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by CORNELL WOOLRICH



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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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MARCH, 12 1938

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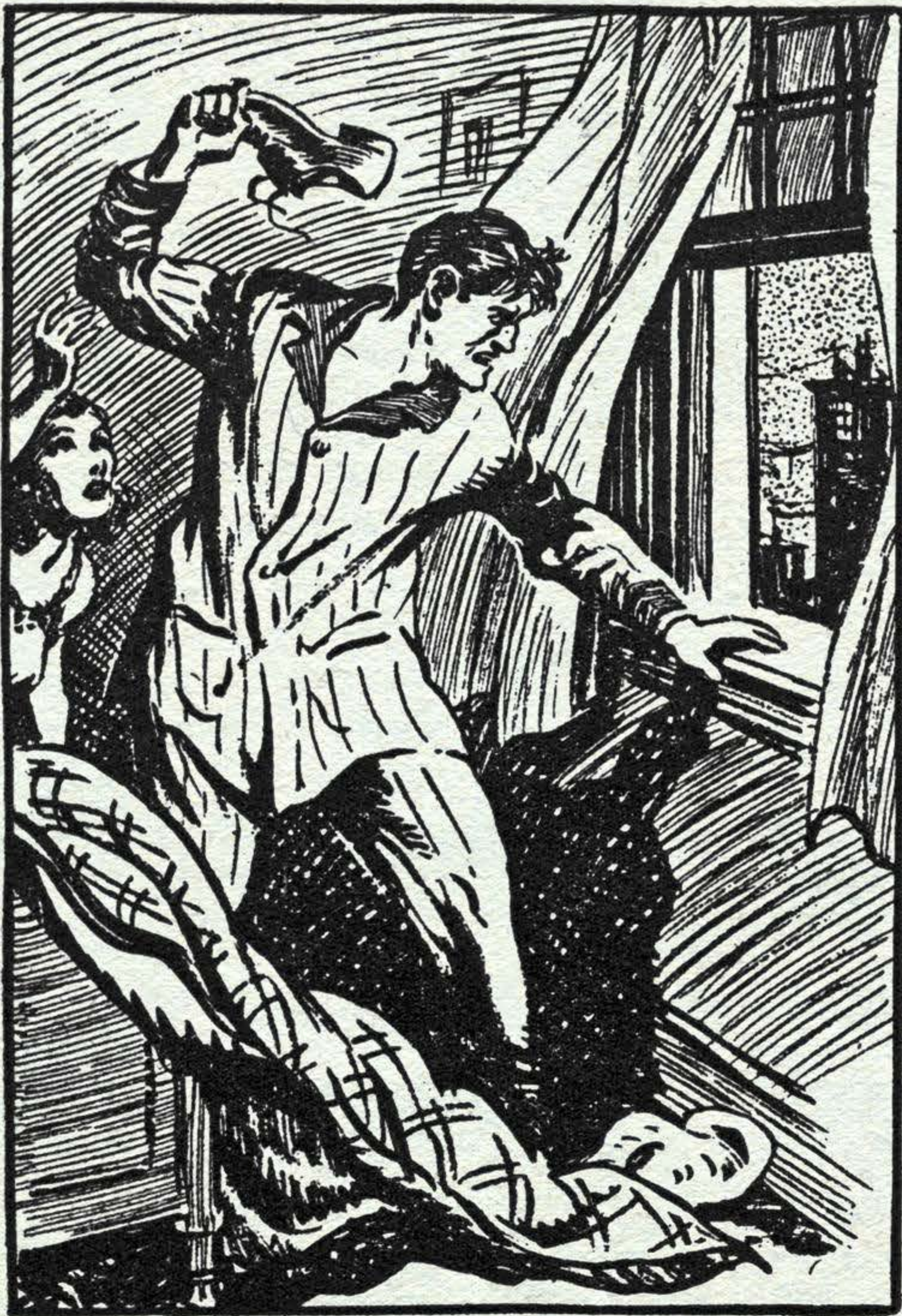


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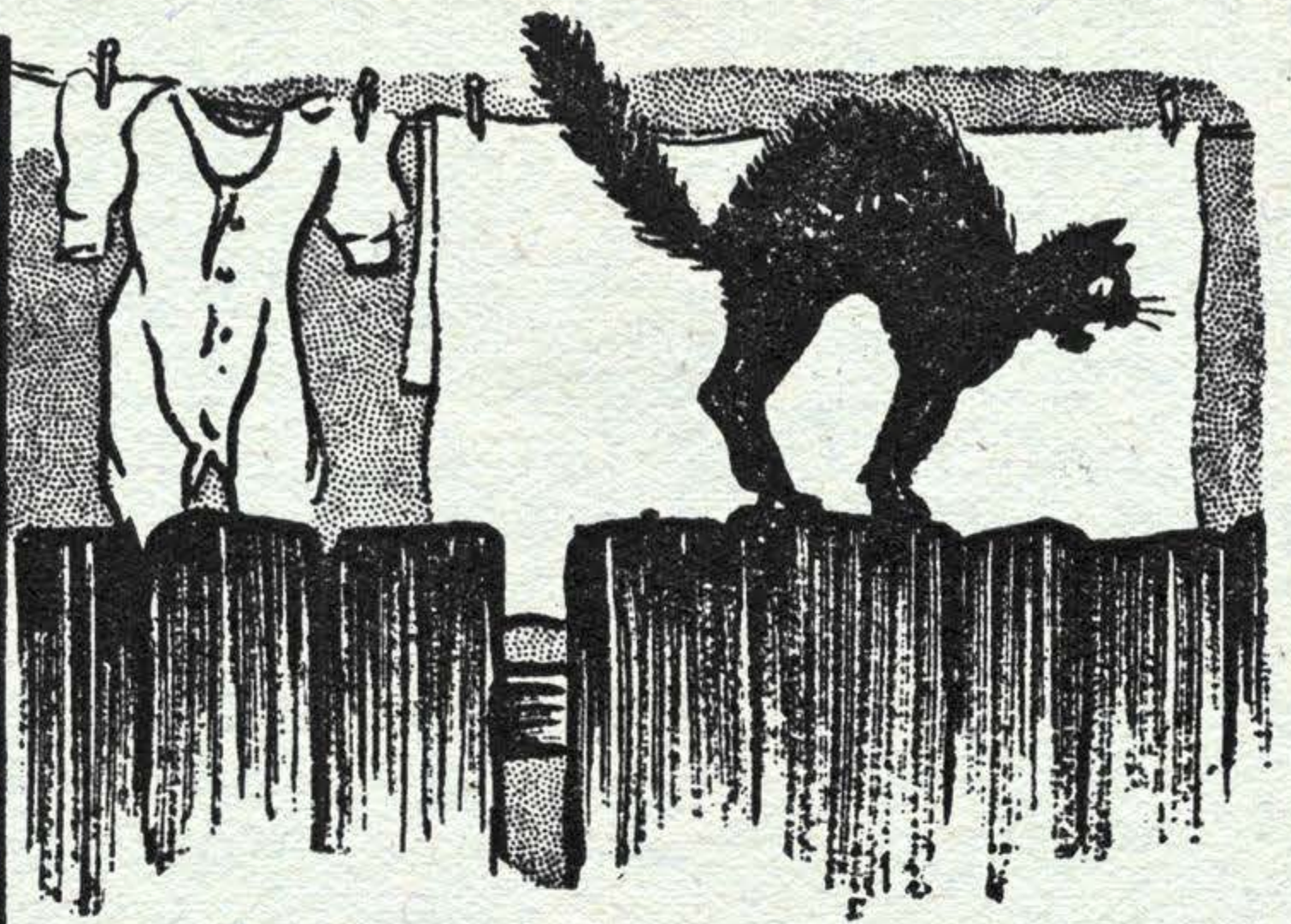


"Tom!" she wailed. "Not your shoes!"

THE cat yowling started in low and rolling each time, like a tea kettle simmering, or a car engine turning over, or a guy gargling mouth-wash. Then it went high. Higher than the highest scream. Higher than a nail scratching glass. Higher than human nerves could stand. *Eeeee-yow*. Then it wound up in a vicious reptilian hiss, with a salivary explosion for a finale. "Hah-Tutt!" Then it started all over again.

Tom Quinn pulled the bedcovers from his ears at the sound of the window sash slamming down. His face was steaming from the ineffective sound-proofing that had only managed to smother him in without toning down the performance any.

He said irritably, "How we going to sleep on a hot night like this with the window closed?"



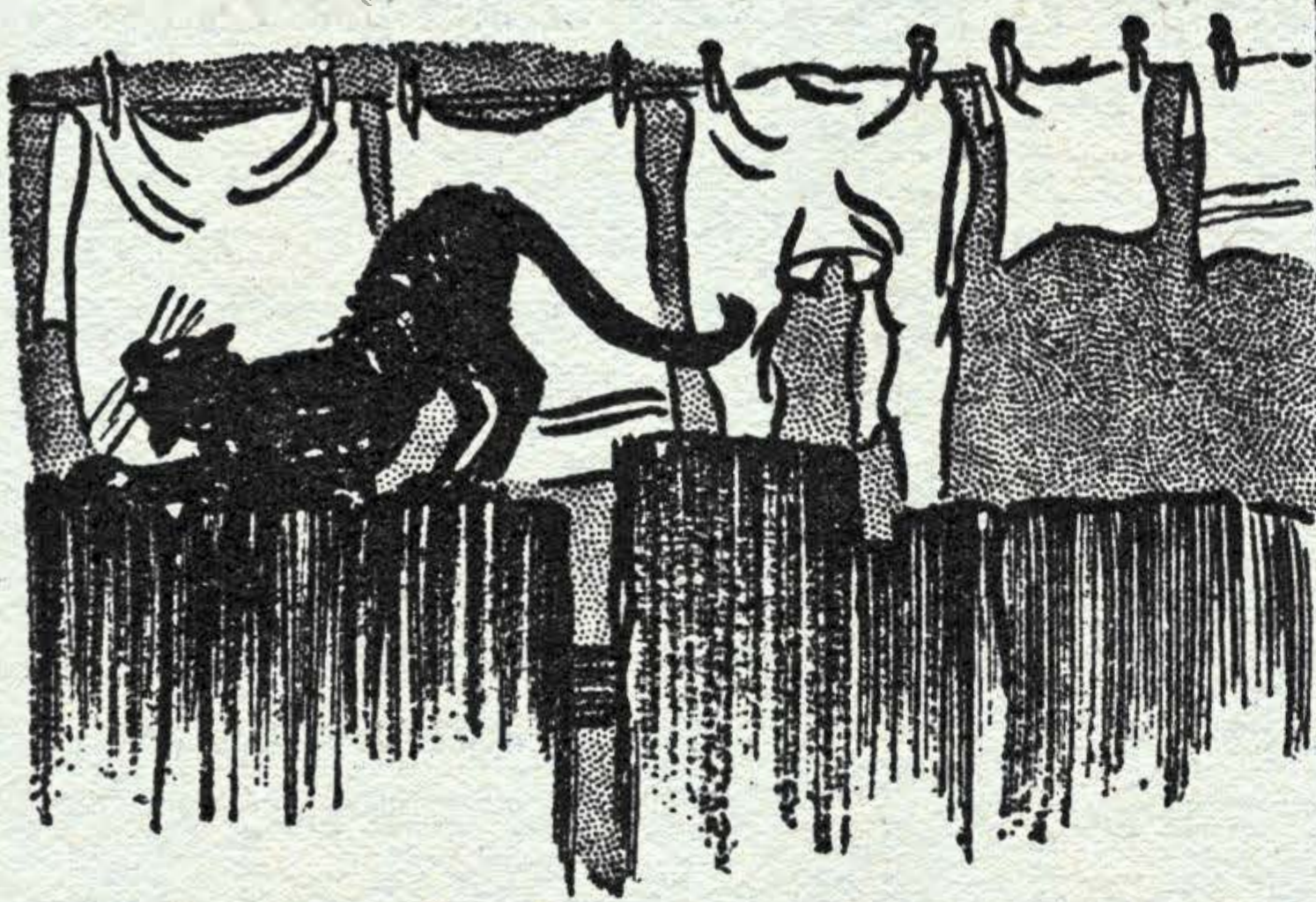
I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes

A Novelette

"Well, how we going to sleep with *that* going on?" his wife demanded, not unreasonably. "Are they making love, or are they sore at each other, or are they just suffering down there?"

The floodgates of his pent-up wrath burst at that. It had been going on ever since they'd retired. He reared up with the violence of an earthquake, scattering the bedding all over the floor. He snatched up something from the floor, took two quick slapping steps over to the window, jerked it up, wound up his right arm like a big league pitcher, let fly into the obscured backyard five stories below.

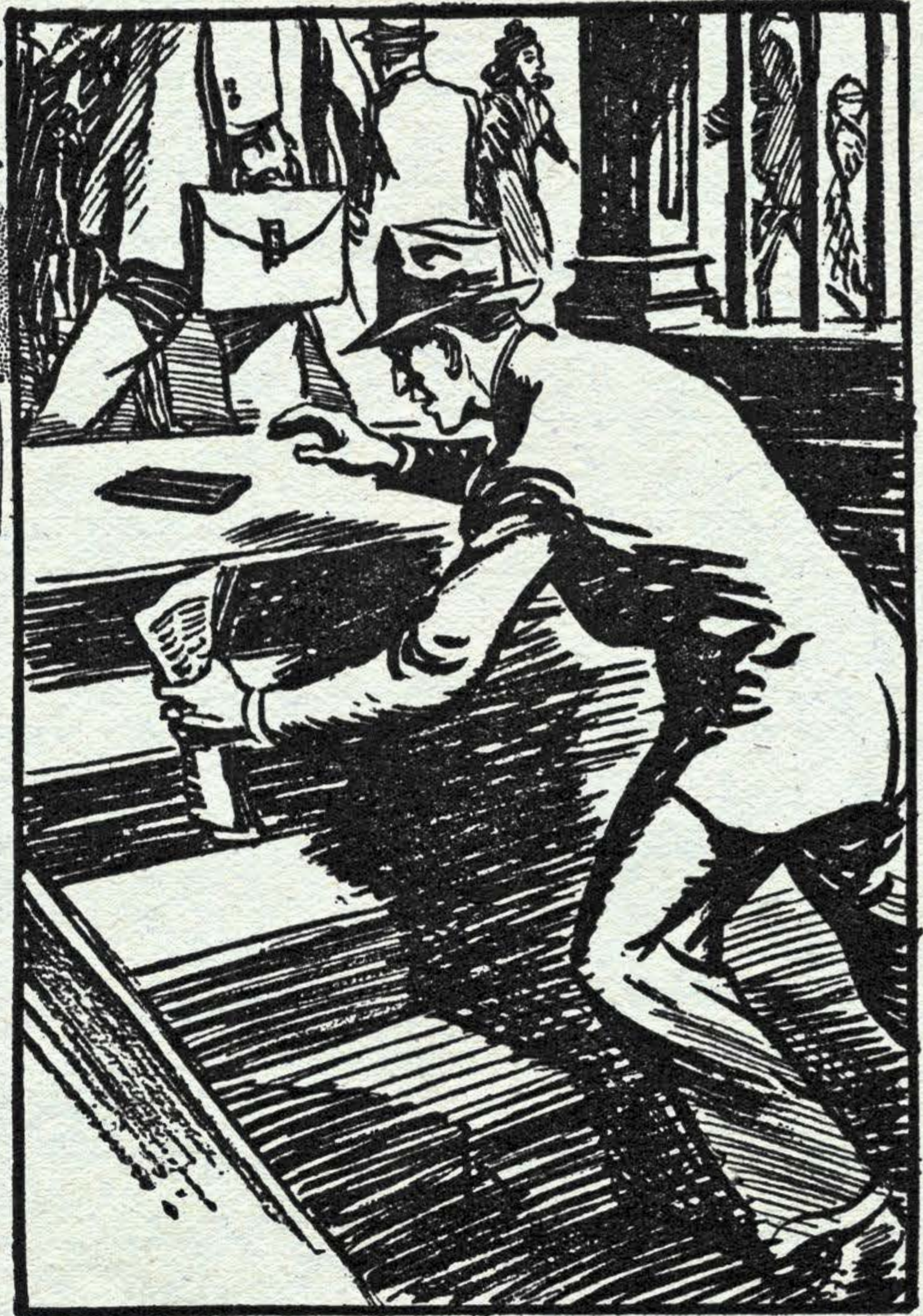
His wife didn't see what the object was in time to stop him. There was a complete lack of any answering impact or thud from below to show that the missile had found a mark. There was not even a hitch in the caterwauling. To Quinn's inflamed ears it even seemed to take on an added derisive



By Cornell Woolrich

Author of "Endicott's Girl," etc.

A dramatic and powerful story of the tragedies that result from little mistakes



"I was coming up the subway stairs—"

note, as though the felines were razzing him.

"Cats!" he panted hoarsely. He jumped back to the bed again, stooped for the mate to what he'd flung the first time, returned to the window, and again wound up.

This time she saw what it was, tried to catch his arm in time, just missed as he let go.

"Tom!" she wailed. "Not your shoes! What's the matter with you?"

There was as complete a lack of results as the first time. The heavy-soled object might have taken wings, gone up into the air instead of down, for all the sound of striking that reached them. The vocal pyrotechnics went on unabated.

"Well, that was a smart stunt!" his wife commented acidly. "How are you going to work tomorrow? In your stocking feet?"

His anger had turned to sheepish-

ness, the way it does when a man has made a fool of himself. "I got another pair in the closet, haven't I?" he defended himself.

"I don't care, you're not throwing a perfectly good pair of shoes like that out of the window! They cost ten dollars, with those special built-in arches for your flat feet! You go down there and bring them back."

"At this hour?"

"You march down there and get them before one of the janitors picks them up in the morning!" she insisted.

He thrust a moth-eaten robe around him unwillingly, found a pair of carpet slippers, and started out, mumbling: "Didn't even hear them hit anything. I got an aim like a—"

IT WAS a full quarter of an hour before he came back. When he did,

he looked more crestfallen, sheepish, than ever. His wife didn't need to be told. She could see that his hands were empty. "I thought so!" she said scathingly. "Couldn't find them, now could you?"

"I looked all around in both yards, ours and the next one over," he said shame-facedly. "Not a sign of them anywhere."

"They *must* be down there somewhere!" she insisted. "There hasn't been anyone else down there. I've been watching from the window the whole time. Why didn't you take that flashlight with you?"

"I lit matches," he said. "I went over every square inch of those two yards, even climbed over the fence in my robe. They must have gone in somebody's open window on one of the lower floors, on that side facing us."

"Well then, why didn't you ring their doorbells, find out for sure?"

"Wake people up at this hour, asking for my shoes? What kind of a sap d'you think I want them to take me for? They'd laugh in my face!" It was true; it was one of those things that the average man finds it strangely difficult to bring himself to do. He doesn't mind appearing ridiculous to his wife, but with outsiders it's a different matter.

"Well, don't expect *me* to go down there and ask for them back for you," she said. "You were the one threw them—now you can do without them! We're so well off we can't get away out of this awful heat, like most of the people that live around us, but you can afford to throw ten dollar shoes out of the window."

Tom Quinn was back in bed again. He looped the clothing around his upturned ear once more, not against the cats this time but against his wife's re-

proaches—which he had a sneaking suspicion were well earned.

He heard a good deal about it the next morning, more than he cared to. He went off to his work still tingling all over from her verbal thrusts and jabs. He expected to hear a good deal about it that evening when he returned, too, and in fact for several days to come. It would be a week before he heard the end of it. Not that Mrs. Quinn was a nagger—quite the opposite. She was cheerful and easy to get along with as a rule. The heat, which had been unabated for three weeks now, was probably telling on her. And then outside of that, he could see her point in this case. They were not well off, quite the reverse. Things had been getting worse for several years now with him, instead of better. His shoes, because of his arch deformity, were one of the largest items of expense they had. Unlike most couples, he paid twice as much for his as she did for hers. And the more he thought about the way he had thrown them away, the more childish and stupid he had to admit he'd been. So childish and stupid that it became doubly impossible for him to go around to the flats on the next street and make inquiries about them, or even have the janitor of his own building do it for him. The way the people were in this neighborhood, whoever had them would probably deny finding them, keep them—he tried to console himself. But it was no use.

He even toyed with the idea of buying himself a new pair, rubbing a little dust on them, and pretending to his wife that they were his former ones returned, to avoid being subjected to her sarcasm, but he found it impossible to do that because he didn't have the necessary ten dollars to spare.

HOWEVER, when he returned from work that evening expecting to hear quite a good deal more about those shoes and none of it complimentary, he found her opening remarks bewildering. She seemed to have no further complaint to make.

"Well," she said admiringly, "I'm glad you had spunk enough to go around and demand them back, like I told you to. I really didn't think you would."

She pointed, and he saw the shoes there side by side on the floor, on a sheet of newspaper they'd been wrapped in.

She took it for granted it was his doing that they had been restored. "Guess you didn't have time to come back upstairs with them yourself this morning, did you? You were late for work as it was," she went on, answering her own question.

"Oh, then you didn't see who brought them?" Quinn pumped.

"No, I found them standing out there at the door when I went out at noon, wrapped up in paper. Funny they didn't ring the bell and hand them over personally. Still, it was nice of them to go to all the trouble of climbing those four flights of stairs. Who had them?"

Quinn decided he may as well bask in her good opinion, even if he hadn't earned it. The shoes were back, so what difference did it make? If he admitted it hadn't been through him they were returned, she might start in all over again criticizing him.

"Somebody across the way," he said vaguely. That was undoubtedly the truth of the matter anyway, since they certainly hadn't been able to do a boomerang loop in the air and fly in some window on this same side of the court.

She didn't press him for further details.

He picked the shoes up and looked them over curiously, but they looked no different to his untrained eye than they had when he had taken them off last night and parked them under his bed. They needed a shine, but they had then too; he decided he'd celebrate their return by blowing them to one. He got about one shine a year, as a rule.

At the same time he was wondering how the mysterious person had known which flat to return them to. She'd turned on the light in the bedroom, he remembered, when he went down to look for them, and he supposed the finder had judged by that. But then why hadn't they rung the bell when they were returning them and waited a minute to make sure they had the right party? Or for that matter, if they'd been awake at the time and seen the tell-tale lighted window, why hadn't they called out to him then and there, while he was down there in the yard looking? Why wait until today?

The only explanation he could find for that was that they *had* been awake and *had* seen the window light up, but didn't discover that the shoes were in the same room with them until today, in the daylight. Maybe they didn't sleep in the room the shoes had landed in, therefore didn't hear them tumble. Or if they did (and most people's bedrooms in these flats were at the back), maybe the shoes had landed on a carpeted floor or in the seat of an overstuffed sofa. It was certainly uncanny that they had both passed through one and the same window, and avoided smashing the pane.

In any case, Quinn felt, the whole thing was too trivial, too unimportant one way or the other, to waste time

wondering about. He'd miraculously gotten his shoes back, and that was all that mattered. By the following morning he and his wife had both practically forgotten the episode. By the following evening they definitely had. By the second morning after it was so completely erased that only direct mention of it could have brought it back into their minds, and they were the only ones who knew about it, so who else was to mention it to them?

II

THE old frame house down near the waterfront had never held so many people since the day it was put up. It must have been a pleasant place fifty years before: trees overhanging the limpid water, cows grazing in the meadows on both sides of the river, little frame houses like this one dotting the banks here and there. It wasn't a pleasant place any more: garbage scows, coal yards, the river a greasy gray soup. Dead-end blocks of decrepit tenements.

The house was set far back from the street, hemmed in by the blank walls that rose around it.

The inspector, who was a heavily built man, looked doubtfully up at it as he stepped in under the warped porch-shed. "I hope I don't put my foot in the wrong place and bring it tumbling down on top of us."

"Living in a place like this was asking for it," one of the men with him remarked. "A regular corner-pocket; it must be pitch dark all the way back here at night."

The house was bigger on the inside than it gave the impression of being from the front. They passed down a tunnel-like hall to a room at the back, which kept lighting up, bright blue, as though there were a short circuit in

there. A couple of men lugging a camera came hustling out, nodded, and left, trailing an acrid odor of flashlight powder behind them.

The inspector went in, said: "So that's him, eh?"

There was a man lying dead on the floor, with a section of clothesline wound around his neck. Although the activity going on all around stemmed from him, nobody was paying much attention to him any more. One of the detectives even stepped over him to save time getting from one side of the room to the other.

A pyramid of empty tin cans had toppled down in the corner. A terrified mouse darted out, around, and in again. Its long tail stayed visible between two of the cans, then vanished more slowly than the rest of it had.

The inspector said, "I'm only surprised it didn't happen long ago."

"He only went out once a month to buy canned goods. Never left the place outside of that. I guess that's how he managed to stay alive as long as he did."

"Well, he's going out now and it ain't to buy canned goods," the inspector said. He called out into the hall: "Morgue! We don't need him any more." A couple of men waiting out there came in with a basket.

"How'd they get in, whoever it was?" the inspector wanted to know.

"Right here." One of them indicated a wide open window, facing the back. "The old guy would never open the front door for anyone of his own accord. Too suspicious. It was still locked on the inside when we got here, anyway. He must have left this window open a little on account of the awful heat. In came death."

"Hidden hoard motive, like with all these recluses," suggested the inspec-

tor. "Well, did they get in? How does it look to you men?"

A man rifling a sheaf of old papers, letters and clippings through his fingers, and sneezing from the dust at intervals, spoke up. "I think they did get something. There's not a sign of a bank book, safe deposit key, or memorandum of any investments anywhere around, and it's a cinch he didn't live on air. The storekeeper where he got his monthly groceries says he never showed up with anything smaller than a twenty dollar bill. The large old-fashioned kind that don't circulate any more."

"How does *he* look?" asked the inspector crisply.

"Okay at first sight. He was the one notified us. You see, this Wontner had been buying from him so long, he knew just which day to expect him in. Always the first of the month. It never varied. So when he didn't show, today being the day, the grocer came around and knocked, thinking this guy might be ill and need help. When he didn't get any answer, he tipped off a cop."

"It happened last night, the examiner tells me."

"Yep, somewhere within the past twenty-four hours. The killer was unaware of Wontner's habits, otherwise he could have timed it different and given himself a whole month's headstart on us. By doing it last night, he cut himself down to within twenty-four hours' margin of safety. If it had happened tonight, after he got his groceries, no one would have been any the wiser for a whole thirty days to come. The guy was a complete hermit."

"Well, they got his hoard, proof enough," said the inspector. "Now one of the first things we want to watch out for is sudden signs of mysterious prosperity around here in the immedi-

ate neighborhood. They'll lie low at first, think they're smart, but they won't be able to hold out for long. Anyone that breaks out in a new suit or starts dolling his wife up, or moves kind of sudden to a new flat, or starts setting them up for the boys down at the corner, we'll keep our eyes open for that kind of thing." He added abruptly, "Where'd the rope come from? Think that'll do us any good?"

"No, we've already traced it. He picked it up right out in back here. Wontner used to hang his shirts on it to dry."

THE inspector went over to the open window, peered out. Something like a high-powered lightning-bug was flashing on and off around the side of the house, where there was a narrow chasm between it and the warehouse wall that towered over it. "Who's out there?" he asked.

"Bob White, digging for worms."

The gleam went out, and a man in horn-rimmed glasses, his collar open and his necktie knot pulled nearly around to his shoulder to lessen the heat, came up to the outside of the window.

"Just in time, inspector," he said. "I've got a beauty out here, a pip! Come on out and take a look."

Bob White didn't look much like a detective. He suggested a college student of the post-war generation, of the earnest, not frivolous, variety; not so much because of a youthful appearance as because of an air of enthusiasm and seriousness combined. His mates pretended to laugh at him, and they secretly admired him.

The inspector went out onto the plot of ground behind the house, littered with empty tin cans and rubbish discarded over a period of years by the

murdered eccentric. The others came out after him one by one, trying to look disinterested and not succeeding.

Bob White beckoned them on, turned back into the narrow alleyway running through to the front. "Stay on that plank I've laid down there, will you, fellows?" he suggested. "There's a few fainter ones back along here, and you may want more than one. But this one—zowie!"

He stopped and pointed. The others craned their necks over the inspector's shoulders; the hindmost one squatted down frog-like and stuck his head out from behind them all.

"There's either a drain- or water-pipe somewhere close under the surface here. It must be defective from age, and keeps the ground damp above it. Now look at that, right in the middle of it! What more could any of you ask for?"

The footprint was crystal clear as his torch played caressingly over it.

"The thing's over, before it's even halfway begun." The inspector didn't waste any more time. "Hurry up. Phone the lab to get some guys up here with moulage and take the impression of it. We can build the whole man up out of that thing. We'll know what he looks like and everything about him by the time we're through. This is as good as a photograph."

"He made it when he was leaving," Bob White pointed out. "Not on his way in. The toe's pointed out toward the street. He was lucky the first time, missed the soggy patch. His feet landed on the hard stubbly ground before and after it. But his luck didn't hold up on the return trip; his foot came right down smack in the middle of it."

The inspector said grimly, "His luck's run out now—whoever he is."

"YOU can quote me," said the inspector, bouncing a pencil up and down on its point atop his desk, "that we are confident of making an arrest shortly. The case is proceeding satisfactorily. And now, gents, if you'll excuse me, I'll get back to my work."

"Aw, inspector, can't you do better by us than that?" one of the reporters whined. "That's the same old gag."

"Now boys, don't be hogs. I'll send for you when I've got something more for you. Don't slam the door on your way out."

When they'd shoved their copy paper into their pockets and gone, he picked up his desk phone, asked for the police laboratory.

"How's that mold coming along?"

"It's come through pretty. I'm sending you over a sketch of the man we reconstructed from it."

"Good. I'll have it photostated and pass it around among my men."

"Here are some of the details. The man you want is five foot ten, weight around one hundred seventy-five or eighty. He takes a nine shoe. He's flat-footed; this shoe has a special built-in arch, a sort of steel rib between the heel and toe to give him support. You know, cantilever principle. That should narrow it down immensely; the firms that sell those things usually keep a list of their customers, like a doctor does patients. His occupation is sedentary; doesn't do much walking or even standing—the heel is hardly worn down at all. Look for some kind of a white-collar worker."

"You've practically handed him to me on a silver platter," said the inspector gratefully.

A messenger had arrived with the sketch and the plaster mold in twenty minutes. Photostatic copies of the former were ready within half an hour.

after that. The inspector called the men he'd detailed to the case in and handed one to each.

"There's the man," he said. "The facial features have been left out, but study the silhouette, the build and carriage. All we need to know now is his name and present whereabouts. I want every one of you to go to a different firm specializing in arch support shoes, check the customers on record by the measurements on this sketch; they may be able to identify him for you by the shoe alone. If he got those shoes in this city, we'll know who he is inside the next twenty-four hours. And even if he didn't, we'll have him inside a week at the most. Give me that classified directory. I'll detail you. Keller, you take them down to the E's, Easy-Walk Shoes, Incorporated. Michaels—" And so on.

Within five minutes he was sitting alone in his office. It was now forty-eight hours after the discovery of the murder.

Bob White had drawn the S's to the Z's. He phoned in at about five. "I've got him, inspector," he said. "Second place on my list. Supporta Shoes. They keep a litmus-paper graph of the shape of the customer's foot, to keep track of any improvement as he goes along. It matches our shoe-print like a hand does a glove. No possibility of error. But the salesman was almost able to identify him from the sketch, without that, anyway. Now here's what their records have to say: Thomas J. Quinn. Thirty-eight years old. Height five-ten. Weight 170. Occupation, bookkeeper for a millinery concern," White paused, then gave an address. "They keep a complete record, you see, go into it scientific, even take X-rays of the foot and all that. Bought his current pair late last spring. Grouses a lot about the

expense each time, to the best of the salesman's recollection."

"Well, that's another little nail in his coffin." The inspector was jubilant. "He lives just a little farther away than I'd expected, but well within the radius of opportunity to soak up neighborhood gossip about the old miser, and also temptation to commit it. Five blocks west and one north of where Wontner lived. Ten minutes' walk, even for a guy with flat feet." He finished jotting, closed his notebook. "Great, White. I'll call the rest in. Meanwhile you get over there quick. If he's lit out already, report in to me immediately and we'll send out an alarm. If he's still there, keep your eye on him. Don't let him out of your sight. I'm not pulling him in right away. I'm going to keep him under observation a little while yet, see if any of the miser's hoard shows up. We've got him now, so we don't need to be in a hurry. The stronger the case we can build up against him, the less work it is for us in the end."

III

QUINN came in pale and shaken. His wife could tell at a glance something had happened to him. It was more than just his feet troubling him again.

"Tom, what's wrong?" she said anxiously. "You look all white and disturbed! You haven't—you haven't lost your position, have you?" She caught him by the sleeve, stared up into his face.

"No, thank heaven," he said, but almost absently, as though whether he had or not didn't matter so much any more. He glanced behind him at the door through which he had just come in, as though fearful of having been followed. He stammered, "I—I been

like dazed since it happened. I can't believe it. It's like a dream, You hear and read about things like that happening, but I never thought it would happen to me."

He was fumbling agitatedly with his coat. He gave another of those looks behind him at the door. Then he brought something out of his inside pocket, tossed it down on the table before them for her to see.

She said, "What is it?" looking from him to it, and from it to him.

"You can see what it is," he answered shortly. It was black and oblong. It was a wallet. "Look inside it," he added almost fearfully.

She did. Then her own face paled a little, like his. They'd been so down and out for such a long time, they'd had to do without so many things for so many years now—"Tom!" she said.

"Two thousand and ten dollars," he said. "I counted it just now, on the stairs outside. I was afraid to count it—where I first found it, afraid somebody'd see me. All the way home I expected to feel someone's hand drop heavily on my shoulder, hear somebody say 'Give that back to me—it's mine!'" He wiped his sleeve across his damp brow, glanced apprehensively at the door again.

"But how—where—?"

"Sh!" he warned. "Talk lower. Somebody living in the house might hear you from outside. If they knew we had that much money in here—I was coming up the subway steps and—and you know how the ground's on a level with your eyes before you get all the way to the top. Maybe that's how I happened to see it. There were plenty of people walking past it, but they weren't looking down, I guess. They were so thick around it, maybe that's why none of them had a chance

to see it. The man in front of me, his foot kicked it a little way and he never even felt anything, never looked down to see what it was. I reached for it, took a quick peep, and I could tell right away there was more than fifty or a hundred in it. I looked around, and no one seemed to be looking for anything they'd dropped, so I slipped it in my pocket and I—"

She was examining it hurriedly. Not the money now, the wallet itself. "Nothing," she said. "Not a scrap of paper, not a card, not an initial, to show whom it belongs to!"

"No," he assented eagerly, "that's just the way it was when I picked it up. No marks of identification."

She gave him a peculiar searching look, as though asking herself if he were telling the truth or not; whether there really hadn't been any token of ownership to begin with, or whether he had purposely removed them, done away with them, to give himself an excuse for not returning it.

He was saying, raptly, "We can get all the things we're always wanted, now. Just think, Annie."

"But Tom, it belongs to *someone*. We can't just appropriate it. Oh, if it were a matter of twenty dollars or even fifty, all right, there wouldn't be so much harm to it. But not *this* amount of money, not two thousand dollars."

"Sh! Pipe down, I tell you," he warned, with another of those looks at the door. "D'you have to broadcast it?" Perhaps it was his conscience speaking and not he; the knowledge that he wasn't really entitled to the money.

She lowered her voice, but went on: "It may be some poor soul's life-savings, for all we know. It may be an emergency fund; it may mean the difference between life and death. *We*

don't know what it was for. We have no right to spend it. My conscience wouldn't let me."

"What should I have done?" he demanded indignantly. "Left it lying there—for the next one to pick up and appropriate, that has no more right to it than I have?"

"No, I don't say that," she conceded. "But about spending it—that's another matter entirely."

"How we going to notify the owner, even if we wanted to? There's no mark on it to show whom it belongs to."

She was handling the money now. "You can tell it's been scraped together over a period of years, wasn't just drawn out of a bank," she commented ruefully. "Some of them are those old-fashioned large-sized bills you don't see any more. He—or she—must have kept it by them all along, added to it little by little. That only makes it worse, don't you see, Tom? Some poor hard-working man or woman, alone in the world—illness or something. Maybe it was needed in a hurry, they came out with it on their person—and now where are they?"

"Ah, don't be so sloppy," he said crossly. "There's just as much chance it was some well-to-do no-good, who carries that much around for spending money and will never miss it."

"No," she said firmly. "Not in this kind of a wallet. Plain, cheap, turning green with age and it's not even real leather."

She had him there. He flared up unreasonably, at the ethical obstacles she was putting in the way of his enjoyment of it. Almost anyone would have resented it, probably. "So what do you want me to do with it? Go round to the police and turn it in? They're as big a bunch of grafters as anyone else. How do we know they

won't divide it up among themselves and pocket it?"

He didn't really think that, and she knew it. He was just saying it as an excuse. "That's really what you ought to do," she said mildly. But he could tell she wasn't going to insist, if he didn't want to. She was only human. She would have liked to have the use of the money just as much as he, only she had more scruples. "Then if no one showed up to claim it, after a certain length of time they'd turn it back to us. It would be rightfully ours."

"Well, I'm damned if I'm going to!" he said stubbornly. "I need a break once in a while as well as the next guy, and I'm going to give myself one!"

"Mark my words, Tom," she said sorrowfully, "we won't have any luck if we help ourselves to that money without at least giving the owner a chance to claim it. I'm funny that way. I have a feeling it'll bring us misery. Call it feminine intuition, if you want to."

Then, taking pity at the disappointment that showed plainly on his face, she suggested a compromise. Women are good at compromises. "All right, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll keep it here with us intact, say for a week. We'll watch the lost and found ads in the papers. If there's no mention made of its loss at the end of that time, we'll consider it ours to do with as we want."

His face brightened immediately at that. He was probably thinking there was not much danger of anyone who had lost currency, actual cash, on a crowded city street, being optimistic enough to advertise for its return. That would be just throwing good money after bad. If it had been jewelry or even negotiable securities, that would have been another matter. They wouldn't advertise for money.

"Okay," he agreed, "that's a bargain."

HE found a good hiding place for it—the cardboard box his Supporta Shoes had originally come in, full of tissue paper, down on the floor of the clothes closet. Who would look for anything valuable in an old shoe-box? His wife did not examine it a second time after he had once put it in; she had seen him put it in, wallet and all at the time. If she had looked later, she would have found the money there but the wallet strangely missing. The sole connecting link with its former ownership was gone. Tom Quinn was loading the dice in his own favor, or thought he was. But it's the gods who do the casting.

The next day, which was the earliest it could possibly have been advertised for, he brought home the evening paper with him as usual. But she could tell just by the sanguine look on his face that he'd already taken a peek at the lost and found section and—much to his relief—had failed to find the item. He'd probably been very much afraid he would.

Quinn's wife was a scrupulous woman, however. "All the papers, Tom," she insisted, "not just one"—and sent him out again to the corner newsstand.

He came back with a whole sheaf of papers tucked under his arm. It wasn't in any of them.

A law of increasing returns, so to speak, was working in their favor. If it wasn't published the first day after the loss, it was far less likely to show up the second day. And if it wasn't in by the second day, the chances of its being in the third day were almost non-existent. And so on. In other words, it would have been advertised

for almost immediately—or not at all.

It wasn't in the second day either. She made him scan all other parts of the papers as well, in search of a possible small filler or news item dealing with a report of its loss to the police. There wasn't that either.

Emboldened, mentally keeping his fingers crossed, he began to talk tentatively of the things they were going to get. "I haven't had a new suit in five years. I'd like to be able to stick things in my pocket without having them drop through to the ground."

She tried conscientiously to keep to the spirit of their bargain. "Now wait, don't count your chickens before they're hatched—just let's make sure first." But her heart wasn't in the job of squelching him.

It wasn't in the third day either. He was wearing down her resistance now. "There's that Fall coat you're needing, Annie; you could get one with a fur collar. We could get a radio, too."

She tried to keep the shine out of her eyes. "We could move out of this crummy place, to a better neighborhood—live like real people for a change." She went over to the window, parted the curtains, peered discontentedly down. "I'm so sick of the sight of that dingy street down there! Baby carriages. Fire escapes. Some loafer or other always standing in a doorway sizing you up every time you come and go. There's one across the way there who hasn't budged for hours."

He was too busy building air castles to pay attention to what she was saying.

It wasn't in the fourth day either. "There's no use waiting any more, Annie," he coaxed, when they got through examining the assorted newspapers on the table. "They don't ad-

vertise half a week after a thing is lost. They do it right away or not at all. We've played fair. We've waited. Come on, what do you say? Let's get started."

She gave in reluctantly, but she gave in. Her qualms weren't downed without an effort, but they were downed. "All right, Tom," she said slowly. "I guess they've given it up for lost by now, whoever they are. I still feel funny about it. I only hope it doesn't bring us misfortune. But all right—if you say so."

"Thatta girl!" he cried, and he slapped her delightedly on the shoulder, as he got up and went toward the closet, where the shoe-box was. Fortune's smile was a crooked one, just then.

THEY subtracted a tenth of the money, two hundred, and divided that evenly between them. Then they each went on a separate buying spree the next day, because Quinn had to work until five, couldn't get off any earlier. He got back to the flat after she did. She couldn't see him at first, just a pyramid of cardboard boxes coming in the door. Behind them, when he'd set them down, he was resplendent, in a complete new outfit from head to foot—or rather ankles. His shoes alone remained unchanged; they were too much like a medical prescription for there to be any kick in buying new ones. But everything else was brand new—hat, suit, shirt, tie, socks.

"I picked out a radio too, a beaut, made a down payment on it." He chuckled. "I unloaded all those old-style large bills on them everywhere I went, weeded them out. They're too bulky. I didn't want to be bothered with them."

She showed him her acquisitions. The goose hung high. "I treated my-

self to a permanent, went for the whole works. Oh, Tom, isn't it a wonderful feeling, to be able to spend what you please? The hair wave must have made me look good, all right. Some lizard or other followed me all the way home, right up to the very door. I couldn't shake him off. He didn't try to come up to me or anything; but I know I'm not mistaken."

He smiled tolerantly. Just like a woman; probably it was only her imagination.

"Oh—and most important of all! I found a new apartment, and paid a deposit on it. Way over across town. Elevator, steam heat and everything. The moving men are coming the first thing in the morning."

"Well, we haven't much time, in that case. Let's start packing, so we'll be ready for the van when it gets here."

They were very happy as they started to dismantle their old home. He was whistling, shirt sleeves rolled up, as he dropped things into a pair of old valises in the middle of the room. She was humming as she went around taking things out of drawers and cupboards.

There was a knock at the door. Sepulchral, knell-like. They both stopped, looked at each other. "The transfer company must have misunderstood me; I distinctly told them to come in the morning, not—" She went over and opened the door, and a man walked past her into the middle of the room. Then another man, then a third. They didn't have aprons, or sleeve guards, or truckmen's caps.

"You're Thomas J. Quinn, aren't you?" It wasn't a question.

Quinn nodded, whitened a little at the way it was said. He straightened, let the armful of things he had been holding slide down into the open valise.

"You're under arrest for murder!"

And the whole bottom seemed to fall out of the world, and leave the two of them suspended there.

BUT I don't even know *who*. How could I when I don't even know *who*?" Huddled there on a chair in the back room at dawn, he'd been saying that hopelessly, at intervals, all night long.

"You don't know *who*?" The inspector spoke quietly. They had too good a case, too perfect a case against him, to have to bother with a third degree. That almost always reacted in court, anyway; all a lawyer had to do was whisper "police brutality" to prejudice a jury in favor of a defendant. "Then why did you buy a copy of every single evening paper published in the city, three nights running, if not to follow the developments of the case? Find out when it was cool enough to spend the money that was burning a hole in your pocket."

"But I've told you what I wanted the papers for. I've told you how I came into possession of the money."

"You expect us to believe that? A twelve-year-old kid could think up a better alibi than that. Found it on the street, did you? Then why didn't you turn it over to us? Where's the wallet you say you found it in? Now you listen to me, Quinn. I've been on the police force thirty-five years. I've sent some beauties in for indictment. But I never yet in all that time—are you listening?—I never yet got hold of such an airtight unbeatable case as we've got on you. Yes, you can well get pale. I'm not saying it just to frighten you. Why, the very place the money was found is—is a kind of poetic justice. It went around in a circle. Your shoes betrayed you to us and when we traced them there was the money in the very

box they came in. Yes, you unloaded nearly every one of the large size bills, but you might as well have handed them direct to us. We've impounded every single one of them."

"My shoes," Quinn groaned. "You keep saying my shoes. All night long you keep saying my shoes." He closed his eyes and put his fists up beside them. "How could they go where I've never gone? How could they leave a print where I've never put my foot? I'm telling you again, gentlemen, like I told you at midnight when you dragged me to that awful place, like I'll tell you with my dying breath—I never *saw* that house before, I never set eyes on it before, I never walked there, I've never been within blocks of it."

The inspector said, almost compassionately: "Don't lie, Quinn. You can't get around those shoes of yours."

The suspect half rose from his chair, as if in intolerable rebellion. One of the detectives put out a hand, pressed him back again.

He kept shaking his head helplessly. "There's something about my shoes I gotta remember—and I can't! Something I gotta remember—and I don't know what it is! I can't think straight, there's so many of you around me, you've got me so scared and rattled. It's such a little bit of a thing, but if I could only remember—"

"I'll tell you something to remember about them!" said the inspector stonily. "Remember this about them: that they've walked you straight into the electric chair!" He swept the unsigned confession impatiently aside. "Take him out, boys. He's such a goner there's no reason why we even have to waste our time on him. Darrow himself couldn't get him off this."

Quinn lurched from the room, half

supported by two of the detectives. He was still mumbling dazedly, as the door closed after him, "Something I gotta remember—something I gotta remember—"

"Bring her in," said the inspector.

Bob White, who was taking part in the questioning, asked: "What are you going to do with her, hold her as an accessory?"

