

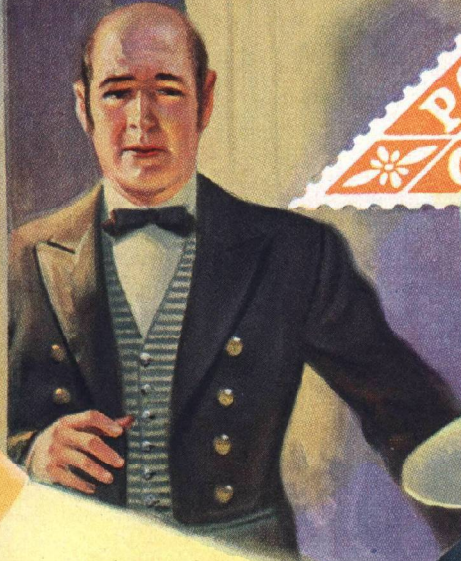
# DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FIVE

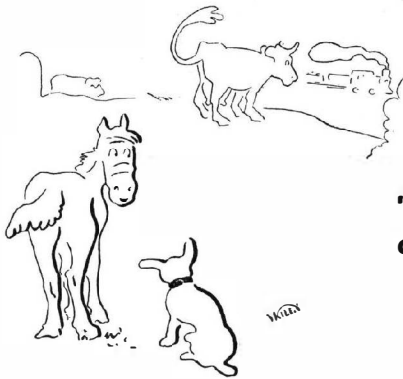
APR. 16  
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**Murder for a  
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**T. T. FLYNN  
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APRIL 16, 1938

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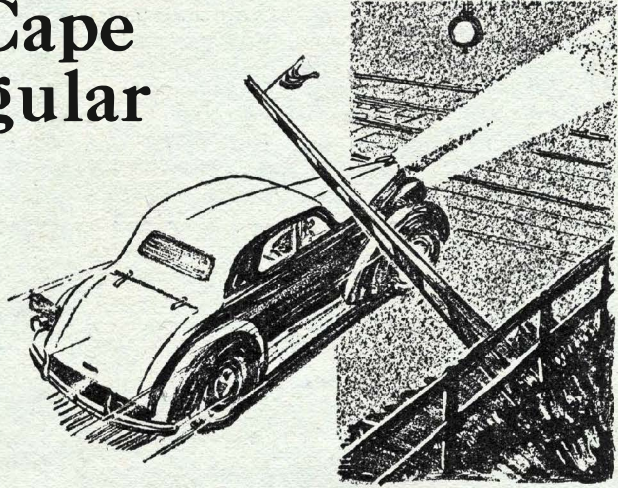
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# The Cape Triangular

By  
Cornell  
Woolrich

Author of "I Wouldn't  
Be in Your Shoes," etc.



*If thine hobby offend thee, put it away, for it is better to be  
without a hobby than to be condemned to everlasting hellfire*

MURRAY HOBART was sitting in his den under a very strong shaded light, gazing through a magnifying glass at a small flat object held up by his other hand with a tiny pair of tweezers, when someone knocked at the closed door. He put down the tweezers first, with infinite care, then the glass, and then he got up with an air of great annoyance, strode over to the door and unlocked it.

"Well?" he scowled. "Is the house on fire? If it's anything less than that, I'll have your—"

The servant standing out there said apologetically, "I know, Mr. Hobart. I told him you were going over your collection and couldn't be disturbed, but—"

"Who is it?"

"It's an Inspector Foster on the wire, sir."

"I don't know any Foster," snapped his employer irritably. "Get rid of him.

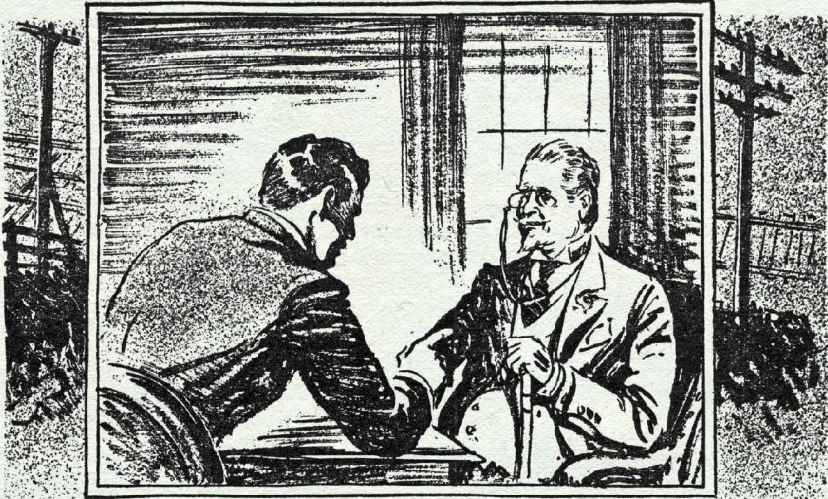
Tell him I'm not—" He gestured. "Wait a minute. Inspector, did you say? Inspector of what?"

"I—I don't know, sir. I think he said Homicide Bureau."

Hobart felt his chin. "Police department, eh? That's unusual." He took an extra twist in the cord of his dressing gown. "I'll talk to him," he said, and stepped out through the doorway. Before moving away, however, he transferred the key to the outside, closed the door and locked it. Then he went down the paneled hall to the telephone.

The manservant, with a single sullen scowl at the insulting precautions his employer had just taken, went on about his business. His lips moved sneeringly. "Little colored pieces of paper," he breathed contemptuously.

Hobart, at the phone, stood in such a position that he commanded a full view of the door he had just come from.



"I came out to do a little buying," beamed the pigeon-like little man.

"This is Murray Hobart," he said. Inspector Foster introduced himself a second time. Then, "I was wondering," he said, with the hesitancy of a man asking a favor, "if we could trouble you for a little expert advice. I understand you're a specialist in this particular field, and I was wondering if you'd be good enough to give us the benefit of your opinion."

Hobart kept his eyes on the room door, as though he wished the unwelcome interruption were over, so he could go back inside there to resume his recent occupation. "Brokerage?" he said shortly. "That's my occupation."

The inspector laughed disarmingly. "No, no, no. I mean, er, your sideline, your hobby—postage stamps."

"Oh." But the change that came over Hobart was almost miraculous. His eyes lit up, his voice took on life, for the first time he began to take a real interest in the conversation and no longer waited for the first opportunity to cut it short.

"How did you happen to hear of me?" he asked interestedly.

"Well you see, we're—by that I mean the Bureau—is on a job, a case, and there's an angle to it that has us stumped. It's a little over our heads. We're none of us qualified to give an opinion. We're not authorities in the matter, you understand. It would mean a trip to New York, to some big stamp dealer, to clear it up, and that would take days. I wired the head of one such firm, to find out if there was any possibility of getting the information we need without the trouble of sending someone there personally, by means of photostats for instance, and he wired back, of course, that there wasn't, but mentioned your name as being competent to help us. He said he'd been supplying you for years and you were on his mailing list, right here in the same town with us."

"Well, if it has anything to do with stamps," agreed Hobart, not bragging but with the air of a man stating a

simple fact, "I don't believe there's anyone can tell you more about them than I can. What is it you'd like cleared up?"

"I'm afraid you'd have to examine the evidence personally to be able to pass an opinion on it."

"Yes, in the case of stamps I think that's always necessary. Particularly if it's a question of detecting a forgery."

"I'm afraid it's a little more gruesome than that," the inspector said apologetically. "It's a murder case, and it's important for us to know—"

"Stupid of me," interrupted Hobart. "Homicide Squad. It would be, of course. Where is it you want me to go—down to headquarters?"

"No, if it wouldn't be asking too much, could you come out to 215 Rainier for a short while? I'll send an official police car for you if you like."

"Thanks, but that won't be necessary. I'll drive out in my own car."

The inspector's voice became almost effusive in his gratitude. "Thanks, Mr. Hobart. We appreciate your cooperation a lot."

"Not at all. I'm very interested myself now in finding out what this can be," Hobart assured him. "I'll be there almost directly."

"Think you can find it all right?" The inspector repeated the address.

"I'm sure I won't have any trouble." Hobart hung up, went back into his den. It took him less than five minutes to put away the paraphernalia of his obsession. A wall safe figured in this. When he came out again, locking the door after him and pocketing the key, he had exchanged his dressing gown for the jacket of his suit. He called to the servant for his hat and coat.

"Don't bother waiting up. I'm taking my own latchkey."

"Yes sir. Good night, Mr. Hobart." The man closed the front door after him respectfully, then grimaced savagely. "Him and his colored scraps o' paper!" he seethed. "Locking 'em up like they was blooming diamonds!"

HOBART went around to the side of the house, took his car out of the garage, and set out. He stopped at the first intersection he came to and asked another motorist, waiting there for the light to change: "What's the nearest way to Rainier Street?"

The directions the man gave him were simple enough to follow. Hobart reached his objective in about twenty minutes, going at a rather fast clip. The thoroughfare was wide but rather shabby looking. It seemed to him to be just the kind of street upon which murder was apt to strike. He coursed along it slowly, scanning the door numbers.

The curb before 215, when he finally found it, was empty, and there was no sign of any undue excitement or activity going on about the premises. He braked, got out, and rang the doorbell. A pugnacious looking woman in sweater and apron looked out at him.

"Tell Inspector Foster Mr. Hobart's here," he said pleasantly.

She tightened her grip on the door. "There's no Foster lives here," she said surlily.

"I didn't say he lives here," Hobart explained patiently. "He told me to come out and meet him here."

"He couldn't of," snapped the woman, "because there's nobody here by that name, waiting for you nor nobody else!"

Hobart's jaw dropped in surprise and annoyance. He took a step back, verified the number beside the door, came in again. "But this is 215 Rainier



Street, isn't it? I'm sure I heard him right. He repeated it twice."

"Yeah, this is 215 Rainier Street, but there's no Foster here and never has been. I been living in this house five years and I ought to know. Somebody's been kidding you." Congenitally suspicious, she shifted the burden of responsibility to her husband's shoulders, though Hobart had made no move to force his way in. "Max, come here a minute, talk to him, will ya?"

The man of the house, as is often the case, was a little less hostile, but no more helpful than she had been. "No," he said in answer to Hobart's perplexed question, "nobody along this street has called the police in. There ain't no trouble around here, as far as I know."

Hobart shook his head. "A fine thing, dragging me out of the house on a fool's errand like this! It couldn't have been a practical joke, because I don't know anyone who would—" He broke off. "May I use your phone a minute? I'll pay you for the call. Maybe I can reach him through headquarters."

The woman quickly forestalled this, in a loud stage-whisper. "No, don't let him in here! You don't know who he is or what he's after!"

The man looked a little embarrassed, but refused. "You better try a drug store."

Hobart, who could have bought the whole house and the ground it stood on out of his cigarette money, turned away fuming at the boorishness of these people, and strode back to his car. Before he could start off, however, the door reopened and the man called out to him:

"Hey! I just thought of it! Are you sure he said *street*, Rainier Street?"

He hadn't, now that Hobart thought

of it. He'd just said *Rainier*, without any further designation.

"Because I just remembered, there's a Rainier Parkway too, way out on the other side of town. Our mail gets mixed up sometimes. He mighta meant that."

He gave Hobart a few sketchy directions, and later on Hobart amplified them from another motorist. His annoyance evaporated before long. As long as he was out and in the car, it seemed childish not to try his luck at the second address before turning home. If the inspector was a real inspector and the case was on the level, it gave promise of being inordinately interesting. Anything concerning stamps was interesting to Hobart. Their collection was a fetish to him. They took more time than his business.

## II

**B**UT the twenty minutes had nearly tripled themselves before he finally reached his new destination. This Parkway with the plagiarized name (or maybe it was the other way around) ran through a far superior residential section than had the first. All the residences along it were set in ample grounds. Some of the estates comprised entire square blocks. Two-fifteen was among the latter. It was a house a good deal like his own, but on an even larger scale. There were two cars standing out in front of it, and when he went up the front walk a heretofore invisible figure detached itself from behind one of the veranda columns and became a uniformed patrolman barring his way.

"An Inspector Foster in there?" asked Hobart.

"Oh yeah? You Mr. Hobart? He's waiting for you. Go right in." The cop even opened the front door and ac-

commodatingly held it for Hobart to go through.

The hallway was lighted but empty. Up above somewhere, at the top of a spacious, curving white-painted staircase, came a sound of feminine sobbing pitched in a low, exhausted key, as though it had been going on for hours. A voice with a Negroid drawl to it was coaxing, "Drink dis tea now, honey. Come on, drink it for Beulah."

A tiny white thing on the carpet became, to Hobart's keen and almost microscopic eyes, a rose petal. Another, more waxlike, he identified as a gardenia petal. A noticeable aroma of flowers and pungent greenery clung to the air. The funeral, evidently, had already taken place. He was glad of that. He was not an amateur criminologist, had no hankering to stare corpses in the face, or even be under the same roof with them for any length of time. He was a philatelist.

He turned in at the brightly lighted, double doorway ahead, and entered a room where there were three men. One was busy at a large open secretary reading through a stack of old correspondence, item by item. A second was seated at a table, with a number of thick albums before him. They were about two feet square, gilt-edged, with expensive hand-tooled leather bindings and the initials *A.H.* embossed on each. He was slowly turning the pages of one with the perfectly blank look of a man looking at something he doesn't understand. The third was doing nothing but sitting in an easy chair, smoking, with his legs crossed, as though waiting for something.

Hobart said, "Inspector Foster?" to the man engaged with the stamp albums.

The idler in the chair, who was younger and far less identifiable as a

police officer, got up and came toward him. "I'm Foster. We were just beginning to wonder whether—"

Hobart said, clasping the offered hand, "Sorry I took so long, but I went to the wrong address first. I darned near gave up then and there," he added, as a gentle hint that he wasn't merely an errand boy used to chasing around at people's behest, and that they should be glad he'd come at all.

Foster looked genuinely remorseful. "I wouldn't have had that happen for the world! We did the same thing ourselves last night when we first answered the call. I should have been more explicit, but we've been working like dogs all day and I guess in my hurry it slipped my mind."

"That when it happened, last night?"

"Yes, sometime between nine and midnight." Foster introduced his two teammates. "This is Broderick, and this is Timmins, Mr. Hobart. Sit down, won't you? Now first I'd better tell you what we've gotten so far." At this point, Hobart noticed, the one called Broderick curved his index finger around so that it met the point of his thumb evidently suggesting a zero. Foster went on. "This man Aaron Harding—"

"That the murdered party?" Hobart hadn't even known whose house he was in until now.

"Yes, a very wealthy man. Realtor by profession and, like yourself, an ardent stamp-collector on the side. As a matter of fact his collecting activities were taking up more of his time than his legitimate business. He was getting on in years, had made his pile two or three times over, and figure I he was entitled to a little relaxation, I suppose. That's neither here nor there. He was a widower and lived here

alone with just a darky couple, man and wife, cook and chauffeur. Well, they had some revival meeting or chicken fry or whatnot to go to last night, and he gave them both the night off, and stayed here alone. When they left at nine he was sitting in this same chair you're in now."

Hobart looked down at the chair with a layman's typical queasiness, but remained where he was. To the detective mind, evidently, it didn't even occur that such a trivial coincidence could make anyone uncomfortable.

FOSTER went on: "He had his stamp books spread out around him. When they came back at twelve and the woman looked in to see if he'd like any refreshment, he was still in the same chair, stamp books spread out around him, but—he'd been smothered to death by a handkerchief being pressed tight over his mouth and nose until his heart had stopped beating. We figured that from bits of lint found on his lips and nostrils."

Hobart blew out his breath to dispel the repugnance the recital had evoked. "Shouldn't the handkerchief give you a clue?" he ventured finally. "I've heard you people are very clever about things like—"

"It was his own," said the detective ruefully. "Here's how we've reconstructed it, with the little we have to go by. He admitted the person himself. He must have. There are no signs of forcible entry anywhere around the house. We don't believe the person was known to him by sight, and we're positive he wasn't expected. Harding would have mentioned he was coming to the darkies, and he didn't. But this man somehow gained Harding's confidence out there at the door and was led in here to view the collection. Pos-

sibly he pretended to have stamps to offer for sale. The old man reseated himself, sneezed as he did so, from the effects of going to the open door the way he just had, took out his handkerchief, and the other stepped quickly behind him, applied pressure, and kept on applying pressure until the suffocated old man was gone. Then the intruder left, without taking anything, without disturbing anything, without leaving a clue behind. No fingerprints on anything—tabletop, chair, doorknob, or the covers of the albums themselves. Obviously gloved."

"That's a tough baby, all right," admitted Hobart.

"You're telling us?" said Foster ruefully. "We've been working on it twenty-four hours, and we've gotten exactly nowhere. We've got to get our teeth into a motive before we *can* get anywhere. Before we can begin to make even faint motions of looking for our suspect. He came, killed, and went absolutely unseen by the human eye. He wasn't just a marauder or burglar, because there's not a penny in cash missing."

Foster produced a bulky crocodile wallet. "The old gent had two hundred odd bucks in this thing alone, right on his person, and there's three times as much lying practically in the open elsewhere around the house." He produced a smoked-pearl stickpin, the size of a kidney bean, and a gold cigarette-case with a ruby clasp. "No valuables or jewelry missing—and inside in the dining room, directly across the hall from here, is a whole set of solid silver service, gold lined. Not a silver spoon missing!"

"It wasn't anyone who had a grudge, who felt personal enmity toward him. We've checked back twenty years or more and can turn up absolutely noth-

ing that by any stretch of the imagination could have created ill will toward him. He's never discharged any servants, because he's never had any but these two Negroes. His chauffeur has never run over anyone or so much as barked anyone's shins. He's never made any deals in real estate at the expense of any of his competitors. He dealt in the development of new tracts, out beyond the city limits—virgin parcels, so to speak.

"It's not an inside job either. The two darkies have been with him for years. Old retainer stuff. They've both got religion worse than a pup has fleas. They thought so much of him that the old Negro tried to hang himself when he first found out his boss was gone. Harding didn't leave any will—no motive there. On the contrary, afraid that he'd outlive them or that they'd be insufficiently provided for by the State when he passed on, the servants were both getting a pension *during* his lifetime. It's *now* that it stops."

"I thought I heard a woman sobbing upstairs," Hobart said.

"Yes—that's his only living relative, his married daughter."

Hobart didn't say anything further, but Foster read his thought. "She took a plane out from Chicago at nine this morning for the funeral. No possible personal gain motive involved, to be blunt about it. D'you know who she's married to? Adams of the Electric Corporation of America. Her husband's one of the ten or twenty wealthiest men in the country. If the old man was well off, she's practically a mint walking around on high heels. Nor did Harding carry a cent of insurance either—old-fashioned old duck evidently. Mrs. Adams has already served notice she'd rather waive her share

in her father's estate, have it turned over to charity or public works, and the State is the sole remaining beneficiary. And the State does not commit murder—it executes people for it instead. So it's completely an outside job if there ever was one. That gets us back to the point I made before. Not a red dime, not a silver spoon missing from the house."

**F**OSTER pointed a finger at Hobart, to fasten down his attention even more securely, although he had it already anyway. "*Now*. Here's where you can come in handy for us. It's occurred to us that robbery may have been the motive after all, but not cash or valuables." He pointed to the weighty volumes on the table. "It may have been committed, and we've already been on the case a full day and a night without knowing it. We've been over those albums not once but several times, and we're still in the dark; although there are plenty of blank spaces—"

Hobart made a condescending pass with his hand. "Every collection has them. When every space is filled, you may as well be dead. You have nothing more to live for."

"We can't tell whether the ones that aren't there were taken from the collection, or never were in it in the first place. Nor can we tell whether they're valuable—valuable enough to commit murder for—or unimportant. Don't you see what it'll mean? If you can dig up the motive from inside that collection, look what a head start that gives us! That narrows us down to a suspect who owns a stamp collection himself, who knew Harding owned one, and finally, if you tell us something valuable is missing, we can watch for it to turn up. We can tip off the

various stamp brokers and dealers in New York, just as though it were a piece of hot jewelry. Otherwise we're up against a completely motiveless case, and that means—no soap. D'you think you can help us out on this angle, Mr. Hobart?"

"I'm pretty sure I can. If he had any system at all to his collecting, I think I can tell you the things you want to know." He drew his chair closer to the table, slipped the knot of his necktie. "You say the stamp books were spread out around him when he was found. Were they open or closed?"

"Those two were closed, standing one atop the other. This third one was open on the table before him."

"What page, can you tell me?"

It was now Foster's turn to look a little self-satisfied. "You bet I can!" he said warmly. "I may not know anything about stamps, but it's my job to notice any little thing like that. It's where I left that little strip of paper sticking out for a marker."

Hobart reopened it to that page. "Cape of Good Hope," he murmured, reading the printed title of the country at the top.

"Look at that whole row of blank frames across there. What about them?" Foster prompted hopefully, spearing his finger out. "Don't it look like—?"

"Look out! Don't prod them with your nails! Stamps are very fragile things," Hobart said fussily. "Hand me that glass."

He peered through it briefly, announced authoritatively, "Those are stamps he never had. I'm going to give you one pointer, before we go any further; something you evidently don't know. We collectors don't lick stamps and paste them down flat on the face of the album, like people do when

they're mailing a letter. D'you know how it's done?"

Their three heads shook as one.

"By means of hinges. Little tabs of wax-paper, gummed on one side only. They peel off very easily. You just *draw* the stamp off without damaging it. Now. He never had any stamps in this row of frames, because the hinges would have left little patches of dullness on the album paper. I'm looking at it through the glass and the surface gloss of the paper is unmarred."

They just gave him a look of silent admiration, grouped around his chair.

"He had a beautiful collection," said Hobart wistfully. "A crackerjack. He must have been at it for years. Funny I never heard of him, living in the same town with him. I guess we both dealt with out-of-town agents. There aren't any dealers here, as far as I—"

He broke off suddenly as he turned the page. He was staring fixedly at something. He just sat there rigid, as if turned to stone. They saw a lump rise in his throat, as if he were swallowing something with difficulty.

"What's the matter?" breathed Foster anxiously, looking from Hobart's face to the page, and from the page back to his face again. "Anything wrong?" Did you find something?" But there were no blank spaces on this one at all. Every frame was filled.

Hobart recovered himself with an effort, as though remembering there were three other people in the room with him. He looked up at them dazedly for a minute.

### III

"WELL, what is it?" they chorused. "What'd you find?" Their untrained eyes peered at the well-filled page and showed no understand-

ing. If they'd been watching Hobart's left hand instead, which was resting open on his thigh just below the table, they would have seen it contract into a tight knot, until the knuckles showed white.

Foster, answering their own questions, said, "Why, there's nothing gone from that page. Every space is filled!"

"That's just it. Every space is filled," nodded Hobart. "Gentlemen," he said slowly, turning to look up at them, "you asked me to come here and help you. I think I can tell you what you want to know without looking any further. On this page, staring up at you from the midst of all its companions, is one of the most valuable stamps in the world."

"Which one is it?"

"To your eyes one doesn't look any different than the others," said Hobart almost scornfully. "Well, it's the Cape of Good Hope triangular, this three-sided one right here. Did he own a catalogue? He must have. Let me have it a minute. I'll show you what Scott's quotes it at."

He opened the stamp collector's bible, which gives the description and current market price of every stamp issued anywhere in the world, and he read aloud: "One hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

The three detectives nearly fell over. "Are you kidding?" one said. "For *that*, for that little colored piece of paper?"

"That figure is only hypothetical," Hobart went on. "That's what it would bring if it were available. That's what it brought the last time it changed hands, evidently. As it is, it's priceless, because there are only three of them known to be in existence. One is in the collection of the late King George, one belonged to the late Czar, I think,

and one was in the Ferrari collection which was sold at auction behind closed doors in Paris about fifteen years ago. This may be either one of those last two—if it's genuine and not a fake. There are a number of fakes floating around." His jaw set in a grim, bitter line. "I know of more than one unsuspecting collector who has been stung with them by unscrupulous fly-by-night dealers, who rented an entire establishment for a 'front,' filled it with dummy stock, just for the sake of making this one larcenous transaction, then vanished in time to escape prosecution."

"Well, which is that one, the McCoy or a counterfeit? Can you tell?" Foster asked eagerly.

"No, I can't," said Hobart irritably, as though the sight of such a treasure had made him discontented. "Not just looking at it with the naked eye, or through a glass either. It needs a watermark detector." He stopped their torrent of further questions with an impatient lift of his hand. "From your point of view its continued presence in the album can mean only one thing. That the stamps played no part in the murder, their theft wasn't the motive, and the murderer was not a stamp collector. You can bet your lives he wasn't! He certainly wouldn't have left that fabulous thing undisturbed if it had been."

To his surprise, he could see that Foster appeared unwilling to accept this conclusion. The detective walked away, lit a cigarette, turned, and stood looking back—part of an unconscious third-degree technique.

"Unless," Foster suggested, "it really is a fake, and he only saw that after he croaked the old guy, and then didn't bother taking it after all."

"He couldn't tell by just looking at it," Hobart insisted stubbornly. "I

don't care who he was. If I can't, he couldn't have, either! He'd have had to take it out and put it in a watermark detector before he could make sure, and it hasn't been taken out of the album."

Foster wouldn't give in either. "Fair enough as far as it goes," he said skeptically, "but you're not using psychology, and that brings us back onto my ground again. Look at it this way. If there are only three of them as you say, how can anyone taking it possibly hope to get rid of it afterward—unload it without creating an uproar in stamp circles? Don't you see? It's *too* rare, *too* easily identifiable. It'd be like heisting the Venus de Milo or the Hope diamond. He was no fool, whoever he was. Don't you think it's likely he realized, at sight, that this thing would be a white elephant? Isn't it possible he purposely left it there because its possession would have branded him, and instead helped himself to a lot of less unique, but still worthwhile, stamps from other parts of the collection? Stamps whose ownership would be harder to trace, stamps that would bring him plenty of money without the risk of detection? I don't think you've given us our answer yet. Not until you've gone over that collection from A to Z and told us definitely whether anything is missing from it."

Hobart nodded reluctantly, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. He kept chewing his lower lip. "That'll take days," he said unwillingly. And one of the other detectives remonstrated with Foster. "Don't forget, Frank, Mr. Hobart isn't on the city payroll. After all, he's given you his opinion."

"Well, I don't want to impose, but we're absolutely dependent on you for

our clues in this." Foster appealed to the stamp expert.

Hobart glanced once more at the tiny pyramid-shaped piece of paper lying there on the page. He seemed to make up his mind abruptly, as though the stamp had exerted some sort of magnetism on him.

"I'll do it," he said. He drew his chair in again. "I'll start in alphabetically and work my way through the albums country by country. That's the only way." He pointed to the catalogue. "Do you see those little pencil-checks next to a great many of the listings? That means he had those items. That's the way most collectors keep a record of what they own. I do it myself. It's simply a routine matter of verifying the catalogue-checks by what's in the album."

"Oh, well, if that's all there is to it, one of us could do it. There's no reason why you should," Foster suggested penitently.

Hesitantly though he had been before, Hobart now seemed anxious for the chore. "I can do it about three times as quickly, though, because I'm familiar with the stamps at sight. You people would have to pore over the color of each one, and the face value, and the date of issue and all that; I can identify at a glance. Besides, it's no tiresome task. I'll enjoy it even though they're somebody else's stamps. It's my hobby. I think I can work over the whole collection in about two sittings."

HE took off his coat, polished up the magnifying glass, and got busy. They watched him fascinatedly for a few minutes, but the novelty quickly wore off. All he did was simply go down the line of pencil-checks in the catalogue with one tracing finger, and with his other hand keep swiveling

a pencil back and forth between catalog and album, occasionally bringing the glass into play to inspect something more closely. That was all there was to see. Their interest quickly waned, and after all they had their own work to attend to. After a series of hoarsely-whispered consultations—they were like schoolboys in the presence of a headmaster, who must not be disturbed—they went out one by one, metaphorically on tiptoe, if not literally. Foster, the last to leave the room, said: "Tell you what. You holler if you come across anything missing. I got a little more questioning to do upstairs."

Hobart simply nodded abstractedly, without looking up. Yet if he seemed oblivious of the fact that he had been left quite alone in the room, that was a misleading impression; he was acutely conscious of it, with every nerve in his body.

"Fools," he thought savagely, continuing to pore over the tabletop, "leaving a stamp collector, I don't care who he is, alone and unwatched with the Cape triangular! After I *told* them what it's worth!" It was, he realized vaguely, because they didn't quite believe him. That is, consciously they did, but unconsciously they didn't. It still had no meaning to them. It was just a triangle of colored paper no matter what he said about it. If it had been jewelry or something their minds were *trained* to think of as intrinsically valuable . . .

He had reached Canada, the country before Cape of Good Hope, when he finally quit for the night. The last thing he did before shutting the album was to turn two pages ahead and take another look at the famous Cape triangular. A long, lingering look. A tormented look.

"Are you real," he breathed rever-

ently, "or are you a phoney like mine?"

The only way to tell was by the watermark. The paper that blocks of stamps are printed on, before they are perforated and separated, is watermarked just like banknote or writing paper sometimes is. The watermark of the paper plays as important a part in the stamp's description, in Scott's catalogues and to collectors all over the world, as its color or design or face value. The authentic Cape triangulars, issued back in the Forties of the Nineteenth Century and now all gone from the world but three, were watermarked with the British royal crown and the initials *V R*, Victoria Regina. The fakes were unwatermarked, for this official postal paper could not be obtained, and that was the only sure way of telling them apart—as Hobart had found out to his cost. An unwary collector, in the heat of acquisition, seeing a prize he had never hoped to obtain within his reach and usually at a lower figure, was apt to overlook that—or had been ten or fifteen years ago, when knowledge and use of the watermark detector was not so widespread as now.

He was dying to know: had old Aaron Harding been stung just as he had, or was this the genuine article? Alongside that question, the preoccupation of these three ignoramuses as to who had killed him and why seemed trivial, unimportant, child's play.

The old man had not owned a watermark detector; old-fashioned in that respect just as he had been about insurance and making a will. Hobart, as he moved the short distance from the table to the open room-door, made up his mind. He would bring his own over in his pocket tomorrow night when he came back to continue his auditing. If they left him alone in the room, off and on, the way they had tonight, he



could easily take the stamp out of the album, test it in the detector, and replace it again without their being any the wiser. What harm could there possibly be in that? It was just to satisfy his own curiosity.

On the other hand, why do it secretly, behind these men's backs? What harm would it have been to mention openly what he wanted to do, ask their permission? It almost certainly would have been granted him. Was it because he didn't want to attract their attention to his overweening interest in it, put them on their guard against possible substitution? Was it because he already knew that he meant to do more than just test it?

He raised his voice and called from the doorway, "Foster! Inspector Foster! I'm going home now."

"Find anything?" the detective called down from above-stairs.

"Not so far, but I'm going ahead with it tomorrow night."

Foster came down personally to see him out.

Hobart said, "You're not going to just leave those albums lying out there on the table all night, are you?" They couldn't get it into their thick heads that those scraps of paper were worth all kinds of money! "Didn't he keep them in a safe or anything?"

"No, just inside the drawers of that secretary, from what the Negroes tell me. I'll put them back and keep the key on me. But they're safe enough. There'll be a cop at the door all night, anyway." His attitude was plainly, "What burglar would be fool enough to go after *those* things, when there's real loot in a house?" He began to thank Hobart warmly for his assistance, as he accompanied him to the door.

"Sorry I haven't been able to turn

up anything definite for you yet," the expert said, "but I may come upon it further along in the collection." The remark had an insincere ring, to his own ears, though. Because he knew he wasn't really interested in whether he did or not. He was only interested in having an excuse to come back the next night and find out for sure whether or not that was a genuine Cape triangular.

#### IV

**B**USINESS was slow the next day. There wasn't much trading. Well, he'd made enough money. It wasn't a matter of bread and butter any more. And that was when your spare-time hobby started to grow on you, crowd aside your full-time occupation. He'd noticed long ago that he couldn't get as much thrill out of a transaction that meant a sizable profit as he could out of getting hold of some philatelic rarity that completed a certain set or filled the last blank space on a certain page. It was unreasonable, but there it was.

He found himself thinking of that Cape triangular time and again, even when he was watching the ticker. Was the stamp real or wasn't it? And if it was, what good was it to a dead man?

He didn't start right over to Harding's house when he had finished his dinner that evening. He unlocked his den instead and went in to take out his own collection. It was while he was turning the dial on the wall safe that he happened to glance up into a mirror and see his manservant standing in the open doorway, looking in questioningly.

He whirled angrily, strode over to the door. "Don't come in here," he said sharply, "You know I don't let anyone in here."

"Sorry, sir. I knocked but you didn't hear me. Inspector Foster just called again, sir. He said if you hadn't left yet to finish going over Mr. Harding's collection, to tell you he was on his way there, himself and he'd stop by and call for you, if you'd care to wait for him."

This was unimportant from Hobart's point of view. He certainly had no reason for *not* wanting to ride out with the detective. In fact it saved him the trouble of getting his own car out of the garage. It was important only in that it gave the servant his first inkling as to what the police-auxiliary business was his employer was engaged in over there.

Hobart closed the door in his face abruptly. The man's face, as the shadow fell athwart it, became a study in homicidal rage. (It takes a fine point of psychology to explain this fully.) Apart from the fact that all household servants resent undue precautions guarding against theft taken by their employers, as a reflection on their characters, there was this added factor: this man of Hobart's was fully aware that nothing of any value outside the stamps was kept in that den. Since these stamps meant absolutely nothing to him, were perfectly worthless in his eyes, it only aggravated him the more to have them guarded from him so pointedly. It was adding insult to injury. He could have understood it if it had been silverware, but to do it about something that in his estimation belonged in the dust-bin . . .

And finally, it so happened that he was rigidly honest, had never stolen a pin in his life, but was of a sulky, vicious disposition, inclined to brood over his grievances, whether real or imaginary, until they festered and became maniacal hates.

Hobart opened his album, looked at his own Cape triangular. He'd often wondered why, after he'd found out definitely it was spurious, he'd bothered keeping it in his collection, why he hadn't thrown it away and marked it off to experience. In the beginning, when he'd gone to the police about it (that was in New York) and they'd been trying to apprehend the swindler, he'd needed it of course for evidence. And then after that, when it became evident that the sharper had made good his escape, well, maybe the fact that Hobart had parted with five thousand dollars for it had something to do with his hanging onto it, just like people hang onto gold-brick stock they've been swindled into buying, even when they know it's not worth the paper it's printed on.

He removed the stamp now, with his tweezers. Then he brought out his watermark detector. This was simply a shallow little tray, about four by six inches, of a hard black bakelite composition. He placed the stamp in it, face down, so that the white reverse showed uppermost. Then he poured a few drops of benzine over it, enough to moisten the bottom of the tray. It wasn't necessary to use this liquid; the same effect could be achieved with plain water, but benzine dries more rapidly. The soaked paper still showed completely unshadowed against the tray's blackness, for this one was unwatermarked, a forgery.

He'd subjected it to this test repeatedly after the first devastating discovery—even performed it for the police to prove his point. He wondered, therefore, why he bothered repeating it at this late date. Was it, he reflected with a twinge, just the excuse, given to himself by himself, for getting the stamp out of the album?

He took it out of the pan, left it on a sheet of blotting paper for the air to dry it. But then he didn't wait—he put the album back without it, locked the wall safe. It stayed there on the blotting paper as though he'd forgotten it. He hadn't. He was fighting a battle with himself, a battle that gave no outward sign.

**F**OSTER didn't bother to ring the doorbell when he arrived, just stayed in the car and tooted the horn. Hobart went out to him, leaving the stamp behind. He seemed to have won the battle.

He shook hands, asked the detective hospitably: "Care to come in a minute for a drink before we go?"

Foster gave him a humorously rueful look. "On duty? I'd like to keep my job a little longer." He opened the car door for him.

"Just a minute," Hobart said abruptly. "I forgot something." He went back into the house. He had forgotten something. Something innocent, as yet. The watermark detector, with which he'd been meaning to test Harding's Cape triangular on the sly.

But when he left the den the second time, the stamp wasn't there on the blotter any more. He'd lost the battle.

A colored man with the mournful eyes of a dog that has lost its master opened the door for them at Harding's house. A tall stately woman garbed in black was coming down the stairs as they entered.

"Mrs. Adams, this is Mr. Hobart," said the detective. "He's a stamp enthusiast like Mr. Harding was. He's been good enough to put his expert knowledge at our disposal."

She gave Hobart a warm look, as though the fact that he and her father had something in common was enough

to make her look favorably on him. "I used to see him with the stamps so often," she said sadly. "Cruel, isn't it, Mr. Hobart?" She raised a handkerchief quickly to her lips, then regained control of herself.

Foster went into the murder room, unlocked the secretary, took out the albums for Hobart. Then Foster rejoined Mrs. Adams in the hall. She had, for obvious reasons, not stepped into the room.

Hohart seated himself at the table, shot back his cuffs, and resumed his "auditing." He took up where he had left off the night before, and in a very few minutes had reached and passed the triangular. Without moving a facial muscle he raised his eyes to the open doorway, dropped them again.

A moment later, without any warning, the darky was standing there in the doorway, coughing apologetically. Hobart looked up a second time without showing any emotion, although something like a short circuit had just gone through his system.

"Beg pardon, suh. Mrs. Adams like to know can I git you any refreshment while you wukking?"

"Thank you. A glass of water," said Hobart pleasantly.

The darky brought it in on an expensive chased-silver platter, set it down on the table, withdrew tactfully. Hobart heard his almost inaudible tread go up the stairs to the floor above. Mrs. Adams and the detective had also gone there some time before this. Evidently there was an attic or storeroom full of trunks containing old letters and documents that claimed their attention.

Now was as good a time as any. Hobart fished out his watermark detector surreptitiously and placed it on his lap under the table. He stuck

two fingers into the drinking glass, traced their moistened tips along the bottom of the detector. Then he took up Harding's tweezers, fixed them on the stamp and gently peeled it off its hinge and free of the album. He dropped the stamp face down onto the glistening tray.

Wrist shaking a little, he raised the tray up above table level, where the light could get at it freely. The black of the tray slowly peered through the soggy stamp in a series of tracings that finally resolved themselves into the British royal crown with the initials *VR*.

It was genuine, it was the real thing! It was the third Cape triangular, either from the dispersed Ferrari collection or the lost Romanoff one! His head swayed back until it almost struck the tall chair-back behind him; he tightened his neck muscles, pulled his head sharply forward again.

**I**TS monetary value was no temptation to him. He didn't think of it in that way at all, of what he could get for it. His collector's instinct cried out for its possession, to *keep*, to hide away, even though no other living eye but his own ever saw it again. He thought: "Harding's dead now. I'm not robbing anyone at all. *She* doesn't understand stamps or care two pins about them. Nor does she need the money they might bring. Who'll ever know the difference? Who'll ever be the wiser? It's not as though I intended to dispose of it afterward, run the risk of exposure. It'll stay with me forever, and no one ever sees my collection but myself."

He took the stamp out of the tray and placed it on the table, to let the dampness evaporate. He reached in his pocket, brought out his own, the

counterfeit. He held them close to each other. So very much alike, so identical in every detail of coloring and engraving. Only that betraying little watermark.

