—keep your distance from him, Paynter, but go with him!"

"Which is the servants' rooms, punk?" demented George Batey demanded as Paynter wheezed behind him to the top floor.

"That one is mine and the next Mary's and the next Felice's, and the one at the rear is Anna's, sir, but—"

No kidding, only he was crazy mad, George Batey would have been in stitches, looking at the results you got by using speed like this. Maybe fifty seconds and he had Mary's room taken to pieces, drawers dumped on the bed, dresses and shoes hurled to the floor, while George Batey crawled around in the closet itself, finally coming out of the wreckage with a sigh of "No diamond here, mug!" and passing on to Felice's room. One more minute and Felice's bed-chamber looked as if a cyclone had just passed through; George Batey climbed out of the ruins and plodded on to Anna's room.

This cook dame, it seemed, ran to jewelry, mostly the five-and-ten stuff. Mr. Batey hauled out a dozen bracelets and rings and chains, snarled over them, dumped more drawers on the floor and, this time even tore the clothes from Anna's bed before taking the closet to pieces. Then, mopping his brow, he slowed down.

"Listen, you," he said to Paynter. "I had no breakfast and I gotta have a bite to eat before I go on wreckin' this house."

"Why, yes, sir; wouldn't a spot of food possibly quiet you down a bit?" the butler

asked eagerly. "Something in the stomach, as it were."

"Lead me to it and make it snappy!" George Batey puffed.

Atterford was at his study door when they got downstairs.

"That's enough of you!" he shouted. "Get out of this house, Batey! Your chief's out of town and nobody in your hellish agency." He gulped. "Where the devil's he heading now, Paynter?"

"To—to the kitchen for a bite to eat, sir. He thinks it might quiet him, like."

"He—he—" Vance Atterford dabbed his moist brow. "Very well. Take him down and come back here at once. Anna can look after herself."

WELL, he had the right dope on that, anyhow, George Batey observed a moment later. The jane was maybe thirty-five and good-looking and she might weigh an ounce under two hundred, mostly muscle; but it was the grin on her fat face that got you. You looked at this dame and for no reason started to laugh and she also started to laugh. George Batey relaxed and sprawled in a wooden chair.

"So you're the guy that's raising hell upstairs?" Anna chuckled and looked him over approvingly. "I bet they call you Pinky, you're that pink and white, like a baby. Okay if I call you Pinky?"

"Anything is okay, so long as you feed me, beautiful," George Batey grinned. "What's to eat?"

"How about them little cakes for their five o'clock tea?"

There were four dozen or so of these little round cakes, with frosting. George Batey sampled one and started; they were like something an angel would be baking. He sampled three more, and finally drew out his cigarette-case with:

"Smoke, pint-size?"

"I'll get fired if Paynter catches me, but—" She took a cigarette and then beamed at the case. "*Some case!*"

"They don't come no better," George Batey grinned and tucked it back in his pocket. "Listen, are you tellin' me them

upstairs put down all them cakes with their tea?"

"What a chance!" Anna laughed. "Nix! Harry gets eight or ten for the kids."

"Harry?"

"That's my brother, that ain't worked for a year till this week. And I think today he gets the cold chicken and the spinach, too."

"And how come you don't get the air for takin' 'em to him?" Mr. Batey yawned.

"I don't take 'em, Pinky," Anna chuckled richly. "He stops off here to see me on his way home from work, with his plumber's kit—and there's no tools in it. Get the idea? Say, listen, would you like half a dozen for your dinner? I think I've got a box. How long you going to be here?"

"Well, I have to wreck the house upstairs first, but . . ."

The fat doll was laughing her head off as she bustled around and found a flat box. Six little cakes she fitted into it and put it aside and then she looked thoughtfully at George Batey.

"Pinky, you look like a swell little guy. How'd you like a real break on this diamond thing?"

"What's that?" George Batey asked, sitting up.

"Ssssh! I'm only putting two and two together and maybe that makes nothing and maybe it doesn't. Look, this frost-bitten dame upstairs. She's that way about a guy named Kester, an artist. I don't know which is nuttier about the other, but I think it's her; these icebergs are always the wildest, once they get going. He ain't got a dime and she ain't got much more. They were getting married, anyway, only Atterford got wise and gave him the boot, weeks ago, see? Well, around twelve o'clock last night," Anna whispered, with a cautious eye on the door, "she was phoning Kester—I heard her while coming from the top floor bath. I couldn't get the half of it, but it was something about having the price to elope. Then I lost a lot of it and then she was telling him she had it and he should come and get it—and I lost it again. And then it seemed

they were talking about somebody named Stringle—some such name.”

“Stengel?” George Batey said, breathlessly.

“Stengel it was! You wouldn’t know any Stengel?”

“Says you!” George Batey hissed delightedly. “He’s a fence!”

“A what, Pinky?”

“He buys hot diamonds and other stolen stuff. Go on.”

“No kiddin’!” Anna said and her eyes opened wide. “Well, here’s the rest of it. Maybe one o’clock, Althea went downstairs, I think in her bare feet, making hardly a sound. I heard the front door open and about two minutes later, I heard it close again—and this morning Paynter found one of those funny Turkish cigarettes Kester was always smoking around here. So—could it be she pinched that diamond so her and Kester had the price to elope? Or what, Pinky?” Anna frowned.