"I suppose we'll have to, the way she backs him up on every flimsy statement. I'll tell you frankly, though, I'd rather not if I could avoid it. If anything could weaken our case against him, it would be sending her up for trial along with him. You see, she's not the type. She's so honest and respectable to look at—oh, I know that don't mean a thing in one way, and yet in another it does. She'll draw sympathy, and automatically he'll get the benefit of some of it. If I could be sure she wasn't in on it, innocently swallowed the cock-and-bull story he told her about where the money came from, I'd take a chance and let her go, just concentrate on him."

White said, "I found a rosary among her belongings when I cased the flat. If you're a believer in psychology, I know a simple way to find out for sure whether she was in on it with him or not."

"I'll take a chance, What is it?"

"It's half past six now. Turn her loose, with a tail on her of course. I'll be able to tell you within half an hour, by seven whether she's involved or he did it without her knowledge."

"We'll give it a spin."

MRS. QUINN came in in custody of a police matron. She wasn't crying any more now. Her face was white and haggard with the horror of this unspeakable thing that had sud-

denly dropped out of the clouds on the two of them.

"Sit down, Mrs. Quinn," said the inspector, in a more considerate voice than he had used toward her husband.

She spoke first, without waiting for him. "Won't you believe me that he couldn't have, that he hasn't been out of the house at that hour for years—never since I can remember?" she said in a low pleading voice. "You say it happened at four in the morning. He's been asleep in the same room with me at that hour every night—not once, not once—"

"Just let me ask you one question, Mrs. Quinn," interrupted the inspector crisply. "Have you always, invariably, every night, been awake yourself at four in the morning?"

The answer was so muffled, those in the room could barely hear it. "Seldom—hardly ever." Her head drooped downward.

"Then how do you know he's always been in the room with you at that time? Let's pick a night at random. Let's pick the night of August fourth."

She raised a stricken face. She didn't have to answer. They could tell. She couldn't remember, couldn't differentiate that night; all their nights and all their days were so much alike, it was blurred. It was gone beyond hope of recapture, with nothing to distinguish it by, to get a grip on it by, to separate it from the rest.

"You can go home, Mrs. Quinn," said the inspector abruptly. One of his men had to open the door to get her to move, she was so dazed. As she went out the inspector raised his thumb out of his clasped hands, at Bob White.

White called back in a quarter of an hour. "She's out of it, inspector. You can rely on that"

"How do you know?"

"She went straight from the precinct house to seven o'clock mass, to pray for him in his trouble. She's in the church right now. Not even the most hardened criminal would have nerve enough to do that, if there was any guilt on his own conscience. I had her typed right."

"Good," said the inspector. "Then the release becomes bona fide. Come on in again. I'm glad she's out of it. She won't blur the issue now. He hasn't got a Chinaman's chance."

IV

QUINN was booked at eleven that same morning and bound over for the grand jury. It sat immediately after Labor Day, that is to say, within a month of the time the murder had been committed. The footprint mold, the actual shoes, the testimony of the clerk who had sold them to Quinn; that of Wontner's grocer as to the kind of bills he had always received in payment from the old man, that of the clothing and radio salesmen and the renting agent as to the kind they had received from Quinn within a week of the murder, were more than it needed. It was a circumstantial case without a peer. He was indicted for murder in the first degree and trial was set for the following month, October.

When it came up on the calendar, the lawyer appointed by the court to defend him told him openly, in his cell: "I have taken this case at the court's order, but I cannot save you, Quinn. Do you know what can save you, what the only thing is? You have one chance in a thousand, and this is it: *If* you are telling me the truth—and bear in mind that *if*—and actually found that wallet where you say you did, just outside the exit kiosk of the Brandon Avenue subway station, at or around six P.M.

on August 5th, there is a slim chance, a ghost of a chance and no more, that the person who lost it will recognize the circumstances through the publicity it will receive at the trial, and step forward at the last minute to corroborate you. Even if he does, that is by no means sure-fire, you understand, but it is the only ray there is for you. I am going to pound and hammer and dwell on the time and place of your finding it every time I open my mouth, throughout the trial, but it's still a thousand to one shot. The person may be far away by now, where local news (and this trial of yours is after all not big-time) won't carry. He may have died in the meantime. He may not have been in lawful possession of the money himself at the time, and hence may be afraid to step forward and identify it."

He looked narrowly at the indicted man, lidded his eyes suggestively. "*He may never have existed* at all. You're the loser, if he didn't. If there ever was a wallet and you destroyed it as you say you did, that more than anything else sealed your doom."

"I tell you I did! I was obsessed with the idea of keeping the money for myself, wanted to make it as difficult for it to be successfully identified as I could. I cut the wallet up into little pieces with a razor blade, without my wife's knowledge, and next day when I went to work I threw the pieces into successive waste-receptacles I passed on the street, a few at a time. I thought I was smart, I thought I was clever!"

Irony. He had once been afraid the rightful owner would put into appearance, and he would lose the money. Now he was afraid that he wouldn't, and he would lose his life.

Crouched there on the cell bunk, he lowered his head resignedly. "I used to think, in the beginning, the first few

days after I was arrested, that there something I could tell them about my shoes that would have cleared me, or given me a fighting chance at least. Gee what torture it was, trying to think what it could be, never able to! I nearly went crazy, racking my brains. Now I know better. I don't try for it any more. It wouldn't come to me at this late day if it didn't then. I guess I was mistaken."

"I guess," said the lawyer dryly, "you were."

"**W**AS the defendant—that's that man sitting there—a regular customer of yours at the corner where you keep your shoe-shine box, Freddy?"

"Him? Naw! He lived right down the block. He passed me twice a day coming and going, and he never got a shine for years. You coulda wrote your name on his kicks, the dust was always so thick. I gave up paging him long ago. Then one day in August he comes up to me of his own accord for a work-out. I nearly keeled over." (Laughter.)

"Can you tell the court anything in particular about that shine, Freddy?"

"I can tell 'em he needed it." (Laughter.) "It was so long since he had one last he thought the price was a nickel, didn't even know we organized and went up to a dime." (Laughter.)

"Anything else, Freddy? Can you remember anything about his shoes, outside of the fact they needed polishing badly?"

"They had steel beams underneath 'em. One of 'em was so ganged up with dry mud or clay, not on top, but underneath, that it kept dropping off and getting in my way, so finally I took me a knife and scraped it clean for him."

"Your witness."

"No questions."

"Exactly where did you find this wallet, Mr. Quinn?"

"Just outside the street exit of the Brandon Avenue subway station, the uptown side."

"What date?"

"Wednesday, August fifth."

Remark from the bench: "The defendant and his counsel needn't shout so. They're perfectly audible all over the room."

"What time of day was it?"

"Around six in the evening."

"Take the witness."

"Just two questions, Quinn. A subway station at six in the evening, you say. Was there a very large crowd around you or was there not?"

"There was a—pretty large crowd around me."

"What is this I am holding in the palm of my hand, Quinn?"

"I can't tell. You're standing too far away."

"I shouldn't be, for anyone with normal eyesight. Is your sight defective or isn't it? Answer my question!"

"I'm—nearsighted."

"And yet you and you alone, out of all those people coming up the subway stairs, the majority of whom must have had unimpaired eyesight—you and you alone were the one to see this wallet. The State rests its case."

"**W**ELL, we didn't get a nibble," the lawyer said bitterly to Quinn in his cell, while the jury was out. "Every day since the trial first started, at least once a day, I made a point of emphasizing where and when you found that wallet, how much was in it, what it looked like. No one, not even a fake popped up, hoping to get his hands on the money. That would

have been something, created a certain effect of probability for us at least. Now it's too late. It's over. He won't step forward now any more. Because he never existed anyway, except in your own imagination. If I wanted to explain how I got hold of a certain sum of money, I would have been more clever about it."

Quinn said dismally, "But the truth is never clever. This was the truth."

"Here he comes to bring you back again. They must have agreed already. *Twelve and a half* minutes, by my watch! I don't have to go in there with you. I can tell you what it's going to be right now before I even hear it, when they're out such a short time."

"I'm like a dreamer dreaming a dream," Quinn said as the court attendant unlocked the cell gate, "and I never seem to wake up."

* * *

"We have, your honor. We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree."

* * *

"I sentence you to death in the electric chair, in the week beginning December 26th, said sentence to be carried out by the warden of the State Prison at—"

"My shoes! I gotta remember something about my shoes! Oh, *somebody* help me, help me to remember! I don't want to die!"

BOB WHITE, homeward bound on Christmas Eve, the collar of his ulster turned up around his stinging ears, met a cop he knew by sight, hustling a seedy-looking individual with silvery stubble on his face along in custody. The prisoner was not guilty of an important infraction. White could tell that by the willingness the arresting officer showed to linger and exchange

a word or two with him, cold as it was. Their breaths were white nebulae floating from their mouths.

"This is a hell of a night to be running anyone in," White kidded. "What's he done?"

"It's that old Wontner place, down near the river, on my beat. Him and every other vag for miles around have been pulling it apart for weeks, carting it away piece by piece for firewood. Every time we board it up they bust in all over again and carry off some more of it. They been warned time and again to stay away from there, and now we're cracking down. I've got strict orders from my captain to bring any of 'em in I catch doing it from now on."

"That place still standing?" said White in surprise. "I thought it was pulled down long ago. I was on that case. The guy gets the jolt sometime right this week, I think."

The old stumblebum, stamping his feet fretfully on the frosty ground, whined: "Aw hurry up and take me to the lock-up where it's warm!" He delivered an impatient kick at the cop's ankle to spur him on.

The latter jolted, lifted him nearly clear of the ground by the scruff of the neck, shook him wrathfully like a terrier. "Warm, is it, eh? I'll make it warm for ye, I will!" He complained to White: "It's all week long I've been going this. There'll be another one at it by the time I get back."

"I'll go down there keep an eye on it for you till you get back," the detective offered. "May as well. I got nothing to go home for on Christmas Eve anyway. Just four walls and a hatrack."

"The pleasure's all yours," said the cop. He and his wriggling prisoner went zigzagging up the street one way, White turned down the other toward

the bleak wintery waterfront, wondering what impulse was making him go near such a place on such a night of all nights. He'd heard of murderers revisiting the scene of their crimes, but never detectives.

It was a cavernous maw of inky blackness between the enshrouding warehouse-walls. His torch scarred the frozen ground before him as he sauntered idly up to it. He shifted the light upward against the face of the building itself when he got in close enough. It had looked bad enough that day last August when they came here to find Wontner's murdered body, but it had been a mansion then compared to the shape it was in now. He could understand the cop's exhausted patience with the neighborhood vandals. The porch shed and porch flooring before the door had disappeared in their entirety. There wasn't a pane of glass left in the windows. The door was gone too, and so were the window frames and casings. Even the very boards that the police had nailed across the apertures had been ripped out again.

He went around to the back, through that passageway where he had found the damning footprint. It was worse, if anything, back there; the vandals had been able to work with less danger of discovery from the street.

In the dead silence, while he stood there gazing ruefully at the ruin, he heard a scuttling sound somewhere inside. Rats, probably, alarmed by the penetrating rays of his torch through the fissures of the loosened clapboards. Something fell heavily, with a tinny thud, rolled restlessly, finally quieted again.

Rats undoubtedly, but he was just policeman enough to decide to go in and take a look, for the luck of it. He hadn't intended to until now, taking

it for granted Donlan, whose beat it was on, had everything under control.

He made his entrance through the gaping back door, picked clean of every impediment; he advanced weaving his torch slowly downward before him, not through caution so much as to make sure of his footing. It was a highly necessary precaution. In the room where they had found Wontner, whole sections of the flooring had been pulled up bodily, laying bare the skeletal cross-beams underneath. You could look right down through them, in places, to some kind of a sub-cellar or basement. The sound came again, from down there. *Whisk! whisk!* And then a clinking, like chains. More of that loose rolling.

He advanced a cautious step or two out along one of the denuded cross-beams, like a tight-rope walker; aimed his torch downward through the interstices. There was a flurry of agitated scampering beneath. Sure, rats. The place was alive with them, crawling with them. It was a menace to the vicinity. The Board of Health should have done something about pulling the wreck down. Red tape, he supposed. But if kids ever got in here in the daytime and started playing around—

A gray torpedo-shaped object scurried by underneath, plainly visible in the attenuated pool of light cast by his torch. A second one followed, hesitated midway, turned back again. His gorge rose involuntarily.

He did something wrong. Maybe the slight motion of his head, following their movements down there, was enough to throw him off balance. Maybe the rotted plank had just been waiting for the excuse to crumble. There was a bang, a sickening sagging, and he shot forward and down, legs out before him, like a kid riding a bannister

rail. A lot of dust and junk came down around him.

It wasn't much of a fall, six feet at the most. And the place underneath wasn't bricked or cemented, just hard-packed earth; more like a shallow dug-out or trough than an actual cellar. Perhaps excavated by hand by Wontner over a period of years, the soil carted away a little at a time. He was lucky. His torch, spun into a loop by the fall, came down after him, miraculously failed to go out. It rocked there a few feet away, casting a foreshortened eye of light. He quickly snatched it up again, got to his feet. It lessened the grisliness of the situation a little. The redoubled rustling all around him, the imagined feel of loathsome squirming bodies directly under him. He let out a yell; anyone would have. Stood there sweeping the light all around him in a circle, to keep them back.

Their frightened darts in and out of the radius of his light seemed like vicious sorties and retreats. He expected to be attacked at any minute, and knew if one did, all would follow. The shadows were lousy with them all around him. There was that clinking again, and something cylindrical rolled against his foot. He jumped spasmodically, whipped his torch-beam down at it. It was only a can, dislodged by one of the rodents in its scampering.

He snatched it up to use as a missile, poised it in his right hand, sighted the torch in his left. It caught one out midway across the earthen floor. He let fly with an involuntary huff of repulsion. The can struck it squarely, stunned it. He grabbed up a second can—the place was strewn with them—and sent that at it to finish it off. Instead the can struck the first one and split open. The top shot up, as though

it had been crudely soldered by hand under the paper label. The rat, recovering, side-wound off again with a broken back or something.

White forgot it and the rest of the rats, forgot where he was, forgot to shout up for help. He just stood there staring at what lay revealed within the pool of light. Not shriveled, spoiled food but a tightly-rolled bone-shaped wad of money was peering from the burst can.

What attracted Donlan, the cop, inside from the street sometime later was the sound White was making shattering can after can down there with a large rock.

"It's me," White said, when the second torch peered down on him through the shattered floor-beams. "I fell through. Watch your own step up there."

Donlan said, "Watcha got?"

"I've got ninety-two thousand dollars—so far—out of old tin cans down here, and there's still more to go. Gimme a hand up, quick! Don't you see, that guy couldn't have done it after all. Because *this* is the hoard, down here, still intact—not that two thousand we nabbed him with!"

"NOT at all," contradicted the inspector flatly in his office when they'd returned there with the one hundred and fifteen thousand that had come to light. "It proves he didn't get Wontner's hoard, and that's all it does prove. It doesn't prove he didn't commit the murder, not by a damn sight! We missed this cache ourselves, didn't we? And we had whole days to turn it up in. He only had a few hours, from four until daylight. It took the vandals depredations and an accidental fall on your part to lay this sub-cellar bare. There are any number of ways

of getting around it. He may have been frightened away before he had time to search the premises thoroughly. Or he may have searched thoroughly and still failed to find it. Or he may have been contented with the two thousand he found out in the open, been misled into thinking that was all the old bird had, and not troubled to search any further."

He smoothed the large old-fashioned bills into some semblance of symmetry. "This still don't get around that shoe-print, White, or that sudden burst of extravagance within a week after Wontner's death. You're overlooking a few things. Quite a few."

"Sorry," White said stubbornly, "I'm sold on it that we've sent the wrong man up for it. You mean you're going to let him go to his death Thursday night, after this has come to light?"

"I'm most certainly notifying the District Attorney's office at once of what we've found. It's in their hands, not mine. I'm just a police officer. But I know how these things work. This'll never get him a new trial, if that's what you think. This isn't new evidence, not by any manner of means. This is only evidence that he didn't get what he was after. I doubt they'll even grant him a postponement of execution on it."

White flared hotly, "Then it's going to be the worst case of a miscarriage of justice in years! It's going to be legal murder, that's what! You can't see the forest for the trees, all of you! Footprints, a few old-fashioned bills, a shoe-shine; where does any of that stack up against this? He was sent up on a circumstantial case entirely, and nothing else but. It was a good case, I'm not saying it wasn't. But this, what we've found here, was supposed to be

the whole mainspring of it. Where is the case now? It hasn't got a foundation. It's just a lot of disconnected little coincidences floating around in the air!"

"Then if you feel that way about it," said the inspector coldly, "and I must say that I don't agree with you, apart from the fact that it's none of your business any longer—"

"It's certainly my business!" shouted the detective. "I don't want that man's blood on my conscience. I helped put him where he is, and it's up to me to do all in my power to get him out of where he is. And if you're all too short-sighted to feel the way I do about it, then it's up to me to go it alone."

They were definitely hostile, thought he was showing off.

"It's the Christmas spirit," somebody murmured. "He's trying to play Santa Claus."

"Go right ahead. Nobody's stopping you," assented the inspector ironically. "If you feel Quinn's the wrong man, bring me in the right one. That's all you've got to do. That's all that can save him, I'm telling now. My desk telephone's here at your disposal anytime you're ready. I'll get in touch with the D.A.'s office at a minute's notice for you, any time you bring me in the right man. They'll phone the governor and get Quinn a stay of execution; they're not any more anxious to send the wrong party to his death than you are or I am." But the mocking tone in which it was said showed that he didn't expect anything to come of it. "Quite a large order, I'd say," he went on, giving one of the others the wink. "He's due to light up on Thursday night, you know, and this is one o'clock Tuesday morning. D'you think you can do all that inside of three days? And you better make sure it's

the right man, White. Don't make a fool out of yourself."

Bob White grabbed up his hat, pulled the door open. "There's nothing like trying," he said grimly.

Somebody jeered softly, "Bob White, wotcha gonna sing tonight?" as the door closed after him. They all had a good hearty laugh over it, in which the inspector joined. Then they promptly forgot him.

V

A LIGHT-SWITCH clicked on the other side of the door after he'd been knocking for some time. Quinn's wife opened it, a scarecrow in a wrapper, past all fear, alarm, hope, any sensation now.

"Didn't think you'd still be living here," he said. "Glad I found you."

She said expressionlessly, "Did it happen already? Is that what you came to tell me? I thought it wasn't until Thursday night." But only her lips did the talking. Nothing could reach her any more. The change that had taken place in her since he'd last seen her at the trial threw a wrench into him, though he wasn't particularly soft-boiled, his squad-mates to the contrary. Her hair was tinged with gray now, her face had set in lines of permanent despair.

"I know it's late. Sorry to get you up at this hour."

"I don't sleep any more," she said. "I sit by the window in the dark, these nights, all night long."

"Can I come in and talk to you?"

She opened the door wider and motioned him in dully, but all she said was, "What about?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "It's about your husband, of course; but I mean, I don't know what there is to talk about any more. I left my pre-

cinct house in a huff just now, stopped by here on an impulse."

She just sat there looking at him, hands folded resignedly in her lap.

"You don't believe he did it, do you?" he blurted finally. "Well, I've come here to tell you that—I don't, now, myself."

He waited for some sign. No surprise, no interest, no hope.

"We found one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars in that house tonight. The whole thing looks different now. To me it does, anyway." He waited again. "Isn't there some little thing you can tell me? Something you didn't tell them? Don't mistrust me. I'm on your side now." He lowered his shoulders, brought his face down to the level of hers. "Don't sit there looking like that! There isn't much time. Don't you realize it means your husband's life?" And then, baffled by the continued stoniness of her expression, he cried almost in alarm: "You don't think he did it, do you?"

"I didn't in the beginning, I didn't for a long time," she said hollowly. "Now I—"

"His own wife!" he muttered, appalled. "You mean you do now?"

"No, I only mean I'm not sure any more. I don't know any more. You, the police, and the public, and the whole world, said he did. They *proved* he did. I guess they ended up by—nearly proving it to me too. They planted doubts in my own mind, by the time they were through."

He gripped her anxiously by her bony shoulders. "But he never *said* he did it, did he? He never told you he did it?"

"No, the last thing he said to me, when they took him away, was that he was innocent, that he didn't do it."

"Then we can still save him! You've

got to help me. That's why I came in here tonight. You were living with him, in the days and weeks and years before it happened. I wasn't. There must be something, some little thing, that you and you alone can dig up that'll turn the trick. Try, please try. Look: there are two things blocking us. One is that footprint. The other is the wallet of money he found. The footprint is the important thing. The other's nothing, won't stand against him by itself. They can't prove he took that money from Wontner. They can prove his shoe made that print outside Wontner's house. They have already. Beyond a shadow of a doubt. I worked on that angle of it myself. The Supporta Company was able to convince me, by showing me its records, that no other pair of shoes but the ones they sold your husband could have made that print. There was no possibility of duplication. They use an individual last for each one of their special customers with defective feet, individual mechanical appliances in the arch. No two cases alike. It looks pretty insurmountable. And yet we can level it down. We've got to. Now first, what did he do with his old ones, what did he do with them each time when they were worn out and he was ready to discard them?"

"Just kept them. Couldn't bear to part with them on account of how expensive they were originally. I can show you every pair he ever owned, since he first started wearing those kind of shoes." She led him into the back room, opened a closet door, showed him three pairs of shoes in varying stages of deterioration. Their soles, as he picked them up one by one and examined them, were worn paper-thin. One had a hole in it the size of a dime, one the size of a quarter, one the size of a half dollar.

"None of these made that print," he said. "It distinctly showed an intact, unbroken sole in perfect condition, heel scarcely run down at all. And the testimony of that bootblack proved it was that current pair that had the clay on its bottoms, anyway; I'd forgotten that." He let his hand roam helplessly through his hair. "It looks like we're up against it. I'd been playing around with the possibility, vague as it was, on my way over here, that one of his old, discarded pairs had passed into the possession of somebody else; been thrown out, let's say, and picked up by some prowler or derelict, worn around the vicinity of Wontner's house. But since they're all accounted for here in the closet, that won't hold water. Can you recall his current pair, his new pair, passing out of his possession at any time, between the time he bought them and the time of the murder? Did he send them out to be repaired at all?"

"No," she said despondently, "they didn't need it. They were only a couple months old, in fairly good condition."

He shoved the closet door closed disgustedly, strolled back to the front room. "I'm in for it. I want to get some sleep at night for the next ten years, and I won't if he—"

HE PUT his hand on the doorknob, ready to go, stood there motionless with his head lowered. "I don't change my mind easily, but when I do it stays changed. I'm convinced he didn't commit that murder, Mrs. Quinn. But I've got to have more than my own conviction to go by. I don't know what to do."

She just sat there, apathetic. Emotionally dead, if not physically. A widow already, though her husband was still alive in the Death House.

In the two o'clock silence of the

world around them, a sound filtered in from somewhere outside, from the back of the house. A faint wail, eerie, lonely, dismal.

"What's that?" he asked absently, hand still on doorknob.

"Cats, cats on the back fence," she murmured tonelessly.

He shrugged hopelessly, opened the door. "No good hanging around," he muttered. "This isn't getting me anywhere." He went out into the hall, said to her over his shoulder as he pulled the door to after him, "You can reach me at the precinct house, Mrs. Quinn, if you remember anything you want to tell me. White's the name."

She just nodded lifelessly, fixing her dead eyes on him, sitting there huddled within the lighted room like some kind of a mummy, that had power of understanding and nothing much else.

He closed the door and went slowly down the outside stairs, a step at a time, flexing his knees stiffly like an automaton, chin down. Some of the flat doors on the lower floors had cheap Christmas wreaths on them already, for tomorrow.

It had been so easy to put Quinn where he was now. It was so hard to get him out again, once there. But he couldn't let him die. His own peace of mind was too valuable to him. He couldn't let him die—and yet how could he prevent it?

He passed through the vestibule into the icy cold of the deserted street, turned his coat collar up against it, spaded his hands deep into his pockets, trudged dejectedly up the street toward the corner. As he turned it, he thought he heard a drunken woman calling out shrilly from the upper story of one of the tenements behind him, but a taxi flitted by just then along the lateral avenue carrying Christmas Eve rev-

elers, and drowned the sound out. He went obliviously on his way.

It was too cold a night to walk far, or wait for a train on an underground platform. He decided to take a taxi, himself, back to his room. He spotted one on the other side of the avenue, hailed it, and it executed a U-turn, came coasting around beside him. He got in, closed the door, gave the driver his address. The latter hesitated, hand on gear shift, asked knowingly via the rear sight mirror: "Want to lose her, boss, or is it all right to wait a minute?"

The cab-door pulled open again and Tom Quinn's wife stood reeling there outside of it, still in the inadequate wrapper she'd worn in the flat just now, head bared to the bitter night air, naked feet to the frozen ground. A pennant of steam trailed from her lips, but she couldn't articulate.

He thought she'd suddenly gone out of her mind. He lunged at her, hauled her bodily into the heated cab, shed his ulster and wrapped it protectively around her. He expected violence, a struggle, but she just sat there panting.

"Back around the corner quick, number 324," he told the driver.

"What's the matter with you, trying for pneumonia?" he barked at her.

She said, still in that flat, dead voice, but with her chest rising and falling from the run after him, "It isn't anything, I guess, is it? I remembered now, though, hearing them. I've heard them many times since, but it came back to me only now, because you asked me what it was, I guess."

Delirium, he thought. "What what was?" he asked her.

"The cats. The cats on the fence. He threw them at them one night. His shoes. Just before it happened, sometime around that time. It isn't anything, though, is it? It won't help you any,

will it?" But he could detect a note of pleading in this last. She was thawing a little, not from this outer immediate cold, but from the numbness of soul that had gripped her all these weeks.

"Threw them both?"

"First one and then the other."

"How soon did he get them back again?"

"He went down right away, but he didn't get them back that night at all. He said he couldn't find them. I came upon them next day at noon, outside our door, wrapped up in newspaper."

He jolted. But it wasn't because the taxi had stopped. It was still only coasting to a stop just then. "Allah's good—even to a poor detective," he murmured fervently. Then he turned on her almost savagely. "And you didn't mention this till now! What's the matter with you? Did you *want* your husband out of the way? Was he *anxious* to die?"

"I never remembered it until tonight. It was such a little thing. I didn't think it was anything."

HE HUSTLED her across the sidewalk under his ulster. They plunged into the building again, went jogging up the stairs. "Anything? It's the whole thing! It's the whole mechanics of the case! The rest is just pedestrian. A rookie could go on from there." He dived in ahead of her, plunged through to the back room. "Which window was it? This one? Down a jolt of whiskey, so you don't get a chill. Then come in here and help me with this."

They were still serenading down there on the dividing fence. She followed him in a moment, coughing slightly, brushing her hand across her mouth.

"You see what I'm driving at, don't

you?" he said curtly. "Somebody else had them between the time Quinn pitched them out of here and the time you found them at your door next day. That somebody, *while he had them on*, went and killed old man Wontner in them. Then, frightened, sensing that they might betray him in some way, saw to it that they got back to you people anonymously. Or maybe not. Maybe the whole thing was deliberate, a vicious and successful attempt to direct suspicion toward the wrong man, and thus win complete immunity for himself.

"It must have been the same night that the murder took place, he threw them out. I don't care whether you can remember it or not, it *must* have been that night. There's no other possibility. That cat-bearing fence down there is not more than six or seven feet above the ground. If he didn't find them in either yard when he went down to look, it's obvious what became of them. This was August, windows wide open top and bottom. They went in one of those two ground-floor flats in the house directly across the way. No matter how sore he was, no matter how lousy his aim was, they couldn't have gone in any higher than that—he would have had to throw them straight out instead of down.

"All right. Somebody in one of those two back rooms had been thinking the Wontner thing over for a long time past, was all primed for it, was only being held back by fear of the consequences. The shoes, dropping into his room like something from heaven, spurred him on. Gloves or a handkerchief would do away with fingerprints, and with a peculiarly constructed pair of shoes like this to direct suspicion elsewhere—what more did he need? He must have watched your husband look-

ing for them out there. When he didn't come around and ring the front doorbell asking for them, when this man saw your flat-light go out and knew you'd given them up for lost—for that night anyway—he put them on and carried out his long-deferred scheme. I'm sure now that so-perfect footprint wasn't accidental, was purposely made, left there for us to find and draw the wrong conclusion from. To return the shoes to your door, unseen, next day involved a certain amount of risk, but not much." He made a delighted pass at his own chin. "That takes care of the footprint. The money in the wallet will take care of itself. But never mind all that now. I'm wasting time up here. I don't need you any more. You nearly waited until it was too late, but you came through beautifully."

She tottered after him to the door. "But isn't it too late? It's—it's over four months ago now. Isn't he—won't he be gone long ago?"

"Sure he's gone long ago," White called back from the stair-well as he spun around down, "but he can't go any place I can't go after him! Start dusting up your flat. Mrs. Quinn, your husband'll be back in a few weeks."

He routed out the janitor of the building behind the Quinns' first of all, quelled his growls with a whiff of his badge. "Now never mind your beefs. How long the people in 1-A been living in the building?"

"The McGees? Two years next April."

"And 1-B, on the other side of the hall?"

"That's Mrs. Alvin. She's been living in the house five years."

He took the flat to the left of the Quinn window first. Both ran all the way through from the street to the rear. He kept his thumb on the bell.

"Headquarters. You McGee, are you?"

A man of about fifty, in long underwear under a bathrobe, admitted—with evident nervousness—that he was. His wife hovered in the background, equally nervous. Somewhere behind them a kid's voice piped: "Is it Sandy Claus, Mom, is it huh?"

Sandy Claus asked crisply, "Who sleeps in your back room?"

"Me three kids," said McGee. Less nervousness now, the detective noticed. He went back just the same and took a look for himself. They had three beds in there. There was a girl of about thirteen in one, two younger girls in the other.

"They always slept back here?"

"Ever since we moved in. What's up, mister?"

Instead of answering, White glanced down at the floor. He said, "What size shoe d'you wear?" Watched his face closely. McGee looked innocently startled at the question, but not guiltily startled. He was evidently one of those men that don't know their own sizes.

"Twelve," answered his wife unhesitatingly.

That, by the looks of them, was putting it mild. They were out of it, for all practical purposes. He just asked one more question, for luck.

"Ever have any relatives or friends—men friends—stop with you here in the flat, say, last summer?"

"Naw, they ain't room. Where would the kids go?"

"G'night," said White abruptly.

A LADY of ripe vintage opened the door across the hall after a lengthy interval. She gave him the usual apprehensive reaction. "Don't get alarmed. Just want to talk to you. Who occupies your back room?"

"Why, I rent that out to roomers."

"This is it," he said to himself. "I'm coming in," he said, and did so. "Who's got it now?"

"Why, a very respectable young lady, a librarian. She—"

"How long's she had it?"

"Since about Labor Day."

"Early in September, eh? You may as well sit down and quit shaking. This is going to take quite some time. I want to know who had it before this very respectable young lady."

"A young man, a— a Mr. Kosloff."

"Mr. Kosloff, eh?" He got out his notebook. "About when did he give it up?"

It wouldn't come to her. "Two or three weeks before—"

"You've got to do better than that, Mrs. Alvin. I want the exact date. That man's under suspicion of murder. So it's important."

She gasped, fluttered, floundered. "Oh, you must be mis— He was such a quiet, nice young man."

"You can always count on 'em being that way at home. Now how about it? Don't you keep any records?"

"I—I can tell by my bank book, I think." She went inside, fumbled around endlessly, came out again with a dog-eared passbook. "I get ten dollars for the back room, and I make a point of depositing each room rent as soon as I get it. Now, the last entry here, before she came, is July 30th. They pay in advance, of course. I'm very strict about that. That means he stayed on until the fifth of August."

White narrowed his eyes joyfully at her. Wontner had been killed during the night of the fourth-to-fifth. "You're doing swell, Mrs. Alvin. Now just think back carefully. Did he let you know a day or two ahead that he was leaving, or did he walk out on you un-

expectedly? This is important. See if you can remember."

She concentrated, struggled, recaptured. "He just up and marched out at a minute's notice. I remember now. I was put out about it. I wasn't able to sell that room all the rest of the month."

He'd found out all he needed to know. He got down to business, pencil to notebook. "What'd he look like?"

"About twenty-eight or thirty, light-haired, around your height but a little slimmer."

"Eyes?"

"Er—blue."

"Was he working while he stayed here with you?"

"No, but he kept trying. He just couldn't seem to locate—"

"Did he say where he was going, leave any forwarding address?"

"Not a word." That would have been too much to hope for, anyway. "As a matter of fact, a letter came for him the very next day after he left, and I kept it here for a long time, in case he should ever call around for it, but he never did."

He nearly jumped into her lap. "Where is it? Y'still got it?"

"It was stuck in the mirror of the sideboard for months. Finally I threw it out."

He felt like grabbing her and shaking her till her store teeth fell out. "Where was it from? What was the postmark on it?"

"Well, the idea!" she said haughtily.

"Come on, you're a landlady. Don't try to kid me."

She looked slightly furtive, so he knew he'd hit the nail on the head. "Well, er—can't a body get in trouble for opening other people's mail?"

"No," he lied flagrantly. "Not if it's left unclaimed for over thirty days."

She brightened immediately. "Well, I didn't like to mention it, but I wanted to see if it was—er, important enough to keep any longer, so I steamed it open. It was just a trashy letter from some girl in—now let me see, Pitts—Pitts—"

"Pittsburgh?"

"No, Pittsfield."

"What was in it?" But he was on his feet already, heading for the door.

"Oh, she said she was glad to hear how well he was doing in the city."

But he hadn't had a job at all, according to his landlady. That explained the motive for the murder. To live up to the glowing reports he'd sent back to his home town. White knew where he'd find him now. Massachusetts. He could get up there by noon today, Christmas Day. A hell of a day. But it was being a hell of a day for poor Quinn in the Death House too, his next to the last day on earth. A hell of a way to spend Christmas.

Mrs. Alvin faded out behind him, standing open-mouthed in the doorway of her flat. She'd have something to talk about now for the rest of the winter.

"Grand Central," he told the taxi driver.

VI

CHRISTMAS Night, on the outskirts of Pittsfield, was all it should have been, diamond clear, with stars bright in the sky and new-fallen snow white on the ground. Which still made it a hell of a night to do what he'd come up here to do. The little house he was watching looked inviting, with a warm rosy glow peering through its windows and a wreath in each one. A girl's head had been outlined against them more than once, on the lookout for somebody. Well, there was some-

one else around on the lookout for somebody too.

The roadster drove up at 6:30, just in time for Christmas dinner. It was a seven hundred dollar job. The man who got out was well-dressed, and he had something white, like a box of candy, under his arm. He turned in the gate and walked up the path to the door of the house. He reached out his hand to the knocker wreathed with holly. Light falling through a fanlight above showed him to be about 30, light-haired, six feet. He wasn't handsome, but he didn't look vicious. You could understand a girl asking him to Christmas dinner at her house.

He never made the knocker. He heard the snow crunch softly behind him, and the other man was standing there.

He said with a smile, "Were you invited too?"

"No," White said. "I wasn't invited." He took him by the elbow. "Let's go back to your car," he said. "Let's get away from the house here before she looks out again and sees you."

"But I've got a dinner date."

"No, Kosloff," the detective said, tightening his grip on the arm, "you've got a date down in the city, for the murder of Otto Wontner."

He held him up for a minute, till the danger of his falling was past. They turned around and went back toward the car, through the blue-white snow.

Kosloff didn't say very much until they were sitting in the railroad station waiting for the next train out. Stunned, maybe. Finally he turned around and said to the detective, "Don't wreck my life, will you? I was going to ask that girl to marry me tonight. I've got a diamond ring in my pocket right now I was taking to her."

"I know," said White somberly. "You paid five hundred and fifteen dollars for it. I watched you pick it out through the jewelry-store window. Where did all that money come from, Kosloff, you been spending since you got back here last August? You didn't have a nickel down in the city, living at Mrs. Alvin's."

"My mother died right after I got back. She left it to me."

"Yes, she did die. But not till *after* you got back. But you already had it when you stepped off the train. You made a big splash, bought all kinds of presents before you went out to her house, were dressed fit to kill."

"Yes, but I did that on my last few bucks, I tell you! It was all a bluff. I knew she was going, I wanted to make her think I was a big success before she passed on. I couldn't let her go thinking I was broke, a failure. And the hicks around here, they swallowed it."

"And what about now? I've looked up the records. She turned over to you exactly five hundred dollars. Why, that car of yours alone—"

"Yes, five hundred was all she had banked. But she was old-fashioned, didn't trust banks. I came into thousands in cash, she had hidden in an old wall-safe in the house with her."

The detective said, "Can you prove that?"

"No," his prisoner answered. "She didn't take anyone into her confidence but me. Can *you* prove that I got it from this man you think I killed?"

They just looked at each other. A train whistle blew out along the tracks.

"Are you going to do this to me?"

White turned his head aside. He thought, for the first and last time in his career. "What a lousy business I'm in!"

"Then God forgive you," Kosloff said.

White said, "Go over to the phone and call your girl. Just tell her you've been called back to town on business, can't make it tonight."

THEY were the first customers Campana had when he opened up his grocery store for business early on the morning of the 26th.

"Did you ever see this man before? Look good at him. Take off your hat, Kosloff."

"I think I do." Wontner's former grocer walked all around him, studying his features. "Sure, sure. Lasta summ'. Heessa live near here, no?"

"Was he ever in here when the old man was around, buying his monthly supply?"

"Sure, sure. He laugh at old man onea time. I say to him, 'You shoulda have all his mon', then you can laugh.' He aska quest', heessa get very interes'."

Kosloff said, low and unasked, "It's true. But that doesn't mean I— There must have been dozens of his other customers talked over Wontner with him."

"But those dozens of others weren't living across the way from Tom Quinn, where they could get hold of his shoes and put them on to go out and commit a murder in. You were. It's about over, Kosloff."

AT EXACTLY 3.15½ that afternoon, after he had questioned Kosloff, Campana, Mrs. Alvin, and Mrs. Quinn, the inspector finally picked up his desk phone, said, "Give me the District Attorney's office."

Bob White just took a deep breath from the ground up, and let it out again.

TOM QUINN opened the door of his flat, said with the utter simplicity that comes of great tragedy, "I'm back, Annie. I was released this morning."

"I know," she said, "Bob White stopped by and told me you were coming."

"I was on the other side of the—little door already, that night, stumbling along, my slit trousers flapping against my legs. I didn't even know it when they turned me around and started me back the other way, couldn't tell the difference. I wondered why it was taking me so long to—get to it, and then I looked and I was back in my cell." He covered his face with both hands, to blot out the memory.

"Don't talk about it, Tom," she urged.

He looked up suddenly. "What are you doing, Annie?"

She latched the valise she'd been packing, started toward the door with it. "I'm leaving, Tom. You're back now, you're free. that's all that matters."

"You mean you still think—?"

"I'll never know, I'll never know for sure. There are 364 days in the year; 182 of them I'll believe you, 182 of them I won't. Sometimes I'll think they got the right man the second time, sometimes—the first. They built up too

strong a case, Tom, too strong a case. You were gone 15 or 20 minutes that night, looking for your shoes. It would take about that long to walk to where that old man lived and back."

"But I came back without them. You saw me still without the shoes when I came back. I was down there looking for them the whole—"

"Yes, Tom, that's what you said. You also said you lit matches down there. I was at the window the whole time and I didn't see a single match flare down below."

He wrung his hands in anguish. "I fibbed. I remember now! I told you I used matches, but I didn't, because I was a moral coward. I was ashamed to have the neighbors see me and laugh at me."

"But that little fib is taking me from you. It's costing you me and me you. Because if you fibbed about the little thing, how do I know you didn't lie about the big one?" She opened the door. "Who can read that man Bob White's heart? How can I tell just how much he knows, and isn't saying? Who knows where duty ended and pity began? I can't go through that hell of uncertainty, can't face it. Goodbye, Tom." The door closed.

Down below on the backyard fence he could hear the cats at it again, wailing their dirges.

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ADV.



Last Request

By Bert Collier

Author of "No Danger," etc.

Out of the death house came a cryptic message which was to serve its own crude justice

THE big electric clock over Warden Holt's desk marked the passing of time with the same mechanical accuracy as on any other night. Yet to Red Denson, watching it with an odd fascination, the almost liquid sweep of that long second hand seemed to take on cosmic significance, crasing as it did, steadily, inevitably, the remaining minutes in the life of one Dutch Mannix, gambler, bank robber and murderer.

It required an effort for Denson to jerk his eyes from that moving finger. Then through the window he saw the

lights of the State Prison's central bulk, forming neat patterns in the squat mass of steel and granite. And way up at the top, isolated by a strip of darkness, a single light that fitted into no pattern at all. An oddly incongruous light that marked the death house where intent men tinkered and tested and prepared for the events of the morning.

Red Denson fought back the creeping tension, told himself Dutch Mannix was just another crook who had come into head-on collision with the law. This was just another assignment to cover.

If anybody was entitled to feel that way about it, the man was Red Denson. As reporter for the *Evening Star*, he'd covered just about every top flight execution in the death house since they

made such things formal and stopped letting a posse string up the condemned to the nearest tree.

Maybe you've read some of Red's stories in your home town newspaper. The news services have carried them far and wide. Some of the executions Red has recorded for posterity are as famous as the hanging of Dannie Deever.

But Red never got used to it. Each job was a soul-shattering experience. Maybe that's why his stories were tinged with greatness.

He stopped looking through the window and faced the warden across the battered desk. "Yes, sir," he told Holt in a plaintive voice, trying to force a note of levity into it, "this will be my nineteenth. Eighteen men kicked through the door of eternity before my shrinking eyes, and now Dutch Man-nix. I'm beginning to feel like a stand-in for the Angel Gabriel, or whoever it is that wafts the departed spirits to the judgment seat."

"Don't take it so hard, Red," the warden soothed him, catching the tightness that lay under the words.

"I can't help it. I hate the job. It's getting me down. Warden, after one of these parties of yours, I can't sleep for days unless I get so pie-eyed that I'm scared to sleep because I might forget to dodge the pink elephants."

Holt protested, "You look at this wrong, Red. Honest, when you handle the obituary, the guys on the short end consider it's a real mark of distinction. Next to a commutation, that's their fondest hope. You should have heard Dutch when he found out you were coming down. He can't wait to see you."

"He wants to see me?"

"Sure. He wants to help you get it all straight—names spelled right and dates correct. He wants to give you

the low-down. 'How I shot the bank messenger and escaped with 75 grand,' by Dutch Mannix as told to Rufus 'Red' Denson!"

"For Pete's sake don't joke about it," Red muttered darkly. "I feel bad enough as it is. It's a swell reputation I'm getting. Sort of ghoulish."

"Seriously, Red, Dutch wants to see you. He's in a sweat about it."

Red said with heavy sarcasm, "He wants to tell me where he cached that dough he got in the stickup."

"Why not? It's still missing, ain't it?"

"That money's not lying around after all these months. Dutch had help on that job—remember what the witnesses said? His stooge got that cash."

"That's one theory," Holt said. "I happen to know the detective bureau thinks different. Confidentially they've been working on Dutch ever since he's been here. Most of that money was in big bills. Why hasn't some of it shown up at the banks again, if it's in circulation?"

"Give him time. He must be smart enough to know it's hot money."

"I won't argue with you," Holt said. "Maybe it's something else on Dutch's mind. Maybe he wants to sing a little."

"About what, for instance?"

"An old-fashioned but still popular motive called revenge," Holt said. "The only way they pinned the messenger job on Dutch was because somebody squealed on him. Somebody squealed and he took it. Maybe he's thought it over and is ready to mark that bill paid."

"Warden," Red said, "I'm the one that's supposed to have imagination, not you. Suppose you cover this story for the *Star*." Holt grinned. "And anyway," Red went on, "why should Dutch want to whisper secrets in my

shell-pink ear? Why not to the police?"

Holt said, "You're too modest, Red. These torpedoes and punks and strong-arm guys swear by you. You could write up the electrocution of some fifth-rate slugger from the waterfront and overnight he'd be the late Public Enemy No. 1. You've got the magic touch."

"But in private life," Red groaned, "all I ask is peace and quiet. Why the buildup?"

"It's no buildup. I just want you to talk to Dutch."

"Oh, all right," Red said. "I suppose I should, anyway. My public demands that I pass on his last interview, together with the fact that the condemned man ate a hearty breakfast."

"Attaboy," Holt said, reaching for the buzzer. "I'll get Hank to take you over."

TRAILING the guard, Red Denson shuffled down the stone corridor to the last cell in Murderers' Row. As far as appearances went, he might have been the undertaker arriving a trifle ahead of schedule. Red was certainly not the type of newshound commonly portrayed by Hollywood. He was about six-feet-six in his socks, and skinny as a hunger striker on the ninth day. He wore glasses, was bald on top of his head, with a curious fringe of caroty fuzz around the edges.

His rectangular face expressed acute discomfort. That's how it always made him feel, this avenue of the good-as-dead, every time he came here at the call of duty. For the nineteenth time he was trudging the cold stone, eyes half closed, fighting to keep from staring at that little door, scarcely noticeable in the solid wall ahead, a one-way door at the end of the road for the shadowy figures that inhabited this double row of metal cells.

The guard stopped, worked with a barred door and rolled it back on oiled hinges. Red saw a figure starting up in the dimness, a figure that came forward with awkward haste and said, "Red Denson! I was thinking it was about time."

The door clicked shut as Hank made them secure before moving out of earshot to stand and stare at them with unwinking eyes, like a cigar store Indian.

Red greeted the man. "Holt said you wanted to see me."

"Yeah. Sit down."

Red slumped down on a wooden bench, studying Dutch Mannix. He had never seen him in the flesh before. Dutch wore a white shirt open at the neck, dark trousers, and slippers. His head was shaved. It gave him a queerly ludicrous appearance, robbing him of a certain sly cunning usually so apparent in his pictures. Dutch returned the stare with an intentness that made Denson uncomfortable.

"Denson," he said at last, "they say you are a right guy."