But he kept fighting it out, as he had at his home. And the tide started to turn, the longer he hesitated. *He* was no thief. He'd never done anything like this before in his life. He wouldn't have dreamed of doing a thing like this in business, appropriating a client's account. If he did this now he was no better, no, he was far worse, than that long-ago sharper who had mulcted *him*. He could survive without this particular stamp. He had plenty of other rarities in his collection. And if no one ever looked at his albums but himself, all the more reason for being satisfied with the counterfeit he'd had all these years. But there was this collector's fever to contend with, this vague instinct for perfection, for fulfillment, that craved the satisfaction of knowing *he* possessed the genuine one, even though nobody else ever would.

In the end he might have won out, overcome the temptation, but circumstances defeated him. The front doorbell rang sharply, and the colored butler's tread started down the stairs to answer it. Again he dabbed a finger into the glass of water, and stroked it across the hinge that had remained in the album, renewing its adhesive properties.

There was no excuse. The outer door had already opened. But there was equal time left to have replaced either one in the frame, the counterfeit or the genuine. He put back the forgery he had brought from his own house, and pressed it down until it remained fixed fast on the hinge. Then he put his other hand down on the tabletop,

covering the real one, just as Broderick came into the room.

"Hello, Hobart," the detective greeted him guilelessly. "How you coming along? Where's Foster, upstairs? We just picked up a suspicious character that was seen roaming around this vicinity two days ago." He went out again to the foot of the stairs, called his fellow worker down.

Hobart had only to lift his hand from the table. The stamp, still damp, adhered to his palm. He thrust his hand into his side pocket, and when he brought his hand out again it was empty.

Foster's voice was raised, outside in the hall, in argument with his teammate. "You're crazy! Harding would never have let anyone of that description into the house in the first place, and if he had gotten in he would have swiped everything he could lay his hands on, you bet. . . . All right, I'll go down and question him, but you're way off on the wrong track, I tell you!"

Hobart went ahead with his work, eyelids discreetly veiled.

By eleven-thirty he had reached Zanzibar, the last country in any collector's album, and as he straightened in his chair with a sigh, Foster and the other dick came back. They were still arguing as they reentered the room, but apparently Foster had been vindicated by the results of their questioning. "Sec, I told you he'd be a false alarm!" he was saying. "Why, he's just a stumblebum. The flophouse keeper himself told me he was in a two-bit bed that whole evening from nine o'clock on! How you making out, Mr. Hobart?"

"Just got through now," Hobart told him, cushioning his hands comfortably behind his head, "and I can give

this collection a clean bill of health. There's nothing missing, according to the check system he used in his catalogue. Not the cheapest two-cents-red American variety."

The news was understandably not welcome. Foster's face sagged. "Now where are we?" he asked dismally, turning to confront his partner. "The stamps arc out of it, and that was the only angle that promised a ghost of a possibility."

"There's still a chance that it was a stamp fiend," offered Broderick by way of half-hearted consolation, "but he was frightened away by something and didn't finish casing the collection for what he wanted."

Hobart was about to say, "How long does it take to lift a stamp out of one of these books, if you know what you want?" but changed his mind prudently. "I'm going home," he said instead. "It's been a strenuous evening's work."

HE MADE the trip back, in the detective's car, with no more sense of guilt or strain than if he hadn't had a \$150,000 stamp in his pocket. At his own door he waved aside the dick's renewed thanks with an airy, "It was an interesting experience! Wouldn't have missed it for the world."

He stood there outside his door with his latchkey in his hand until the sound of Foster's car had dwindled away in the direction of downtown. He smiled derisively after it, and murmured something that sounded like, "Great detective! He's taking money under false pretenses!"

In his den he turned on the light and closed the door. He opened the safe, took out his own album, and opened it to the Cape of Good Hope

page. Then he took the priceless triangular out of his pocket, touched it to his lips, held it up for a moment toward the light with a smug expression. Finally he affixed a hinge to it, placed it where he had taken the counterfeit from.

Just as he was about to return the book to the safe, however, some faint sound from outside came to his ear. He crossed swiftly to the door, almost jumped at it, flung it open. The servant was standing out there, one foot out behind him, trying to appear as though he had just come up the hall to knock. Hobart received a distinct impression, however, that he had been crouched down on his heels for some time past watching him through the keyhole.

He could feel his face whiten, and tried to steady it. "I thought you'd gone to bed!" he yelled. "What're you doing out here at this hour, spying on me?"

"No sir," said the man submissively. "I only wanted to ask you if I should lock up yet."

"You ought to know that without having to ask!" He slammed the door, nearly striking the man in the face with it. He went back and finished putting away his collection. He was shaking a little—and not altogether from exasperation, although he felt plenty of that.

He swore through clenched teeth. "He had to catch me just at that particular moment! That's the only slip-up I've made throughout the whole business!" But then, he consoled himself, the spying servant had no way of knowing what it was, at that distance, nor where it had come from, nor how it had been obtained.

He didn't give the man as much credit as he deserved. For at that very moment, locking up and putting out

lights in another part of the house, his hostile employe was grimacing knowingly: "Swiped it, eh? I can tell that by the look he had on his face. It's always the ones that mistrusts others that turns out to be crooked themselves. I'm biding my time. I've got something now, but I'm biding my time with it. He thinks he's a tough guy, does he? Well, when I get the chance I'm going to show him I can be tougher."

V

ONE week went by from the night Hobart had completed his specialized "assistance" to the police investigation of Aaron Harding's murder. During that time the inquiry seemed to get no further. An item in one of the papers told him that Mrs. Adams had returned to Chicago. She intended to return later to dispose of the house after the case had been finally closed. There was no other mention of the matter. It had been a "quiet" sort of murder, in one sense—had not excited much public interest, so the editors made no attempt to keep it alive. Hobart certainly had no further reason to be particularly concerned with it. He had not committed it; he had not even known the murdered man. It was none of his business. He had not seen or heard from Foster or the others in the interval, either.

Exactly one week to the day after his last visit to the Harding house, his office secretary announced: "There's a Mr. Lindquist out here to see you."

He couldn't recall the name offhand as belonging to any of his clients, but there was no sense in turning away a new account.

A short little man with an extremely ruddy, cherubic face and a pointed white goatee, came bustling in. He

vaguely suggested a French cabinet minister, with his cutaway coat and glasses on a heavy black cord.

"I couldn't resist combining pleasure with business!" was his greeting. Then, at the uncertain look on Hobart's face: "I see you can't place me. Well, that's not to be wondered at. You've been dealing with us for years but I seldom attend to our correspondence personally. I'm Helmer Lindquist, president of the Lindquist Stamp Exchange of New York."

Hobart smiled with his eyes, but the lower part of his face tightened a little—why, he could not have told. They shook hands.

"So you're the man that's been getting all my hard-earned money!" he said jocularly. "Sit down." Hobart offered a cigarette. "What brings you to this neck of the woods?"

"I came out to do a little buying," beamed the pigeon-like little man.

Hobart's jawline wouldn't relax, much as he tried to ease it. "You came out *here* from New York to do some buying? It's usually the other way around, isn't it?"

"But this is a special opportunity not likely to occur again, what the French call a *bon marché*." He glanced at Hobart cooly, as though debating whether or not to tell him any more. "I know I shouldn't tip my hand like this. I'm not forgetting you're a collector yourself. However, I represent a corporation, and you're probably not in a position to pay one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a single stamp, so there's no harm in—"

The tautness of Hobart's facial muscles had become like lockjaw. He just looked the question, without being able to ask it.

"Yes, you've guessed it," chirped the gnome-like visitor. "The famous

Cape triangular, in the Harding collection. I have a client in New York at this very moment, ready to pay me two hundred thousand for it, cold cash. If I can get it back for what Harding paid for it, fifty thousand dollars profit is not to be sneezed at."

Hobart's tongue flicked across his lips. "How do you know it's genuine?" he murmured almost inaudibly. His mouth was dry.

"How do I know? Why we sold it to him! Our firm has never handled a single stamp that wasn't genuine in the ninety years of our existence. Our agent bought it from Ferrari in Paris in 1922." He blinked alarmedly. "Why, you look pale, Mr. Hobart! Are you ill? What's the matter?"

"If you'll glance behind you at that ticker you'll see the reason."

Lindquist did so briefly, but spread his hands at shoulder level. "Greek to me," he said.

Hobart had gotten up with forced steadiness, was drawing water from the cooler into a paper container.

Lindquist was laughing puckishly. "Naturally, I don't blame *you* for being on your guard, after the way you were taken in yourself by that very stamp once. The burnt child shuns the fire."

"So you know that too?" Hobart didn't get pale this time, or betray himself in any way. The first shock had insulated him against the second. Watching the water bubble into the cup he was holding, he said to himself stonily: "This man must die. He sold Harding the genuine triangular. He remembers reading in the papers at the time that I was swindled with a forgery." Aloud he asked with careful steadiness: "Have you seen the Harding collection yet?" But obviously Lindquist hadn't, or he would already

have raised the alarm about the substitution.

"No, but I have an appointment with Inspector Foster to look it over tomorrow. I can't, of course, buy anything until the estate has been probated, but I'm hoping to be able to get an option, first claim on this triangular, from Mrs. Adams, and put one over on my competitors in that way."

Hobart said, "Why don't you come out and dine with me at my house tonight? I'll show you my collection." And inwardly, "If you live long enough to get there."

"Splendid, splendid!" the enthusiastic little connoisseur burst out. "I'm at the Harrison Hotel. Very kind of you indeed! And now I won't take up any more of your time."

"I'll call for you at six sharp and drive you out." As the frosted-glass panel closed after his caller, Hobart slumped back behind the desk and held his head in both hands. "He's got to be put out of the way," he said to himself.

It wasn't revelation of the theft that worried him now any more. He was realizing he had put himself into a position where he would almost certainly be charged with the murder itself. After all, how could he prove that he had taken it the night he had, and not two nights before, the night Harding had been killed? He had stayed in his den that whole night going over his stamps. Nobody had seen him, could vouch for him, but his servant—and a single unsupported corroboration like that was too shaky to count on. . . .

Yes, he would have to commit a murder, with all deliberation, as the only way of escaping being charged with one. One he had had nothing to do with.

He switched on his inter-office loud-speaker, snapped, "I'm not in to anyone for the rest of the day, understand?"

Tracing imaginary lines on his glass-topped desk with a gold pencil, he said to himself: "There are two ways out to my place from the Harrison Hotel, downtown. One is the short way, with traffic lights to guarantee its safety. One is the long roundabout route, that crosses the railroad right-of-way twice. He's a stranger here. He won't know the difference. The Flyer shoots through those right-of-ways at about 6:10 every night, for the East. If something should happen to the car, and it stalled on the crossing, I'd have time to jump for it—if I knew ahead of time—but would he?"

He bounced the gold pencil on the glass. "That's it!" he exulted. He was a business man, quick to make decisions. Only this time the business was death.

## VI

AT FIVE to six, in a dark backstreet behind the Harrison Hotel, he stopped his car, got out, took a wrench from the tool kit and carried it around to the front door on the right hand side. He glanced around him, but in the twilight, in this section of factories and warehouses, there was no one in sight. He began swinging the wrench like a short-tempered man who has been trying to repair something and finally loses control of himself. The blows bent the outside door-handle down at such an angle to the face of the door that it became impossible to turn it, even from the inside. Then he flattened the latch-grip on the inside, so that even thin fingers couldn't work under it to get a grip on it. The door beside the guest seat



was now jammed immovably for all practical purposes. One could still open it, with patience and dexterity, yes, but not in an emergency, under stress of excitement or extreme fright.

Five minutes later, around the corner from there, he was leading Lindquist toward the car under the lighted hotel-marquee, all sociability. Murray Hobart could be agreeable when he wanted to.

"You'll have to get in from that side and squeeze through under the wheel," he apologized. "A truck grazed me coming down and jammed that door fast."

"Too bad," sympathized Lindquist.

("You'll find out how to-bad it is," Hobart thought.)

He noted with satisfaction the difficulty the rotund little connoisseur had in clearing the steering wheel shaft with his convex shape and short little legs. When he had, he was jammed into a corner pocket from which the only possible escape lay in vaulting over the top of the door. He was neither of a build nor agility to make this feasible. And it was going to come up on this side, from their right; that meant the dazzle of the headlight would blind him. And the natural instinct would be to get away from it, not jump out *toward* it. That meant the wheel shaft would trap him.

"Do you drive, Mr. Lindquist?" Hobart asked, to make conversation as they started off.

"No, strangely enough I've never taken it up."

Hobart glanced at his watch. A minute past six. It had better happen at the first crossing, otherwise the Flyer might go by before they reached the second. Six-ten o'clock for the first, and about a quarter past for the second.

He held his car to a steady forty

going down the shabby warehouse-lined road, that had neither traffic officers nor lights nor carried any private traffic, and that drew away from the direction of his own house at nearly a right angle, only to loop around again later. Forty was just about right—would get them there neither too soon nor too late. And since Lindquist didn't drive, he wouldn't be able to recognize the engine trouble, when it came, for the fake it was.

"How simple it is to kill another man," thought Hobart philosophically.

He started to talk about stamps again, to keep Lindquist's mind occupied. He was that kind of a man. He could talk shop to the man beside him while he was in the very act of driving him to his death.

He said, eyes on a tiny green pea ahead that marked the railroad crossing, "My own collection is no slouch, if I must say so myself. I've been collecting about eighteen years now."

"Nothing like it, is there?" agreed Lindquist heartily.

Ahead, the green pea at the point of perspective of the broad gloomy vista had swollen to the size of a grape now, a green Malaga grape hanging there in mid-air.

Hobart glanced at his watch. Six-eight. They'd just get there in time for the funeral. One hand left the wheel, came idly to rest on the door latch next to him, in readiness for his own imminent bolt.

Lindquist had gone on chattering blithely about the Harding collection. "I bet if it were appraised it would come to a cool half million. Why, his early British colonials alone—"

He bit the sentence off short. Left it hanging in mid-air as though it had been cut by a knife. Hobart stiffened and the bristles on the back of his

neck stood up. He'd seen the collection, this man next to him! Not the fact that he had admitted knowledge of the British colonials (for in the guise of stamp dealer he could have supplied them to Harding and therefore known they were in the collection), but the way he had guiltily stopped short in mid-sentence, choked on what he was saying, gave him away. He had already seen the collection, and yet he had said in the office this afternoon that he hadn't. That could only mean one thing. He was no stamp expert. At least not the innocent, casual looker-in at Hobart's office that he pretended to be. He was a decoy, a police spy, a stool-pigeon! He had been employed by Foster to get the goods on him, Hobart. That meant he was already under suspicion, they had their eyes on him.

**T**HAT changed everything. He mustn't die. He mustn't die! Why he, Hobart, was under surveillance right now, must have been every step of the way. The whole thing was a set-up. If he went through with his plan now, they'd have him dead to rights for murder! He'd *take* the grand larceny rap, he'd even risk being accused of the Harding murder—anything, *anything*. But he mustn't go through with this. It would be delivering himself up to them tied hand and foot.

The red light glowed ahead of them like a malignant planet. He braked violently, maniacally, nearly standing erect in his seat to bring down the last ounce of pressure. They bucked, teetered, lurched, half skidded, half ploughed, to a sickening stop, inches away from the outside line of rails of the quadruple trackbed.

The lathe-like barriers that had at-

tempted to descend to guard the right of way were unable to meet, formed a pointed arch over the car. One of the rear tires went shudderingly out with a plaintive whine, overstrained by the skidding.

"My, you did that on short notice!" remonstrated Lindquist mildly.

There was a roaring like a high wind, a blinding beam of light shot along the track, reared abruptly into the air, snuffed out, and the long sleek Flyer went racketing by, car after streamlined car of it. The reflection of the long rows of lighted windows streamed across their faces like a rippling golden pennant. Hobart's was glistening with sweat. Lord that had been a close shave! If the revelation had come a minute later. A minute? Ten seconds!

He pushed the door on his side open, got out on trembling legs. "Got to have a look at that back tire," he panted to Lindquist—probably unheard in the din of the passing train.

He went to the back of the car, supporting himself with one arm against it as he did so. He had to, to stand up straight, he was so shaken.

He squatted down like a frog by the left rear wheel. Sure, flat as a— He got vertigo or something, couldn't focus his eyes straight. The spokes seemed to revolve inside the rim. The wheel was starting to draw away from him, slowly, then faster.

He straightened with a shriek. He saw at once what had happened. Lindquist was wedged under the wheelstem in the attempt to get out after him, facing backward, waving his arms helplessly around over his head like pinwheels. He'd done something, accidentally stepped on the accelerator, taken off the brake. There was a short pronounced grade down to the de-

pressed trackbed, enough to pull the car into motion.

He yelled, "The brake! Put on the brake!"

But evidently Lindquist couldn't. He was wedged there, floundering inextricably. But it was all right, it would be all right. The long Flyer, not yet completely past, was running the second track over, and here came the observation car. It would be past by the time the machine nosed that far out.

They seemed to miss each other by inches, while Hobart stood there paralyzed, incapable of moving. *Fff!* and the aluminum observation-car had streaked by, the right of way was clear.

The car rolled on across the just-vacated second pair of tracks, came to a halt athwart the third, the center of the depression.

Lindquist was still semaphoring. He had one leg out over the side but he couldn't seem to extricate his other hip. Hobart could see him too plainly. There was something the matter! He was all blue up and down one side, as if a flashlight picture were being taken of him. There was an inhuman screech overhead, like a bird of prey—and a freight came tearing out from behind the Flyer, racing in the other direction, with the unexpectedness of a blacksnake. There was a crack like a sheet of tin being torn off a roof, and a lot of little things came falling down all over.

"GET me a drink, quick—and, and pack my bag!" blurted Hobart as his servant opened the door for him a few minutes later. No time had been lost. He had to burn that damn stamp first of all. He was in for it now. But it was an accident. They couldn't make it anything else! True, at first he'd

intended—but he'd changed his mind. It was an accident!

The servant poured him a jiggerful of brandy and he gulped it down. "Accident," he gasped. "Car smashed up—man I was bringing home to dinner—"

"Better take another." But the servant's eyes were hard. It wasn't said solicitously.

Hobart wanted another drink but he had to go in there and get rid of that stamp before he did anything else. He threw the door of his den open—and the lights were already on, and Foster was sitting there waiting for him.

"A little too unexpected for you?"

He smiled at Hobart's spasmodic heave, but not like he'd smiled a week ago, not grateful or respectful or admiring. Perhaps the dick was no longer accepting his pay under false pretenses. Perhaps he never had.

He said, "You know why I'm here." And he got up and came over to Hobart. He took Hobart by the cuff and twisted that around into an inextricable knot that acted like a manacle.

Hobart didn't pretend he didn't know. The game had gone past that stage now.

"You think I killed Harding. I didn't. All right. I'll make a clean breast of it. I did substitute a fake for the triangular. But that was two nights after, when I went up there to help you. I didn't kill him."

He turned beseechingly to the servant standing impassively behind him. "Tell him, Graves—tell him! You were spying on me through the keyhole, I know. Tell him, tell him what night it was you saw me come home and put a stamp into my book late at night."

"I have already, sir." said the serv-

ant respectfully. "He asked me that the first thing, and I told him. It was nine nights ago tonight. Tonight's Thursday. It was Tuesday of last week."

"The night Aaron Harding met his death," murmured Foster.

"No!" Hobart's voice rose to a wail of anguish. "He's lying! He's got a better memory than that! He hates me! He knows it was a week ago tonight—last Thursday night."

"I have got a good memory," said the servant imperturbably. "You've often told me so yourself. That's why I know I'm not mistaken. It was *Tuesday of last week*." And he just looked levelly, inscrutably, at his employer.

Hobart appealed frantically to the detective. "Don't you remember the first night you phoned me to come out? I went to the wrong address first. Doesn't that *prove* I'd never been to Harding's house before?"

"Not necessarily," said the detective. "It could just as easily prove you were clever enough to want to make it look that way. Lindquist, who was never in this town before, got out there without any trouble. Where is he, by

the way? We investigated him and he's exactly what he says he is."

"I had an accident with my car." Hobart shuddered. "He was—it was hit by a freight train at the Central Avenue crossing just now."

All Foster said, with deadly emphasis, was, "*Since when is Central Avenue the shortest way between the Harrison Hotel and your house here? Let's get started, shall we?*"

And as he half-carried the almost senseless victim of circumstances through the door with him, he growled disgustedly: "All for a little bit of colored paper! I have a letter in my pocket right now, from Mrs. Adams, in which she mentions she was going to give the stamp collection to you intact, triangular and all, as soon as the estate was settled, to show her appreciation and because neither she nor her husband are interested in stamps and you are."

"I didn't kill Harding!" shrieked Hobart.

"You're the only one who had a motive," Foster said flatly. "You're the only one who could have. If you didn't kill him, who did?"

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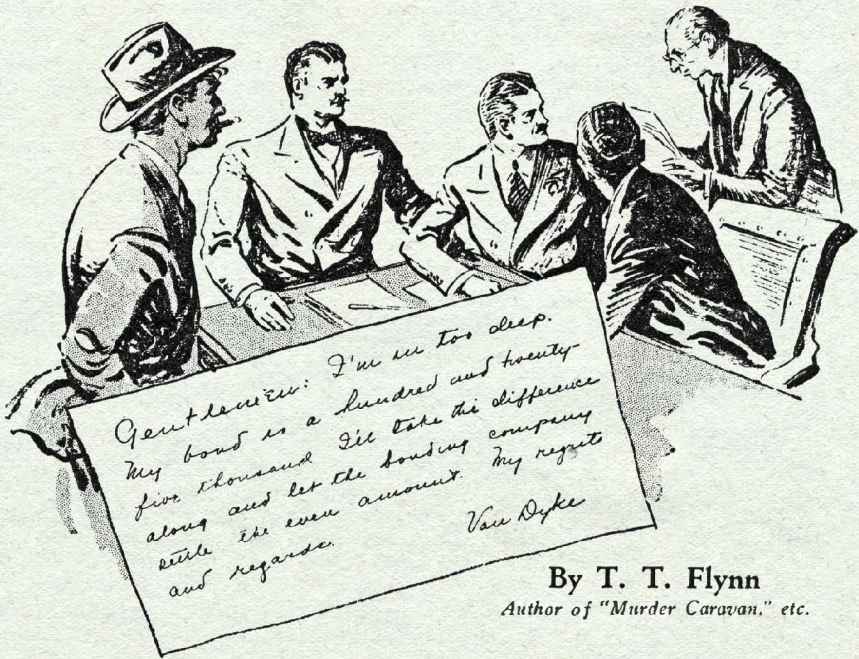
An excess of acids or poisons in your blood, when due to functional kidney disorders, may be the beginning of nagging

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(ADV.)

# Death Plays a Sucker



By T. T. Flynn

Author of "Murder Caravan," etc.

THERE in the quiet bank vault, Bradley's hands began to tremble as he decided to kill Van Dyke. Steadying himself, Bradley put down the packet of hundred-dollar bills and looked furtively at the others. They hadn't noticed, they were too busy counting the cash to find how much Van Dyke had stolen.

In the directors' room, Fosdick, the bank's president, and Simmons and Cleve, the vice-presidents, and that shaggy-haired badly-dressed little surety company detective, were waiting for the figures.

"Forty - three one - thousand - dollar bills," announced Gauge, snapping a rubber band about the thin packet. "I guess Van Dyke knew these would leave a trail."

Jordan, number three teller, tossed a canvas money sack onto a heap of other sacks. "Three thousand and ten dollars in pennies."

Steelman, the head bookkeeper, snapped, "Hurry—they're waiting."

Jimmy Allison, the junior teller, grinned from the sacked rolls of nickels and dimes.

"If you ask me, Van Dyke had it all planned. Remember that cutie I saw him with? I wonder if he took her along. Paris, Monte Carlo, Singapore—it'll be good while it lasts."

Bradley's lip curled. Good for nothing but donning their seersucker coats, paying out, receiving other people's money. They wouldn't believe Van Dyke was safely away, they were sure Van Dyke would be caught. In the

directors' room it was taken for granted. But Fosdick, the president, Simmons, Cleve, the vice-presidents, were fools. Van Dyke, that hearty, back-slapping fellow, had planned too well. Ten, fifteen years Van Dyke must have planned—and only Alvin Bradley remembered.

"Twenty-three one-hundred-dollar bills," said Bradley evenly. "Van Dyke evidently took most of the hundreds."

THEY were waiting when Bradley entered the directors' room, a meek, slightly stooped man with thinning hair and prim eyeglasses.

"Well?" said Fosdick impatiently.

Bradley read from the paper in his hand.

"Ninety-seven thousand, six hundred and forty dollars, and fifty cents. That seems to be all the cash Mr. Van Dyke got."

Fosdick exploded. "Isn't that enough? Don't look so sanctimonious, Bradley!"

Bradley flushed. How he disliked them. Not one had been so long with the bank. Van Dyke, the thief, when he had been promoted past the head teller's post where Alvin Bradley was a fixture, had chuckled, "Stop being a worm, Alvin, and thinking how badly you're used. The lightning may strike you next time."

Simmons, lean and good-looking in his expensive suit, mused, "I wonder why Van took that extra fifty cents."

Cleve, the other vice-president, guessed, "I suppose for the same reason he left this note, and had the repairs rushed on his fishing rod. Van thought of everything." Cleve cocked an eyebrow at Candleman, the sloppily dressed little man from the surety company. "It was his favorite fishing rod, didn't his wife tell you?"

Candleman nodded soberly.

"The tip was loose. She still thinks he's away on a fishing trip."

"What a shock she'll get," said Simmons regretfully. He read again from the note before him.

*Gentlemen: I'm in too deep. My bond is a hundred and twenty-five thousand. I'll take the difference along and let the bonding company settle the even amount. My regrets and regards.*

*Van Dyke.*

Candleman looked pained. "That's a lot of money for us to make good, gentlemen."

"But necessary," murmured Cleve. "I suppose you'll get Van Dyke."

Candleman nodded vaguely. "We usually do. Where did he usually fish?"

"Everywhere," volunteered Simmons. "Salmon in New Brunswick—trout in New England, bass in Florida, bone fish along the Florida Keys; now and then he'd have a try at marlin or sailfish. Van was a bug on fishing."

Candleman absentmindedly fumbled with a coat button.

"Florida, now—that's handy to Cuba and Central America. I wonder if he'd be fool enough to try to get away on a Pan-American plane."

Cleve shook his head.

"Van wasn't a fool—although in a way, I suppose, he was a fool to do this."

Fosdick slapped the table. "Certainly he was a fool! His life's ruined!" Fosdick looked helplessly at the others. "I can't realize Van actually has done this. Why—why—are you still here, Bradley? That's all. Mind you, no gossiping."

THREE days later Bradley resigned.

Fosdick was annoyed.

"I don't understand, Bradley. You're not eligible for retirement."

"I realize it, sir."

"You've done well as head teller. The bank is willing to recognize satisfactory service—say an increase of a hundred dollars a year."

"I'm sorry, sir. My health. . . ."

Ah, it was good—after twenty-three years. Bradley took his savings, better than thirty-four hundred, in twenty-dollar bills. But as he walked away from the bank, fright suddenly laid hold of Bradley like a cold hand. He stopped, looked back. There was still time. They'd take him back. Suppose he didn't find Van Dyke? Suppose these new fantastic dreams of wealth went flat?

They couldn't! He *had* guessed right. Tonight he'd know. After a moment, Bradley walked on, a meek-looking figure, inconspicuous in the crowd. . . .

Mrs. Van Dyke, in her apartment doorway, was the same fleshy, carefully made-up woman who had often appeared at the bank. Tonight she wore a rose tea gown, held a half-eaten chocolate cream, and looked disappointed.

"Mr. Bradley, from the bank? Of course—come in."

Bradley apologized, "I've some fishing tackle Mr. Van Dyke lent me."

"Heavens—more of that!" She had her peevish grievance. "Van is away now, you know. I don't even know where. He was to meet a friend in Washington. Have they heard from him at the bank?"

"I don't believe so. These are flies—wet flies I borrowed. Mr. Van Dyke said he'd be glad to lend me more. I was wondering if he'd taken all his trout flies and rods." Bradley smiled apologetically. "I'm planning a little fishing trip myself."

"I don't see how you men can like

it, Mr. Bradley. I don't even eat fish, and I loathe mosquitoes and the impossible places Van goes. He won't even take a bridge hand if he can beg off to putter with that mess of fishing things."

A bridge table, cards, cigarettes, chocolates, waited in the living room. She'd get her mind off bridge quickly enough if she knew how fast Van Dyke's life was running out.

The thought gave Bradley a little glow of humor, but he was earnestly apologetic:

"If I could look at his tackle. . . ."

"I wish you'd take it all away. I'm sick of it. In here. . . ."

Van Dyke had fitted up a large closet. Racks held fishing rods. Shelves, hooks were filled with heavier equipment; cases of drawers contained flies, hooks, lures, reels. Fishing was a passion with the man, had been so when he first came to the bank, had increased as Van Dyke's income enabled him to gratify his hobby.

In the closet Bradley was suddenly uncertain. All the tackle looked alike. Three days of studying the stuff, buying the wet flies to bring here hadn't helped much.

He asked, "Did Mr. Van Dyke take his trout tackle?"

She shook her head. "You'll have to see. After all these years, I can't tell a dry fly from a wet fly—although goodness knows Van has showed me often enough."

Several rods were missing from the racks. Bradley was suddenly relieved to find the shallow drawers neatly labeled. *Dry Flies—Wet Flies—Plugs—Sinkers.*

Two drawers were labeled Dry Flies. Bradley held his breath as he looked—and suddenly his heart was pounding and he was almost giddy with relief.

Only an odd dry fly or two was left. Van Dyke had taken only what he wanted in the immediate future. The missing rods were at the small end of the rack, trout rods of course. Van Dyke had left with trout on his mind. . . .

"Take anything you can use, -Mr. Bradley."

He was husky and couldn't help it.

"Thank you—very generous—this big rod and—and this reel and some of these hooks. And this creel, if you don't mind, so I won't have to bring them back on a string. . . ."

Anything to make talk, to have something to carry away. Bradley left the apartment with the smaller stuff inside the creel and the heavy rod case in one hand, and now he was feverish with impatience.

There wasn't much else to do. The drab Mrs. Bradley who had never kept their walk-up flat very neat had died three years back. Bradley had not missed her much after the first month. He had taken a room, eaten out, found it to his liking.

**B**RADLEY boarded a train in the morning, taking the fishing tackle. It was a visible excuse for the trip. He had given up the room. He had few friends, none close. His trail would end at the rooming house. No one would worry about what happened to Alvin Bradley.

Precautions had to be taken. Bradley rode from Philadelphia to Indianapolis on the first ticket, and on a different railroad and fresh ticket to Chicago.

There Alvin Bradley passed out of existence.

George Henderson, from Boston registered at a modest hotel. It was George Henderson who wandered into a State Street pawn shop and pur-

chased a second hand thirty-eight caliber automatic pistol. And later at a sporting goods store a box of cartridges.

That afternoon Bradley boarded a train for Denver. From a Denver hotel he walked out and purchased a second hand sedan, paying cash in the name of George Henderson. The dealer helped him get Colorado tags.

In the morning Bradley drove out of Denver on the winding grade that writhed up into the heart of the Rockies. Twice during the day when the road held no traffic, he got out and practiced with the gun. Now the feverishness urged him on. Suppose Van Dyke had not found things to his liking? Suppose Van Dyke had left, was getting ready to leave? This time there would be no clues. Trust Van Dyke for that.

The mountain grades were terrifying, distances seemed endless out here in the West. This vast world of great mountains, staggering vistas, lonely solitudes brought a slow pressure of uneasiness.

It occurred to Bradley when he had driven twenty miles without seeing a car that he had never been so alone before. His mouth dried out when he thought of Van Dyke and what must be done. After a little he found he could put that aside by thinking of the tens of thousands of cash money Van Dyke had along.

Then, suddenly, in the late afternoon, the crossroads was there, as Van Dyke had described it long ago. A faded sign said, *Indio Springs*. A poorly graded dirt road led up a lonely mountain valley sided by rocky tree-covered slopes.

Long ago Van Dyke had told it with the gleam of a fanatic in his eye.

"Star Lake, the old fellow called it,



and he said the creek emptying into it was full of rainbows and the lake itself alive with fighters. Snow water, and no one ever went in there to fish. They'd have to walk the last three miles. Never be able to get a road any nearer. So I went to his place for a few days—and he hadn't told half of it. Big ones. Fighters. The most perfect dry-fly fishing I'll ever see. Before I left I bought his cabin and the acre of ground he owned on the lake edge. Bradley, I'm going to forget it until I retire; and then I'm going back and drop dry flies to those fighting beauties until my arm gives out or they're all gone."

Van Dyke had never mentioned the Colorado lake again, or gone to Colorado.

Fantastic, perhaps, to be certain Van Dyke was here—but then you had to know Van Dyke's phobia. And he had taken his dry flies. Bradley's heart was pumping with excitement when he reached the rocky pinnacle "like a church spire" that Van Dyke had described.

There beyond the pinnacle were the rain-gutted ruts that struck up the valley slope, steep, steeper, until the low gears ground heavily, the motor labored and the sedan bounced and bucked over the road rocks. But another automobile had passed this way recently.

A mile beyond a gap in the ridge, where the road ended beside a great rocky gully, Bradley found an expensive sedan off in the brush. It bore Colorado tags, but he was calmly certain now. He took only the loaded automatic, thrusting it down inside his belt, out of sight under his coat.

Somber shadows were already darkening back in the trees. Bradley's shoes scuffed audibly on the trail rocks. He

was quickly panting. The loneliness felt like a weight crushing down. The wind soughing softly through tree tops was almost sinister, and the cold fright came back. Once Bradley thought he heard an automobile in the far distance. A mistake, of course. It was nerves. His mouth was dry again, his palms felt clammy, and a heavy knot was growing in his middle. Nerves again. When this was over, he'd never get out of sight of another human.

Then the little lake was there before him, down the slope through the trees—and he was calm. Someone was chopping wood. It stopped as Bradley moved quietly on the down-slope of the trail.

HE WAS close before he saw the cabin huddling near the lake edge, with a thin gray spiral of smoke rising from a rock chimney.

A lean-to behind the cabin had fallen in; otherwise the years had treated it kindly. An axe had cleared new brush back some yards, and a folding canvas boat was drawn up on the stones. Van Dyke was whistling as he stepped out and started toward the boat—a tall, broad-shouldered man wearing comfortable khaki trousers, an old shirt, and a stained khaki fisherman's hat.

A stick cracked under Bradley's foot. Van Dyke whirled, reaching to his hip pocket.

"Hello, Van," Bradley called.

Van Dyke stood rigidly, staring while a man might breathe twice; then slowly Van Dyke's hand left his hip pocket. "What the devil are you doing here?"

He was shaken, suspicious, dangerous. Bradley knew fear again, but he came on, a meek, smiling little man peering through his eyeglasses.

"I—I remembered you telling about

this place, Van. I had to hide and I couldn't think of any better place."

"Hide?" said Van Dyke in the same husky-harsh voice. He was still pale, still taut, ready for action as he looked past Bradley to see who else might be following.

"When they started checking closely to see how much you had taken, I had to leave too," said Bradley meekly.

"You?"

"Yes."

"You're here alone?"

"Yes."

Van Dyke stared—and abruptly the blood was back in his face and his laughter was incongruous and jeering.

"So you were doing the same thing! You! Alvin Bradley, the sanctimonious little rabbit had his hand in the cash all the time! I'll believe anything now!"

Van Dyke sobered and almost snarled, "Are you sure you got away clean?"

"Yes. I—I changed trains at Indianapolis, and again at Chicago, and used another name when I bought an automobile in Denver. I didn't want to be followed, Van."

"I suppose not," Van Dyke muttered, staring. "But you always were a spineless fool. No imagination. Damn it, Bradley, why did you have to come here? I ought to throw you in the lake."

"I'm sorry, Van. I'll go away."

"Like hell you will!" objected Van Dyke. "I'll keep you here under my eye. Are you sure you didn't let anyone know about this place?"

"Of course not."

Van Dyke grunted skeptically. "How much did you take?"

Bradley gave the first sum that came to mind—his savings. "Thirty-four hundred."

"Good heavens!" said Van Dyke in disgust. "I'd have given you that much

to keep away from me! Damn that memory of yours. I remembered I'd mentioned this place to you, but I hoped you'd forgotten it. Did you bring a suitcase?"

"It's back in the car."

"We'll take a flashlight and get it after supper. Come on in—as long as you're here. I was just about to put some trout in the pan. Beautics. What a wonderful spot to fish!"

Van Dyke turned to the cabin door, asking, "What did they say at the bank?"

"They thought you were a fool," said Bradley, reaching under his coat.

Van Dyke laughed—he was still laughing when the first bullet caught him in the back and knocked him sprawling. . . . The last bullet in the pistol entered the back of his head.

Bradley jumped back, shaking, gagging, looked once with horrified fascination, and plunged blindly into the cabin still holding the smoking pistol.

**H**E WAS panting, sweat was on his face as he looked wildly around, saw the expensive leather suitcases against the wall, and jumped to the nearest. It was unlocked, and when he snatched it open, neat bundles of bills tumbled out on the floor.

Bradley dropped to his knees, fingering them. All here! Some fifties—all readily passable, almost impossible to trace. He steadied as he handled the money. All over now, all as he had planned—nothing but the vision of Alvin Bradley, wealthy and free, with the world before him.

Van Dyke's body, weighted with stones, would be safe in the lake for some time. Through the night hundreds of miles could be covered—Utah, Nevada, California. With most of the money hidden, the car disposed of,

there were a thousand places in the United States, Canada, Mexico, where an unknown man might enjoy himself.

Bradley closed the suitcase, stood up and spoke aloud. "So you thought I was a fool? We'll see now."

He was out the doorway, halfway to the body when the quiet voice at the corner of the cabin said, "I'll kill you if you move!"

He looked as sloppily dressed as ever, that little bonding company detective, but no longer vague and helpless as he came forward with a nickel-plated revolver.

"I didn't think you'd be crazy enough to do this. I should have stopped you last night," said Candleman regretfully.

"Stopped me?" Bradley repeated stupidly. He was dazed with fear. "You—you were following me?"

"All the way," said Candleman. "Where's that gun?"

"B-but I hadn't done anything!"

"That was what made me curious," said Candleman. "I couldn't figure what you were up to, borrowing fishing tackle an hour before I dropped in to see Mrs. Van Dyke."

"What was wrong about t-that?" Bradley stammered.

"Nothing, mister. But when a man borrows a deep-sea fishing rod made to catch 'em weighing hundreds of pounds, and a small creel to carry them back in, I get curious. Cleve, at the bank, told me over the telephone you never fished. And when you started inland to Indianapolis next day with a deep-sea fishing rod, I thought I'd better tag along. But I didn't dream you were up to this. It's first-degree murder. I suppose you know what it means?"

Saliva was running from the corner of Bradley's mouth as he looked toward the suitcase with its neat packets of bills.

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## Lunch For Two

**P**ATIENCE, diligence and perseverance must be your motto in the field of endeavor which you have chosen." This may have been the advice to two young gunmen, when embarking upon their criminal career, who recently robbed a New York office on upper Broadway.