George Batey drew a deep breath and ate another cake.

“Listen, baby,” he said, with great feeling, “sometimes I had to work like a dog on cases and once or twice they got laid on my lap; only nobody ever done for me what you’ve done this last five minutes.”

“You mean, you got to trail Kester till he goes to see this Spingel, or whatever his name is?”

“Day and night, kid—*day and night!* I’m sneakin’ out of here now by the basement door and—hey, is Kester in the telephone book?”

“Sure. His first name is Adrian and he lives in West Seventy—”

And just there, in the most singular way, the conference ended, for the kitchen door opened with a bang and two able-bodied policemen moved in quickly; and behind them was Paynter and behind him Atterford; and the one red-headed harness-bull had grabbed George before he asked.

“This is the guy?”

“That is he!” Atterford stated icily. “Take him out of here and lock him up

until I can get in touch with his employer and decide what to do.”

And now the other harness-bull was hauling at George Batey, too, and Mr. Batey was saying mildly: “Take it easy, pal. I’m goin’ quiet.”

“And *now*, Mr. Batey,” Vance Atterford said with a rather terrible smile, “your connection with this case is at an end.”

“Well, I gotta admit,” George Batey answered, and picked up a final cake in passing as they dragged him unceremoniously toward the basement door, “it almost looks like you were right.”

UNACCOUNTABLY at liberty, George Batey appeared at the rather humble studio of Adrian Kester a little before one—a nice young guy, he observed, but he looked like he could do with a haircut and a square meal.

“From Smith’s,” George Batey explained. “We got just the polo pony you want, Mr. Kester.”

“What on earth do I want with a polo pony?” Kester asked amazedly.

“Well, ain’t you Mr. Arthur Kester?”

“I’m Adrian Kester and I’ve no more use for a polo pony than—”

“Say, am I dumb!” George Batey cried. “I got the wrong address out o’ the telephone book. I beg your pardon,” he said, backing out.

Just as unaccountably, a few minutes before five, he materialized at the foot of the Atterford basement stairs, as Paynter descended. He clapped one hand over Paynter’s mouth. After that there was utter silence until, in another ten minutes, Mr. Batey climbed the stairs and entered the Atterford study; and you might have thought he had smallpox, from the face on Atterford and—oh, it seemed the old Chief was there, too.

“Batey!” he roared. “In all the years I’ve been in business, no client ever before had to call the police to throw out an operative or—”

“Well, Chief, you never had an operative just like me,” George Batey beamed. “And listen, Chief. They serve tea here

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FOR PIPE OR CIGARETTE

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DETECTIVE FICTION.

at five, so maybe we could sit down and talk this over quietly, huh?"

Atterford made noises in his throat. The old Chief looked like he had just burst three blood vessels—and at that, Paynter, shaking all over, was tottering in with a tray and a pot and cups and little plates and a big silver plate full of cakes and—

"Confound it, Paynter, what's gone wrong with *you*?" Atterford forced out. "*Pass* those cakes! Don't dish them out on the little plates!"

"I'm s-s-sorry, sir!" Paynter mouthed, but still he set the one small plate in front of Atterford.

"So now eat your cake, Mr. Atterford," George Batey added breezily. "What I mean, will you kindly eat that cake?"

"He's gone wrong in his head," the Chief said quietly, and gripped George Batey. "I'll get him out of here, Mr. Atterford."

"Only first he has to eat that cake, Chief!"

"Well, maybe you'd best humor him and eat it, sir," the old Chief choked. "It ain't so good to cross 'em when they're like this."

Atterford was snow-white now. Yeah, and he was biting into his cake at last, looking at George Batey—and now he was yipping quite loud and choking and trying to spit out something! And *now* he had it on his plate at last and he was gibbering like an idiot, for which you couldn't strictly blame him, on account of this thing he's just got rid of was a diamond, all wet crumbs, of course, but still a diamond big as a hickory nut!

"Speed, says this louse of a Lavery, and I gave 'em speed!" Mr. Batey rasped at his employer. "And always a good show, says this Lavery—and if *that* ain't a good show, *what t' hell is a good show?*"

SO now they were riding home in the old Chief's car and it seemed the old Chief was quite subdued.

"What's in the box, Batey?" he grunted.

"Huh? Cakes," Mr. Batey said. "You

heard. She said if I was good enough to get her, I'd ought to have 'em anyway. They're swell, Chief!"

"And—ahem!—how much was that check Atterford gave you?"

"Why, that was for twenty-five hundred bucks," George Batey said cheerfully. "That was just a little personal testimonial; you heard that, too. I'm buyin' the kid a new car with it."

Then the old Chief cracked and asked almost humbly:

"Batey, how in the name of seven devils did you ever break it?"