"Well, I don't know," Red said. "I don't know about that." It was coming, he thought. He knew the signs. One of those hysterical autobiographies, winding up in protestations of innocence. Eighteen times it had happened, and now it was happening again. It was going to be awful. "I try to do what I can, Dutch."

"That's what I hear," Dutch told him levelly. "Well, Denson, I'm asking you to do something for me."

Red thought, "It's coming!"

"A guy like me," Dutch said, "ain't got many friends. They don't come around to kiss me goodbye. But there's something I got to tell somebody. I want you to tell 'em for me."

This was the same old thing, all

right. Still it sounded different, because of a curious agitation in the man's voice and gestures. Red began to show some interest. Maybe Holt was right about Dutch wanting to tell where that stolen money was hidden.

"It's for a friend of mine," Dutch dropped his voice to a tight whisper. "Swear you'll carry it to the one I say—and nobody else!"

Touched by the man's urgency, Red nodded. Dutch seemed satisfied. "It's a dame," he said in the same tone. "Maybe you know her, Denson—Francine Dore."

Denson jerked to attention, shooting a startled glance at Mannix. He knew her, all right. Francine Dore was a flashy dancer at the Blue Goose, Johnnie Frasek's hot spot. She was the kind that got in the papers a lot—always being robbed of jewels, or getting kidnap threats. Fake stuff for cheap publicity. Only she got by with it because her picture looked swell on page one. She had looks. And a figure.

"Yeah, I know her, Dutch," Denson said. "And come to think of it, I heard she was your—"

"The girl friend," Dutch finished. "That's right, Denson. Only she ain't come up to see me. Scared of getting mixed up with me now, I guess. But I can take it—and I still want to tell her something. I can trust you to do it. They say you're a right guy."

"Sure," Red whispered. It must be about the money, after all. His mind formed headlines. "Mannix in chair tips dancer to stolen cash!" Boy, what a story. What pictures. Francine looked swell in pictures.

Dutch eyed him with pathetic eagerness. Then, swiftly, he told him: "Say this to her for me, Denson. Say Dutch says he'll see you Friday at seven, as usual."

Red Denson grunted as the words smacked against his eardrums. He gasped. "What are you going to do—haunt her?"

Dutch laughed harshly. "Nothing like that!"

"Then," Red said, darting a look around the impregnable steel bars, and the stolid, watchful figure of Hank against the wall. "It's not a . . ."

Dutch declared grimly, "Nothing like that, either. The devil himself couldn't get out of here with hell's own explosives. I'm cashing in, Denson. It's just a bit of sentiment. That's straight. She'll understand it that way."

That, thought Red, was hard to swallow. Sentiment and Dutch Mannix made a combination like pack ice and molten steel, black and white, night and day. He couldn't picture Dutch's thin, cruel lips whispering sweet nothings to Francine Dore. Still, who was he to say it wasn't so. He'd read somewhere that every guy had a soft spot, and that probably included guys like Dutch Mannix, too, who had hearts of armor plate.

"It's my last request," Dutch pleaded. "I'm a gambler. I'm gambling you wouldn't refuse a dying man."

Red muttered, "No, I guess I wouldn't, Dutch. Not when you put it that way."

"Well thanks, pal," Dutch said, tremendously relieved. "You don't know what this means to me."

Red unravelled his lanky form and got up, patting his bald head as if to stimulate the processes of thought. "You're right, I don't." He looked past Hank, bearing down to unlock the door and on to that other opening in the thick wall that led to a small, secret room into which, in a matter of hours, Dutch Mannix would stumble. Denson was troubled by an odd feeling that he

was being made an actor in that grim play, instead of an impersonal dramatic critic, as it were. He murmured, "My gosh! Suppose something went wrong . . ."

BUT if you read the newspapers the next day you know that nothing went wrong. It was all there in Red's story, that tense atmosphere of waiting, waiting, waiting—that grim march from the cell to the chamber of death—and the things that happened therein as Dutch Mannix squared his account with society, as the lawyers are fond of saying. You'll remember that Red Denson touched also upon the disappointment of certain officials who hoped to the last that Mannix would break down and reveal the hiding place of the cash he had taken in his final exploit as a big time bandit.

There was only one thing that Red Denson did not describe in his story, for the reason that he considered it a personal matter. This was the strange way in which, during the entire time that Mannix was in the chamber, he kept his eyes fixed painfully upon those of Red, holding them with a pleading intensity. Even when nervous attendants were doing their grim business with straps and accessories of death. Even to the instant when the cap was adjusted over his face to mask the effect of the voltage.

And how, in that last fleeting second, Denson was impelled to nod slightly, upon which Dutch actually smiled.

It was that unaccountable smile which sent Denson out of the room shaking and puzzled, to write his story; which rode him until he sought out the Blue Goose some hours later and found a seat at an obscure table.

Francine Dore was doing her number. Red ordered a double rye and sat

back to watch. Undoubtedly the girl had something. She was a bit below the usual height, but solidly built, with a dancer's legs and body, lithe and strong. Her hair was midnight blue-black and shot with reflected light as she moved about singing a torch song. All that was fine, Red thought, and made him wonder how she got linked with a gambling crook like Dutch Mannix. But when she went into her dance he began to understand.

An inner voice told him he was a sap and to get to hell out of there and stick to his reporting of events in other people's lives instead of getting mixed up in them himself. But he had yet to see anything more moving than the eloquent eyes of a dying man. And so he waited impatiently for the girl to finish her number so he could get the chore done.

He wasn't comfortable in the Blue Goose. Things had happened there, things he'd heard about professionally, like sluggings, and gyp tricks on visiting firemen. He itched to carry out Dutch's last request and beat it. Silly business, anyway, and if he hadn't given his word . . .

He noticed suddenly with surprise that a dapper little man was bearing down upon him. The man wore a dinner jacket that fitted his form, but not his personality. At a debutante's ball you would spot him at once at a gate crasher. Dark and slender, with dangerous eyes.

The man pulled up at the table and queried, "Mr. Denson?"

"Right."

"I'm Johnnie Frasek," the man said, taking Red's apathetic hand and pumping it effusively. "I read your story about Dutch and—"

"Frasek," Red declaimed rudely, "I'm trying to forget Dutch Mannix

just as fast as I can. Please help me, not only by letting me drink your rye, but by keeping silent on the painful subject."

"I know," Frasek agreed, "and by the way, the check's torn up. It's on the house, Denson. We want you to feel at home."

"Candor compels me to say," Red told him, "that I don't like your joint, Frasek. I'm only here on business."

"Business!" Frasek said, grinning. "That's funny. There's something I wanted to talk to you about."

"Me?"

"Sure. Mind stepping into my office?"

Denson thought, "Why not?" It might be better to see the girl there, in private, in event she was inclined to be hysterical. Women often were, upon receiving messages from the departed. Frasek probably wanted to chat a while about Dutch Mannix's last hours. Most people had a strange curiosity about such matters.

Red trailed him around the edge of the room and through a curtained door to a dim corridor. Music and crowd noises ended abruptly when the door was closed. Frasek walked ahead to another door and stood aside, motioning Red in.

THE place was too informal for business, according to Red's notions. Besides the desk and telephone there was a long and luxurious divan, several overstuffed chairs, a picture on the wall that wasn't exactly for children, and a small bar on wheels.

"Sit down and pour yourself a drink," Frasek suggested, closing the door gently.

Denson accepted the invitation. "Thanks. Make it snappy, though, Frasek. I've got an errand to run."

"It's not much," Frasek said. "Dutch was a friend of mine. I was anxious to know what happened last night—the details, I mean."

"Don't you read the papers?"

"Sure. But I thought maybe there were things you didn't print."

"Such as what?"

"Such as — farewell messages," Frasek said, grinning like a man trying to make a poor effort to seem unconcerned.

Denson became watchful. The grin didn't fool him. Frasek was tense, crazily tense. "Maybe so, and maybe not," he said. "Anyway it wouldn't be for you."

"So there was a message," Frasek cried. "What was it, Denson?"

"It wasn't for you. Dutch said give it to—"

Unaccountably, there was a gun in Johnnie Frasek's fist. Red's eyes bulged. It was like magic, the way that gun popped into view.

"Never mind what Dutch said! You tell me!" Gone was the grin, and the oily, ingratiating manner. Frasek became hard and grim as he handled the gun in an intimate way.

"Now, Frasek," Red said. "I'm not looking for trouble. I don't like trouble. I'm just doing something for a guy."

Frasek snapped, "You tell it to me!"

"I don't know what you think it is," Red said, "but it's not what you think it is." That sounded complicated. Red grinned. He was tempted to tell Frasek, to see his face go flat with disappointment. Frasek thought it was a tip-off to the seventy-five grand, obviously. But Dutch had his promise to give that foolish message to Francine . . .

Frasek shouted, "You stubborn bean

pole. Talk fast, or you're going to get the beating of your life!"

By the same magic that had produced the gun his left hand suddenly held a sap. He put the gun in his pocket and transferred the loaded leather to his right. "Start talking!" he rapped, beginning to move in.

"Wait a minute," Denson said nervously. "I'm a man of words, not deeds, Frasek. I'm not after trouble, but even a rat will fight when it's in a corner."

"You're one that won't," Frasek said and smacked him on the side of the jaw with his open left hand.

It was like stepping on a dynamite cap. Denson seemed to fold his immense lankiness into a compact square as he lashed out with both arms, wildly. He had as much grace as a home-made windmill in a tornado, but of his clumsy effectiveness there was no question. Both his clenched fists exploded against Frasek's head, almost in the same instant. Johnnie Frasek's hands flew up in a gesture of surprised pain. His head snapped back, he gyrated to the wall and thence to the floor where he lay staring woodenly, a reddish smear punctuated by a tiny globule of blood marking the corner of his mouth.

Denson seemed astonished by his own prowess. "So that's the way it's done," he said aloud, gazing down at the groggy Frasek. "I've often heard it described—lead with your left, cross with your right, and bingo! . . . I better scam before that skunk comes to and tears me apart!"

HE walked across the office and opened the door, not even sparing Frasek a backward glance. As far as he was concerned, Johnnie Frasek was definitely out of his life. He opened the door and stepped into the corridor. Several other doors fronted it, but the

one he headed for was at the end and led to the main part of the Blue Goose where there were people and maybe a cop outside.

"This settles it," Red muttered to himself. "I'll never tie myself up with a promise like that again. As soon as I get that goofy message told I'll—"

He skidded to a stop. Suddenly the door on his right was jerked open revealing Francine Dore in a cascade of yellow light. She still wore her dancing costume, if you could call those two narrow strips of silver spangles a costume. Across her shoulders was a flimsy dressing gown.

Her eyes were wide with emotion and she stretched out a pleading hand toward Denson and gasped, "Come in—here, quick!"

With a grunt of surprise, Red skipped through the door. The girl slammed it shut, leaned against it with both hands on the knob behind her and stared at him.

Red said with admiration, "Those pictures didn't lie."

"You're Mr. Denson," she whispered. "You're looking for me—Dutch told you something—" She spoke jerkily, as anxious and tense as Johnnie Frasek had been.

"I thought it was a secret," Red told her, "but it seems to have got around. Frasek was positively nasty about it."

"Frasek—" she faltered. "You told him?"

Red was beginning to enjoy himself. "No, but I had to lay him among the daisies to keep him from insisting too much."

"You mean . . ."

"I gave him a taste of the old Denson dynamite," Red chuckled, "and it's all so darned foolish, sister. All Dutch said was—"

She darted forward, her skimpy lit-

tle dressing gown billowing out behind her, and pressed chill fingers against his lips. "Not here!" she cried. "Not here! Somebody may be listening!"

"But for Pete's sake," Red protested, "all he said was—"

"Hush!" she commanded. "We'll go some place else."

"You mean on account of Frasek? Boy, will his face be red when he finds out Dutch said—"

Francine cut in stridently. "Will you be quiet, you fool? Believe it or not, you're in danger. Every cheap crook in town knows Dutch told you where he hid the money."

Red laughed. "There'll be a lot of red faces, then. All Dutch said—"

Like an adagio dancer the girl hurled herself past him, pawed open a drawer of her dressing table and snatched out a pistol, a tiny, effeminate little weapon. She slanted it upward so that it covered his face.

"Now will you shut up?" she asked harshly. And then, as Red seemed to choke, she went on. "This is for your own protection, you dummy! Let's get out of here!"

"Everybody's gone nuts!" Red growled, then went silent and watched her as she flung a fur coat over her spangles, backed around him to the door, opened it and peeped out, taking care to keep the pistol pointed in his direction. This, he decided, was the limit. Just because Dutch Mannix got sentimental over an old flame, everybody was on his neck. When they found out what Dutch really had said, they were in for a terrific let-down. But as long as the girl had that gun on him, he'd be good. "Newshawk shot in dancer's dressing room" was one headline he didn't crave to see.

The girl motioned him to follow. They went down the corridor, back

past the room where he had left Frasek, and through another door into an alley.

"You better be good," the girl said, showing him the bulge of the gun under her coat.

Red nodded.

SHE waved down a taxi and they got in. It was a queer, silent ride. The girl sat in the corner, a rigid little bundle, her eyes boring toward him while the gun showed dully in her hand, half hidden in the folds of her coat. At the end of the ride Red paid the taxi driver because she seemed to expect him to do it, but he wondered how he was going to get that on the expense account.

Francine took his arm and hurried him up the steps. As the door of the apartment slammed shut behind them, she whirled to face him. Her voice shook. "Now tell me!" she jerked out.

Denson studied her face. No doubt of it, the girl was almost frantic. Not with any concern for Dutch—she had scarcely mentioned his name. It was no sentimental message she wanted, but something else, maybe something about the hiding place of a fortune in stolen cash.

He was going to enjoy this, after the way she'd acted. The more he saw of Francine the less he liked her. It was going to be funny, seeing her wilt, after all the excitement.

He said, "Hold on tight, sister. Here it is. Dutch said to tell you he'll see you at seven o'clock Friday, as usual."

But if he expected amazement he was never more fooled. The muscles of the girl's face grew even more rigid.

"He's dead, isn't he?" she breathed in frightened tones.

"Unless he worked a miracle," Denson told her.

"Seven o'clock Friday, as usual," she repeated, her eyes blank with puzzled concentration. "Seven o'clock Friday—as usual . . ."

Then slowly the tightness was wiped away and something else took its place, a hard, satisfied, astonished gleam. She said, "Good old Dutch! Good old Dutch, putting it like that. We didn't have to be so careful after all, the way he fixed it!"

"Okay, then," Red told her. "I'm glad the gibberish means something to somebody. I'll just be on my way—"

She looked at him, her eyes alive. "Mister," she said, "I could kiss you for what you've done." She must have meant it because she moved toward him, laying her hand on his arm and lifting her lips. To Red Denson this was worse than the gun. He said, "Skip it, sister, I—"

A key was rattling in the lock. The girl sprang back. Red growled, "Listen here, if you pull that gag about 'my husband!' I'm not going to hide in any closet."

"Shut up!" she snapped, staring at the door. It opened and Johnnie Frasek came in. He wore a scowl, perfect on one side of his face, marred on the other by a darkening bruise about the corner of his mouth. His gun pointed steadily toward Red Denson, but he spoke to the girl.

"Did you get it?"

"Johnnie," she said severely, "you scared me. You shouldn't come bursting in that way."

"All right about that! Did you get it?"

"Of course I got it. Why did you try to rush things and scare the gentleman. Now if you'll just show him out . . ."

She smiled at Red, but Frasek's eyes blazed. "Show him out?" he growled.

"We've got something to talk about first." He rubbed the side of his face angrily. "And anyway, we can't let him go blabbing all over town."

Denson said, "I didn't blab to you." Frasek plowed toward him furiously, his face mottled with anger. The girl caught his arm, pulled him back. "Don't get nasty, Johnnie!" she cried. "Don't spoil things."

"I'll spoil him," Frasek swore.

Red said, "I wouldn't get rough, Frasek. I'm not looking for trouble, dammit. Just point that gun the other way and I'll get going where I can forget the whole silly mess."

"Shut up!" Frasek roared, waving the gun. Red lapsed into somber silence. "Now, Fran, tell me," Frasek continued.

She frowned, "I'd feel better if you'd let this mug out," she said, but when Frasek glowered, "—okay, if that's the way you feel." She began to grow excited. "Dutch sent the message, all right. He said he'd see me Friday at seven—as usual."

"What?" Frasek shouted.

"Keep quiet. He did that so nobody—not even this nimble wit here—could get it but me."

"You mean that means something?" Frasek fumed.

"Sure, to me. It's this way. Every Friday Dutch used to drag me for a walk in the Municipal zoo. He liked to feed peanuts to the monkeys by the hour, and talk about the little place in the country where we were going to live when he—retired. Don't laugh, Johnnie, dear. That's the sort of stuff I had to listen to for months."

Frasek said, "What are you kicking about, baby? It's paying dividends, ain't it?"

"I guess so," she said. "Dutch swore he'd get the word to me if anything

happened to him. Well, he's done it! As sure as I know my name I know that money is hidden somewhere about that monkey house at the zoo. That's the only place he could mean when he said—as usual!"

Denson groaned. "Why didn't you let me go before I found out what a sap I've been?"

"Yeah, Johnnie, that was dumb," the girl said. "Now we got him on our hands."

"I know what I'm doing," Frasek returned sharply. "Did you ever stop to think this may be a trick of Dutch's? That he may have suspected something about you and me?"

Denson began to see a light. "That you sang to the cops about him, Frasek. I'm just beginning to realize what a louse you are."

"Not exactly sang," Frasek said without rancor. "The cops never knew where the tip came from." He turned to the girl. "At that Dutch may have guessed. I'm going to take this hard-head along to make sure everything is on the up-and-up."

"Not me," Denson said. "I—"

Frasek laughed raspingly. "This happens to be my show!"

All at once Denson felt sorry for Dutch Mannix. Frasek was certainly rubbing it in. First, he stole Dutch's girl friend. Then he fingered Dutch for the bank-messenger shooting. And now he was going to cash in on the seventy-five grand Dutch had tried so desperately to bequeath to Francine Dore. And Dutch had gone to his grave not knowing what a sap they'd made of him.

Still, a dead sap was better off than a live sap, when the live sap was looking down the barrel of a gun with an angry killer at the other end.

"Sit tight, Fran," Frasek said. "Me

and this bean pole are going after that dough. Then I've got some unfinished business with him." He snickered cruelly. "And after that—you and me are going places!"

"On Dutch's money—with Dutch's girl," Red Denson said.

"Francine never was his girl—he was just kidding himself," Frasek said. "And as for the dough, half of it's mine, anyway. Didn't I help him pull that job?"

THE zoo at night is a place of smell and sounds, and dark, mysterious blackness. Frasek parked his car some distance away, shoved his companion out, then began to walk along the concrete driveway toward the shadowy buildings, herding Denson before him. Distant lights lay across the buildings, revealing restless, slinking outlines behind the barred cages. Frasek got out a flashlight and sent a beam groping ahead. Eyes of a big cat reflected topaz fire. Frasek pushed ahead rapidly until they stood before the monkey pen.

Sleepy whimperings changed to excited squeals as his light disturbed the little animals. They began to scamper about with foolish concern, making shrill sounds.

"Cute little devils," Frasek chuckled in Red's ear.

"Yeah," Denson said, "and I ought to be in there with 'em, the fool that I am."

Frasek's voice had a grin in it. "You're doing all right."

His light drifted over the cage. It was a large, rectangular building on a high brick foundation, well populated with excited, squealing simians. "The stuff couldn't be in the cage itself," Frasek muttered, focusing the light on the foundation. "But those bricks look promising."

Prodding Red Denson ahead with the point of his gun, he examined the bricks, layer by layer. He forgot the clamor of disturbed monkeys in his tight concentration. They inspected one whole side, took up another.

Suddenly Frasek expelled a gusty breath. He spat out, "Look there!"

In the finger of light each brick stood out distinctly. Denson saw that two of them seemed slightly out of line, as if the plaster between them had crumbled.

"That's it, sure," Frasek whispered tautly. "Think of Dutch finding a place like that—better than a safe deposit box, any day!"

"Now that we've found it—" Denson said.

"Shinny over that railing and see what's behind them bricks," Frasek ordered. "I'll hold the light—and the gun, Denson. Don't forget the gun. Just because it's the zoo, don't try any monkey tricks!"

He laughed throatily, jabbing the pistol in the small of Denson's back. Red grunted, unravelled his lanky form and vaulted over the railing. He moved toward the cage. He reached forward with groping fingers.

He gasped, "The brick's loose!"

"Hurry!" Frasek panted.

Denson stalled. Off to the right was a rustle of sound, not animal, but human. A moving shadow. A voice rang out. "Drop that gun. There's enough of us here to blast—"

The light died.

For a split second the blackness was like pitch. Denson jerked rigid. Above him he heard Frasek bellow: "You doublecrossing snake!" The pistol spit flame. Denson felt the bite of it on his face and neck. His eyes ached from the glare before his brain went numb from the explosive thunder.

Lights flooded in. Denson groaned and sat up. Electric globes blazed about the cage. Frasek stood in the bath of light, his face dully set, gripping his shoulder with fingers expressive of agony. Men converged upon him. Denson closed his eyes.

When he opened them again he saw Captain Allison of the detective bureau looking down at him.

"Sorry, Red," Allison said. "We should have warned you. Are you hurt much?"

Red struggled to his feet. "Hell, no. Remember I'm a newspaper man. I want that story."

"Not much else to it," Allison said. "Last week, when the city got that WPA grant to renovate the zoo, they found the missing money behind some loose bricks in the foundation of the monkey house. We kept it quiet and chased up to the State Prison, hoping Dutch would come through with some of the missing facts about who was in the job with him."

"Did he?"

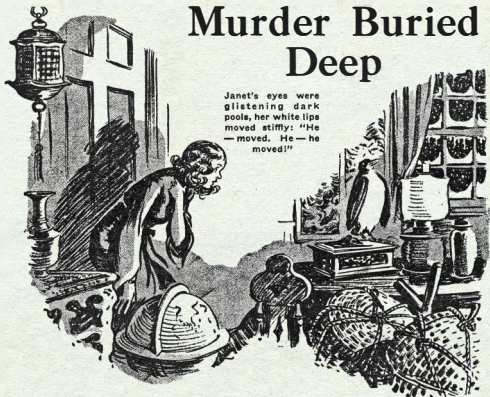
"No. But he told us to stand by the monkey cage and the guy we wanted would show up—with you. I wonder how the hell he guessed it?"

Denson looked at Frasek, limp, ready to crack as the detectives hustled him toward a patrol car. But he was seeing again Dutch Mannix in the electric chair. Dutch Mannix, staring at him, imploring him mutely to deliver the message to Francine Dore. Taking a gambler's chance that Red would help him put into motion the sardonic plan he'd worked out in the solitude of the death house. Figuring that if Francine was two-timing him, Johnnie Frasek would get the dope from her and run that errand . . .

"Yeah," Red Denson grunted. "I wonder how the hell he—guessed it!"

Murder Buried Deep

Janet's eyes were glistening dark pools, her white lips moved stiffly: "He—moved. He—he moved!"



By Norbert Davis

Author of "Cat's Claw," etc.

IT WAS just after four o'clock, but already the day was beginning to assume the quiet grayness of winter dusk. The corridor was dim and shadowy, and brass door knobs made cold golden gleams as Abel March walked along past them toward the stairs at the front of the building.

He was a big man, gaunt and tall and slightly stooped. He walked with a steady, effortless plodding step that could, and had, carried him over an amazing amount of ground in a short time. His hair was grayish at the temples, and his eyes were a deep blue, alert and kindly and understanding.

There was a sharp turn in the corridor at the head of the stairs, and he was almost there when he heard

voices. The first was masculine, and it ended a sentence on a questioning note as March stopped, hesitating.

"... dance tonight?"

A girl's voice said reluctantly: "I can't, Bob. You know how much I'd like to, but I can't. Uncle was so angry last week. I just—just can't face it again."

March still hesitated, not wanting to listen but not wanting to disturb them, either.

The masculine voice said, suddenly angry and resentful: "How much longer are we going to have to put up with that?"

"Oh, Bob! Not much longer. Uncle doesn't understand. He's so—so set in his ways, and he's old. He's—done so

Heels made a quick, light tap-tap-tap into the hallway. They stopped suddenly, and then there was a scream



It's a long step from investigating ancient Egyptian tombs to solving a 20th century murder—but not for the "Tomb Detective"

much for me. He's never begrudged me anything I wanted. Please don't make it any harder."

"Okay. Forget the dance. Can I walk home with you?"

There was a little rustle of movement, and their heels clicked in receding echoes, going down the short flight of stairs.

March waited for a second, and then on a sudden impulse he turned around and walked back along the corridor. He turned to the right, went up a broad stairway, came out into another corridor. Coming to a door that had "English" written in the lower left hand corner of its frosted glass panel in neat gold lettering, he opened it and looked in.

It was a large square office with steel filing cases looming high against the walls. There were four desks, none of them occupied, and another closed door

to March's right. He tapped gently with his fingers on the glass panel.

"Riller," he said. "Professor Riller."

No one answered, and March turned the knob. The door was unlocked. March opened it and looked inside.

Riller was standing in front of the room's one high, narrow window. He was staring out into the twilight, his thin shoulders hunched forward tensely and his hands clenched into knobby fists behind his back.

"Hello, Professor," March said.

Riller whirled around with a sudden start, his glasses making a quick bright glint. He was an elderly man, thin and bald and dried up. He was the head of the English Department at Greys University, and he was keenly conscious of his own position and scholas-

tic importance. He had always been careful to be polite to March because March had a reputation as a scholar and scientist so far in advance of his that there was no comparison.

March was an internationally famous archeologist, renowned for his explorations in a score of different countries. In addition to that he had a wide popular reputation as a radio lecturer on archeology. Advertised as the "Tomb Detective," he gave short talks on his own experiences and the things he found as a result of them. He had an amazing ability to reconstruct the life and time and customs of ancient peoples and to so explain them that men and women whose bones had long since disintegrated to dust became once more living, human, interesting and understandable.

"You startled me, Professor," Riller said, shakily.

"I knocked, but you didn't hear me."

"Come in," Riller said.

HE TURNED and looked out the window again. His back was stiffly rigid, and March could hear him breathing. March walked over and stood beside him.

Below them the campus was a white blanket criss-crossed in a pattern of black, straight lines that were cleared walks, surrounded on all sides by Gothic buildings that were tall and gray and haggard in the dusk and strangely like tipsily dignified old women with their white snow-caps set at jaunty angles.

Riller was watching two hurrying figures, walking close together along one of the paths.

"Isn't that Janet—your niece?" March asked.

"Yes," Riller said tightly.

"There's someone with her."

Riller made a strangled, furious sound in his throat. "That—Ames. I told her not to go around with him. I've warned her a dozen times."

"You don't approve of him?" March inquired.

"Approve of him. *Approve!* That stupid fool. He's nothing but a hired athlete. A paid performer on our football team. And he's here on a scholarship. Giving *him* a scholarship."

"Well, why not?" said March. "He certainly works for his education a great deal harder than most of our students. Football isn't an easy job. And his scholarship isn't paid for by the school. It's offered by a group of alumni."

The two hurrying figures outside were gone now, and Riller turned slowly to look at March.

"Did *you* ever play football?"

"Yes," March admitted.

"I thought so. You're prejudiced. Football is commercial athletics. It has no place in a college. It puts emphasis on brawn and thick skulls, not on brains."

"It takes some brains, too," March said.

"Bah! I'm sorry, Professor, but I don't care to talk about it any more. Frankly, this affair between Janet and Ames is driving me out of my mind. I won't have it. I won't! I've raised Janet since her mother and father died. I've given her the best education possible. She has a wonderful brain and wonderful opportunities. I won't have her throw herself away on that fool!"

March smiled. "I think you're taking it too seriously. Young people will fall in love, you know. It's been going on for several thousand years, and it would be a pretty difficult custom to change. Come on and drop over to the Faculty Club with me."

Riller shook his head. "No. I'm sorry. I want to go home. I want to see Janet. I have a few things to tell her."

"I wouldn't say anything to her," March said. "After all, there's no harm in walking across the campus . . ."

Riller went to the door, held it open. "Thank you, Professor. I'm quite capable of taking care of my own affairs."

MARCH lived and boarded at Peg-Leg Smith's Snug Haven. It was a big, square house just over the western boundary of the campus, looking fantastically modern now with snow drifted white and thick around the cupolas that were twin bulging eyes staring over the steep slant of the porch roof.

March's feet creaked coldly on the porch, and he fumbled in the shadows for the door catch. Warm air came out at him with a rush, pleasantly loaded with the odors of cooking food and hot rum. March shouldered the door shut, shed his overcoat and hat in the narrow entry hall, and went into the big, long living room.

"Ho!" said Peg-Leg Smith. "Tupper, roll out the rum keg, you swab! Here's the first mate comin' off his watch. And bring me another."

He was sitting in front of the fireplace, tilted back in an enormous leather chair with his peg leg braced against the wall. He was a short, incredibly round little man with a red face and a voice like a sea lion. During his career he had been cook on half a hundred freighters that had sailed the seven seas from one end to the other.

"Thanks," March said. "It would taste good."

He warmed his hands at the fire that was a red, glowing mass of coals. It was always good to get back to the

Snug Haven again. It had an atmosphere that was unique.

This room Peg-Leg called "The Hold," and with good reason. It was loaded with one of the strangest cargos ever accumulated, the fruits of Peg-Leg's raids on many an exotic port. There were oriental lamps and rugs in great profusion and Japanese hangings and a weird looking Chinese table made of teak and inlaid with ivory and a camel's pack saddle and, brooding bitterly in the shadows of one corner, a stuffed penguin whose name was Aunt Sue and who had been Peg-Leg's inseparable companion until, one time in Barcelona, it had eaten three cans of sardines without waiting for Peg-Leg to remove them from the cans which contained them.

The house itself always reminded March of some fantastic galleon, home from its travels now, and stranded grotesquely in the middle of the staid and sober college town. The impression was intensified at night when the halls were dimly narrow passageways with the wood-work gleaming dark and lustrous, and the cold snapped and groaned in the old timbers, and the wind creaked in the tree limbs around the roof.

Peg-Leg was holding a tin mug in his hands, and he hammered it emphatically on the stone mantel of the fireplace. "Tupper! Step lively!"

Tupper came hurrying through the dining room, carefully holding a small tray with two steaming mugs on it. He was a thin youth with an owlish serious expression that was emphasized by his thick horn-rimmed glasses. He was a student at the University. He helped Peg-Leg around the Snug Haven in return for his room and board. He always looked pallidly unhealthy, worried, nervous.

MARCH took one of the mugs. "Hello, Tupper. How are you coming along with the calculus?"

"A little better, I think, sir."

"If you're not busy tonight, bring it up to my room, and I'll see if I can't give you a hand."

"Thank you, sir," said Tupper.

"No!" said Peg-Leg emphatically. "Tupper, you go to the picture show tonight. I'll give you some money if you're short."

"No, sir," said Tupper. "I can't. I've—got to study." He hurried back into the kitchen.

"Damn and blazes!" Peg-Leg exclaimed. "That kid's got too much buzzin' around in his bean already. He hadn't ought to be at them books all the time. Don't do any good. I never studied and look how smart I am."

"I've noticed," March told him. He sipped at the hot rum, frowning thoughtfully. "Peg-Leg, do you know anything about love?"

"Me?" said Peg-Leg. "Why, hell yes. Everything. Why, I mind the time I was in Istambul lookin' around to see what I could see and just by accident-like, I stumbled into this sultan's harem. Five hundred wives, he had. Or maybe, six hundred. I lost track pretty quick. Why, I was near smothered in the rush. They chased me around that palace like a rabbit. I couldn't get away from 'em."

"Did you try?" March asked, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"Not very hard," Peg-Leg admitted. "Until the old man came home. Then you shoulda seen me. I hurdled a twelve-foot wall without missin' a stride. I run ten blocks in ten seconds flat. I run so fast I was on the boat ten minutes before my shadow caught up with me."

March smiled absently. "I was think-

ing of Bob Ames and Janet Riller—and Professor Riller."

Peg-Leg spat in the fire. "That crazy old coot! Somebody ought to keel-haul him and—"

The door bell shrilled once and then again. Before either of them could move, the door crashed back against the wall, and Janet Riller was standing there looking at them with eyes that were all dilated black pupil, holding on to the drape to support herself, shuddering uncontrollably.

"Old Nick and forty screaming demons," Peg-Leg said blankly. "What—what—"

She was a small girl with even, delicately sensitive features and hair that was a deep, smooth black framing the small oval of her face. She was wearing a blue dressing gown that was short enough to show the smoothly rounded calves of her legs. She wore blue bedroom slippers that were damp, water-soaked. Her lips were pinched with cold.

"Dead," she said. "My uncle—is dead."

She swayed forward, and March jumped toward her, caught her as she fell. His cup of rum dropped, spattering hissing liquor on the fire. Peg-Leg came out of his big chair like a jack-in-the-box, astonishingly agile in spite of his wooden leg.

"Here! Put her here!" He pushed the chair even closer to the hearth. "Why, she's nigh froze! Why, she ain't got hardly nothing on!"

MARCH lowered her gently into the chair. Peg-Leg jerked a robe from the couch, wrapped it expertly around her. Her eyes were closed, and she breathed in long drawn gasps.

Peg-Leg presented his tin mug. "Drink this. It's hot. Do you good."

Tupper always makes 'em hotter than hell-fire."

She swallowed some of the strong liquor, gasped.

"More," Peg-Leg urged. "Take a good pull at it."

She swallowed again, choking a little. Her lips regained some of their normal color. Her hand in March's grasp was icy cold, trembling. She opened her eyes slowly, staring up at him.

"I killed—my uncle."

"Blow me down!" Peg-Leg exclaimed.

March smiled at her. "Just rest a moment. You can tell us when you feel better."

"No! I've got—to tell you now. I came home early. I was changing my clothes—when Uncle came in. He called to me, and when I answered he started upstairs. I could tell he was angry from the sound of his voice. I put on this robe and went into the hall . . ." She stopped, breathing hard.

"And then?" March inquired.

"We argued—there in the hall at the head of the stairs. He was terribly angry—because he had seen me with Bob Ames. He said awful things about Bob—about me. I couldn't stand it. I started down the stairs. I meant to go away—get out of the house. He started after me. He caught me by the shoulder. I jerked to get away from him. I—I didn't know what I was doing. He slipped and fell—rolling all the way down the stairs, bumping . . ." She put her hands over her face. "He's dead. Lying there. I ran—ran—"

"Suicide," said Peg-Leg stoutly.

"Suicide and nothing else, that's what. Why, I mind the time I was on the *Lucy C.* and the third mate passed a remark about my coffee. I slung a skillet at him, and it cracked his head like

an egg. Ephriam Royer was the skipper on that old tub. He drank three quarts of rum every day and his nose was so red we didn't need any portside lights when he was on the bridge. Suicide was what he called it, and he wrote it down in the log just that way. He said if a man had a *papier mâché* skull he should either refrain from making smart remarks or else learn how to duck. And that's—"

"Enough," March finished.

"Oh," said Peg-Leg, blinking. "Well—all right."

There was a quick light step in the hall, and a woman stopped in the doorway of the living room, staring in at them in silent surprise.

"Miss Diola," March said, "will you come here, please?"

She was a small woman, competent and quick moving, with a dark, faintly foreign air about her. Her hair was jet black, piled high on her head. Her eyes were a deep and sympathetic brown. She taught courses in both Italian and French at the University. At the moment she was Peg-Leg's only feminine boarder.

She came forward quickly now and said: "What is it, please?"

"This is Miss Janet Riller," March said.

"Yes, yes. I know Miss Riller. But what is the trouble?"

"Miss Riller's uncle, Professor Riller, has had an accident. I am going over to his house at once. Will you stay with her, please?"

"Of course." Miss Diola knelt down beside Janet and put her arm comfortingly around the girl's shoulders.

March nodded to Peg-Leg. "You call a doctor. Tell him to come over to Riller's."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Peg-Leg. He hurried out into the hall with March,

helped him on with his coat. He looked back into the living room cautiously and then put his mouth close to March's ear. "That old cuss ain't gonna need a doctor, I'll bet you a chaw off my best plug. Love is like a locomotive goin' ninety miles an hour. Sometimes you can flag it down, but it ain't healthy to stand in the middle of the track when you try it."

II

THE night had fallen now, and the wind had a bleakly bitter chill. It brought stinging tears to March's eyes as he hurried across lots following Janet Riller's wavering tracks in the deep, crusted snow. He came out into South Street, and the University was stretched down in the valley below him. Now, outlined by its lights, it looked like a square tilted a little with the sweep of the ground, pushing against the much larger oblong that was the city behind it.

Windows beckoned warmly cheerful on both sides as he went quickly along, and he felt once more the pleasant and comfortable charm of these surroundings, and at the same time he wondered if he weren't going toward something that would spoil all that and over-lay everything with a tragedy and all the more horrible because it was so useless.

The campus and the residential district around it seemed an isolated little corner of the world where life was dignified and leisurely and contemplative and where the harder, crueller things were pushed back and away. But all that could change—so quickly.

Riller's house was on the corner, set back away from the street. The iron picket fence around it made a slanting ladder of shadow on the lawn. The gate was open. March's feet crunched coldly on the sidewalk.

He went unhesitatingly up on the porch. The front door was open wide, pushed back against the wall, and March was within three paces of it when he saw the vague, formless movement in the dark shadows of the hall. He stopped short, feeling a little crawling chill along the back of his neck.

"Who's there?" he said sharply.

The movement was closer to the door, and a man's form took shape out of the shadow. "Ames, sir," a voice said in a tone that was thick with uncertainty and shock.

"Ames!" March exclaimed. "What are you doing here? Where's Professor Riller?"

Ames was big, almost as tall as March and much broader. He had the heavy-set shoulders and deep chest of an athlete. His face was attractive in a battered, homely way normally, but now it was drawn and stunned, and a muscle at the corner of his mouth twitched spasmodically.

"He—he's hurt."

"Where?" March demanded. "Show me."

He pushed into the dark hallway, fumbled for the light switch, flipped it over. At the blaze of lights, he turned his head automatically to look toward the staircase at his left. The staircase was empty, and there was nothing at its foot. There was no sign of Riller.

"Where is he?" he asked.

The skin on Ames' face looked white and shiny and taut. "In the dining room. He—he's dead, sir."

March pushed through the drapes that masked the square doorway. He felt along the wall, snapped another switch, and the bright light gleamed on the polished mahogany of a round center table. Riller was lying on his face, half hidden under it. His arms were flung wide in front of him, as

though he had tried to check the force of his fall.

March knelt beside him. Again he felt that crawling chill along the back of his neck that was like the congealing touch of icy fingers. Riller was dead. There could be no doubt of it. His head was a horrible welter of blood and broken bone. His skull had been smashed.

DRAWING a deep, steadying breath, March stood up. "Yes," he said to Ames. "He's dead. How did you come to be here?"

Footsteps pounded loudly and suddenly up the walk, across the porch. Two men burst into the hall and stopped short in the doorway of the dining room.

"Ah!" said the first one, heavily triumphant. "So here we are!" He was short and widely thick-set with long, heavy arms and thick legs that were bowed a little. He wore a black hat with the brim snapped down over his eyes. His cheeks were red from the bite of the wind, spotted with little purple clusters that were broken veins. He held a stub of a cigar in the corner of his mouth. He jerked his head now at the man with him. "Outside, Murph. Take the back."

The second man was a uniformed policeman, solid and bulky looking in his blue greatcoat. He nodded silently at the order and went back along the hall toward the rear of the house.

"Lieutenant Burke," the first man said, jerking his thumb to indicate his own chest. "Who're you two?"

"This is Bob Ames," March said. "My name is Abel March."

Burke squinted at him. "March, huh? You the guy they call the Tomb Detective?"

"Yes."

Burke shrugged. "Well, this ain't no tomb, although it looks like somebody's been tryin' to make it one. Is that Riller on the floor?"

March said: "Yes. May I ask just how you came to be here?"

"I was just gonna ask you that," said Burke. "But seein' you got it in first, I'll answer it. Some guy called up headquarters. Wouldn't give his name. Just said that Professor Riller's niece had just killed the old man."

Ames drew in his breath in a strangled gasp. "No!"

Burke looked at him. "No, what?"

"She didn't. I tell you, she didn't!"

"How do you know she didn't?"

Burke asked. "Did you do it?"

The question hit Ames with the force of a physical blow, and he winced under it. "No," he whispered thickly. "No."

"Well, where is this niece?" Burke demanded.

"She's at my boarding house at present," March informed him.

Burke nodded. "Okay. Now what do you know about this? The guy that called us said that this niece pushed the old man down the stairs and cracked his noggin for him."

Ames' breath whistled through his nostrils, and he said something in an incoherent mumble.

"That's absurd," March said promptly. "Professor Riller slipped and fell down the stairs. The fall merely knocked him unconscious momentarily. Janet Riller, his niece, was frightened and ran over to my house to get aid."

"Huh!" said Burke. "It sounds nice, but you ain't tryin' to claim he's unconscious now, are you? He looks pretty dead to me."

"He's dead," March admitted. "But the fall downstairs didn't kill him."

"No?" said Burke.

"No. In the first place, there's nothing on the stairway or near it that could produce the wound on the back of his head. In the second place, he couldn't possibly have gotten up and walked in here after receiving such a wound."

"Ummm," Burke said thoughtfully. "That head don't look like he could get it from just fallin' down stairs, at that."

"He couldn't," March agreed. "I only examined the wound very superficially, but it looks to me as though he had been struck repeatedly with some blunt, heavy weapon."

"Yeah," said Burke. He nodded at Ames. "You're Ames, the football guy, huh? What're *you* doin' here?"

AMES swallowed with an effort. "I—I came over to talk to Professor Riller."

"What about?"

Ames put one hand up to his head. "I came to talk to him about Janet. Professor Riller objected to her going with me."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a football player."

"Huh?" said Burke. "Are you tryin' to boob me?"

"It's true," March put in. "Professor Riller hated all forms of organized athletics. I don't know why. But he was really a fanatic on the subject. He hated football and anyone that participated in it particularly, I suppose because it is the most popular and publicized of organized games. He couldn't talk reasonably about it. He flew into a rage whenever anyone mentioned the game. It amounted to a mania with him."

"If you ask me," said Burke, "all professors are a little on the screwy side." He nodded meaningly at March.

"All right, Ames. Go ahead. He didn't want you to go with his niece, so you came over here to talk to him about it."

"Yes," Ames agreed dully. "Janet and I love each other. We want—to be married. I didn't want to always be—hiding, sneaking, when I went out with her. After all, it was so stupid. To object to me just because I played football. He and I had argued about it before, but we had gotten no place. This time I intended for us to come to a final understanding."

"Oh," said Burke, looking sideways at Riller's body. "A *final* understanding, huh? Well, go ahead."

"When I came up on the porch," Ames said, "I saw that the door was open. I couldn't understand that—in this cold weather. I knocked, and then I heard something moving—"

"Where?" Burke demanded, instantly alert.

Ames shook his head blankly. "Somewhere in the back of the house. Quiet, stealthy movement. I called. No one answered. I thought of burglars . . ."

"Uh-huh," said Burke, nodding sarcastically. "You thought of burglars—so what did you do?"

"I came inside. The back door squeaked, as though someone had closed it carefully. I went through the hall toward it. It was dark, and I don't know the house well. I fell over a chair. Then I went into the kitchen. There was no one in sight. I looked out the back door. I couldn't see anybody."

"I can believe that last, all right," said Burke.

"Then I came back through the dining room, and—and I saw Professor Riller lying here . . ."

Burke made a flat, cutting gesture with his hand. "That's enough." He came two steps closer, suddenly shot

out his hand and caught Ames by the lapel of his coat. "You killed him!"

"No," Ames said uncertainly. "No, I—"

"You lie! You come in here after the girl scrambled, or maybe before, for all I know. The old boy had just taken his tumble down the stairs. He was groggy, half knocked out. He come staggerin' in the dining room, here, and you come running after him and hit him—"

"With what?" March asked quietly.

Burke jerked his head around. "Huh?"

"Hit him with what? Ames was here when I got here. He hadn't left. There's no weapon here. If Ames hit him—what did he hit him with?"

A foot-fall sounded in the hall, and the policeman loomed in the doorway. He was holding a short, heavy piece of lead pipe, dangling it carefully in front of him, gripped between his gloved forefinger and thumb. The pipe was crusted with something black and thick near its end.

"Look," the policeman said. "I found this just outside the back door. I seen the hole in the snow. Somebody slung it . . ."

Burke grinned gloatingly at March. "There's your answer, Professor. Right out of the back of the book."

III

IT WAS very late when March got back to Snug Haven again. Peg-Leg was still sitting in front of the hearth. Professor Lacey, one of the boarders, sat opposite him. Peg-Leg was still drinking rum. He had consumed quite a lot. March could tell that instantly, because the more rum Peg-Leg drank the closer he moved to the fireplace. He was now practically inside it, with his wooden leg so close to the

bed of gleaming coals that it was in momentary danger of catching fire.

There was a murderous looking butcher knife sticking in the floor beside his chair, the long blade glinting coldly.

"Hi!" he said fuzzily, waving the mug of rum at March. "Greetings, mate. Have a drink?"

"No, thanks," March said. His gaunt face was drawn and tired and worried. "Good evening, Lacey."

Lacey nodded and said: "Hello, Professor." He was sitting in the chair opposite Peg-Leg. He was a short man, partially bald, with a precise, slow way of speaking. He was plump, and his face should have been ruddy, but it had a drawn, gray pallor. His eyes looked tired, and he slumped a little sitting in the chair. He taught several Political Science courses at the University.

"Did the police come here to question Janet?" March asked.

Peg-Leg nodded carefully. "They did, but they didn't."

"Didn't what?"

"Question her," said Peg-Leg. "I was a sittin' here whittlin' on my wooden leg with this here butcher knife when a lemon by the name of Burke put his sour puss inside the door. He wanted to ask her questions, and I said no. We had an argument, and it seems I got excited and started gesturin', all forgetful about the knife in my hand. First thing I know, this Burke went out of the door so fast a cat could have sat on his coat tails. He ain't been back since."