The two gunmen entered the office when it was occupied only by a young clerk. Flourishing revolvers they demanded that he open the safe. When informed that he did not know the combination, the men decided to wait for the manager.

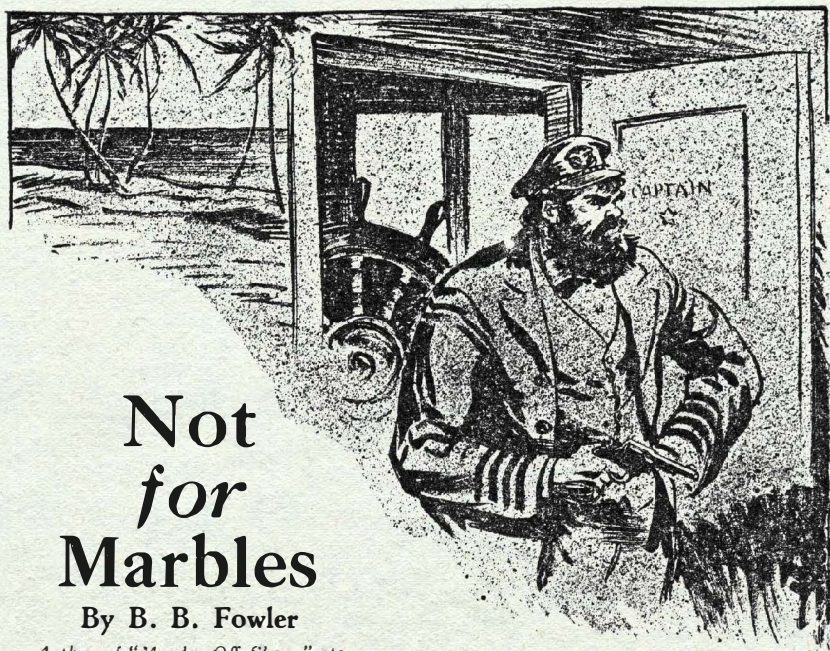
Their patient wait lengthened into hours but they did not waver. When lunchtime approached, one of them went out and returned with sandwiches and coffee, including enough for the clerk. After lunch, the two young men entertained the clerk with



various selections from Italian operas. It is said that their voices were of a fine quality.

Finally, four hours after their entrance, the manager returned and was relieved of over \$700 by the gun-toting duet. However, the bandits returned five dollars for "incidental expenses" and then left, as cheerfully as they came.

—George C. Howard



# Not for Marbles

By B. B. Fowler

*Author of "Murder Off Shore," etc.*

THERE was a breeze drawing through the open window but it felt as if it were pulled out of the mouth of an open furnace. The thermometer in the shady side of the window registered something over a hundred. Dell Breen jerked his big feet off the desk and let them fall with a bang, flung the paper he had been reading into the corner and said, "Nuts!" in a raspy, sour tone.

Outside the open door a voice said musically, "Remember your blood pressure, Mr. Breen."

Dell stood up, growling unintelligibly. He jammed a battered Panama over his touseled, ink-black hair and jerked it down over one cold, blue eye. He draped his coat over an arm and stalked out through the outer office.

The red-headed girl at the desk

looked up and her eyebrows raised quizzically. "And now, I'll bet," she said, "you're going out and drink a couple of gallons of beer. Don't you know that will only make you hotter?"

"Wrong," Dell snapped. "I'm going to Marty's and have a Tom Collins. That will make me cooler. The hell with business in this weather."

Trina Crane smiled mockingly. "You still eat in this weather. And the rent comes due no matter how high the thermometer registers. Think of that while you're having your Tom Collins, Mr. Breen."

"How do you gals do it?" Dell asked stormily. "You look as cool as an Eskimo. You must have ice water in your veins. I was going to let you take the afternoon off. But since you like business so blame much you can just hold down the fort."



"You pushed your mug into something doesn't concern you, Breen."

*Black Bill's hoard was cached,  
nobody knew where, by an old  
man who'd forgotten what it  
was and where he hid it*

Trina put her head on one side and crinkled her snub nose in derision. "I always said you big fellows couldn't take it. Go ahead and have your Tom Collins. If the bill collector calls, I'll just stall him off as usual."

Dell said, "Nuts!" again, with still greater vehemence. He slammed the door behind him with a force that made the ground glass panel tremble, and went down the empty corridor with hard banging strides.

He walked into Marty's and relaxed with a long sigh. It was cool inside. He could feel the chilled air caress the back of his neck and wash gently over his temples. He leaned on the bar and said, "Andy, I don't know why everyone isn't in here today. To hell with the streets in this weather."

Andy grinned and said, "I'll bet I know what you're going to have, Mr. Breen. I'll bet you're going to have a Tom Collins, I'll bet."

"You'd win, Andy," Dell said. "Slap a long, cool one together and start another right after that. This heat is frying my insides."

**T**HE two old guys were at their usual place at the end of the bar. The big, gaunt man was drawing his usual map. He bent over the bar and his sunken eyes glowed under his jutting brows as he traced lines on the paper with the blunt pencil. His face had a bewildered, lost expression on it as he drew.

The other man was short and round, a roly poly. He watched the gaunt man with compassionate interest on his round face and drank beer.

Dell walked down the bar and

stopped beside them. He grinned at them and said to the man with the pencil, "Hello, Skipper, how goes it?"

The gaunt man pushed the map toward him and said, "That's Waiki. That's where I was when Black Bill came ashore. He was a black, hard devil, was Black Bill; a murdering, thieving scoundrel. He killed my men, burned my boat and stole my money. But I beat him at last."

He chuckled deep down in his chest. "He was a hard, tough man but I beat him. I beat him with these two hands." He thrust out his great, bony hands and stared at them. I killed Black Bill in fair fight with my two hands. Then I took—" He halted, his deep-set eyes tragic in their bewilderment. "What was it I took off Black Bill?"

The little fat man said, "There, there, Skipper, don't let it worry you. You'll remember one of these days." He smiled at Dell as though asking him to humor the skipper.

Dell smiled back.

A girl came through the door and halted, blinking as though the cool dimness blinded her after the hot glare of the street. She was tall and graceful and poised. She had dark eyes in a smooth, warm complexion. Her mouth had the slightest droop of sadness in its gravity.

Then she saw the two men at the end of the bar and the gravity lifted a little as she smiled. She walked toward the bar, saying, "Ah, there you are, Mr. Benedict. Don't you think it's time Daddy went home?"

"Whatever you think, Miss Arnold," Benedict replied. "I stayed in here with him because it is so cool."

The girl looked at Dell with sudden suspicion in her eyes. She stared along the bar and seemed relieved at seeing no one else there. Dell moved away

as Andy came to lean over the end of the bar.

Miss Arnold talked to Benedict in a low murmur. They both kept glancing at Dell as they talked. Finally Miss Arnold asked Andy something and Andy glanced at Dell and murmured back.

Dell saw sudden interest brighten the girl's eyes. She spoke more rapidly and Andy wagged his head slowly. Dell could hear his voice now. He was saying, "Sure, Miss Arnold. Sure, I know him. He's a good guy. You could trust him with anything you owned. Dell Breen is a leveler."

He listened to the girl, turned, jerked his head at Dell, saying, "Mr. Breen, I want you to come over here and meet Miss Arnold. Her and Mr. Benedict have something they think you can handle for them."

Dell joined them at the end of the bar. Andy backed discreetly away and watched them as he polished glasses. Miss Arnold said in a quick, breathless voice. "Andy tells us that you are a detective and that you can be trusted."

"I've been in business a long time because I know how to keep my mouth shut and protect my clients' interests," Dell said succinctly. "What is it you're up against?"

The girl nodded toward the gaunt man. "It's about Daddy." She drew in her breath and expelled it in a long sigh and Dell noticed now that she had a lovely figure.

"I'll begin at the beginning," she said. She turned to Benedict. "You stop me if I've got anything wrong."

Benedict nodded gravely and the girl went on: "My father had a plantation and did some trading among the islands in the South Pacific."

"Waiki," the gaunt man interposed,

"that's where I was." He pushed the map forward and said with pathetic eagerness. "That's Waiki."

"Yes, Daddy," Miss Arnold said soothingly, "it was Waiki." She turned back to Dell. "He must have been quite prosperous because he always had money to send to me while I was at school. He was always writing to me that as soon as he could sell at a fair price he was coming home to spend the rest of his years with me. Then he wrote to tell me he had lost everything. This Black Bill that he talks about was a pirate."

"Black Bill was a snake," the gaunt man cut in harshly. "He was a black devil. He burned me out and stole everything I had. But I went after him. I showed him that he couldn't do that to Buck Arnold."

The girl nodded as though in confirmation. "He must have done so," she said, "because later I received a cable from him saying he was starting for home. I was in Chicago then. He told me he was coming home with a fortune. He was coming, he said, on the *Pacific Queen*."

The gaunt man wagged his head and chuckled. "Black Bill. I killed him with my two hands. I made him pay for what he'd done to me."

"The *Pacific Queen* came through the Panama Canal bound for New York," his daughter resumed. "There was some uncertainty about her landing date. She was a tramp, not a regular liner. Father landed a day earlier than I expected. I was on my way from Chicago at the time."

She paused, swallowed painfully, and went on. "He left the ship and went to a little hotel near the docks for the night. Someone on that ship must have learned that father was carrying something worth a lot of money.

They followed him to the hotel and—"

Tears swam in her dark eyes. Her slender fingers picked at the purse she was carrying. "As nearly as we can find out they got into father's room and tried to get his fortune away from him. But he had it hidden somewhere. They beat him up so badly that he was carried to the hospital for dead. When he regained consciousness he was as you see him now. He cannot remember a thing that has happened. He can remember events up to Black Bill. Beyond that his mind is a blank. But we know that whatever he had was valuable. And we know that no one has found it."

Dell's thick black brows pulled down in a frown. "How do you know that for certain, Miss Arnold?"

"For one thing," Miss Arnold said promptly, "they came back to the hotel room after father was taken to the hospital." She paused and caught her breath and fear sharpened her eyes. "Just lately there have been men watching father."

"You're sure you're not imagining things, Miss Arnold?"

Miss Arnold shook her head. Benedict patted her on the arm and said, "There, there, Laura," in a gentle tone.

He turned his head and glanced at Dell with concern pursing his lips, "I am sure, Mr. Breen," he said earnestly, "that Miss Arnold is laboring under no delusion. I have seen the men myself. One of them was hanging around in front of her apartment when I called there today."

DELL nursed his jaw in one hand as he stared back at Arnold. "It does sound as if the boys didn't get what they were after. Maybe if we rounded up a few of them we could find out what it is they're after."

Benedict wagged his head mournfully. "I wish you could do that, Breen. But the fellow I saw today was a tough-looking customer. He didn't look as if he'd talk freely to anyone."

"I got ways of persuasion," Dell said drily. "Leave me alone in a room with one of these birds and I'll bet we'd both know a lot more before we came out."

"Maybe, maybe," Benedict said doubtfully. "I certainly wish you'd take the case and try, Mr. Breen. The way things are now Miss Arnold and myself are getting too nervous for comfort. It's like living under the threat of some disaster. Something must be done."

Laura Arnold said slowly, "I don't know what your fee is, Mr. Breen. I haven't a great deal of money just now. Father's hospital bills and all have eaten up my savings. But I've got a good job and can pay you off so much a week. If you do recover whatever it is father has hidden, I'll see that you get a fair share."

Dell opened his mouth to speak and Benedict said hurriedly, "I have a little money. I'll be glad to pay you a retainer, Breen." He gazed at Buck Arnold affectionately and went on, "I knew the old boy before he went to the Pacific. We were friends in the old days. The least I can do is help him now."

Dell said gruffly, "I'll take a look at the layout. If it can be cracked I'll crack it. Don't you worry about what it will cost, Miss Arnold. I'm no Shylock. If I turn up the stuff, whatever it is, we'll talk about pay."

Laura Arnold's dark eyes made Dell feel very comfortable inside as they glowed on him. He made his voice gruffer because of it as he went on, "You go along home now and look

after your old man. I'll be around and see you later."

Laura Arnold scribbled an address on a slip of paper and handed it to Dell. "I'll expect you soon," she said. She took her father's arm and said gently, "Come on now, Daddy. Time to go home."

Buck Arnold picked up the map and handed it to Dell. His deep-set eyes were full of agonized bewilderment. "That's Waiki," he said, as though he were trying very hard to impress a point. "That's where I was when Black Bill came after me. You find out what it was I took from Black Bill when I killed the hellion."

"You leave it to me, Mr. Arnold," Dell said. "I'll find out about it for you."

He leaned against the bar and watched them go out, the girl on one side, the chubby little Benedict on the other, his straw hat coming only to Buck Arnold's bony shoulder.

Behind him, Andy said, "There's a guy, Mr. Breen, who's been through the mill, I'll bet. Geeze, if that guy could tell you things that's happened to him, it would make a swell yarn, I'll bet."

Dell shook his head and pushed the Panama hat farther back on his head. He took a step away from the bar toward the door when Andy said, "Here's that second Tom Collins you asked for, Mr. Breen. You'll feel better out in that heat if you take it before you go."

"There's something in what you say," Dell said. "I can't go wrong on that advice."

## II

STEPPING out into the streets again was like stepping into an oven. The heat that had simmered in



the streets all day was getting more oppressive and stale as the afternoon melted into early evening. Dell sighed and headed for the office in long swinging strides.

Trina Crane was tidying her desk when Dell stamped in. He stopped, looked at her impressively. "Well, I got a case," he said brusquely, then added enigmatically, "I got the prize case of the year."

Trina smiled with artificial brightness as she said with edged sweetness, "Do tell me about it. I suppose the crown prince of Yakoo has lost his jewels and you're going to turn them up and bust the great international spy ring in the process."

"If it was only as simple as that," Dell sighed. "Trina, did you ever hear of a blind man that was in a dark cellar, looking for a black cat that wasn't there?"

"I never did," Trina answered promptly. "But it sounds just like you on your usual sort of case."

"Don't plague me, precious," Dell said absently. "I've got just that kind of case. I've gotta find something and nobody knows what it is. It's hidden somewhere and nobody knows where by a guy who forgets what it was and where he hid it."

"And I suppose," Trina said practically, "that you get your fee when and if. What's in this for the office, anyway?"

Dell shook his head, "Honey child, I don't know. If I turn the thing up I get a cut of whatever it happens to be worth. That is," he went on ironically, "if I can prove that what I turn up is it and it's worth anything."

"I can see where this is going to be a perfect Breen case," Trina said caustically. "Why don't you let me handle the business end of these deals for

you?" Her eyes looked stormy as she chanted, "I hope you turn up at least a couple of dozen doughnuts and a can of coffee. A split on that would at least keep us eating."

"Now, listen, Trina," Dell said patiently, "we're not as bad off as all that. Of course we could use a nice fee. But we're not starving yet."

"Have we got to wait till the wolves are howling outside the door before we start to worry?" Trina snapped.

"You gals, you're all alike," Dell grumbled. "Always looking for more and more and more. Money ain't everything, Trina. There are times when a guy has got to go to bat for real people."

"It's a woman," Trina snapped. "I know, Dell Breen, you don't have to tell me. Some baby-eyed blonde has got hold of you and given you a hard luck story. I know the signs. You make me sick."

"You give me a pain yourself, if you want to know," Dell said harshly. He began to talk himself into a rage. Finally he said, "And she ain't a blonde. And she ain't a red-headed, grasping, nickel-pincher either."

He threw the last over his shoulder as he stomped into his office and slammed the door behind him. He picked up the paper from the corner where he had thrown it and slumped into his chair grumbling. "Money, money, money! That's all these gals think about."

HE could hear Trina's high heels clicking angrily in the outer office. When she jerked the door open she had on a yellow hat that was cocked at a belligerent angle over one eye. She swung her purse and said, "I'd just like to see what would happen to this office, Dell Breen, if I didn't take a lit-

tle interest in things. I'd just like to see."

"All right, all right, you'd just like to see," Dell grumbled. "Now where does that get you?"

He grinned and heaved himself to his feet. "I'm hungry, chicken. What say we step around the corner and see if Henri can still cook a steak?"

"You'll put your coat on if you do, you big oaf," Trina said. "I'm not going out with you carrying your coat on your arm like a longshoreman."

Dell grumbled as he hauled on the coat. He pulled the Panama down, caught Trina's arm and headed for the elevator.

In Henri's he snapped an order to the waiter while he opened the paper and ran his eyes down a column.

"A swell escort you turned out to be," Trina said bitterly. "You take me out to dinner and embarrass me with your attention. Why don't you just sit at another table and talk to Henri? That would be just as good as shoving your nose in a paper."

Dell slapped the paper down on the table and said, "Wait a minute, Trina," in an altered voice. He read aloud. "Due today at Pier Six, the *Pacific Queen*. Hardesty, Master, with a miscellaneous cargo from Pacific ports."

"Is this a proposition, Mr. Breen," Trina asked snappily. "Maybe you want me to sail away to a tropical isle and live on cocoanuts. Well, I'll tell you now, nothing doing. We stay here and gather local cocoanuts."

"Just a minute, Trina," Dell said patiently. "This ship is tied up with this case I got. There's a connection here."

"I wondered when you were going to get around to that case," Trina said resignedly. "Suppose you break down and tell me all about it."

As she listened Trina's eyes began to narrow. "You may have something there, at that," she admitted. "They don't send guys to the hospital and tear up hotel rooms for marbles. Go on from there."

Dell shook his head. "That's as far as I've gotten, baby. But I begin to see a lead. I'll bet those bozos on this *Pacific Queen* know plenty."

Dell wolfed his dinner and then wedged himself into a telephone booth while Trina finished. It was as hot as a Turkish bath in the booth. Perspiration rolled down his face as he talked and listened. In between mopping his face he made notes on a slip of paper.

When he came back to the table he said, "Trina, I'm going on the war-path. You trot around to see this Laura Arnold and see what else you can pick up. I've got the dope on the hotel where Buck Arnold got his. She doesn't know anything about anybody on the *Pacific Queen*. I'll look after that end of it myself."

He picked up the checks and headed for the door, disregarding Trina's wisecracks.

THE *Pacific Queen* didn't look like a queen to Dell. She reared straight, rusted sides awkwardly from the water. A row of bleared portholes stared drearily out over the deserted dock. From the shadows of the dock shed Dell surveyed the boat. A sailor on the gangplank watch lounged on the rail and gazed sleepily down the cleated plank.

The sailor came slowly erect as Dell walked the gangplank and moved over to the bar at the end of the plank. Dell stopped and leaned against the rail. "I'd like to see Captain Hardesty," he said easily.

The sailor growled, "I've got orders not to let nobody aboard."

"That doesn't include me, buddy," Dell said. "I'm a special kind of person. I'm coming aboard."

The shoulders of the sailor strained forward, "You bloody well try it, Mr. Wise Guy."

A voice back in the shadows rumbled, "What's going on there, Ferris? Who are you talking to?"

Ferris glanced over his shoulder, "It's a mug who wants to see you, Cap'n Hardesty. I told him nobody could come aboard and he says he's bloody well coming just the same."

A new element came into the unseen voice. "Let him come aboard, Ferris. I'll talk to him if he wants to see me."

Ferris stepped to one side and Dell walked across the deck toward the voice. His feet made hollow sounds on the steel deck. The voice had moved. It spoke again just ahead of him. "Follow me to the bridge deck. My cabin is up there."

Dell saw the man materialize as he climbed the flight of narrow steps. He was huge with long apelike arms and immense shoulders.

Dell followed, his muscles tightening. There was something off color about this packet, his nerves told him. He became surer as he reached the bridge deck. Something hard jammed into his ribs and a voice growled. "So you would butt in. Just walk straight ahead through that door and I'll have a look at you."

The room at the back of the pilot house was big. A heavy bed was clamped to the floor. A huge chest of drawers was built into the bulkhead. Light from the hulk in a brass ship's lantern cast a feeble glow.

The fellow was whiskered to the

eyes. Red lips made a line through the grizzled red of his beard and mustache. He had a little knob of a nose and bright little blue eyes.

His voice had a note of hoarse triumph as he said, "So it's the bloody Mr. Breen. You pushed your ugly mug into something that doesn't concern you, Breen, and now you'll damn well have to take the consequences."

"So you're Hardesty," Dell said softly. "And you know all about me. That's damned interesting. Do you mind telling me what it's all about?"

"I'll tell you before I heave you over the side out at sea," Hardesty growled. "I don't like nosey landlubbers, Breen. I've got no use for damned pavement pounders like you. It'll be a pleasure to tell you what it's all about before I heave you over the side with a length of anchor chain lashed to your feet."

He came closer and peered at Dell. "I don't like your face, Mr. Bloody Breen," he snarled. "I don't like your face or your sneaking ways. I like you a bloody sight less than anyone else I know."

Dell braced himself. Hardesty would be a tough man to take. He looked as though he would rather mix in a bar-room brawl than eat. And right now he was on the business end of a young cannon.

Dell did not realize how lightning fast the big man could move until he saw the hairy fist start. He tried to duck and caught the blow like the smash of a sledge hammer on the side of his face. As he went down he felt it club him again. After that he knew nothing for awhile.

### III

**H**AMMERING pain in his head woke Dell Breen. He stared up at the brass ship's lantern and worked

his jaw. The whole side of his face felt paralyzed and dead. His jaw was all he could move at first. Hardesty had trussed him up with the efficient skill of a sailor.

He rolled his body and found he was not lashed to anything. He lay on his side and surveyed what he could of the room. A locker of some kind with a full-length mirror built into its door was in the opposite wall. He rolled over to it and tried to break it with his feet and found that when he kicked out, the cords that bound his wrists to his ankles bit into the flesh until the blood started to flow. After the second kick his arms felt numb and dead and he hadn't made any impression on the mirror.

He rolled over again and saw a derby hat resting on a chair. He pictured the round hard hat perched on the top of Hardesty's great shock of red hair and grinned feebly. Then the grin faded as a new thought came to him.

He rolled across and bumped the chair until the hat fell off. It rolled across the room and Dell had to roll after it. He was bathed in perspiration by the time he got it.

The next move was even more difficult. He found he could hold a cramped position on his knees as long as he kept his wrists close to his ankles. Perspiration ran into his eyes and almost blinded him as he worked the hat into a corner, turned it and worked his head into it.

It came down around his ears and flopped over his eyes. He went across the room in a series of little hops on his knees. He saw himself in the long mirror and grinned. He looked as though he had gotten his head into an iron kettle with a rim on it.

He put his head down and butted the mirror like a goat. His head began

to ache more violently as he butted. The hat was down so far over his eyes that he couldn't see now. Rage began to mount in his throat and made him forget his headache. He threw everything he had into the last butt and heard glass crackle and crunch as his head went through.

For a second he held his breath. He had a sudden horrible picture of himself caught with a sliver of glass in his jugular, bleeding to death with his head in a jagged trap.

He worked his head back gingerly. His head came out but the hat remained wedged in the splintered glass. He got the rim in his teeth and jerked savagely and a long sliver of glass came out with the hat.

He rolled over and got the sliver of glass in his hands. A jagged edge of glass under his thigh bit through his clothes and through the skin. He could feel warm blood trickle down his leg. But he had the sliver of glass in his hands. It cut his fingers as he sawed at the cords.

**I**T took him ten minutes to get free. He stood up and surveyed himself in the top half of the mirror. There was blood on his face, trickling down from the edge of his scalp where a piece of glass had bitten through. He looked at his hands. Three fingers were badly cut.

Looking around he saw a bathroom. Inside he found a medicine chest and located a bottle of iodine. He poured it over his cut fingers and swore as the stuff burned like a flame.

He opened the door of Hardesty's stateroom and listened. Far forward somewhere a man was singing, *Abel Brown the Sailor*. Far-off traffic rumbled heavily. The air was thick and warm and pungent with a mixture of

a hundred waterside smells. But after the heat of the enclosed stateroom the night air felt almost cool. That, and the rage that mounted in him, brought steadiness and returning strength.

He went very softly down the companionway to the lower deck. He hugged the deck house, his feet making no sound as he padded on the balls of his feet. He was behind the sailor on the gangplank watch before the man heard him. Even then the fellow was not suspicious. He turned slowly, his voice more curious than alarmed, "Who's that?"

Dell said, "A guy with something for you," as he stepped forward on his right foot and pivoted, throwing all the weight of his shoulders into the left hook to the sailor's stomach. The man doubled up with the breath leaving him in a loud, "Woosh."

"That's for you," Dell snapped. "And this is for that louse of a captain, in case I don't get a chance to give it to him myself." He brought the right up from the hip in a crushing uppercut and the sailor shot back against the rail and flopped down on the deck.

The fellow who was singing *Abel Brown the Sailor* forward, stopped suddenly and yelled, "Hey, what's going on there?" His feet made loud, clanging noises on the steel deck as he ran.

Dell went down the gangplank in a series of leaps. The board had enough spring in it to give him momentum. He cleared the space between the gangplank and the shed in a long, spring-propelled leap. He made for the street with the second sailor's voice following him in a string of startled, "Heys!"

Walking up the street in hard, angry strides he thought it over. He was still as much in the dark as ever. But he

did know now that Hardesty knew something. He knew also that Hardesty had been tipped off that a detective had entered the game. He cursed his own stupidity at not remembering that he had been hired in a public bar and that even then, someone had probably been tailing the Arnolds and Benedict.

There was, he knew, another angle of approach. There was the hotel where Arnold had stopped. Laura Arnold had been able to tell him the room where Arnold had been registered. The room had been torn apart twice. Hardesty and whoever was in this with him were still looking for the unknown valuables. Therefore the hotel would still be a focal point.

BREEN stalked across the bare and cheerless lobby to the shabby desk. The man behind the desk was pinched and thin. He had shifty black eyes that were like jet in the pallor of his face. He looked suspiciously at the streaks of blood on Dell's face as he turned the grubby register around to face him.

Dell grinned and wiped at the blood streaks with the back of his hand. "I got paid off this afternoon," he said. "A couple of mugs tried to take me in a back alley."

The clerk nodded. It was in his eyes that such things were not unknown to him. Dell let his eyes wander over the tiny cubicle behind the counter. There was an oblong frame with cardboard slips opposite the room numbers. The white ones had names typed on them. The pink ones were blank. Opposite number 206 he saw the name, "William Gannon."

Dell jerked his head at the slip and said to the clerk, "I'll bet that's Bill Gannon off the *Pacific Queen*. Good old Bill. How long has he been here?"

The clerk's eyes filmed over with

caution. "Mr. Gannon has been with us quite awhile. I wouldn't know about what ship he came off."

"That's all right." Dell said heartily, "Bill was always a cautious guy. He knows how to keep his mouth shut, Bill does." He winked at the clerk as one man winks to another who understands these things and the clerk smiled coldly and tightly.

"If you'd just stick me somewhere on the same floor as good old Bill I could look him up when he comes in."

The clerk picked a key off the rack and held it in his hand. "You'll have to pay in advance, mister," he said.

"Sure," Dell said agreeably. "I understand. He threw a crumpled five-dollar bill on the counter and explained, "I'll bring my duffle bag around later. I left it in a saloon while I located a berth to turn into."

The clerk said, "Up the stairs and to your right. Your room is 209. The toilet is right across from your room."

Dell could feel the clerk's eyes boring into his back as he swaggered across the lobby with what he hoped was a good seaman's roll. The filthy stairs creaked as he climbed to the barren, odorous corridor above.

He unlocked 209 and went in. He groped in the darkness till he found the bare bulb in the center of the room and snapped it on. He stood for a second, gazing around, his nose wrinkling with distaste. The air was stale and foul. He crossed and threw up the window and surveyed the rest of the room with a glance. The bed was an old-fashioned brass affair. Over the head of it a fly-specked card read, "God bless this abode."

**D**ELL grinned wryly and looked around. Besides the bed there was a washstand with a cracked mirror over

it, two rickety chairs and a battered desk in a corner. The covers on the bed looked as though they had seen a lot of guests since they had seen a laundry.

He paused at the foot of the bed for a long time, his face heavy with thought. As he paused he rested one hand on the top of one of the low brass footposts. A noise somewhere in the hall made him turn quickly. It sounded as if someone had fallen. No other sound followed that one dull thud.

He stood a moment, listening.

As he turned, the top of the brass post came off in his hand. He held it, staring at it, then he stared at the hollow post from which it had come and a speculative gleam came into his eyes. He replaced it slowly and made an attempt to screw it back in its place. But the thread was worn and stripped. The brass cap turned round and round loosely. When he lifted his hand the cap stayed on the post at a drunken angle.

Behind his closed door he went through his pockets. His gun was gone. He felt of the empty holster under his arm again and his mouth pulled down at the corners and his eyes burned a more frosty blue. He shoved a hand into his hip pocket and sighed with relief.

He pulled the sap out and looked at it most lovingly. He slapped it into the palm of his left hand and grinned. Slipping it up his sleeve he put his head on one side and gazed at the door.

Opening it softly he slid out into the corridor. He could hear a low murmur of voices from the lobby below. Someone was talking to the clerk. Dell listened for a second but could hear nothing of what was said. He shrugged gently and walked along the corridor,

keeping close to the wall to minimize the creaking of the loose boards.

A thin thread of light trickled out from under the door of 206. Dell put his ear close and listened. There was no sound from within. He tried the knob cautiously, turned it and pushed the unlocked door open slowly.

A voice across the room said, "Well, if it ain't Mr. Bloody Breen again. So you got loose, did you? You're smarter than I thought. But this time I'll make sure of my job."

Hardesty was sitting with his back to the window. Under the glare of the naked bulb his red whiskers shone like polished copper. His eyes were very bright and blue above the whiskers. His tongue looked pale and soft as he licked his lips. "That's what you're going to get, Mr. Bloody Breen."

He jerked his head. Following the direction of the gesture Dell saw a man lying on his face on the floor beyond the bed. A cheap blue serge coat covered his bony shoulders. His long legs were clad in soiled gray flannels and ended in heavy-soled boots. The fellow had a fringe of sandy hair between his scrawny neck and the shiny bald top of his head. Only now the bald head wasn't so shiny. It was bisected by a red valley from which blood seeped to run through the fringe of hair, over an ear to the linoleum beneath him. Something about the way the man lay told Dell that he would never move again under his own power.

#### IV

**H**IS face a mask, Dell looked at the big gun in Hardesty's hand. Hardesty's hands were matted with red hair. Red hair trickled along the thick fingers that held the gun so steadily. On its long barrel was a smear of crimson. Dell glanced from it to the

crushed head of the man on the floor.

Hardesty chuckled hoarsely. "That was Bill Gannon, Mr. Bloody Breen. That was Bill Gannon who used to be my first mate. He tried to double-cross his old skipper, the scurvy rat. But I knew, Mr. Bloody Breen. I knew that he was trying to. Trust Red Hardesty. He gets to know most things. I knew he was trying a double-cross, just as I knew that you were coming on the job, Mr. Bloody Breen. I make it my business to know everything."

Dell smiled tightly. "You're quite a man, aren't you, Hardesty? You're a very smart man in your own opinion. Now if you could only get somebody to agree with you."

Hardesty got up very slowly, the black snout of the gun very steady as it menaced Dell. "I'd like to put a slug through your guts, Mr. Bloody Breen. But it would be too noisy. So I'll just bash your head in the way I did Gannon's."

He came across the room very quietly. It was fascinating to watch such bulk move with such catlike silence. He kept his eyes on Dell and the snout of the gun started to rise a little.

With his eyes gripping Hardesty's Dell let the sap slip out of his sleeve into his hand. "I took your gun, Mr. Bloody Breen," Hardesty said, "so you'll just have to take what's coming to you without a struggle."

Dell kept his face blank. Hardesty was a long pace away from him when he moved. He stepped in, his left wrist knocking the snout of the big gun up, his right coming around with a swish.

Hardesty saw it coming. The man had reflexes like a cat. His mouth jerked open as he ducked. But the sap was traveling too fast. Dell was putting all the anger and hurt he had felt into

that swing. It was aimed at Hardesty's jaw. Hardesty ducked just enough so that it took him on the side of the head just above the ear.

All the strength flowed like water out of his heavy legs and he started to fall. Dell managed to get his hands under Hardesty's shoulders to ease the force of his fall. A heavy thud might bring the nosey clerk up.

Hardesty lay on his face without motion. The big gun with the smear of red along its barrel lay a few inches from his outflung hand. Dell kicked it into a corner and stared down at Hardesty. "You were just a little too smart, Skipper," he said softly. "You were just a little too sure of your own ability and shrewdness. And that doesn't pay in this business."

He looked toward the door. It was all but closed. He stared at Hardesty again, then at the dead Gannon. Then he glanced around the room.

**I**T was a carbon copy of 209. The same smeared and cracked card was over the head of the brass bed. The same kind of washstand and mirror stood against the wall. But where the other mirror was cracked this one was merely bleared and distorted with spots.

Dell walked to the foot of the bed and looked at the brass posts. The caps were screwed on evenly here. Then he saw something else, a thin thread hung down a half inch below the collar of the cap. Dell stared at it, his eyes beginning to shine.

It looked as though this might be it—the break he'd fought for.

Holding the end of the thread very carefully between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he unscrewed the brass cap. He dropped the cap on the bed and still very carefully pulled

up the thread that ran down into the hollow post and seemed to have something heavy on the end.

There was a little sack of chamois skin on the end of the thread. Dell hefted it in his hands and whistled tonelessly. He continued to whistle as he loosed the string of leather that pulled the bag closed at the top. The whistle died as he stared into the chamois bag.

He put a thumb and forefinger into the sack to pick up one of the big pearls. He was so intent on what was in his hands that he did not hear the door open. He heard nothing until the man who was behind him slugged him on the back of the head. He caught at the foot of the bed but there was no strength in his hands. Clawing at the bed he slid down to the floor.

Dimly he heard someone scurry past him. The door slammed and the man was gone. Dell shook his head, clamped his teeth and fought with the nausea that gripped him. He felt himself slowly coming to the surface. He hadn't been slugged hard. Either the man who had hit him hadn't the strength or else he was in too much of a hurry.

He sat up and stared dazedly at Hardesty, still sprawled on the floor. "Mr. Tough Hardesty," he said drily, "if you had a head like mine you'd be in a better position to boast. I guess I can take it."

He stood up on trembling legs. Gradually the trembling passed. He backed slowly to the door. As he paused he saw a tremor run up Hardesty's back. He was lying with the side of his face resting on the floor. As Dell watched him he saw one blue eye open cautiously and slowly close and Dell grinned.

Dell walked around Hardesty very cautiously. He could see the butt of his own gun peeping out of Hardesty's pocket. He very expertly snapped it



out and stood for a second with it in his hand, the shrewd smile on his face growing. With his eyes still on Hardesty he backed again toward the door, the gun held in his hand.

In the corridor he closed the door softly behind him. He carefully eased the gun into its armpit holster. "Go ahead and play possum, Mr. Hardesty, and see what it gets you." He jerked his big shoulders in a shrug, turned and ran lightly along the corridor and down the rickety stairs. There was a queer questioning gleam in the clerk's eyes as Dell crossed the lobby toward him.

**D**ELL'S face was very grim as he leaned over the counter. "Now, wise guy, you can call the cops. There's a dead man up in 206. I didn't kill him but I know who did. When the homicide boys come tell them that Dell Breen was here. Tell them that I'm going to the apartment of Laura Arnold on Waverly Place. Tell them to look me up and I'll give them the score."

He watched tight secrecy flow into the clerk's face and smiled grimly. He turned from the desk and halted a moment with his head bent, listening. He could hear uncertain feet moving toward the stairway in the hall above. The smile twisted his lips into still sharper irony as he headed across the lobby to the street.

He took his time finding a taxi, waiting on the curb till a cruiser came down the street. He climbed in slowly, gave the driver the address on Waverly Place and leaned back in his seat with the same enigmatic smile playing on his lips.

The smile was still there when he paid off the cabby and crossed the sidewalk to the apartment entrance. But it

faded slowly as he waited for the click of the door after he had rung.

He climbed the two flights of stairs slowly. Laura Arnold had come out into the hall and was leaning over the balustrade. Dell saw Trina's red hair shining in the lamplight and heard her voice, "Well, here you are at last, you big lug. What kind of a game have you been playing?"

Dell said, "Shut up, pest. I've got troubles of my own. I've been kicked around like an old can and run through a sausage grinder. Shut up and see if Miss Arnold has a drink in the house."

"I've got some beer in the ice chest," Laura Arnold said hurriedly. "I'm afraid I can't offer you anything else." "Give him beer," Trina said crossly. "He'll drink anything."

As he came into the room he saw the shocked solicitude in Laura's eyes. Trina's eyes widened and her mouth softened. "Aw, Dell," she said in quick contrition, "I didn't know that you'd been hurt. What happened? Are you badly hurt?"

Dell grinned wryly. "Just scuffed around the edges and a few nicks in the shell, kitten," he said. "Thanks for the sympathy. I guess I've got to get half killed to get a kind word from you."

Trina bustled away and came back with a pan of water and a cloth. She started to dab at the blood on Dell's forehead but he pushed her away and said thickly, "Where's that beer? I want beer more than anything else right now."

Laura came out of the kitchenette pouring beer from a can into a tall glass. Dell took it, buried his nose in the suds and drank thirstily. He sighed as he set the glass down and said, "Another one would be about right."

Trina shifted from one foot to the

other impatiently. "If that isn't like you, Dell Breen. Here we sit all evening worrying our heads off, and when you come back looking as if someone had been working on you with a meat axe, you haven't got a thing to say for yourself. What happened? What did you find out? Who beat you up?"

"Just a minute, kid, just a minute," Dell said softly. "One thing at a time."

**B**ENEDICT came on tiptoes into the room. He gave a start when he saw Dell, then said to Laura, "He's asleep at last. He was very restless and excited. I had to listen to him tell me a dozen times about Black Bill and Waiki before he'd settle down."

Dell's eyes asked questions and Laura said, "Mr. Benedict has been with father all the evening. He can handle him much better than I can. Father is highly excited tonight."

Dell wagged his head and said, "I see."

Trina burst out again, "Come on you dull oaf and tell us what happened."

Dell said, "I went down to the *Pacific Queen* to interview Captain Hardesty. But Hardesty was waiting for me. We had a little passage in which all the winnings went to the skipper. I got out of that with the major portion of the damages you see. Then I went to the Haven Hotel. I found Hardesty again and a dead man."

Laura's breath made loud whistling noises as she leaned tensely forward. Trina watched Dell with narrowed eyes. Benedict was standing beside a table, his round eyes on Dell.

Trina snapped, "You're holding out on us, Dell Breen. I can see it in your eyes. You can't fool me. I know you too well. Come on, what did you find?"

"I found the marbles," Dell said

softly. "I found the marbles that all the rough boys have been playing for."

"Marbles?" Trina asked. "What do you mean, marbles? Come on, Dell, loosen up."

"You found out what it was Daddy hid," Laura said. "What was it?"

"I'm coming to that," Dell said. He put his elbows on his knees and listened. The thunder of the Sixth Avenue L filled the room with echoes. Outside in the street a boy yelled shrilly. A radio was turned on somewhere in a neighboring apartment. Someone was climbing the stairs slowly.