"Why, I tell you, Chief," Mr. Batey said, and stretched his legs and puffed one of the Chief's cigars, "it probably would 'a' been impossible for one o' these third-string punks, like Lavery for instance, but it was very simple for a high-class operative like me. Look! How it lay, it had to be this Althea dame that lifted it. Okay! He said she took off her clothes and all that, so she didn't have it on her; but he also said how just before that he was huntin' through the conservatory. So I figured she might have hid it somewhere while alone and maybe picked it up later and I'd find it by turnin' the house inside out.

"Only then I searched them servants' rooms, meanin' to put on that act and then take Althea's room down inch by inch—and, Chief, you could 'a' knocked me down with a postage stamp when I opened that locket in the cook's room and seen that picture o' Altoona Red, the gem crook. Well, his moll is Laughin' Kate Ryan and extra good herself, and while I never seen Kate I beat it down to the kitchen and let the fat dame gimme some finger-prints on my cigarette case.

"Then I started lookin' at them little cakes. Chief, that doll is an artist, whatever she does! Every cake was absolutely smooth and perfect, except this one she had a little to the side, and that had a small finger-mark on the icing, and also there was a touch o' lipstick on that cigarette butt—and she was wearin' the same color lipstick!

"Well, when she started tellin' me how she was sendin' out some o' these cakes by her brother, I started tyin' things together and—well, you heard her when the bulls brought her up and made her sing. She'd been on this cookin' job only three weeks and she was only there on account of her Altoona was after that stone. They had it fixed he was to come in and crack the box tonight, only when the rock disappeared that way she had to change her plans quick. She snuck up the back stairs whilst they were dinin' and went over the study and found the rock in one o' them bronze bowls over the fireplace—and did you see the face on Althea when she spilled that, after her gettin' the idea Kester had been in and took it, and tryin' to cover him on the cigarette butt! Well, it seemed Kate already stole about half o' Althea's cigarettes, so she doped out that little frame-up for Kester, in case they called in the cops or somebody like me. I always heard, Chief, that Laughin' Kate is very, very slick."

"You ain't so bad yourself, Batey," the Chief admitted. "Go on with the bedtime story."

"Go on to where?" George yawned happily. "The bulls yanked me out before I could heft that one cake and, I gotta admit, I was on pins and needles till we got back and I dug it out o' the box she had packed with food; and, Chief, compared to the others, it weighed a ton, so I seen I guessed right, like I always do. At that, we stuck a plainclothes guy outside the house, first off, so nothing could get took away, and when we finally come back by the basement door, very quiet, to make the pinch—"

"Well, in Heaven's name, Batey," the Chief demanded hotly, "why didn't you grab this cake in the first place, get out the rock and give it to Atterford, instead of—"

"On account of I was followin' Mr. Lavery's instructions to the letter, like you said, and puttin' on a good show!" Mr. Batey replied just as hotly. "And any more instructions this nut give me will

also get followed to the letter, and what's more—"

"There'll be no more!" the Chief snapped. "Lavery muffed that Ewing job this afternoon and I canned him."

"Oh, yeah?" George Batey said, brightening. "Then, supposin' we have to have an assistant manager, give yourself a break and—"

"We don't! Go on!"

"There's nothin' else," Mr. Batey sighed, as he deflated," except I gave Kester the once-over to make sure he ain't one o' these babies that uses lipstick. That was while they were checkin' up the fingerprints down to headquarters and—hey! This is my corner!"

AND so, George reflected as he entered the three-and-bath whistling all is well that don't end otherwise, as the feller says, and in a couple of days the kid could be riding him home in her new crate. It seemed she was staring at the box he carried.

"Just a few cakes I picked up," Mr. Batey beamed.

"Well, Georgie, don't I make nice enough cakes for you?" Sugar asked and her eyes filled. "I baked a surprise cake for your birthday."

"In that case," Mr. Batey grinned, "chuck 'em in the garbage pail."

"No! You spent money for them."

So it seemed he now had the cue to gather the kid into his arms and get this one squared. George Batey chuckled—and then ceased his chuckling, on account of it looked like something funny was going on here. What he meant, the kid was about to have a fit! She had picked a small piece of wrapping-paper off the cakes and was reading something on it, and she had turned bright red.

"Who is *Pinky*?" she demanded. "Is there somebody that calls *you* Pinky?"

She was now not more than six inches from him and about to burst into flame.

"To Pinky from Anna, in case he gets back," she hissed, reading from the paper. "So *who is Anna*?"



They're Swindling You!

Brother . . . Dime

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the one-hundred-and-fifty-sixth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

HEWYWOOD BROUN tells of being approached by an unknown panhandler who startled him by asking for a dollar instead of the customary dime.

"But see here," Broun protested, "I'm not going to give you a dollar. I don't mind shelling out a nickel or a dime for a 'cupa cawfee,' but a dollar, that's too much. You've got an awful nerve to hit a man for a—"

"Wait a minute, mister," the bum interrupted, "what're yuh tryin' to do, teach me how to run my business?"

And it is a business, if not an art, with hundreds of the professionals. New York City, it is estimated, contributes about three million dollars a year to the support of its beggars, and other cities give in proportion. In St. Louis, the Bureau for Homeless Men made a two-months survey and then estimated that the average daily "take" was \$3.70, although some of the more successful took in as much as ninety-five cents an hour for a seven hour day which commenced at 9:30 A.M. and ended at 4:30 P.M.