"Where's Janet now?"

"Upstairs. Miss Diola is stayin' with her."

March nodded. "That's best. She's been under enough strain today without having police question her."

"I heard they arrested Ames," Lacey said. "Is that true?"

"Yes. I went down to the police station with him."

"Do they have any case against him?"

"Yes," said March. "And a pretty good one. The whole set-up makes him a logical suspect. Did you explain to Janet that the fall didn't kill her uncle, Peg-Leg?"

"Yup," Peg-Leg answered. "I told her as soon as you called me. That cheered her up some, but then I had to tell her about Ames gettin' pinched, and that made her worse again."

March was frowning. "There's something else behind this. The police got an anonymous telephone call, saying that Janet had killed her uncle. How did the person who called know anything about it? *Who* was it that called?"

"The police will find out, probably," Lacey suggested.

March shook his head. "I don't like to depend on that. They're not very interested. They think Ames did it, and they've got Ames." He moved his gaunt shoulders. "I'm worried about it. I like both of those young people a great deal. This is the sort of thing that can tear them to pieces. It will spoil their whole lives."

He stopped, looking curiously at Lacey. He wasn't slumped down in the chair now. He was sitting bolt upright with his hands clenched on the chair arms until the knuckles were white with strain. His eyes stared at something behind March with a glassily horrified sheen.

MARCH turned around. There was a window behind him, but as he looked at it he could see nothing but the smooth blackness of the glass.

"What was it?" he demanded. "What did you see?"

Lacey put his hand up to his throat. "A face," he said thickly. "There was a face—looking in at us . . ."

Peg-Leg blew out his breath in a sudden *whoosh*. "Old Nick!" he exclaimed. "Old Nick and his red hot pinchers. You see it too, then. I thought I was gettin' the screamin' megrims." He took a long enthusiastic swallow of rum. "Whew!"

"It was yellowish," Lacey said in a whisper. "It was just—a face. Blank. Like a mask. There was no expression in it. Only—it wasn't a mask."

March started for the door. "Come on. We'll look."

"Not me," said Peg-Leg. "It's outside, and I'm inside. That's the way I like it."

Lacey got up heavily and followed March through the hall and out the front door. It was warmer now than it had been earlier in the evening. The air had lost some of its bitterly cold bite. And snow was falling softly, gently, thickly, in big wet flakes that glittered like monstrous individual jewels whenever the light touched them.

March went quickly down the steps. "Go to the right," he said to Lacey. "I'll go the other way. We'll meet in back. Call out if you see anything."

March went around the front porch, walking cautiously, hearing his feet crunch in the old snow under the layer made by the new fall. The big flakes touched his face with wet, soft fingers, and the night seemed still and heavy around him.

He turned the corner and went along the side of the house. The window through which Lacey and Peg-Leg had seen the face was on this side, and March saw tracks, going along close to

the house wall the same as he was doing. They were smaller than his own tracks, shapeless holes in the snow, already filling with the falling white flakes.

For some reason March had never thought that the face, if there had actually been a face, might mean any personal danger to him, or to anyone else. It didn't occur to him—until now.

The tracks did it. Mute, mysterious traces in the snow. He stopped, and his throat felt thick suddenly. He was utterly alone in the shadow of the house, and he had no weapon. The person or thing that made those tracks could have heard him coming very easily, could be watching him now.

It *was* watching him. March saw it move, now that he had stopped. It wasn't far away. It was a vague blot against the formless background of the snow.

"Hello," March said. His voice sounded small and shrill in his own ears. He repeated the word: "Hello."

The vague form was a man—a small, wiry man with gray hair tumbled loosely down over his forehead. He wore no coat, no hat. He didn't answer March. He stood watching, with his head queerly canted to one side, as though he were listening like an animal listens—with a sort of wary curiosity.

March's face was stiff. "Who are you?" he asked. He kept his voice low and steady.

There was no answer. The man came two long steps closer. March could see him more plainly now, and he understood what Lacey had been trying to tell him. There was something the matter with the man's face. It had an animal-like vacancy. There was no expression, no feeling, no human intelligence . . .

MARCH swallowed with an effort. He had the answer. The man was insane. "Who—are you?" he asked again.

The man shook his head in a knowing, childish sly way.

March took a deep breath. "You can't stay out here without a coat or hat. You'll catch cold. Come in the house with me."

The man shook his head again in the same quick, sly way.

Lacey called suddenly from the back of the house. "March! March! Where are you?"

The small man spun around instantly and started to run. He was amazingly quick and light on his feet. March went after him. The small man ran toward the back of the house and the sound of Lacey's voice.

"Lacey!" March shouted. "He's coming! Head him off!"

Vaguely through the shadowy white slant of the snow, March saw Lacey's bulky form plow around the corner of the house. Lacey saw the small man coming and stopped and braced himself. They met right at the corner and blended into a kicking, struggling blur.

There was an incoherent shout, and then Lacey staggered sideways, bumped hard against the side of the house, slumped down into the snow. The small man whipped around the corner and disappeared. March got there seconds later, but he could see nothing in back of the house but the slow silent fall of the snow. Tracks went on a slant across the back yard toward the gate in the white-draped hedge that masked the alley.

March knelt down beside Lacey. "Are you hurt?"

Lacey shook his head. "N-no. Breath—knocked out." He put his fingers slowly up to his cheek and then looked

at them in a dazed way. They were smeared with blood. "He scratched me. Like—like an animal."

"He's insane," March said.

Lacey stared up at him. "What! Insane? How do you know?"

"If you had gotten a good look at his face, you wouldn't need to ask. It's perfectly obvious."

"Oh," said Lacey. He heaved himself clumsily to his feet. "Well, let's look for him. We can follow his tracks . . ."

"No," said March. "He went into the alley. He'll go on out into the street. We couldn't follow him any distance. The snow is falling too fast."

"Then what will we do?" Lacey asked.

"Report it to the police. They'll keep a look-out for him. I don't think he's dangerous at all, if he's left alone. He fought with you because he didn't want to be caught."

"I don't know about that," Lacey said, touching his cheek. "He *felt* pretty dangerous. I wonder why he was looking in our window?"

"That's what I'm wondering," said March. His voice was seriously concerned, and he was frowning. "I wish we had caught him. I have a queer feeling about it—a hunch, perhaps. If I had only stopped to think . . . But I really supposed you had just seen some reflection in the glass. I wasn't prepared . . ."

IV

LACEY and Peg-Leg were eating breakfast at the big, round table in the dining room when March came downstairs the next morning. Lacey had twin strips of adhesive tape covering the scratches on his cheek. The white of the bandage made his grayish pallor more noticeable. He greeted

March absently. Peg-Leg waved a fork, his mouth full of toast.

Tupper came in from the kitchen with a tall glass of tomato juice and put it down in front of March.

"Thanks, Tupper," March said. "I'm sorry we didn't get together on the calculus last night."

"That's all right, sir," Tupper told him diffidently. "I'm beginning to understand it better, I think."

He started to go back into the kitchen, and the door bell rang once and then again. Tupper went into the front hall to answer it.

Peg-Leg swallowed another mouthful. "Now who the blazes is callin' at this hour?"

Tupper came back in. "A policeman . . ."

"Hello," said Burke heartily. "Good morning, everybody. Eating breakfast, eh? Looks mighty good, too. I didn't have a chance to eat yet. I've been busy."

"All right," Peg-Leg said in a disgusted tone. "Tupper, get him a cup of coffee and some toast. Mind you don't put much butter on the toast, either. I'm not feedin' the whole police department."

"Are you making any progress?" March asked.

Burke pulled up a chair and sat down at the table. "You bet. Lots of it. I'd like to talk to Miss Riller. But no hurry. No hurry at all. Just whenever she feels up to it."

Tupper brought in a cup of coffee and some fresh toast. Burke attacked them hungrily.

"Did you find any fingerprints on that pipe?" March asked.

Burke shook his head cheerfully. "Nope. Ames wiped it off, or else he was wearin' gloves. Found plenty of his prints around the place though."

"That doesn't prove anything. You found him on the scene."

"Sure," said Burke in a knowing way. "Oh, by the way, I got some more news for you. Remember the looney you reported peekin' in your window last night?"

"Yes," said March.

"Well, I figured from the looks of Peg-Leg here, the last time I seen him, that the guy was probably ridin' a team of pink elephants and leadin' a green dragon . . ."

PEG-LEG put his knife and fork down carefully and leaned across the table. "Are you insinuatin' that I was drunk and seein' things?"

"No, no," said Burke. "I was wrong about it. I admit it. You did see the guy lookin' at you, because the boys picked him up."

"Where?" March asked.

"Clear out on the other side of town—about dawn this mornin'. One of the prowl cars spotted him walkin' along the road. They corraled him and took him to the hospital."

March nodded. "That's the best place for him."

"It is," Burke agreed. "He's not only looney, he's a mighty sick man. He'd evidently been walkin' around all night without no hat or coat, wearin' nothin' but a light suit. He's got pneumonia, and he's gonna be lucky if he pulls through it. The doc was tellin' me he ain't dangerously insane. He's just childish, sort of. Got a mind like a little kid. We know who he is now."

"Who?" March inquired.

"Name of Jackson. He's been an inmate of one of the state asylums in Michigan for a long time. He got away a couple weeks back. I don't know how in the devil he got this far . . ."

Lacey's fork hit his plate with a

sudden clatter. "You said—" His voice sounded thick and choked. His grayish pallor had deepened, and his face looked old and sick and shrunken. "You said—Jackson?"

"Yeah," said Burke, surprised.

"From—Michigan?"

"Sure," Burke said.

Lacey's breath sounded nosily ragged. "Excuse me—please. I have a—phone call . . ." He was making a tremendous effort to control himself, but his hands were shaking, and he had to hold on to the back of the chair for a moment before he was steady enough to walk to the doorway into the hall.

"Well, what's eatin' him?" Burke demanded.

March shrugged in a puzzled way, and Peg-Leg grunted indifferently. From the hall they could hear the click as Lacey picked up the receiver of the telephone, and then his voice said: "Greys two-two-three-one, please."

Burke took another bite of his toast. "People sure act funny in this joint."

Peg-Leg glared at him. "A lot of funny people come here, that's one reason."

Tupper came in from the kitchen with March's cereal and a cup of coffee. He picked up the glass that had held the tomato juice and started back with it.

"Say," said Burke. "How about some more coffee for me?"

"If you get it, you pay for it," Peg-Leg told him. "This here saloon don't serve free lunches."

HEELS made a quick, light tap-tap coming down the stairs into the hallway. They stopped suddenly, and then there was a scream, shrill and high and unbelievably terrorized.

Burke had taken the last swallow out

of his cup, and he blew it across the table in a coughing spray. The glass in Tupper's hand dropped and shattered on the floor. March kicked his chair back, and he reached the door into the hall a scant foot ahead of Burke. Tupper and Peg-Leg were right behind them.

Janet Riller was standing at the foot of the stairs, both hands gripping the rail. Her eyes were glistening dark pools, and her white lips moved stiffly, fumbling with the words.

"He—moved. He—he *moved!*"

The telephone was on a stand back under the stairway, and Lacey was lying there in the shadows beside it. He was on his side, sprawled loosely, and a wan bar of sunlight touched his face and glistened redly in the blood that spread sluggishly under his shoulders. A long butcher knife with the blade stained a dark red lay beside him.

March knelt beside him, touched him gently. There were three jagged cuts, in the shape of a rough triangle, in the dark cloth of his coat between his shoulder blades.

Burke swept the telephone off the stand, jiggled frantically at the receiver hook. "Ambulance!" he shouted into the mouthpiece "Three-forty-two Berkeley Street! Emergency!"

"I'm afraid it's too late," March said softly. "He's not breathing. Any one of those three wounds would be fatal."

Burke slapped the receiver on its hook. "All right." He pointed his finger at Janet Riller. "Now, what've you got to say?"

She touched her white lips with trembling, uncertain fingers. "I—stayed with Miss Diola last night. She kept awake almost all night—trying to comfort me. I finally went to sleep. When I awoke, she was sleeping. I didn't want—to awaken her. I came down . . .

I thought if I had a cup of coffee . . . He was lying there, just like he is. I thought—thought he moved . . ."

"Where'd that knife come from?"

"It's mine," said Peg-Leg.

Burke spun around. "Yours, huh?"

"Yeah. I keep a lot of 'em around—to carve policemen with."

Burke snarled incoherently. "You—you— Watch your step, mister. You'll get plenty of trouble, without lookin' for any." He whirled toward Janet. "I got it now, and it works out just about like I figured. *You* killed your uncle. That guy Ames is coverin' for you. He told the truth as far as he went. He did hear somebody. Only he saw 'em, too. It was you! You ran out the back door and slung that pipe away as you went. Then you hooked that butcher knife from Peg-Leg's kitchen and stabbed Lacey with it just now."

"Why?" March asked.

"Mister," said Burke, "I'm sick of your phoney questions. I don't know why yet, but I'll find out. And while I'm doin' it, she's goin' to jail, where she can't murder anybody else!"

"All right," March agreed amiably. "You don't want me to stay here, do you? I have some business to attend to."

"Go ahead," Burke jeered. "Maybe you'll find a tomb to sniff around in."

March nodded. "Maybe I will."

THERE was a drug store on Oak Street, three blocks from the Snug Haven. March entered it, got some change, and shut himself in the telephone booth at the back of the store. He deposited a nickel, and when the operator answered, said: "Greys two-two-three-one, please."

He remembered that those were the last words Lacey had ever uttered, and in spite of the cold he could feel the

perspiration moist and clammy on his forehead. He took a deep breath, steadying himself. He had the connection now, and the bell at the other end made a regularly spaced buzzing in his ear.

There was a click finally, and a masculine voice said: "Yes?"

"This is Professor Abel March," March said evenly. "To whom am I speaking, please?"

"This is Foster, March. How are you?"

March drew in his breath slowly. "Professor Foster?"

"Why, yes. Of course."

"I see," March said. "Could I speak to you for a moment immediately—in private?"

"Certainly. I have no classes until eleven. Can you come up to the house?"

"Yes," said March. "I'll be there very shortly."

Foster was the senior professor in the Psychology Department at Greys University. He was a widower, and he lived alone—except for a nondescript character by the name of Jones who served him as a combination chef, chauffeur, butler, and general handy man—on the North side of the campus. The house was small and neat and compact, comfortably banked in the white of the snow piled deep around it.

Foster received March at the door and ushered him into the study, a man's room with a big stone fireplace and shiny, deeply comfortable leather chairs and a flat desk that was piled a foot high with examination papers.

"I'm glad you called," Foster told March. "I heard you were accidentally mixed in with poor Riller's death, and I wanted to ask you more about it."

Foster was a big man, powerfully and heavily built. He had thick, silvery gray hair, and his face was still tanned

from his summer golfing. He had blue eyes and a cheerfully open smile.

"I don't know a great deal about it—yet," March said.

"I read in the paper that they arrested Ames."

"Yes. They suspect both him and Janet Riller."

Foster shook his head, scowling. "Bad, that. I know both of those kids, and I like them."

"Do you know why Riller objected so violently to organized athletics—especially football?" March asked.

YES," Foster said. "It's not hard to understand when you know the man's history. I do. I went to school with him. That was at Ledder, back in New England. It was a small college, and they went in very heavily for athletics. They prided themselves on being a tough bunch. It wasn't co-educational—no girls there. The college habitually played games with colleges that had a much larger student body, and in order to get teams that could compete with these bigger colleges, all the students at Ledder had to cooperate. Everybody went out for some team—or for several. Why, I used to turn out for four or five sports every year, and I wasn't any great shakes as an athlete, either."

March nodded. "I know the type of school. Heavy on athletics—light on scholarship."

"That's it," Foster agreed. "The school had a big athletic reputation to uphold, and they were bound to do it. Riller should never have come to the place. He wasn't the type. He had always been physically weak, sickly, never taken part in any kid games, even. You can imagine how out of things he was. One thing I still remember about him—he threw a base-

ball like a girl does. He had absolutely no interest in athletics of any kind."

"I see," said March.

"Well, the result was, the rest of the students made life miserable for him. None of them could understand him, and they rode him constantly. He was the perfect butt for jokes. He had no sense of humor. He always bit on every gag, no matter how silly. Stooze—is what he'd be called these days."

"I understand, now," March said.

"He took four years of incessant riding," Foster continued. "And four years is a lifetime when you're young. He never got over it. He hated athletics and athletes with a venom that was almost incredible. It was a phobia with him, plainly enough. He wouldn't make any attempt to overcome it, because he would never admit that it existed."

"Did Lacey attend that school, too?" March asked.

"Why, yes. He did. Not while either Riller or I were there. He came after we graduated."

"Lacey was murdered this morning," March said.

"Murdered?" Foster repeated blankly. He stared at March. "You—you're not serious?"

"Yes. Janet Riller has been arrested. The police suspect that she killed him."

"Good God!" said Foster explosively. "What utter nonsense! What reason would she have? She hardly knew the man. Lacey had been to Riller's house occasionally, I know, and she'd met him, certainly. But murder him. It's absurd."

"I think so," March agreed. "But there's no use in merely saying so. I'm trying to prove it."

Foster's face was pallid under the tan. "Lacey—murdered. It's—hard to believe. He was a decent chap, and I liked him. A good man in his field, too.

Serious and competent. He wasn't a man to make enemies. Why anyone should murder him . . ."

"Why should anyone murder you?" March asked.

Foster's big shoulders jerked. "Me?"

"Yes," said March. "Lacey was attempting to call you just before he died. I heard him give your number. That's why I called you. I think Lacey was trying to tell you something—warn you of something. And I think that's why he was killed."

Foster moistened his lips. "But—but no one would want to murder *me!* Man, it's fantastic. You must be mistaken."

"No," March said. "Just before he died, Lacey had heard that a man named Jackson had escaped from a mental institution in Michigan."

Foster's shoulders slumped. "Jackson," he said slowly.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

Foster nodded. "Of course. He went to school with Riller and me, graduated with us. Riller and he and I all went into the teaching game, and seven years after we had graduated, just by sheer coincidence, we got jobs in a small school in Michigan. We hadn't seen or heard of each other from the time we graduated. The thing happened there in Michigan."

"What?"

"Jackson went mad. He had been married since he had graduated—very happily married. His wife died suddenly and tragically, and it shook him all to pieces mentally. I saw it coming first. That's an angle of my business. But there was nothing I could do. His mind just simply disintegrated. Riller and I took charge, since we had known him before, and had him committed to an institution where he could be cared for. He escaped, you say?"

"Yes. I think his escape is behind the deaths of Riller and Lacey."

Foster smiled wryly. "No, no. Lacey, you see, didn't even know Jackson. He'd heard about it through Riller, I suppose. When he heard about Jackson's escape, he was startled. But that could have no connection with his murder."

"Why not?"

"Because of the type of mental illness Jackson had. So many people think when a man's mind goes, he's crazy, and because he's crazy, he's dangerous. That isn't so. Particularly not in Jackson's case. In the first place, he's incapable of planning any set course of action. He couldn't concentrate. He'd forget it all in five minutes. His mind is so affected that almost all its efficiency is impaired. The shock of his wife's death simply slipped him back into his childhood mentally. He's utterly harmless. Of course, if you attacked him, he might strike back in instinctive self defense, but that's the limit."

"You're positive of that?" March asked.

Foster nodded. "Absolutely. I'd stake my life on it."

"You may be doing just that," March told him.

Foster laughed. "No, no! He's harmless—completely so. His escape does worry me, though. He's incapable of taking care of himself—helpless as a baby."

"You're right there," March agreed. "He's in the City Hospital now—with pneumonia."

"They found him, then," said Foster. "Poor devil. I'll go and see him—although I can assure you he won't recognize me. He won't remember. I'm sorry, March. You're away off the track on this matter. Jackson had nothing

to do with any murders. He simply couldn't have."

"I think he did," said March. "But I'll be going now. I have some other business to attend to."

V

MARCH went down Foster's walk and turned to the right along the narrow street. At the first corner he stopped and looked back. Foster's house was hidden now by other houses and intervening shrubbery and the trees that lined the street.

March went to the right again. He stopped midway in the block at the mouth of a small alley that ran back in the direction he had come, lined on either side by the bulging walls of high hedges, the blank faces of garage doors. He hesitated thoughtfully, staring down at the snow.

One or two autos had come out of the alley, going slow, making deep, firm tread marks. There was a foot path along one side, already packed by the shoes of delivery boys, servants, tradesmen. March followed it.

Houses were backed closely against the alley on both sides, but there was no sound from them and no sign of any other living person. March walked alone in the cold silence of the alley, hurrying a little.

He came at last to a gate that made a gap in the hedge. He put out his hand to touch it and then stopped, his eyes narrowing. Someone else had touched the gate before him, in just the same way he had intended to do. The mark was plain on the top bar. An impression where fingers had gripped hard and packed the soft snow. Someone else had come this way.

March put his hand down in another spot, closer to the latch, and pushed the gate slowly open. It creaked

a little, moving, and the sound was a thin, faint squeal.

March went inside a small, closely bordered back yard and stared at the rear of Foster's house. There was a screened back porch, looking darkly empty. Tracks led straight across the white snow to it, and there were no tracks coming back.

March approached the back steps, went up them quietly. He tried to peer through the screen, but he could see nothing against the deep shadows inside. He frowned uncertainly and then he pulled the screen door back a trifle and looked through the opening.

A man was lying under the shelf against the far wall. He was a small man, dressed in a blue suit. He was lying on his back with his head twisted over against his shoulder.

March came very quickly inside the porch, knelt down beside the small man. He was breathing in little fluttering gurgles. There was a black bruise that ran from over his temple down across his cheek. March straightened his head out so that he rested more comfortably, and left him there.

He opened the kitchen door noiselessly, looked in at the bright gleam of white ceilings and walls and colored linoleum. Some scoured pans glittered on the drain board, and there were more, waiting to be cleaned, in the sink. There was no one in sight, but March could hear voices talking.

He went across the kitchen, inched a swinging door open. The voices were louder, and there were two of them. March went quietly across the dining room, put his hand on the knob of another door, and began to turn it very gently.

There was something thick and uncertain about Foster's voice: "But listen to me sensibly. There was nothing

else I could do. Surely you realize that."

"I don't realize it. You and your damned psychology. You're the one that started it. Riller just followed your lead. You're the one who's really to blame!"

MARCH could hear Foster draw in his breath. "Why—you—you killed Riller for *that!*"

"Yes."

"And Lacey," said Foster. "Lacey, too."

"Yes."

"Oh, you fool," said Foster. "You poor fool! Can't you understand that Riller and I did the only thing that could be done for your father? His mind was gone. He had to have care. We arranged so he could have it. It was for *his* good."

"You call me a poor fool. Perhaps I am. But I'm not a stupid, criminal fool like you are. Taking a man who was broken in health, sick physically, and putting him in an insane asylum."

"I'm sorry," said Foster. "But he *was* insane. Surely you can't have seen him and not know that."

"*Now*, yes. Who could help it, living year after year after year in that hell hole. *You* drove him insane. You! You ruined his life with your stupid blundering. And you ruined mine because you ruined his. How do you think I liked it, visiting him in that place, seeing him getting gradually worse and worse? Living and yet not living. Living while he was dead. Living in a horrible tomb that *you* put him in."

"Why, he was happy there," Foster said. "As happy as he could ever be. I visited him several times."

"To see the progress of your experiment. How you must have laughed to see it working out. Ruining the life of

a man who never did you any harm. Killing him by inches. And now he's dying of pneumonia. You did that!"

"No," said Foster. "You did it, if you helped him to escape. He was safe where he was—well cared for."

"You lie! They mistreated him. They broke his will and his spirit and robbed him of his sanity."

"You fool," said Foster slowly.

"Riller died, and Lacey died. Lacey I didn't mean to kill. I wouldn't have killed him, but he would have told you too soon. I'm going to kill you, Foster. Now!"

"Yes," said Foster. His voice shook a little. "You poor, misguided fool. They'll hang you, you know."

"No. No one knows me. No one even suspects me."

"March does," said Foster. "He knows you're guilty, I think. If I hadn't been such a self-confident numb-skull, I'd have listened to him, and I wouldn't be here now."

"Yes—March . . . Perhaps I'll have to kill him . . ."

March went through the door and walked very quietly across the thick rug toward the figure that was standing with its back to him, leaning across the desk, pointing the stubby revolver squarely at Foster's face. March touched the figure on the shoulder and said quietly: "This is as good a time as any, Tupper."

TUPPER whirled around, jerking the revolver up. March leaned forward and hit him just as he turned. His bony fist caught Tupper under the jaw and made a flat smacking sound. Tupper went half over the desk, rolled off on to the floor in a white flutter of examination papers. He lay there very still, his jaw twisted queerly, and the breath gurgling a little in his throat.

March picked up the stubby revolver. "I struck him too hard. His jaw is dislocated."

Foster sat there rigid, as though he were afraid to move. After a long time, he raised one shaking hand and wiped his forehead.

"That was—close. I've had some close ones before—dealing with mental cases. But never like this one. He's Jackson's son, living under an assumed name, and he thought Riller and I deliberately put his father away . . ."

"I know," March said. "Jackson must have had some mental trouble that could be inherited. He gave the same weakness to his son. Tupper brooded over the fact that his father was committed to an asylum—he thought, unjustly—until he could no longer think sanely on that one thing."

"Jackson's wife died in child-birth," Foster said. "But I didn't know the baby lived. Jackson never would talk about it, even when he was rational. How did you know?"

March shook his head. "I didn't. I suspected Tupper. I didn't know his motive. You see, when Riller was killed, someone called the police and told them Janet Riller had killed her uncle by pushing him downstairs. Who was that? There were only two possibilities. Someone was in the house at the time and saw her do it, or else someone heard her say she did it.

"It was too much to suspect that someone who had a grudge against Riller would be hiding in his house at the particular moment when Janet and he had a quarrel. The second possibility was that someone heard her tell about it. But the phone call came at once—before she'd told anyone but Peg-Leg and me. Peg-Leg didn't call. He didn't have a chance. He was in the house with Janet all the time, and

she would have heard him. But Tupper was in the house when she came. He could have heard and gone out and called."

"From where?" Foster asked.

"From Riller's house. Tupper went right over there, to make sure Riller was dead. Riller wasn't. Tupper killed him, and then he thought it would be a good idea to throw suspicion on Janet. So he called the police. Again—with Lacey: Tupper could have slipped out from the kitchen into the hall, stabbed Lacey and been back in the kitchen and into the dining room, all within spit seconds. I knew it was either he or Janet. I didn't think it was she. But there was no evidence. None at all. No motive that I knew of. That's why I couldn't do anything."

"Why did you come back here?" Foster inquired. "If you hadn't—"

"I meant to look around in back and see if I could find any tracks in the snow—any evidence of anyone spying on you. I meant to tell Jones, your servant, to watch out. He's all right, by the way. Tupper knocked him out with the gun. He's on the back porch. You'd better bring him inside." He looked around. "By the way, where's your telephone."

"In the hall," Foster said. "Do you want—"

"I want to give some very good news to Janet Riller and Bob Ames. And then I'd like to tell a gentleman by the name of Burke that sometimes tomb detectives can find more than dust and mummies."

Cipher Solvers' Club for Dec., 1937

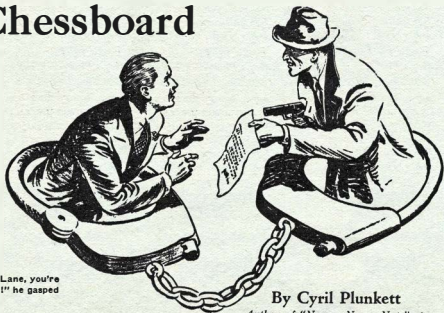
LAST December completed a record-breaking year for our cipher department! Our readers submitted 5,483 answers to Ciphers Nos. 289-312, inclusive, published that month, raising the grand total for the year to 78,129 answers! The previous yearly high mark was 70,919 answers in 1936. Congratulations, cryptofans, on this new record! Look for your name below, if you sent us answers to any of the December puzzles. °Inner Circle Club members (1,000 answers) and †Honor Roll members (100 yearly solutions) are distinguished by degree and dagger signs. The January *Cipher Solvers' Club*, starting off the new year, will appear soon. Watch for it!

Twenty-four Answers—°Aachen, Los Angeles, Calif. °Jay Abey, Maywood, Calif. Abuelo, Okeechobee, Fla. †Age, Erie, Pa. †Ajax, Staples, Minn. °Amanovlettus, Franklin, N. H. †Los Ang, Los Angeles, Calif. †Attempt (75th-78th), Akron, Ohio. †P. J. B., St. Petersburg, Fla. °Baab, Verdun, Quebec, Canada. °See Bee Bee, Hamilton, Kans. °R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J. El Aguila Blanco, Clifton, N. J. °Warren G. Brown, Babylon, N. Y. °Gold Bug, Newburgh, N. Y. †Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky. Frank S. Burlingame, Madison, Ohio. °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, Madison, Wis. °H. Le Care, Norfolk, Va. †How Carso, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. °Blue Hen Chick, Middletown, Del. °Ciphermit, Houlton, Me. †Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y. °Comrade, Baltimore, Md. °Joseph E. Conklin, Riverhead, N. Y. †Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr. †Cryptanalyst,

Clinton, Iowa. °Cucumber, Redondo Beach, Calif. °W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind. Derfy, Avoca, Pa. †Daffy Dill, Bangor, Me. †Dogmaangod, Massillon, Ohio. Ima Dumts, Poland, Ohio. °M. E., Scranton, Pa. °Edmaca, Albany, N. Y. Envy El, Minneapolis, Minn. °Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa. °Ezymarc, Franklin, N. H. †Farad, San Francisco, Calif. †Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky. °C. F., Baltimore, Md. °G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio. Gadder, Chicago, Ill. †F. A. Gauntt, Detroit, Mich. Michael G. H. Gelsingier, Buffalo, N. Y. Irving Genud, Brooklyn, N. Y. †The Griffin, Swansea, Mass. °I-Dan-Ha, Soda Springs, Idaho. Hawk, Baltimore, Md. °Dr. S. F. Hedgcock, Glencoe, Ill. °T. Hegarty, Brooklyn, N. Y. Howard N. Hehr, Buffalo, N. Y. Hilda II, New York, N. Y. †Holly, Dallas, Pa. °G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass. †Mrs. Opal Hurt, Albert Lea, Minn. H. Hyman, Vent-

(Continued on page 97)

Death's Chessboard



"McLane, you're mad!" he gasped

By Cyril Plunkett

Author of "Nurses Never Nap," etc.

LONG distance operator said, "Ready with your party," and Tom McLane began to smile. It was a crooked smile on his dark and rather crooked face. He said: "Hickman? George Hickman?"

"Yes, yes," was coming over the wire. "Who is this?"

McLane wet his lips and thought: Well, here we go, whole hog or none. "Do you remember Tom McLane?"

There was a gasp, and a curse, half uttered. Hickman snarled. "What is this, anyway? What do you want?"

McLane whispered: "Twenty thousand dollars."

Silence answered him, while the wires hummed impatiently. McLane chuckled.

"Do you remember Frisbee?" he asked then.

The silence continued, startled, frightened. "Hickman, you'd better answer," McLane warned.

The killer thought he had checkmated Tom McLane but he overlooked a pawn

Hickman's voice came thickly. "I remember. But he's dead. I read it in the newspapers a week ago."

"That's right, Hickman, but he talked before he died. And he signed a paper. Do you want that paper?"

"Twenty thousand—how do I know that paper's genuine?"

"You know Frisbee's signature, damn you. Now listen, Hickman. I'm coming to Fairmont tonight. I'll see you at your home."

"No, no! My office. At—at eighty-three sharp."

"Okay, then. But you'll buy or you'll get what you deserve."

"You'll bring the paper?" Hickman asked.

"I'll bring the paper," McLane snapped. He hung up, slammed the booth door and left the drug store.

The half-smile hung about his lips. "Blackmail," he muttered and shivered in spite of himself. But he knew George Hickman was a clever man. The other, legal way, might well spell defeat.

In his cottage, a half mile from town, he changed to a dark suit, dark shoes and hat. His trunk yielded a loaded automatic. The trunk was standing beneath an open window, and with sudden fury, McLane gripped the automatic and threw a single shot out the window. A neat hole appeared on a fence post ten yards distant.

"Hickman, that's what I'd like to do to you," McLane said savagely.

IT WAS already dark when the train reached Fairmont. A small town, couched in hills. McLane's lean body swung off and he paused a moment, lighted a cigarette. The match revealed a strong, determined chin, and seamy lines above it. McLane was thirty-four—ten years younger than he looked. But tragedy had stamped his face, and hardened it. That same tragedy had put hatred in his heart. A man slouched toward him in the darkness of the station platform. McLane stopped him.

"George Hickman?" the man replied to his question. "His office is on Court Place, eight blocks straight down Main, then two to your left. The only office building in that block, red brick; you can't miss it. But Hickman's never there nights, Mister."

"I think he will be, this night," McLane answered queerly, and he continued on toward Main Street.

Ten years, he thought; a long, long time. It has been ten years since he had seen George Hickman last. In the

down-state courtroom, blond and big and red-faced—sneering. The memory made McLane's heart pound, and unconsciously his hand reached into the pocket of his coat, gripped the automatic. He told himself: "I've got to be careful. I've got to do this right."

A street light revealed the sign, Court Place, and he turned off Main. When he came to the red brick building he studied it with narrowed lids. It sat back from the street, the upper floor uncurtained, seemingly unoccupied. There was a vacant lot on the right; an alley on the left, hip-high hedge marking it. Bushes grew along the building on either side.

McLane looked at his watch. Eight o'clock. He slipped off the sidewalk, leaped the hedge halfway down the alley, and crouched in the bushes, flush with the red-brick wall. From within the window overhead came the faint ticking of a clock; the smell of fresh paint. He saw then that the window was open a scant inch from the bottom, and his nerves began to quiver at the dragging minutes.

A steeple clock finally boomed the quarter hour, and a minute later a taxi swung its nose into the alley. A figure got out, strode toward the building door. McLane remained hidden, but his hands began to tremble.

Presently lights flashed on in the building, but the shades were drawn. Hickman's voice sounded sharply: "Operator?" The number trailed off. "Cal? Listen, I'm at my office. Can you drop around about fifteen after nine? . . . Good!"

McLane edged toward the front of the building. He reached the door and rapped. When the door opened, the two men faced each other stiffly, for a moment silent. Then Hickman said: "Come in." And seated, the desk be-

tween them, their eyes locked once again.

"You've got the money, Hickman?"

"So I wasn't wrong," Hickman sneered. "You *are* a crook."

McLane ignored the thrust. "Tonight I'm going to do the talking," he said quietly. "Ten years ago I went to prison on a frameup so you and Frisbee could clean up thousands. For ten years I sat in a cell, damning you and my own helplessness. Crook am I now? No, Hickman; *I'm collecting pay for every year I took your rap!*"

"Get to the point," Hickman muttered.

"That is the point. Let's see your money."

Hickman didn't move. He had green eyes, pouchy green eyes, and they were glittering in his florid face. "Not so fast, McLane. You know what this is. Blackmail! You've left yourself wide open for another conviction!"

"Have I?" McLane grinned. "Suppose you call the cops? You'll have to *prove* blackmail—by the paper you're going to buy. And you know what that paper will do to you. It's a confession to felony. I've got you in a corner, and you know it. Twenty thousand, and not one cent less."

Hickman said heavily. "I've got to see that paper."

"Why not?" McLane's hands went into separate pockets. The gun came out first; then the typewritten paper. Hickman, half reaching across the desk, let his arm drop.

"McLane, you're mad!" he gasped.

"Oh, no, I'm not. But when you deal with a fox, you play like a fox. Grab for this evidence and I'll kill you. Read it from where you are. Are you reading?"

"Yes — but twenty thousand! I haven't—"

"Don't stall," McLane warned. "Make up your mind—quick."

"All right," Hickman sighed. "The money's in my safe in the back room. I'll get it."

"And I sit here and let you throw a gun on me? I'm not a fool, Hickman. With my prison record, you could kill me and get away with it. I'll go with you."

Hickman snarled. "Maybe I don't trust you, McLane. I go alone or not at all."

The two faced each other, breathing rapidly. McLane's finger twitched on the trigger. Careful, his mind pleaded. Don't lose your head. He began to nod.

"Okay, go into the room. Shut the door. It won't do you any good to try to beat it, or to call the cops—not while I'm alive and got this confession. When you're ready, kick the door and shove your hands through first, *with the money*. If there's a gun in your hands, I shoot."

"All right," Hickman sighed again. He got up, went into the other room, shut the door behind him.

McLane sat, taut, gun ready. He could hear the clock again, ticking anxiously. He could feel the blood pounding through his veins. He had no regret; only gladness. The twenty thousand belonged to him, cheap for the price he'd paid. He even thought: One blow, a fist in those thick lips before I go. Interest on my sentence. He thought: I'm not too old to start life over. And then he stiffened, caught his breath and cursed.

A gun had cracked behind the door!

FOR a moment Tom McLane sat graven, dumb with surprise. He called then: "*Hickman!*" But only silence answered him, and suddenly he found himself at the door. When he

looked into the room, he cursed again.

The safe stood open, and on the floor in front of it were two packets of bills. Beside them lay a revolver, and a thin curl of smoke was drifting before the crack of the open window. Hickman's body was crumpled, one outstretched hand almost touching the gun. His neck bled from a gaping wound on either side. His breath strangled in his throat. The body convulsed once and stiffened.

One mad instant McLane stood paralyzed, incredulous. It flashed across his mind that Hickman had planned to use that gun on him; that, heaven knew why, he'd turned it then upon himself. He bent over the gun on the floor, then gasped. *The chambers in Hickman's revolver were fully loaded.*

Hickman hadn't suicided. He'd been murdered!

Instinctively, Tom McLane leaped for the window, the obvious point, he knew, from which the shot had come. He flung up the lowered shade, the sash sticky with fresh green paint, and the cool night wind rushed in. But topping it, was sound behind him. And he whirled to see two armed men in the doorway.

The bigger man snapped: "Drop that gun."

Stupidly, McLane looked down at his hand; he'd forgotten he had a gun. His fingers opened, the automatic hit the floor.

"Get it, Wilkins," the speaker ordered, and Wilkins, dark-clothed, grizzled and squat, darted forward. He shoved McLane's automatic in his pocket, then picked up Hickman's fallen gun.

"But who are you men?" McLane blurted.

Wilkins leered at him. "We're bad medicine for killers. To make it plainer,

I'm a private watchman in this town, and this is the sheriff." He turned to the other man. "Well, Cal, I guess we'd better phone the city police."

The sheriff nodded. He was younger than Wilkins, grimmer looking, heavy browed. He crossed the room, picked up the two packets of bills, put them back in the safe and locked it.

"We're responsible now, and we can't take chances with so much money. Keep him covered, Wilkins, while I phone."

"But I didn't kill Bruce Hickman!" McLane cried. "I tell you that shot came while I—"

Wilkins began to laugh. Wilkins said: "Go on singing, big boy. What's the matter, Cal? No answer?"

"Phone's dead," Cal grunted. "Can you hold this fellow while I run down to City Hall? Won't take me five minutes."

"I'll hold him," Wilkins answered grimly.

McLane hadn't moved from his position near the window, but his eyes had been roving, getting a picture of the office. The big safe sat before the room's rear wall. Next to it was a door; whether it led to the hall or still another room, McLane did not know. Along the inner wall appeared a stand, a bookcase, a chair, in that order. On the third side was the inner-office door with a desk beside it. Wilkins lounged on the desk.

McLane remembered then, suddenly, that Hickman had been shot through the neck. A curious thing, with curious meaning, and his mind began to race. When he looked at Wilkins, and then at Wilkins' revolver, his mind began to scream one phrase: *Escape*—before the sheriff returns.

Once they found Frisbee's confession, once they learned his own record,

they wouldn't look for any other motive. Moreover, he recalled despairingly, in his fury earlier that day he'd fired one shot from his automatic. He began to realize that it wouldn't matter that that shot hadn't killed George Hickman. He began to understand that, for the second time in his life, *frameup* stared at him; and this time he knew death in the chair stood behind it.

Two things more he considered quickly. The window at his back was as he had left it, open; a check protector stood on the safe, within reach. McLane took a deep breath and acted with a speed born of desperation. One hand flashed out, caught the check protector, flung it.

He saw Wilkins dodge, stumble. But McLane was already spinning, diving headlong through the window. He hit the ground on all fours, lunged away from the street and for the bushes. There was a bellow behind him, and flame spat into the night. The first bullet whined past his bobbing head. The second thudded in a tree beside him. By that time, bent double, he had gained the end of the building and swerved behind it.

From the street he could hear now, also, the sheriff, returning, and footsteps running into the alley. Then the louder thud of Wilkins' feet hitting the ground.

"Spread out!" Wilkins yelled. "We'll try to hem him in!"

One second McLane paused, a second in which his thoughts were lightning. He saw two thin courses open to him, but the one with greatest danger held also the greatest promise. McLane chose it, leaped for a tree ahead, swung himself up a bare moment before his pursuers came into view, crouched close to the trunk, four men pounded past beneath him.

Their forms had barely merged into the farther darkness when he dropped back to the earth. And quietly, stealthily, he returned the way he had come, to Hickman's open office window.

The course chosen, there was no time for regret, nor time either to weigh his chances further. The room, except for Hickman's corpse, was empty, and McLane flowed up and through the window. One precious moment he spent at the inner wall, the bookcase, and then he stepped through the doorway to the rear.

IT WAS a dark room and musty. His fingers found a box; farther a barrel, burlap covered. The barrel was empty, and McLane stepped into it. Burlap replaced over the top, he crouched waiting.

And the passing time was barbed, charged with menace. He could hear them all now, beyond the door.

The sheriff was saying: "Find the break in that phone wire so we can keep our fingers on the search. I'll have every road out of town covered in ten minutes."

Wilkins' voice: "Wire's cut outside, Cal. This monkey worked it through the window, all right. Hickman came in and found him at the safe."

Another voice: "That seems to be the picture. . . . Okay, Cal, the phone's working."

After awhile they talked to a man called "Doc." The coroner. And when Doc finished, apparently Hickman's body was hauled away.

"The funny thing, Cap," Cal's deep rumble said then, "the bullet went right through Hickman's neck. Yet we can't find that bullet."

"We don't know where this killer stood when he fired. If we knew that, we could figure the angle. Come to

think of it, was the window open or closed when you guys broke in?"

"Open," Wilkins answered.

"Then that explains it. The bullet went through the window."

"Wouldn't it hit the house next door?" Cal asked.

"Might; might not. Nobody's home over there, so nobody could have heard the thud. We'll give the house the once-over in the morning."

They went on talking hours longer, so it seemed, but McLane's wrist watch read ten-forty when they left. For twenty minutes longer he remained in his cramped position, and in those twenty minutes he considered the whole mad sequence of events.

Boiled down, there was but a single, and conclusive answer. The cut phone wire proved someone had stood beneath the slightly open window, listening to his own and Hickman's conversation. That person had learned there was a small fortune in the safe; that, moreover, he, McLane, with a motive and a past, would prove a perfect pawn in this, death's chessboard.

But what was vastly more important, *the money was still in the safe*. And there was, moreover, something else in that next room, a something McLane had seen and understood long before.

The killer, therefore, would *have* to return. McLane said grimly, crawling from the barrel, "That's my only chance. To get him!"

He tried the door, opened it. The window was closed, the shade again drawn. The room was inky black, and silent. He crouched against the wall, beside the safe. His watch showed eleven, and then eleven-thirty.

IT CAME then, a faint rustling sound outside. The window began to raise! Presently the shade ballooned as a fig-

ure crawled through. The shade resumed its natural shape.

McLane held his breath. The figure was a part of the blackness, still invisible, but he could hear its quickened breath. Coming closer—a shadow then before the safe. Steel struck steel, and McLane's heart leaped. The man had laid his gun on top the safe! A moment later tumblers began to click.

All the while McLane's hand was edging upward. His fingers felt the safe's cool top, fluttered on breathlessly, quivered as they met the muzzle of the gun. If lifting it there was a sound, the clicking tumblers muffled it. And McLane's other hand, the left, reached up now also, toward the light switch.

Light blazed on, and simultaneously McLane came up. The man before the safe was the private watchman, Wilkins!

"You!" Wilkins breathed. "Damn you, I—"

"Keep your hands up," McLane warned. He backed toward the desk, fumbled for the telephone.

"Put down that phone!" Wilkins snarled.

McLane answered with a curt: "Operator? Contact police at once. Send them to George Hickman's office."

Wilkins leaped.

The man came flying across the room, arms outstretched. McLane darted sideways. Mr. Wilkins, he decided grimly, was going to take a twenty thousand dollar beating, to compensate for the sum now lost forever.

His first crunching blow rocked the squat man on his heels. The second dropped him. Wilkins hit the floor, bobbed up like a rubber ball. He drove past McLane's defense, crashed a hard right to the latter's stomach; yelled with sudden glee as he battered the taller man back.

McLane began to laugh and his fists came up, twice each, with the speed and precision of an automatic hammer. Wilkins' face turned gray, and McLane's knuckles began to cut the face to ribbons. . . .

"YOUR story had better be good," Sheriff Cal Manders growled, after he and the city police had arrived.

"It is," McLane said quietly. "Wilkins came to the partially opened window, to spy on us and to listen to our conversation. Once he heard of the presence of the money, his plan was to kill Hickman and, when I came into the back room, to shoot me also; to claim then he'd heard the shot and caught me trying to escape. Only you happened to complicate matters by your arrival."

"Hickman had phoned me to drop in on him this evening," the sheriff grunted. "I'd forgotten if he'd said fifteen of nine or nine-fifteen, so I came early to be sure."

"Right," McLane agreed. "Anyway, seeing you, Wilkins had to quickly change his plans, so he took one precious moment to cut the phone wire, anticipating one of you two would have to go out to report the murder. *He* intended to stay. Furthermore, during your absence he *wanted* me to try to escape, so he could still kill me. Only his plans missed fire again when I *did* escape."