He straightened his chair and smiled grimly. "Your father has a very fine and valuable collection of pearls, Miss Arnold. Undoubtedly it was what he took from Black Bill. Bill, like a lot of unsavory characters in those waters, wisely put a lot of his takings into pearls. Pearls, you know, represent great wealth in a small, easily transported medium. Then Mr. Arnold started for home with his pearls. But somebody else knew about them."

Someone stirred in the corridor outside. Dell said in a loud voice, "If Benedict hadn't tipped me off I never would have got past Hardesty."

Benedict opened his mouth and gasped, "What?" in a frightened voice. "What are you talking about?" All the pink was flowing out of his chubby face leaving it white and strained.

The door into the hall jerked open and someone roared, "You damned big rat. You doublecrossing crook. I never should have trusted you."

Dell dived out of his chair as Hardesty fired. The big gun had a voice like a cannon. It spewed orange flame half the length of the room. Benedict went back over the table as though an invisible hand had struck him.

Hardesty jerked around, his big gun

leveling. His mouth was a wide gap in his gleaming whiskers. "As for you, Mr. Bloody Breen," he roared, "I'll make sure of you this time."

## V

DELL had snapped the gun from his holster as he dived out of the chair. He rolled over on one side just as Hardesty leveled the gun. Dell's slug hit him squarely between the two hedges of red eyebrows, and Hardesty went over backward with a surprised look on his face.

Dell got up slowly. On the floor below a woman screamed like a banshee. Laura stood with her hands at her throat, her eyes wide.

Trina was the first to recover. She snapped in a high-pitched voice, "Dell Breen, you big mick, you knew that was going to happen. You led that big Tarzan right up here to make a killing."

"It was the only thing I could do," Dell said. "I had begun to suspect Benedict but I couldn't be sure."

Then his tone changed. Below in the street a cop's whistle was blowing shrilly. "The coppers will be here. We've got to have a story for them."

He crossed the room and frisked Benedict expertly. He found the chamois bag and slipped it into his own trouser pockets. "It's like this," he said crisply, "your father, Miss Arnold, was mixed up with Hardesty some way. It was Hardesty who beat him up and sent him to the hospital. Benedict was his friend. Hardesty killed another of the gang, a fellow named Gannon in the Hotel Haven. But you don't know anything about that. You only know that you were frightened about your father and hired a bodyguard. Hardesty came in here tonight and shot Benedict. I shot Hardesty. We don't

know what it was all about. As far as you know it had something to do with your father's career in the South Pacific. Hardesty won't talk any more. Neither will Benedict. I shall explain my trip to the Haven Hotel as a matter of business for you. I was trying to head off Hardesty. If the cops want any more they'll have to go to the South Pacific."

A blue-coated patrolman with a big gun in his hand and a scared Irish face stuck his head through the door. "What's going on here?" he blustered. He stared from the dead Hardesty at his feet to Dell. Then he saw Benedict's feet sticking over the wreck of the table and his eyes widened more.

"It's all over, copper," Dell said harshly. "Call the homicide boys and I'll talk to them."

The cop came slowly into the room. "The homicide squad is on the way now. Boy, you're going to have some explaining to do."

Dell did have some explaining to do. But he had his story pat and was backed by Laura Arnold and Trina. They all left finally, taking Hardesty's body and that of Benedict with them.

They had already picked up Gannon. Sergeant Hoyle, a horse-faced, frozen-eyed man who knew Dell said, "I guess you're in the clear, Breen. But if there's any kick-back on this I'm coming straight after you."

Dell grinned, "Be yourself, Hoyle. Miss Arnold hired me as a bodyguard. You can see how she needed one. Poor little Benedict was killed because he tried to look after her. But Hardesty was the guy on the murder trail. And you've got him. What more could you ask?"

"I could ask, maybe, for the real story," Hoyle grumbled. "But I know sure as hell that I wouldn't get it."

DELL talked for a long time after the last of the police had gone. "It was like this. When your father got the pearls, Miss Arnold, he knew he had the fortune he wanted. Black Bill had ruined him. He felt he was only squaring when he took Black Bill's pearls. They represented blood money Black Bill had taken from others.

"Your father merely sent you word that he was coming home well heeled. He couldn't tell his daughter the real story in a letter. But he could tell a friend who would understand. And, being human, he had to tell someone. So he wrote a letter to his best friend, Benedict, telling him what he had.

"Your father was coming home with Hardesty, a man who knew both Arnold and Benedict. But your father didn't trust Hardesty so he told him nothing. Benedict went to the ship, hoping to get to Arnold before he went ashore. But Arnold was already ashore. He made for the first hotel.

"Once he got ashore Benedict was afraid to tackle Arnold. Benedict was a weakling and Buck Arnold was a strong, tough man. So Benedict made a deal with Hardesty. Hardesty took Gannon with him and caught your father at the hotel. They beat him up but did too good a job. At first your father was stubborn and wouldn't tell, later he couldn't. That stimed them.

"Hardesty gave it up and sailed with his ship. Gannon jumped ship, figuring on crossing both Benedict and Hardesty if he could find the pearls. He couldn't. In the meantime Hardesty was due back. You got me on the job. Benedict tipped Hardesty to that and he was waiting for me. I guess that's all."

He righted the table that Benedict had knocked over and spread his handkerchief on it. He untied the bag and let the pearls roll out. There were an

even dozen, huge, lustrous, perfect.

Laura put her trembling hands on the table. Her eyes were wide and unbelieving. Trina said in a hushed, tremulous voice, "Good gosh, Dell, they're worth a fortune."

Laura said suddenly, "But Benedict was with father all the evening. How could he have been at the hotel?"

Dell said grimly, "It was a swell alibi. But I'll bet there's a fire-escape at your father's window." He smiled at her nod and went on. "He slipped out, went to the hotel to see if anything was happening. He got there just as I found the pearls. He bopped me, beat it back here, and crawled back by the way of the fire-escape. Evidently your father had gone straight to sleep."

Laura shook her head. "I can't believe it even yet."

"Life is like that at times, kid," Dell said soberly. "But you want to start thinking about other things. I'll steer you to a reputable jeweler who'll give you what those pearls are worth. Then you can have specialists look your dad over. I'll bet he'll be right as rain in a few months."

Laura took the pearls and said shakily, "I don't know how to thank you. I'll be glad to have you handle the pearls. And your fee—"

Dell started to say, "Ah, now, Miss Arnold, don't you worry about that."

Trina grabbed his arm and gave him a jerk. "I'll take care of that, Miss Arnold. I handle all the business details."

As they went down the stairs, Dell grumbled, "You women are all alike. All you think about is money, money, money."

Trina snapped, "Somebody in the firm has got to think about money. In this business you don't play for marbles."

# Boomer

By W. E. Brandon

*Author of "Afterglow," etc.*

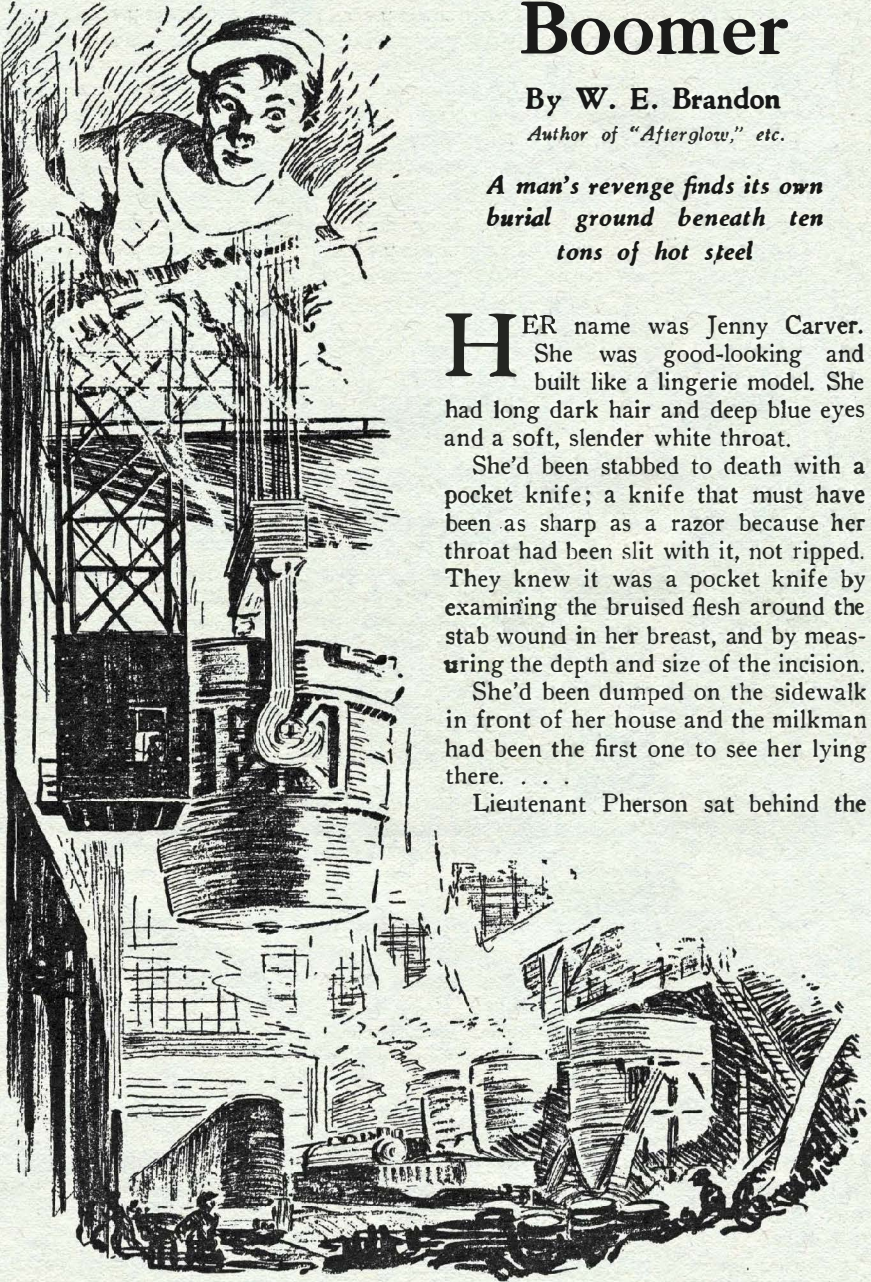
*A man's revenge finds its own  
burial ground beneath ten  
tons of hot steel*

HER name was Jenny Carver. She was good-looking and built like a lingerie model. She had long dark hair and deep blue eyes and a soft, slender white throat.

She'd been stabbed to death with a pocket knife; a knife that must have been as sharp as a razor because her throat had been slit with it, not ripped. They knew it was a pocket knife by examining the bruised flesh around the stab wound in her breast, and by measuring the depth and size of the incision.

She'd been dumped on the sidewalk in front of her house and the milkman had been the first one to see her lying there.

Lieutenant Pherson sat behind the



The Crane stopped with a jerk.

carved Jacobean desk in the study of the old house and looked at his notebook. "You're John Carver?"

"Yes."

"Her brother."

"Yes."

"Father and mother not living, that right?"

"Yes."

Pherson looked up for the first time. John Carver was skinny but well built; about twenty-four, a year or so older than his sister. There was a dazed look in his eyes.

Pherson said: "This has been a hell of a thing. I want you to know that we're not calling it quits until we get her killer. Keep your head clear and try to tell me everything you can. That'll help us."

"If you don't get him," young Carver said, "I will."

"Leave that for us, son. Don't go off your head." Pherson looked at his notebook again. "You and your sister lived here alone?"

"Yes."

"Your father left you both pretty well fixed, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"So you had enough money to go around some, and so did she . . . I suppose you knew about everyone she ran around with."

"Most of them."

"And who she was with last night?"

"No. She said she had a date with some guy she'd just met. He goes to college somewhere."

"Where'd she meet him?"

"I don't know. While she was with a bunch of girls she knew, I think."

"We'll check up on him. You don't know any more about him? Can you give me a list of most of the men she went out with? Good. Here, write their names here . . . We'll get this

guy, son. We'll have him in a week."

John Carver looked up from his writing. "If you don't I will."

Pherson came back a week later. He had a snapshot of a thickly built kid, about seventeen, in a bathing suit.

"This is him," he said. "We found out where your sister met him. At Jane Warder's house. And this Jane Warder says she met him at her brother's college and invited him down to this house party. And her brother says he got kicked out of school about a week ago for some trouble about a girl, so he's the guy."

John Carver studied the snapshot. His eyes glowed, faded. "He looks young."

"That's an old picture. Only one we could get. His name's Joe Redter and he comes from a steel town in Pennsylvania. He'd been going to this college for three years when they kicked him out. Before then and during the summers since, he worked in the steel mill in his home town, so that gives us a lead. He's twenty-two now, and that picture is five years old. The only picture of him we could get our hands on anyplace. It comes from his home town."

John Carver was staring at the picture. "Did you check up on everyone else?"

"No one else saw her that night. It was either this guy or some screwball that was a stranger to her. And this guy's faded now, see, so my dough's on him."

"Faded? You mean he's got clear away?"

Pherson grinned. "You don't get clear away from a killing like this, kid. We're checking up every place he ever lived or hung out in, and we're checking his relatives and his friends in his hometown and the guys he worked with

in the mill there. We're getting his habits lined up, we know what he looks like and what he likes to do. He won't get away from us, boy. Not for this."

Young Carver's eyes were still clouded, filled with the strange expression Pherson had noticed the first day. He said: "He won't, all right."

The detective slapped his shoulder brusquely. "Thought a lot of your sister, didn't you?"

"She's all the family I had. It's been eight years since our parents died. She was the swellest girl in the—"

"Unwind. It's tough, but that's what the world's made of, son. Some people find it out one way and some people find it out another. We'll have that guy in a month."

IT was three weeks later when John Carver looked Pherson up at Police Headquarters. The detective spread out his hands.

"We been doing everything we can. We checked on everyone applying for passports; he didn't go that way. The Shipping Board gave us their record of everyone going to sea on American boats in any job. Not there. Not even a likely alias. We've contacted a dozen steel mills in the area near his home town and are getting their cooperation. Rolling mill—that's what he'd get into. Hot-mill, they call it. That's what he's always done. We've watched the railroads and the buses and the highways. We've broadcast his decription over the country and put what we've got on file with the Criminal Record Office. He's hiding someplace now, but we'll get him."

Young Carver looked thinner. He said, in a strained voice: "I will, if you don't. I'm tired waiting. I want to see the dirty—"

"Hey." Pherson rose from his chair.

"You're letting this thing get you off the road, boy." He came around the desk. "You look like you're half nuts."

"I can't stand it. I keep seeing her—dead like that—and that damned skunk going free. I'll kill him myself!"

He turned and slammed out the door. . . .

He returned two weeks later. Pherson said: "We're not supposed to let this out, but we think we've got a line on him. We've about made certain that he got out of here on a train. We got the ticket from the railroad company and the punch mark on it gave us the conductor. We ran him down, and he got us the trainman and the Pullman porter. The porter gave us a practical identification. The guy had tried to change himself but he didn't know how, and he had a face that was hard to hide. Only thing was, he had a tattoo, a heart with an arrow through it, on his right hand, on that web of flesh there between the thumb and forefinger. The porter swears that wasn't there.

"Now he might have had it taken off. People that knew him said the lobe of his ear was out a good ways from his cheek and looked unnatural. The porter noticed that. And a wide bridged nose, pushed some over to the right. Same height, same build, about the same weight. And the right time."

"Where did the train take him to?"

"Indiana. It was going into Chicago, but he got off at Goshen, Indiana. We'd swear to it that he's in that state yet."

"Then why don't you go out there? Run him down, damn it, drag him back here."

Pherson was patient. "We're checking the district through the mail, the telegraph and telephone companies, and using the State license bureaus—see,

if he gets a driver's license, say, we've got him—and permit bureaus, and the water companies. And the gas and light companies and tax bureaus and school systems—in case he tries to go on someplace and get his degree, and we're checking business mailing lists and directories and fraternal and labor organizations and we've sent a circular to five hundred laundry and dry cleaning establishments. We're watching automobiles agencies, and any kind of transportation stations, and welfare offices. He won't be able to raise a finger without running into one or the other of those, and when he does, he's nabbed. Police out there are working with us. We'll get him."

John Carver's fists knotted.

"You can't watch all those things, sitting here in an office! You know it; you're just hoping for luck. Because the case is out of the newspapers by now you've given it up. He's out there, probably living like anyone else, and—"

"I feel sorry for you," said Pherson, "but you're not doing anything but take up my time."

"I'll get out. I just want to tell you that I'm quitting my job. I'm an electrical engineer, I've worked seven years at it, and now I—it—I—"

Pherson stepped to the door and called a couple of cops. "Take him to the Psychopathic Hospital for observation."

Young Carver was leaning against the wall trying to talk, unable to form the words.

Pherson went out with them, stepped in the inspector's office to tell him about it. "He's cracked clear up. Probably been working his brain too hard, anyhow; they said he was a smart guy and headed places. Be padded places now."

THEY examined John Carver's sanity for three days and turned him loose, with a warning to get a good rest and forget about avenging his sister, if he wanted to keep his mind.

He quit his job and left town the next week. He hung around Gary, Indiana, for three weeks before he got a job in the sheet hot-mill at Crowning Steel.

He went in standing turns as a spellhand. It was summer weather, and John Carver had never done hard work before. They put a pair of three-foot tongs in his hand and told him to grab a red-hot sheet of metal and drag it out of the rolls and pile it.

He worked in a daze of raw heat, a thicker, more stunning daze than the thing which had held his mind since that morning he had seen his sister. Water blisters burned on his face and his feet; sweat soaked him. There was nothing in the place but heat and noise and men and sweat.

Someone showed him the salt pills to take if he wanted to keep on his feet, keep from going all in with the heat. He saw one man fall over that first day with the cramps; a big, middle-aged Kentuckian. He'd have made two of John Carver. They carried him out on a stretcher.

The next day it was a different job, and the next another one. He worked odd hours; sometimes days, sometimes nights. When he wasn't working he got books from the public library, took them to his furnished room, studied them. Books on criminal investigation.

On his eighth day in the mill, they gave him a turn spellhanding the pair-heater on a handmill. Every third heat—every forty-five minutes or so—it was his job to pull the hot bars from the pair furnace, drag them to the rolls, help the rougher swing them onto



the rails. He was all in after the second heat.

He was back at work after the next turn, and they sent him down to drag scale iron—iron that was so hot it was next to melting. The man he worked with wore an asbestos mask over his face, like a rougher, and had a handkerchief tied around his neck. John Carver didn't pay conscious attention to the heat. He felt it, but it didn't reach his mind; nothing did but the purpose with which it was filled.

He worked fast, with a hardness that was beyond his size. He didn't back away when the yellow sheet of iron rolled out of the leveller; he stood there waiting on it, bit his tongs into it viciously, dragged it as though it was cold. His face was burned until bright red spots stood on his cheek bones like rouge.

He was all in when the turn was half over.

He went back again, into the heat that hit a man in the face like a solid thing when he walked into the mill doors; into the heat that took your breath out, smothered you, dimmed your sight, made your nose run as though you were crying; he worked with his mouth wide open, gasping like a fish, blinking his eyes trying to see, each fifteen minute heat seeming like a week.

He couldn't take the hard work—not and do what he wanted to. He wanted to see the men that worked in there; so far he hadn't said ten words to anyone; his mind wouldn't let him waste words on a man who wasn't thick built, with stiff black hair and bat ears and a thick bridged nose, pushed to the right.

He'd seen the overhead cranes, which ran up and down the mill, picked up finished iron from the mills and

carried it to the pack shears, carried the sheared iron from there back to the annealing floor. He saw the cranesmen having long intervals of rest, sitting around on benches, talking with the others.

He went back to the office, to the hot-mill superintendent, told him what he could do and asked for a job on the electrical gang.

The superintendent looked at the references he gave him. "What the hell is a guy like you doing as a spellhand?"

"I wanted the experience."

"You could get a crack at something better than cranesman."

John Carver's eyes exploded. He started to say something, and the look on his burned face startled the boss. But he held it back, said after a minute: "I want to start in from there."

"Well, that's your business. We'll see." He looked after Carver as he went out, his heavy, belting soled shoes clumping on the cement floor. The guy had looked for a minute as though he was going off his nut. He looked half batty anyhow. The superintendent shrugged. Maybe an electrical genius.

**H**E STAYED at Crowning Steel for eight months as a cranesman, and then quit. He went over into Ohio. He went on into Pennsylvania. He came back through Middleton, Ohio, a year later, and hired into a small mill in Indiana the next spring.

He'd changed, but his eyes remained the same; his eyes and his mind. He knew, himself, that he was insane; if being crazy meant getting off the main track. He'd been fired from one job for getting in a fight and nearly killing another millhand, and he'd seen there that his temper was keeping up with his mind. He saw how he was going, but he didn't know how to stop. He

was turning himself into a madman, but it seemed to him, subconsciously, that his way out was along the road he was going. He couldn't stop, give it up, forget about it; his mind would fly apart at that. It had held that one picture up too long.

He never wasted words, talked with the men he worked with. Unless he saw a heavy built young man, with coarse black hair, and wide set ears and a thick bridged nose. . . Then he watched him, started dropping into the mill restaurant at the same time, talked with him about other mills, checked up on him until he had made certain it was the wrong man.

In Indiana, at the small Harper Mills, he was put on the big crane, working on the annealing floor. It was a job for a good craneman, but left a man a lot of hours free every turn.

He'd been there three days when he met Sack Berman. Sack was short, built like a gorilla; he was a doubler on the big mill, a job that took a man to do. Part of every other heat he'd take the sheets from the mill after the breakdown, pull them apart—the hot bars stuck together as they were rolled into sheets—and help the heater shove them into the furnace to be reheated. As they came back after their next pass he caught one end of them with his tongs, waited until the matcher had separated them again, and then folded them over, like books, sent them back for another reheating. It was a tough job—and a man had to have sheet mill experience to take it on.

Sack Berman had had experience. He liked to talk about his jobs in the Pittsburgh mills. He talked to John Carver about them. And he had big, flapping ears, the lobes far out from the cheeks. And a thick bridged nose, shoved to the right. His hair was

brown, not black, but at the part it was a different color. That might have been just dirt. Maybe . . .

John Carver talked with him about other mills.

"Boomer?" Sack asked.

"Boomer. Get tired of one place."

"Me too, boy. I been wanting to shove on somewhere else for a couple years. Maybe will, next spring."

"Hell," said John Carver, his eyes glowing, "go now."

Sack hesitated. "One thing about it, you get no good jobs that way. Guess I'll wait . . ." He brought up one wide, muscled hand to snap the cigarette from his mouth. John Carver looked at it, at the web of flesh between the thumb and forefinger. It was grimy from the mill, but not tattooed.

Sack went on: "And this is a good town, here. Plenty live. You married? We'll go out some payday and kick the burg apart." Sack took out a penknife and opened it, ran the point of the blade up and down his thumb. John Carver would see a lot of that knife; it was Sack's habit to hold it in his hand when he talked, balance it, flip it up in the air and catch it. John Carver would see the knife in his sleep . . .

He saw Sack in a saloon a couple of weeks later, saw him again in the same place a week after that. And that evening Sack said, "Got a couple of babes lined up for later."

"Boy," said John Carver, "I'm on." The coiled snake in him was restless, was baring its fangs, growing more anxious to spring. He couldn't see clearly, his hands were shaking so that the liquor spilled from his glass . . .

The two babes wanted to play and be coy and Sack didn't. They were in Sack's car, out on a country road. John Carver, in the back seat, was kissing

the girl in his arms, listening blindly to what he could hear from the front.

"You don't think a millman's good enough for you, do you, honey?" Sack bantered.

"Oh, I think you're grand. You big ham."

"Ham, huh? I'll tell you something, honey. I'm a college man. You didn't know that, did you?" Sack was pretty drunk. "University educated, that's me. How I rate now?"

"Oh, you're marvelous."

"Come on, don't stall me, sweetheart. Where's your room?"

"It's at home, of course."

"Of course, of course. But I mean some place just for you and me."

The girl in John Carver's arms jerked up her head. "What's the matter, Jackie? Something scare you?"

John Carver slowly settled back on his seat. His eyes were wide, staring. Sack looked back. He laughed. "We're heading for town, Jack. The gals will show us where to go."

"I could tell you where to go right now," said the girl beside him with emphasis.

Sack raised his hand and hit her in the face. "You dirty little crimp. Play-ing lady with me." He hit her again.

John Carver went head first into the front seat. He slammed out at Sack's face with both hands, madly, savagely. Something hit him, he bounced and passed out. . . .

He was stretched out on the road when he came to. Sack was rubbing his hands, the girls were standing behind him giggling.

"Boy," said Sack, "you must have been pretty high."

"Yeah." Carver raised his head, dropped it back at the pain.

Sack grinned. "I'll take a look at your chin."

They were in the glare of the car's headlights. Sack put his right hand up under Carver's chin; he'd just been rubbing his wrists, and that web of flesh between his thumb and forefinger had been reddened by the friction.

The print of a heart with an arrow through it stood out, like a scar, on the reddened skin.

John Carver closed his eyes. "I'll be all right now," he said.

HE WAS stripping off hot iron from the annealing pots. He'd run the rack of the crane over the tray stacked with iron, lower it until the hookups had clamped it around a lift of the hot, annealed sheet steel and carry it down to the other end of the annealing floor to be piled according to size.

Four or five men were sitting around a cold pile of iron, eating sandwiches from their lunch huckets, enjoying for a while the comparative coolness of the annealing floor. One of them was Sack Berman.

Carver saw them leaving, straggling back up to the mills; he stopped the crane, yelled down to Sack: "Stick around a minute. I'm coming down for dinner after this next lift."

Sack nodded up and down and stretched out on the cold pile for a sleep. His turn wasn't on for half an hour. He looked up to laugh and rub his chin.

John Carver shouted back: "My head feels like hell." He saw Sack get out his knife, start scraping his fingernails with it. The snake was writhing, coiling more tightly, gathering itself . . .

He went back for the last lift, picked it up, swung it out over the annealing floor. There were ten tons of hot sheet iron in the rack.

He was carrying it low, lower than usual, only a few feet above the other iron piled on the floor. He carried it toward the pile Sack lay on, his hands tightened on the controls, and the snake lashed out.

He reversed the crane so that it howled like a street car jamming to a stop. In a split instant the lift jerked back, shuddered and stopped with ten tons of steel hanging plumb—and then he dropped it.

A wild yell ripped out, hung for a heartbeat in the crash of other sound, broke off. John Carver jabbed his elbow against a live, low voltage wire, burned it, held it there until it seared in, deep and crippling. He fell against the wall of his cage, passed out, partly from the pain of the burn, but partly from the sudden, emptying absence of that deadly snake from his brain . . .

When they picked the lift up off Sack Berman they found him spread out thin, like an unbaked gingerbread man. John Carver was absolved of guilt of recklessness—it was an accident that he'd burnt his arm and lost control—but the thing hit him so hard that he quit the mill.

**H**E SAW Pherson on the street a month later. The detective stopped him.

"Heard you were back in town. On your old job?"

"Sure am. Working like the devil."

"Fine." Pherson studied him. "You look a lot different from the last time I saw you."

Carver laughed. "Feel different. Been in steel mills for a couple of years."

"Steel? Hell, you weren't looking for . . . You know we never got a line on that guy, don't you?"

"I got that out of my mind," said John Carver. "The mills did that for me. Might have been there yet, but I saw a bad accident, and lost my taste for it. Saw a man flattened out under ten tons of hot iron."

"The devil." Pherson stared at him. He couldn't get it.

"Yeah. The smell was so bad you couldn't go in there for a day. Flattened him out and sizzled him . . . Well, got to get along."

"So long." Pherson looked after him as he walked whistling down the street.

## *Invention Dept.*

**B**ENDING over an editorial desk has many drawbacks. In addition to producing a certain amount of melancholia, it makes us keep up with the times—a discouraging task these days. Thus the latest crime prevention gadget to reach our notice, circuitously, is about one year old.

Some enterprising inventor dug up the idea for a combination file and tabulator to be used by police when checking cars at bridges or other sections of the highway. Cards bearing the numbers of stolen cars are placed in the machine. Then as autos pass the given spot, the license numbers are checked on the machine, and if the number is that of a "hot" car, out pops the little card. We are going to spend an afternoon soon trying to invent a gadget which will similarly discover typographical errors. We'll let you know.

—Ken Foster





"Here's half of the hundred. When you deliver the goods you get the other half"

# Torn Money

By Herbert Koehl

Author of "The Ghost Talks," etc.

*Speaking of fractions: when half of a century note buys lots of trouble a quarter of a dollar bill may ransom a life*

**M**AYBE it was a lot of nerve to sit down in a booth and then only order a cup of coffee. The waiter didn't seem to like it anyway. He smacked the cup on the table, spilling a little of the coffee, and grabbed my nickel. I waited until he had gone and then picked up the sugar bowl and poured about a quarter of a pound of sugar into the cup.

It's an old trick and it wouldn't do for a steady diet. But when a man's only got a dime, a nickel and a few odd pennies . . . well, sugar gives you a lot of energy.

There was a fellow at the counter who was half turned around on his stool staring at me, a little runt of a guy with patches of those brown liver spots on his face. He must have seen me rob the sugar bowl.

He came over to me with a highball in his hand, set it on the table and slid into the seat opposite. He pulled out an almost full pack of cigarettes and held it out.

"How about a smoke?" he said. His voice was high and he talked through his nose. "It ought to go good with that—uh—that meal of yours."

A guy hasn't got much pride when he's broke and hasn't had a puff of the old weed for a couple of days. My fingers trembled when I pulled out a cigarette, but I didn't care. He held his lighter to my cigarette and I took a long drag.

"Kind of up against it, aren't you, son?" he asked, lighting one for himself.

I nodded and took a pull at the sweet, sticky stuff in my cup.

"Sort of think a hundred bucks would look pretty good to you?" he went on.

A hundred bucks. He might just as well have said a million, it couldn't have sounded any sweeter.

"A hundred bucks," I repeated. "There's no such thing."

He laughed. I didn't like his laugh. It was sort of shrill and windy like the noise a sick horse might make. But he was talking about money—big money—and nothing else counted. At least, not when you're hungry.

"Oh, yes there is," he said. "You can make a hundred dollars for a little job I'll tell you about. It won't take much time and it won't be much trouble. What you say?"

"When do I start?"

"Pretty soon. But you look like you could use something to eat."

"A couple hamburgers wouldn't be bad," I admitted.

He wigwagged the waiter, ordered three hamburgers, a piece of apple pie, a cup of coffee, a rye highball and a pack of cigarettes.

While we were waiting he stuck out his hand. It was skinny and a little damp, but what of it? He had what it took to buy eats. "My name's Mercer," he said. "Al Mercer. When you get done we'll drive out to the house. My partner's there and he'll tell you all about it."

The hamburgers and the rest of the stuff arrived and I went to work on them. When I finished I lit a cigarette and we went out to a big, black sedan. He got behind the wheel and we started off. It was a pretty long ride. He didn't say a word and I was too busy digesting to talk. It was dark now, must have been around seven-thirty. We were in the outskirts of the town where the houses weren't very

close together. Finally he pulled up at the curb.

"Here we are," he said.

IT was a shabby-looking, two-story frame house and there weren't any buildings near it. He opened the door and pushed me in ahead of him. A man was sitting in a big chair under a lamp reading a newspaper. He dropped the paper, got up and turned toward us. He was about a foot taller than Mercer and he had thick eyebrows and a mean-looking mouth.

"This fellow's going to do a little job for us," Mercer said. "What's your name, son?"

"Ellison. Bob Ellison."

"Meet Homer Grant," he went on. I shook hands with the big man and was sorry. He had a bone-crushing grip. Mercer was still talking. "Grant's my partner, but he acts like my boss, so he may as well tell you what it's all about."

"Sit down," Grant said. I parked on the davenport and Mercer perched beside me.

"I don't know anything about you," Grant said, "but I'm taking a chance. We aren't honest working men, Mercer and I. In fact, we're not above pulling a little stickup when the need arises. Understand?"

"Sure."

"Good. Well, the last job we pulled we had a close call. Not the cops. There was another mob after the same thing, but we beat them to it. But to save our necks we had to park the proceeds—if you get what I mean—at a pawnshop run by a friend of ours. Now this other outfit knows it's there and they're waiting for Mercer or me to go and get it. So I sent Al out to find someone who could get it for us and not be bothered. It seems he picked on you."

"I see."

"Now you won't have any trouble. You'll just be another customer for the hock shop. And we'll pay you well—what did you tell him, Al?"

"A century."

Grant frowned. "That's a little steep, but I guess it's worth it. Are you game, Ellison?"

I grinned. "For a hundred berries I'd do most anything."

"Okay. Do you know anything about this town?"

"A little."

"This pawnshop is on Fourth Street, three doors east of Buchanan on the north side. Can you find it?"

"Sure," I said. "I know where—"

Somebody was coming down the steps. A few seconds later a girl walked into the room. She was wearing a cheap-looking blue house dress and she seemed scared.

"I'm sorry to bother you," she said, looking at Grant, "but the boy is sick. You ought to call a doctor."

Grant frowned. "Go back upstairs," he snapped. "When we get done here I'll see about calling a doctor."

She stood looking at me. Her head moved sideways quickly and back again. She had light colored hair and a thin face. I couldn't see her eyes.

"Did you hear me?" Grant roared. "I said go back upstairs."

She turned and left without a word.

Grant looked at Mercer. "I told you not to hire that dizzy female," he snarled. Then he turned to me. "You say you know how to get to this pawnshop?"

"Yes."

**H**E took a small envelope out of his pocket and handed it to me. He held it kind of funny, with his forefinger and thumb on the edges. The

letters ABC were printed on it. I took it and put it in the inside pocket of my coat.

"Give that to the man at the pawnshop," Grant said, "and he'll give you something. It may be a bundle or a box or a suitcase. I don't know. But whatever it is bring it back here right away. And don't try anything funny. If you do we'll find you," his voice went lower, "and when we do, by Heaven, you'll be sorry."

I smiled. "Don't worry. I'll do what I'm told. But how do I know I'll get that hundred?"

He stuck out his lower lip, then pulled it in. He took out his billfold, extracted a bill and tore it in half. He handed me one of the pieces.

"Here's half of the hundred," he said. "When you deliver the goods you get the other half. Okay?"

I took it. "Okay." I got to my feet. "There's a car out in front," Grant went on, "just ahead of the one you came here in. The key is in it. You can drive that one."

## II

**T**HE bus was an old one and had seen its best days years ago. But it was kind of fun driving a car again. I took my time and it must have been at least forty minutes before I parked in front of the pawnshop.

As it turned out, it wasn't really much of a job. I went into the store and handed the envelope to the man behind the counter. He was a little bald-headed fellow with glasses. He looked at it and then looked at me a long time like he was trying to get a picture of me in his head. He went into a room in the rear and came back in a minute or two with a small black satchel. I took it and walked out of the place without saying a word.

Nothing happened. Nobody tried to stop me and if anybody was following I didn't notice. After I'd driven a little over a mile, my curiosity got the better of me. I came to a stop and opened the satchel. It was crammed full of packets of greenbacks tied together at the middle with brown paper. There were fives and tens and twenties and there may have been other denominations but I didn't look any further.

When I came to the house I noticed that the black sedan Mercer had brought me out in wasn't there. I left the key in the car and started up the walk. When I was near the steps something hit the cement in front of me. There was a half moon shining and I could see that it was a wad of paper. I stooped over and smoothed it out. Then I struck a match.

On the paper, in a big scrawl made with pencil, were the words: "Be careful. Don't come upstairs." I put it in my pocket, went up the steps and knocked at the door. Grant opened it and reached for the satchel.

"Wait a minute," I said, shoving him away. "Give me the other half of that century note first."

He glared at me, then tried to smile. "Come upstairs," he said. "I have to see whether what you've brought back is all right. If it is, I'll pay you off."

I didn't move. "No thanks," I said. "There's a lot more than a hundred bucks in this satchel. But I don't want any of it. All I want is the other half of that bill. But I want it right here and now."

"You'll do what I tell you," he growled. He started toward me. His right hand moved quickly and when I saw it again it held an automatic pistol. A lot of things happened then, so quickly it was hard to tell what came first.

I SAW the girl run into the room at the same moment I swung at Grant. It was a crazy thing to do—take a punch at a man with a gun—but it worked because he wasn't looking for it. My fist caught his chin and he staggered back across the room. I opened the satchel, had one of the packets stuck in my pocket by the time Grant pulled himself together. He started toward me with the gun up. I threw the satchel at him. Just then the door opened and a shrill voice said: "What is this?"

I whirled and ran my stomach into Mercer's gun. Without thinking I grabbed his wrist and swung him around in front of me so Grant couldn't shoot for fear of hitting his friend. The girl ran across the room and got beside me.

"Go on out," I said. When I heard her crossing the porch, I gave Mercer a shove, ducked through the doorway and jumped for the car. She was already in it when I got there. I scrambled over her knees and kicked the starter. There weren't any shots as we went away from there. We took a corner on two wheels, another on one, and then really got going. There wasn't any signs of pursuit.

Finally we were out in the country. All this time we hadn't said a word. I pulled up at the side of the road and turned to the girl.

"Let's find out what we're doing," I said. "Who are you?"

"Millie," she said. "Millie Hayes."

Her voice was kind of low and husky. Now that I had a chance to look at her in the light from the dashboard, I saw that she wasn't exactly a strain on the eyes. Her face was thin, but a little steady eating would probably fix that up. Her eyes, in the dim light, looked as blue as any I'd ever



seen. And her hair was the color of corn silk.

"Well, Millie," I went on, "what were you doing with those two rats?"

She stared at me and hesitated. "They hired me," she said at last. "I was down at the free employment bureau when a call came in. Somebody wanted a girl with nursing experience to look after a little boy whose mother had been called away. So I went. But when I saw them I wanted to leave. Only—only I needed the money. Maybe you know what I mean."

I had to laugh. "Maybe I do. When was that? This morning?"

"Yes."

"Was it you who tossed that paper wad at me tonight?"

She nodded. "After you left I came part way down the stairs and listened. I heard the little one, the one with the high voice, say that you would be—would be something else to get rid of. The other one, the big man, said not to worry. They'd done enough to burn for anyway, he said, a little killing wouldn't make any difference. He said he'd get you upstairs and—and put you away. I guess he meant he was going to kill you."

"You guessed right," I said.

"Then the little one went away. I don't know where."

"I can guess. He was trailing me. They weren't taking any chances of me getting away with all that dough."

"What do you mean?"

"That satchel I threw at Grant wasn't full of violets. Did they pay you?"

"No."

I took the packet of bills out of my pocket. They were fives.

"Just my luck," I said. "There were twenties in that satchel. Oh well, we can eat anyway. You hungry?"

"I am," she said, "awfully."

"So am I. I've been on a diet." I turned on the motor and stepped on the gas.

**I**T was maybe half an hour later when we came to a little place that had a big sign saying "EAT." I parked in front of it and we went in.

We took the first table we came to. It was right in front of a radio that was blating out dance music. A little man with a big, greasy-looking apron came up to us. It turned out they had chili and sandwiches, pie and coffee. We ordered some of each.