I suppose these men were just the ordinary run-of-the-mill panhandlers,

because a legless Buffalo cripple who shifted the scene of his operations to Rochester for a few days garnered eight and one-half pounds of pennies, nickels and dimes in four hours. It took a police captain the best part of an hour to sort and count the coins. His "take" was \$39.26, about ten dollars an hour!

Another legless Rochester mendicant who traveled to Philadelphia and was arrested there made the trip in his own automobile driven by his chauffeur. He also carried his own "lookout" with him and told the Philadelphia police that he maintained a home in Rochester and that the car and chauffeur were vital to his *business*.

Tony Misiak, arrested in New York for selling pencils without a license, was a pitiful object. His clothing was old and torn and patched. His shoes were worn through and there were holes in all his pockets—except one. Not much use to search him, thought the cop, but when the one good pocket was explored the police found 25 thousand-dollar bills, 79 hundred-dollar bills and 17 one-dollar bills.

A blind accordion player who makes all the Eastern cities in his own automobile—and a good one too—is reputed to be worth about \$45,000.

These men *may* be the exceptions,

but a few years ago a social investigator made an experiment. He traveled from New York to Chicago and return "working" most of the cities en route. On the western trip he was dressed in a suit much the worse for wear, a flannel shirt, no collar or tie, and scuffed, leaking shoes. He whined out a typical bum's appeal. He begged from all. On the way back he was decently dressed and changed his technique, claiming to be a war veteran whose wife was sick, whose baby was hungry and whose heartless landlord was about to throw him into the street. He told his story to prosperous looking business men.

As a down-and-out bum he averaged for the time he "worked" four dollars an hour, which anyone will agree is pretty good pay. But as the distressed war veteran his takings averaged \$11 an hour. Not all men who tell hard luck tales on the streets are professionals—but it's a safe bet most of them are.

Now what do the men *who know* say about this? The Welfare Council of New York City is authority for the statement that, "Only one out of a hundred really needs the 'dime for a bed' he pleads for. Nearly every one in three is an alcoholic—a confirmed drunkard. A full third are professionals, expert in mendicancy. Perhaps one-half are recently employed young men who, having observed in walking the streets how easy it is to get money simply by asking for it, prefer that mode of "relief." Some of the cases they investigated included a distinguished old man with a long beard and a prominently displayed crucifix. Investigation showed that he has \$20,000 in banks, is the owner of considerable real estate, and had been depositing from \$200 to \$300 a week.

There was too the beggar who tapped his way along Broadway by day and who, dressed in evening clothes and high hat, was a night club playboy after hours.

Another man lost a leg twelve years before. He had been begging ever since, sitting displaying his wooden leg. He also had on a brace of the type worn by a person with a broken neck. Under the doctor's stare he admitted he had no neck injury, but that with the brace his earnings had jumped immediately from three dollars to ten dollars per day. This man maintains a family in a comfortable suburban home.

The writers of begging letters have a still easier time. No rough and wet weather for them! Social workers estimate that in a single season 100,000 begging letters pass through the post office in Greater New York, 40,000 in Chicago, 25,000 in Philadelphia, etc.

One begging letter specialist employed a lawyer to help him write a letter which he hoped was law-proof and he sent them out by the thousands asking for everything from books and pictures to clothing and money. One agency answered more than 300 letters of inquiry about him in less than a year but the majority never took the trouble to investigate.

Another family augmented their relief money by mailing begging letters, and rather than divulge to the authorities how much money they obtained in this manner the husband stated that he would rather have relief withdrawn, indicating that he could realize a larger income through his own appeals.

So don't let your over-sympathetic nature respond to these gyps. There are enough agencies in existence to take care of every worthy case—but the *worthy* cases won't panhandle or write begging letters.

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

SIX more cryptofans qualified for membership in our *Inner Circle Club* last June, by attaining individual solving scores of 1,000 answers in this department! The subjoined list of the new "Thousand clubbers" shows the enrollment number of each entrant, the issue of D. F. W. with which the required 1,000 answers was completed, and the total solving score on that date. Congratulations, new ICC members!

ICC Members for June, 1938

Number	Name	Date	Score
115.	*The Griffin	June 4	1,002
116.	*Marie Abild	June 4	1,001
117.	*Dogmaamgod	June 11	1,005
118.	*Ker	June 11	1,003
119.	*Age	June 11	1,002
120.	*Penny	June 11	1,000

Keep tab on your solving record, fans! We'll be glad to publish the total score of any reader on request. The following scores comprise all solutions submitted up to and including those for last June. A reader who has submitted answers under more than one name or cryptonym may have his scores combined by properly identifying his solutions.

Total Solving Scores, June, 1938

795—†Arrowhead.	448—†Agatha.
765—†Alice.	436—†Gregory.
684—†Edw. L. Kowalski.	408—†Neil Johnson.
681—†Chas. L. Rohde.	372—†G. Hirano.
664—†Ruth.	147—†Tex II.
565—†Ralph L. Motz.	138—Graschue.
486—†Mabs.	104—Not Shot.
456—†Luucus.	45—L. E. Dawson.