"I told you, McLane, that your story had to be good," the sheriff warned. "It hasn't been so far."

McLane smiled. "You put the money back in the safe; I never touched the safe—but you'll find Wilkins' fingerprints on the dial now. Furthermore, only the killer, seeing George Hickman open that safe just before the murder,

would know the combination. Sheriff, try that door. *The safe is unlocked!*"

"Finally, I've given you Wilkins' gun. *I've* also got a bullet from that gun, the bullet that killed George Hickman!"

Wilkins gasped. He cried: "It's a lie! Sure I happened to touch the safe, and maybe he has got a bullet, but that don't prove a thing. I shot at him when he was making his escape!"

"No go, Wilkins," McLane grinned. "I escaped *out* of the window, as Cal knows. The bullet I'm speaking about *came from the window*, at the precise angle to plow through Hickman's throat as he knelt before his safe, and lodge in the wall—behind the bookcase. That bullet was the one proof to my innocence, so I doubled back to this office and moved the bookcase."

Cal Manders said: "You talk like you knew Wilkins was guilty all the time?"

"I did; at least I had a strong suspicion. In the first place, he resembled in build the man I talked to at the railroad station earlier tonight, one man who might have guessed there would be big business at Hickman's office. As a private watchman, he was sufficiently curious about my visit to listen at the alley window. Then when he held his revolver on me, before my escape, I saw that the shell in the cylinder chamber just past the barrel alone revealed no bullet tip."

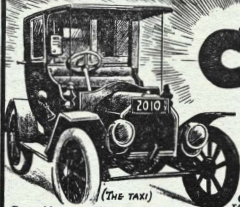
"Good heavens, man, he might have shot that cartridge days ago!"

"You didn't let me finish," McLane chuckled. "The window of this room had just been painted—reason for it being open slightly. Wilkins' gunsight was tipped, *is still tipped*, with fresh, green paint where he'd stuck the barrel through the narrow opening to place his shot!"

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKS ALLAN

The WALL STREET TAXI AMBUSH PART II



(THE TAXI)

POLICE WORK ON THE WALL STREET TAXI AMBUSH HAD REACHED AN IMPASSE WHEN MRS. ISABELLA GOODWIN, NEW YORK'S FIRST WOMAN DETECTIVE, WAS ASSIGNED TO THE CASE. IN 1912, TWO BANK MESSENGERS IN A TAXI HAD BEEN HIJACKED OF \$25,000 BY FIVE MEN.

GENO MONTANI, DRIVER OF THE CAB, HAD BEEN QUESTIONED AND RELEASED, AND A TIP HAD PUT THE POLICE ON THE TRAIL OF "EDDIE THE BOOB" COLLINS AND "SWEDE ANNIE" HULL, BUT IT HAD COME TO AN END BY THE TIME MRS. GOODWIN TOOK OVER.

THE WOMAN DETECTIVE'S FIRST STEP WAS TO FERRET OUT THE LODGING HOUSE WHERE ANNIE FORMERLY HAD A ROOM.



Geno Montani

Mrs. Goodwin

WORKING AS A MAID, SHE WORMED HER WAY INTO THE CONFIDENCE OF ANNIE'S PAL, MYRTLE HORN, A CABARET SINGER, AND OBTAINED INFORMATION WHICH LED TO A THIRD AVENUE HOTEL.



ANNIE



THERE THE TRAIL OF COLLINS AND ANNIE WAS PICKED UP AGAIN AND THE PAIR ARRESTED AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION AS THEY WERE ABOUT TO BOARD A TRAIN FOR BOSTON.

EDDIE WOULDN'T TALK AT FIRST. BUT WHEN CONFRONTED BY CERTAIN ADMISSIONS WRUNG FROM ANNIE BY MRS. GOODWIN, "EDDIE THE BOOB" WAS LED TO BELIEVE THE GIRL HAD SQUEALED. IN A FRENZY OF RAGE, HE CONFESSED.

Coming Next Week—



THE CONFESSION INVOLVED JESS ABBRAZZO, A SICILIAN OF UNSAVORY REPUTE, THROUGH WHOM HE HAD MET ANNIE; GENE SPLAINE, A PUGILIST APPREHENDED IN CHICAGO; AND TWO OTHER CRIMINALS. COLLINS ALSO NAMED SEVERAL GANGSTERS, NOT PARTICIPANTS IN THE HOLDUP, WHO, HE SAID, HAD IN TURN HIJACKED THE ACTUAL ROBBERS DURING THE DIVISION OF THE LOOT IN A SALOON. MOST IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, HE IMPLICATED GENO MONTANI WHOM THE POLICE HAD SUSPECTED FROM THE FIRST.

ALL THOSE NAMED BY COLLINS WERE ARRESTED AND PLACED IN A CELL ADJOINING ONE WHERE A STENOGRAPHER WAS HIDDEN. THE STENOGRAPHER TOOK DOWN A VERBATIM CONVERSATION IN WHICH MONTANI IMPLICATED HIMSELF AS ORGANIZER AND PRIME MOVER IN THE STIEKUP PLOT.

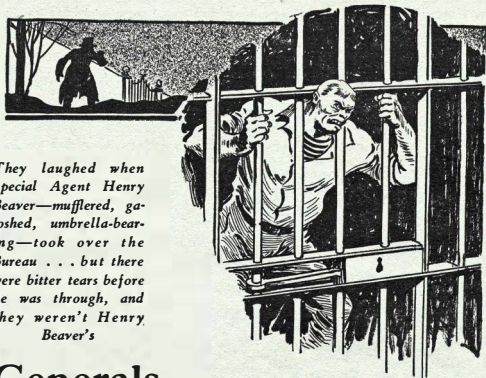


Collins

Abbruzzo

ON THE STRENGTH OF THIS TRANSCRIPT, PLUS THE TESTIMONY OF THE OTHERS, ALL OF WHOM TURNED STATE'S EVIDENCE, MONTANI WAS SENT TO PRISON FOR FROM 10 TO 18 YEARS. HIS CONFEDERATES PLEADED GUILTY AND RECEIVED SHORTER TERMS. ALL WERE DOING TIME LESS THAN 60 DAYS AFTER THEIR BOLD DAYLIGHT HOLDUP—THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN NEW YORK IN WHICH A TAXICAB FIGURED AND THE FIRST TO BE SOLVED BY A WOMAN DETECTIVE!

The Poison Pen Speculator



They laughed when Special Agent Henry Beaver—muffled, gashed, umbrella-bearing—took over the Bureau . . . but there were bitter tears before he was through, and they weren't Henry Beaver's

Generals Die in Bed

By Paul Ernst

Author of "Blind Man's Cane," etc.

THE first time I ever saw Special Agent Henry Beaver was about a month after he had taken charge of the Cleveland office. I'd been down in Washington on a retraining course. I wasn't far out of the rookie class, then, and felt that another course of G-man sprouts wouldn't do me any harm.

I went into the office on my return to Cleveland, with a lot of curiosity, anxious to see what kind of guy I was to work under from now on.

Hugh Quick, a little fellow with a sparrow's alertness, vitality and good sense was chief clerk, then. Hugh looked up at me as I came in the door.

There was a man in there, or rather an imitation of a man, so big that it looked like something made out of metal

"Hi, Larry," he said. "Good to see you back. How's Washington?"

"Still in the same place," I said. "Say, the old joint looks good. I'm glad to be back."

I glanced toward the closed door of the private office. "Hear we got a new boss."

"That's right," said Hugh.

I looked at him hard. It seemed to me there'd been something of a funny tone in his voice.

"Okay?" I asked.

"A special agent in charge would about have to be okay, wouldn't he?" Hugh stalled.

There wasn't an expression in his face. And that was odd. His pan was usually reflecting everything he



done with a ruler. He wore a nondescript but painfully neat and pressed dark suit.

Beside his desk, in the corner, were a pair of rubbers and an umbrella.

So help me! Rubbers and an umbrella Beside a special agent's desk! But of course my first thought was that they were exhibits A and B on some case that had developed.

"Lawrence Dow, reporting back from Washington retraining," I said.

He just looked at me for a minute, with his dull cold eyes unchanging. Then his lips moved precisely in his long, narrow face. As his lips moved, a deep line running down each cheek to his lantern jaws moved slightly too.

"Glad to meet you, Dow," he said.

That was all. I don't know what more I'd expected, but that seemed kind of brief. I waited a split second for orders, didn't get any, and walked out. I went to Hugh's desk.

"What kind of a halibut have we got running this joint now?" I demanded.

"Halibut?" he said.

"Yeah," I said. "Definition, cold-blooded denizen of the dark and gloomy depths. He looks like my old maid aunt."

"He hasn't been in charge long enough for us to get to know him very well," Hugh said cautiously. "But as agent in charge, he must be a good number. I've never heard of a blank in the service yet."

thought. I began to get very curious indeed about the guy, Beaver.

"Well," I said. "Guess I'll check in."

I opened the door and walked in. Behind a desk that was so neat and orderly it hurt to look at it, was the oddest looking specimen I've seen in the G-service before or since.

Special Agent Henry Beaver was a man of forty or better, but looking, or rather *acting* somehow, like a man far older. He had cool gray eyes that were dull like worn agate. His lank hair was parted in the middle as straight as if

WELL, I hadn't either. But as time went on I began to think I was witnessing that very thing.

First about the umbrella and rubbers. I discovered they weren't clues. Beaver wore 'em. Yes, sir, wore 'em, every day, day in and day out, walking along dry sidewalks with the rubbers padding his feet, and the umbrella primly rolled and carried like a cane in his hand. A rough, tough G-man chief—with rubbers on his feet and an umbrella in his hand! Now isn't that a tasty dish to set before an F.B.I. office?

Next I discovered that Henry Beaver, special agent newly in charge, was actually as old-maidish and prissy as he looked. Boy, when they made 'em cautious they hit their peak in Beaver and then broke the mold.

Beaver seldom went out of the office. Almost never did he take part in a man-hunt; he just directed. And his constant amendment to every order he gave, was, "Now be careful. Don't take unnecessary chances."

"He's a good tactician," said Hugh doubtfully, when I pointed out Beaver's excessive use and practice of the word caution. "When he's in charge, and orders are obeyed, the big-shots fall into the net."

"A swell tactician," I said, a bit contemptuously. "A first class general. Always miles behind the lines when the real fighting goes on. You know where a general dies, don't you? In bed. That's where Beaver will get his. He'll never stop a crook's bullet."

By the time I'd been back and working under Beaver for a couple of months, I began to feel that at last the F.B.I. was slipping. Since it was formed, you know, they've put pressure on Hoover down in Washington to fill it with a lot of political appointees. Beaver, says I, must be such. Some

senator with a drag and a brother-in-law has chiseled him in.

The rest of the boys were just as reticent under Beaver as I was. "Now be careful. Don't take chances." We mimicked his cautious, dry, precise voice among ourselves. Old Spook-Face, somebody called him, and the moniker stuck.

From time to time we got trickles of information about Beaver. They added up to a total that was neither good nor bad, just vague.

An older man than the rest of us, he had been drawn into the F.B.I. at its inception, being borrowed from the postal department. He had done much of his work abroad, because he spoke several languages well. The Bureau had lent him to this or that government branch requiring a man in Prague or Budapest or Shanghai, or had sent him for an international crook, or for collaboration with foreign police on special matters. That was why none of us knew anything about him.

Just a kind of cipher dropped in to lead us—and wearing rubbers and carrying an umbrella! *That*, we couldn't get over, or forgive.

But with all my grouching about Old Spook-Face, I hadn't a personal grudge till the afternoon he called me in after a gun-battle with two of the Cleveland Fell gang. A tough bunch. And the two I'd gone after, Butch Fell himself and Dotty Carr, were two of the toughest. In a quick spot, with no chance to call help—or at least I hadn't thought there was a chance—I'd sashayed into their hideout and exchanged lead, two to one. I felt pretty good about it—till Spook-Face got through with me.

"A H, Dow," he murmured, in his soft, precise voice, as I reported in answer to his summons. "Sit down."

I sat, chest out. Dotty Carr was in a cell because of me. I waited for encomiums.

"About this afternoon," he said. "You had a brush with two of our most wanted men, Fell and Carr."

"That's right," I said.

He looked me over from head to foot with those dull agate eyes, as though I were not a human being but some new bit of office equipment that had just been delivered and which he didn't like very much.

"Fell got away," he remarked.

"That's right," I said again, a little defiantly. "There was only one of me and two of them. I couldn't land them both."

"Why was there only one of you?"

"Huh?" I said.

His eyes never lightened, just stared with dull gray intensity into mine. And for all my six feet of, I'm afraid, rather reckless impulsiveness, I felt like a school kid.

"Why did you rush in there alone?"

"There wasn't time to get help," I said. "I was alone when I spotted them going into their hangout. I was afraid to leave and telephone, for fear they'd slip away—"

"You got them at Vine and Hemlock streets, didn't you?" he asked expressionlessly.

"Yes."

"There is a phone booth, in a drugstore window, right across the street from that particular hangout. You could have phoned the office or headquarters, and still have seen if anyone left the building."

"The drugstore window doesn't command the back entrance," I countered, hot under the collar. "They might have gone out the back way—"

"Did you ever look over that building?"

"Well, no," I said. "I'd never had occasion to go into it before."

"But it has been known as a secondary hangout for several weeks. I would suggest in the future that the instant a place becomes suspected of being a gang hangout, you . . . er . . . case it for future reference. There is no back entrance to the Vine and Hemlock building, Dow."

I said nothing. What was there to say?

"You entered that building alone, instead of calling for all the help you could get. You risked your life utterly needlessly—and one of your men got away. You know what that means, just now."

"You can't expect us to travel in a bullet-proofed squad car with a bodyguard every time we go out," I flared.

The agate eyes played incuriously over me, as though I were a six-foot bug that happened to look vaguely like a man.

"I expect every man to avoid all possible risk. Be careful. Caution not only preserves health, it lands crooks who might otherwise get away. Like Butch Fell. That's all, Dow."

I WENT out of there boiling. Be careful! Be cautious! Don't take chances! What was this—a girl's camp with an old maid in pants in charge? Or was it an F.B.I. field office? It began to look like the first.

No back entrance at Fell's hideout. How could I have known that? Most buildings do have 'em. The uncomfortable realization that Beaver had somehow known it, only made me madder at him.

There was another uncomfortable realization bound up in the thing. That was given expression by Spook-Face's words: ". . . and one of your men got

away. You know what *that* means, just now."

Unfortunately I did know what it meant. It meant that we might not catch up with the escaped crook for months—maybe never catch up with him.

For the past half-year in Cleveland, wanted men had formed a nasty habit of dropping out of F.B.I. sight as utterly as though somebody had put them in a rocket and shot them to the moon. Several murderers had slid out from under a sure rap—and disappeared. Several important witnesses had done the same.

We knew the answer, of course, even though the knowledge didn't do us any good: Some crook somewhere had thought up a sort of super-hideout where mobsters with the G-heat on them could lie safely hidden until they could be mysteriously and efficiently shipped out of the country. Formerly, men got too hot when the F.B.I. was after them. Old haunts closed doors in their faces. Nobody wanted them around. Now, someone was specializing in hiding out guns with the high heat on—and was getting away with it.

Therefore, when Fell got away from me at Vine and Hemlock, it didn't just mean that he'd be picked up by somebody in Cheyenne in a couple of months anyhow. It meant that in all probability he was *gone*.

Which knowledge made me, conversely, still madder at Beaver. The general, I sneered to myself. The gouty brass hat. Miles behind the lines himself, where it was comfortable and, above all, *safe*. Never going near action.

There was born in me right then just one huge desire. That was to see Fate tear Special Agent Henry Beaver

out of his safe, cloistered office and throw him on the firing line. I wanted to see how that neat head, with its prissy center part in prim lank hair, would look ducking bullets.

But I wanted it to happen when no one but me was around, because I had a fair idea how Old Spook-Face would take it—or, rather, not take it—and I'm too proud of the F.B.I. to want to see its weak links publicly exposed.

I expected it would take a long time before the right set of circumstances would make it imperative for General Spook-Face to enter the front line trenches himself. But as it happened, less than a week went by before we got that call from Wheeler, a little town southeast of Akron.

II

I WAS in the outer office, twiddling the window-shade cord and thinking of going home. I heard Hugh take a call at the switchboard. Then I heard him squawk, "What? Bruce Kane? You don't mean it!"

I whirled toward him. The little fellow was hanging onto the edge of the switchboard with his face kind of white.

"Found just a few minutes ago? Everything left the way it was? Thank you, Sheriff. Yes, some of our men will be right down. Thank you."

"What's up, Hugh?" I said. "What about Kane?"

He stared at me, through me. "He's just been found dead, in an open field, a mile and a half south of Wheeler. His neck was broken."

"Neck broken! What happened? Did he fall?"

"I don't think so. I gathered that somebody's broken it for him."

Hugh was hurrying toward Beaver's office, talking over his shoulder. He

plunged in—and came out with Spook-Face on his heels.

It was only then that the quick shock the news of Special Agent Kane's death gave me was pierced by sudden comprehension. This was it!

Kane's murder, if it was that, must be investigated at once. Somebody would have to shoot down there in a hurry, before the field got cold, and try to read in the surroundings the riddle of who the murderer might be. No, not somebody, *two* somebodies. More, if possible.

That was because of Kane's reason for being near the village of Wheeler.

There was a faint chance that the three McGee brothers were somewhere around there. The McGees, perhaps the hottest killers in the country at the moment, wanted for the Carberry kidnaping, in addition to a lot of other things. The Wheeler postmaster thought he had seen three men, of their general description, drive through in a big sedan.

Kane had been sent down at once on the chance. Now—he was found dead. It looked as if perhaps the McGees had been located. In which case, even Old Spook-Face could not be blamed for insisting on more than one man going down there to follow up. Even two men wouldn't be enough.

And—there were only Beaver and myself in the office at the moment, with none of the other boys reachable by phone. They happened to be busy on a flock of assignments.

I looked sideways at Spook-Face. Was this my set of circumstances? Was this the event that might force him out of his office chair and into the field? Or would he welsh out of it . . .

It developed that he wouldn't.

"Only you and I here, Dow," he said primly. "And Kane's death should

be looked into immediately. Is there a car downstairs?"

There was. A car that would do at least a hundred if it had to.

"All right," said Beaver. "Just a minute." He went back into his office.

He came out with his rubbers on his feet, and clasping his umbrella.

I HIT the highball in that fast car. In the first place I was burning up with Kane's death. I hadn't known him long but I'd admired him as one swell guy and his murder put a catch in my throat in addition to the swelling fury that is any special agent's at the bump-off of another agent.

In the second place. I knew how important it was to get to the death-spot before time and possibly careless human hands defaced the subtle records around it. And in the third, I wanted to give Old Spook-Face a taste of how the boys rode when they were really in a hurry.

I hit ninety-five at one spot just outside of Cleveland on the crowded main highway down to Akron. I saw with a grim inward grin how Beaver winced when I slammed on the brakes at the last possible second to avoid a collision with a big bulking truck.

But my little plan wasn't to continue. "Stop," he said in his thin, precise tone. "I'll take the wheel, Dow."

I hesitated. "I'll take over," he said more sharply.

So I stopped. And he got behind the driver's seat.

I'd hit ninety-five, as I said, in the stretches where it was possible. Old Spook-Face, for all our legitimate hurry, didn't go over sixty-five.

Sixty-five! It's a snail's-pace when you're on the business we were, and have a hundred miles an hour under the hood. I fidgeted and perspired. And for

all he was my superior I was about to say something pretty sharp when his even voice sounded.

"Anything over sixty-five is unsafe, Dow. Silly to risk your life in a mere automobile accident. Besides, a faster pace arouses too much comment. Police stop you, find you are a special agent, and wave you on. But afterward, they may talk. Some petty crook in a filling station or roadside stand may notice your car because of its unusual speed, and report to the very men you're after."

I could have kicked him out, rubbers, umbrella and all. But in a little while I began to notice something.

Old Spook-Face never hit over sixty-five. But he never went *under* that speed, either. And if you've ever driven the Cleveland-Akron road at seven at night you may know what that means. Five miles better than a mile a minute past trucks, through traffic bottle necks, through village Main Streets where cars are parked diagonally and always some fool is backing out without a look to see if something is coming, is plenty fast.

I glanced covertly at him as he skimmed to the left of three cars and then to the right of a truck and trailer where you'd have sworn there wasn't room for a bicycle. The quirks of the human brain amazed me once more. Old Spook-Face, having decided that sixty-five was safe, went fondly at that speed in places where thirty was perilous.

We flashed around Akron on a traffic bypass I didn't even know existed, and straightened out on a secondary road that led to Wheeler. The tires thrummed on the brick. And I'd hate to tell you how soon we got to our destination. I had to admit that Old Spook-Face's steady sixty-five got

you places faster than my ninety one minute and forty the next. But even as I admitted it I curled a lip at the cautious safety-first principle it involved.

THE sheriff was waiting for us outside his office. He was a big, slow-moving man with a broad face so honest it hurt. He took us a mile and six tenths south of Wheeler and had us stop beside a snake-rail fence.

"He's over in that field," he said. "Got flashlights?"

We had, of course. The three of us filed across a new-ploughed field toward a hedgerow, with our three flashes in a row like lightning bugs that had blinked on and couldn't blink out again. We headed toward a spot of light that represented a lank deputy, guarding Kane's body. Beside him was the farmer who had discovered it, and that was all. The sheriff hadn't let news of the find get out, so no crowd had gathered.

We got to work, with Beaver plodding around like a spinster school mistress on the prowl for minor rule infractions. I went with him some of the time, and some on my own. He didn't pay much attention to me.

We covered the immediate vicinity before going over the body of poor Kane itself. And all we learned was what we could glean from an *absence* of clues. You see, in that freshly plowed field there should have been footprints, Kane's, if nobody else's. And there were none save ours. But there *was* a dimly perceptible dragged trail from the hedgerow to the road where footprints had been obliterated.

"He was carried here," the sheriff said importantly. "A dead man couldn't wipe out his own prints. He was carried here from a car in the road. He died somewhere else."

Beaver nodded, dull agate eyes without expression. Then we turned to the body. And I felt a chilly spot blossom in the pit of my stomach as we ascertained the cause of death.

Bruce Kane's neck had been broken, as the report had it. But how it had been broken was at first a mystery. Afterward, when we began to grope at the truth, we began to wish it had *stayed* a mystery.

There were no marks on head or shoulders indicating that a tumble had broken his neck. And there should have been marks even if he had fallen on his head on soft turf.

There were no welts in the vicinity of his throat as there would have been if his neck had cracked through hanging, or running against a taut wire.

But on the side of his jaw was a dull bruise, and on the back of his right shoulder was another. The second bruise showed faintly like fingers and part of a hand.

It was incredible. It was fantastic. But it looked very much as if someone had grabbed Kane's shoulder with his left hand, cupped his right at the side of Kane's jaw, and then very simply twisted until Kane's neck was broken. But Kane had been a husky lad, of your thick-necked, stocky type. The man who could have broken his neck with bare hands must, it seemed, exist only in imagination.

There were two other things beside the twisted neck. There was a slight gash on Kane's cheek, from which blood had welled to form a brownish, clotted patch. And there were odd little red marks in a double row down his spine.

THE first didn't mean anything to any of us. The gash was as superficial as a cut finger. It couldn't have

been significant, unless poison had entered there. But that didn't seem logical. Why break the neck of a poisoned man?

The second didn't mean anything to the sheriff or me, but it seemed to have made Beaver's dull gray eyes more than usually blank. The little red dots along Kane's spine. Old Spook-Face read, or pretended to read, something unusual into them.

"Have you ever seen anything like that before?" I asked him, calling the bluff of his intent, lantern-jawed face.

"Yes," he said slowly, looking in the dim light—what with his umbrella and dark suit—like the cartoon of Prohibition in the old days. "Not in this country, though."

We all stared at him, and he kept on looking at the curious red dots. Finally he said:

"The last time I ever saw anything like this was in a country under a dictatorship, where men who complained about dictatorial tyranny were strait-jacketed and fed castor oil. Sometimes as additional punishment the strait-jackets were laced as tight as possible. Which is tight enough to squeeze your liver and kidneys up into your lungs, in case you don't know it. Such jacketing may leave marks like this. The red dots on the back are where the grommets press into the flesh when men stand on you to draw the laces up to their tightest."

I stared at him. "But how could that apply here?" I demanded.

"I don't know," he said, in his colorless, prim voice. "Possibly we can find out, however."

We took Kane's body to the local undertaking establishment, and went ourselves to the sheriff's office.

"A gash on Kane's cheek that might have been caused by almost anything,"

I heard Old Spook-Face murmur. "A broken neck. And marks that may have been made by a strait-jacket. Now where, and why, in this peaceful rural section, would anyone use strait-jackets?"

The sheriff heard him too. He cleared his throat respectfully. I'd seen him glance perplexedly at Beaver's rubbers and umbrella, but after all Spook-Face was a special agent and as such was an object of awe to a country sheriff.

"Look," the sheriff said, "I don't suppose it means a thing. But there's a kind of an asylum seven miles north of town. A private place."

"An insane asylum?" said Beaver, agate eyes on the sheriff.

"Yeah. And they might use strait-jackets there. I don't know where else they would. But at that, this place can't mean anything. It's respectable as all get out."

"Respectable?"

"Yeah. Run by a big-shot doctor from Cleveland. Only takes wealthy people who are off their nut. To get in there, you may be crazy, but you have to be rich too. So a joint like that wouldn't have anything to do with murder, would it?"

"What's this doctor's name?" said Beaver.

"Doctor Carroll Byrd."

I whistled. I knew that name. A nationally famous physician was Doctor Byrd. Semi-retired, if my memory served. So he had moved to the country and was heading a private asylum catering only to the wealthiest nuts. Perhaps he was going to write another of the psychiatric studies which had made him famous. Or perhaps he was just tired of a steady grind.

"Doctor Byrd is indeed above suspicion," said Beaver. "However, Dow,

I think you and I will run out there for a chat."

III

THEY called the place Sylvan Glen.

We got out there at a few minutes of ten. Rain threatened; the cold rain of April. The night was dark—and so was Sylvan Glen.

"I suppose they all retire early in here," Beaver said, clattering a second time at a pull-bell set beside a high iron gate.

The bell didn't bring anything two-legged for a moment, but it brought something four-legged at once. A couple of great Danes that stood waist-high to Old Spook-Face. They didn't bark, they did worse. They just stood alertly on the other side of the gate, growling deep down and showing wicked fangs.

"That," I said, "looks suspicious. Dogs like that."

"Not necessarily," said Beaver, in his fussy, precise way. "It would be quite logical for such a place to have dogs. Both to keep outsiders from finding themselves among lunatics if they are misguided enough to try to trespass, and to keep insiders from attempting to get out."

A man came to the door, then, and he looked ordinary enough. A middle-aged fellow in blue overalls, yawning. He opened the gate without even asking who we were or what we wanted. The soul of hospitality, in fact.

We asked for Doctor Byrd, and he led us fifty yards to what had been a huge country home and now was notable for inconspicuously barred windows. He touched the bell there. A girl opened the door.

I can see her now, standing in a dimly-lit big hall, looking through the doorway at us. A very pretty lady, with

auburn hair and blue eyes and a white nurse's uniform on. Sort of a head nurse outfit. Evidently she didn't use much makeup. She was rather pale.

Beaver advanced, hesitantly, as if he was afraid something would jump at him.

"Could we see Doctor Byrd, please?"

"I think so," the girl replied, a little doubtfully. "What did you wish to see him about? You have friends or relatives in here?"

"We were thinking of having some," said Old Spook-Face. "A nephew of mine, never quite right, has recently showed signs of becoming . . . er . . . menacing. I heard about your place in Detroit, where we live. Finding myself in Akron on business, I decided to hire a car and come and talk to Doctor Byrd about him."

"Isn't it a little late?" The girl's brows raised.

"I suppose so. But unfortunately I must leave Akron on the morning train. It was my only chance to investigate the splendid things I've heard about your . . . er . . . institution. So if I may speak to Doctor Byrd . . ."

"I am Doctor Byrd, sir," came a deep, pleasant voice.

A man in white came from a doorway down the hall that I had noticed was partly open. He was a medium-sized guy with dark brown eyes and hair, and a little Vandyke. I'd seen pictures of that face, pictures underlining accounts of Byrd's latest in psychiatric discoveries.

Beaver pedantically repeated the guff he'd told the nurse. Doctor Byrd bowed gravely.

"I have no room just now," he said. "Perhaps later. . ."

Beaver looked regretfully around the neat hall. He could act, all right. He turned in the doorway, clutching his

silly umbrella, then turned back apologetically.

"If you don't mind, could I see how you care for your patients? Perhaps, later, as you say, there may be a place for my nephew. And then I could simply send him down here under an attendant's care without coming myself again."

"Of course," nodded Doctor Byrd, smiling ever so little. "I'll be glad to show you all over the place."

WELL, that didn't look very suspicious, either. It appeared to me that the little row of red dots along Kane's back had led us up a blind alley of respectability.

"I'll be with you in just a moment," said the doctor. "Pardon me."

He went down the hall to the rear, walking easily and with dignity. A door there opened and closed on him.

"Shall we sit down?" said Old Spook-Face.

"The doctor will be back at once," smiled the blue-eyed girl in white. Then she seemed to say something else, and I thought for a crazy minute that I'd gone deaf. For, while I could see her lips move, I couldn't hear a thing.

I stared uncomprehendingly. She caught her lip between her teeth, and did it again. Her lips moved, with no sound coming out. I got it then.

"Get out," she was saying soundlessly. Just that. "Get out."

"I know you will like the way the sanitarium is run," she said pleasantly to Beaver. "Is your nephew violent?"

"Only rarely," Old Spook-Face said, in his colorless tone. "But we are afraid . . . he is very powerful . . . you can understand."

The girl nodded. Now, with her soundless words in my brain, I was telling myself that she wasn't just devoid of makeup, she was pale as hell and

looked scared to death. Or was that imagination?

The rear hall door opened and Doctor Byrd reappeared. He came toward us without affectation, this man whose name stood for genius.

"I have one patient I must always inspect in advance, for safety's sake, before I let visitors in," he said. "The gentleman in question is all right. You may follow me."

The doctor took us all over the place, slowly, frankly. It seemed he took us for just what we said we were. And for our part, I couldn't associate him with murder.

I've been in asylums a couple of times. They always give me the creeps. This one did too. Though I had to admit that if you must go off your chump a place like Sylvan Glen seemed the best bet. The cells, whether padded or plain, were homelike. Some of the men and women within were staring blankly, some were even reading. None of them did more than glance at us as we stared in. There was palpably no ill-treatment here, and obviously nothing *sub rosa* about them. I recognized a couple of scions of wealth, crazed by satiation or poor parent stock. There was one girl whose name you'd know, too.

An ordinary asylum, on the de luxe side, until we got to one big cell on which even the bars were padded. It was on the top floor of the house. And I got instantly that this was the inmate the doctor had meant when he said that he always went to make sure he was safe before allowing visitors in.

I stared through the bars and saw a sight that still lingers.

THERE was a man in there, or rather an imitation of a man, so big that it looked like something made

out of metal. The guy was at least six-foot-ten, and heavy for his height. His head looked no bigger than my two fists, but I saw a minute later that while it was undersized, it was not that small. It simply looked that way because of the impossible span of his shoulders. Hands like hams hung down to his knees. His feet were number twelves or better.

Glomming the hands and feet, and the enormous bony jaw fronting the little head, I got it. This was a victim of the pituitary trouble called gigantism. The little gland in the head that regulates growth had forgot to tell him to stop, so he'd kept on going skyward. There was a difference, though.

Most pituitary giants are weak for all their great size. They grow at the expense of their muscles. This one was not. I saw muscle like cable ripple along his great arms and shoulders as he moved. One of the exceptions, he was a giant in strength as well as height.

"Dear me," said Old Spook-Face, shrinking back a little. "Isn't he dangerous—"

The thing in there suddenly screamed. It was hellish, like a child's high-pitched scream coming from the tremendous bulk. Then the man-mountain hurled toward the door, crashing against it.

"Your scarf," said the doctor. "I didn't think— It's red— Turn your coat collar over it."

Beaver quickly covered his dull red scarf, which he had worn as if it were cold midwinter instead of April.

"Why does red bother him?" I asked as we walked away. "Does he think he's a bull?"

"It's not the color exactly," said the famous Doctor Byrd, a bit vaguely. "It's a certain association . . . I'm sorry he was disturbed. I assure you it hap-

pens seldom. Your nephew would be perfectly safe here, if I have room for him later."

"I'm sure he would be," said Beaver primly.

"Most of my patients are quite docile. In fact, some of them you'd never know were patients, if you weren't told. My nurse who admitted you, for instance."

I must have stared with an open mouth, for the doctor smiled his small smooth smile and touched his Vandyke with a little fingertip in a gesture of discreet amusement.

"She is almost normal again," he said. "Soon to be discharged. But not *quite* herself yet."

We got to the front hall. She was there, where we'd left her. I stared at her, trying to pretend not to. Crazy, too, huh? It was hard to believe.

AT the door, Beaver hesitated a moment. He looked at Byrd with a sort of severe diffidence.

"The big fellow—I'm sure he is kept safe. But wouldn't it be better to keep him in . . . er . . . a strait jacket, or something of the kind?"

Byrd drew himself up a little. "My dear sir, strait-jackets are brutal. They're instruments of torture no matter how gently applied. There is no such thing in this establishment."

"I beg your pardon," said Old Spook-Face nervously. "I seem to have made a mistake. Set it down as a layman's error, please."

While they were speaking I turned to see where the nurse had gone. She was in the doorway from which Byrd had come when we first entered. Movement at the end of the hall beyond her caught my eye.

A door was just being closed there, as if it had been opened, the opener had

seen that company was calling, and then it was being shut in a hurry. But for an instant I saw a face.

It was a face to make me doubt my own sanity first, and be sure my eyesight was wrong next. It was a countenance with a high, prematurely bald forehead, beady black eyes, a thin long nose like a wedge, and the thinnest lips I'd ever seen on a human being.

The face of a guy named Butch Fell, he of the eel-like propensities for escape who had gotten away from me in Cleveland the week before, and hadn't been seen or smelled since.

"Good night," Old Spook-Face said primly. "And again, thank you. Here is my card. If you have a place for my nephew in the next few months, please write me."

He gave Byrd a card from a worn case. That wasn't surprising. Most of us have an array of cards, different names, different addresses. There's usually someone at the given address to carry on the pretense that Soandso really lives there, too.

We went out the high iron gate. I didn't see the great Danes so I judged they were being chained temporarily while we made our exit.

We got in the car. I said to Beaver: "Doctor Byrd is a great man. An honorable man. And his face certainly matches his pictures beyond suspicion. But just the same—I saw Butch Fell back there. Or his everlasting double."

I think I expected a debate. But I didn't get it. Old Spook-Face drew his dull wool muffler tighter around his throat against the April dampness and nodded, eyes emotionless.

"It was not his double. It was Fell."

"In *that* guy's place! It's unbelievable."

We drove toward Wheeler.

"Look," I said. "That girl's not

crazy. She told us to get out, making motions with her lips because she didn't dare talk out loud. Byrd was afraid she might have done something like that, so he put that flea in our ears."

"I fear you may be right," said Beaver. He sighed. "I also fear you would find it impossible to tell any third party that the slightest suspicion could attach to the name or establishment of the great Doctor Carroll Byrd."

IV

THE rain dripped down the eaves. The window of the room at the Wheeler Inn was patterned with the cold drops. I walked up and down before Spook-Face.

I'd wanted to get the old maid into a spot where he'd see action, had I? I'd wanted to see him in a place where he'd duck bullets? Well, I should have known better. For now he was, by all accounting, in such a spot—and he refused to do anything about it. Henry Beaver was quite yellow. He had hung around in his office because of that. It was proved, now. He was a good general—firmly resolved to die in bed. And I, whose motto always has been to live while you live and then, when you must, die without making a fuss about it, felt myself slowly going as nuts as the mass of muscle with the pin head back at Byrd's place.

"We've got to get in that joint, again, secretly, and look around," I said. "You know what we've almost certainly stumbled onto? The high-powered hideout where all these mugs who have slipped through our fingers are cooling off. This is the catch of the year, unless we're both nuts and saw some interne who just happened to look like Butch Fell. Which neither of us believes."

"I believe that Sylvan Glen may be the super-hideout we've assumed exists near Cleveland," nodded Beaver. "But it would be foolish to rush in there right now, to find out more definitely. Also, it wouldn't be safe. The dogs, that enormous lunatic, a dozen armed men—if our assumption is correct—"

Safe be damned, I started to say—but didn't. After all, this tepid bottle of milk was my superior. But I certainly had a laugh, without any humor in it, at myself. I'd wanted this, to see for myself if the man's timidity would show through. It was, making large yellow stains. But hang it, Old Spook-Face's rank cowardice was endangering the biggest haul of the decade.

"We must be sure," said Beaver primly. "Also we must keep our heads, not take chances."

"Sure?" I rasped. "You saw Fell. So did I."

"Doctor Byrd's name is one to conjure with. Trying to get a search warrant for Sylvan Glen would be like trying to get a warrant to go through the White House."

"We could do it. We could insist on it and ram it down the local authorities' necks. As special agents we have the power."

"And having forced it—suppose we raided Sylvan Glen and found nothing wrong? What do you imagine such a mistake would cost the Service in prestige?"

"There's bound to be something wrong. Bruce Kane found out something about Sylvan Glen—and was murdered for it. We get a hint, too, and run from it . . ."

I STOPPED there. Spook-Face was drawing himself up like an irascible spinster.

"We shall not rush in heedlessly."

That is an order. We shall get more men tomorrow, watch with the deputy and sheriff, and wait till a suspicious character enters or leaves Sylvan Glen. *Then* we shall go through the place—with plenty of help."

"And meanwhile we just sit here?"

"Meanwhile," said Beaver, dull eyes on me, "we just sit here. Am I understood?"

"Yes," I said gruffly. And then I added, without quite knowing that I was going to, "sir."

So he went out of my room, a thin, spare, prim figure with his overcoat still on because it was a bit chilly in the hotel. And I looked at my bed without seeing it.

For I had no intention of going to bed. My next move had been born while I was talking to Old Spook-Face.

Just hang around Wheeler for a day or two and try to catch a crook entering or leaving Sylvan Glen? And meanwhile risk somebody there getting onto our identity and sliding out of our hands? Hardly! That was not *my* idea of the way to do business.

To me it was crystal clear that there was only one thing to do: That was, slip into the place, look around, get incontrovertible proof that it was a criminal hideout, and then come back with the marines. That was what I was going to do, and the hell with Agent in Charge Henry Beaver.

It was eleven. I waited till past twelve and then went downstairs and got hold of the proprietor's brother-in-law. He was at the desk, fiddling with a yellow tin top that, I guessed, belonged to the proprietor's little boy. It whistled when it was spun.

"I'd like a couple pounds of liver," I interrupted his innocent amusements. "Got any in the hotel kitchen?"

"Sure, we have some. But it's too

late to cook anything. Did you want liver sandwiches?"

"Of course not," I said. "Who ever heard of a liver sandwich. I want it raw."

"Raw?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yeah, raw," I said.

"Why do you want raw liver?"

"Because I feel like going for a walk," I said. "And whenever I go for a walk late at night, I always take a couple pounds of raw liver along with me on a leash."

THE rain had increased to a hard drizzle outside, slapped at you by a fitful wind. It was damp and shivery and, after I got off Wheeler's two blocks of Main Street, as black as a landlord's heart. It seemed even blacker when I stopped the car a half-mile from Sylvan Glen and took out on foot in the slop and mud of the road.

I'd placed the wind when I got to the interminable iron fence surrounding the joint. It blew from the side opposite the one I was approaching, and blew fairly steadily. I walked along the blackness of the road till I got to the far corner of the grounds. There I tossed my liver—or, I should say, the hotel proprietor's brother-in-law's liver—over the fence. After that I went back to the side of the fence I'd approached first, and waited.

Dogs in the grounds, eh? Yes, but dogs are not quite as infallible as people sometimes think. A hard wind blowing toward me from the dogs would keep my scent from them at a little distance. I figured that if I stayed where I was till a car passed and probably drew the dogs to the road-side of the grounds, the meat would then engross them for a few minutes, and in that time I had a fair chance of getting in without the dogs whiffing me.

A nice neat thought. But I began to think I'd never have a chance to try it. For on a night like that, cars along this back road were not quite as plentiful as cabs on Times Square. I think more than an hour must have passed before a rattle-trap scuttled by in the mud, with headlights reflecting for a moment on the iron pickets of the fence and making them look like the strings of a huge harp.

The minute the car came abreast of the gate, I swarmed up that fence to an overhanging tree-branch, and jumped down. It was scary business. For all I knew I'd jump right into the jaws of those two hounds. But I heard no savage snarls, and felt no fangs. I legged it for the big house.

There I wasted no time. It was taking a chance to bust in without looking around. But it was taking more of a chance to stay outside with the great Danes loose. I went to the first dark ground-floor window I saw and tried it. It went up an inch. I got a grip to raise it the rest of the way, and then sank to the ground like a shot. I'd heard a footstep.

From the shadow of several ornamental evergreens spotted here against the house, I looked toward the sound. Dark as the grave, the night was. But the thing that had made the noise was so near that it could be very dimly seen. I looked at columnar legs, with hands like hams dangling at the knee-level. I looked on up at a tremendous torso; and up and up till I saw a small head set like a walnut between impossible shoulders. It was the crazy giant. Holy herring, they let that thing walk loose in the night!

NOBODY was ever more silent than I was till the big fellow moved out of sight. After that, no one ever

opened a window quicker or entered it faster. I didn't draw a decent breath till my feet were on a carpet in darkness and the window was shut behind me. Then I calmed my fluttering pulse and tiptoed toward the door.

There I heard nothing. The whole house seemed quiet with the stillness of late night—it was half-past one by now. I opened the door into a dark hall and went into that.

Upstairs a man screamed. Just once, not very loud, with not much expression in it. Probably some lunatic having a nightmare, I thought.

The scream underlined my position in the place. It was filled with the mad, one of whom roamed the grounds like a walking tower, having either escaped for the moment or perhaps deliberately been let out to reinforce the watchdogs against trespassers. In addition, the place, if I were right in my conviction, harbored heaven knew how many badly wanted gunmen. I was in for a sweet time if I fell into the hands of either.

Altogether it was far from being a savory situation. I almost snickered a little as I pictured Old Spook-Face standing beside me. What a help *he'd* have been!

Somewhere above, I faintly heard a deep, pleasant voice. Doctor Byrd's. And it opened up a third alternative for me, if things went wrong, which wasn't much more pleasant to think about than the other two.

Suppose things *were* on the level in here, and I were caught in the sanitarium of one of the nation's most respected doctors? My only alibi would be that I'd caught a half-second glimpse of a guy that looked like a criminal I'd once met. Wouldn't that be nice? No search warrant, outrageous intrusion of a respected physician's privacy . . .

I went toward the doorway in which

I had seen, or had thought I saw, Butch Fell's face for an instant earlier in the evening. There was no light in the hall, but there was a certain dim illumination coming from the second floor, which seemed to have a light somewhere on it. I got to the door, all right, and opened it.

It led down, as I'd guessed it might. And, strangely, there was dim light downstairs from the basement, too. I liked that. The basement was the one part of the house Doctor Byrd, not unnaturally if he were on the square, had neglected to show Beaver and me a few hours ago.

I went down, on the balls of my feet, stepping to the side of the stairs to avoid creaks. Once again I heard the scream from up above. It sent the shivers through me. I got to the foot of the steps and saw a pretty finished room for a basement. There was a shaded bulb in the center and beyond that a barred door.

Lunatics down here, too, eh? The more violent ones? But that didn't seem probable. If violent patients were kept in the basement, why wasn't the small-headed giant among them? Certainly he was violent enough. I could still send a chill along my spine by picturing that cable-muscle! brute in his mad dash against his barred door, aroused by Beaver's red wool muffler. If the bars hadn't been there . . .

I went to the barred door. There was a man in a small cell behind it. The man was asleep, looking like a weary child. And for an instant I got a shock. For I thought I looked at Doctor Byrd, asleep—and yet I had just heard Doctor Byrd's voice two floors above.

There was the Vandyke, the strong face, the white-clad body. But the features . . . They looked very tired, and not so full-fleshed as Doctor Byrd's.

STEPS sounded on the stairs. The sleeping man moaned and moved, but did not wake up. I ducked behind the chrome-trimmed, shiny bulk of the latest thing in oilburners. A guy came into the basement, crossed it, and stood before a blank wall at the end. The foundation wall, I thought. I hadn't seen his face—just his back. A husky back, with the white of an interne on it.

The guy did something to the wall and a piece of it opened nicely. Secret door into an underground hideout that extended out under the lawn somewhere. This was the stuff! I was about ready to leave, now, with full knowledge that we could raid this joint profitably, nationally known doctor or no nationally known doctor.

The door in the seemingly solid foundation wall closed, and I went back up to the hall. I started toward the dark room with the friendly unfastened window. But I never reached it.

A scream of a different nature from the ones I'd heard before came to me from upstairs. But it was not a scream so much of a repressed cry of pain. A girl's cry, not a man's.

Then I heard words in a girl's voice. The girl with the blue eyes who had opened the door to us earlier.

"No! I tell you I won't! Not again."

The doctor's voice came in answer, more subdued, so that I couldn't make out what he said. The voice was—still pleasant.

"I tell you I won't assist any more! I—"

The girl's words broke, and the repressed cry sounded out again. I went up the stairs.

The second floor hall was lighted all too brightly. I felt like a flea on a hand-glass, with no hair to hide behind. There was a door toward the front

opened an inch or so, with light coming out. Next to it was a door that was closed, but with light showing at the crack at the bottom. All the other doors were dark.

I went to the partially opened door, with my gun out and cocked.

"... I say we ought to take care of this jane right now," a man's voice came to me. Not the doctor's smooth tone. "She knows a lot too much."

"You hear that, Beatrice, my dear?" the pleasant voice sounded. "Our minds are undecided about you as it is. You had better be a very, very good girl and continue to do as you're told."