While we were waiting, the music stopped suddenly and a man's voice, smooth and deep and a little bit sickening like some radio announcers' voices are, started to spout.

"We have just received information, ladies and gentlemen, that clarifies the news flash we announced some time ago. For the benefit of those who have just tuned in, we will make a complete report." He paused and then the honeyed tones continued:

"The father of four-year-old Kenneth Randall has paid the \$25,000 ransom demanded for his release. The payment was made at a pawnshop on Fourth Avenue. The kidnaper, or his accomplice, turned over an envelope containing part of a one dollar bill that matched a part left in the boy's sand-box when he was kidnaped. The pawnbroker, acting on instructions from John M. Randall, the boy's father, then gave the kidnaper or his agent a satchel containing \$25,000. The envelope also contained an address, ostensibly that of the place where the kidnaped boy would be found. The police immediately rushed to that place and found—nothing."

I looked at Millie. Her eyes were wide and frightened. The man with

the greasy apron set two bowls of chili in front of us and went back for water.

"Did you know about this?" I asked.

She shook her head. "They acted strange," she said, "but I didn't—"

"One circumstance," the radio voice went on, "is being given careful attention by the authorities. It will be remembered that the Randall boy was kidnaped from the walled-in yard in back of his home. His nurse had left him playing in his sandbox while she went indoors a moment."

"It just goes to show," I said, "a guy should always read the newspapers. I didn't even know there'd been a kidnaping. I—"

"Be quiet" she whispered.

"—the boy was gone" the announcer was saying. "Police found one end of a dollar bill in the sandbox. They assumed the kidnapers planned to use the remainder of the bill to identify themselves when they tried to collect ransom."

"This guy Grant," I said, "seems to enjoy tearing up money."

"The envelope given the pawnbroker," the voice continued, "did not contain the entire remaining part of the bill. The piece of money in the envelope matched that left in the sandbox, but police believe the fact that the kidnapers retained part of the bill shows they will try to collect additional ransom."

"They would," I said.

"Mr. Randall has announced," she speaker went on, "that he will make no further effort to contact the kidnapers. They have broken their agreement, he declares, and now there is nothing to do but give the authorities a free hand. One official asserted his belief that the kidnaped boy has been killed. Otherwise—"

Millie grabbed my hand. "He's all

right," she whispered. "He had an awful fever, but he's alive. He—"

"Shut up."

"Keep this station tuned in for further developments in the Randall kidnaping—"

MILLIE was looking at her bowl of chili. There were sandwiches and pie on the table now.

"Let's eat," I said. "It looks like I collected some money for a couple rats, but there's nothing to do about it. You can bet they've made tracks."

We piled into the food. Between mouthfuls I asked her if she'd really told me everything she knew. She swore she had.

"Don't you think we should go to the police?"

I took a big bite of a sandwich and chewed a bit. "Guess we should," I said at last. "You can if you want to, but I won't."

Her eyes got wider. "You won't? Why?"

"I have reasons. And besides don't forget I'm the guy that collected the ransom. Maybe they wouldn't believe me."

"That's right." She started in on the pie.

We were all finished and I had fished a five from the packet to pay the bill when the band stopped in the middle of a hot number and the silky voiced announcer came on again.

"The following news bulletin has just been received from headquarters," he said. "The man who collected the Randall ransom money early this evening has just been identified through department of justice files at Washington as Robert D. Ellison, who was released six weeks ago from the Allenwood penitentiary, where he served an eighteen-month term for grand larceny.

Ellison was identified by means of fingerprints found on the envelope which he gave the pawnbroker in exchange for the ransom. The prints were sent to Washington by wirephoto and the identification followed quickly."

Millie was staring at me. "Is that you?" she whispered.

I tried to smile. "How'd you guess it?"

"You were in jail?"

"You heard what the man said."

"Did you—I mean, were you guilty?"

I shrugged. "I didn't think I was but the jury had other ideas. But that's a long story. The point is it looks like I'm going to be put back on ice again pretty quick if I don't watch out."

The announcer was still talking. "The numbers of the ransom bills are known to the authorities. As soon as it can be compiled a key will be broadcast by which the money can be identified quickly. The bills were in denominations of fives, tens, twenties and fifties. Meanwhile, everyone is requested to watch for a 1932 coupé bearing license number RA 364. I'll repeat that. License . . ."

"Let's get out of here," I said and hurried up to the cash register and paid the bill. Millie followed me out to the car and we climbed in.

"What are you going to do?" she asked as I started the motor.

"I'm going to drop you off somewhere," I said. "You're in the clear and you better stay that way. As for me—well, I'm going back to that house."

She grabbed me by the arm. "You're not going to drop me off," she said. "I know you didn't have anything to do with this and I'm going to help you prove it."

I laughed. "You think they'd believe you?"

"I don't know. All I can do is tell the truth. And I'm staying with you."

"Okay. But don't get in the road."

THERE wasn't any car in front of the house when we got there. We went up to the front door. It was locked.

"Stay here," I said, "while I look around. I should be good at breaking and entering."

Around in the back I found a cellar window that wasn't locked. I pushed it open and slid through. It was black as the inside of a safe and I struck a match, found the stairs and went up to the first floor. By the light of another match I made my way to the front door, opened it and let Millie in. Then I located the switch and turned on the lights.

"Keep your eyes and ears open," I told her. "I'm going upstairs and look around."

I didn't find anything. A double bed in one room and a little cot in another showed signs of having been slept in, but there wasn't any luggage or anything else that might give a lead. Of course, they'd rented the place furnished. When I got downstairs, Millie was standing by the telephone.

"Find anything?"

I shook my head.

"We'd better call the police," she said. "Maybe they won't believe us, but it won't be as bad that way as it would if we were picked up."

"Maybe you're right." I grabbed the phone book and looked at the front where police headquarters is generally listed. There was a phone number on it, written lightly in pencil. It was MA 6754.

I showed it to her. She shook her head. "That might have been there for months."

"Sure. But it's a hunch."

I sat down and dialed MA 6754. A woman's voice answered. "Hobson's residence."

"Mrs. Hobson?"

"Yes."

"This is Homer Grant talking."

"Why yes, Mr. Grant. What's the matter? Isn't everything satisfactory?"

I stalled. "Well, I don't exactly know for sure yet."

"Where are you now?" She sounded annoyed. "At the cottage?"

I hesitated. "Why no. You see, I—that is, we got kind of mixed up on directions. So I thought I'd call you to make sure we got the right place."

"The right place," she repeated, her voice getting shriller. "Why you told me you'd been to Riverside and knew just where the cottage was."

"I must have been mistaken. If you could just tell me exactly . . ."

"Certainly I can. Only I don't understand. Well, anyway, you know where Highway No. 68 intersects with Riverside Trail?"

"Yes."

"It's about a mile on the other side of the state line. You turn to your right there. And it's the third lane on your left. There's a mailbox there that says Shady Rest Cottage. Have you got that?"

"Yes. Thanks a lot, Mrs. Hobson."

"You're quite welcome. I hope everything will be all right. But I can't . . ."

"I'm sure everything will be fine," I interrupted. "Thanks again." I hung up.

"Come on, Millie," I said. "We're going for a ride in the country."

**T**HE place wasn't very hard to find. Highway 68 was concrete and carried a lot of traffic, but Riverside Trail was a narrow, gravel road with

as many bends as a bowl of pretzels. We took our time, watching for lanes to the left. The first two were fairly close together, but it seemed we never would reach the third and for a while we were afraid we'd missed it. But finally we spotted it and I slowed up. The headlights touched a mailbox.

Millie had good eyes. "It says Shady Rest, R.R.9," she said.

I stopped just past the lane and then backed into it. It wouldn't hurt to have the coupé's nose pointed the right way if things called for a quick getaway. I kept backing till we were well off the road. There wasn't a light to be seen, so the cottage was probably pretty far back.

"Now you stay here," I said. "In case I'm gone longer than I should be, or you hear anything that sounds like trouble, you head for civilization and call the law."

Her chin went up and by the light from the dashboard I could see she was getting ready to show her temper. "I'll do nothing of the kind," she snapped. "I'm going with you."

"You want to be a nuisance?"

She looked hurt, but her chin stayed high. "I won't be. You're one against two and they've got guns. You're a fool to go in there, but since you're going you can't stop me from tagging along."

"So you think I'm a fool, do you?"

She touched my hand and smiled. "I know you are, so don't argue. I'm coming along and I may be a help."

"Lot of help you'll be," I grumbled and got out of the car. She jumped out on the other side and we started up the lane together. The road turned to the right for about fifty yards and then sharply to the left. Through the trees we could see a faint light.

When we were about half a city block from the cottage I grabbed her

arm. "Here's where you wait, and I mean it. I'm going to see how things look."

She didn't kick and I walked on as quietly as I could till I came to a side window and looked in. They were there, all right, Grant and Mercer, and they were playing some kind of a card game, with a bottle and two glasses between them on the table. There was something else on the table—Grant's wicked-looking, blue-steel automatic. It didn't take a Solomon to see that it would be suicide to walk into the room with nothing but a pair of fists.

I found my way back to Millie, noticing as I went a big tree beside the road twenty yards from the house that two fair sized men could hide behind. Taking Millie by the arm I led her to the tree. "Did you ever throw a rock?"

"They used to call me a tomboy."

"Swell. The only chance we have is to get one of them out of the cottage. That's where you come in. I'm going up and park at the side of the house. You can lean over from behind this tree and throw stones at the front door. Get the idea?"

"Of course."

"Good. And for Pete's sake try to hit the door. If you hit me I'll spank."

She let out a little laugh and I crept back to the cottage and squatted down beside the porch. A few seconds later something landed on the steps. Then another stone hit the front of the porch. Millie hadn't got the range yet, but the lanc was well graveled and she had plenty of ammunition. Her next shot hit the door. Less than half a minute later a path of light swung across the steps.

**J**UDGING from the size, it was Grant who came out on the porch. He was in his shirtsleeves and some-

thing in his right hand glittered. He came out a few steps, looked around and rubbed his chin with his left hand. Then he went in and shut the door.

Another stone hit the door, hard. And then another. The door opened again. Looking through the window I could see Al Mercer sitting at the table with his chin propped on his hand, studying the cards before him. It looked like they were playing double solitaire. They must have been hitting the bottle pretty hard, too. It was almost ready to be laid away as a dead soldier.

I tore my eyes away from the window. Grant had left the porch. It was a fifty-fifty chance he'd go the other way, but he didn't. His footsteps sounded louder. He passed in front of me, no more than five feet away. I got out of my crouch and jumped at him, swinging my right fist. It made a perfect landing on the side of his jaw and his head snapped back. The gun dropped from his hand and I scooped it up. He had staggered back a few paces and I closed in with the gun pointing at his middle.

"Walk back into the house in front of me," I said, "or you'll never walk again."

He turned without a word and I walked behind him, jabbing the gun in his back. He went up the steps and across the porch. I followed, walking softly. Mercer looked up as Grant came into the room and then jumped to his feet, reaching behind him. I poked the gun around Grant and pulled the trigger.

Mercer let out a yell and grabbed his right arm. I gave Grant a shove.

"Get over there with your pal," I said.

Someone was running across the porch behind me. I hoped it was Millie. It was.

"The little guy's got a gun in his hip pocket," I said. "Go get it."

She ran around me and over to Mercer and pulled a little revolver from his pocket like she was used to doing that sort of thing every day in the week.

"Give it to me," I always did want to be a two-gun man."

She handed it over obediently.

"They're both wearing neckties," I went on, "just as if they were gentlemen. Take Grant's off and tie his hands behind his back. And when we get through do the same thing with Mercer. Maybe you're not as much of a nuisance as I thought you'd be."

She flashed me a smile and went to work. A faint cry came from somewhere in the house. It sounded like a child in pain. Millie looked around at me, but I didn't move. She went on with her job. Two minutes later she had them sitting on the davenport with their hands tied behind them. I noticed a little table at Grant's right with a heavy looking ashtray on top of it. And under the table was the little black satchel I'd collected at the pawnshop. Just then the crying from the other room started up again.

"Go see about that," I told Millie. She went through a door at the back and pretty soon the crying stopped. I looked around the room. There was a telephone on a small stand.

"All the comforts of home, hunh," I said. "That's fine."

Millie came back into the room. "The poor kid," she said. "He's burning up with fever. And he keeps asking—" Her voice broke, "he keeps asking for his mamma."

Al Mercer set up a howl. "What about me," he yelled. "You shot me in the arm, you crazy fool. I'm bleeding. You want me to bleed to death?"

I looked at him. "I'd love for you to bleed to death," I said. "Go right ahead."

I handed Millie the automatic. "If they give you any excuse at all, you shoot. If you just feel like practicing, why shoot anyway. They've got it coming."

I PICKED up the receiver, dialed 0 for operator and got her quick. "Call police headquarters," I said, "and tell them that the kidnapers of Kenneth Randall are at Shady Rest Cottage, Rural Route 9, Riverside. You got that? Then get to work. I'm not fooling."

Grant spoke as I hung up. "You're acting like an idiot," he said. "You could take that satchel there with twenty-five grand in it, turn us loose and scam."

I laughed. "I could take the satchel and scam without turning you loose. But I'm not going to do it. I can't use that kind of money."

"You've already got some of it," he shot back.

I felt my pocket where the pack of fives still nestled. "That's different. I didn't know what kind of money it was when I took it. And I'm not keeping it long, now that I know."

He sneered. "Just a brave, honest hero, aren't you? But you didn't mind doing a job for us when you thought we were a couple of ordinary burglars."

"I was broke and hungry," I said, "and burglars are just burglars. But kidnapers are something else again. I'll have to be a lot hungrier than I've ever been before I throw in with kidnapers."

"Rats."

"That's what you are. Now shut up and think of a good story to tell the cops when they get here."

He must have done as he was told. Anyway he didn't make a sound and neither did anyone else, except that the crying started up again and Millie went into the other room and then it stopped.

It must have been at least twenty minutes after I'd phoned when it happened. Maybe it was longer. I was just beginning to wonder how long it should take a fast police car to reach the cottage when I saw Grant lurch quickly to his right. His hand, which should have been tied behind him, grabbed up the ashtray from the table. I ducked, but the thing caught me solidly on the left ear and for a second everything went black.

The next thing I knew I was on my hands and knees and Grant was standing over me waving both guns. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"Times have changed," he said. "Go over there and untie Mercer's hands. He should be loose but he isn't. Your girl friend doesn't tie a very good knot."

The door in the back opened and Millie came in.

"Sit down on that davenport," Grant ordered. "There's been a revolution and I'm on top now."

She looked at me and then sat down. There wasn't anything I could do but take the necktie off Mercer's hands.

"Now you tie them up," Grant told Mercer, "and see that you do a better job than the little lady did. Use the same necktie—they won't prove anything."

The little man did as he was told, working on me first and then on Millie. When he finished he stepped in front of me, swung his right fist and caught me flush on the chin.

"You would let me bleed to death," he yelled.

"Never mind," Grant said. "Pick up

that satchel and come on. We haven't got much time."

As Mercer stooped for the satchel we heard the sound of tires grinding into gravel and headlights hit the front window.

"Drop it," Grant cried. "They're here."

I laughed. "Now what you going to do?"

He sat down at the table and motioned Mercer to do the same. "I'm sitting tight," he said. "I've just caught a couple kidnapers with the goods."

"How long will that story stand up? The boy will know who kidnaped him."

He looked at me kind of funny, then snorted. "That's what you think."

**H**EAVY footsteps sounded on the steps and a short, broad man came into the room. He wore a gray suit and a felt hat pulled over his eyes and he held an automatic in his hand. Another fellow, thinner but no taller, was on his heels.

"All right," the first one said. "If anybody moves they won't move far. Where's the kid?"

Grant handed him both guns.

"Thank heaven you've come," he said. "My partner and I have been holding that fellow and his girl friend here for an hour. We were getting jittery."

"Where's the kid?"

"He must be in another room," Grant said. "We heard something like a child crying. But we were too busy to look."

Two other men were in the room by now. One of them, a tall slim man carrying a black case, went through the door in the back. The other, gray haired and broad shouldered, followed.

The one who had come in first seemed to be in charge. He looked at Grant. "What's happened here?"

"We were driving by," Grant said,

"my partner there and I—we're traveling salesmen—and we spotted the car out in front by the road. We'd heard the radio broadcast telling everyone to watch for license number RA 364 so we stopped. I had a gun in the car, the little one I just gave you, and we came in here and took them by surprise. That long drink of water there," he went on, waving at me, "fired one shot and hit my friend but I got to him before he could do any more shooting. I clipped him on the ear, as you can probably notice."

"That guy's an expert liar," I said.

"Shut up," the fellow with the gun said. "And then what?"

"That's about all," Grant answered. "We tied them up and I called for the police. As I said before, I'm sure glad you've come."

"You sweet thing, you," I said.

The short, broad man jerked a chair back from the table and sat down. "Just to get things straight," he said, "my name's Jordan and I'm with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. So is he," and he jerked a thumb at his mate who was pulling up a chair beside him. "The two men who went in the other room are J. K. Randall and Doctor something-or-other. I don't know his name." He looked at Millic. "You say this girl is in on the kidnaping?"

Grant shrugged. "I don't know. She was here with him. And all I had to go on was that car out there—or rather, its license."

The G-man nodded. "Okay. We'll soon see what's what."

The gray haired man with the broad shoulders came out of the back room first. His face was wet with perspiration. He looked around the room and his eyes stopped on me. "Is he the one?" he asked. His voice was hoarse with pent-up rage.

"That's the way it looks," said Jordan, "but don't—"

Randall wasn't listening. I'd never seen eyes so crazy with hate as his. He brought his right fist around and caught me full on the jaw. That made twice in one night and it hurt. My head snapped back like it was on a hinge and everything went hazy for a minute. I remember jerking at the necktie that held my hands behind my back, but nothing gave. Then Randall had me by the throat. His fingers dug in just below the Adam's apple. I tried to pull away, but couldn't. The room started to look like a merry-go-round. Then suddenly the pressure was released.

Jordan was talking and his voice sounded like it came from the next county. "Cut it out, I tell you. We'll take care of him." He had Randall by both arms and was pulling him away.

Just then the doctor came into the room. "Is there a phone?" he asked. Grant pointed to it. "I'm calling an ambulance," the doctor went on. "The boy's in pretty bad shape, but I think he'll be all right." He dialed the phone, got his number, said a few words in a low voice and hung up.

**J**ORDAN took the floor. "Since we've got to wait for the ambulance," he said, "we may as well get things straight." He looked at Grant. "You say you and your friends were driving along and spotted that license number and—"

"They got wonderful eyes," I said.

"Shut up, you," Jordan barked.

Just then Mercer let out a yell. "What about me? I've been shot and there's a doctor here and he doesn't do anything about it."

The doctor went over to him, helped him off with his coat and looked at his right arm. "Just a scratch," he said.



"I'm sorry," I grumbled.

Randall was talking to Grant. "I want to thank you," he was saying. He held out his hand and Grant took it. "You can never know what this means to me. If you're a father, you can understand. But you'll be well paid. I offered a reward, five thousand dollars, and you and your friend will get that."

"You can pay him out of that satchel beside the davenport," I said. "He wanted all of it, but I guess now he'll be satisfied with a small cut."

Jordan jumped up, ran around and picked up the satchel. "This is it," he said. Then he looked at me. "What do you mean, he wanted all of it?"

I stared back at him and laughed. "You're a G-man," I said, "and you're letting Grant make a fool of you. He and his pal Mercer are the ones who kidnaped the Randall boy."

Jordan took something out of his inside pocket and looked at it. "You're Bob Ellison, aren't you?" he said.

"That's right."

"Then you collected the ransom, didn't you?"

"You're still right."

"Well, then, what are you talking about?"

I leaned forward and looked him in the eye. "Just this. I was tricked into collecting the ransom, I didn't have anything to do with the kidnaping and I can prove it. As soon as I found out what I'd got mixed in with, I started out to find the kidnapers. That is, Millie and I did. And we found them. They're right in this room and they're trying to make you think they're heroes. I'm talking about Mr. Grant and his friend Mercer."

"You say you caught them. You can't expect us to believe that. After all, the evidence shows they caught you."

"I'm not worrying about the evidence," I said. "Before very long you'll have proof that neither this girl nor I had anything to do with the kidnaping. And you'll know who did. All I ask is that you keep your eyes on that saintly pair."

Jordan ran his hand over his face and stared at me.

"Just how do you expect to prove all this, Ellison?" he asked.

"The boy's over four years old, according to the radio reports, isn't he? He'll be able to tell you who kidnaped him."

I must have said the wrong thing. Randall got out of his chair. Jordan jumped up and caught his arm. "Take it easy," he said. Randall shook him off and walked over in front of me. His cheeks were as close to being purple as any cheeks I'd ever seen.

"You filthy rat," he shouted. "Trying to make us believe you didn't know—"

Jordan jerked him back, but he pulled himself loose. "You knew," he yelled, "you must have known all the time—long before you planned this thing—you must have known my son is—my poor little boy—is blind!"

## V

THE whole world seemed to slip from under my feet. I snapped my head up and looked at him. "He's what?"

Randall's eyes were wild. "You're putting on an act," he almost screamed. "The boy is blind. He was born blind. That's why you picked on him. And, by heaven, you're going to hang for it."

I looked at Millie. "Did you know?"

Her face was a sickly white. She shook her head. "He was asleep most

of the time I was with him. I didn't even guess."

Through sort of a mist I saw the six men sitting around the table looking at us. At the left was Jordan, who still held the automatic loosely in his hand. Next was his G-man partner. Then came Grant and Mercer and, closest to where we were sitting on the davenport with our hands tied behind us, Randall and the doctor.

Grant had a kind of sneering smile on his face and Randall still looked like he was just this side of apoplexy.

"I guess we're sunk then," I said. "At least I am. What do they do to you now for kidnaping, Jordan?"

He stared at me. "The boy was taken across state lines," he said finally. "That puts it under the Lindbergh law and that can mean the death penalty. And to the federal government, there's only one form of execution—hanging by the neck until you are dead."

"No!" Millie cried. "They can't do that to him. He's innocent, I tell you. He's telling the truth and you're so stupid you can't see it."

"That's enough," Jordan said sharply.

"Yeah," I muttered, "cut it out, Millie. It won't do any good." I felt like all the strength had oozed from my body. "They won't believe me and I guess a jury won't either."

"Anybody who kidnap a blind boy—and he must be a pretty sick kid, too, right now—can't expect mercy from a jury," said Jordan. He got up, laid his gun on the table, and came over to me. "I'm going to see what you've got in your pockets."

He didn't find so very much. The packet of fives, an empty billfold, a dirty handkerchief, the crumpled piece of paper Millie had thrown at me, three one-dollar bills, some change and half a century note.

"What's this?" he asked, straightening out the piece of paper that said, "Be careful. Don't come upstairs."

"That's a little warning Millie gave me. It's part of a long story, but you wouldn't believe it."

"And this piece of a hundred dollar bill," he went on. "You seem to have a habit of tearing up money." He grinned. "Maybe we can get you for mutilating currency."

"What you mean, a habit?"

He laughed. "So you don't know? When you pulled the kidnaping you left a piece of a dollar bill in the Randall yard. We figured that was for identification and it was. The envelope you gave the pawnbroker had another piece of the same bill. But there was still another piece of the bill that you kept. You probably thought you'd use that to get some more ransom. Only—" he paused and frowned. "Only that piece of the bill should be on you and it isn't. I guess you've swallowed it."

I sat up straight, jerking my arms behind my back because I wanted to wave my hands.

"I didn't swallow it," I said, trying to hold his eye. "It isn't on me because I never had it. But I think I can tell you where it is."

**H**E RUBBED his chin with the fingers of his left hand. "So you do know something about this case. Go ahead. Where is it?"

"I've been trying to tell you that the men you want are Grant and Mercer and you won't listen. Now if you found that piece of money on one of them you'd start to believe me, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, but—"

"Well, why don't you search them? Or do you think heroes shouldn't be searched?"

Jordan looked disappointed. "This sounds like a stall. I thought you were getting ready to tell something."

I stamped my feet on the floor. I had to do something and I couldn't use my hands. "For the love of Pete," I burst out, "I've told you plenty, but you're too dumb to do anything about it. Go ahead and search them, they won't bite you."

Jordan looked at Grant. "Would you gentlemen object? Just to prove he's talking through his hat?"

Grant shrugged. "Not at all. It's just part of his game, we haven't anything to hide."

Jordan's partner went through Mercer's pockets first. He found the usual things, a billfold with about forty dollars and identification cards, some small change, keys and a pocket knife and so forth.

Then he went through Grant's pockets with pretty much the same result, only this time the exhibits included a fountain pen and a letter from a novelty concern that said something about the sales quota being raised. When Grant's things were all spread out on the table, Jordan looked at me.

"There you are," he said.

"Yeah, that proves a lot," I came back. "That little hunk of a dollar bill would be awful hard to hide, wouldn't it? You'd be sure to find it at a glance, wouldn't you? If you'd turn me loose I bet I'd find it on one of them."

"Oh, shut up," he said wearily. "I knew that's what you wanted, to be turned loose." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Wish that ambulance would get here."

Grant was putting his things back in his pockets and I kept my eyes glued on him. When he picked up the fountain pen his fingers were trembling, or else it was my imagination.

"Wait a minute," I yelled.

Jordan's eyes snapped toward me. "Now what?" he barked.

"How about opening up that fountain pen of Grant's?" I said. "That would be a dandy hiding place."

"Forget it," Jordan growled. "You talk too much—the wrong things."

Grant laughed. "You've got to give the guy A for effort," he said. "He's trying every trick he can think of."

"Listen, Jordan," I said, speaking low, "if you think I'm talking too much now, just wait till I get on the witness stand. They may hang me, but I'll go down fighting. I'll have plenty to say about you. All you've done is try to pin this thing on me. You've taken everything for granted. You won't make an honest effort to verify anything I say. I may go to the gallows, but you're going to get a real roasting before I go."

Jordan sighed and held out his hand to Grant. "Okay," he said, "anything to shut him up. Let's have the fountain pen."

Grant didn't move. "It's all right to be good natured," he grumbled. "but enough is enough. You're treating me like I was suspected of something, just on account of that guy shooting off his mouth."

I FELT like a fellow who had caught hold of a life preserver just when he was about to go down for the third time. Jordan had got to his feet and was staring at Grant the way he had stared at me.

"I said give me that fountain pen," he snapped, "and no back talk."

Grant shrugged and handed him the pen. He shoved his chair back a few inches.

Jordan unscrewed the cap, looked in-

side it and laid it on the table. Then he pulled the pen apart, exposing the rubber bladder that held the ink. A little sliver of green fell on the table. Jordan grabbed it, his fingers moved quickly, and there it was—a piece of green paper about two inches square, with two straight sides and two jagged edges and it had originally come out of one of Uncle Sam's mints.

Jordan turned toward Grant and then dived for his automatic. Because Grant had jumped up and was lunging for the door.

The automatic exploded three times, close together. Grant crumpled to his knees with one hand on the doorknob, then swayed a moment before he toppled over on his back. Jordan, the doctor and Randall ran over to him. The other G-man had a gun trained on Mercer who was slouching back in his seat whimpering.

"So Ellison was right," Jordan said, looking down at the fallen man. "You and Mercer did it. What a fool—"

"You said it, brother," Grant sneered. The words came from his mouth in a windy gasp. Little bubbles of blood danced on his lips. "I had you fooled easy. If it wasn't for him I'd got away with it. Came pretty close at that. Everything he said was true. Me and Mercer snatched the kid and hired Ellison to get the ransom. The girl—she didn't have anything to do with it—with it, either. You can—you can hang Mercer, but," his voice was fading away to less than a whisper, "but you'll never—never—hang me. I'm—" We couldn't hear any more.

The doctor stooped over him and then straightened. "He was right," he said. "He'll never hang. He's dead."

Jordan was looking at me. He came around in back and untied my wrists. My hands felt numb and I rubbed them.

"I owe you a lot of apologies," Jordan said. "I was a jackass, but—"

"Forget it. Is it all right for Millie and I to go now?"

"Sure. You're in the clear. Only—"

Randall's hand was on my shoulder. "My boy," he said in a choked voice, "I owe you more than I can ever express. When I think of how I treated you—but I'm hoping you understand how I felt."

I shook his hand and smiled. "In your place, Mr. Randall, I'd have done the same—only more so. Think nothing of it." I walked over to Millie. She had stayed on the davenport like she was petrified. I took the necktie off her wrists "Come on," I said "Let's be on our way."

"Just a minute," Jordan said "You've got to come to town with us. The newspaper boys will want to talk with you and take your pictures. Don't you know it yet? You're heroes, both of you."

I looked at Millie. "I think we'd like to duck that stuff, if it's all the same to you. You know the whole story. You can tell them. We want to go and get something to eat. And a little sleep wouldn't hurt, either."

"You've got something there," Millie said.

"Have you any money?" Randall asked.

I shrugged. "No, but we didn't have any before this thing started. So we're holding our own."

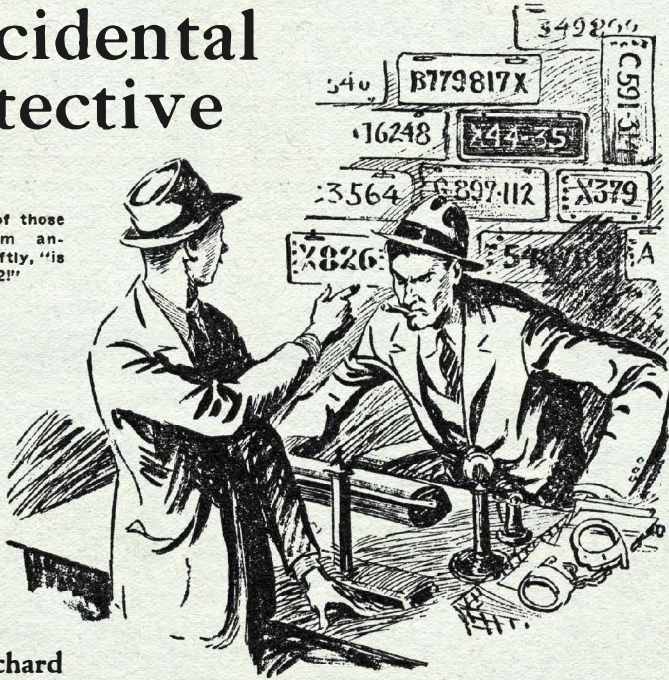
Randall smiled. "You've got five thousand dollars," he said. "I offered a reward, you know, and you've got to take it."

"I'm not arguing with you," I said. I looked at Millie and held out my hand to her. "We could do things with that kind of dough, couldn't we, kid?"

She took my hand and pressed it. "We could try," she said.

# Penny Pim— Accidental Detective

"The sum of those plates," Pim announced swiftly, "is 5,121,952!"



By Richard  
L. Hobart

Author of  
"Flannel Cakes," etc.

*Maybe one unique specimen like Penny Pim is born in a million. And maybe it's a good thing, too!*

PENNY PIM was startled by the sound that blasted at his eardrums from around the corner on Pennsylvania Avenue. It was a new sound to him, yet curiously enough, it deeply stirred something in his subconsciousness. The sound came again and Penny Pim struggled desperately in an effort to classify and allocate it.

It annoyed Penny Pim. Not the sound itself, of course, but his inability to marshal his thoughts concerning it. It chagrined him to discover in his mind a bit of vague information which was filed away in a disorderly manner.

*Brrrrrrrrrr!*

Again the sound came and Penny Pim's face crinkled as his brain jostled similar and related sounds into memory cells. A fast train crossing rail joints? No, too rapid for that. A ball-peen hammer striking repeatedly upon a sheet of steel? That was closer. A series of torpedoes being exploded? No, not loud enough and the sounds were too regularly spaced.

*Brrrrrr!*

A yearning to catalogue the strange sound decided him. Momentarily, he crased all thoughts of Naomi Goode, someday to be Mrs. Pennington Pim. She would be waiting for him in front

of the *Potomac Theater*, up near the White House. But a minute or two delay to see what was happening here could do no harm. At that, he could almost hear her say: "Pennington, you must be ill. You are three minutes late!"

*Brrrrrr!*

A terrible thought came to Penny Pim's brain as he hesitated at the corner of the Commerce Building before turning into Pennsylvania Avenue. He knew that sound now—a machine gun! He had read of machine guns. He never before had heard the growl of the weapon. But it *had* to be that.

Long training forced Penny Pim to snap a glance at his strap watch. It was 6:32 P. M. Then he looked west on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Penny froze. His serious, pale blue eyes widened and his lower jaw, just a bit on the receding type, hung. A Coldstream Guards mustache, as blonde as his sparse hair, dangled on his upper lip.

He was too frightened to run. His knees were jelly beneath him. But his keen eyes took in everything. Each of the dozen or more sights was immediately indexed and cross-indexed—he used the Dewey Decimal system for filing all mental pictures—and then painstakingly, but with incredible speed, tucked away for future reference.

Penny Pim had a system. It wasn't mnemonics or anything like that, and he didn't recognize it as an occupational disease, which it was. For Penny Pim could no more keep from seeing things, both large and small, and storing them away in his memory than an adding machine operator can help getting the correct total of a string of figures if the right keys are pressed. Penny saw everything and retained

those items he wished to remember.

Sometimes merely seeing and remembering things bored him, so then he would add the numbers on the automobile licenses that passed, or some other simple task like that. He could easily keep a running total of them, no matter how swiftly they sped by. At times, the result ran up into hundreds of millions.

The machine gun sputtered once more.

**T**HEN, with the speed of a battery of candid cameras with lens set at 1/300, Penny Pim's amazing brain began to file away pictures. He ran forward, bent down over the figure on the sidewalk.

*ITEM*—Dead man's face unrecognizable because of bullets. Tall, gray hair, white linen suit spotted with blood, cream-colored summer felt hat off to one side. Something shiny dangling from right wrist. (Filed in mental drawer G-0013, given over to gruesome sights.)

*ITEM*—Man's leg from thigh down disappearing in rear end of black sedan. Dark blue trousers, white shoe. The man in hurry. Shoe either freshly polished or new as it was gleaming white. (Miscellaneous file P-2169 devoted to unknown but interesting people.)

*ITEM*—Black Pierce-Arrow sedan, 1936 model, just gathering speed. Virginia license plate, RH-1,016,-538. Tag bent at lower left corner. Rear curtain down. Scratch at edge of right rear fender. (File A-11 where other mental pictures of fine automobiles were placed which he desired for his own.)

*ITEM*—Tires: new Goodyears, chain style tread. Spare a bit dark with road wear. Patent lock open on spare. No tire cover showing. Tires apparently a bit under-inflated.

*ITEM*—Car turned south off Pennsylvania Avenue. Probably headed for Potomac River bridge and a Virginia hideout.

*ITEM*—Taxicab driver, Mike Duffy, Cab Drivers' License No. 490, first on scene after himself. Time: 6:33:09 P. M.

"Jeeze!" gasped Mike Duffy, cab driver, in wide-eyed excitement.

"I—er—believe he—he's dead," Penny Pim choked. It was the first time he had seen horrible death from so close a vantage point. As excited as he was, his twenty years of training at occupations necessitating careful observation did not fail him. He had seen times of stress before, always mental of course, and each time he had come through with flying colors, even if weak-kneed with excitement.

Penny Pim turned in some anger as he was unceremoniously jostled aside. He saw a park policeman, Shield #3192, take over. Other people pushed into the horrified circle. Cars stopped on the Avenue, their occupants rushing to join the morbid and white-faced throng around the dead man.

A squad car with two policemen squealed to a stop. The uniformed men shoved the crowd back, leaving the first policeman, Penny Pim and Mike Duffy closest to the dead man.

"What'd you see, you?" the park policeman snapped at Mike Duffy.

"I—I ain't seen nothin', Officer. I had to put on brakes to keep from havin' a red sedan run me down. Musta

been the—the murder car. I—I turned the corner, sor, an' seen the poor dead man. This gentleman," Mike Duffy pointed at Penny Pim, "was bendin' over the dead gentleman when I stopped at the curb, sor."

The park policeman wheeled on Penny, eyed him with an expression on his face that showed he wasn't pleased. "Well," he snapped, "what did you see?" He said it in a way that told he didn't expect a great deal in the way of helpful information.

"I—I don't know who killed him, sir, but I've a description of the car." Penny was a trifle embarrassed at the attention.

"You have?" The park policeman was frankly astonished. "Well, you're the first witness I ever had with sense enough to look around. Say-y-y!" The park policeman pointed to the shiny thing dangling from the dead man's right wrist. "This guy must've escaped from the law! He broke his handcuff, and—"

"Ridiculous!" Penny snorted. "The man must have been carrying a brief case of some kind with something important in it. Anyway, that half a handcuff on his wrist doesn't look strong enough for police work, does it?"

"Did you see a brief case?" insisted the amazed policeman.

Penny admitted he hadn't. "But I can easily reconstruct the scene and see one," he said quietly. Penny had control of himself now. "If you'll look closely you can see where the chain has been freshly cut with heavy wire pliers. People don't chain things to their wrists unless they're valuable. Therefore, what the man had in the brief case must have been worth a lot of money."

"Pretty good figuring, mister!"

Penny swerved as the new voice came from behind him. The policeman stiffened, snapped a quick salute.

"Captain Linn, sir," he said, respect and relief in his tone.

Penny Pim blinked. He had heard of Captain Linn, ranking detective of the Metropolitan Police of Washington. Linn was tall, had a thin and cynical face, keen gray eyes.

An ambulance gong clanged harshly. Under cover of the confusion of picking up the dead man, Penny Pim mopped perspiration from his high forehead. The handkerchief slipped from his hand, still a bit shaky, and fell to the spot on the sidewalk just occupied by the dead man. He shivered a bit as he retrieved it, gingerly folding and replacing it in his coat pocket.

"I think," Detective Captain Linn said, "it might be a good thing if you came along with me to headquarters and told what happened. You apparently kept your eyes open." His smile was a trifle taut.

Penny nodded. He didn't know what he'd tell Naomi, but this was a case of necessity. Detective Linn ushered him into a squad car and it sired its way clear of the machines pack-jamming the avenue.

"WELL," Captain Linn said pleasantly, a long blank of paper before him on the desk, "we'll start by asking your name."

"Pennington Pim, sir," Penny said.

"Now," Captain Linn went on, "what were you doing at the scene of murder?"

"I was walking from work. That's at the Government Printing Office near the river, lower Fourteenth Street. I always walk as the exercise is beneficial."

"No doubt," Linn said drily, look-

ing over Penny's pale face, his soft body. "What do you do there?"

"I'm chief inspector. I look for errors in the printed currency. I've been there ten years. Before that I was in Commerce as head of the file room. I was in charge of all filing," Penny said proudly. "Millions of filing compartments. Well—almost." He grinned. "Actually, 978,023. I was sent to the Treasury Department to get the files in shape. Liked the work there and stayed on as an inspector."

"Ever see the dead man before?"

"No, sir. I know where he works, though."

"You know where he works!" shrilled the amazed detective. "How do you know where he works if you never saw him before?"

Penny Pim blushed. "W-well, I made a slight misstatement there, Mr. Linn. I should have said I know the work he's engaged in."

"And that is?" Linn snapped.