Starting off this week's puzzles, note the sequence HP in †Half-Pint's division, as in-

indicated in the third subtraction. Next, consider $P - H = I$ for symbol I. The 10-letter keyword runs from 0 to 9. In *Mrs. W. C. Bird's contribution, try for the phrase R ENAY BEYOY, noting NO. The three starred groups should then drop into place. And that should give you a good start.

Orchid's crypt offers short words for entry. Thus, XRE'F ZF. KF. and KG may be followed up with TKHGF GKPNF and *XH. Continue then with GRVUFKVUG and TZVUX. In Tenderfoot's message the affixes GRG- and -KAGK should help with group 4. Or, as an alternative opening, the pattern VRLIAA, with successive doubles, looks tempting.

In †Rengaw's cipher, look to UK and GUNL. With these guessed, supply the third letter in LUVL. And so to NGUYUVLN; etc. Spot your own clues in this week's hardest cipher, †Alice's Inner Circle offering! Answers to this week's puzzles will be published next week. Asterisks in Nos. 236-7 are prefixed to groups to indicate capitalization.

No. 235—Cryptic Division. By †Half-Pint.

R I R E) A C I I P E (T L A
L T C A

I H R A P
I R A A H

I P B I E
I H E B T

I I L

No. 236—Into the Fold. By °Mrs. W. C. Bird.

ZYXHVUY, SYZ °*RSSYP *HRPHXY *HXLG UYUGYPO!
 UNT TVL KYB NO ULHE YSQVTUYSB CPVU VLP HRDEYP
 OVXARSK FYDNPBUYSB NO R ENAY BEYOY UNST
 TYNPO! KVVV XLHM!

No. 237—Unfailing Dart. By Orchid.

"ORDU KG ZOBZAG ZF TKHGF GKPNF," XUYOZHUG *XH.
 *ZOTHUX *ZXOUH, TZVUX *DKUEEUGU SGAYNRORPKGF.
 "ROEA GRVUFKVUG BU XRE'F LERB KF!"

No. 238—No Hand-Out. By Tenderfoot.

XCGFOE XRDR BUPVAB GRGAQPBKAGK URSL, LOPAB
 XEYRKXAKVVSU XSN, NSHAB PNSFPGSOE BSGZTPVX,
 DOATB MPBPRGSOE VRLLA, ASKB NEKXPVSU NASU.

No. 239—Rural Rhapsody. By †Rengaw.

FLOOSBAY FLUFREPOO FLUSSADZ GUNLUK FTQH KOZN
 LUVL UK EFEFUE, GLUYZN FUFEP E FLOODZ BSTX
 VSEZZ-VSTGK FYAXD. CAYYBSTVZ FSTER; NGUYUVLN
 BEYYZ; PEH UZ PTKO.

No. 240—Hectic Night. By †Alice.

AVYO KXUNF, YNBVFX ONSVDLH, TNUSGHR, GXBD OLTH
 NUXLFD. ENVR RHSD KVDO YNBO, AVFTB, RVNUXFR-
 BHD EGNDVFLU KAVBD KNDYO. SAXPH, RHENADHR
 ZVN EVBDXG AXLDH.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

229—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 M E N B I T D O G S

230—A Scottish bagpipe band has left to tour Europe. If they get away with it, there should be little worry regarding peaceful dispositions of Continental nations.

231—Walking on cool, soft grass relieves tired, aching "dogs." Confound these signs in parks, etc., reading, "Keep dogs off lawn"!

232—Photographic filters transmitting only ultra-violet or infra-red rays produce,

with proper emulsions, strange, sometimes fantastic, pictorial effects.

233—Famous fisticuff fan fiercely fought frisky faker. Flashy fraud fainted. Foxy fighter foiled, floored foe forthwith. Finis!

234—Weird noise wakes tramp. Nomad finds hyena doing swing dance. Sound makes night heavy under lurid mirth. Quiet comes after beast quits.

All correct solutions to current puzzles will be listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for October. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



THROUGH some mysterious way, known only to necromancers and other such odd folk, the weekend usually brings the manic depressive out in us and on Monday morning we arrive at the office with the cheerfulness of Gloomy Gus. The past weekend was one exception. We spent two days in the country, far from the scenes of violence and crime that makes our daily fare. The peaceful chirping of the crickets and the mooing of the cows so lulled our shell-shocked nerves that we even refused to be depressed by our host's story of how he had just walked out on a fifteen-hundred-dollar-a-week job in Hollywood. (Of course, in fairness, we must admit that we never saw fifteen hundred dollars and we don't believe anyone else ever did—unless it was a banker, before 1929.)

The point we've been trying to make, in our usual obtuse way, is that this morning we arrived at the office in such a pleasant mood that we failed to kick Germaine, the office cat, and completely forgot to berate our secretary for being two minutes late. We strode briskly through the corridor and, smiling broadly, arrived at our office. And there It was. A Thing,

some of our writers might say! The postman had arrived earlier and exactly in the center of the desk was a fresh, unopened letter.