The only answer to that was a sort of panting sound, as though sobs were being turned by sheer force of will into gasps.

The first voice was raised again. "You're takin' too many chances, Doc. The guy downstairs—you oughtn't to let him hang on like you do."

"My friend, I am in charge here," said the pleasant voice. "I do as I think wise. And I consider it wise to preserve my dear brother's health. Suppose an exhaustive investigation is launched before we can get away from here. There are men who know Doctor Carroll Byrd all too well. In such an event, Doctor Carroll Byrd can talk to them—with death at his elbow—and persuade them that things are indeed as they seem at this place."

I was seeing a lot of light now that didn't come from the electric bulb. Brother. Hmmm.

I heard the doctor say something more in a lower tone, bent nearer the open crack to listen, and then there was a voice *behind* me.

"*Hel-lo*, boy-scout. So nice to see your smiling mug again. *Drop the rod!*"

I opened fingers that had clenched

suddenly on my gun butt. The automatic fell to the floor. I stared into the face of Butch Fell, and the muzzle of the gat he leveled at me.

V

ALTHOUGH I'd not been with the F.B.I. long I had run into quite a few rotten situations. But never anything like the one I found myself in a few minutes after Fell surprised me by tiptoeing up behind me.

I sat in the room whose occupants I had been listening to a moment ago. It was a large bedroom made over into an operating chamber. There was the glass and tile table in the center, with a powerful droplight over it. On the table was a sheeted form with bloody bandages over its face. Easy to spell out the story. Some crook under those bandages had just had the latest in plastic surgery performed on his pan and hadn't come out from the anesthetic.

The guy with the Vandyke who called himself Doctor Byrd, stood beside the table with rubber gloves stripped off and no gauze over his face, but otherwise dressed as he'd been when he operated. Beside him, rubbing a wrist that was flame red from being twisted, was the nurse called Beatrice.

In addition there were five of the nicest rod-boys in the room you'd ever hope to collect under one ceiling. Butch Fell, the three McGee brothers, and another gun called Halloway. All wanted killers. All big-shot gunmen. All staring at me as cats stare at a crippled canary.

But of the lot I liked the man in white with the Vandyke the least.

"I suppose," said Halloway, a gorilla with a red blotch of a birthmark on his jaw, "you'll want to keep this ape alive, too, like the nurse and the guy in the basement."

"He does not," said Fell, thin lips twisting. "This one gets opened up. Right now."

Several guns were on me. And it was six to one in a locked room, and me with no gun. I suppose a guy who couldn't swim, dumped into the middle of the Pacific Ocean during a hurricane might be in a worse spot. But not much.

The doctor hadn't condescended to answer Fell or Halloway. He spoke now to me touching his trim Vandyke with a little fingertip.

"So you did catch a glimpse of Fell. And you did not call here concerning the nephew of the other gentleman with the umbrella," he said.

"That's right," I told him. "We did, and we didn't."

"I expected you, of course," he nodded. "You entered the place"—he looked at a watch—"seven minutes ago, through the library window."

I didn't say anything to that.

"Certainly you didn't expect to find the property unprotected? There is an alarm on every window and door."

I bit my lip. "You have dogs, I thought that was all."

"Dogs are all right in their way," he told me, "but I thought it wisest to have mechanical warning as well. I knew the moment you set foot in the house. We have been hunting you ever since. You were in the basement?"

"Yeah," I said.

Halloway started forward, gun ready.

"Then he saw Byrd down there! What the hell are we waiting for? Burn this guy down!"

THE rest were ready, too. I heard the girl gasp and I thought I was all through right there. But the doctor held up his hand—smiling.

"Not so fast," he said.

"I'll say, not so fast!" I snapped back. "It's unhealthy to burn G-men down, and you all know it."

It was a sappy remark; I was just stalling, keeping my courage up. It didn't even shake the doctor's smile.

"Of course, my friend," he said smoothly. "We recognize that. Which is why I stopped the shooting. There's a better way. One that we've used before.

"Oh," said Halloway, stepping back again. The girl got paler than ever, if that was possible.

"In the yard. Get him," said the doctor to Fell.

Whatever the words meant, Fell wasn't having any. He drew back. "Who? Me? Get that guy? Nothing doing!"

"You're not afraid, are you?"

"Damn right I'm afraid. I wouldn't go near that crazy big fella without a machine gun in my hands!"

So I got it, then. They were talking about the lunatic mountain of muscle I'd seen on the grounds. Wanting to get him.

The doctor smiled at Fell's refusal and pressed a button in the wall near the door. There was a tap, after a moment. He opened the door and a man in interne's white came in. He was heavy-set, young, hard looking. He glanced at me without curiosity—the whole houseful were all too well aware of my presence and capture—and then looked at the doctor.

"Get Billy, in the yard," the doctor said.

The guy in white looked nervous, but nodded and left.

"You going to have him in *here*?" squawked one of the McGees—Harold, the smallest and the deadliest.

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Lemme out!"

"Don't be a fool," said the doctor. "Billy is quite safe in all but one circumstance. That one provocation will not harm any of *you*, while he's in here."

I was sweating, then. I hadn't got the details but I knew the intention. Looking at me, the doctor saw that I knew.

"So it's going to be quicker for me than for Bruce Kane," I said.

"Is that the name of the other one?" replied the doctor, in a conversational tone. "Yes. It will be quicker for you. We wasted time strait-jacketing him, and he got away anyhow. So we let Bill at him. *We* aren't guilty of murder you see. An irresponsible madman did the trick—and will do it again. Possibly it won't be the neck this time."

I moistened dry lips. The doctor turned to Fell, for the first time losing his smile. But even then he didn't seem angry, just kind of peevish. Like a kid who was a little annoyed.

"This is your fault. If you had stayed in the basement, Fell, where you were supposed to stay, this would not have occurred."

Fell swore, but without conviction in his tone. He gnawed his lip. "Will we have to lam out of here, now?"

"I don't think so. This one will be found miles away, too. There will be a search, but I believe we can stand it with the slightly unwilling aid of the 'famous' Doctor Byrd."

HIS lips curled over that one, and I got a glimpse of a sudden, dark depth. He was brother to the man imprisoned below. The family strain, accentuated by a little makeup, accounted for the resemblance on which this icy devil had played. And he hated the real Carroll Byrd for his pretige and suc-

cess with a bitter hatred. Almost an insane hatred.

"What about the deaconish looking gent who was with this guy when they came earlier?" said Fell.

"If he ties the forthcoming misfortune to Sylvan Glen, we shall be terribly sorry and turn Billy over to the law. That's all. It's not my fault if a patient breaks loose, chases a trespasser and kills him a few miles away—and then that trespasser turns out to be an officer of the law."

The girl screamed, then, high and sharp, staring at me with dilated eyes. Her will had snapped. She was on the edge of complete hysteria. The smallest McGee got to her and put his hand over her mouth. He did it rather lackadaisically. Evidently they were not too afraid of noise getting out.

"Take her away," said the doctor. "One of you wheel this man out also." He nodded toward the form on the operating table. "He's coming to. Jack can take care of him after he gets here."

It left me, in a moment, with only four men against me instead of six. Maybe I should have found that encouraging. I didn't. I only gripped the edge of my chair, tried to will myself to swing the thing at the doctor's head and have it all done with, and couldn't.

There were heavy steps on the stairs outside. Queerly aimless and uneven steps. Accompanying them was a high-pitched, incoherent babbling, like the voice of a child playing, using a child's imaginative language instead of regular words. The doctor nodded to one of the gangster's who had stepped behind me. I didn't pay any attention. I was half out of the chair, hair stirring at the back of my neck at sound of the high-pitched voice. A child's voice—and yet with a queer hoarseness and fullness too heavy for any child's tone.

Next instant I felt a sort of sting on my cheek and out of the corner of my eye saw a man leap back from my chair. I put my hand to my cheek and took it away with blood on it. The man, one of the numerous McGees, had gashed me with a pocket-knife or whatnot.

"Hey," I said stupidly, "what the hell—"

I stopped at the look in the doctor's eyes. He was smiling a little more widely, as if at the greatest joke in the world.

"It's on account of Billy," he said. "He is usually docile—if you are careful with him. But there is one thing that invariably infuriates him. You got a glimpse of it with your more discreet friend earlier this evening."

I remembered how the giant maniac had flown off the handle at a glimpse of Beaver's muffer.

"Red," I said.

"Yes, red," nodded the doctor. "Not the color, but the association. The resemblance to blood. Billy, poor boy, is driven out of what fragment of mind he possesses when he sees blood. Such as that which is now to be seen on your face."

I guess I was breathing, but it didn't seem as if the air was getting to my lungs. I felt suffocated.

"There was a cut on Kane's cheek."

"That's right," he said. "There was a cut on Kane's cheek. Billy . . . didn't like it. He won't like yours, either."

AND then the door was opened. I got just a glimpse of a white-jacketed body—and after that an entire doorway full of the vacant-eyed, babbling human. You couldn't see anything past that hulk, stooping a little to avoid hitting its undersized head, turning a little sideways to crowd through the portal.

I was on my feet, crouching, holding my hand over my cheek, but feeling the blood from the gash trickle through my fingers and run down just the same. I felt like something out of a delirium, and I seemed to see something else out of a delirium as I stared at the swaying mass of muscle in the doorway.

Billy was babbling in a hoarse child's voice and looking first at one and then at another of the men in the room. The gangsters there were staring back with their guns in their hands and stark fear in their eyes.

The doctor said to them, "Edge toward the door. Get out while he is occupied with out impulsive G-man. And get out fast!"

"Gawd—" Fell breathed.

And then Billy's senseless, monotonous babbling ended. For an instant he stared at me, with moist lips slack and little eyes shining with a strange, empty fire. Stared not at my eyes, but at my face where the red blood showed in spite of my hand.

He screamed. His hands came up with fingers extended. I jumped for the window. There were bars over it. All the men were near the door now, staring at me and at the tremendous figure slowly coming my way. As Billy came forward, hands weaving before him in a sort of lunatic's spell, they slid toward the door.

Billy screamed again, like a mad child. I was in a corner, pushing back like a dumb animal crazed with fear. I wasn't too afraid of death, I'd always told myself. But *this!* I saw Bruce Kane's neck, and the bruise on jaw and shoulder. Neck broken like a rotten twig in a man's bare hands. *This* man's bare hands.

Under the madman's crooking arm, I caught a glimpse of the interne's white coat in the doorway, got a

glimpse of Fell backing out of the room, almost touching the white-clad figure. I heard somebody yell:

"Hey! *That's not Jack!*"

But these things meant nothing to me, for at that moment the maniac sprang, great hands driving for my throat. I dropped, dove under his arms, sprawling flat on my face as I did so.

I started to scramble for the door but the big fellow, with the intuition of the mad, swung that way and I saw I could never make it. I veered for the window again and senselessly beat against the bars there.

At this point I heard a coughing roar, and then three more, following fast. I turned desperately. Gun shots.

But no one was shooting at me. I saw the giant standing to the right of the door, stopped for an instant by the explosion of the shots. I saw the smallest McGee silent on the floor and Fell writhing there. I saw the ice-blooded doctor drawing a gun from under his coat. The move seemed slow, yet I knew that it was not. It was just that in this crowded fragment of time everything seemed in slow motion.

I saw guns in the hands of Holloway and the two other McGee brothers—and I saw, for the first time, *all* of the white-clad figure in the doorway.

It was not the man who had gone out for the giant. It was Special Agent Henry Beaver.

VI

OLD Spook-Face, in the interne's white coat, stood with feet a little apart, a prim smile on his lantern-jawed face and a .45 in each hand. As I stared, the one in his left bucked heavily, and another McGee sagged floorward. Then Old Spook-Face sprang back into the hall a tenth of a second before bullets from the guns of

Holloway, the doctor and the last McGee fanned the air where he had been.

That chilling, high-pitched scream, like the wail of a child coming from a man's corded throat, rasped out. The smallest McGee and Fell were shot through the body and blood hadn't yet sogged through their clothes. The last one to fall, the second McGee, had taken it in the throat and red was spouting.

The huge madman had seen it.

Billy got to where that figure jerked on the floor, and bent low over it, with maddened little brain scourged by the red flood . . .

We'll draw a veil over that. But while the giant was occupied, I picked up Fell's gun. I was straightening when Old Spook-Face came back into the doorway.

It was a mad thing to do. The three had their guns trained on it. It was like walking straight up to a machine gun for Beaver to step calmly back again, squarely into the doorway. I've never seen anything more reckless.

Four guns spoke almost at the same instant. *Almost!*

Two were Beaver's, one was the doctor's, one was that in the hand of the last McGee. But Beaver's two coughed first. I'd read of such shooting, but I'd never seen it before. The doctor fell with his hands over his abdomen, the third McGee tilted straight backward, with a blue hole over his right eye. And Old Spook-Face stood there with his prim little smile, unscathed. By sheer recklessness, and wizard quickness, he had gotten away with it.

I shot the gun out of Holloway's hand, as he recovered from the shock of events.

The room was very still. Holloway breathed stertorously, holding onto his

hand and staring with eyes that were still dazed and unbelieving. Beaver leaned against the door-jamb, guns drooping in his thin-fingered hands. And then there was, once more, that curdling child's scream coming from a colossal throat.

The mad giant had turned from the form on the floor and was glaring again at me. He came toward me, stooped over so that his great hands were almost even with his ankles. And I raised Fell's gun.

"Don't shoot, it isn't necessary," said Spook-Face.

"Not necessary!" I choked out. "I—"

MY finger was tightening on the trigger when Beaver sent four shots crashing through the ceiling, and for all his mania the eyes of the giant were wrenched mechanically toward the source of the noise.

Beaver dropped his guns. Dropped them, so help me, and hauled from under the borrowed white coat a strip of dull red. His muffler. It stood out in a startling contrast to the white as he held it deliberately across his chest.

"My God, Beaver—" I yelled.

The rest was drowned out as Beaver's purpose was accomplished and the giant forgot me and sprang for him. Beaver threw the scarf behind him, out of sight in the hall. His right hand flashed from his coat pocket.

And the most absurd thing in the world resulted from the swift movement. Suddenly, thrown from his hand, there was spinning on the floor with a silly whistling noise—the yellow tin top belonging to the proprietor's little boy.

I felt like yelling with laughter. I knew what a hysterical woman feels. I was aware of my knees buckling under me so that I swayed where I stood. And

—I was aware the giant's rush had stopped.

The big fellow glared at the whistling, shiny little top, and then at Beaver. There was no more maddening red in sight on Beaver. And I was behind him with my bloody face. The giant babbled something in a hoarse child's tone.

Beaver deliberately bent and picked up the top. For the moment he was as helpless before the madman as a bug under a looming sledge-hammer. He backed out into the hall, with the big fellow slowly following, and then spun the goofy little thing again, out there.

The big boy clapped his hands. Stained hands. "Come on," Beaver said soothingly. "Just come with me, and you can have it. See? This is the way it works. You press this stem down, and the top spins and makes the nice noise . . ."

Their steps progressed down the hall. I heard the crazy whistle of the toy once more, halfway up the stairs to the top floor, and then I sat down, rather heavily, with just enough wit left to cover Holloway, the one live gunman left in the place.

"Jeez," he said weakly. Which was perhaps the only possible comment at the moment.

Beaver came back. "He's locked upstairs in his cell," he said. "Poor fellow. Pity to shoot him. He wasn't responsible. Besides, you'd be surprised to know what Governor, of which State, is that demented thing's father!"

There was a clatter on the stairs. The Wheeler sheriff and four hastily gathered deputies came into the room, too late to do anything but look around . . .

YOU'VE read the rest in the newspapers, I expect. The doctor was Doctor Charles Byrd, little-known,

black-sheep brother of the famous Carroll Byrd. Kicked out of the medical profession for an illegal operation, he had drifted into tending crooks at fat fees: taking care of bullet and knife wounds, altering features. From that he had gone to hiding them out. When his famous brother opened Sylvan Glen, he saw a way to head a super-hideout and took it.

Sylvan Glen had been confiscated with all cells full of mental cases from rich and well-known families. Charles Byrd kept it going that way; it was a swell front. He kept his brother, to use if the patients got beyond his medical knowledge, and to present a front with a gun covering him from a far doorway if investigators got too persistent. Also, he kept on Carroll's Byrd's head nurse, forcing her to assist in his plastic-surgery cases. She was the one who tried to warn us.

A dozen big-shot crooks had gone to Sylvan Glen, had their maps altered and then been sent by plane out of the country. And half a dozen were there that night: a guy named Queen, who was the one who'd just had his face cut into a new shape when I went into the operating room, and the five others already mentioned.

Queen and Halloway were the only ones taken alive. Old Spook-Face apologized for that. He said, with so many men against him, he hadn't thought it safe to try to shoot to cripple. He had felt impelled to shoot to kill.

But that was in the future. At the moment of our leaving that hell-hole, I stood at the front door with Beaver while a deputy was splashing up the dark road for the car. Beaver was leaning against the wall, trembling.

Trembling? He was shaking like a leaf. Shaking till his teeth chattered. You could hear the little sound of them

quite plainly. His face was positively yellow.

"You idiot," he chattered. "Why didn't you reach up and break the light when the big fellow charged you? In the darkness you might have done something for yourself."

"Why didn't I?" I said. I was moved to frankness by the sight of his pitiable reaction. "I'll tell you why, and then I won't even admit it to myself, ever again. I was scared clean out of my mind. Too scared to think of anything. So damn s-scared . . ." You see, I was trembling just a little myself in the nervous reaction following the past quarter-hour.

"How'd you happen to come?" I asked.

"I went to your room, found you were out and went down to the lobby," he replied, teeth clicking like castanets. "The clerk told me of the liver so I knew where you were. Liver . . . dogs . . . Sylvan Glen. I borrowed the sheriff's car. Told him to follow as soon as he could. Went in such a hurry that I didn't get my rubbers or umbrella. . . ."

He hadn't gotten his hat, either. His lank hair was plastered down with the rain.

"But you took time to get that ridiculous top," I said.

He shrugged trembling shoulders. "It was on the hotel desk. I grabbed it, with the big fellow in mind. Knew, of course, who had killed Kane the instant I saw *him*. Case of arrested development . . . childish . . . very well, perhaps a child's toy might come in awfully handy. It did. Saved us from having to kill him."

THE deputy was swinging the car into the drive. I saw the headlights grow as it came toward the front door. We went out.

"Why, the dogs are chained!" I said, seeing the two Danes straining at steel links at the side of the porch.

"Sure. They were chained when I knocked the interne out, to borrow his coat and come back into the house with the big fellow. I imagine they've been chained all evening—to make it easy for callow young special agents to enter."

I swallowed that. I had it coming. I put my hand under his arm as we started out to get in the car. He was shaking like he was about to fall apart.

"Don't let it get you so bad," I said. "I know just how you feel. Rotten aftermath . . . But it's all over now."

Beaver stared at me perplexedly, teeth chattering, face greenish yellow.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

I blinked. It was the first time I'd ever heard prim Old Spook-Face swear. And I was astounded by his obvious perplexity.

He shook harder. "This is your fault," he said waspishly. "I'll be laid up with a chill for a week."

"Chill?" I said. "You must chill easy."

"I do," he said as serious as an owl. "I can guard against it with rubbers and an umbrella, except when some young dunce is so badly in need of help that I haven't time to get them."

I took off my coat and put it around him, and helped him into the car.

"We'll be back at the hotel with a doctor and warm water and blankets in two shakes," I said. There wasn't much else I could say.

He didn't reply, just shivered beside me with his eyes closed. But they opened as I slid around a muddy turn at fifty miles an hour.

"Slow down," he said peevishly. "Don't drive so fast over a slippery road at night. It isn't safe."

"Yes, sir," I said, very respectfully.

Cipher Solvers' Club for Dec., 1937

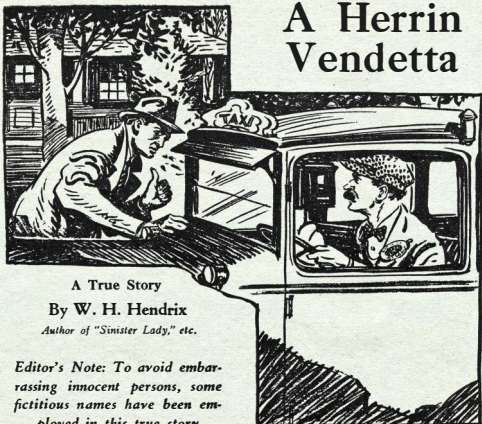
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(To Be Continued)

A Herrin Vendetta



A True Story

By W. H. Hendrix

Author of "Sinister Lady," etc.

Editor's Note: To avoid embarrassing innocent persons, some fictitious names have been employed in this true story

"I'll only be here a minute, don't run away,"
Gus said

IT WAS a foggy night in July, 1927, one of those murky nights that all St. Louis knows so well and hates so helplessly. Visibility was limited to about one automobile length. All traffic crept, and even creeping was hazardous. Drivers threaded their way as best they could, fearful that "something would happen" under this deep, all-concealing mantle. And something did.

The city awoke the following morning to be shocked by news of a murder so inexplicable that its mystery was exceeded only by its fiendishness. At the corner of Grand and Russell avenues, a quiet, peaceful portion of the south side, the body of Chester Bar-

nett, dynamic chain grocery store magnate, was found, two bullets through the heart and two through the head.

And as if the bullets, either of which would have produced instant death, were not enough, the killer or killers had added the further touch of slitting the victim's throat from ear to ear.

St. Louis seethed with excitement. If a popular official, or a leading clergyman, had been slain, it would have caused no more of a stir. For Barnett had literally taken, first his immediate neighborhood, and then a large part of the city, by storm. Coming to St. Louis about five years before with an extra suit as his only capital, he had leased a little hole-in-the-wall in the Tower

Grove section and set himself up as a neighborhood grocer.

He worked hard and he had ideas. Soon he had another little shop. In less than a year he had half a dozen of them. He started branching out into more elaborate establishments, and his chain grew like a bed of mushrooms. His personal popularity kept pace with his business success. Energetic, capable, with a charm of manner that inspired and held friendships, he had become in the short time he had been in St. Louis a commanding figure in civic affairs, a leader in church and fraternal activities, charity and welfare projects.

And so it was that the whole city demanded a quick solution of the crime.

A day and night of inquiry yielded almost nothing, and the next morning the city awoke again to discover that the only developments reported by the police were the extraction of the death bullets which were turned over to the crime laboratory, and the total lack of even the flimsiest of clues in what already had been termed by the newspapers "the murder of the decade."

The little that was known, in fact, only deepened the mystery. Two business friends of Barnett volunteered the information that they had left him about midnight at the corner of Twelfth and Olive streets and had seen him enter a taxicab there to go home.

Soon the driver of the taxi came forward to tell his story. He was Walker Valentine, an "independent" cabby who had come to town a few years before and by some odd method of calculation figured that his best bet would be to get the custom of the newspaper men. Hence he specialized in parking near the newspaper offices and had built up an acquaintance that included practically all the reporters of the city. They, and the friends they threw his

way, constituted the bulk of Walker's trade. Everyone liked the lank fellow, kidding him everlastingly about his big walrus moustache, an adornment of which Walker was particularly proud and which he unquestionably would not have exchanged for a brand new car.

Walker told police he had picked Barnett up at the downtown corner and taken him to Grand and Russell avenues, where the slain man had insisted upon getting out. He lived a few doors from the corner, Walker knew, having often hauled him before; but the night was so foggy and maneuvering a car so perilous, that Mr. Barnett had insisted upon leaving at the corner so Walker wouldn't have the added hazard of making a turn in the street. Yes, sir, that was all that Walker knew—he had let Mr. Barnett out, bade him good night, and started back downtown.

The body had been discovered at 5:30 in the morning by some men on their way to work. Police surgeons had agreed that death occurred about midnight. Officers pursued their questioning of Walker.

"Didn't you hear any shots as you drove away?"

"Nary a one," Walker said. "But in that fog, thick as pea soup, you couldn't hear a shot more'n fifty yards. Why, driving out with Mr. Barnett I noticed pertick'ler that a feller passed me on Grand Avenue with his bus backfiring louder'n two pistols shooting together and I couldn't hear him when he got four or five lengths ahead of me."

And so the driver's story didn't contribute toward the solution of the crime for which no motive, seemingly, could be discovered. Meantime anger flared throughout the city and demands increased that the police "do something." Interested groups and various civic

bodies began to threaten mass meetings to protest the failure of police to make headway. City and county law enforcement chiefs began to worry over the public reaction to their futile investigations.

ON THE second morning after the murder, Gus Hutchinson, reporter on an afternoon newspaper, walked apprehensively into his office and found his worst fears realized. Hardly had he seated himself when the booming voice of Guy Holmes, city editor, summoned him.

"Gus," Holmes said, "I see the papers this morning haven't dug up any more pay dirt than we had yesterday on this killing. There's a wow of a story in it somewhere, but the cops ain't going to find it, apparently. So that seems to put it right in your lap. Go, my lad, and bless you."

Gus growled eloquently.

"Listen here, Guy," he moaned, "it has been exactly four days since you and I had a formal agreement, a solemn treaty and—"

Holmes waved a threatening arm. "We'll take that up at the next session," he stormed. "Meantime, I want a yarn for the first edition that at least looks like news."

What Gus sought to remind his chief about was a conference the two had had in a speakeasy four days before, during which Holmes had promised positively, after much arguing, to grant Gus' request, repeated at least weekly for the past five years: to take the reporter away from police and crime reporting, which he loathed with a terrible loathing, and return him to his former assignment, politics and public affairs.

Gus cursed the day, five years before, when Herrin, Illinois, was swept

onto the front page of every newspaper in the land by the outbreak of a labor war in the mines. The first news flashes that day reported scores killed and civil war imminent . . . and so Gus had been dispatched to the scene. His reporting of the Herrin massacre was so outstanding, his colorful description of the dramatic events so gripping, that newspapers throughout the nation reprinted it as "tops" among the vast volume of reports coming from the scene.

The assignment ended about the time St. Louis was preparing to clean up "Egan's Rats" and other underworld gangs, and so the managing editor had ordered: "Better put Gus on that clean-up; let him take over police, too, so the tieup will be right." And there Gus had stayed, despite his cursing, storming and periodic threats to quit until he wangled the promise from Holmes—and then this happened.

"Tell you what," Holmes said, "there's a story in this, sure as you're born, and we both know it. Crack it, and that deal we made goes through, if I have to do physical battle with the boss to get his consent."

With a disgusted shrug Gus went to the reference department and examined the clippings from his own and all the other papers which contained references to Barnett. There was the story of the man's start down in the Tower Grove section—a small item about the man who said he was going to "humanize the grocery business of St. Louis." Other clippings told of this and that event during his rise, of how his stores multiplied from week to week.

Nothing here, Gus reflected, that hadn't been used the day before. There was one small item, however, describing a squabble between Barnett and Rico Machetti regarding a lease on a building which Barnett had wanted

and eventually got. Gus put this clipping in his pocket, wandered by the city editor's desk to blast that harassed man once more about crushed hopes, then went forth to do what he was told to do—get the lowdown on the murder that had rocked the city.

Lieutenant Webb was the commander in chief of the combined city and county forces, and to him Gus went first.

"How's it going?" Gus asked the vexed detective.

"Gus, this looks like one for the book," Webb answered. "There doesn't seem to be any way to add it up, if you get what I mean. Here's a bird without a single enemy. So what? So he's murdered. The only thing we've got is the bullets, and a helluva lot of good that's going to do us—without any gun."

"Looks like a tough one, all right," said Gus. "I looked over everything on file about this baby and it's all hotsy tots and roses, except this one thing I brought along. Thought we might dig into it."

HE PRODUCED the small item, printed more than a year ago, which set forth simply that Barnett had succeeded in holding the lease on an insignificant little store building after a contest with Machetti. The place had previously been a Machetti store; Machetti, for reasons not clear in the newspaper account of the transaction, had transferred his lease to another person, from whom Barnett had bought it. Subsequently, Machetti sued to regain it, and lost the action.

"Not much in that," Lieutenant Webb mused, "but the name may mean something. We'll dig into that a bit."

The name Machetti, meant sinister doings to the police. With the dawn of Prohibition, Machetti had engaged at

first in open flouting of the law. He operated two or three prosperous speak-easies in the south end of the city and was on the verge of opening a rather snooty downtown booze outlet when his troubles with the law began. He had a long record of arrests, but that he had never been convicted proved his skill at maneuvering.

Finally, however, when the "heat" had grown so intense that it threatened his profits, he had ostensibly turned from bootlegging to the safer career of neighborhood grocer. Presto, overnight he made "food shops" of what previously had been poorly concealed bars. Though he had for some time avoided arrest, his grocery stores were suspected by police of being the same old speakeasies under lawful labels. But Machetti was smooth, always had a ready alibi and had acquired considerable political pull.

Lieutenant Webb and Gus went to the courthouse to scan the record of the lease litigation and were astounded to find that it had been a bitter battle, though it attracted no attention at the time it occurred. Record of proceedings showed that Machetti had been militant and threatening throughout, his attitude apparently having helped him lose the suit.

"Tell you what," said Gus, "I'll run out and have a chat with the widow, and meet you in your office in half an hour."

Mrs. Barnett, stricken with grief and burdened with funeral plans, was reluctant to discuss her husband.

"I know very little about his business affairs," she told Gus. "You see, Chester left his business behind him when he came home, and if he had unpleasant news, well, he kept that entirely to himself. Oh, why did we ever leave Cairo and come here? It has been

a battle all the time, Chester working himself to death to get somewhere, and then this."

"You come from Cairo, you say?" asked Gus.

"Yes, in Illinois," said the widow. "If we had only stayed there, we would have been better off."

She turned to end the interview, then had an afterthought.

"This matter that you mention," she said, "I know nothing of it, really, though dimly I seem to remember he mentioned fearing trouble with this—what did you say his name is—Machetti? A dispute about some store locations, wasn't it? Well, I'll tell you what you may do. I'll show you his desk. He always kept things carefully filed and laid away. If you wish, you may look through his letters and see if anything will give you the information you seek. Under the circumstances, you will of course excuse me."

She guided Gus to a little alcove off the living room where the slain man apparently had conducted most of his business affairs, and left him alone with the victim's papers.

"This is a break," Gus said to himself, "that is, if there's . . ."

Within five minutes he whistled softly to himself, tucked a letter into his inside pocket, hunted Mrs. Barnett to make a hasty adieu and rushed back to the taxicab where Walker Valentine waited.

"Back to Lieutenant Webb's office, detective headquarters, the quickest time you ever made it in," he ordered.

HE DASHED into that officer's sanctum radiating excitement. "If you think we aren't on a hot trail, take a look at this," he said breathlessly, exhibiting the letter he had brought from the Barnett home. He reread it

over Lieutenant Webb's shoulder, then both expressed identical conclusions.

For the letter was ample, if properly supported by additional evidence, to start the writer toward the death cell. It was written by Machetti less than a month previously and related to Barnett's effort to get possession of another Machetti store.

It read:

MR. BARNETT: I got your letter yesterday. I am tired of it all. the way you try to get places where I got stores. You win last time in court, but I tell you this right now, you have to win more places than in a court house to take another place from me and keep on living. I give you warning you better forget this store right. for I keep it. Yours truly, RICO MACHETTI

Gus, conscious of the passing of time and determined to get something in shape to publish for the one o'clock edition, prodded Lieutenant Webb.

"Now what?" he suggested.

"Man alive, we're getting somewhere," Webb exclaimed. "Now, I want to see the letter from Barnett, the one this is the reply to, and then, so help me, I believe we'll have just about all we need to make out a definite case against Machetti. This thing here is nothing short of a death threat. Tell you what—I'll dash into court and get a search warrant, only take me a minute. Then we'll go out to Machetti's joint and find the Barnett letter, if he hasn't destroyed it. I'll get a writ for a liquor search and be right back."

He dashed through the door.

The usual booze search warrant quickly obtained, Lieutenant Webb and Gus started to step into the detective's car when the latter hesitated.

"Maybe we better not run out in a police car, at that," he said. "If that bird happened to have a hunch that the real heat is on, he might see the machine first and give us the slip."

"Well, there's my favorite mount, Walker, hitched to yon curb," said Gus. "What more appropriate than to have the last man who hauled the late lamented drive the men in pursuit of the killer?"

"Walker," demanded the detective, "do you know where Machetti's place is, out south?"

The cabman nodded, flicking his giant moustache. "Sure. Get in."

As the machine sped south, the two men analyzed all the data gathered in a busy hour. Machetti, they had learned, had aspired to create a grocery store chain at just about the time Barnett's star began to rise as a chain store magnate. From the brief court record, it had been made plain that Machetti had fought the steady encroachment of Barnett's stores as competitors.

One or more of Machetti's so-called "grocery" stores had been put out of business by the competition of the Barnett chain. Then, it appeared, Barnett had obtained one which he had been unable to buy outright from Machetti, by directly buying up the lease. The letter Gus discovered at the home, and which he had taken away with Mrs. Barnett's permission, indicated a fight was brewing over another of the Machetti stores.

THE cab pulled up at the Machetti establishment and Gus and Lieutenant Webb walked inside quickly. It was a good-sized store, stocked poorly with groceries in front, with Machetti's living quarters in the rear and a section between the two compartments containing a couple of rooms plainly furnished with chairs and large, barren tables the use for which was obvious. It was a dull hour and the place was entirely empty.

Machetti came walking slowly from the rear, eyeing the visitors strangely until he recognized the lieutenant.

"Well, Machetti, another rap," said Webb. "Here's the warrant, same old story. Guess I'll just have a little look."

It was an old story to Machetti. Liquor searches had been made so often that another made little difference. Lieutenant Webb began looking methodically into corners, peering under dark counters to conceal the real intent of the visit. Machetti stood grimly smiling, fooled completely.

"How's business, Machetti?" inquired Webb. "I hear you're closing some of your dumps."

"Well, if I can't make money, what I do—keep open anyhow?" Machetti mourned bitterly. "I try sell groceries, have four, maybe five stores. Then you fellas ride me all time, you and Federal men. People get scared, what? They no come back. I no make expenses. Then, more big stores keep coming in, push me around all time. So all I got now is this place and one, maybe two more. And I may lose one of them."

"Well, Machetti, you better go straight," Webb cut in, throwing his searchlight into the rear corner of the storeroom. "There's a law against this likker business, you know. You can't beat it all the time. What d'ya mean, you may lose another store? Federal men been moving in?"

Machetti gestured helplessly. "Honest, I no sell booze, not any more. The only other store I got worth a damn is four blocks from here. And now the big chain going to open right next door, unless I take a beating and sell 'em my own place. What can I do?"

Leisurely finishing his search of the front storeroom, Lieutenant Webb stalked back into the living quarters.

In a corner stood an enormous icebox, with a flat top that served as a desk and catch-all. Webb flashed his light beneath the box, where papers, receipts, letters and refuse of all kinds was piled, swept back as it fell from the top of the disordered desk. He dropped to his knees and began rummaging.

Sorting out various pieces of soiled mail, some of it bills which had never been opened, a letterhead caught his eye. Handing it to Gus, who stood beside him, he said in an undertone that Machetti could not hear: "Take a look at this. Maybe it's it."

Gus dropped into a chair and glanced casually at the letter. Careful not to reveal his excitement, he nodded toward Webb, who still was on hands and knees prying beneath the icebox. At the same time, his eye caught the glint of a bright metal object partly uncovered in a pile of trash and which the probing Webb apparently had not seen.

"What's that, back on your right; there, that bright thing?" Gus asked. "See—there."

"Well, I should say so," Webb said, picking up a nickel plated revolver. "Kinda careless where you leave your hardware, ain't you, Machetti?" he called to the proprietor, who was nonchalantly awaiting the end of the search some distance away.

"Never saw the gun before," Machetti muttered. "I no put it there. I have gun, yes, back in living room. That not mine."

"Well then, maybe we'd better take it along with us," Webb smiled, pocketing the weapon. He arose and glanced once more around the room. "I guess you've got the likker buried in the alley this time, but watch your step, boy. We're going to get tired of these things some day. And when the Federal

men put the finger on you it means Atlanta, you know."

He and Gus strode out the front door and reentered Walker's cab. Speeding away, Gus remarked gleefully: "What a break, and the guy didn't get wise. Still believes it was a liquor raid. But here's the letter we wanted—the only thing we need."

IT APPEARED, indeed, that within two hours the riddle of Barnett's slaying had been solved. Even Webb, an old-timer hardened against excitement and thrills in line of duty, grew as exuberant as Gus as they studied the letter from Barnett to Machetti.

The letter, expressing the fairness and generosity of the slain man, read:

"Dear Mr. Machetti:

"In line with the several conversations we have had regarding the store location, I am prepared now to make you an offer which I am sure you will find as tempting as it is pleasant for me to make it.

"You admitted to me that your profits have dwindled in that location to almost nothing, the bulk of your former trade having been attracted to other locations. You told me in our last conversation that if you could get what you considered a fair price, you would sell. You intimated that \$2,750 would seem fair to you.

"I have appraised, as best I could, your stock in the store, which I do not believe exceeds \$800 worth at the moment. Your lease is worth very little, considering the way the property has been kept up. But as I told you, the expansion of my chain makes it desirable that I have an outlet in that region, and because of that I am going to meet you more than half way. So I offer you \$3,500 for your property, as it stands—and most likely you can move much

of your stock to another place, since there are many items in the store which I do not care to stock.

"Thus, I am offering you, as I figure it, more than \$2,000 for your intangible assets, such as good will. I trust that you will accept this in the spirit in which it is made, making it unnecessary for me to engage the property next door, making the transaction more expensive for both of us. Let me hear from you immediately.

"Yours very truly,

"CHESTER BARNETT."

"And his death threat was the answer," Webb smiled. "Gus, I believe we have something here. Looks like the works. Tell you what we'll do. We'll run by the crime laboratory and leave this gun, for that certainly was a suspicious cache for it, wasn't it? Then we'll go and lay the whole thing in the district attorney's lap."

Gus agreed eagerly.

"Righto. And while you take the artillery in I'll call the office and tell 'em we may have something to print one of these days."

THE prosecutor studied the letters carefully, then sent his secretary to fetch the court record which had launched Webb and Gus on their fruit-ful tour.

"I believe, boys, that this will nail Machetti for the murder," he declared. "Webb, before Machetti gets a hunch and does a vanishing act, I think we'd better issue a warrant and throw him in the iron. This is plenty, not only to arrest him on but I don't believe I'll need any more to convince a jury. So we'll go ahead—"

Sergeant Patton from the crime laboratory burst into the room before the district attorney completed his sentence. He flung the gun found in Ma-

chetti's place on the table in front of Webb.

"Lieutenant," he shouted, "that's the gun that fired the four bullets into Barnett's body. We tested it six or seven times. It makes a distinct marking that couldn't be mistaken. Not a question about it."

"And Machetti saw you find the gun?" the prosecutor roared. "Webb, burn up the road and bring that fellow in!"

"I'll wait right here," Gus said, "and have my paper on the wire so as soon as he's questioned the story can go to press."

"How about fingerprints on the gat?" asked the prosecutor.

"Not a single one," said Sergeant Patton. "He must have been wise enough to wipe it off."

"Well, we don't need 'em—it really doesn't matter," said the prosecutor. He turned genially to Gus. "You fellows certainly have done a day's work. How the devil did you happen to get that steer on the thing, anyway?"

Gus explained how he got his hunch from the clipping regarding the suit over the lease, a trivial little item which apparently had been overlooked by reporters the day the story rocked the city. The rest was simply the natural follow-up.

"Funny that wasn't noticed the first day," the prosecutor commented.

IT WAS not long before Lieutenant Webb arrived with the prisoner. Machetti looked as suave, unworried, Gus noted, as he had appeared an hour before while observing the search of his premises. The prosecutor confronted him first with Barnett's letter.

"Made you kinda sore, didn't it?" he asked.

The unperturbed Machetti merely

shook his head. "I dunno," he said. "Why I have to sell him my store if I don't want? He bought one lease and put one of my places out of business. I no have to sell, do I? Free country, ain't it?"

"Well, you don't have to threaten to kill a man, either, do you, Machetti?" the prosecutor went on, holding before his eyes the letter he had written to Barnett with his own hand. "Sort of a little slip on your part, wasn't it, don't you think?"

Machetti began to crack under the questioning. "Well, I write when I mad as blazes," he said. "I no meant anything like—"

"Machetti, you made the mistake of keeping the gun, that's your chief trouble right now," the prosecutor interrupted, indicating the accusing weapon lying on the table.

"I tell you I never see the gun before!" Machetti screamed, by this time sensing his real predicament. "I tell you, I never—"

"There's no use going ahead with any more of this," the prosecutor said, turning to Webb. "Let a warrant be issued charging murder in the first degree. Bail is denied. Lock the prisoner up."

Within an hour, Gus's newspaper plastered the city with an extra edition which the tense population grabbed eagerly. Machetti had been caught; notes in the hands of officials showed the motive and revealed the threat, and the lethal weapon had been found in his home. An airtight case, the prosecutor's statement called it, commending the newspaper man for his assistance and exalting Lieutenant Webb for his swiftness in gathering the evidence and bringing the prisoner to book.

St. Louis breathed easier; all, that

is, except Gus Hutchinson. He was so inextricably tied up with this case in which he not only would have to continue reporting developments but would have to serve as a key witness for the state, he realized it would be weeks, perhaps, before he would get to the job he desired so ardently.

"Hell, Gus, you're the city's idol!" Holmes cried gleefully. "A few more performances like this and we'll do almost anything for you—except give you a raise."

THE trial was speeded. A special grand jury indicted Machetti and the hearing was begun within two weeks. His luck, which long had kept him out of the toils as a liquor violator, deserted him now. Despite a perfect alibi setup, the state's evidence was too damning to be overcome. He was convicted, sentenced to die and the appeal gesture produced only smiles among lawyers and judges.

"Appealing that sentence is certainly the height of uselessness," a colleague bantered with Machetti's attorney.

The city, satisfied with the speed justice made after a twenty-four hour delay in starting, went about its business again, awaiting the next deep fog. And Gus Hutchinson devoted hours to figuring how to make himself so great a pest he would be chased out of the office to the political assignment he craved. But he still was a reigning hero, much to his own disgust.

"You're entitled to a week or so of rest," Holmes told him one afternoon. "Just coast along, Gus, and I'll get you that job transfer, as soon as the Old Man finishes celebrating the beat you put across when you broke this yarn."

"Well, while you do your day's pondering, you'll excuse me if I meander

out and see the Cards play," said Gus, and strolled from the city room.

As usual, Walker was parked in front of the building. He opened the door with alacrity. "Hail to the big shot. Taxi, mister?" He smiled invitingly at Gus, at the same time emitting a stream of tobacco juice with unerring accuracy, dislodging a bumble bee from the edge of the curb fifteen feet away.

"What I've meant for a long time to ask you," Gus parried, "is how the devil do you manage to chew tobacco all the time and never get that prize mustache of yours mixed up with it?"

"Oh, I been chewing now f'r over thirty year," said Walker. "I remember when I could squirt the juice as acc'rate as you can shoot a slingshot. Ain't as good as I used to be, though, since I lost a front tooth a coupla years ago."

"Well, let's dash out to the ball park," Gus ordered, lolling comfortably into the cab. "But wait a minute, let's see—we're pretty early for the game. Tell you what—drive me out to Mrs. Barnett's house. I gotta see her again about something."

"Ain't you fellows ever goin' to wind up that case?" Walker queried. "I thought that was all washed up, all except bumping off Machetti and callin' it a day."

"Oh, it's all over, so far as that goes."

"All kiddin' aside, Mr. Hutchinson, I felt mighty proud that one of my best customers was the one to get all the glory out of that case."

The cab ground to a stop in front of the Barnett home. "I'll only be here a minute, don't run away," Gus said, darting up the steps.

HE FOUND Mrs. Barnett packing. "Yes, I'm going to leave this place with its hateful memories," she

said. "I really have few ties here. I believe I'll be happier back in my old home neighborhood, among relatives."

The widow clasped a big scrapbook. "All the terrible story is here. I pasted all the pieces from the papers here," she winced at the recollection of the past few weeks, "the whole terrible story. Maybe some day I will want to look at it. But not now."

Gus took the book and began glancing at the story he had helped so much to start. Turning the pages, he noted a number of snapshots, among them several of the slain man. And then he came upon one that caused him to almost drop the book as a memory that had been seared deep in his brain was suddenly resurrected. With a great effort he remained calm.

"You say you came here from southern Illinois, Mrs. Barnett?"

"Yes, Mr. Hutchinson. We came here from Cairo."

"Oh, yes; and you moved from Herrin to Cairo; right?"

The woman paled under his glance and stifled a scream. "Yes—we did, if you must know," she moaned. "But after that terrible experience there—Mr. Hutchinson, if you could only understand the terror of it all, that summer of 1922 when the whole countryside was bathed in blood . . . Oh, I had resolved never, never to even utter the name of the place again. And here you mention . . . how did you know it, tell me?"

Gus pointed to a faded snapshot pasted in the scrapbook. It was a picture of Mr. Barnett, clad in miners' overalls with a pick over his shoulder and a happy smile on his face.

"Oh, oh, oh," the widow cried, quickly shutting the book. "Please tell me you will keep my secret for me, that you will tell no other person? You

see, my husband was in that difficulty, with men on both sides ready to destroy each other's lives. When we got out of it all, we both swore we'd never speak of it again, try to blot it from memory so far as possible. And then, Chester began, to prosper. Oh, we've been so happy . . ."

"Don't worry any more," Gus patted her shoulder. "Now I must be going. Forget about Herrin. I dislike memories of Herrin just about as much as you do, but for a different reason."

A GLANCE at his watch showed Gus he still was a bit early for the ball game. He gave Walker an address downtown, on Sixth Street, which proved to be a poolroom with a cigar store in front. "Be out in a minute, wait here," he told Walker. Returning in five minutes, he started for the ball park.

He watched the rise and fall of Walker's mustache as he sat and munched on his cud of tobacco. "Say, you," Gus taunted him, "if you're really going to chew tobacco, why don't you get a brand worth chewing? I take a bite now and then myself, especially at a ball game. Here, have a wad of mine." He offered a package of scrap to the driver.