"He's an engraver, sir. If you'd noticed his hands you would have seen they were discolored, the fingernails particularly. They weren't the same color of a photographer's fingernails who does his own developing, so I assumed he must be an engraver."

"You're pretty observant, aren't you?"

Penny blushed again. "I—I've just been trained to look at things. My work, you know." Penny smiled as if that explained everything. He smoothed his Coldstream Guards mustache with thumb and forefinger.

"You got the number of the license plate?"

"Oh, certainly. It was almost the first thing I did. But I'll have to do a bit of figuring first." He motioned to a pad of paper. "Mind putting down two numbers as I call them?"



Brow washboarded into a puzzled frown, Linn nodded.

"Put down 931,738,206," Penny Pim instructed evenly.

Detective Captain Linn growled, but he put down the long figure in blunt numerals.

"Now," Penny said thoughtfully, "take it from 932,754,744. The remainder will be the number of the car."

"What are you handing me?" Linn snarled, his thin face blazing angrily. "I've a good notion to send you to St. Elizabeth's. You're completely nuts! What you need is a mental check-up."

"I forgot to explain," Penny apologized. "You see, when I walk down the street I add automobile license plates as a—a sort of pastime. The last license I added today brought the total to 931,738,206. After I saw the plate on the Pierce-Arrow I subconsciously added it to the total I already had and got 932,754,744. Naturally, the difference between the two numbers would be the license number of the Pierce-Arrow. Quite simple, eh? Er—er have you subtracted yet?"

"You mean you can carry figures like that in your head!" the detective shrilled, mouth hanging wide.

"Oh, certainly," Penny shrugged. "That really is nothing. Wait until you try to add all the numbers on an hour's run of twenty or fifty dollar bills. Now, *that* calls for concentration!"

Detective Linn busied himself with his subtraction, finally looked up. "I get the number as 1,016,538."

"Exactly! Only it's 1 dash 016 dash 538," Penny explained. Then: "Now put Robin Hood in front of it."

"Robin Hood!" Linn asked, frowning.

"I mean the initials RH," Penny

explained, again apologetically. "As it was a Pierce-Arrow and the initials in front of the license number were R and H, I put the name of Robin Hood down in my memory to tie up with the 'Arrow' part of the car's make. That's pure mnemonics and a rather amateurish method of memory."

"I see," Linn sneered. "Robin Hood shot arrows, eh?"

"Precisely, sir," Penny beamed happily.

There was a knock at the door and Detective Linn pressed a button on his desk and a uniformed policeman came in. "We've found out who the dead man is, Cap'n," he said. "It's a guy by the name of Carveth. He's an engraver, has a small plant in Baltimore. Used to be with the Bureau of Engraving here in Washington."

"Engraver—*engraver!*" Linn flashed a look at Penny Pim, who nodded brightly. "Well, I'll be damned!" Then, brusquely: "Take this number, Brophy, and see who owns it. It's a Virginia license." Linn tore the sheet from the stretch pad and handed it over. The policeman nodded and left the room. Linn rubbed his pointed chin, eyed Penny. "Let's have the rest of it, Pim," he snapped.

PENNY nodded and talked while the detective put it down on the report. Across the room from him, Penny saw six rows of license tags on the wall. There were eight tags in each row, forty-eight in all, and each was from a different state. Penny assumed they were samples of the tags from every state in the union so that the Washington police could keep a check on the style and coloring used by each. Penny was always soothed by numbers, especially when they were neatly arranged in rows and readily

seen. As he talked, Penny added the first row subconsciously. It took longer than ordinary, about ten seconds, because a part of his brain was talking to the detective about the murder.

He finished, sat back. Detective Linn nodded. "So you like to look at things, eh? Count 'em, too?" His eyes went for the first time to the forty-eight license plates. There was a triumphant look on his face as he snapped his gaze back to Penny Pim.

In one flash of his eyes, consuming only four seconds of time, Penny added the final rows of numbers.

"Suppose," suggested Linn, a wise smirk on his face, "you tell me the total of those license plates on the wall. I'll give you five minutes, but no writing on paper!" He sat back, well pleased with himself.

Penny grinned to himself. He already had the correct total firmly fixed in his mind. But he wanted Detective Captain Linn to be more amazed than he would have been had the total been given at that instant. He nodded, flashed a glance up and down each row of figures, turned to the detective.

"The correct total is 5,121,952," Penny said evenly.

"I'll be—"

The door opened and Brophy came in. He shook his head. "No such number ever was issued in Virginia, sir."

"I thought so," Linn snarled. He swung on Penny Pim. "You're just a show-off, Pim! You didn't remember that plate number. You're just one of those smart guys who forever run to the police when anything happens. You're full of theories, know more about detective work than Sherlock Holmes. Just one of the mugs filled with melodrama who has to be in the limelight and get their names in the paper. Bah!" He savagely tore the

end from a slim stogie, held a match to the tip. "I'll show you up, you little punk!" He snapped up at Brophy. "Take down the numbers of those license plates and then add 'em on the machine in the outer office. I want this squirt made as sick as he looks."

"But, sir," Penny protested, "that is the number on the license tag! I *couldn't* be wrong! I've never made mistakes with small numbers like these. It's impossible—"

"Shut up!" roared Detective Linn, sitting back in his chair. He snapped: "Just because you happened to guess Carveth's occupation doesn't mean you're not a show-off." He smoked in silence while the puzzled Brophy laboriously took down the numbers, walked from the room. In five minutes he was back, excitement showing on his face. He handed the long strip from the adding machine to his superior.

Detective Captain Linn looked at the total, compared it with the one he had jotted down on the pad. He frowned, blinked, let ash from the stogie dribble to his coat without notice. He looked across at Penny Pim, said slowly:

"You're right, by thunder! The total is 5,121,952!"

Penny Pim nodded, vastly pleased. "I can give you the total of each row, sir, or call out the individual numbers if you wish without looking. That isn't difficult at all. It should prove I didn't make a mistake on the license number of that black sedan."

"Maybe—maybe," Linn nodded, but there was a hard look now in his keen eyes. He looked up at Brophy. "You got something to tell me?"

"Yes, sir," Brophy said. He stepped close to Penny, said: "The boys've been questioning that cab driver, Mike

Duffy. First thing he said was the murder car was *red*, a Caddie sedan. Then he saw something on the ground after the dead man, this Carveth, was moved, and—"

"Yeah, Brophy, I know," Detective Linn said from lips that did not move. "I was waiting to see if this Pim would come clean." He glared at Penny. "I saw you wipe perspiration from your face at the scene of the murder, Pim, saw you *accidentally*—" he emphasized the word—"drop that handkerchief over something on the ground. That something under the dead man was a crumpled piece of paper! You tried to hide it. You gathered it in your handkerchief and put it in your coat pocket! You're good at adding, Pim, so add *that* up for me! It's all a stall to try and throw the police off the scent. You got your facts *too* good, my buckaroo! You're in with the gang that bumped Carveth! Why, I don't yet know." Linn got to his feet. "Pim, I arrest you as an accessory to the murder of Carveth! Give me that handkerchief in your coat pocket!"

Face pale, mouth wide and blonde little Coldstream Guards mustache trembling, Penny pulled the handkerchief from his coat pocket. First of all, he knew the sedan was *black*. Yes, he knew there was something in the handkerchief, all right, but he'd wanted to see it first. On the spur of the moment Penny had concealed evidence from the police. He didn't know why he had done it. He only knew some strange reason made him want to run down the murderers of the man who had lain bleeding at his feet.

And now he was jailed for murder! What would Naomi think? She'd never speak to him again. And tonight, a beautiful proposal of marriage filed word for word in Drawer M-A 1 in

his mind, he had intended asking her that all important question.

He put a white hand to his breast, felt his thumping heart. He always had led a quiet and sedentary life. The excitement of the machine-gunning, the kaleidoscopic sequence of events, his misjudged motive with the note—all contributed to the weak feeling that filled him. He felt as if he was about to faint.

"Ah-ha!"

Detective Captain Linn held a square of crumpled paper in his hand, waved it triumphantly before Penny's startled eyes.

"Ah-*hauua!*" repeated the detective, face flushed. "You *did* have something to do with this murder, Pim! Listen to this, Brophy." Linn read slowly:

Got word from Pim. Tonight is best time. Pick him up front Government Printing Office, lower 14th Street, about 6:25. Party will be in front Commerce Building about 6:30. Don't worry about Pim. All alibis worked out and no need worrying about the dumb police.

"No name signed to it," Linn snapped, "but I'll guarantee to sweat that out of you!" He stepped forward, caught Penny by the shoulder. "Pennington Pim," he rasped, "I arrest you for murder—" He stopped, stared in amazement at his suspect.

Penny Pim had fainted.

"**N**AOMI, I love you! I want you to be my wife, to share my life. I have money saved up, own a lot over in Alexandria where we can have a little cottage. I only make a small amount each year, dearest Naomi, but we can live well on it. I love you, my dear Naomi—"

The proposal of marriage Penny had painstakingly composed and written down so as to be more readily re-

membered came easily from his lips. He knew every word of it, knew where each comma, semi-colon and period was placed. He often recited it backwards to himself so as to prove he knew it perfectly. It went like this:

"Naomi dear my, you love I. It on well live can we but, Naomi dearest, year each amount small a make only I."

It was childishly simple.

Penny Pim opened his eyes, saw a laughing guard looking through the cell bars at him. Raucous sounds came from either side up and down the cell block. The sounds came from prisoners watching him wake to consciousness. Penny blushed. He knew he'd been proposing to Naomi in his dreams. That he was proposing aloud to the edification of a group of bums surrounding his cell was apparent—and embarrassing.

"Thinkin' of the girl friend?" sneered the guard. "You'd better shut up. My boarders don't like too much noise." His laugh was echoed by the frowzy prisoners.

Penny looked at his wrist watch. He groaned. He knew Naomi long ago had left for her apartment. And he was in jail! He had tried to aid the police. He couldn't help it if he saw things, remembered them. It was part of his makeup. His job depended upon his keen eyes and a prodigious memory. And he was *chief* inspector.

When he was with the Department of Commerce he had kept hundreds of thousands of things in his incredible brain. Now, with the Treasury, he must scrutinize every bill coming from the tiers of presses, immediately recognize a hairline smudge, a microscopic blob of misplaced ink or hundreds of other minute errors. And while doing that he had learned to add the serial numbers on the bills. It made the hours

pass quickly, gave his brain as well as his eyes something to do.

Another thing Penny Pim knew was hot money. There were thousands of bills throughout the country listed as "hot." These bills had been stolen or paid out as ransom kidnaping cases, and the numbers recorded. But often the money got back into circulation because bank clerks would fail to note the numbers. The bills would become worn, eventually to return to Washington for redemption and to be destroyed. It was also Penny's job to look over this worn and tattered currency to see if any of the numbers were "hot." If hot money was found then it was traced back to the bank sending it in and an effort made by the G-men or T-men to see if the crooks were still in that locality. Penny Pim had helped capture several criminals in that manner for he had memorized all the vast series of numbers on the hot bank notes. It was an exhilarating task for his peculiar type of brain.

Penny looked up as he heard footsteps coming along the corridor. He saw Detective Captain Linn motion to the jailer, heard keys jangle. The next instant the door swung wide.

"I don't know how I ever can apologize, Mr. Pim," Detective Linn said seriously. "I made a mistake, that's all, I've been looking you up, have checked your superiors with the Treasury. By checking the time you left the printing office against a normal rate of walking, I find you could not possibly have been in with that gang. Everything you've said is true. You're free, Mr. Pim." He grinned.

"All right," Penny grated out. He was very angry and the laughter of the jailer and the prisoners a while before hadn't helped him. "It's easy

enough for you to say that. But what about my—my girl friend who waited for me? How about her? She's mad now, probably went off with—with—" Penny was making it harder than he knew it was, "with some other fellow! And all on account of you stupid police just as set down in that note!"

"Yeah," Linn snapped, angry now. "I still don't understand that note. It's got your name in it twice. You should feel damn' lucky to get off at all. You're still under suspicion, my buckaroo! Now beat it before I change my mind."

"I don't know anything about that note, Linn," Penny snapped, pale face taut. "I—I did see it on the ground, wondered why you or that park policeman didn't see it first. I—I wanted to help solve the case, pull the note out here at headquarters and show it to you. I—I suppose it looked like I *was* in with the gang for you saw the note after all. And the color of the sedan was black, not red like that dumb cab driver says! Now that you've treated me as you have I'll just let you work the rest out for yourself. I'm pretty sure I could lead you right to the murderers, but now I'll let you find them!"

Penny turned sharply on his heel, walked out. Strangely, his brain now was clear, was racing along with blinding speed. He knew exactly what procedure he was going through to find the murderers of Carveth!

**T**WO blocks down the street he saw a pay station in a cigar store. He walked in, got long distance operator. A minute later he was talking to the warden of the Virginia State Prison.

"I—cr—I'm calling for Detective Captain Linn, Washington Metropolitan Police," Penny lied easily. Then:

"I believe you make all the automobile license tags in your state? I thought so. Give me the name of the last man released from the stamping department. Ummmm. Home in Alexandria, eh? Kiki Mawson, eh? Owned a garage there, did he? Thanks a lot, warden." Penny hung up.

His first deduction had turned out splendidly. He hadn't been fooled by that license tag. It was of authentic manufacture, he had been sure. He also knew Virginia state convicts made the tags. It was as easy as adding ten six-place figures together. That tag must have been manufactured by a convict in the state stamping factory, smuggled out to the gang! And it was natural to suppose the last man leaving the factory was the one responsible.

The police could look up the number of that tag as much as they pleased; it wasn't even on the records. Yet it would never arouse suspicion as it was authentic down to the last detail, was made like all the rest of the Virginia tags, on state machinery and with the real dies! It was pretty clever, Penny thought.

That the last man released from prison who worked in the stamping department lived in Alexandria, just across the river from Washington, was a stroke of luck. His name was Kiki Mawson and he had been paroled two weeks before, had reported each Saturday night to Alexandria police as required. And Kiki Mawson was a mechanic, had owned a garage when he was caught receiving property. He also had been mixed up with a wire-tapping gang operating out of Pimlico, the race track—

Pimlico—PIM!

That's where that name of his had come in! Penny saw the words of the note as if they were in front of him.

"Got word from Pim." Also further along in the note: "Don't worry about Pim." The note referred to some person the writer had met in Pimlico! The name of the track had merely been abbreviated into "Pim."

Penny Pim grinned to himself as the taxicab turned right off the bridge on the far side of the Potomac, headed for the river drive leading to Alexandria. Penny paid off the driver at King Street, walked to the drug store on the corner and made for the phone booth.

He was taking a chance on the Southern R.R. freight office being open, and it was. In a minute he had the night freight agent on the telephone. "Who's talking?" Penny asked softly.

"This is Holland, night freight agent, sir."

"Oh, yes, Holland," Penny said, now making his voice gruff. "By the way, how many pieces of sheet steel were in that last shipment I got from you?"

"Just a minute, sir. This is Mr. Rawson, isn't it?"

"No. Name's Mawson," Penny corrected with an excited grin.

"I meant Mawson," the freight agent said. There was a pause for a minute and Penny dimly heard the rustle of papers. Then: "There were eighteen pieces, Mr. Mawson. You got all of them?"

"Yes," Penny said quickly, "but there seems to be some mistake. I got a bill for them this afternoon, but the address was wrong. By the way, what address have you on the waybill?"

"At the garage, sir. Let's see. The address is Gem Garage, 8418 Ort Mill Road. That's you, isn't it?"

"Yes," Penny said, voice shrill with excitement. "That's all." He replaced

the receiver on the hook, walked from the booth.

Ten minutes later, behind the wheel of a Drive-It-Yourself flivver, Penny Pim was headed toward the Ort Mill Road. According to the way the numbers ran the garage must be several miles out. Penny guessed it was a combination soft drink spot and garage, possibly with living quarters attached.

Penny came to the crest of a hill, stopped the car. Facing him at a turn in the road below was a cluster of lights. He took a knife with a long blade from his pocket, got to the road and walked to the rear of the car. After a minute of sawing with the blade he managed to get the point through the casing. There was a sharp hissing of air. Penny got back into the car, released the brakes and coasted toward the cluster of lights in the little valley and the electric sign which read *Gem Garage*.

THERE were three men in the room. Two of them looked at the third, a man wearing a cab driver's badge on his shirt. The number was #490.

"Go ahead, Mike," one of the men prompted.

"Well, like I said, Mawson," Mike Duffy began, "I filled the police full of wrong info just like you told me to do. I told 'em the car that almost runs me down is red and they believe that. I says it was a Super-8 Caddie instead of a Pierce-Arrow and that it has a District license. Gunner," he nodded to a youth with burning black eyes sitting opposite him, "happens to drop the note from his pocket, I suppose, because when they picks up the stiff I sees it."

"Then this guy, Pim's his name, who comes running up makes like he was

wiping sweat. He drops his handkerchief and picks up the note. Pim is the sort who likes to shoot off his face, knows everything. I knew he'd tell the coppers about the note. Well, I goes on down to headquarters, as was planned, and tells the dicks about seeing this Pim palm the note. I tells it before he does and it sure gets him in bad.

"The door is open four-five times and I overhears him telling everything he knows. And, Mawson, it was pulchery! That guy sure uses his eyes. But when I tells 'em Pim picks up the note and was hidin' it they locks him up. He'll be in there from now on. They'll throw the key away. I—"

"Wait a minute," Mawson interrupted. Kiki Mawson was a big man, had a bald head, small eyes set close together in a prison-gray, puffy face, a cruel mouth. "You say this guy's name is Pim?"

"Yeah," Duffy nodded, "something Pim. Didn't get his first name, but his last name is Pim."

"I'll be damned!" Mawson laughed. "That note has the word 'Pim' in it twice! Only it refers to Gunner here." Mawson jerked his thumb at the little man with the burning eyes. "It was from Hugon and he's referring to the man from Pimlico, Gunner Wry! Hugon, by the way, is due here tonight with the jack. We picked Gunner up down in front of the Government Printing Office on lower 14th Street. I let him see the note and he must've stuck it in his pocket, then dropped it when he made a dash for the brief case after Tommy-gunning Carveth. Jeeze," his laugh was loud, "it's a good thing he *did* drop it! This Pim punk will take the rap for us!"

"But he got all the dope on the car, this time, the fact that Carveth had a

brief case chained to his wrist!" Duffy shrilled.

"Yeah, but that note'll put him in the chair, Mike," Mawson laughed. He lit a cigarette.

"Maybe so," Duffy worried. "But he saw the kind of tires, the bent place in the fender, knew the car was armored—"

"How'd he know that?" Mawson asked incredulously.

"Well, he saw it was mighty low on the rubber and guessed the rest, I suppose. Those steel plates weigh down on the tires pretty heavy, you know. Hell, he even saw Gunner's new shoes!"

"Uh?" Gunner looked up, then at his spotless shoes.

Mawson laughed. "Don't you worry, Gunner. Mr. Pim will have nice boarding for a long time. What if this Pim did see you? That was a good guess about the car being armored, though. He's a smart guy at that." Mawson nodded.

**T**HERE was a knock at the door and Mawson growled: "Come in," and moved his hand near his left armpit. A man dressed in dirty coveralls entered the room. He was short, heavy, had a tanned face with an oil smudge across the chin. Mawson grinned. "Oh, it's you, Scotty. How's the gas and oil business?"

"Rotten," Scotty said, face in a frown. "I gotta guy out there in a push-it-yourself who's got a flat. Looks like the damn tire's been sliced with a knife. Looks phoney to me. Maybe he's—"

"You guys got a case of the heebie-jeebies," Mawson jibed. "Go ahead and fix the tire and get him out of the way. You won't have to play garage-man after tonight, Scotty. But what's

the guy doing now? Suppose he'd followed you in here?"

"This guy!" Scotty laughed. "Don't be silly. He ain't got sense enough for that. I left him out there with a sody pop and he's—"

The telephone jangled and Mawson reached for it.

"Yeah, Mawson talking," he said. He listened for a few seconds, said: "Naw, I didn't phone you about steel plates. Sure, I got my shipment the other day. Oh, the second shipment's in, eh? What the hell! Don't you think I'd know if I called you? Oh. Oh-h-hh, I see—" Mawson slowly cradled the receiver. His face was pale, taut. His hand slipped to his left armpit and an automatic showed. When he spoke the words were low but the others could not mistake the urgency in them.

"It was the freight agent in Alexandria. Said when I talked to him a while ago he forgot to tell me the second shipment of plates for the other armored car was in. And I didn't phone him! That shows someone's on the trail! The coppers may be surrounding us right now!"

"Maybe this little guy with the yellow mustache is spying things out, Mawson," Scotty said excitedly. He felt of his pocket. "Hell, I left my gat in the drawer of the desk. It was so heavy—"

"Yellow mustache!" Mike Duffy shrilled, face strained. "Has he got yellow hair, big forehead—"

"That's the guy!" Scotty yelled. He turned toward the door.

"Golly, how'd he get outta jail?" Duffy shrilled.

"Wait!" The command snarled from Mawson. He held up his hand, motioned the others to gather around. "Listen, you guys. Scotty, you go back and stall with that puncture. We'll slip

around back and all jump him at once. Then we'll take that baby for a nice buggy ride—"

*"I don't think so, Mawson!"*

Penny Pim stood in the doorway! In his hand was an automatic which he held in a steady grip.

"Cripes, my gun!" Scotty snarled.

"It'd be too bad to get killed with your own gun," Penny said with a hard smile.

It was all incredible to Penny Pim. He couldn't quite understand it. Here he was holding up a gang of desperate criminals and he was as cool and collected as if he were inspecting ten-dollar bills as they came from the presses. But he was angry. Detective Linn had made him that way with his derisive laughter, his sneers and jibes.

"How the hell did you find us?" Mawson asked, pale face working. "I—I thought everything was covered."

"Just a matter of thinking things out and keeping my eyes open," Penny said modestly. He saw Duffy for the first time. "Ah, Duffy, eh? I had more than an idea you were mixed up in this. I saw you eyeing that note and ready to pick it up. I managed to beat you to it. Then, at headquarters, you saw a chance to frame me because my name was used in the note. Out in the garage I saw the black sedan and the counterfeit license tag is exactly as I gave it to Linn." He looked at Mawson. "Imagine the note referred to someone coming from Pimlico."

"Yeah, Gunner's from Pimlico," Mawson snarled. "It was pretty clever figuring that out and I don't see how you found me."

"Really rather simple, Mawson, and I'll tell you just to show how all crooks are caught." Penny explained about the automobile license and his deduction that it had been made by a convict



working in the state stamping factory. "Now all the items of which I made mental pictures check." His grin was triumphant. "Even to the killer's new shoes!"

"Jeeze!" Mawson looked at Penny and there was awe in his close-set eyes. "I oughta have a punk like you tied up with me. I sure could make a place for a guy with your head!"

"You'll do the tying up, Mawson," Penny said sternly. "Start in right now with Mike Duffy! There's some wire over there in the corner. Duffy, put your hands behind you. And, Mawson," there was no mistaking Penny's meaning, "don't make the mistake of doing a bad job of it."

"Damn, caught by a punk!" Mawson groaned as he tied up the taxi driver and turned toward the others.

"I imagine it's plates for a ten- or twenty-dollar bill that's behind all this," Penny offered in a casual tone.

"Well, you seem to know everything so I might as well tell you," Mawson growled, busy with the wire. "Yeah, a twenty. Carveth, the engraver, made 'em. They're photo-engraved with the blurry lines tooled out by hand. Carveth used to be in the Bureau of Engraving."

"And your machine-gunner killed him so there'd be one less to divide with," Penny stated. Then: "You're going to jail, Mawson, and I'm doing my best to see that all of you get the chair! And at the same time I'm showing up that hick of a detective, Linn! Yes, Mawson, you and the others will burn—"

"No, Mr. Big Talk, you're going to burn unless you drop that gat!"

Penny Pim froze. Something very hard was jamming into his backbone, pressing inexorably and menacingly. A gun!

"Hugon!" Mawson cried excitedly.

"HUGON!" Mawson again yelled relievedly. "Boy, am I glad to see you! Wait, I'll get this punk's gun."

He snatched the gun from Penny's lax hand and pocketed it. Then, close-set eyes wild with rage, gross face flushed, he slammed out with his fist. The hard knuckles connected with Penny's mouth, cut both lips. He tasted salty blood on his tongue and his knees began to melt beneath him. He groped out with both hands in an effort to catch hold of something. Again Mawson's knuckles slammed his face and he fell backward into merciful unconsciousness.

Penny opened his eyes to find his head was pounding like the automatic stamping machine that turned out half-dollars as if they were so many links of sausage. His shoulders ached; in fact, he felt bad all over. The men Mawson bound had been released and were glaring at him with cruel eyes from across the room.

He didn't like playing at detective. He wished he hadn't been so short with Detective Captain Linn. Right at the moment he would have welcomed Linn with open arms—no, that would take a lot of physical effort and he ached in every joint, felt as if many bones were broken.

A kick from Mawson's big foot brought Penny back to life. He sat up, wondered what the big red things were that he could see just by glancing downward. He decided after a moment that the red things were his swollen lips and the blood clotted on his Coldstream Guards mustache. He also decided he was in somewhat of a mess.

A man he had not seen before was eyeing him keenly. Penny decided it must be Hugon. The man nodded. "Yeah, he's a punk, all right. Better get rid of him—*quick!*"

Hugon was a tall man, with red hair

and strangely light blue eyes. He wore a perpetual frown on his face, and his mouth was so thin-lipped as to appear only a gash across his narrow face. He turned to Mawson, tapped a brief case he carried in his hand.

"Here's the fifty grand, Mawson. What you told me of this punk makes me want to close the deal in a hurry. He's smart and the way he worked things out is better than the lousy cops could've done. Maybe he found some way to tip 'em off. By the way, I brought the jack in fives, tens and twenties. My collections in New York have been pretty good the past few weeks so I got the jack in small bills and saved it for you. That's better than big money on a deal like this and you can get rid of it quicker. Suppose you count it up, give me the two sets of plates for the phony twenties and I'll shove off."

"That's the stuff," Mawson nodded. "We're blowing too. Miami on the five-ten plane in the morning. I've already reserved seats and was just waiting for you with the jack before sending Scotty for tickets."

Penny watched Mawson as he counted the stacks of neatly banded currency. He saw the plates on the table. He got slowly to his feet. Plates for printing currency were something he knew a lot about. He moved closer, looked them over with a critically appraising eye. They were masterpieces, all right. He saw they were a photo-engraved job but the blurry lines had been hand tooled so as to make them sharp.

They would pass an expert's eye—almost.

"Well, punk, what do you think of 'em?" Mawson rasped.

"Only fair," Penny managed to say through his split lips.

"Whatcha mean?" Hugon snarled, thin gash of a mouth straight across his face. He looked at Mawson. "You trying to put something over, Mawson? The deal was that the four plates were to be perfect."

Penny Pim laughed, his pale blue eyes sparkling with excitement. "If they're perfect why should he be selling them? Why shouldn't he keep them and turn out the counterfeit twenties himself? Ever think of *that*?"

"Say!" Hugon was instantly suspicious. He looked keenly at Penny. "From what Mawson says you're a real expert on this kind of stuff. Suppose you look 'em over. I brought a magnifying glass along so's to look at the plates myself. You take it." He reached into his pocket and handed over a large reading glass.

Penny took the glass and studied the plates for long minutes. They were good, very good, but he found a dozen minute places where mistakes had been made. A part of a decorative wreath that had stems shorter than the original, thirteen and a half lines in one place instead of fourteen long ones. Little things, yes, but glaring errors when the T-men and G-men got on the trail.

"The best way to do, Hugon," Penny said, "is to compare the plates with the real money here." He motioned to the stack of currency Hugon had brought in the brief case.

"Go ahead," Hugon snapped.

Penny reached for a stack of currency, riffled it through his fingers until he came to the twenty dollar bank notes. Suddenly he was very excited and his fingers trembled a bit. As he handled the worn bills a vague plan was taking shape behind his bulging forehead. He came to a bill, nodded for Hugon to look through the glass.

"Look at this corner decoration on the original, Hugon; and then at the plates. See how thick the lines are on the plate? Too thick. A Fed would spot them at once. Let me show you some more bad engraving. I can best point them out by using some of these fives and tens." He reached for a stack of them.

Penny arranged a number of the bills, one on top of the other. As he did so he pointed out where errors occurred on the plates. "Even though these are fives and tens, Hugon, they're engraved just like the twenties. Here is the same type of line and corner arrangement on this ten as you'll find on the twenty. See where the plate is wrong? You'd have a Fed on your trail—"

"That's enough, punks!"

**PENNY PIM** and Hugon looked up in startled surprise. Across the room Mawson stood tense with his three men. All had guns ready.

"Why—why, what's this?" Hugon shrieked, red face flaming.

"A stick-up," Mawson spat out, cruel lips twisted. "We're getting the jack *and* the plates! We were doing it anyway, Hugon. You came here by yourself. You and this punk, Pim, will take a ride together just before we leave for the Miami plane." He stepped forward, face taut, snapped: "Scotty, get some jack and drive over after the tickets. You can get to the airport and back in thirty minutes. Here's the jack."

Face white, Penny handed the stack of money he held in his hand to the raging Mawson. "T-T-There's j-just six hundred d-dollars there, M-Mawson," he said haltingly, voice hollow with foreboding.

"And that's just enough, punk."

Mawson snarled savagely. His fist *spatted* to the side of Penny's face as he grabbed the money. He handed it to Scotty, who nodded and raced from the room.

"Now," Mawson said nastily, "we've got a nice little wait. Punk, you and Hugon get across the room and sit on the floor. Gunner—" to the little man—"take Hugon's gat." He looked at his watch. "It's twelve-thirty now. We'll sit up the rest of the night. We gotta leave here about quarter of five in the morning. There's too many people on these roads now to try a rub-out. We'll wait. It's still dark at five and we can get rid of these punks on the way to the airport."

It was a long night. Penny Pim sat against the wall, his sore and protesting muscles screaming in agony whenever he moved. If there was only some way to be *sure!* He certainly was through playing detective. It wasn't the life for a—*for a man who had a girl like Naomi waiting!* He wondered what she was thinking. Was she very angry? Or just hurt because he failed to show up for the movie date?

A battered alarm clock on the table ticked off the long seconds, each one bringing him closer to eternity. There was no way out now. The chance he had taken was a big one, the—

"Boss, I'm getting the heebies. Let's take these punks out and get it over with." Gunner Wry jerked to his feet, eyes dancing crazily.

"What time is it?" Mawson asked with a yawn.

"After four," Scotty said sleepily. "I'm damn' tired of holding this gat on these two punks. My wrist feels like it's breaking. I'm with the Gunner, Mawson. Let's find a nice big ditch for these guys and then ride around a bit before the plane leaves."

"Well, okay," Mawson agreed. "You got the tickets? Each of us take one, see? We won't speak to each other on the plane." He looked across at Penny and Hugon. "All right, punks, hop up! We'll take a little ride and then—"

Dazed, body and head aching, Penny got slowly to his feet. If there was only some way he could gain time. His plan *had* to work, simply had to! If he had just another hour. . . .

Then Penny Pim threw back his head and laughed. It was a cackling, creaking sort of a laugh, but it expressed a sardonic mirth that was grating, almost hysterical.

"What the hell?" Mawson yelped, pasty face angrily red.

"The—the money!" Penny shrieked. "You—you think—you're getting away with it! Fools! You utter damned fools!"

"For a plugged copper I'd chop this guy in two!" Gunner Wry raised his Tommy-gun, thin face ascowl.

"Wait!" Mawson ordered. He swerved on Penny. "What you mean?"

"You fool!" Penny croaked. "Don't you realize all that money is hot? Sure, it's hot! Stolen money, ransom money! The number of every bill is on record in every bank and police department in America! They'll catch you before you even get to Miami!"

"Damn you, Hugon!" Mawson swerved, jerked up his gun.

A wild scream came from Penny's bruised lips. The grating keening of his shriek made Mawson jerk. The next moment Penny had the gunman's arm in both hands. He twisted, pulled. Somewhere he had read that *ju jitsu* was done by pulling and twisting. By an incredible piece of luck he did everything just right. Mawson parabolae over Penny's hunched-up back, crashed to the floor. Just before his

body hit Penny jerked once more and a bone cracked.

Hugon, face red and eyes flashing, jumped for Gunner Wry who was trying to raise his machine gun in the cramped room. The red-headed man got the gun. Gunner, body and muscles set for a terrific jerk, braced himself. Instead, Hugon pushed the gun and the butt of it got Gunner Wry in the throat. He fell back, gurgling a strangled scream.

Scotty and Mike Duffy converged on Penny for a quick kill. Hugon turned, panting hard, at Penny's wild scream of alarm. He jumped forward, made for Duffy. The taxi driver pulled trigger and the bullet caught Hugon in the center of the forehead. Duffy yelled, turned the gun on Penny Pim.

Penny saw the man's finger tighten on the trigger, saw the flesh whiten. He threw himself forward the instant the shot sounded. Something terribly hot flashed through his shoulder. Dimly, he heard a fusillade of shots from far away, the crashing of a door. Then unconsciousness again swooped down and enveloped him. . . .

**P**ENNY PIM awoke to a feeling of oppression. He couldn't breathe, couldn't suck enough air into his straining lungs.

"Take it easy, fellow," a soft voice told him.

Penny opened his eyes, looked up. Staring down at him, keert blue eyes understanding, was a man. The clean-cut face relaxed into a smile. "I'm Grant, Treasury Department," he said. "It took us three hours to get the message, Mr. Pim, but we finally got it through our thick skulls. It was more than cleverness. You're a genius, young man!"

"M-Message?" a voice croaked.

Penny turned his eyes with a mighty effort, saw Mawson staring at him, his close-set eyes venomous but puzzled.

The T-man grinned. "Sure, a message. Mr. Pim recognized at once that all the money Hugon was giving you for the plates was hot. Hugon collected it from fifty or more different cases in the New York rackets." He flashed an admiring look at Penny Pim. "Maybe you're feeling well enough to tell it, Mr. Pim," he suggested.

Penny nodded. "Sure, Mr. Grant. I—I knew it would get into circulation tonight as Scotty was going to pay for the plane tickets. I—I managed to have just the right amount ready for Mawson when he sent Scotty for them. While I was comparing the money with the plates I arranged the bills to spell out a message. A certain bank note's number told me it was from the Apperson extortion case, in New York. Another number was one I remembered from the Halpern kidnaping case. Air-line ticket offices watch out for hot money more than the banks even for crooks always try to make a getaway by air.

"All banks, ticket offices, and places where there is a big turnover in currency, have orders not to disturb the order in which the bills are placed, but to call the G- or T-men at once. The ticket seller apparently kept his head and did just that. I spelled out, using

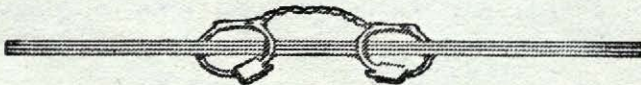
the numbers on the bank notes in a special case as the key, the words: HELP—8418 ORT MILL ROAD—HELP T-MEN. The "H's" were bills from the Halpern case and whose numbers the T-men had on file, the "O's" came from the Offenburger case, in Newark, and so on. I picked an H, D, A and H for the address of the Gem Garage, as they are the 8th, 4th, 1st and 8th letters of the alphabet." Penny closed his eyes, shook his aching head. "I—I guess that's about all. Oh, I'm so tired, so—"

"You're a real detective, Mr. Pim," Grant said softly. "I wish I had some men like you in my division!"

"Just—just an accidental detective, Mr. Grant, and—and really rather interesting work," Penny Pim said weakly. He smiled with strained effort, whispered: "But I showed up the great Detective Linn, my—my buckaroo!" His head lolled back. Before his dazed eyes materialized the features of Naomi. A twisted grin crossed his battered face. He wondered if he'd forgotten that proposal of marriage. He'd have to brush up on it. How did it go now?

"Naomi dear my, you love I," Penny Pim whispered. "It on well live can we but—Naomi dearest—year each—amount — small — a — make — only —I—"

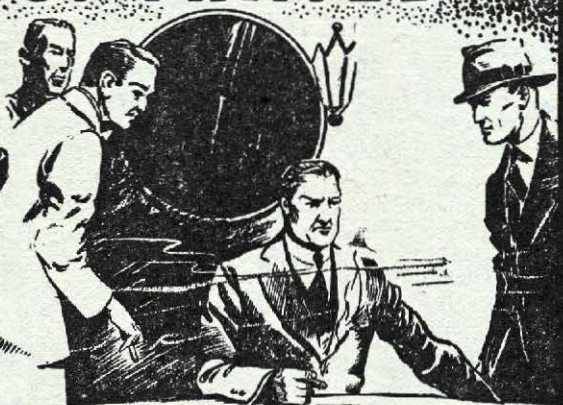
"Poor fellow." T-man Grant said gravely, "he's completely out of his head!"



# ILLUSTRATED



Meyer  
**Frankenberg**



## "HOT" BONDS II

By the spring of 1935, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's search for the ring of "hot bond" artists who had stolen \$4,000,000 in securities from Wall Street financial houses had reached an impasse. Bernard Klein, leader of the gang had been trapped and was in a French prison. Meyer Frankenberg, the ex-pickpocket, was still at large.



For months suspects were watched without results until a tapped telephone line between Florida and New York disclosed that three men were to meet for the disposal of a "piece"—in Criminal Argot, a stolen bond. G-men planted themselves in a New York hotel lobby and seized Charley Hartman, "Spilly" Evans and Ben Espy.



Espy got away—the G-men wanted to trail him. Later they took him by crowding him against the wall of a house with their auto. He was ready to talk.

Coming Next Week—

# CRIMES

By STOKRIS ALLAN



AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, A RAID ON AN APARTMENT IN KELSEY CITY, FLORIDA, PRODUCED JOE BEDELLI, BROADWAYITE, ROCCO "THE WOLF" DE GRASSI AND HIS BROTHER, GEORGE. G-MEN FINE-COMBED THE PLACE BUT THEIR SEARCH WAS FUTILE UNTIL, HIDDEN IN A SACK OF LIMA BEANS THEY FOUND A \$100,000 HOT BOND!

FRANKENBERG AND OVER A MILLION IN "PIECES" WAS STILL MISSING. TO THE SURPRISE OF U.S. ATTORNEY J.J. DOWLING, THE EX-DIP GAVE HIMSELF UP AND PLEADED GUILTY—NOT OF STEALING BONDS—BUT, OF TRYING TO SELL THEM.