With cheerful ruthlessness, we ripped it open. And there is where our spirits took a nosedive. We reached the third paragraph and ran screaming from the room. It took one hour, three office boys and a red-headed stenographer to get us back. But our smiles were gone and Germaine fled to the *Argosy* office for safety. It was then that we decided that we had suffered too long in silence; our sorrows must be bared.

Our correspondent, who must remain unnamed but not unsung, will from now on be known as X, the Unknown. Without further ado, we give you

X

DEAR EDITOR:

Enclosed is a story which I think is pretty damn good.

Enclosed also is return postage just in case it turns out that you're not worth the lousy little salary Munsey's pay you for editing *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*. If you turn down this story you're no judge of stories.

DFW is a damn good magazine, but it'll be much better if you print this story of mine.

Incidentally, what happened to that

"By-Lines" column you started in the Aug. 13 issue and discontinued in the Aug. 20? The writing was punk but the idea was good. You'd better put it back.

Until my next brainstorm, here's hoping.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

Eventually we calmed down enough to look at the story that accompanied this little masterpiece. Although the first two paragraphs reduced us to such quivering doldrums that the man in *Argosy* had to bring out his strait-jacket—an old family heirloom—we persisted until we had read the whole story. Then we worked off some of our venom by the violence with which we attached the rejection slip.

In the first paragraph, Mr. X had a character step out of a twelfth-story window and plop to the sidewalk. Thereafter in quick succession, the hero tripped a yawn in midstride (Did you ever see a yawn walking?), his jaw dropped down to his belt buckle; he caught up the slack in his jaw, and he gaped the body. And then we gaped his story.

Among other things, Mr. X's letter has influenced us to go ahead with certain plans which we have been nurturing for these many years; the establishment of a Camp Utopia for indigent writers. The cabins would all be papered with certified publishers' checks and each room would contain an autographed photograph of an editor about to be electrocuted. There would be open fireplaces in which logs, made from pressed rejection slips, would burn merrily. No stories would have to be sent out to be returned by unfeeling editors. Instead, every yarn would be turned over to the Board of Directors of the Mutual Admiration Committee for publication in the *Utopia Thrilling Tales*. In other words, all of the writers would live

by being taken in by each other's stories.

By this time, everyone is probably tired of the subject but before moving on to greener pastures, we want to make two answers to Mr. X. The first is in answer to his second paragraph reference to our weekly stipend. Like the fictional character of illegitimate parentage, we wish to demand indignantly, "Whose salary is lousy?"

We really refuse to answer his question in the last paragraph concerning the column, "By-Lines," but if others are wondering, it will appear at spasmodic periods in the future. And, in parting, we hereby challenge Mr. X to a duel. As the injured party, we feel that it is our right to choose the weapons—typographical errors at twenty paces.

In our flustered state, we forgot to mention that postman did leave a few other letters on our desk. Among these was a letter from another contributor who takes a little more kindly—we might even say paternal—attitude toward editors in general. Somewhat mollified, we turn to the gentleman from North Carolina,

ROBERT DEETS

DEAR SIR:

Enclosed is a story of mine entitled "Murder Out of Mind." I am also enclosing return postage as I don't believe it is a very good story. Not that I think it is worse than any of the yarns you print. Rather, let us say, it is the same level as your average story. I don't, however, expect you to buy it, which explains the return postage.

If you decide that it isn't for your magazine, don't be afraid to shoot it back with just a rejection slip. So far I have collected 17 rejection slips on this one story and I find them very useful as bookmarks. Since I have some that are duplications, I would like to trade with other writers who have interesting rejection slips. When I first started getting them, I was angry. But

COMING NEXT WEEK

I'm Bait

An exciting novelette of a man who doubled for a killer's target, by

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Dressed to Kill

A complete short novel of spies and counter-spies in jittery Europe, by

FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Sky-High Murder

Sergeant McChesney brings a high-flying killer to earth.

A novelette by

CHARLES ALEXANDER

**TIAH DEVITT • LEWIS CLAY
WILLIAM BRANDON • BERT COLLIER**

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

now I treat the matter much in the same fatherly tolerance that I accepted my son's expulsion from college after I had spent so much time and money in getting him there.

I think your magazine a fine job. I have been reading it for five years now; ever since someone rang my doorbell on a Hallowe'en Eve and ran off, leaving a copy of it on the doorstep. I particularly liked the Thomas Duncan and Edwin Truett stories in the August 27th issue. How about some more Cleve Adams yarns? Keep up the good work.

HIGH POINT, N. C.

Even though we didn't buy Mr. Deets' story, he is a man after our own heart. Not only does he like the stories we print but he doesn't expect us to buy the ones he writes. Frankly, we're a little puzzled as to why anyone would leave a copy of DFW on his doorstep as a Hallowe'en prank but we're much too upset to worry about it today.

We were going to print a letter from a man who not only thinks we're no good but doesn't like anything about us, but we're very happy to find that there's no more room.