"Where'd you get this?" Walker demanded. "It's the best eating tobacco there is. I ain't seen any of it for four or five years."

"Oh, a pal of mine sells it. He has an apartment in my building," said Gus. "I get a package once or twice a month. Well, now that you've got that face full of good tobacco, what do you think of the game today?"

Ardent Cardinal fan, Walker was ever ready to talk on the subject.

"Cards'll win in a walk today," he opined.

"Don't want to bet a little something, do you?" Gus asked.

"Well . . ." Walker hesitated. He ran a hand into his pocket. "Tell you the truth, I ain't holdin' any cash, had a light couple of days this week. But boy, if I had it I'd lay it on the Cards this day."

"Wanta bet your old bus here against, say, twenty bucks?" Gus demanded.

"Couldn't do that," Walker faltered. "But I'd bet anything else I could get my hands on . . ."

Gus had an idea.

"Well, I'll lay you five bucks against that mustache of yours that you think so much of. If you lose, off it comes soon as the game is over. It'll grow back, so you won't have a permanent loss."

"T's a bet," Walker agreed, laughing at the incongruity of the gambling proposition.

That day the Cards took a trimming, 11 to 2, and Gus emerged from the ball park with the air of a conqueror. Walker was in the cab line awaiting him, doleful at his impending sacrifice.

"Right down town and into the barber shop. I'm going to see that you pay off on the line," he ordered, and to a barber shop they went. Gus called several cronies from the office to watch the payoff. They stood, showering razberries and tonsorial taunts at the chagrined Walker as he dutifully had the appendage clipped, then underwent a shave. With a few more derisive jibes at his knowledge of baseball, Walker was left to sit in his cab and stew in his lone fury. Everyone knew how he had cherished that mustache.

Gus and the gang returned to their news room just as Holmes was cleaning off his desk to leave for the day. He enjoyed the Walker episode as the

boys recited with shrieks the story of how stoically the cabman had paid off.

"But isn't that a bit—er—ah—lighish amusement for one of our foremost finder-outers?" he asked Gus.

"Here, you envoy of Satan," Gus countered, "how about getting me back my old job on this paper? Any developments?"

"Sh-h-h-h . . . Wait awhile. You're getting your pay, aintcha?"

"Once and for all," Gus stated, "I'll make a deal with you. If I turn in, within two days, another yarn which you will concede is as good as my so-called murder solution, will you then and there deliver me from the crime and police Golgotha and restore me immediately to pseudo respectability in what I jokingly call my profession? Do you agree, so help you God?"

Holmes saw there was a gleam of earnestness in Gus's eyes, and decided he wasn't joking, altogether.

"I don't know what could be a better story," he said, "but yes, I'll make that agreement. Now what are you going to dig up—the announcement that Joe Jones is going to run for Congress?"

Gus ignored the razz aimed at his own political reporting inclination. He stood erect, simulating an attitude of deep thought.

"No, I shall go out as a crime reporter in a blaze of glory, get me? I think that tomorrow, at the latest, I shall startle, amaze, uproot and otherwise disturb the city."

"And immediately thereafter get your dinner jacket packed for a tour as political correspondent and commentator," said Holmes.

EARLY the following morning Gus arrived at his desk. He telephoned Lieutenant Webb. "Say, if

you'll come up to my dump for a minute," he told the detective, "I'll give you the biggest tipoff since the flood."

Not long thereafter Webb entered and Gus drew him into a remote corner of the room. "Lieutenant," he told him, "I've got the killer of Chester Barnett all ready for the pinch, and I believe you can get set for an immediate confession."

"Meaning?"

"Walker Valentine, our trusty taxi driver. I hate like anything to do this, Lieutenant, but after all, murder's murder."

Webb looked as though he thought Gus had gone mad, but the reporter continued, unperturbed: "Tell you what you do: pick him up, he's downstairs by the front door now. You wouldn't know him, for I won a bet yesterday and he paid by shaving his mustache. Hop in his cab and when you get to headquarters take him in with you on some pretext. Then do this: pull that gun we found under Machetti's icebox on him and ask him where he got it, how he got rid of it. I think that's all you'll have to do. He'll crack, I'll gamble on that."

The two men talked together earnestly for several minutes more, Gus convincing the detective absolutely of the soundness of his theory. The lieutenant walked rapidly out of the room, Gus trailing him shortly after and following to headquarters in another cab.

When Gus entered the lieutenant's office, Walker sat limply in a chair facing the officer. His face was colorless, he was shaking like a man with a chill and he was moaning repeatedly: "I swore I'd do it, and I done it."

"It's all over except the legal end," Webb told Gus. "The confession is

being drawn now and will be signed in a few minutes."

"When you get it signed, Lieutenant, will you do me one favor—bring it over to my office and see me before you make another move?"

Thirty minutes later, Lieutenant Webb stalked with a satisfied air into the news room and sat down beside Gus' desk.

"For the love of heaven," he said, "tell me how you ever got this hunch."

"Got the confession with you?" Gus asked. Webb nodded. "Let's see it, then, for I want to crack this story quick."

Gus wrote rapidly, running the pages through without a halt.

"There," he said, "there's the story, so far as the paper is concerned. Now, let's go get a little nip. I won't have anything else to do for awhile. I'm off the crime and police beat now—going back to politics."

As they passed the city editor's desk, Gus tossed the folded story into the copy basket. "Take a look at that when you get a chance," he said, hurrying along, "you might want it for the first edition."

SAFELY hidden in a nearby speak-easy, Gus told Lieutenant Webb "the story behind the story."

"You know," he said, "airtight and unbreakable as that case against Machetti was, I never could quite accept it as a hundred percent right. But I didn't get a solitary hunch of anything different until yesterday afternoon. And it was all in the way I happened to notice Walker when he spit, out here by the curb. It sort of awakened an old memory, nothing to base it on, but just a sort of mental jolt. I dashed out to Mrs. Barnett's and ran slap dab into proof my hunch

was right—or at least nearly enough proof to go on."

"Let's get this straight," said Webb. "What did this man's spitting remind you of?"

"Oh, a scene in Herrin that I've never forgotten, because it was so symbolic of the hatreds among the rival miners' groups at that massacre. I had been on the job there for three days and was leaving the place. About half a mile from the mines, on a hot, dusty road was a little soft drink and tobacco stand. I stopped for a soda and there was a man, obviously a miner, buying a pouch of chewing tobacco. While I sipped my drink he stood quietly filling his mouth with the tobacco. Then another man approached, bought something and trudged on in the dust. This chap with the tobacco whirled to watch the disappearing figure, and he spat viciously into the dust. At the same time, forgetting there was anyone near him, he muttered to himself. 'I'll get you, some day, I swear it.' I never forgot that scene, and the man who spat in the dust was Walker Valentine. I got the hunch yesterday when I noticed him spit as I got into his cab."

"And your next move, Gus—?"

"I went out to see Mrs. Barnett. She had told me right along they came from Illinois, always specifying Cairo. I figured I'd spring something about Herrin on her and see how she'd act. But I didn't have to. I saw her husband's picture in an old scrapbook, his miner's pick on his shoulder. Then she admitted everything."

"You just about had it in the bag then."

"Almost. I happened to recall the kind of tobacco this little stand sold because the shack was built out of the colored signs of the tobacco maker. When I left the Barnett home, I took

a chance on a little place downtown where that tobacco might be had, and they had one package of it. The man told me he hadn't had a call for it in six months. Well, when Walker saw that tobacco pouch he just radiated the identity I suspected."

"You didn't give him any hint?"

"I should say not! There was just one thing more I needed to make it an absolute cinch. I remembered the man who had spit and sworn the terrible vendetta there beside the road had a peculiar scar on his upper lip—a fantastic, ominous scar that I could identify anywhere if I could get a glimpse of it again. So I played with the theory that such a distinguishing mark might be the reason for the mustache which Walker prized so highly. And, too, the mustache might be why the man's face never had clicked with me before, since I remembered the incident so well. The only problem was to either get the mustache out of the way—or get him unconscious or asleep so I could grab a peep at the lip."

"Well," Lieutenant Webb remarked, "this makes twice the Barnett murder has been solved, both largely through you. It makes me sort of sorry to see you leave our department to write politics. But we'll be seeing you, I suppose, when we need help on cleaning up the next case."

"Say," Gus asked, "does that confession—I looked at it very hurriedly—does it give every detail? Does he spill everything?"

"Everything," Webb said. "They were on different sides when that massacre occurred in Herrin. Walker kept the hate alive all through the years and waited patiently for his chance. You are right about the reason for his mustache—it was his costume for the final act. He said so in the con-

fession. And the gun? Well, when he'd shot Barnett and slit his throat just to be sure, he felt the need of a few drinks to steady him. So he went down to Machetti's. While Machetti was out back getting the alky, Walker ditched the gun under the icebox and kicked a lot of trash over it. That's the story."

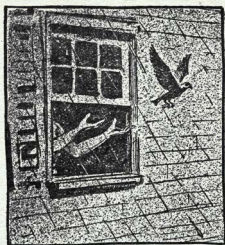
WHEN Gus approached his office trucks were dashing out the circulation alley and newsboys were yelling an extra.

"Where in hell have you been?" Holmes cried. "The story was complete, of course, but what about the lowdown? How in the name of all the saints and prophets did you phenagle that yarn?"

"Have your police man see Lieutenant Webb," Gus replied engagingly, his face beaming with a wide, conquering grin. "The police have the whole story—how it happened, the hunch, how it developed and all. Machetti will be released. Really, I don't see why your political expert should be called upon to soil his hands with a lot of crummy explanations on how a crime story is run down."

"Oh—there's another thing I was looking for you about," said Holmes. "I just had a talk with the Old Man—was he sore! Here's what he said: 'Under no circumstances change Mr. Hutchinson's assignment. Why, with two world-beating scoops to his credit, what are you talking about shifting him for? Are you just plain crazy?' That's what he said, Gus, so I figured for the time being, you know—"

"You go to HELL!" Gus shouted and left the office forthwith. But, from force of habit, Mr. Hutchinson started walking rapidly in the direction of the police headquarters press room.



Coffins for Three

By Frederick C. Davis

Author of "Front Page Dynamite," etc.

Cyrus Hatch finds the mysterious Timothy Quinn and meets the man who holds the secret of the "bloody birds"

NEW YORK Police Commissioner Hatch's son, Cyrus, becomes involved in a murder case when he is present at the Club Grotto at the time Attorney Seligman is killed. Evidence points to a girl, calling herself Joan Doe, who has been sitting at Cyrus Hatch's table. Cyrus later overhears her talking to a man at the bar and hears some reference to "bloody birds." She leaves the club with the man.

When four shots sound outside the club and Seligman staggers through the door, Cyrus, and his bodyguard, Danny, rush to the sidewalk. There they see Joan Doe standing at the curb with a gun in her hand. A moment later a man shoves her into a car and they drive off, followed by a maroon limousine.

Commissioner Hatch arrives with a squad of detectives and soon makes a clear case against Joan Doe. But Cyrus shocks his father, and disgusts the detectives, by claiming the girl is innocent.

Cyrus and Danny go from the club to the law offices of Flack, Seligman and Pirano and discover that Joan Doe has already been there, has tied up one of the murdered man's partners and ransacked the office.

Also involved are Howard Westcott, who

had driven the maroon limousine, and his wife, Lois, who had been in the night club with a mysterious gray-haired man. Cyrus learns that Westcott, a pigeon fancier, has lost a crate of birds and he and Danny



Suddenly a pigeon was released from the window

This story began in Detective Fiction Weekly for February 19

visit the Westcott home, posing as officers. There they meet Terry Alexander, Westcott's sister-in-law.

While Cyrus and Danny are there one of the missing pigeons returns with a message attached to its leg. Westcott reads the note and tells Cyrus that he is dropping the case. But Cyrus gets a glimpse of the note which says that Rhoda Quinn killed S., and tells Westcott to watch out for Cyrus Hatch.

Having noticed Westcott studying the back of a *New Yorker*, he buys one and discovers that Joan Doe is the girl in the cigarette ad on the back of that magazine. Later he calls up an agency and learns that Joan Doe is really Rhoda Quinn, a professional model. Obtaining her address, he visits her apartment. But there is no one there but Lloyd Daly, a magician, who claims to be a friend of Rhoda's. While they are talking, the police arrive and arrest Daly. Cyrus later goes down to Headquarters and is again warned by his father to stay out of this case. While there, information comes in that vandals had been at the cemetery the night before and chipped six letters from the Seligman tomb. The missing letters are three E's, one A, one I, and one S. The police are inclined to think it the work of a crank, but Cyrus thinks otherwise.

In the meantime, Danny has been trailing Mrs. Westcott and reports to Cyrus that she has again met the gray-haired man and that now the latter is watching a certain house. Waiting until he leaves, Cyrus enters the house while Danny trails the man. While Cyrus is searching the rooms, he hears someone entering and hides behind the shower-curtains. A moment later someone turns on the water. Parting the curtains, Cyrus is faced by Rhoda Quinn, almost nude, with a gun pointed at him. Cyrus becomes more convinced of her innocence after talking to her. She goes into another room to dress and leaves by the window.

Danny arrives to say that the gray-haired man is in the Carlson Hotel; Jane Porter is watching him. Danny and Cyrus

hurry to the hotel and corner the man in the washroom and when they search him they find a photostatic copy of the marriage license of Rhoda Palma and Timothy Quinn. The man admits he is a private detective but refuses to tell who has employed him. Cyrus suspects it is Mrs. Westcott.

Returning to the college where he teaches, Cyrus is warned by the Dean to drop out of the case or he may be fired. He refuses to quit. Also waiting in the office is a detective sent by Cyrus' father. While in the middle of his class, Cyrus receives a phone call from Jane who is at his apartment. She tells him that Terry Alexander has been there but has left, and that Sam Flack and a man, who answers the description of Sanders, are waiting to see him.

Cyrus and Danny, accompanied by the detective, leave immediately. Arriving at the apartment, they find another detective assigned to watch Cyrus, but no sign of Jane or the two men.

Searching the house, they find Jane, unconscious, lying on the bed in Cyrus' room. Over in the corner is Sam Flack—murdered. As one of the detectives races for the telephone, a girl darts out of a closet and, running to the street, escapes in a taxi. It is Terry Alexander.

CHAPTER XI

The Girl in Brown

TWO white-coated internes stood beside the bed with a litter. Jane Porter's lids drooped. The usually gay lines around Hatch's eyes were deep and dark. He bent over Jane, holding one of her strengthless hands.

"You're going to be all right," he said.

Jane's wan lips moved but Hatch could not distinguish her words.

"Can you repeat what you just said, Jane?" he asked gently.

He scarcely caught her whisper. "Of course—I'll be—all right."

"Are you able to tell me what happened, Jane?"

"Flack—sent me to the—drug store."

"Then you weren't here when it happened?"

Jane whispered, "He said—afraid he would—heart attack." She drew a quavering breath. "When I came back in—somebody hit me."

"Who did that, Jane?"

"I didn't—see," Jane managed. "That's all—I know."

Hatch's lips pinched together. "You're going to be all right," he said again. "I'll be seeing you soon. Stiff upper lip, Jane."

Jane whispered, "Bring my pajamas—when you come?" Her eyes closed.

Hatch straightened, rubbing his hand hard across his mouth, nodding to the internes.

They shifted Jane onto the litter and carried her out. In spite of the rain, a crowd was collecting around the stoop. The men placed Jane in the ambulance. It sped off with its siren wailing.

Zimmer and McCullough remained in the bedroom with the corpse of Sam Flack.

Hatch took up the telephone, found a number in the directory and spun the dial.

"Flack and Pirano, good morning," a girl's voice said.

"Connect me with Mr. Pirano," Hatch said.

"Mr. Pirano isn't here."

"Where is he?" Hatch demanded.

"He went out a little while ago."

"How long ago?"

"I guess about a half an hour."

"When are you expecting him back?"

"He didn't leave any word."

Hatch put the phone down. Delevan eyed him anxiously as he drained his

highball. Through the window he watched a heavy sedan swing to the curb. Police Commissioner Mark Hatch alighted from it and climbed the stoop. Cyrus Hatch squared his shoulders and opened the entrance.

"Hello, Cyrus," the Commissioner said soberly.

"Hello, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said.

"How do, Commissioner," Delevan ventured.

The Commissioner trudged into the bedroom. While Zimmer and McCullough talked to him, he gazed regretfully at the corpse. Hatch stepped into the hall and examined the powdery print on the floor. He extended his foot as if to smear it, but reconsidered.

HE looked up at the sound of squeaking brakes. Two rubber-coated patrolmen were ordering the crowd on the sidewalk to disperse. A second car was stopping in front of the house. The Homicide Squad piled out of it.

Vogt led the way in, carrying a black case. Houser and the photographer tramped after him. They glanced sharply at Cyrus Hatch, went into the bedroom and nodded to gruff orders from the Commissioner.

The photographer carried his case back into the hall. He began preparations to make photographs of Terry Alexander's footprint.

The Commissioner returned to the living room and dropped himself into a big chair beside the fireplace.

"Last night you said you'd probably get yourself into a nasty jam, Cyrus," the Commissioner said.

"And I have," Cyrus Hatch admitted.

"You said you wouldn't expect any official leniency from me."

"I still don't," Cyrus Hatch said.

"I can't show you any," the Commissioner said. "I've got to treat you the same way I would any other man in this situation."

"I asked for it," Cyrus Hatch said, and he smiled wryly. "There's no use trying to keep me out of the case now, is there, Mark?" He glanced into the bedroom. "This was a man's job. Doesn't that fact change your mind about Rhoda Quinn?"

"Damnation," Mark Hatch said, "no."

"Listen, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "This is the biggest case you've tackled since you were appointed."

"You're making it a damned sight bigger than it should be, Cyrus," the Commissioner said. "The way you're mixed up in it, you're making it a terrific headache. You're damned near making it a national issue."

"That's why you can't let yourself go wrong on it, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said. "If you bank everything on Rhoda Quinn, and lose, it may break you. I don't want that to happen."

"There are plenty of men waiting for something to break me, Cyrus." Commissioner Hatch sighed and wriggled his toes in his shoes. "You'd better tell me about what happened here."

Cyrus Hatch thought a moment. "I want to give you all the help I possibly can, but at the same time I've got to weigh every word I speak, for good reasons of my own."

"I wouldn't hold anything back, if I were you, Cyrus," the Commissioner said.

In the hallway a flash-bulb glared.

Cyrus Hatch's gray eyes sharpened. "This morning I went to the office of Flack, Seligman and Pirano. I accused Pirano of being in some kind of a crooked deal with Seligman. Sam Flack was there and heard the whole

thing. Flack was apparently honest, but he was dumb, and my accusation surprised him. After I left the office, he must have wanted to square himself, so he came here to see me. Jane was here while I was having a class, and he waited."

The Commissioner contemplated his shoes and wriggled his toes. Houser came from the bedroom and stood by without speaking.

"While Flack was waiting, Norman Sanders showed up," Cyrus Hatch said.

"Damnation," the Commissioner muttered.

"I don't know why he came," Cyrus Hatch went on, "but I do know that he and Flack had an argument. Flack got so worked up he sent Jane over to the drug store. By the time she got back Flack was dead. The murderer was just about to leave. He was desperate to get away, and he struck Jane down."

"Then Sanders did it," Houser said.

"Possibly," Cyrus Hatch said. "Possibly not. Pirano is missing from his office. He might have followed Flack over here. He might have killed Flack in order to keep his crooked deal covered up."

Again white light flashed in the hall.

The Commissioner said, "Houser, I want John Pirano brought in."

HOUSER went to the telephone. While he put through a call, Cyrus Hatch said, "I haven't any idea who killed Flack, but stranglers are always men. That lets Rhoda Quinn out of this one."

"A strong woman could've done it," the Commissioner said. "When a woman gets mad, she can be as strong as a man. Rhoda Quinn handled Pirano plenty rough last night."

Vogt came from the bedroom, carrying a special fingerprint camera. "We'll

have to dust the whole place, Commissioner," he said.

Mark Hatch nodded. "Don't overlook anything, Vogt." Gazing hard at his son, he added, "Every piece of furniture in Rhoda Quinn's place was polished after Seligman was killed. Daly did that, trying to protect her, but he overlooked several places. We got some good fingerprints off of a package of cigarettes she left in one of her purses. I hope we don't find any more of that woman's fingerprints in here."

Cyrus Hatch's mouth puckered. He said, "You won't, Mark."

"Then what woman made that footprint in the hall?" the Commissioner asked.

Cyrus Hatch said in a low tone, "I don't know."

"Didn't you see her as she ran out, Cyrus?" the Commissioner insisted.

"I can't tell you who she is, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said.

The Commissioner looked grim.

"You can't, or you won't?"

Cyrus Hatch drained a few melted drops from the highball glass.

"Cyrus, I'm going to take you down to Headquarters and hold you," the Commissioner said.

Cyrus Hatch answered with a tense nod.

"You gonna hold me too, Commissioner?" Delevan asked.

The Commissioner said, "I'm going to hold both of you."

"Okay," Delevan said.

In the hall, light glared again.

Cyrus Hatch gazed meaningfully at Delevan, then at the door of the bathroom, then again at Delevan. In return, Delevan looked puzzled.

Houser left the telephone "What about that girl, your son's secretary, Commissioner?" he asked. "Hadn't we better keep one of the boys with her at

the hospital? We'll have to hold her as a material witness."

The Commissioner said, "We'll do that, Houser."

The photographer came in from the hall, carrying his tripod over his shoulder. "Got some good ones of the footprint, Commissioner," he said. "We can blow 'em up to actual size and make good use of 'em." He carried his camera into the bedroom.

"Vogt can use the shellac sprayer on it now," the Commissioner said. "That makes two women we're looking for. When we find the second one, we'll hold her as a witness too—if we don't charge her with murdering Flack."

Again Cyrus Hatch gazed at Delevan, then at the bathroom door, then back. This time light dawned in Delevan's eyes.

"Excuse me," Delevan said. "I gotta go."

He stepped into the bathroom and closed the door.

The buzzer sounded. Zimmer tramped to the entrance.

In the bedroom, Cyrus Hatch saw the photographer aiming his camera at Flack's body. Vogt was brushing gray powder over the footboard of one of the twin beds, and the powder was clinging to clusters of smudges.

Zimmer reappeared, following Deputy Commissioner Sprague. Mark Hatch's face grew a shade redder at sight of Sprague. The Deputy Commissioner smiled amiably at Cyrus Hatch, looked in at Flack's corpse, then came to the Commissioner's side, frowning with false concern.

"This is going to be tough," he said. "Tough on you, Commissioner."

"Don't lose any weight over it, Sprague," Mark Hatch said. "I'll do the worrying."

"A report was phoned in just after

you left, Commissioner," Sprague said, "so I thought I'd better come right away. It was phoned in by the cop on the tour that takes in a Hundred Twenty-Fifth and Third Avenue. His name's Weinik."

Cyrus Hatch shifted to the bedroom door and gazed at the detectives working over Flack. His lids lowered as he listened to Sprague.

"Weinik is a friend of a Mrs. Maltz who runs a rooming house up there," Sprague went on. "Mrs. Maltz told Weinik she rented a room last night to a young woman. It was late, after midnight. The young woman paid a week's rent in advance, but this morning she cleared out. Weinik thought it might be Rhoda Quinn."

Cyrus Hatch put his hand on the bathroom knob.

"Mrs. Maltz told Weinik she happened to look out into the hall this morning, and she saw two men coming out of that room," Sprague continued. "She told Weinik one of those two men was over six feet tall, and the other looked like a fighter."

Mark Hatch, his face suddenly darker, said heavily, "Cyrus, come here."

"Just a minute, Mark," Cyrus Hatch said.

He sidled into the bathroom. Closing the door, he turned the bolt into its socket. Delevan was standing on the edge of the tub and opening the small window.

"After you, chief," Delevan said.

HATCH looked out into the court. The area within the block of buildings was divided by wooden fences. The yards were deserted.

Hatch thrust his feet over the sill, squeezed out and dropped ten feet. Delevan clambered after him. Side by side, they moved toward the fence.

Delevan put his foot into Hatch's hands. Hatch boosted him up, then pulled himself over. He tried a door that opened into the court from the rear of the adjacent building. Finding it locked, he turned to a lower window, which was open six inches.

He raised the sash and slid into a gloomy room full of a thick odor of cooking. An Italian woman was rocking in a chair while nursing a baby. Her eyes and her mouth opened, but she did not scream. At a table, two small boys, a smaller girl and a fourth child of indeterminate sex were perched before plates of minestrone. As Delevan followed Hatch into the room, Hatch counted heads.

"It's all right, madam," he said to the woman. "We're census takers."

"Five, right?" Delevan said.

"Right," Hatch said.

"I gotta two more," the woman said.

"Make it seven," Hatch suggested to Delevan.

"Seven it is," Delevan said.

"Good day, madam," Hatch said to the woman. "We'll be back again in ten years."

"In ten year I gotta ten more," the woman said with a giggle.

Hatch and Delevan went into the hall. A dark-visaged man was coming down a flight of stairs. Immediately he broke into outraged denunciation. Hatch shrugged and climbed past him, dogged by Delevan. When they reached the street door, the woman was screeching at the man and the man was bellowing at the woman and the children were yammering and the baby was howling.

Hatch and Delevan ran through the rain, away from the patrolmen stationed in front of Hatch's apartment. At the corner they climbed into a taxi. Settling back, they brushed water from them-

selves. Hatch gave the driver the address of the Westcott home.

"What was that there janitor hollering at us about, chief?" Delevan inquired.

"He was protesting that the sanctity of his wife, his family and his home must remain inviolate. He was of the opinion that we were something less than pigs, and he mentioned that if we would wait a minute, he'd cut our throats."

"I'm gonna go back and that there guy is gonna be bust inna snoot," Delevan said.

"Not now, Danny," Hatch said. "This is much more important."

Delevan grinned. "Yeah," he said happily. "Maybe I'm gonna see that there sweet Westcott dame again. I sure gotta yen for that sweet dame."

"Good heavens, Danny!" Hatch said. "Don't make life any more complicated than it already is."

WHEN the taxi reached their destination, the dignified doorman came to their aid with an enormous umbrella. Once inside the apartment building, Hatch said, "Miss Alexander is expecting us," and went with Delevan into the elevator. Leaving it at the penthouse level, Hatch touched the call-button. A maid opened the door.

"Mr. Hatch and Mr. Delevan calling on Miss Alexander," Hatch said.

"Come in, if you please," the maid said.

Lois Westcott was in the glass living room. She was pale, but her eyes were steadfast. As she greeted Hatch and Delevan, a boy of three left a pile of building-blocks and came to her side.

"This is my son Peter," Lois Westcott said. "Peter, this is Mr. Hatch and Mr. Delevan."

"Hello, Peter," Hatch said.

"How do," Delevan said. "Pleasure."

"And this," Lois Westcott said, "is my father, Rupert Alexander."

She turned to a man who was sitting in a chair in the corner. Rupert Alexander was glowering at Hatch and Delevan with dark, fiery eyes. His white hair and his white mustache bristled. His movements as he advanced were forceful, even threatening. He crushed Hatch's and Delevan's hands and acknowledged the introductions with a curt nod.

"This," he announced abruptly, in an abrasive voice, indicating a glass piece on the mantel, "is an excellent specimen of a Graeco-Egyptian ointment jug, is it not?"

Hatch considered it. "Indeed it is," he said.

"Nonsense!" Rupert Alexander snapped. "It's nothing of the sort. It's a Mosque lamp of the fourteenth century from Syria. You know nothing about fine antique glass, young man. You're probably even ignorant of the difference between a Catalonian flask and a Saracenic pilgrim bottle. Hrrrf!"

Hatch retained his composure with an effort, but Delevan took a wary step backward.

"I confess I'm ignorant of it," Hatch said.

"Hrrrf." Rupert Alexander cleared his throat vehemently, fixing Hatch with his fierce eyes. "Young man, glass is one of the oldest scientific and artistic achievements of the human race. Glass plays a vital part in our modern civilization. It's becoming of greater importance every day. Without it we couldn't exist. You'd do well to inform yourself, young man." Rupert Alexander's glare warned Hatch that he had better do so at once.

"Father, Mr. Hatch is here to see Terry," Lois Westcott said placatingly.

"What is *he* here for?" Rupert Alexander demanded, thrusting a finger at Delevan.

"Mr. Delevan will be glad to hear about your collection of glass, I'm sure," Hatch said.

Rupert Alexander caught Delevan's arm and pulled him aside.

"Sit there," he commanded, nudging Delevan into a chair. "Have you ever seen a glass diving-board, young man? I developed a special flexible glass which is suitable for diving-boards. I also make heat-absorbing window-glass, and glass construction blocks. I make nuts and bolts of glass, spark-plugs of glass, wall-paper of glass, glass piping, and what's more I make tin cans with glass windows in them. What do you think of that?"

Delevan could not express his amazement.

TERRY ALEXANDER hurried into the room. She was still wearing the rust-colored suit. At once, with an apprehensive glance at Lois Westcott, she led Hatch from the room. Taking him into her bedroom, she closed the door.

"Why did you come!" she said in alarm. "I warned you about Father. If he finds the slightest excuse for thinking something is wrong—"

"He'll be damned well justified," Hatch interrupted. "You know why I'm here, Terry. I don't need to tell you that Sam Flack was murdered in my apartment not more than an hour ago."

Terry's hand flew to her throat. "I—I don't know anything about it!" she protested.

Hatch stepped toward her. "That's not true," he said. "Heaven knows how many other lies you've told me. Sooner or later I'm going to get the truth out of you, but right now I'm trying to

keep you out of this murder case. The first thing you've got to do is take off those clothes."

Terry looked down at herself, then lifted her frightened eyes to Hatch's. "But—why?"

"Don't put on an act for me, Terry!" Hatch snapped. "Last night two men saw Rhoda Quinn run away from Seligman's body, and they both muffed her description completely. Today a detective saw you run away from Flack's body, and he got every detail of your appearance correct. The police have a description of everything you're wearing right now, excepting your underwear. You've got to get out of those clothes."

Terry took a retreating step. "But they can't possibly think—"

"Terry," Hatch said grimly, "there's a radio in this apartment, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Your father listens to it, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then it won't be long before he hears a description of your whole outfit come out of it. You've got to do more than merely take those clothes off. You've got to hide them, get rid of them. You can't ever wear them again."

"But I had nothing to do—"

Hatch took another step. Trying to avoid his advance, Terry backed against the wall. The force of his eyes made her cringe.

"You'll take those clothes off right now, or I'll do it for you," Hatch said.

"But if you'll only let me explain—"

Hatch's fingers grabbed her blouse. His jerk sent buttons flying. Without speaking, Terry removed the blouse, then slipped out of her skirt and stood there in her pink slip.

He turned to the closet and caught her jacket off a hanger. He dumped

the contents of her brown purse onto the dresser, then stuffed a pair of brown gloves and a brown hat into it. Then he turned back, pushed Terry into a chair and pulled off both her oxfords.

"Get me a box," he said.

She did not move. Hatch took a hat-box from the closet shelf. Finding it empty, he picked up an armload of her shoes. Dumping them into the box, he forced the cover down.

"What—what are you doing, Cy?"

"I'm leaving you just one pair."

Hatch said. "Buy yourself some new shoes at least a size larger or smaller than you're used to wearing, then throw the old ones away. You left a footprint in my hall."

"What are you going to do with my shoes and my suit?" she asked. "You can't carry them away, with Father out there."

Hatch put the stuff on the bed. "I'll decide that when I've finished with you. Out with it, Terry—tell me the truth."

TERRY sank into a chair, gazing at Hatch fearfully.

"You went to the Jungle Bar of the Carlson Hotel in answer to a phone call from Duncan Kerrigan," Hatch said. "Why did you lie to me about knowing him?"

"I don't know him," Terry said. "I never saw him in my life."

Hatch's fists clenched. "Good heavens, Terry! Don't force me to beat it out of you."

She gripped the arms of the chair. "I don't know him," she insisted. "He called Lois. Lois didn't dare leave. She was afraid Father would notice something. She sent me—told me how to recognize Mr. Kerrigan, and asked me to bring back something he had for her."

"All right," Hatch said. "I don't

know why, but I believe that. From the Jungle Bar you went to my apartment."

"I wanted to talk to you—tell you I wasn't able to get hold of any of the messages."

"You waited a while at my place," Hatch said. "then you left."

"I went back to the Carlson, to see if Mr. Kerrigan hadn't turned up. I had something to eat, then I went back to your apartment."

"Exactly what happened then?" Hatch demanded.

"I rang and there wasn't any answer," Terry said. "The door was open slightly, so I went in. Then I saw—in the bedroom—"

"Describe it exactly," Hatch said.

"Your secretary was lying on the first bed," Terry said. "I went in, and then I saw the man lying on the floor beside the other bed. They both looked dead. I didn't—didn't know what to do. Just then I heard the buzzer. There was someone at the door."

"Go on," Hatch said.

"I hurried out of the bedroom—"

"Did you close the door when you left that room?"

"Perhaps I did. I don't remember. I was terrified. All I could think of was that I had to get away somehow. I ran into the hall. The door began to open. I hid in the only place I could find—behind the coatrack."

"Who came in?" Hatch asked.

"A man. A man with bushy black eyebrows."

"McCullough, a detective," Hatch said.

"He went into the living room and sat there," Terry said. "He could see out into the hall, and I didn't dare move."

"How did that powder get on the floor?" Hatch demanded.

"I dropped my purse a second before

the detective came in. It burst open and the powder spilled out of my vanity. I didn't even dare pick it up for a few minutes, because the detective was sitting there in the living room. I had to wait—"

"Another thing you've got to do, Terry, is change your brand of powder."

He took her vanity case off the dresser and put it in his pocket.

"Then we found the body and you knew we'd be sure to find you if you stayed, so you scrambled," Hatch said.

"Cy—what can I do?" Terry asked in a small voice.

"Keep absolutely quiet about this, even to Lois," Hatch said. "And tell me the truth—everything you know about the whole situation—the sooner the better."

Terry thought a moment, then rose and turned to the closet.

"ALL I know is what Lois told me this morning," she said. "She told me that Mr. Kerrigan is a private detective, and that she hired him because she was afraid Howard was in trouble, and she wanted to help Howard."

"What kind of trouble?"

Terry selected a dark dress from the closet and began putting it on.

"She didn't have time to tell me anything else, with Father stalking about. I don't think she's sure what it is."

"And Howard doesn't know about Kerrigan?" Hatch asked.

"Howard doesn't know," Terry said, quickly arranging her hair.

"The birds have brought more messages in, haven't they? But you haven't been able to get hold of them, is that it?"

"Howard won't let anyone come into the loft."

Hatch's eyes were glinting. "Howard and Lois have been married how long?"

"More than four years. Why do you ask?"

"Tell me about them."

"At that time Howard was working on his plastic," Terry said. "He'd tried to get a job with some manufacturing company, so he could have the facilities of a big laboratory, but he hadn't been able to connect. He'd gone ahead on his own, working alone, day and night, in a stuffy little room. He'd spent every cent he had on material and equipment, and he hadn't eaten enough, and he'd taken sick. He was pretty far gone when he came to Father."

"Nobody in the family had met him before that," Hatch said.

Terry used her lipstick. "No," she said. "Howard knew that Father has always been a progressive industrialist. Father has backed several men with sound ideas for commercial developments, like Howard's. Howard was so poor and so ill he couldn't carry on any longer, so he offered to sell his data to Father—offered a tremendously valuable thing for a ridiculously small amount—because he knew Father could make the most of it. Father was deeply touched—his reaction was typical of the best in him."

"He befriended Howard," Hatch surmised.

"He did everything possible to help Howard. He sent Howard to Saranac. When Howard came back, strong and well, Father built a complete laboratory for him, and they organized a company. Howard threw himself into his work again, and now he's winning out. We all admire him with all our hearts. Father, being the kind of man he is, might turn violently against Howard, but Lois and I would stick with him in spite of everything."

Hatch was silent a moment, gravely studying Terry. Then he said, "You're in love with Howard."

Terry turned to him suddenly.

"No," Terry said. "It's not like that."

Hatch looked grimly into her wide eyes. "You're so much in love with him, you'd do anything to save him from disaster. You'd go so far as to kill a man, even two men, to save him, if it was necessary."

Tears came into Terry's eyes and she bit her lips. She shook her head tightly. "It isn't like that, Cy," she said.

Hatch turned away. Terry seized his arm.

"Where are you going?" she asked quickly.

"Up to the loft," Hatch said. "I'll get Howard Westcott in a corner and pound at him until—"

"Don't—don't do that," Terry said. "Not while Father's about."

She retained control of herself with a trying effort. Her eyes begged Hatch to relent. Abruptly he clenched the bundle of clothes under one arm and took up the box of shoes.

"Is there an incinerator chute in this penthouse?" he asked.

Terry led him along the hall, through the kitchen and onto the landing of the fire-stairs. Hatch opened an iron panel in the wall. First he stuffed the clothing into the chute, then he dropped Terry's shoes into it. Last he disposed of her purse and her vanity case.

"God help us both if I've overlooked anything," he said.

CHAPTER XII

Who Is Howard Westcott?

WHEN Hatch and Terry returned to the living room, they found that Lois Westcott and Peter were no

longer there. Rupert Alexander, gripped Delevan's arm, had him stationed in front of a picture.

"You know what that is, young man?" Rupert Alexander was demanding.

Delevan shook his head miserably. "A glass print," Rupert Alexander said. "A unique medium of art-expression brought to its highest development by the Barbizon group. The picture is etched on a black glass plate, after which photographic prints are made from it. This is a Daubigny. I have several Rousseaus, Corots and Millets. My favorite—" He broke off to glare at Hatch.

"I'd like to hear more about your collection of glass another time, Mr. Alexander," Hatch said. "I'm afraid we must be going."

"Hrrrf," said Rupert Alexander. "I've scarcely touched upon the subject. I hope you feel enlightened, Mr. Delevan."

"I'm a guy I was never more enlightened in my whole life," Delevan said faintly.

Hatch said, "Goodby, Miss Alexander. Goodby, Mr. Alexander."

Rupert Alexander stiffly nodded his farewell, and stalked back to his chair. Terry opened the door for Hatch and Delevan, then closed it upon them quickly. Waiting at the elevator, Hatch grim and Delevan weary, they heard Rupert Alexander questioning Terry about their visit, and heard her parry his questions. When the panel opened, they stepped into the cab.

"This here is the first time I was ever punch-drunk outside a ring," Delevan said with a sigh, "and this here is the last time I'll ever think glass it's something which you just look through it."

Crossing the lobby, Hatch saw that

the doorman was at the switchboard of the house telephone.

"Your car is here, Mrs. Westcott," the doorman was saying over the wire.

A man wearing a dripping raincoat over his overalls pushed into the lobby and left a car key in the doorman's hand. He followed Hatch and Delevan out, trotted to a motorcycle and chugged off in the rain. Signaling a taxi, Hatch noticed a maroon limousine at the curb.

The taxi sloshed up. Hatch ducked into it behind Delevan. As it accelerated, the driver looked back and asked, "Where to, boss?"

"Right here," Hatch said. "Stop."

The bewildered driver stamped on the brake-pedal. Hatch placed a dollar bill in his hand, then ducked out. Delevan hurried behind him. He opened the outside rear door of the limousine and got in.

"Down," he commanded as Delevan followed him in.

He sat on the floor of the car, behind the front seat. Delevan hunched beside him. He looked through the dark rain toward the entrance of the apartment building.

"Chief, this here business it gets screwier and screwier," Delevan said. "By this time your pappy he's probably raising all kinds of hell about he can't find us. I wanta know why we're hiding inna backa this here jalopy."

"Lois Westcott is going somewhere, Danny, and we're going with her, but I'd rather she didn't know it," Hatch said. "It can't be a social engagement that's sending her out in this weather. It must be something more important."

"Duck, chief!" Delevan warned.

Before he lowered his head, Hatch glimpsed Lois Westcott hurrying across the sidewalk. Delevan crouched lower beside him. The front door of the

limousine opened. The car swayed a little as Lois Westcott climbed in. In a moment the motor awoke, and the car started off.

Hatch and Delevan huddled low while they traveled. The tires made a sticky rippling sound and the windshield wipers click-clicked rhythmically. Lois Westcott angled eastward and southward.

WHEN the car stopped, and Lois Westcott alighted, Hatch raised his head. He saw her entering a squalid tenement. A sooty sign at the front door read, *Furnished Rooms*.

"This here it's sure a funny dump which a sweet dame like her would be coming here. chief," Delevan opined.

Hatch looked up at the wet windows. The rain had slackened; only a few drops were falling.

After a moment, Hatch said, "Watch that window, Danny."

A window on the third floor was being raised. A woman's hands lifted it, then disappeared back into the darkness. For several minutes nothing was visible in the frame. Then the hands reappeared, holding a pigeon.

The pigeon launched into the air on spread wings and circled twice before it streaked westward.

"Another message is on its way to Howard Westcott," Hatch said.

He left the car. With Delevan, he pushed in to the same door that Lois Westcott had opened. The hallway was murky and rancid. Having climbed the wooden stairs to the third landing, they turned to the door connecting with the front room.

A faint fluttering and chirping sound came from the room. Hatch knocked.

The noises continued, but no one answered the door. Testing it, Hatch found it bolted.

He said, in a disguised tone, "Nobody home," and signaled Delevan back. Walking loudly, they went down the stairs. At the second landing they turned about. Their steps made scarcely a sound as they again approached the door. Hatch stood on one side of it and Delevan stood on the other. The birds in the room kept making noises.

Presently the door opened. Lois Westcott stepped from the room, caught sight of Delevan, gave a gasp of alarm, then ran toward the stairs. Delevan bounded after her and stopped her by putting his arms around her.

Lois Westcott looked breathlessly into Delevan's face. Delevan did not relax his embrace.

"Danny," Hatch said, coming toward them, "you have your arms around a married woman."

Delevan beamed. "Yeah," he said. He held Lois Westcott snugly.

She looked pleadingly at Hatch and whispered, "Please, please."

Delevan kept his arms around her. "Maybe she'll try to get away again, chief," he said, still grinning. "I better see she don't get a chance to beat it, chief."

Hatch suggested, "Let's go back in the room."

Lois Westcott extricated herself from Delevan's arms. Delevan's grin persisted as she hunted in her purse for a key. She opened the door of the front room and went in first. Delevan followed close behind her. Hatch closed the door.

The room was shabbily furnished. A crate of pigeons was on a chair. It contained three birds.

"They weren't stolen, of course," Hatch said. "You confiscated them yourself."

"Howard mustn't know that," Lois Westcott said quickly.

"You brought the pigeons here, so you could send him messages, but you don't want him to know the messages are coming from you. Is that it?" Hatch asked.

"Yes," she admitted.

"You know something about Howard—something he has kept a secret from you—but you don't want him to know that you know it," Hatch said.

Lois Westcott said nothing.

"Why not?" Hatch asked.

"I don't want it to haunt Howard all the rest of his life with me," she answered. "I don't want it to stand between us year after year like an ugly ghost. If he never realized that I know, we'll be—so much happier."

Hatch nodded and sat on the bed. Lois Westcott searched his eyes. Delevan's gaze did not leave her; a dreamy smile played across his lips.

"LOOK here," Hatch said. "I promised Terry I wouldn't drag you and Howard into this mess if it could possibly be avoided, and I mean to keep my word. I've been pretty high-handed, but I hope you feel you can trust me."

"Howard mustn't be dragged into it," Lois Westcott said. "No matter what happens, he *must* be kept out of it."

"I can't help you with that unless I know what all this means," Hatch said.

Lois Westcott appraised him silently. Delevan's eyes remained on her.

"I'm not sure myself what it means," Lois Westcott said. "I only know that Howard's in trouble, somehow, in serious trouble, and I've got to help him."

"How did you find that out?" Hatch asked.

"I sensed it months ago," Lois Westcott said. "First Howard received a letter. I saw it when it came. It was from the law firm of Flack, Seligman

and Pirano. Howard didn't tell me what was in it, and he tried to keep me from seeing how much it upset him, but I knew. Then there were several phone calls from Mr. Seligman, and finally Mr. Seligman came to the apartment."

"What was Seligman up to?"

"It was something that Howard didn't want to tell me about, so I didn't question him," Lois Westcott said. "But next I noticed that Howard was depositing smaller amounts than usual in our joint checking account. When I balanced the account at the first of the month, I found he'd deposited one thousand dollars less than his salary."

"You didn't question him about that, either?" Hatch asked.

She shook her head, slowly, from side to side.

"Howard said something about having to buy some new equipment for the laboratory, but I knew that all equipment was to be paid for out of capital. I knew Howard must have a powerful reason for concealing the truth—I knew something must be terribly wrong. I got so horribly worried I had to do something, so I . . ."

Lois Westcott hesitated. Footfalls were coming along the hallway. They paused at the door and a key clicked into the lock. At once Lois Westcott rose and opened the door.

Duncan Kerrigan looked in. He started at sight of Hatch and Delevan, and made a gesture of amazed resignation. Coming in, he closed the door tightly.

"I've been telling Mr. Hatch why I employed you, Mr. Kerrigan," Lois Westcott said quietly.

"Damn me," Kerrigan said. "You might as well go ahead with it. It looks like nobody can keep anything from him."

"I may be needing a job soon, Kerrigan," Hatch said. "How about hiring me for your agency?"

"Not by a damned sight," Kerrigan said. "In my agency, I've got to be the best man. You'd better start one of your own."

"Thanks," Hatch remarked with a wry smile. "Go on, Mrs. Westcott."

She was looking at Hatch forcefully. "I was so worried about Howard I had to do something," she resumed, "so I went to Mr. Kerrigan. I think he'd better tell you the rest himself."