Bedelli



Rocco "The Wolf" De Grassi



Geo. De Grassi



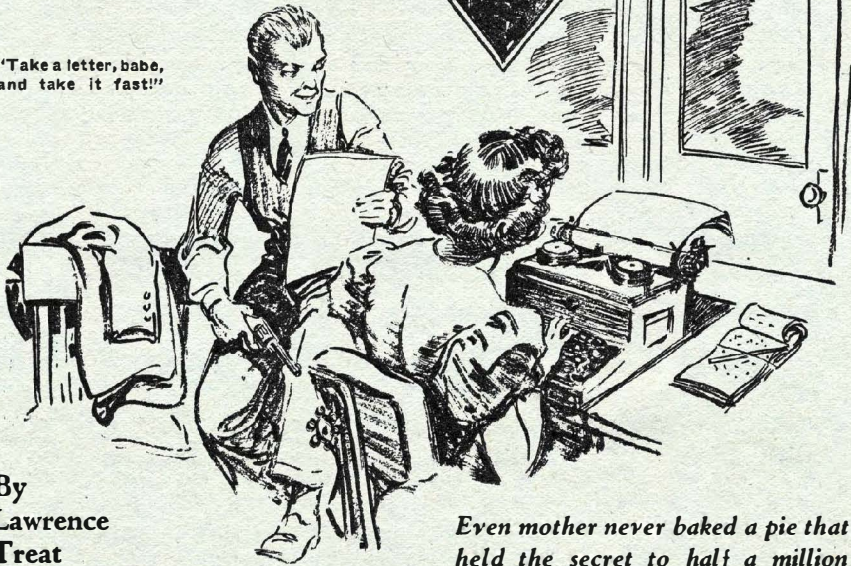
SENTENCE WAS DEFERRED ON HIS PROMISE TO RETRIEVE WHAT HE COULD OF THE HOT BONDS. A FEW DAYS LATER, DOWLING WAS HAND-ED A KEY TO A SUBWAY STATION LOCKER. IN THE BOX WERE OVER A MILLION OF THE STOLEN SECURITIES.

FRANKENBERG WAS SENTENCED TO ONLY A YEAR AND A DAY, NO DOUBT BECAUSE OF THE RETURN OF ALL THOSE MISSING "PIECES". THE TRIO TAKEN IN NEW YORK PLEADED GUILTY TO SIMILAR CHARGES AND DREW MINIMUM TERMS.

BEDELLI AND THE DE GRASSIS ARE APPEALING A GUILTY VERDICT BROUGHT IN BY THE FIRST WOMAN JURY SITTING IN A FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT. LOSS OF AN APPEAL WILL MEAN FOUR YEARS IN PRISON FOR EACH.

# Proof of the Pudding

"Take a letter, babe,  
and take it fast!"



By  
Lawrence  
Treat

Author of "Lead a Horse," etc.

*Even mother never baked a pie that  
held the secret to half a million  
dollars*

**P**EPPEY little Flannagan looked like a cross between a cherub and a featherweight champ but he felt like a man trying to chop down a tree with a penknife. The case was two days old and stale, washed out.

He had come up to the north-woods village of Smyrna because Barton Seely sent for him. Seely, broad-shouldered, with round handsome features under his dark hair, looked out of place in the tiny cell behind the sheriff's office. Too big for it. Too prosperous, too well fed, too healthy despite the worry in his deep brown eyes.

But he was dangerously close to

hysteria as he shouted through the rusty bars of the jail. "You got a wire from me? Then you're Flannagan. Listen—you know why they have me here—assault with intent to kill. They can give me ten years for it. Realize what that is? Know what it means to a man like me? Ten years. It's crazy. But even Tannick—he's my lawyer, came all the way up from New York—even Tannick says they can get away with it if I don't run."

Flannagan screwed up his sharp squirrel of a face. "You're going off the deep end, Seely. I never saw you before in my life. You send for a first class investigator and when I get here you put on a scene like a chorus girl



in a jam. Want me to sit down and have a good cry with you or what?"

Seely shook his head. "I'm all up in the air—anybody would be. But you're right, I guess. I'm acting like—like a—"

"Like an idiot," supplied Flannagan pleasantly. "And that's charitable. Suppose you tell me what happened. You and Warren Lamport were on a hunting trip. Who's Lamport?"

"Manages some of my properties, but promotion of high class real estate developments is his specialty. Best man at it in the country."

Seely's jaw snapped with the first decisive words he'd pronounced since he was jailed. Flannagan drawled, "So?" in a soothing tone.

"So we came up here. Just the pair of us and my man Glidden. I have a hunting shack that I use every year or two. I shouldn't have taken Warren. We'd been disagreeing about things. It's no secret, Flannagan, so I may as well tell you. He's got a sharp temper in him and I guess I have too. We scrapped on the way up, scrapped in the woods and scrapped when we got back for the night. We even scrapped over the pudding."

"This a nursery tale?"

"The pudding," went on Seely, as if he hadn't heard. "There's no stove in the shack and Glidden did the cooking over an open fireplace. Makes it more like a camp. Glidden claimed you couldn't cook desserts on it, and Lamport said he was an ass and he'd show him. So Lamport mixed stuff in a bowl and called it a pudding. I was cleaning my gun. I got sarcastic and we had unpleasant words. Glidden went to chop wood and I went outside to cool off. Lamport put his pudding on to cook and—what's the use, anyhow?"

Little Flannagan snapped like a dog

herding a steer into the corral. "I come six hundred miles and now you're scared I'll get the goods on you instead of fixing up a phony case. Listen, Seely—you know who I am or you wouldn't have sent for me. I go after the facts, and if you're clean on this I'll get you free. But so help me, if you shot Lamport I'll nail it on you so tight you can't squirm out with a crowbar. Or with a million dollars. Want to tell me what happened or want me to take the next train back?"

SEELY shrugged wearily. "You may be able to help—you're the only hope I have left—but my story's so feeble I'd be better off if I shut up. But here it is anyhow. I was standing outside and I'll swear nobody could have gone in or out without my seeing or hearing him. I heard the shot inside. Not loud, not as loud as it should have been, but I knew what it was. So I came in on the run, and there was Warren lying on the floor. No gun in sight, none we could ever find. Mine was in my pocket. No reason to shoot himself. The bullet glanced off his forearm and went into his side. You are not likely to shoot yourself in your own forearm, and you certainly can't do it without a gun. But there he was, anyhow, lying on the floor, and as soon as he came to he started groaning about my not meaning it. He really believes I shot him."

"Right forearm? Maybe he was left-handed. You can hide guns."

"He wasn't left-handed and he wasn't ambidextrous either. There was no gun and he's not the suicide type, Flannagan. You'll see for yourself."

Flannagan saw. A tall sinewy man lying on a hospital bed, telling feebly how his best friend had tried to kill him. Deliberately. Then Flannagan had

to go out. Lampport was weak and couldn't talk much. Doctor's orders.

As for the man Glidden, all he could do was shake his head and say nothing with a butler's accent. He'd been chopping wood. He hadn't heard anything. When he came back, Lampport was lying there and telling Seely he shouldn't have done it.

The gun? None except the one in Seely's pocket. Seely had cleaned it, oiled it and loaded it, standing next to Lampport who was measuring his ingredients for the pudding.

Pudding again. Little Flannagan let loose a few pounds of steam and marched out to the shack. Seely had called it a shack, anyhow. It had all the modern conveniences except a stove. Seely had funny ideas about roughing it.

Sightseers had messed up most of the evidence, if there'd been much in the first place. Flannagan found merely a couple of dried bloodstains and then the ashes in the fire. He shoveled the ashes into a paper bag and took them back to the sheriff's office to study under a portable microscope. Ashes and the bullet that Sheriff Reveneau had locked in his safe, in a carefully labeled envelope.

Reveneau, big and grizzled and matter-of-fact, sat on the edge of the desk and nursed his bewilderment. Flannagan stared at the bullet for a long, long time. He had to believe it, and at the same time it was almost impossible. A smooth-bore pistol. A modern bullet without rifling marks.

After a while Reveneau couldn't keep it to himself any more. "Of all the gosh-darned foolishment," he growled. "They all of 'em admit there wasn't nobody else around, so Seely must have done it. And one bullet missing from his gun. You can't worm out

of it, fella, no matter how much money ye git."

Flannagan held the little lead pellet in his hand, flipped it thoughtfully and caught it. Reveneau was six inches higher and five inches wider, but a man is as big as the inside of his head.

Flannagan said, "Let's iron this out. Who do you think I am, anyhow?"

"Reckon you're asking for it. Seely, he's got more money than'd fill this here room, so he hired you to twist things round his way. Trouble is, you can't twist. This shooting happened in my jurisdiction and you can't buy me neither. Seely goes up for it next court. Gimme back that bullet. Doc Jervis dug it out'n Lampport's side and I don't feel right 'bout lettin' you nor anybody else handle it."

Flannagan dropped it on the desk. "You have me wrong, Sheriff. Neither Seely nor anybody else hired me."

"Come up for the fun of it, hey?"

**F**LANNAGAN beamed amiably and looked like the bright boy of the class. He had his favorite cue. "In a way, yes. The university has a police school—the Academy of Police Science, it's called—and my job is to tackle the tough ones and show that the scientific methods get results where the old ones don't. Then I send a line in to the papers to the effect that the Academy cracked another one. I'm paid for getting publicity, but my job is to find the truth regardless."

"Science," muttered Sheriff Reveneau slowly. "Ain't nothin' wrong with it if you use your plain common sense. Only when you use your common sense, ain't no need for science."

"I'll make a bet with you, Sheriff. I'll bet Seely didn't shoot Lampport and

that Lamport didn't do it himself either, and I'll prove it with this sort of thing." He tapped the microscope. "If I'm wrong, I'll come up here and work under you for three months. But if I'm right, you come down to the Academy and take a three months' course in police work. Is it a bet?"

Reveneau scratched his head thoughtfully, then extended a great bearlike paw. "My hand on it," he said. "But I'll tell you one thing. Even if you proved somethin' with this scientific stuff o' yourn, they wouldn't believe it up here. You got to show a jury what a man instead of a microscope tells."

Paul Flannagan gripped the hand and hardly listened. He was already building up the publicity in his head. "County Sheriff Comes Out For Science." The papers would eat it up.

Arthur Tannick went down on the train with Flannagan. Tannick took care of the legal end of the Seely interests and made enough out of it to have to juggle his own income tax. He was tall, smooth, with a nose that looked as if it were made for his pince-nez glasses rather than the glasses for it.

Tannick lit a cigar that smelt of tobacco and perfume. "It's a mess," he said irritably. "I told Seely as soon as he got out on bail to hop the jurisdiction. There's no case unless Lamport takes the stand, and I can persuade him not to."

"I told Seely if he jumped bail he'd practically admit he was guilty."

"Well, isn't he?"

"How do I know? About this Lamport—he's a lawyer?"

Tannick nodded. "Doesn't practise, though. More of a promoter than a lawyer."

Flannagan said, "Seely and Lamport

came up for some shooting and now they got a shooting and they don't like it. I could feel sorry for that pair. All alone in the woods with nothing between them and the cold except a five-thousand-dollar shack, and nothing between them and starvation except Seely's valet. Think of it, Tannick—two men and only one valet. The way I look at it, they should have brought along the chef from the Waldorf and then there wouldn't have been any trouble."

"No need of being facetious. They had angry words over a pudding, and though the statement sounds ludicrous, it was merely the excuse, the *casus belli*. If Lamport goes on the stand they're bound to bring in a verdict of guilty. Even Lamport couldn't explain how he shot himself and then disposed of the gun. Seems to me that's the strongest point against Seely."

Flannagan shrugged. "One point in Seely's favor balances everything else you can possibly say."

"What's that?"

"Why in hell would he call *me* in if he were guilty? He knows I'll get the truth, no matter what it is."

"Maybe you overrate yourself, Flannagan."

And little Flannagan snapped back, "Impossible!" and looked vastly pleased with himself.

**B**UT it was sheer bravado. The same bravado with which he'd talked himself into his job three months ago. The university had had a million dollars worth of police school and laboratory equipment but no pupils and no prestige. Flannagan had erupted with the idea that practical work, practical success was the answer. Solve a few murders, make the world know the Academy was cracking cases, and

the Academy was made. He'd wrangled a trial for his scheme, with himself as publicity director.

Maybe it was luck, maybe it was little Flannagan's liberal sprinkling of Academy funds, but the next important murder case was an Academy triumph. The papers stated that the police had arrested the murderer "in cooperation with the Scientific Academy of the University" and the police commissioner admitted he had had "invaluable help." Thereafter Flannagan was made.

But it was a precarious making. One boner and the opposition would be on his neck. The jealous police officials who didn't like to divide credit; the reactionaries who believed in the old-fashioned methods; the crooked politicians who were secretly connected with crime.

As soon as Flannagan reached New York, he walked into the Academy laboratory and put down the bag of ashes he'd collected from the fireplace of Seely's cabin.

"Have a look at this stuff," he said, "and let me know what you find."

Stettinus, the laboratory wizard, tall, stooped, with a yellow wrinkled face and a mouth wide enough to grace a cartoon, said, "What'll I look for?"

"Anything in general, pudding in particular. Bread pudding, prune pudding. Maybe even cordite pudding. You never know these days."

Stettinus sniffed. "Cordite?" he said, and went to work.

There was no cordite, of course. Pine ash, hickory ash, paper ash. Traces of prune pudding. A twisted cartridge case, unmarked. But no cordite. Flannagan read the report and did nothing—yet.

The newspapers interviewed Lamport as soon as he came out of the

hospital. He indicated that a high sense of ethics and his feeling of responsibility as a citizen would compel him to appear at the Seely trial next month. As for Seely, he got out on bail, jumped the jurisdiction and persuaded the local authorities to do nothing except hope he'd show up at the proper time. Unusual? Sure. But the answer was Tannick and unlimited money.

Flannagan waited until Lamport had recovered and was back at work. Then Flannagan made an appointment, marched into Lamport's luxurious office and said, "I want to talk to you about the Seely case."

LAMPOR T appraised him with sharp, calculating eyes. "Nothing I know of to talk about."

"Oh yes there is. I've uncovered an extraordinary piece of evidence. Lamport. About an automatic pistol you own." Flannagan consulted a slip of paper and read off some serial numbers. "That's yours isn't it?"

"Yes, but I don't see what bearing—"

Flannagan interrupted. "Of course you don't. The strongest point against Seely is that his gun was the only one on the scene and that one bullet was missing. A ballistic expert could prove the bullet that wounded you didn't come from Seely's gun, but a country jury would say, 'If it didn't come from Seely's then where the devil did it come from?' And they'd disregard the evidence."

"I'm not a ballistics expert and I saw who shot me. That should settle the matter."

"Exactly. Except that I found a cartridge shell near the fireplace and I wondered whether I couldn't hook it up to another weapon. So the other night I took the liberty of entering

your apartment and borrowing your gun. I fired a few test shots and compared the ejector marks on the cartridge case with the marks on the cartridge from the fireplace."

"And they didn't match," said Lampport, leaning forward with a shrewd expression.

"And they didn't match," agreed Flannagan genially. "But that, of course, is only between the two of us."

"I don't get you."

Flannagan shrugged. "A simple matter to exchange the cartridge case from the fireplace for one of my test samples. Now, you see, they do match."

"It's a frameup!" snapped Lampport. "Sure it is."

Flannagan studied the effect of his words. They produced not outraged morality nor even a sense of being duped, but admiration and a cool, calculating appraisal of how best to handle the situation.

Flannagan said quietly, "I think we understand each other."

"I'll have to think it over." Lampport pressed a switch and spoke into the dictaphone connecting with the receptionist in his outer office. "Will you call Durer? I'll be wanting him later on." Lampport left the switch connected so that the remainder of the conversation could be heard outside.

"What are you after?" demanded Lampport angrily. "Money?"

"Oh no. Something far more elemental. Justice."

"What's that?"

"I'll try to explain, though you could best start with a dictionary. Then, if it's still beyond you, I could submit a bibliography. Some very great minds have examined the subject."

"As I understand it, Flannagan, you're deliberately framing me with false testimony. You're claiming that

a gun which I left in New York was actually in Smyrna."

"Oh no. I'm claiming that your gun was in Smyrna because I can prove it."

"And just what do you want out of this?"

FLANNAGAN did something rare with him. He repeated himself. "Justice," he said. "When I was in Smyrna, I found a case against Seely that looked practically airtight, except for one little thing. But the alternative was too fantastic, assumed too fast and facile and fertile a brain behind it, so I kept the idea to myself. When I brought my evidence to the laboratory my hunch was confirmed, but confirmed with a delicate piece of scientific analysis that nobody would believe. Certainly not a Smyrna jury. I needed you to help me, and you did." Flannagan heard a door slam in the outer office. The rumble of voices sounded vaguely. He stood up.

"And so," he said, "I found that the marks on the cartridge case prove the gun is yours."

"You lie!" thundered Lampport. "I never even took my gun with me."

"Difficult to prove."

Lampport cleared his throat and spoke in a loud voice. "So your proposition is that if I pay you enough you won't frame me on the Seely case."

Flannagan, in an equally loud tone, replied, "My proposition is this: I want you to do just one thing." He moved casually toward the side door. "To go to hell!"

He yanked open the door and dived. Lampport yelled, "Get him—cover the back!"

Flannagan dashed to the left, saw a door marked, "Lewin Office Supply," and opened it. A girl was sitting in

front of a typewriter. She had dark hair and brown eyes and a long delicate face. Flanagan peeled off his coat, pulled a gun and barked, "Don't get scared and you'll be all right. I'm in a jam—cops'll be here—take this letter down on your machine—and so help me, if you give me away—"

His mouth tightened and his eyes shot fire. Then he hopped on one corner of her desk, gun still drawn but concealed by his body so that he was half sitting on it.

Her face went chalk white and she stared with her large, appealing eyes. Flanagan smiled. "Steady," he said. "Now take this: 'According to our records the goods were delivered on the 14th of the month and—'"

The typewriter was clicking steadily. Flanagan jerked his head around as two cops punched open the door and strode in.

"What do you want?" demanded Flanagan.

They hesitated. One said:

"A little guy, your build—seen him anywhere?"

"Not in the last fifteen minutes. I've been dictating. What happened?"

The cop glared. "How the hell do I know? Maybe nothing. But if he shows up, yell."

"Yell my head off," grinned Flanagan. "Hope you find him, officer."

The door slammed shut. Flanagan drew a deep breath. The girl said, "It was too fast for me and I didn't have time to think. I don't believe you'd shoot me. I'm going to scream."

"Of course I wouldn't shoot you, and you won't scream either. At least not until you know what it's all about. Let's go downstairs and have a soda. I'll tell you how I was framed, and if you think the cops ought to have me, then you can scream your head

off. Want my gun for a guarantee of good faith?"

HE held her with his eyes, with their clear steady blueness, with their frank liking for her and with the vague dreamy humorous quality in them.

She said, "Yes, I'll take your gun." Flanagan held it by the barrel and waved it casually. "It's a wild excitable crazy kind of world, isn't it? You're a stenographer in a—what kind of an office is this?"

"Office supply. Weren't you going to give me the gun?"

"Yes. Fascinating work. Fascinating despite the drudgery, because any minute of any day somebody can walk through that door and change the entire course of your life. Two minutes ago you could have opened your mouth and ruined me. You can still do it. A half hour ago I kept a routine appointment and a man framed me. The police wouldn't hold me a half hour, but my name would come out and a very worthy enterprise be damaged with the laughter heaped upon it." He calmly pocketed his revolver. "I wish I could do something to thank you for using your head."

"You could tell me exactly what this is all about and see if I believe it."

He looked thoughtful as he put on his coat. "My name is Flanagan. Paul Flanagan. And yours?"

"Elizabeth Dean."

"May I use your phone, Miss Dean?"

He dialed Lamport's number. Into the mouthpiece he said, "This is Flanagan speaking. I'm in a phone booth around the corner and thought I'd tell you to call off the police hunt. A waste of time, now. I knew what you were doing as soon as you told your re-

ceptionist to call Lieutenant Durcher. An unusual name, Durcher, and I happen to know him. I doubt whether he'd have arrested me under any circumstances, but the story would have reached the papers and made me a laughing stock. My attempt to compel you to withhold testimony. My reputation's a vulnerable point, in view of my work. You tried a neat trick but it was obvious that you didn't switch off your outer office communication. The only obvious thing you've done thus far. And thanks for an interesting afternoon. You enabled me to meet an extremely attractive young lady, and that doesn't happen every day."

He hung up. "I think I can go in safety now, Miss Dean. As for the explanation I was going to give you—suppose we postpone it till dinner this evening. Say the lobby of the Astor, about seven o'clock. Will that suit you?"

It did, but the meeting between Paul Flannagan and Elizabeth Dean is no part of this story, except that as a result she changed her job from the Lewin Office Supply to the publicity office of the Academy of Police Science.

**A**BOUT a week before Seely was due to stand trial in Smyrna for assault with intent to kill, Lampport came to see him by appointment. It was the first time the two men had spoken at any length since the shooting. Seely, embarrassed, older and more haggard than when Lampport had last seen him, offered cigars and a highball before he came to the point of the interview.

"I've been thinking about this, Warren. You claim I shot you. I can't find it in me to doubt your word, even though I have no recollection, no consciousness of the act. They say that

men can do things automatically, without volition or realization of the nature of what they're doing. Maybe. If it's possible, maybe that's what I did. A kind of temporary insanity. That's the plea Tannick advises me to make."

"I'd like to think that was the reason, Bart. Even so, it's tough on me."

"On *you*? You're not threatened with jail—how is it tough on you?"

"To be the means of sending you to prison," said Lampport steadily. "If there were some way out—"

Seely stared at the ash of his cigar. "Unless you give your testimony, there's no case against me. But Tannick made you an offer and you turned him down."

Lampport nodded. "I thought the two of us could talk it over together. If I don't testify after I've been subpoenaed, I'm in for a lot of trouble."

"I'll pay for that trouble. Anything you want."

Lampport leaned back in his chair and studied the ceiling. "Suppose, instead of shooting a man—shooting me, to be exact—you'd done something else. Some other crime. Were driven to it by necessity, by circumstances you couldn't control. Suppose you took money which you were handling in a capacity of trust."

Seely sat up suddenly. "The C.P.A.'s been going over my books. He hinted at a shortage which he hadn't checked yet. You mean you've been defrauding me?"

Lampport was staring at Seely now, staring with that sharp penetrating look. "I wouldn't care to admit that. But if you found you could lodge a charge against me, and if instead of ~~doing~~ it you made good the money and dropped the charge, then it might be worth my while to keep away from Smyrna." Lampport swallowed. "Pure

coincidence that I have this means of defending myself."

Seely said, "How much?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand. Say another two hundred and fifty to set me up."

Seely broke into a broad grin. "For half a million you'll drop the Smyrna charge? I'll have the money in three days."

"Cash," said Lamport.

"Cash," repeated Seely. "And now that we have it settled, how did the shooting really happen?"

Lamport shrugged. "If I told, my position would be considerably weakened."

THE door opened and little Flanagan walked in. "Got it on the dictagraph, Seely. It worked the way I told you. Here are the warrants against Lamport for false imprisonment, malicious prosecution and extortion."

Lamport leapt to his feet. "Say, what is this?"

"The showdown," replied Flanagan. "The evidence was nothing to get. All I wanted was your admission of Seely's innocence."

Lamport stiffened. "That's something you'll never get!"

"If I told," quoted Flanagan, "my position would be considerably weakened. Wouldn't convince the Smyrna woodsmen, but it'll convince a New York jury, and that's where the actions for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution will be brought. There won't be a trial in Smyrna."

Lamport shrugged.

"You have some evidence? Or are these purely obstructive tactics?"

"Judge for yourself. When Seely cleaned and loaded his gun, he dropped one of the bullets without realizing,

Dropped it in the prunes and left an empty chamber in his gun. The laboratory can prove it because the cartridge case, despite the heat, still had a minute coating of sugar and syrup and prune particles.

"What happened was that when you poured the prunes into your pudding, you poured the bullet too. Whether you dropped it, whether you spilt the pot or it boiled over, I don't know. But that bullet landed in the fire and the heat discharged the bullet. *No gun ever fired it!*"

"You're crazy!" thundered Lamport.

"That's what I thought at first, when I found a bullet without rifling marks and a cartridge case without any marks at all. It took too clever and quick-thinking a man to engineer. But after my interview with you the other day, I learnt not only how quick-thinking you were, but also how worried. There was no reason to try to frame me on an extortion charge, but you saw a chance to force me out of the picture and you grabbed it. The gambler mind taking a long chance. Same thing as at Smyrna.

"A bullet dropped in the fire and then exploded, wounding you. You saw a chance to get something on Seely. You needed that because you'd been embezzling his funds. You held off until now, though you had this in mind right from the beginning."

Lamport laughed. "Sure I did!" His hand whipped from his coat and leveled the automatic. "But the only real evidence you have is that dictagraph, and you're getting the record for me right now and smashing it to bits!"

Flanagan narrowed his eyes. "It's in the next room."

"Put your hands up and stand next to each other. Now walk ahead, slowly. You're both covered."



**FLANNAGAN** had to lower his hand to turn the door knob. He was close to the door as he entered the next room. When he dived, his speed was double quick because the door was swinging one way and he was leaping the other.

He landed on his knees, whirling and snapping up his revolver in the same instant. The big automatic thundered and the door jerked and showed a splintered panel. Flannagan backed slowly to the corner and held his breath. If he'd judged Lamport right, Lamport wouldn't leave without taking the last desperate gamble of shooting it out.

Flannagan waited. Seely was behind the big upholstered couch across the room. Flannagan saw the door move slightly and something emerge from it. He held his fire, his eyes darting from the object he hadn't identified to the door hinge and then back again.

In the narrow opening between door and hinge a black muzzle slid upward.

Flannagan compressed his lips and fired twice through the slit. There was a groan, the thud of a body toppling, the shattering sound of glass. Flannagan sprang forward to the door and peered cautiously around it.

Lamport was lying on the rug, his automatic a few feet from him. Near the door lay the broken vase which he had used as a decoy in the hope of drawing Flannagan's attention.

Seely spoke shakily. "He's dead?" he asked. Then he saw Lamport move. "Ambulance--police!" he babbled.

Flannagan walked over to the phone and dialed a number. "Hello, Miss Dean? Flannagan speaking. Get that publicity material about the Smyrna sheriff coming out for science and send it right out. All the papers. And one other thing--call the police and an ambulance to Seely's house. I'd do it for myself except that I want a drink first. Not for me, stupid--for Seely. Imagine a big guy like that fainting, just from a little excitement."

## Looking Backward

**F**OR the past six or seven decades time has been fugiting along at a merry clip with various small items of history repeating themselves all unnoticed by the hurrying throngs of generations. All of this delving into the past was brought about by reading the comments of George C. Howard on page 33. And, in an indirect manner, it leads up to a similar incident during the raid on Lawrence, Kansas, by Jesse James.

It was a warm, star-lit night in August, 1863, when the four hundred guerillas, led by Jesse James and Charles Quantrill, thundered into the unprotected city. During the next four hours there was enacted one of the worst crimes ever to appear in the annals of American history.

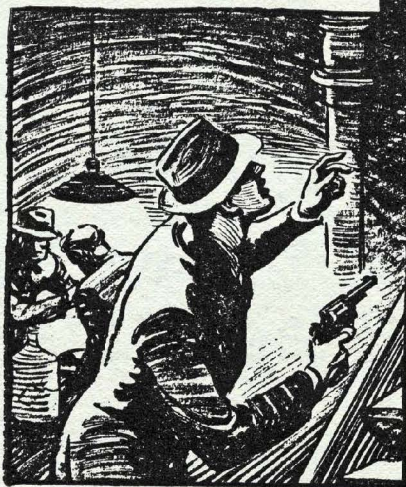
But while murder and robbery ruled the city, here and there individual bandits went looking for small personal pleasures. Several entered the clothing stores where they were fitted for "store clothes" and the clerks were paid off with a bullet through the brain. One bandit entered a restaurant and ordered a beef stew made according to his own recipe. While it was prepared, he entertained the chef with snatch of song. Once his hunger was satisfied, he rejoined his comrades in crime.

—Walter T. Barlay



# Murder Wholesale

By Dale Clark  
*Author of "Challenge," etc.*



Stan tiptoed toward the stairs and found a man on guard

**Fragile! Use No Hooks!—  
And be careful how you handle  
this case of homicide, for it  
may explode in your face**

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED—

**E**MLOYED by a private detective agency, Stanley James Baxter is making good money until he meets Selma Elmore, debutante. He studies law nights and in a few years is admitted to the Bar. As a young lawyer his social standing is much improved but he is rapidly going broke for lack of clients when he has a peculiar caller, Joseph Callum.

Callum, it appears, is a racketeer in that he makes a practice of buying a small amount of stock in some corporation, acquiring legal rights as a minority stockholder, and then threatening a lawsuit. It is a form of legal blackmail, or at least so says Judge Horace Elmore, Selma's father, who is attorney for the Randt Camera Company and to whom Baxter

goes after talking with Callum. Elmore advises young Baxter to drop the case. "I'll think it over," says Baxter.

Selma, he learns, is about to be married to John Harne, general manager of the Randt company.

Baxter goes to Callum's home to investigate further. He finds Callum shot to death in the doorway—and in the house is Selma Elmore. She was there, she says, as a guest of Lois Callum, niece of the murdered man. The two girls tell conflicting stories. Some mysterious caller is supposed to have killed Callum.

Callum had mistreated his niece, and she, as Suspect Number One, is jailed. Stan Baxter becomes her attorney at the urging of Selma Elmore. Later he returns to the Callum home. In a dark hallway he is attacked by a mysterious assailant,

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and recovers consciousness to find that he had interrupted safebreakers.

The trail leads him to the home of Julius Randt, and there he find that Randt also has been murdered. On the scene are Harne and Judge Elmore, both of whom deny complicity. Elmore says that Randt's bitterest enemy is Frank Kendall, rival camera manufacturer.

At Kendall's home Baxter gets an intimation that Lois Callum might be Kendall's daughter, and that Kendall is not aware of the fact because his wife had left him before the child was born, but Kendall admits having been a party to the Callum housebreaking.

In an argument, Baxter shoots a finger off Kendall's ex-con servant, Wolan.

"I'll kill you for this!" says Wolan.

## CHAPTER XI

### Second Warning

STAN stopped off at his office on Bay Street. A light glowed behind the frosted glass door of the dentist's office across the hall. As he fumbled with his keys, that door opened. "Mr. Baxter!"

He turned to see Miss Delevan. Her face, under its vivid mop of red hair, looked queerly pale. She held out a ragged bit of brown paper. Her voice sounded shaky:

"I found *this* under your door a little while ago."

"Come in—let's see it." Stan threw open his office and snapped on the light. He took the brown paper. It looked identical to the one he had found in the same place that morning. This time the crudely penciled message ran:

SECOND NOTIS    LAY OFF    OR  
YOUL BE NEXT                    THE MOB

"I worked late tonight, getting out the monthly statements," the redheaded

girl said. "I heard someone come along the hall, stop, and then go away. So I opened the door and looked out. Whoever it was, had gone. Then I saw this paper under your door. Mr. Baxter, what does it mean?"

Stan was unlocking the inner office door. "I'd like to know, myself."

The girl followed him into the inner office. "I tried to telephone you. I happened to know your apartment address, and I tried that. Then I called the Randt place."

"Randt? Why?"

"Because I had the radio turned on in the office. I heard the news broadcast."

"Oh."

She said, "I talked to a police officer there. He said you'd gone. Then another man took the phone. He told me to try Judge Elmore's home. I tried that, too." Miss Delevan grinned. "The girl there seemed quite upset. Is she the one, Mr. Baxter?"

Stan mumbled, "What one?" from the depths of a cabinet across the room.

"The Lycinth Hill one," the redhead said. "The one you wanted to be a lawyer on account of."

Stan brought a pair of metal boxes to the desk. "If you mean Selma Elmore, I've only met her half a dozen times. Several years ago about a jewel robbery, and then twice—three times—lately."

Miss Delevan laughed. "Love at first sight! . . . What are you doing with that talcum powder?"

"It isn't talc. Fingerprint dope."

Presently he looked up and shook his head. "The only prints here are yours, I guess."

He drew a low-powered microscope from the other box. Among the papers in his pocket was one which purported

to be Leslie Kendall's birth certificate. Stan focused the lens on the physician's signature.

"Look here, Red. See these broken lines?"

She squinted. "Uh-huh. What do they mean?"

"It's a forgery," Stan said. "A tracing, probably. The easiest sort of fake to detect."

He thought silently for a moment, staring at the safe in the corner of his office. It was a good deal more modern than Callum's, but was it really burglar-proof?

"Delevan," he asked, "has your boss a good strong-box in his office?"

"We've something better than that. A key to the night depository of the Trans-Continental Bank."

"Fine," said Stan, thrusting the papers into a manila envelope. "If anything happens to me tonight, deliver this stuff to Sweeney's agency, Delevan. Tell them to get in touch with Selma Elmore."

"Oh, Mr. Baxter!" The girl looked genuinely dismayed. "You are in danger! For heaven's sake, be careful!"

It was one of life's little quirks, thought Stan. Red Delevan was a fine, loyal girl, and an exceptionally lovely one. Yet she did not quicken his pulse at all. He had to fall for Selma, who was already in love with another man.

Perhaps Miss Delevan was thinking the same thing. She went silently to fetch the depository key.

**H**E DROVE up Lycinth Hill again. Lights burned on the lower story of the Elmore house, and Selma came to the door.

"Is the judge at home now?"

"No-o; but he will be, any minute. Come in, Mr. Baxter."

John Harne got up from a chair in

front of the fire. His square chin wore a grape-purple bruise, but he greeted Stan with a grin.

"The judge wanted to take those records back to the plant. He'll be along very soon. Sit down, Baxter."

Stan glanced around the room with its shaded, intimate lights. "I don't want to butt in," he said, a little awkwardly. "I could wait in his den."

Harne laughed. "Nonsense. We were only talking about the murders. You're the authority. We'd be glad to listen to your ideas about it."

Stan walked slowly across the room. He stared for a moment into the fire. "All right," he said abruptly, and turned to Selma.

"Miss Elmore, let's take a hypothetical case. Suppose you're a young woman who stands to inherit a large sum of money."

"That's not very hypothetical," said Harne with a smile. "Selma ought to be able to imagine that very easily."

Stan ignored the comment. His eyes remained fixed on the girl. "But also suppose that up to this minute you had been kept in ignorance of the truth. A certain man was hiding your real identity from you. Only by accident did you learn that he had proofs of your right to—say, several hundred thousand dollars. What would you do?"

Selma smiled. "I suppose I'd grab the proofs and run like the devil."

"You couldn't. The proof is kept locked in a safe, and you haven't the combination."

"Well, I'd certainly *do* something!"

"But what?"

Selma tossed her brunette head. "Mr. Baxter, I think I'd hire you to help me."

"And if you had no money to hire me?"

"Oh, John would lend me some," she said, with a glance at Harne.

"Yes," Stan muttered. "I was afraid of that. Yes, it's all perfectly logical."

He told them the story, leaving out the conversation with Judge Elmore, however.

"Don't you see?" he concluded. "Callum had those papers. If Lois saw them, she couldn't help realizing their importance. Therefore she called upon her closest friend—you, Miss Elmore—and borrowed money. But that very evening, Callum offered to sell the papers to Kendall. You see where it leads?"

"Lois was upstairs with me," Selma countered.

"She let Kendall into the house. She may have guessed what Callum was up to. She may have lingered on the stairs long enough to hear them talking."

The girl gasped. "You mean she might have killed Callum so he couldn't sell those proofs?"

"It is plausible," Stan said coldly. "The evidence was forged, but she couldn't know that. There was a fortune at stake."

"Wait," said John Harne. "Callum wasn't killed until after Kendall had left the house. How could Lois know the papers hadn't gone with him?"

Stan shrugged.

"She came downstairs a second time, to let the blond man into the house. From the stairway, she could look into her uncle's study. The papers may have been in plain sight there," he argued. "Besides, Kendall wouldn't carry ten grand in his pockets. And Callum wouldn't want to take a check, under such circumstances. It would be logical for Lois to expect Kendall to come back later—or the next day—with the money."

Selma's brown eyes flashed. "Stan Baxter, you don't really believe all of that."

"No. No, I don't."

"Then why say such things about Lois?"

"Because the D.A. will think these things," Stan said grimly. "It all goes to supply Lois with a motive. An urgent motive for murdering Callum that night. It ties up with the nitrate stains on her hand and the bullet torn oil-cloth."

Selma exclaimed, "But she explained those things!"

Stan shook his head.

"Let's take the legal view of it," he said. "Suppose she did practice with the gun. Suppose she did accidentally put a bullet hole into the garage. She could have done all those things and *still killed Callum.*"

He smashed his fist into his palm. "It's even worse than that. The bullet hole in the garage can be twisted to show premeditation. They'll say she put that bullet hole there on purpose, so that later on she could explain away the oil-cloth."

Selma stared at the young lawyer in stupefied silence. She gnawed her underlip nervously.

"Then," said John Harne. "Lois is in more danger than ever?"

Stan nodded. "She's in the greatest possible danger. No attorney could persuade a jury that she didn't kill her uncle. Not on the facts we now have."

"But what about the Rand killing?" Selma cried. "You mean the same killer murdered both, and she was in jail when Rand was shot."

"Yes, I believe that," Stan said gently. "But I couldn't tell it to the jury. Couldn't even get the facts before them. Any testimony about Rand's death would be ruled out of court."

"Incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial?" asked Harne.

"Exactly."

Selma wrung her hands. The diamond flashed in the firelight. "But we've got to do something! In spite of all you say, Lois is innocent. We can't let her go to—to the chair!"

"There's only one thing we can do," said Stan. "We've got to catch the real murderer."

**T**HÉRE was a little silence, broken only by the ticking of a clock and the snapping of the eucalyptus fire. The three exchanged nervous glances.

Harne spoke first, clearing his throat. "What about Frank Kendall? If he wanted those documents badly enough—if it was cheaper to kill Callum rather than pay ten thousand dollars—?"

"I don't think so," said Stan. "Kendall would not have shot Callum at the door. He would have gone into the study. He would have forced his victim to open the safe. He didn't know that Lois hadn't the combination to the safe."

Harne growled. "But if he was on the grounds when Mr. Randt was shot—?"

"No," said Stan. "That won't do, either. The man I trailed across the yard never got to the porch—never even crossed the terrace. He wasn't that far ahead of me."

"But you chased him, didn't you?" said Harne. "And I saw him running down the driveway."

"You saw him—not the killer."

"But how—"

Stan said, "The murderer was still on the porch when you saw Kendall running across the yard."

John Harne gulped. "I didn't look down the porch at all! He could have

been crouching there among the elephant ears—then he could have darted across the yard the other way. He could even have fled back into the house."

There was another startled silence. Stan broke it this time.

"I've got to see the judge," he said. "I'm going to the plant."

## CHAPTER XII

### The Blond Man

**T**HE steel gate in front of the Randt Camera Company building was locked. On the gatepost appeared a panel into which was set a button, and the sign, *Night Bell*. Stan Baxter rang and waited.

He got no response.

His stare went up to the office wing of the building. A yellow panel in the night was a window, with shade drawn. As if thrown on a magic lantern screen, a shadow appeared against the shade. Stan recognized the bulky silhouette. It was Judge Horace Elmore.

The judge was putting on a topcoat and a hat. The light went out, and the whole building stood shrouded in darkness.

After this, nothing at all happened.

It was very odd, thought Stan Baxter. Odd that it should have taken Elmore this long merely to return some papers to the office. That the watchman had not answered the night bell. And most curious that Horace Elmore, several minutes after snapping off the office light, had not emerged from the building.