WEEK AFTER NEXT

Novelettes:

**Richard Sale
Norbert Davis
Carl Clausen**

Serial:

Lewis Clay

Short Stories:

**Arden X. Pangborn
Samuel Taylor
Charles Alexander
William G. Bogart**

Features:

**M. E. Ohaver
Frank Wrentmore
Stookie Allen
James W. Holden**



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85 Chambers St., New York

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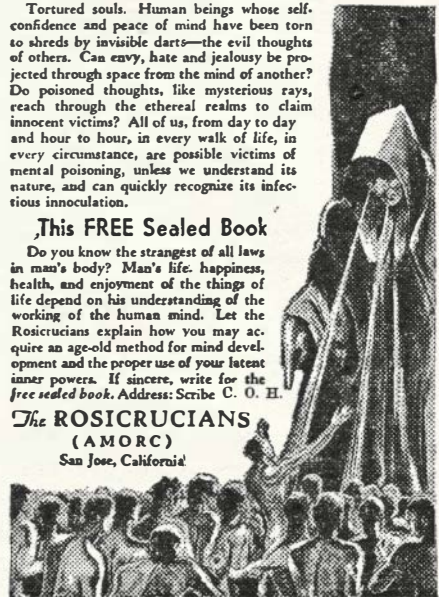
Tortured souls. Human beings whose self-confidence and peace of mind have been torn to shreds by invisible darts—the evil thoughts of others. Can envy, hate and jealousy be projected through space from the mind of another? Do poisoned thoughts, like mysterious rays, reach through the ethereal realms to claim innocent victims? All of us, from day to day and hour to hour, in every walk of life, in every circumstance, are possible victims of mental poisoning, unless we understand its nature, and can quickly recognize its infectious inoculation.

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Dept. 1058-R

CHICAGO

RUPTURED?

Get Up-To-Date Relief

Why try to worry along with old-fashioned trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad seals opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip. Holds rupture whether at work or play. Light, easy to wear. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE 100-page, cloth-bound book "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal, truthful 60-day trial offer. Also names of grateful patrons in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

In answering advertisements it is desirable that you mention DETECTIVE FICTION.

STOP THAT! SLAM!



AMAZING INVENTION
STOPS SLAMMING DOORS

KANT-SLAM closes heaviest doors silently, positively, automatically. Prevents slamming or leaving doors open. Easily installed. Lasts many years. Easily replaced. **LOW PRICED.**

Real Demonstrator Furnished. We supply actual KANT-SLAM on easily-carried miniature door. You make big money on quick sales to stores, offices, factories—every building can use 1 to 201. Write! Get details. Demonstrator to workers.

KANT-SLAM CO., Dept. D-90, Bloomfield, Ind.

AIR CONDITIONED KUSHIONTRED SHOES



EARN BIG COMMISSIONS AND YOUR OWN SHOES FREE AS QUICK EASY BONUS

Steady income all year showing outstanding new Fall line Men's, Women's, Children's shoes. Over 150 styles. Also amazing Groflex shoes—need no breaking in! \$10,000 Gold Bond guarantee satisfaction. Free shirts, ties, hosiery offers to customers. Wonderful self-adjusting inbuilt arch. We pay postage. No experience needed. Big \$30 Case of Sample Shoes without cost. Write TODAY for full information, money-making plan and Free Selling Kit.

TANNERS SHOE CO. 812 BOSTON, MASS.

WRITE FOR FREE OUTFIT

BE A PASSENGER TRAFFIC INSPECTOR



Let Us Help You to **SUCCESS** and **GOOD PAY!**
Trained **Railroad and Bus Passenger Traffic Inspectors** are in constant demand. Our graduates are placed in positions at up to \$135. per month, plus expenses on alert, or we refund tuition. Rapid advancement for ambitious men—19 to 50—who complete easy, home study course. Prepare yourself—specialize. Free Booklet on request.

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE
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High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares you for entrance to college. Standard H. S. texts supplied—Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

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RHEUMATISM!

NEURITIS — ARTHRITIS

Read the book that is helping thousands! A postcard brings you a FREE copy latest edition "The Inner Mysteries of Rheumatism" sealed and postpaid. Address the author today. H. P. Clearwater, Ph. D., 1954-H St., Hallowell, Me.

ASTHMA

WRITE FOR **FREE TRIAL OFFER!**

If you suffer from Asthma Paroxysms, from coughs, gasping, wheezing—write quick for daring **FREE TRIAL OFFER** of real relief. Inquiries from so-called "hopeless" cases especially invited. Write:

NACOR, 296-F State Life Building, Indianapolis, Ind.

MEN

Get free booklet about Zo-ak Tablets—the formula of well-known New York physician created especially for men. Zo-ak contains quick-acting vegetable stimulants plus essential vitamin concentrates in adequate amounts to build up health and strength. Ask for Zo-ak (blue box) at any good druggist, and write for free booklet by registered physician. Sent in sealed envelope by Zo-ak Company, 503 West 45 St., Dept. A, New York.

Believe It or Not! by Ripley

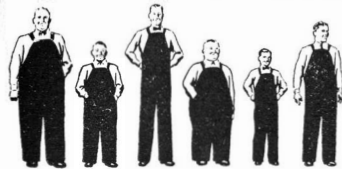


NO OTHER OVERALL WEARS LIKE
LEE JELT DENIM!