Kerrigan wagged his head. "That releases me from my obligation to keep quiet," he said. "Now we'll square away, Hatch. After Mrs. Westcott told me what was going on, I went to work on Seligman. I called him up and pretended I was Howard Westcott, but he wouldn't say anything over the phone that I could make any sense of. Besides, he suspected it wasn't Westcott talking anyway—my voice wasn't right. I was working on a hunch that a woman was mixed up in it somehow, so I watched Seligman. There was only one woman who kept showing up at Seligman's office, and she looked like the type who'd make trouble for a man."

"Rhoda Quinn," Hatch said.

Kerrigan nodded. "I spotted where she lived, and tried to find out more about her. It wasn't so easy. I couldn't dig up any connection between her and Howard Westcott. I called her up, and said this was Howard Westcott talking, but the name didn't mean a thing to her. Still, she was my only lead, so—"

"So you burglarized her apartment," Hatch said.

KERRIGAN eyed him. "I got into her place and searched it. I didn't find a damned thing, so—"

"Except a nickel revolver," Hatch said.

Kerrigan frowned at him. "I did not steal Rhoda Quinn's revolver," he asserted. "I saw that revolver in her dresser drawer, but I didn't take it. I was looking for something that would give me a line on why Howard Westcott was paying money to Seligman. I didn't find one damned thing, but I kept on watching her."

"Does that bring you up to last night?" Hatch asked.

"It does," Kerrigan said. "I followed her from her apartment down to Seligman's office, then up to the Club Grotto. I reported to Mrs. Westcott by phone, and told her I was up against a tough proposition, and that we'd have to do something drastic."

Hatch's eyes returned to Lois Westcott. "All this while you were trying to help Howard without letting him know that you knew something was wrong?"

"Yes," she said. "I decided I must see this woman. I joined Mr. Kerrigan at the Club Grotto. We tried to decide on the best course."

"I'd just about decided I'd have to call a showdown on Rhoda Quinn, when you showed up, Hatch," Kerrigan said.

"She'd have welcomed it," Hatch observed. "I know well enough what happened after that. You both left the club in a hurry after Seligman was shot, because you thought your names might get in the papers, and that might tell Howard what you didn't want him to know."

"Right," Kerrigan said.

"You see," Lois Westcott said, "I wanted to warn Howard that he might become involved somehow. The best way I could think of was to use the pigeons. I'd been about to take them to

the express office when Mr. Kerrigan phoned me, so, instead, I hunted for a place where I could keep them. Mr. Kerrigan came here later and wrote the message that Howard received while you were in the loft."

"Howard's reaction to that message clinches the connection between him and Rhoda Quinn," Hatch said. "What was the message you sent just before Danny and I came in here?"

"I wanted to reassure Howard—tell him the police haven't learned what the connection is," Lois Westcott answered. "Even we don't know exactly what it is. But whatever it may be, I'm determined to do everything possible to safeguard Howard."

"Suppose the police find Rhoda Quinn soon," Hatch said. "Suppose she spills the works?"

Lois Westcott was fearfully silent. Kerrigan wagged his head.

"Mrs. Westcott," Hatch said, "I have a question. It may seem strange, but there's good reason for asking it. Tell me how did you and Howard Westcott happen to get married?"

Lois Westcott said with a reminiscent smile, "It came about in an unusual way. Father commanded it."

"Does that mean you and Howard weren't in love with each other at the time?"

"Howard and I were very much in love," Lois Westcott said, "and Father knew it. He was very fond and very proud of Howard, but impatient with him. One night he told Howard bluntly, in my presence, that he wanted Howard to stop this romantic nonsense and marry me right away. Father was set on it, and he simply had to be obeyed. I was quite willing. Howard wanted it as much as I—fortunately, because Father would have had nothing more to do with him if he'd jilted me." Lois

Westcott smiled softly. "We were married very soon, and we've both been wonderfully happy, especially since Peter was born. Does that answer your question?"

"It does," Hatch said soberly.

Lois Westcott rose. "I don't dare stay here any longer. Father's very watchful, and I've got to be careful. Mr. Hatch—" She was still searching his eyes—"I realize you're not exactly working with the police, but—they mustn't learn about this."

"I'll do my damndest," Hatch said.

Kerrigan said, "Leave it to us, Mrs. Westcott."

She went to the door.

"So long," Delevan said, still grinning. "So long, Mrs. Westcott."

"Goodby," she said.

DELEVAN watched her through the door until she disappeared down the stairs. Turning back, he said, "If there's anything I can do which it'll help that sweet dame, I'm sure as hell gonna do that."

Hatch looked into the crate of pigeons.

"Which is the other night flier, Kerrigan?" he asked.

"That speckled bird in this corner," Kerrigan answered.

"Now you can tell me what that other photostat was."

"A letter sent to Rhoda Quinn by her husband."

"What did it say?"

"It said Rhoda was welcome to everything he owned, and he was never coming back."

"She probably has the original tucked away safely somewhere."

"You can bet your last dollar on it," Kerrigan said.

"Was it handwritten?"

"Yes."

"You didn't have a chance to compare the handwriting with anyone else's," Hatch said.

"With you and Delevan on my tail, I didn't have a chance to do anything but tear it up and throw it into the waste basket," Kerrigan said.

Hatch sat on the bed. "You're risking your license by hanging around with me," he warned Kerrigan. "I'm a fugitive from justice."

"Damn me!" Kerrigan blurted.

"Not long ago Sam Flack was murdered in my apartment," Hatch said. "I don't know a damned thing about who did it, but the Commissioner told me he was going to hold me as a witness, so Danny and I slipped out through the bathroom window. By this time thousands of cops must be combing the town for us."

"Damn me!" Kerrigan said. "What the hell are you going to do about it?"

"Keep out of their hands as long as possible," Hatch answered. "Once they pick me up, I'm sunk."

"This damned case is going to sink all of us," Kerrigan said. "I don't know where to turn next."

"I advise you to lay low," Hatch said. "If you don't mind, I'll hang around here a while."

"Stay as long as you like," Kerrigan said, rising. "I'd better get back to the office and watch developments. If I can help you out, without blowing up the whole works, give me a ring."

"Thanks, Kerrigan," Hatch said. "You'll be hearing from me."

His manner anxious, Kerrigan went out. Hatch sat looking at the crate of pigeons.

"If there's anything which I can do it will help that sweet dame," Delevan promised again, "I'm sure as hell gonna do that."

Hatch took his notebook from his

pocket. He wrote on a page, then tore it off and folded it. He turned to the crate of birds, opened its door, reached in and closed his hand over a speckled pigeon. As he drew it out carefully, it cocked a bald eye at him.

On the dresser Hatch found a spool of thread. He wrapped the folded note around the pigeon's leg and tied it securely in place. Going to the window, he held the bird out, then tossed it into the air.

The pigeon skimmed from his hands, circled, then winged off toward Central Park.

Hatch watched it until it vanished. He closed the window. Delevan followed him from the room and down the stairs. Pausing at the street entrance, Hatch looked distantly into the gloomy sky.

"Chief," Delevan asked, "what was this here message which you sent it to that there Westcott guy just now?"

Hatch answered, "The message says, 'Cyrus Hatch knows that you are Timothy Quinn.'"

CHAPTER XIII

Timothy Quinn Confesses

DELEVAN trotted beside Hatch to the corner. At a newsstand Hatch bought a paper. They gazed at the streamer headlines.

"Nothing about Flack," Hatch said. "It will probably be splashed all over the next editions." He read, "Magician Grilled in Seligman Murder, Released."

"Chief, why ain't they holding that there guy like your pappy he was gonna hold us?"

Hatch wagged his head. "They could easily have charged him as an accomplice," he agreed. "They must have a good reason for letting him go."

"Maybe your pappy he's coming to think the way which you figger it, chief," Delevan said. "Maybe the way which your pappy figgers it now, he figgers the woman she never kilt that guy, so then he can't hold that there magician as any accomplish."

Hatch laughed shortly.

"So far as I know, nothing has happened to change the Commissioner's mind about Rhoda Quinn, Danny. No, there's something else behind this move. Sprague said they were playing it cagey with Daly."

"Your pappy is a guy he sure as hell won't give us any inside dope on it now, chief," Delevan said.

"I may be able to find out about it anyway," Hatch said.

He entered the cigar store on the corner and stepped into the telephone booth. Slotting a nickel, he dialed the number of his own apartment.

McCullough's voice said, "Hello?"

"This is Mallet, the Commissioner's secretary," Hatch said. "Is the Commissioner still there?"

"Commissioner left quite a while ago," McCullough said.

"Sprague there?"

"Sprague went back to Headquarters."

"You waiting for the Commissioner's son to show up?"

"I'll say I am," McCullough said. "And Zimmer's camping over in his office."

"Thanks," Hatch said.

He disconnected and dialed the number of Police Headquarters.

"Deputy Commissioner Sprague's office," he requested. When Sprague's secretary answered, he said, "The Commissioner calling."

Sprague's voice came, "Yes, Commissioner."

Hatch lowered his tone to simulate

his father's. "Any information on Daly, Sprague?"

Sprague growled, "I wish to hell there was, Commissioner. I haven't been able to find out where in hell he scrambled to after he shook the men we put on his tail."

"Checking on everything?" Hatch asked in the same false voice.

"Yes sir," Sprague said. "We've got the apartment cased and the phone wires tapped. We're watching the garage where he keeps his car and all the terminals. We—" Suddenly Sprague shouted, "Say, what the hell is this! You're not the Commissioner! The Commissioner just walked into this office!"

HATCH hung up, smiling. His smile faded as he left the booth. He consulted the directory and returned to the phone. The wire brought him a woman's voice.

"The Alexander residence."

Hatch said:

"Mr. Westcott please."

"Who is calling?"

"Cyrus Hatch."

Hatch waited a long minute.

"Yes?" Howard Westcott's voice sounded worn and morose.

"I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Westcott," Hatch said. "Where is the safest place?"

Westcott hesitated. "What—what do you want?"

"Information," Hatch said.

"Have—have you told anyone that . . ."

"Not yet," Hatch said. "You've nothing to lose by telling me the rest of it."

Again Westcott hesitated. Then he said, "Come here."

"If your father-in-law is about?"

"It'll be all right," Westcott said.

"I'll be there within half an hour," Hatch said.

Westcott hung up. Hatch left the booth. Delevan followed him to the corner, where they paused.

"I found out about Daly," Hatch said. "They let him go for a purpose. I couldn't ask how long ago they released him, because I was pretending to be the Commissioner, and the Commissioner would know that. They put men to shadowing Daly, hoping he'd lead them to Rhoda Quinn. He went them one better—he shook the detectives who were trailing him, and disappeared."

"They shoulda expected a magician to disappear," Delevan said. He's a guy whom he's up to something, chief."

"He's probably doing exactly what the police thought he would—trying to connect with Rhoda Quinn. He must have a pretty good idea of how to go about it, or he wouldn't have shaken the detectives. The question is, where can he find her?"

"That dame she ain't been able to get word to him, chief," Delevan said. "Not while the cops had him, she wasn't, and after that she wouldn't know where the hell to get holda him."

Hatch nodded. "Daly and Rhoda Quinn must have made some arrangement. But between the time she disappeared, right after the murder, and the time when the cops picked him up this morning, he heard from her only once. Remember that telephone call he got just before we barged in on him?"

"That's right, chief," Delevan said. "That call it's a thing I went and forgot about it."

"Daly mentioned a name over the phone—Zarata's," Hatch said. "The arrangement seemed to be that if Rhoda Quinn should call him again, he'd understand that she would meet

him at Zarata's. Back to the telephone book, Danny."

Hatch entered the cigar store and consulted the directory.

"Only one Zarata," he said. "Zarata Theatrical Properties. That ties up with Daly's occupation as a magician. It's on Forty-Fifth Street, the other side of Tenth Avenue."

"That there's a place which we're going at it," Delevan surmised.

"You're going alone," Hatch said. "Look it over, Danny, but be careful. If either Rhoda Quinn or Lloyd Daly hasn't shown up, keep an eye on it. Ring me if anything develops. Within the next hour or so you can reach me at the Westcott place. As soon as I've finished there, I'll join you."

"Okay, chief," Delevan said.

They walked a block to a taxi station. Hatch climbed into the first cab and Delevan took the second. The two taxis crossed to Fifth Avenue, then Delevan's continued westward while Hatch's turned uptown.

ENTERING the apartment building, Hatch said to the doorman, "Please announce to Mr. Westcott that Mr. Hatch is coming up." When the elevator left him at the penthouse, Westcott was looking out the door. Westcott's face was grayish with fatigue and anxiety.

Hatch found the glass living room empty.

"This is the hour for my father-in-law's nap," Westcott said.

He led Hatch into the pigeon loft. The casement windows were open. The caged birds strutted about, chirping and preening themselves.

Westcott removed a slip of paper from his pocket and showed it to Hatch. It was the message that Hatch had dispatched by pigeon.

"Do you know who sent that?" Westcott asked in a husky tone.

"I do," Hatch said, "but there are reasons why I can't tell you."

"How—how did you learn?"

"Not from Rhoda Quinn," Hatch said. "She doesn't know where you are, or that you've changed your name."

"Thank God!" Westcott said. "Hatch, you don't realize what this means. If this becomes known—even privately—my father-in-law—it will ruin me."

"I realize it," Hatch said. "You were never divorced from Rhoda Quinn, were you?"

Westcott said, "I'll tell you the truth because it would do no good now to try to lie about it. You could check up and you'd soon find me out. I never was divorced from Rhoda."

"When you married Lois Alexander, you were aware that Rhoda was alive and still legally your wife." Hatch said.

"Yes," Westcott said.

"Which makes it a clear case of bigamy." Hatch said.

Westcott tore the message in two, then tore it again and again until it was reduced to flakes. He rolled the bits into a ball and put the ball into his pocket.

"Sit down, Hatch," he said wretchedly.

Hatch took a chair near the table. Westcott sat facing him. The rain was freshening again. A few drops blew in the windows.

"What are you going to do—about this?" Westcott demanded.

"I can't answer that question until I've heard your story," Hatch said, "but I'll say this much now. I don't believe Rhoda Quinn killed Seligman. She's a vindictive, mercenary, thoroughly dangerous woman, but that has no bearing on the question of her guilt.

I'm trying my best to clear her. I hope I can do it without harming you. But if I have to expose you in order to clear her, I will. The best move you can make is to tell me the whole truth, and trust my judgment."

Westcott said slowly, "Terry told me she believes you'll be fair."

Hatch's face was impassive.

"How much does she know about it?"

"Everything," Westcott said.

Hatch's jaw clenched. "You mean to say that Terry Alexander knows all about your previous marriage?"

"Great Scott, I had to tell somebody," Westcott said. "It caught me so unexpectedly—hit me so hard, I had to get it off my chest, had to have somebody's advice. Terry was the only one I could turn to."

For a moment the muscles on the sides of Hatch's jaws were hard and white. "Go on, Westcott," he said.

Westcott stared out into the murk. "Life with Rhoda was impossible—impossible," he said in a hushed tone. He took a firmer grip on himself. "It was all wrong. I used to be in the advertising game. I didn't belong in it. I hated it. But I made good money at it—big money. That's why Rhoda married me. I couldn't control her spending—we lived beyond our means. I had to go on making more and more. I like money myself, but it—it didn't mean nearly as much to me as it did to Rhoda. To her it meant everything."

"What happened to bring on the break?" Hatch asked.

"Business went to pot after the crash," Westcott explained. "Rhoda kept driving me to the limit, but I was forced to retrench. She made life miserable for me because I wasn't earning enough. We could still live well, but not nearly well enough to suit

her. She accused me of shirking, and then she left me."

Hatch's eyebrows went up. "She left you? I thought it might have been the other way around."

"She left me," Westcott said, "and when she came back I was gone."

"But she certainly must have realized that everybody was hard up at that time," Hatch said. "Where did she get the idea you were shirking?"

WESTCOTT answered, "Whenever I signed up a new account, I took pains to get thoroughly acquainted with that particular business. I learned a great deal from one account with the Monument Tire Company, and even more from the New Plastic Corporation account. The research end of it fascinated me. It seemed to me that the men in those laboratories were building the foundations of the future world in their test-tubes. My business had dropped off so that I had plenty of time, so I began studying and doing some research on my own. I decided to try to develop a universal plastic that would be everything a plastic should."

"What was the matter with the plastics already being made?" Hatch asked.

"There are hundreds of different plastics, but every one of them is limited in use—each lacks some important quality—and most of them are too expensive," Westcott said. "I gave myself the job of making a new plastic that would be much stronger—unaffected by heat or cold—as transparent as glass, and at the same time capable of taking all colors and being perfectly adapted to thousands of different uses. First I had to find a true solvent for cellulose—"

"You've succeeded in developing a

composition with the right properties, haven't you?" Hatch asked.

"It can be used for almost everything," Westcott said, his eyes lighting. "It's as strong as cast iron. It won't warp, it won't soften with heat or turn brittle with cold. It's not limited in design, color, effect or size. It can be used for most parts of automobiles, in shipping, in constructing railroads, in aircraft, in machinery, even in making fabrics. Almost everything about the house can be made of it—the window- and door-frames, the floors, the walls, the furniture, even the hardware. Entire skyscrapers can be built of it—and will be. There's a new industrial era in my plastic, Hatch. Seeing all these possibilities—I was so carried away, I couldn't have abandoned my work."

"Small wonder," Hatch said.

"But Rhoda had no patience with it," Westcott said. "She had no vision. She demanded parties and bridge and night clubs and travel and imported clothes. Finally I told her I was never going back into advertising, and I wouldn't be able to make even a bare living until a break came—and the chances were a million to one against getting the break. She blew up. That's when she left me."

"Then you came to New York," Hatch said.

"Terry told me she explained to you what happened after that."

"She didn't explain why you married Lois Alexander when you were already a married man," Hatch said.

Westcott said soberly, "I'd cut myself off entirely from my old life. I tried to forget I'd ever lived it. That's why I changed my name. Marrying Lois—God knows I wanted to—Lois meant everything to me that Rhoda never could have meant. If I'd confessed the truth, it would have hurt her

deeply, Hatch. And her father—at the very least, he would have withdrawn his backing. My happiness and my whole future depended in every way on marrying Lois."

Hatch said quietly, "I understand."

A profound sigh broke from Westcott's lungs. "There's nothing else to tell."

"Look here," Hatch said. "I know that Seligman located you, but he stood between you and Rhoda—kept you isolated from each other. How the devil could you be sure he was actually representing her?"

"He brought me a letter in Rhoda's handwriting. The letter said she realized my position, and she didn't want to make any trouble for me, but she needed money. She promised she wouldn't interfere if I'd take care of her."

"You're sure the letter was in Rhoda's handwriting?"

"Of course."

"I doubt it like hell," Hatch declared. "She's not the sweet, long-suffering type. Far from it! Give her a chance and she'll demand every cent you've got, she'll torture you, she'll milk you dry and watch you suffer until she's sated, then she'll deliberately expose you and wreck your whole life."

Westcott stared at Hatch.

"And you should realize that," Hatch said. "You'd damned well better realize it."

Westcott nodded tightly. "I *know* it," he said.

"As matters stood until last night," Hatch went on, "Seligman was the only person who was a threat to you. He was blackmailing you. If he'd wished, he could have turned Rhoda loose on you, and she'd have given you the works with a vengeance. Seligman was a hell of a big danger to you. You had

a damned good motive for killing that man."

Westcott looked straight at Hatch. "I did have a strong motive," he admitted, "but I didn't kill him."

"You were waiting outside the Club Grotto in your car last night," Hatch said, "waiting for Seligman to show up. How did you know he was coming there? What did you intend to do?"

WESTCOTT clenched his hands together. "Last night," he said, "I realized I couldn't let Seligman go on bleeding me. I wanted to go to Rhoda directly and appeal to her. I phoned Seligman's office and talked with his partner, Sam Flack. All Flack could tell me was that Seligman was going to the Club Grotto later. I parked across from the club and waited."

"Rhoda was in there. Did you know that?"

"She must have gone in before I arrived," Westcott said.

"But you saw her come out."

"She came out with a man just as Seligman arrived in a taxi."

"Who was the man?"

"I didn't recognize him."

"Then what happened?"

"The three of them talked together a moment. The other man, the one I didn't know, turned away. Seligman left Rhoda and went to the door of the club. Rhoda's back was turned to me. Then I heard the shots, and saw Seligman fall."

"Did you see any flashes from a gun?" Hatch asked.

"Yes. The flashes were over to the left of Rhoda, close to the side of the building."

Hatch sat forward. "Did you see the man who fired?"

"Not distinctly," Westcott said.

"But you did see that man?" Hatch insisted.

"I saw him dimly."

"Would you recognize him if you saw him again?"

Westcott hesitated.

"I doubt it. It was too dark. I doubt it."

"What did he do?"

"Seeing Seligman fall—it threw me into a panic," Westcott said. "And there was a lot of confusion over behind the cars on the other side of the street. I couldn't tell what was going on. The next thing I knew, Rhoda was in one of those cars with a man, and it was starting off."

"You followed it," Hatch said.

"I saw my chance to get to Rhoda directly," Westcott explained. "It was the first time I'd had so much as a glimpse of her in six years. Then I realized Rhoda wasn't in the car any longer. Somehow she'd gotten out, and I hadn't seen her leave it. I kept following the car, hoping it would give me a lead to her, but I lost it in Central Park."

"You began this by assuring me you would tell me the truth," Hatch said.

"I've told the truth," Westcott declared.

Hatch smiled wryly. "If you have, then you're the best witness on earth to testify to Rhoda Quinn's innocence. Think that over, Westcott. If you don't testify for her, she'll probably be convicted. If you do come forward with your testimony, you're sunk."

Westcott clenched his hands together.

"And if you haven't told me the truth," Hatch added, "you're the man who killed Seligman."

A testy voice sounded through the closed door, from the base of the stairs.

"Lois!" Rupert Alexander com-

plained. "Lois, you're late with my tea. Bring my tea!"

Westcott jerked to his feet.

Hatch began, "Last night, after the pigeon flew in with the first message, you drove out to Mount Sinai Cemetery and—"

"Great Scott, Hatch!" Westcott blurted. "I can't let Lois' father see you here. He already suspects something's wrong. If he begins demanding an explanation, it'll bring everything crashing down on our heads. He takes his tea in his study, but he won't be long. I've got to get you out of here."

"What does PAC mean?" Hatch asked.

Westcott seized Hatch's arm. Without answering the question, he drew Hatch down the stairs. Gesturing him to remain silent, Westcott led him to the entrance.

Rupert Alexander was muttering irascibly in a nearby room.

"For heaven's sake, don't come back," Westcott beseeched in a husky tone. "Don't even phone. If you really mean to help us, as Terry says, you'll do as I ask."

He opened the door and thrust Hatch into the vestibule. As Hatch faced about, the door closed. Angrily, he raised his thumb to the bell-button; but his hand poised. He wagged his head and turned to the elevator.

CHAPTER XIV

Meet Mr. Sanders

LEAVING the building, Hatch signaled a taxi. He told the driver, "Forty-Fifth Street and Tenth Avenue." His face was hard with thought.

When the cab stopped at a red light, he said, "Hold it," and ducked out. He bought a paper at the newsstand on the corner, then folded back into the taxi.

He read the latest headlines while he rode.

They shouted that Sam Flack had been found murdered in the home of the Police Commissioner's son. They howled that the murderer had attempted to kill Professor Hatch's secretary. They screamed that Cyrus Hatch and Danny Delevan were missing and the subjects of a city-wide search by the police. There was a two-column photograph of Hatch and Delevan.

Another item announced that a special meeting of the faculty of Knickerbocker College was to be called to consider Professor Hatch's activity in the Seligman-Flack case.

Other headlines asserted that the police were still looking for Rhoda Quinn and Norman Sanders. Efforts were being made to locate John Pirano. The fact that Lloyd Daly had included himself among the missing was not mentioned.

It was raining again.

Hatch abandoned the papers when he left the taxi, hurried into the side-street and found Delevan leaning in a doorway. Delevan was singing quietly to himself. Hatch stepped into the doorway beside him.

"How do, chief," Delevan said "That dame she just went up."

"Rhoda Quinn?"

"She couldn't be anybody else," Delevan said. "I phoned the Westcott place a minute ago to tell you about her, and that sweet Westcott dame answered and she said you wasn't there and she said please I shouldn't call any more. She sure is one sweet dame, and if there's anything which I can do it for her, I'm sure as hell gonna do that."

"What about Rhoda Quinn?"

"First I looked into this here Zarata place," Delevan said. "It's like a place

like one of these here mad doctors in the movies he might live in it. Nobody they ain't around, except a guy he's painting an idol or something. I tried to find out from this here guy if anybody was there, but this guy started getting tough, so I figgered you wouldn't want me to putta slug on that guy, so I come back out and waited around."

"Meanwhile having another butter-milk," Hatch said.

Delevan started. "It's funny you say that, chief. I can't figure it why it smells like Irish—I mean buttermilk—on accounta it was a Coca Cola I had."

"The Coca Cola smells like rye," Hatch said. "Go ahead, Danny."

"So pretty soon this here Quinn dame she got outta taxi and went up-stairs," Delevan said. "It wasn't only a minute ago."

"We're going right up," Hatch said.

Delevan led the way through a begrimed door. A sign on the wall read, *Zarata Theatrical Properties*, and a red arrow pointed upward. Hatch and Delevan climbed angling stairs. At every landing there was another arrow. On the top floor a door bore the name of Zarata. Hatch quietly opened it.

The big room was filled with scenery, pedestals, spears, piles of lumber, the canvas columns of a castle, boxes, trunks, poles, fake fireplaces, cases of dummy books. Dangling lights cast a flat glare into the glass eyes of a stuffed gorilla and over a rusty suit of mail. Delevan and Hatch picked their way through the dust-laden jumble to a door connecting with an inner room.

RAIN was trickling into the second room through a broken skylight. It was as fantastically cluttered as the first. In the center of it stood an Oriental idol fashioned of *papier-mâché*

which leered at Hatch horribly. It was twice as tall as the lean man in overalls who was clinging to a stepladder and painting its twisted face Chinese red. At sound of Hatch's step, he descended with his paintbrush and closed his right eye.

"Whattaya want?" he demanded.

"I'd like to talk with—"

"Ain't nobody here but me, see," the man said. "Come around some udder time, see?"

"Danny," Hatch said quietly, "I think this chap talks too much."

"Lissen, you," the man said. "Ya ain't got no business here, see? You guys get outta here, see, or I'll t'row ya out, the bot' of ya, see?"

"I see you are gonna be bust inna snoot," Delevan said.

Hatch hooked his arm around the man's neck and clamped his hand over the man's mouth. Delevan took the brush from his hand. Hatch released him and pushed him toward Delevan.

He attempted a haymaker that whizzed past Delevan's nose. Delevan unleashed an uppercut that rattled the man's teeth and rolled his eyes in their sockets. Hatch caught him as he sagged down, and stretched him out on the floor.

Delevan sat at the base of the idol and put both feet on the man's flat chest.

"How about your gun, Danny?" Hatch said.

"That's right," Delevan said. "This here gun it's a thing which I'm always forgetting I got it."

He pulled the automatic from his hip pocket and poked it against the unconscious man's neck. In his other hand he still held the paintbrush.

"Keep him quiet, Danny," Hatch said.

"Leave this here mug to me, chief,"

Delevan said. "The more I think about it, the more I'd like to get back inna ring with that Jonegan stumble-bum."

The man on the floor moaned, opened his eyes and lifted his head. He said throatily, "You dirty punks."

Delevan slapped him across the mouth with the paintbrush. His head bumped the floor and chinese red drooled from his lips. He spat paint and gagged.

"You ain't saying anything, guy," Delevan warned him. "If you think you're gonna be saying anything, I'm gonna push this here brush down your throat, see? Now whattaya say?"

The man lay gasping, glaring murderously at Delevan, twisting his head and spitting red paint.

"Play dead," Delevan commanded.

He swiped the brush across the man's eyes. The man screwed his smeared face into a ghastly grimace and stiffened. Delevan held the gun hard against his throat.

Hatch turned to another door. The third room was also crowded with a conglomeration of theatrical properties. Partitions in one corner walled in space for an office. A light was burning inside it. Hatch approached it cautiously and heard voices.

A woman's voice said, "We can't do this again. It's too damned risky. You've got to stay away from me. And you're going to keep your mouth shut, understand that?"

A man's voice said, "For heaven's sake, I'm only trying to help you, Rhoda. All along I've only been trying to help. If you'd listened to me in the first place, all this wouldn't have happened. You're crazy to keep on trying—"

"I'm damned sure of what I'm doing," Rhoda Quinn retorted. "Before this day's over, I'll have a dozen of the

best lawyers in the country working for me, and that lousy rat I married is going to be paying the bills."

"Rhoda, for heaven's sake, we could slip away together and—"

"I'm not going to slip away with you or anybody else. Will you get that through your head? I've got this thing right where I want it. When I leave here I'm going straight—"

"Rhoda, for heaven's sake—"

"I've got that Timothy Quinn right where I want him, and I'm going to make the most of it, and I don't want any more of your interference."

AFTER a moment of silence, Lloyd Daly asked in a sick tone, "How did you find him, Rhoda?"

"Through those damned pigeons of his," Rhoda Quinn said. "If I'd only thought of that sooner! I hated the lousy birds, that's why I forgot about them, but what Sanders said reminded me. It didn't take me an hour to find out everything I wanted to know."

"Where is he, Rhoda?" Daly asked quietly.

"He's living on Fifth Avenue, and he calls himself Howard Westcott. Well, from now on, Howard Westcott is going to be paying plenty and doing everything he can think of to keep his darling wife out of the soup. All right, Lloyd, I've said enough."

"Listen, Rhoda," Daly pleaded. "Just let me say one more thing, Rhoda. You know how much I love you. I want us to have a happy life together—above everything else, I want that. I've done everything I could to—to make you see that you and I could be happy together, if you'd only—"

"If that's all you've got to say—"

Daly's voice was husky as he broke in. "I don't let you go ahead with this."

"You can't stop me."

"Listen, Rhoda—"

Hatch returned quietly to the middle room. Delevan was still sitting with his feet on the painter's chest.

"Let's go, Danny," Hatch said.

"Listen, guy," Delevan said, bending over his victim. "You gonna keep on playing dead?"

The painter pulled his smeared eyes open. Delevan removed his feet and allowed him to elbow up. The painter swung to a crouch and desperately sprang a roundhouse at Delevan's head.

Delevan whacked him in the face with the brush, then dropped the brush and drove his fist to the line of the man's jaw. The man toppled against the idol, then collapsed in a heap.

Delevan gathered a handful of the seat of the painter's pants, dragged him across the floor and left him behind a pile of lumber. Pocketing his automatic and wiping red paint from his knuckles, Delevan accompanied Hatch to the stairs.

"Rhoda Quinn has found out about Howard Westcott, Danny," Hatch said, as they ran down. "In a minute she's a dame nobody can stop her."

"Cripes, chief!" Delevan said, hurrying at Hatch's side. "That there dame she's a dame whom nobody can stop her."

"I'm afraid so," Hatch answered. "But at least I can warn Westcott."

Hatch pushed through the street door and Delevan shouldered out beside him.

A voice behind them said, "Put your hands in your pockets."

Something pressed ominously against Hatch's back, and also against Delevan's.

"Put your hands in your pockets," the voice commanded again. "Keep your eyes straight ahead."

Hatch and Delevan obeyed. The man

behind them was covered by the darkness.

"Be careful," he warned. "Go over to that doorway. Stand facing the street. If you don't do exactly as I say, I'll jolly well have to shoot you."

Hatch and Delevan moved cautiously to the doorway. The pressure on both Hatch's back and Delevan's continued as the man followed them closely.

"Keep your eyes straight ahead," the man repeated tersely. "If you behave, you'll be all right. I don't intend to rob you. You're going to listen to what I have to say, that's all."

The door of the Zarata workshop opened. Rhoda Quinn appeared. She gazed about, then ran through the rain, passing Hatch and Delevan without a glance. At the corner she climbed into a taxi.

As the traffic light turned, the taxi swerved into the cross-street, traveling eastward.

Zarata's door opened again. Lloyd Daly emerged from it. He searched the gloom.

"Taxi!" Daly shouted.

The taxi stopped directly opposite the doorway. Daly glanced in the direction of Hatch and Delevan and the unknown man, then ran to the cab.

"Trafalgar Hotel," he said as he sprang in.

The taxi reached the corner as the traffic light changed again. It swerved north. Hatch, turning his head as if to watch it, looked hard through the corners of his eyes.

"Danny," he said, squaring his shoulders, "I want you to meet Mr. Norman Sanders."

The pressure on Hatch's back, and on Delevan's, increased threateningly.

"How do," Delevan said to the man behind him. "Only, this ain't any pleasure."



Picking' Your Own Pocket

Pictures and Cash

By
Frank Wrentmore

This is the one-hundred-and-twenty-seventh 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.

THE letter of a lady who shall be nameless here, shows how you can help yourself sometimes when you realize that you are being swindled. For obvious reasons, I am also deleting the name of the company; it's the scheme itself that interests us.

"I want you to know of a company that certainly must be crooked. This is a late date to write you concerning my deal but I gave all the information with letters to the postmaster here, but they haven't done anything yet."

(Complaints of mail fraud may be given to postmasters anywhere but they, in turn, must forward them to the Chief Inspector's office in Washington where they are docketed, given a docket number, and then assigned to an inspector in the district where the firm complained against has their place of business. It is frequently impossible for the inspector to give the matter immediate attention because there are only between 500 and 600 inspectors in the entire United States and only a fraction of those are assigned to fraud work. Hence the delay.)

The letter continues: "In September,

1936, an agent allowed me to draw an envelope. If the envelope I drew had a certain slip in it I would be lucky and get a picture enlarged free of charge. Of course, my envelope was empty but the agent told me that Mrs. So-and-so down the street *had* drawn a luck envelope but she didn't care to have an enlargement made and had authorized him to give it away to someone.

"I said, 'I suppose you tell that to everyone on whom you call?'" (Reminds you of Gracie Allen, doesn't she?) "I was to promise to hang the picture where my friends could see it and by so doing *they* might order pictures. When I couldn't understand how any company could do such a thing for nothing, he said it would cost \$1.98 for postage and handling charges and dumb me gave him \$1.98 and got a receipt.

"On November 2, another slick article came to call on my invalid mother, ostensibly to get the correct colors for tinting her picture and father's. He was contemptible and demanded \$2.00. She thought of calling the police but hated to cause a scene.

"On December 5, a letter came to me from the company. It contained a slip with my name signed to an order for a No. 10 frame to cost \$9.90, from which a credit of \$2.00 had been deducted, balance \$7.90. The salesman had evi-

dently filled out the order blank and had *signed my name*.

"I had never seen a frame, nor had I considered buying one. I wrote to the company and told them I wouldn't accept it and was going to report them to the Federal authorities in order to get my original picture back. I did refuse to accept the picture and pay the C.O.D. charges when it was delivered and it wasn't long before I got the smoothest letter telling me that they would notify the postmaster to deliver it again and I should accept it without paying anything. This is what happened and I got my original and the picture, but they should be stopped from doing such crooked business. His imitation of my signature was very good indeed."

So there you have it, a typical case; misrepresentation, mail fraud, and a little forgery. It is almost impossible to catch the agents who actually do the dirty work because these nomadic gentlemen get all they can get in one town and then travel on, seldom returning. Only the employer knows where they can be located—and he won't tell.

The companies are, in a measure, responsible for the acts of their agents, and this company seemed to realize it. But some of the outfits in this business are as bad as their representatives. Once they get a valued photograph in their hands they don't let go of it until the customer ransoms it by paying an exorbitant price for a frame she never ordered. The Federal Trade Commis-

sion has stated that enlargement and frame is rarely worth more than \$2.50.

F E. FARRER writes me from the Y.M.C.A. at Tampa, Fla., about a scheme, new to him—and it may be to you too—by means of which a pair of gyps steal \$9.00. The swindle is usually worked on cafeterias during the busy hours and because of the somewhat delicate nature of the latter part of the transaction a woman is usually employed.

After the two have finished their meal the woman lags behind her escort and by the time she reaches the line at the cashier's desk two or three persons separate them. The man pays for his own repast with a ten dollar bill and leaves the restaurant. That bill, of course, is the top bill in the ten-dollar compartment in the money drawer. By the time the woman reaches the cashier her companion is away down the street so she tenders a one dollar bill in payment of her check. When the cashier gives her change for a one she protests, "Why, I gave you a ten dollar bill." An argument follows, the manager is called, and the woman, apparently as an afterthought, recalls that she had written a telephone number on her ten dollar bill. She repeats the number and it is found on the bill planted by her boy friend. This doesn't work with cashiers who do not put bills in the cash drawer until after they have given customers their change. Under those circumstances the trick isn't even attempted.



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.

HYMAN, Vantor, N. J., contributes in this installment a table of first-rank importance to cryptographers. Mr. Hyman's tabulation represents an analysis of word frequencies in the 104 "Inner Circle" ciphers published during 1936 and 1937. These ciphers contained 1977 words, including 390 four-letter words, 434 five-letter words, and 351 six-letter words. And of these three lengths, the appended table presents all words which occurred three or more times each. This table will be a great help to solvers in unraveling difficult messages. Thanks, H. Hyman! We appreciate your valuable contribution!

WORD FREQUENCY TABLE 1936 and 1937 Inner Circle Ciphers By †H. Hyman

4-Letter	5-Letter	6-Letter
13 upon	6 under	6 whilst
8 from	5 after	4 behind
8 with	5 midst	4 liquor
6 over	3 about	4 police
5 also	3 anent	3 beyond
5 down	3 black	3 hungry
4 back	3 brisk	3 jovial
4 cops	3 found	3 sleuth
4 find	3 havoc	3 toward
4 wild	3 rival	
3 city	3 swift	
3 dead	3 track	
3 dust	3 veldt	
3 goes	3 watch	
3 junk	3 young	
3 long	3 yoked	
3 lost		
3 onyx		
3 runs		
3 star		

Clues to this week's ciphers: *T. F. B.'s division puzzle uses a 10-letter key word, numbered 0123456789. Note the sequence ID indicated in the first two subtractions, and eliminate in DIGI ÷ S = SIR. In Half-Pint's message, identify V, ZKVZ, and ZKD. Then turn to DFFG, KXFKN, and SVNG. In Cosmopolite's contribution, BYFZ and the phrase TSR FZO will lead to HOKYSSYSK and OSRYSK. This should give you a lead.

In †Jan's cryptogram, the affixes SK-, -SKY, and -ARR will unlock the three SKHARO-groups. In †Remdin's alliteration, approach ABDGED through endings -D, -G, -GD, and -GDD. Spot your own clues in *Kappa Kappa's Inner Circle cipher! Incidentally, if the matter is not clear, H. Hyman used only these Inner Circle ciphers, such as this week's No. 66, in preparing his 1936-37 I. C. word-frequency analysis.

See next week's magazine for answers to this week's puzzles! Asterisks in cryptograms always indicate capitalization.

No. 61—Cryptic Division. By *T. F. B.

SIR) DOGPET (DDS
IIDY

DOOE
IIDY

DIDT
DIGI

EY

No. 62—Superior Exterior. By Half-Pint.

ZKD ZXTVOLY, *GLYZK *VODAXHVT FVOD EXAR ADGDO-
ESXTF MYVXS, SVNG DFFG KVBXTF V KXFKN QLSXG-
KDR, FSVGGSXUD GYAPVHD ZKVZ ADPSDHZG XOVFDG
SXUD V OXAALA.

No. 63—Foremost and Final. By Cosmopolite.

*TVETFLTA, HOKYSSYSK BYFZ "T" TSR OSRYSK BYFZ
"A," YG FZO "TVNZT" PC UPROLS NOSTV YSGFYDFYPSG
TSR FZO "PUOKT" CPL ELPPXG!

No. 64—Slogan for Buyers. By †Jan.

XSYX-FNARRPNA ROLDE-RXVNFANR SKBPDA PKSKZL-
NUAB SKHAROLNR OL FPNDXVRA GLNOXCARR RADPN-
SOSAR. *TAOOAN *TPRSKARR *TPNAVPR VBHSRA: "SKH-
AROSYVOA TAZLNA SKHAROSKY!"

No. 65—College Quarrel. By †Remdin.

*ABDEFEG *A. AEHKHLGD AZGKHYHXKG AZVGUYUFVA-
FEGD, ABDGED AZXGFEFXXG *AZHTSUZ *A. ARBHUG AZT-
SPGUD ABDEFUED, AZVSGD AZOFHUZGDD. ABDNSE, *AZH-
TSUZ AZXGFEFZ!

No. 66—Old Adage Retold. By *Kappa Kappa.

ZYXVUTSR ZPVOZXTN LKXTPXZXVLHK OZPVGTKXZX-
VLPK ZFXVYHSZXT OLFT ULYVGTFLHKSR XEZP LFZSSR
TDBFTKKTN BFLSVD UTFALKVXVTK!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

55—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
CAN'T VEX HIM

56—It may be interesting to note that this year we can add an extra six answers to our solving scores. Fifty-three Saturdays!

57—Mark Twain, noted American author, was really Samuel Langhorne Clemens. His pseudonym came from a term he often heard in his youth on Mississippi steamboats.

58—Honey-hunting urchin raids apiary. Formidable insects resent invasion, sting gamin. Raucous screams, mournful howls, quick retreat!

59—Financier strolls near cliff. Vicious calf butts him over edge! Jutting tree catches cuff, halts perilous drop. Farm wife sees accident, pulls banker back with pike-staff.

60—Blow-crazy knights jumped quickly into moat after furious tilt versus savage invaders. Many mail-clad swimmers drowned.

All correct solutions of the current puzzles will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for March. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



READERS with long memories will recall, we trust, that in the January 8th issue we mentioned our Uncle Abner and his annual struggle with resolutions. Perhaps we were a little facetious but certainly we meant no unkindness.

Uncle Abner himself, in sober moments, has always been willing to admit that his behavior is inexplicable if not downright peculiar.

We never dreamed of any protest. The longer we live, however, the more we are resigned to the fact that humans are obscurely motivated and that a mere man cannot expect to understand what is jestingly and wrongly referred to as the weaker sex.

The following letter speaks for itself:

DEAR NEPHEW:

Si Gallup showed up at our place with that magazine of yours the other day and let us read that smart-alecky piece you wrote about your Uncle Abner.

You ought to be ashamed of yourself, making fun of your own kith and kin like that.

And there's not a mite of truth in what you wrote, either. Your Uncle Abner is an unfortunate soul and can he help it if he gets an awful cold every year and tries to break it in the usual way?

Besides, that talk of him sleeping in the

pigpen is libel. He only done that once, when the snow was waist-deep. You know mighty well he usually goes to the barn and crawls under the hay, so as to keep warm without having to haul firewood.

It ain't true, either, that your Uncle Abner won't work. He is a very sick man and no one in his right mind could expect him to do more than he does.

I don't want you to write any more sassy pieces in your magazine and I think you owe us an apology.

AUNT NETTIE

We herewith formally apologize, Aunt Nettie, for our previous remarks concerning Uncle Abner. We're very sorry, too, to learn that he is in a bad way. Recalling other instances when Uncle Abner was ill, would it be out of place to inquire if he is suffering from another sad accident in that series which started when you broke four of his ribs belting him with a fence-rail?

That seems to be enough concerning the curious activities of our family. Possibly no one is really interested, anyway. More to the point is this communication from

ALEXANDER CARRUTHERS

who has a word of praise for us and a short vital message.

DEAR EDITOR:

You are to be congratulated for publishing that fine story by Donald Barr Chidsey,

titled *On Your Way Out*. That was so true to life that it hurt, because my own oldest son was caught in the marijuana net before his mother or I realized what was happening.

All parents of adolescent boys and girls should read this story, and all other available material so that they may combat this scourge if it touches their own children and their own lives.
New York, N. Y.

From a gentleman in Texas,

FRETWELL SHOCK

comes this pleasant letter in praise of *Copper*, and others.

DEAR EDITOR:

Have just finished *Copper*, by Kenneth L. Sinclair, in the December 11th, 1937 issue. I cannot praise this story too highly, for to me it is one of the strongest, best written shorts I have ever read in your weekly.

My first purchase of your weekly some five years or more ago, was the start of an unbroken chain.

My only criticism would be less plotted murders, by profligate wards, sons, etc., of their rich benefactors. Personally I prefer anything in the detective story line, don't know the authors but the characters of *Daffy Dill*, *Candid Jones*, *Morton of Miami*, and *Riordan and Halloran*, to me are the "stand outs" of your mag. One serial at a time, please. On the whole I think DETECTIVE FICTION is "The Tops" at any price.

San Antonio, Texas

Dale Clark, who has written us many fine stories, seems to have a staunch friend in

ALEXANDER HUDSON

who writes from the Lone Star State, where the snow piles high and the wind blows cold.

DEAR EDITOR:

I read the novelette called *Ringside*, by Dale Clark. This was a nice piece of work; in fact, it is the best story that I've read in a long time. Please give us more of Dale Clark's stories.

Worthington, Minnesota

A letter which arrives from

MISS CONSTANCE BAKER

reminds us that we're very proud of our lady readers.

DEAR EDITOR:

I have just finished reading D. B. McCandless' story, *Unclean*, and I want to thank you for publishing it. Although your stories in general are such that no lady need be ashamed to read, once in a while you print something which has a definitely feminine appeal. *Unclean* was such a story. May we have more like it?
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

This letter from

A. BENNETT

is published for the especial benefit of Mr. Richard Sale:

DEAR EDITOR:

Richard Sale really had me worried when I got my copy of DFW this week and read those cryptic words: *A Hearse for Hiawatha*, on the cover.

Hiawatha, as I remember only too clearly from my grade-school days, was a gallant and handsome Indian hero in a poem beginning:

"By the shores of Gitchegummi—" or something

That hearse business worried me all day, until I could get home and get my shoes off and read the yarn. I kept wondering what DFW was coming to, first with Indian Joe and then with Hiawatha.

But it all turned out all right, and we're all friends again. But I was sure scared for a while!

Muskogee, Okla.

The editors are speculating timidly about what Mr. Bennett will say of the story by Mr. Sale which follows *A Hearse for Hiawatha*. As you will doubtless recall, it was a novelette entitled: *Die, Hamlet!*

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