A PAIR OF OVERALLS
CAN BE MADE WITH
AS FEW AS 10 PIECES
OF CLOTH 5 BUTTONS
2 BUCKLES & THREAD



BUT-
IT TAKES 76 PARTS AND 484 OPERATIONS
TO MAKE SUPER-COMFORT TAILORED-SIZE



Lee JELT DENIM OVERALLS

NO TWO OF THESE 6 MEN
ARE BUILT ALIKE

YET YOUR **Lee** DEALER CAN
GIVE THEM ALL TAILORED FIT
IN WAIST, LEG-LENGTH, CROTCH
AND BIB-HEIGHT, BECAUSE **Lee**
CUTS EACH PART ESPECIALLY TO
FIT EACH BODY MEASUREMENT.



SEND FOR PROOF!
THIS MINIATURE
CUT-OUT OVERALL
OF JELT DENIM
WILL SHOW YOU
WHY THIS TOUGH
MULTIPLE-TWIST
FABRIC WEARS
LONGER-
BELIEVE IT OR NOT!
WRITE FOR IT!



TEAR TEST!
OF **Lee** JELT DENIM
SHOWED IT TOOK 204 LB. PULL
WITH THESE STEEL JAWS TO
BREAK ONLY ONE SINGLE INCH
OF THIS TOUGH MATERIAL.

**JUST LIKE DAD'S-
IN FIT AND WEAR!**



H.D. LEE MERCANTILE CO., DEPT. AF-10 KANSAS CITY, MO.,
- PLEASE SEND ME THAT MINIATURE CUT-OUT OVERALL!
AND MY NEAREST **Lee** DEALER'S NAME, TOO!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____

RIPLEY'S EXPLANATION: An overall could be made by sewing up the 10 pieces shown above—if you don't care how it fits and wears. But in order to make an overall fit as perfectly as a Lee Jelt Denim, you need 76 parts—and each piece of cloth must be cut as accurately as the parts of a fine suit. This gives you "tailored" fit not only in leg length but in waist, crotch and bib height. Most important of all, Lee is

the only overall made of genuine Jelt Denim—sanforized to end shrinking and woven with multiple-twist yarn to meet the test shown here and dozens of other hard wear and working tests... believe it or not!

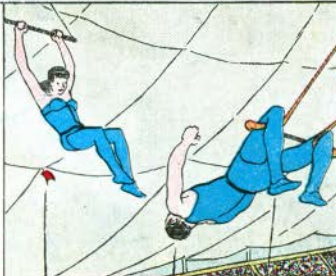
Copr. 1938
THE H. D. LEE MERC. COMPANY
Kansas City, Mo. Trenton, N. J. South Bend, Ind.
San Francisco, Calif. Minneapolis, Minn. Salina, Kans.

THRILLS from the CIRCUS

FEATURING
ANTOINETTE CONCELLO
 TRAPEZE SENSATION
 AND
TERRELL JACOBS
 LION KING

MISS CONCELLO, HOW ARE CHANCES FOR A STORY ON YOUR BIGGEST THRILL AS AN AERIALIST?

TONY, TELL HIM ABOUT YOUR FIRST TRIPLE SOMERSAULT IN THE AIR.



"NO WOMAN, TO MY KNOWLEDGE, HAD EVER EXECUTED A TRIPLE MID-AIR SOMERSAULT. I HAD TO DEPEND ALMOST ENTIRELY ON AUTOMATIC TIMING..."

"...BUT AS I WHIRLED OFF INTO SPACE... ONCE...TWICE...FOR A SPLIT-SECOND I PRACTICALLY LOST CONSCIOUSNESS..."



"...THREE TIMES...AND...I MADE IT! THRILLED AND SAFE!"

TERRELL, TELL HIM ABOUT THE TIME SPARKY, OVER THERE, ALMOST FINISHED YOU



"I HAD ALMOST COMPLETED MY ACT WITH 25 LIONS, WHEN SPARKY AND ANOTHER MALE WENT FOR EACH OTHER..."



"TRYING TO BREAK IT UP, I WAS KNOCKED DOWN AND SPARKY TURNED ON ME. THINGS LOOKED PRETTY BAD..."

"BUT I GOT THE UPPER HAND. BEFORE I LEFT THE CAGE, EVERY LION WAS BACK IN PLACE."



AFTER A TURN IN THE BIG CAGE, I NEED A 'LIFT' IN ENERGY, AND I GET IT FROM A CAMEL. I'VE SMOKED CAMELS FOR 16 YEARS. HAVE ONE, TONY?

YOU BET, TERRELL, THERE'S A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAMELS AND OTHER KINDS--IN MILDNESS--IN SO MANY WAYS!



One Smoker tells another ...
"CAMELS AGREE WITH ME"

PEOPLE DO APPRECIATE THE COSTLIER TOBACCOS IN CAMELS
 THEY ARE THE LARGEST-SELLING CIGARETTE IN AMERICA

CAMELS ARE A MATCHLESS BLEND OF FINER, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS--TURKISH & DOMESTIC
 (SIGNED) R.J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO., WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.



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