Stan stepped back and peered up at the riot fence which surrounded the plant. The fence, a very strong one, was at least twelve feet high; then it was furnished with a setback of

barbed wire. A similar setback protected the top of the steel gate. Even a man with a ladder would have had a sorry time scaling this fence. To tackle the thing barehanded was out of the question.

Stan Baxter started. He had heard a groan. The sound was muffled, but certainly it had originated in a human throat.

Then a light flickered briefly inside the building. It was at the lower end of the plant, and Stan saw it only because the groan had seemed to come from that direction.

He took two long steps to his coupé, which was parked in the driveway fronting the gate. He snapped his flashlight from its clips along the steering column. He ran up the street.

On the afternoon which preceded Joseph Callum's death, Stan had observed a street improvement project here. A sewer main was being placed. At that time he had scarcely noted the work. Mainly he had been watching Selma and John Harne drive away in Harne's roadster. The steam shovel had been an unimportant factor, but it was all-important now.

During the day, some fifty yards had been added to the trench beside the riot fence. Stan covered that fifty yards at top speed. He leaped into the cab, came out onto the rusted arm of the machine.

It was a steep climb. Stan made sure that his flashlight and Elmore's .38 were snugly stowed in his coat pockets before attempting it. He made the climb on all-fours.

The thing had looked very simple from the ground. Twenty feet up in the night, with a brisk cold wind whipping into his face, it became a good deal more of a feat. Stan balanced precariously creak on the narrow slant of

the yard arm. Directly below him was the big metal bucket. Also below him, but several yards away, the fence stretched its wickedly barbed top.

His knees bent into a jumper's crouch.

Sole leather whisked a sound into the night. There was another, explosive sound. "Huh-h!"

And then, "Oh, hell!"

Stan was still on the shovel's arm, sprawled there with his arms hanging over one side of it and his legs on the other. He had been extremely lucky. He had slipped before actually jumping, and he had instinctively thrown himself across the arm instead of plunging down onto the biting edges of the dirt bucket.

The damage was slight—a little wind knocked out.

Stan pulled himself to his feet. It took nerve to do this, and more nerve to stare out over the fence where the steel barbs glimmered their menace.

A little shiver ran up his spine, and he wet his lips nervously. He was not a fool. And even a fool would have been impressed by the possibilities of that barbed wire setback. A man who landed in that hell's thicket would lose a good deal of blood before he got out.

And even if he cleared it, he might easily break a leg when he struck the waste-rock yard on the other side of the fence.

He crouched. The muscles in his calves bulged in an effort to grip the metal underfoot. He relaxed deliberately. He inhaled deeply, swung his arms twice, and jumped.

The fence seemed to come right up at his face. But he was over it with a breath-taking inch to spare. He struck the rock, stumbled, and rolled over; sat up with his fists filled with small, sharp stones.

HE DREW a deep breath of relief and got to his feet again. The palm of his right hand smarted with painful lacerations. A trickle of blood ran warmly down one kneecap, exposed where the trouserleg had been torn across.

Stan gripped the gun in one hand, the flashlight in the other. He strode to the deeper shadows along the wall of the plant, and followed the wall until he came to the main door. It was unlocked.

The darkness inside was warmer, and very silent. And he listened carefully, without hearing a sound. Stan knew the layout of the plant only vaguely. The wing to his left housed the offices. The central and right portions of the building contained the machinery, but which departments were which he had no idea.

Stan turned right, toward the groan and the flicker of light. . . .

He was in a corridor, one with a rubber-matted floor. He did not use the flashlight; did not dare to. A vague gray oblong in the distance was his only guide. He supposed it to be a window at the end of the corridor. When he reached it, he would also have reached the right wing of the gigantic plant.

Stan stopped in front of this window. His eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness. He could at least see that he had come out into a second corridor, at a right angle to the first. But the place remained as silent as a tomb.

This silence became menacing, as he thought of it. Where was the watchman? What had happened to Judge Elmore? And whoever was responsible for the groan and that flicker of light at the window? There flashed into Stan's mind the picture of another

man waiting in this silence—waiting in ambush.

It began to look as if he had risked his neck for nothing. Certainly he would accomplish nothing by blundering ahead into the darkness. But neither could he use the flashlight; it would only betray his presence, perhaps make a target of him.

He thought for a moment, and then groped in his pocket until he found a half dollar. His muscular fingers set the coin a-spinning on the window sill.

The half dollar made scarcely any sound at first. Stan tiptoed along the corridor. He flattened himself against the wall as the coin stopped spinning on its rim—kicked over—and gave its prolonged silvery ring.

Now, a footstep.

A door on the other side of the corridor opened. A ray of white light sprang from the opening. It passed the sill, where the half dollar was ringing its final note, and probed that end of the hall.

Stan's grip tightened on the butt of the .38—the hard rubber was slick with blood from his lacerated palm. To see him, the other would have to open the door wider.

Instead, the door slowly closed.

Was this a trick? Stan had to chance it. He went forward, shifted the flashlight so that he held it between his biceps and chest, and dropped his left hand to the doorknob. This kept his right arm and the gun free for action.

He tugged gently at the knob. He was not so much afraid of a squeaking hinge here as of a sudden, warning draught of air.

A faint whitish glow appeared. He waited, watched, with the door only inches open. The faint light was motionless, and certainly not pointed in his direction. Reassured, he heeled the



door another half foot and knifed his lean figure through the opening.

He could see now that the white glow emanated from an electric torch. The torch itself was out of sight behind a stack of wooden packing boxes, but its area of illumination reached to the opposite wall. There was light enough to see that he had come into Randt's shipping department.

Some wooden boxes and a greater number of cardboard cartons were ranged across the concrete floor. The cartons bore the Randt label, and prominent stickers that said, *Fragile! Use No Hooks!*

With the flashlight again in his left hand, Stan started across the floor. He followed a tier of the cardboard cartons, came out behind the electric torch.

THE torch lay across a packing box. Its owner had his back turned to Stan. Both his arms were buried to their elbows in the wooden box.

Stan Baxter's brows lifted in mute surprise.

"Seventy-four," the man was whispering under his breath. "Seventy-five, six, seven." A faint rustle of paper accompanied the count.

Stan said sharply: "You're covered, mister!"

The other man grunted, and then rather slowly turned around. Stan's gaze searched the face which was thus revealed to him.

It was a plumpish face, well fed and closely shaved. It was also a very fair-skinned face. Stan got an impression of large blue eyes under the blondest of brows. A felt hat, pushed high up from the forehead, let several strands of stringy, tow-colored hair fall across the man's forehead.

The other features were present, but unimportant. He was neither strikingly

handsome nor markedly ugly. He was neither very fat nor very thin; not tall and not short. His clothes seemed ordinary, neither ragged nor stylish.

In short, there was only one thing noticeable about him. He was blond. And not just an ordinary blond, but remarkably and memorably so. His pale coloring gripped the eye. It caused him to stand out like one white canary among a thousand yellow songsters.

The two men faced each other for a long moment, neither speaking. During that moment, Stan remembered Lieutenant Andreason's skepticism because Lois Callum could not give a better description of the mysterious caller. But it had really been an excellent description. Trained operative that he was, Stan could not have improved on the girl's simple phrase, "a blond man."

The blond man broke the silence.

"You can put away your gun," he said quietly. "I'm not a criminal."

"Yeah. What are you?"

The other shrugged. "I'll explain that to the proper authorities."

"Your mistake, my friend," said Stan. "You'll explain it to me."

"No, sir." The blond man was unfrightened and thoroughly businesslike. "You'll have to call the police. I won't offer any resistance, I promise. But on the other hand, I refuse to say anything to you—or anyone else connected with the Randt company. And that's another promise."

Stan Baxter said, "Raise the hands, mister."

He slapped a hand over the other's garments.

"You see," said the blond man, "I am unarmed."

Stan grunted, reached into the man's inner coat pocket. He drew out a brown leather wallet. The blond man made a

gesture of protest; said, "You've no right to—"

Stan's eyes widened over the wallet's identification card. "Good Lord!"

The blond man nodded. "Yes. My name's George Worthington. I'm an investigator for the Federal Trade Commission."

### CHAPTER XIII

#### Pieces of Glass

STAN BAXTER echoed, "The Federal Trade Commission!" He regarded the blond man with considerable respect. The Federal Trade Commission, to the average newspaper reader, would mean little—just another vaguely familiar arm of the United States Government—in fact, not even an arm, but only one of Uncle Sam's little fingers. FTC—it didn't sound very glamorous. Probably another of those alphabetical agencies. A gang of long-haired economists poring over charts and graphs. A bunch of people with soft jobs.

But Stan knew better. His law schooling had given him an insight into the workings of the Commission. It was the watchdog, the umpire of American business. It maintained headquarters in Washington, with field offices in New York, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. Its staff, over five hundred strong, was constantly on the alert to squelch fraud and deception.

These men were the government's aces in a war against business rackets, just as the men of the FBI were its aces in the war against underworld crime.

True, the FTC lacked glamor. Unless you could see the glamor in forcing poisonous tonics and contaminated foodstuffs off the American market. Unless there was glamor in keeping shifty schemers from stealing people's

money with false advertising of phony products.

All of this flashed through Stan's mind in an instant. Then he closed the wallet and handed it back to Worthington. "But what are you doing here?"

The FTC investigator shrugged. "I've told you twice, I won't answer that—except to the police."

"But look, Worthington," said Stan quickly. "I'm not the night watchman, as you seem to think. I don't work for the Randt company at all. And what's more, I don't intend to hand you over to the police."

The other's blue eyes narrowed in a frown. "Well!" he said. "Then what in the devil are *you* doing here?"

Stan Baxter smiled. Events had taken an unpredictable turn—the kind of a turn the police would call "the break" in the case. He meant to make the most of that break, and to do so he had to win the blond man's confidence. It was a vital step.

He said: "Frankly, I have no business in the plant. I'm as much of a trespasser here as you are. My name is Baxter. I'm Lois Callum's lawyer. You surely know that she's been arrested for the murder of her uncle?"

"Yes, sir," said the blond man. "I read that in the papers."

"Then you also read that the police want *you* as a witness?"

"I know." Worthington's lips tightened. "It happens that I can't tell the police anything of importance. My work is extremely confidential. I wanted to avoid publicity, at least for a day or so. The circumstances were unusual, and I took it upon myself to say nothing. After all, there's no doubt the girl did kill Callum, is there?"

"I doubt it," said Stan grimly.

"Speaking as her lawyer?"

"No. Speaking as man to man. I

think she's innocent, and I expect you to help me prove it."

The blond man did not attempt to disguise his amazement. "Oh! In that case, naturally I'll report to the authorities at once! I only kept silent because I thought Miss Callum's guilt was unquestionable. And, as I say, because I knew nothing whatever about the murder."

Stan grunted. "But it won't do any good for you to report to the police."

"What? Why not?"

"Because they think her guilt is unquestionable," said Stan. "Because your story won't mean a thing to them."

The F.T.C. man studied Stan Baxter searchingly. He shook his head slowly.

"I'm sorry, Baxter. What you are saying doesn't make sense to me."

Stan said: "All right, it doesn't make sense to you. But will you trust me, anyway? Will you?—remembering that a girl's life depends on your decision? For this means life or death to Lois Callum."

The words were impressive, and even more impressive was the manner in which Stan voiced them.

"No decent man could say *no*," replied the blond man. "But wait a moment, Mr. Baxter. Your name is familiar—I saw that in the newspapers, too. But can you prove your identity? How do I know that you *are* Baxter?"

Stan nodded. "I was a private detective before I became an attorney. I carry a permit and a pistol license. Here they are."

"These papers could have been stolen," said Worthington. He drew a fountain pen from his coat, and took a scrap of wrapping paper from the packing box. "Will you sign your name here?"

"Sure!"

The blond man carefully compared

the freshly written signature with those on the permit and license.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "The precaution seemed necessary to me. Now, what do you want to know?"

STAN drew a long breath of relief. "First," he said, "I've got to know why you went to Callum's home last night."

Worthington nodded. "I was sent there by Frank Kendall. Mr. Kendall recently filed a complaint with the Commission, alleging that his Amerioptic Company was suffering unfair competition from the Randt Camera Company. The investigation was assigned to me. I called on Kendall yesterday morning, and he arranged an appointment for me to meet Callum."

"Why?"

"Kendall claimed Callum had some evidence against Randt."

"That doesn't surprise me," said Stan. "Callum told me the same story. But did you actually see any such evidence?"

The blond man frowned thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't call it *evidence*. Not so far as the Commission was concerned. Callum took me into his study. He opened his safe and got out a bundle of papers. They were freight records, and they tended to show the volume of Randt's business. But they did not directly concern the complaint I was investigating."

"Those records," said Stan musingly. "Did Callum hand them over to you?"

"No. He hardly allowed me to touch them," said Worthington. "I got the idea he intended to wring a lot of money out of someone for them—either Kendall or Randt. The whole thing had a fishy look to me."

"Did he put them back in the safe, then?"

"No, not that, either. My recollection is that they remained on the desk. I remember he covered them with a paperweight. There was quite a draught from the window."

Stan said, "You stayed there how long?"

"About twenty minutes, more or less. It was longer than I wanted to stay," muttered the blond man. "Callum was very eager for the FTC to take action against Randt. You can see why. He thought it would make those papers of his just so much more valuable."

Stan reflected. "You must have left the house five or ten minutes before the shooting occurred."

"Yes. I judge so, by the newspaper accounts."

"And tonight you went to see Julius Randt?"

"Correct," nodded Worthington. "I went there early in the evening, because I understood he received no one during the day. It had something to do with his health—asthma, I think."

"Why did you go to him?"

"It was routine," said Worthington. "I asked Mr. Randt about the complaint. He denied it. In fact, he all but had me thrown out of his house. He accused me of being in league with Kendall and Callum."

"Hot-headed, eh?"

"Of course, it was a serious matter for him," the blond man said quietly. "If anything like that could be proved, it would ruin the company. No retailer would ever take chances on stocking a Randt product again."

"Yeah," Stan said. "Is it that bad?"

Worthington's fingers drummed slowly on the packing box. "It is every bit as bad as that. You can see why I wanted to keep the investigation secret.

I didn't want to start any rumors until I knew all the facts."

He paused for a moment, then said: "Kendall's complaint charged the Randt company with fraud. The Randt camera is advertised to be equipped with a Clarex lens. Kendall claims that a large percentage of the output is really equipped with a less expensive and inferior Japanese lens."

**T**HIS interested Stan. He reflected that Judge Elmore had called Callum's suit absurd, because the reported camera sales corresponded exactly with the purchases of Clarex lenses. But if some of the cameras were equipped with another lens, then the stockholders were certainly being rooked.

"Well," he asked, "is that possible?"

Worthington nodded.

"Oh, yes. Only an expert could tell the difference—at first. But these inferior lenses are put together—they consist of a number of pieces of glass, you know—with a synthetic cement instead of balsam. After a year or so, the stuff discolors badly. And the lens is then worthless."

Stan said. "But the ordinary purchaser wouldn't find that out for a year or so?"

"No. By that time, Randt could have rolled up huge profits. He could undersell Kendall—which was what Kendall kicked about. He would destroy the reputation of the Clarex product. And he would bilk a great many camera buyers."

"Yes, it sounds like a clever racket," said Stan. "But how did Kendall get wise to it?"

The blond man explained: "He showed me a collection of Randt cameras in his office. The lenses were inferior, all right. But that proved nothing. Kendall might have switched them

himself. You'd be surprised the gags these fellows will think up, in order to persuade the FTC to crack down on a competitor."

"I can imagine."

"I don't have to imagine. I've seen it."

Both men laughed softly.

"So," continued Worthington, "I realized after my talk with Randt that I wouldn't get any cooperation out of his crowd. I went back to my hotel, and found a wire from the San Francisco office. They had checked with the Customs along the coast. Randt had never imported any lenses openly. If he used any, they were smuggled into this country."

"Oh!"

"Oh is right," said the blond man. "And if that was his game, he'd try to cover up after talking to me. I wanted to get into the plant here. It would be illegal, but I didn't mind chancing that."

"Yes, but how did you get in?"

Worthington smiled. "Through the gate. A fellow drove in ahead of me. I slipped through before he parked his car in the yard and came back to lock up again."

Followed Elmore in, Stan decided.

He said, "You found something, didn't you?"

"Plenty!" the blond man agreed. "These wooden boxes, Baxter! Each of them holds a gross of those Japanese lenses! You can figure it out for yourself."

He chuckled; the elation passed quickly, though.

"I wonder," he said, "what possessed Randt. A man of his wealth and personal standing in such a racket!"

Stan's lips pressed into a narrow straightness.

"You'll never know."

"What—?" he exclaimed.

"He's dead."

Worthington flinched a bit. "You mean, he took that way out?"

"He was shot—murdered."

They looked at each other steadily. Worthington moistened his lips. "It's a funny thing. I had a feeling—almost a physical feeling. In here, tonight."

Stan grunted. "Well?"

"Of course, I don't believe in spiritualism, or anything like that," the blond man said hastily. "But I thought I heard—well, a groaning sound. I flashed the light out into the hall just before you came in."

He broke off, chuckled.

"But I'm talking nonsense. It was you I heard moving around in the building."

Stan Baxter said, "Not me! Listen! *Do you hear that?*"

## CHAPTER XIV

### A Man's Secret

THEY froze to attention. For a long moment, they heard nothing at all. Then the sound repeated itself—an eerie, muffled, painful groan.

"That's it!" Worthington breathed. "It wasn't so loud before. We'd better look into this, Baxter!"

He snatched the electric torch from the packing box and started across the shipping room.

"No! Not that way."

The blond man halted, looked around in surprise. Stan's lean face was an enigmatic mask in the shadows back of the flashbeam.

"We won't be decoyed through that door," Stan said grimly. "Callum made that mistake. Randt opened a door, too. It's damned unhealthy."

"You don't think—"

"That anyone would take a potshot

at us?" Stan finished the other's thought. "Yes, I do. I'm certain of it."

As the FTC man stared, the groan wrenched the silence again.

"It's under us!" Worthington gasped.

"Uh-huh. Throw the light around here once."

The circular spot of white enlarged as it followed the wall.

Stan said, "There!"

He peered at the large carrier belt which traversed the opposite end of the room. The belt entered through an aperture in the side wall, and traveled above a long workbench.

The utility of the device was obvious. The belt came from the assembly department, bringing the completed cameras to the bench where they were packed into individual boxes, replaced on the belt, and then finally stowed into the shipping cartons.

What interested Stan was the fact that the belt disappeared through a panel in the floor. He said:

"That's big enough for us to go through, isn't it?"

"It looks that way."

They had walked to the end of the bench. Stan knelt, and prized up the metal lattice-guard surrounding the belt. He stared through the uncovered gap in the floor.

"It's easy—only a seven or eight foot drop. I'll go first."

He gripped the sides of the opening, slid down into the aperture. The hole wasn't too large—Stan's chest and wide shoulders only scraped through. As he straightened out, his toe found the basement floor.

He stepped aside, reaching for the gun and the flashlight he had again stowed in his coat pockets. But there was no need for the flashlight. Ahead of him, the basement was dimly il-

luminated by the pale yellow glow of an electric bulb over the hulking form of a furnace.

He had dropped into the boiler room of the plant. And now Worthington was at his side again.

"There!" the blond man whispered. "There it is again!"

"Uh-huh, come on."

They tiptoed past the toothless, fire-reddened gums of the gaping furnace door. Stan, ahead of Worthington, stopped and silently pointed. They had found the source of the groan.

A man was propped on the bench under the dropcord bulb beyond the furnace. An elderly man, on the fattish side, he had one hand clapped to his forehead. He wore overalls and a denim jacket. A tin, five-pointed star pinned to the jacket's upper left pocket said *Watchman*.

The elderly man's body teetered unhappily on the bench, and as the two men stared, another woeful groan fell from the fellow's lips.

On the coal-grimed floor some bits of rope and a wet wad of bandana handkerchief told their own story.

Worthington started toward the watchman, found his path barred by Stan's arm. Stan pointed again.

Back of the watchman's bench, a flight of wooden steps climbed through the boiler room ceiling. There was visible a pair of trouser legs, standing motionless on the third from the top-most step.

Stan and Worthington exchanged glances. Stan jerked his head, and both men backed around to the other side of the furnace. The watchman, preoccupied with his own troubles, had not noticed them.

Stan pointed at an iron poker propped against the furnace, then pantomimed what Worthington was to

do with this poker in case the watchman pulled a gun.

The blond man nodded.

Stan's hand firmed on the .38. The lacerated palm had swollen rather painfully. He went past the rear of the furnace, tiptoed toward the stairs. He looked up.

The steps climbed to a hallway, having a door which opened onto the right wing corridor of the ground floor. The door stood ajar. The man on the steps was peering out into the corridor. A cocked revolver glinted in his hand.

It would have been just too bad for an intruder in the corridor. Or for anyone coming out of the shipping room! Stan spoke softly:

"What goes on, Judge?"

**T**HE big man on the steps started convulsively. He lifted his hands, and then turned slowly. It was Judge Elmore, all right.

He stared at Stan Baxter, and dropped his hands. "You!" he ejaculated. "What are you doing here?" Then, in a theatrical whisper:

"Burglars!" the judge said. "They slugged the watchman—tied and gagged him. They're up in the shipping department now!"

Stan glanced around, grinned. Worthington stood in front of the furnace, weighing the poker in his hand. There was no need for it. The watchman just sat and stared helplessly at the scene.

"I don't think so, Judge," Stan said. "We just came from the shipping department."

"You what?" Elmore demanded. "But you couldn't! I've been watching! Baxter, what the hell is all this?" He came heavily down the steps and saw Worthington. "And who is this fellow?"

The blond man gave Stan a warning look.

"He's helping me with this affair," Stan evaded.

"But what in the devil are you doing here?"

Stan said, "I wanted to see you, Judge. Selma told me you were at the plant, and I came here. Now it's your turn."

Elmore nodded. "I had a little work to clean up in my office. I heard a groan, and traced it to the boiler room. I found the watchman here writhing on the floor, tied hand and foot, with a handkerchief in his mouth. He says three men slugged him down here, about an hour ago."

The watchman rubbed his forehead and groaned piteously.

"He was still practically unconscious," Elmore continued. "It took me a while to revive him, enough so he could talk sense. Then I heard voices in the shipping room overhead. So I took his gun and went up to the top of the stairs."

Stan turned to the watchman. "You're revived now, aren't you?"

"My head," the old man mumbled. "My head hurts bad."

"But you feel well enough to show my friend here to a telephone?"

"I guess," the watchman said dubiously.

"Then go ahead. Here, Judge. Let's have that gun." Stan handed the weapon to Worthington. He grinned at the blond man. "You know what to phone the cops about all this."

Elmore said, "We can all go now."

"Oh, no, Judge. I want to talk to you—alone."

"I see." But Horace Elmore's florid features looked confused. He watched Worthington and the watchman climb the stairs; he shook his head.

"It's a mistake to leave a poor old duffer like that in this place alone at night. I always said so. It's a job for a young fellow with red blood in him. Well, Baxter, what's on your mind?"

STAN chuckled. "Judge," he said, "do you expect me to take you seriously? Am I supposed to believe that you—in your office, in the other wing of the building—could hear a man groaning in the boiler room? Especially when that man was practically unconscious, and had a gag in his mouth?"

Elmore flared, "Certainly I heard him!"

"Baloney. It's impossible!"

"Young man"—the judge's tone was icy—"do you mean to call me a liar?"

Stan said, "Uh-huh. Not only a liar, but a damn poor one!"

Horace Elmore moistened his lips.

"Look," said Stan. "You didn't trace any groan here. You came here, and it was pure accident you found the watchman on the floor. Isn't that the fact?"

"It is not."

"Oh yes it is. And the reason you won't admit it," Stan went on, "is that someone might ask what you came to the boiler room for. You wouldn't like to answer that, would you?"

The judge did not reply. His eyes seemed tortured under the younger man's relentless inspection. His gaze shifted to the floor.

Stan shrugged. "All right, don't answer. I'll just go through your pockets."

"You can't do that!"

"No?" Stan eyed the bulge of Elmore's coat-front. "You came down here to burn something in the furnace—and then didn't do it. You worked over the watchman first. And then you wanted to get rid of him before you

destroyed the stuff. And now you're not going to have a chance to."

He took a step toward Elmore. The man's face had gone very pale.

"Wait a moment," he said huskily. "This isn't what you're probably thinking. It—it's personal, it concerns no one but myself."

"You admit you came here to burn what you have in your pocket."

"Yes," said Elmore, his plump lips trembling. "Some personal papers—no longer important since Mr. Randt is dead. A little trouble he once had. That's all. And out of respect for his memory. I think it best they be destroyed."

Stan's voice was dry, harsh: "Those papers," he said, "concern Selma!"

The blood rushed furiously into Horace Elmore's cheeks. He gave the younger man a burning stare. There was anger in his eyes, and fear.

He swallowed twice before he could speak at all. He cried then, "Baxter, I warn you! Leave my daughter's name out of this!"

Stan sighed. He faced an unpleasant job. And he pitied Horace Elmore at this moment.

"I'm not a fool," he muttered. "Tonight at Randt's you pledged me to secrecy. You said you didn't want to stir up an old scandal. Why? Whom were you afraid of hurting, Judge?"

The big man recoiled from that question. Shrank, as if from a physical blow.

Stan went on remorselessly: "Why couldn't you tell the police? Randt was dead. Julia had been dead for many years. Frank Kendall lived, but you hated him. Whom were you afraid of wounding? Judge, wasn't it some other living person—a person very near and dear to you?"

A sudden perspiration dampened the



other's flushed face. With a trembling hand, Horace Elmore loosened his collar. But his breathing remained as hard as before. He said heavily:

"No living person, Baxter! You see, I loved Julia. I loved her as much as Randt did, and just as hopelessly. And I didn't want to have her name in a murder case. Not even twenty years after her death."

A twisted smile touched Stan's lips. "I guessed that you loved her, Judge. And I knew you lied when you hinted Lois Callum might be Julia's daughter. I knew that after I talked to Selma."

"You told Selma?"

Stan said, "She told me that you paid no more attention to Lois than to her other chums. It stood to reason you would have had a very special interest in Julia's daughter."

"But I didn't know it!" Elmore cried. "I found out only the other day that Callum had papers—"

"Forgeries!" Stan said. "I've seen them. And you knew very well Callum's documents were forged."

"That's not true."

"It is," Stan insisted. "The genuine papers were in your hands. But in a minute they'll be in mine. Because I'm taking them away from you!"

He advanced a long step and his hand shot out to grasp the other's lapel.

And then the strength seemed to ebb out of Horace Elmore. The man's whole body sagged. He cried in a strange, broken voice:

"All right! Selma isn't my child! Her real name is Leslie Kendall!"

## CHAPTER XV

### Eyes in the Dark

THE only sound was Judge Elmore's sobbing breath. The color had deserted his face, leaving the skin

an ashen gray in which the eyes burned like coals. He slowly sank down onto the watchman's bench.

Stan shook his head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry that I had to hammer the truth out of you."

Several moments ticked away. Elmore looked up. "Well, you've got the truth. Julia begged me to take care of the baby if anything happened to her. I made arrangements with an orphanage—one of my father's pet charities. The baby was left there a few weeks, and then my wife and I took her away. My wife knew the whole story. We told our friends that we wished to raise the girl as her own—the fact that she had only foster parents was not to be mentioned to her, ever."

"Did Randt know?"

"No!"

Stan said, "What were your plans?"

The judge hunched his shoulders helplessly. "There were no definite plans. I expected to reveal the thing some day, after Selma grew up. She had a claim to a good deal of money—Julia's money, not Kendall's by rights. But tonight changed all that."

Elmore fell into a moody silence.

"Well?" Stan prompted.

"She doesn't need Julia's money. Selma is well enough off as my daughter—and John Harne's wife."

Stan frowned. "But, Judge, you knew that before."

Horace Elmore's large head drooped. "Yes. But I didn't know Kendall was a cold-blooded killer. There's the vital thing. Selma must never be branded as the child of a murderer!" He raised a clouded, brooding gaze to Stan's face. "Baxter, you agree with me, don't you?"

"Wait a moment," the young lawyer said. "What makes you so sure Kendall is a murderer?"

The judge got up from the little bench. He began a nervous pacing across the grimy floor. Bits of coal crunched under his feet.

"But there's no doubt about it," he declared. "I know the whole story. Callum asked Randt for money to start a suit against Kendall. When Frank Kendall got wind of it, he killed them both. He believed that Lois was Julia's daughter, and he went gunning for the two men who knew the secret."

Stan shrugged. "Judge, you're lawyer enough to know that's only a theory."

"But there are facts to prove it," the older man asserted. "I might as well tell you. Randt planned a meeting in his home tonight. He invited Harne and me—told me Frank Kendall would be there. Kendall had been kicking up a fuss with the government—some unfair competition charge. Randt intended to confront him, accusing him of killing Joe Callum. There's no doubt in my mind that Kendall knew what to expect, and therefore he shot Randt."

"It isn't proof," Stan said. "It's only more theory."

"That isn't all." Elmore gulped. "Baxter, I arrived at Randt's home tonight *before the police did!* As I drove up the hill, a man came running out of the driveway with a gun in his hand. He ran over the top of the hill and leaped into a sedan parked in the shadows there. Instead of turning into Randt's driveway, I followed that sedan. It went straight to Frank Kendall's home."

"But you didn't tell the police that?"

"No."

"Why not?"

The judge threw back his head, straightened. "Because they would have held me as a material witness. I didn't know how much they would

make Kendall confess, if they arrested him. Sooner or later, I thought, they would get at most of the truth." He was pacing now and he paused in front of the furnace and said. "I wanted to keep Selma's name out of it. I wanted time to do *this!*"

He whirled, with astonishing speed for a man of his bulk and years. His plump right hand clawed, raked open the furnace door. The other hand darted inside his coat.

The furnace flames threw dancing red shadows across Horace Elmore's face, distorted with a look of wild triumph.

STAN BAXTER blurted, "Hold that!" and hurled himself forward. A thunderous *crash-h* boomed and echoed. There was a metallic *ping*, and the electric bulb exploded into bits. Darkness washed across the basement, turned to a ruddy pink in front of the furnace where Stan grappled with the judge. A reek of pungent gunsmoke penetrated the air.

The two men weaved momentarily in a tangle of interlocked limbs. Stan grunted, flung Horace Elmore into the blackness beyond the furnace. The gun roared again as they rolled on the concrete. Stan could hear the bullet glance from the furnace.

Stan gritted an oath and succeeded in pinning his weight across the other's body. He could hear the big man's breath whistling through clenched teeth. Elmore flung himself into another convulsive struggle.

Stan pinned a hand to Elmore's threshing arm, forced that down. He had a leg across the other arm. He looked up. A cry choked in his throat.

Across the boiler room two tiny, gleaming eyes shone in the dark. They were very bright, curiously wedged

shaped. They wavered, seemed to swim together. . . .

Stan shivered. An icy tingle engulfed his tensed muscles. Those eyes weren't human! They were—

There was another blinding flash, a bellow that reverberated under the low ceiling.

Stan quickly let go of Horace Elmore. He yanked the flashlight from his pocket, clicked its switch. Nothing happened. Afterward, he found the bulb broken; it must have shattered when he fell on the steam shovel, or perhaps when he landed in the yard. . . .

The eyes had disappeared, anyway.

Someone came running along the corridor upstairs. A spill of light swept down the steps. Thin smoke drifted across the beam.

"Baxter!" It was Worthington's voice. "Are you all right? What happened?"

Stan said, "Get that light down here!"

The blond man came down the steps, two at a time, and Stan met him; took the electric torch. He pointed it around.

Horace Elmore sat up on the floor; he was thoroughly smeared with coal dust, and he looked both ill and angry.

"You fool!" the judge said. "Pulling a gun on me!"

Stan cried, "Me? I didn't pull any gun!" He had the .38 in his hand now, though. He ran across the boiler room, flinging the electric beam under a thicket of asbestos-wrapped pipes. He looked into the coal bin, and scowled. He looked around the furnace, too. Farther on, he found an ash-lift. This had a chain operated hoist.

Staring up, he saw the hatch open, saw stars in the sky.

Behind him, Horace Elmore wailed, "Baxter! Come here!"

It was an agonized cry. Stan swung

around, came back into the boiler room. On Elmore's face was an expression of helpless panic.

"The papers!" he gasped. "Have you got them, Baxter?"

"No!"

The judge said, "I dropped them! They're gone!" He was hunting around in front of the furnace, and he said: "They're here somewhere. Got to be! Let's have that light, Baxter!"

Stan said, "You didn't throw them in the furnace?"

"No, no!"

Stan made sure of this. He stared into the furnace, studied the red flame licking over the undisturbed coals. There wasn't a trace the blackened crisp papers would have left.

He wet his lips. "All right. They're gone. They're just gone."

The judge couldn't believe it. He searched around the furnace thoroughly. He swore. Finally he turned to Worthington.

"You didn't pick them up?"

"No," the blond man said. "What were they?"

"He could have," Elmore said to Stan. "I insist we search this man!"

Stan grunted. "That's wasting time. Where's that watchman?"

"Why, with me," Worthington said. "At the phone. I left him there when I heard the first shot."

**T**HEY went upstairs. Stan stepped outside. The steel gate was open now. He had rather expected that. He went inside again: the watchman was still beside the telephone, in a little room off the main corridor.

Stan sat down, put his hands on his knees, and looked intently into the old man's face. "You're scared, aren't you?"

"I'm hurt. My head hurts," the old

fellow said plaintively. He rubbed his forehead and groaned.

"What's your name?"

"Sam Bedlow. I'm sixty-three years old."

"How long have you worked here?"

"Nine months."

"The man before him got pensioned," Judge Elmore interrupted. He leaned against the wall, frowning. "What's the point of all this, Baxter?"

Stan said to Sam Bedlow, "What happened tonight?"

"I was in the boiler room. They sneaked behind me. I didn't have any chance."

"Who sneaked behind you?"

"Them," Bedlow said. "Three of them. They had masks on."

Stan grunted. "What were you doing in the boiler room?"

"I fired up. I was pulling my box when they grabbed me. I couldn't fight off three of them, grabbing me from behind that way."

"He means the police call box," Horace Elmore said. "He pulls it every hour on that hour."

Stan didn't look up at the judge. "If that happened a couple of hours ago, how does it happen that the police didn't come here? You must have missed the next hour."

"I dunno," Bedlow said. "Maybe they pulled the box then."

"Don't you know?"

"My head hurts. They hit me. How could I know? I was knocked out cold."

Stan said, "You were out cold for two hours?"

"I must have been."

"Yeah. They hit you from behind, but your forehead hurts."

Bedlow looked frightened. "My whole head hurts. I'm sick. I don't know what I'm saying."

Stan laughed a little, not pleasantly.

"Your whole head hurts. You were knocked out for a couple of hours. It's mighty queer they hit you that hard, and didn't even raise a bump on your skull!"

Bedlow was trembling, his eyes blurred and confused. "It hurts *inside*," he protested.

"Look at your wrists," Stan said.

"They didn't tie you up very tight, did they?"

Bedlow blubbered unhappily. He had reason to. A police siren wailed down the street.

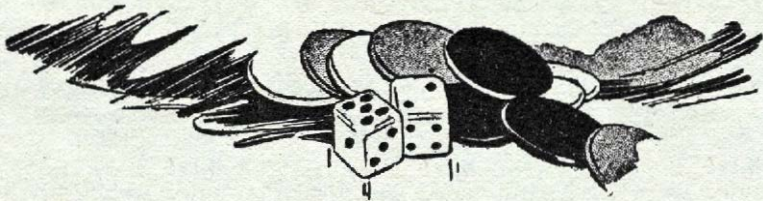
Stan got up hastily. "Come on, Judge. I'm going to get to the bottom of this beautiful hocus-pocus. We'll have a talk with Selma."

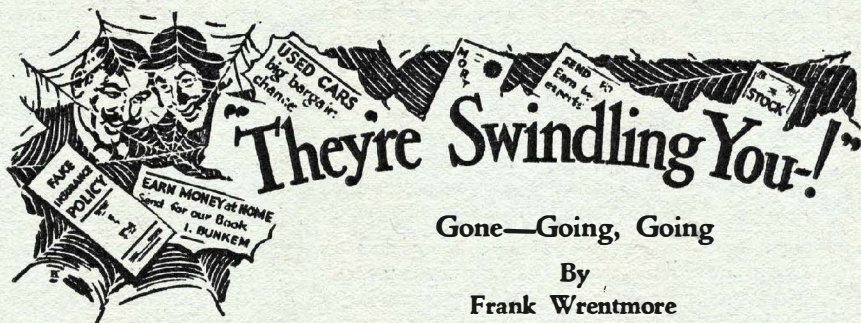
Elmore blinked.

"Selma!" he exclaimed. "But she couldn't know anything about it."

"That," said Stan, "is what you think."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK





*This is the one hundred thirty-second 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.*

**T**HE first fraud order on a type of mail racket which is growing increasingly popular among the mail-gyps was equipped with a full set of teeth by a United States District Attorney in Hartford, Conn., Robert P. Butler. One of the promoters is in jail and some of the others are working off a suspended sentence. They've got to be good—or else?

A few years ago—and a few gyps are still working it—the prevalent mail-racket formula consisted of inducing applicants to send one or more dollars to the gyp for merchandise which the worker was supposed to improve. For a dollar or so the mail fraud specialists would send their victims a few greeting cards to be gilded, some handkerchiefs to be embroidered, etc., and the “come-on” was an offer from the firm to buy back at fancy prices from the worker all *acceptable* finished products. But they bought mighty few, only enough to be used as samples to send to new victims.

Uncle Sam, in the person of postal inspectors, stopped much of this—not all—and the smart boys began to look around for a safe substitute. I don't

know who devised this latest scheme but he must have been flattered almost to death because it has been imitated by half the mail swindlers in the country. It must have bothered the post office inspectors too, because it has taken them some time to pin this one to the mat. Like most gyp propositions it appears fair and honest and appeals particularly to shut-ins. The Harbor Merchandise Company of Hartford, Conn., worked it this way:

They first inserted classified advertisements in such newspapers as would accept them offering home-workers an opportunity to earn a salary of from \$10 to \$12 per week. In the follow-up literature which was sent to those who answered their advertising they requested a dollar deposit “in order to show good faith and honest intention” and promised to return this dollar if (a) the worker was dissatisfied and returned the kit in its original condition or (b) after four orders had been received by the company. Payment for the work was to be made by the company in advance. Doesn't that sound lovely?

The Harbor Merchandise Co. was ostensibly selling safety razor blades by mail. For the dollar the worker received sample blades, 10 circulars describing the blades, together with stamps and envelopes and 15c addi-

tional to pay him for his labor in addressing and mailing the envelopes. The whole outfit cost not more than 35c, leaving the Harbor Merchandise Co. a gross profit of 65c out of the worker's dollar. The worker was then supposed to mail these circulars to his friends and relatives so that they would buy their razor blades from the company. Of course, if the circulars were mailed and produced no results the worker was naturally dissatisfied, but he was out his dollar too because (a) the kit couldn't be returned in its original condition and (b) there were *no* orders, let alone four.

The literature of the company abounded in the lies and half-truths common to this type of come-on circulars. I quote, "There is nothing complicated about the work . . . as a matter of fact Uncle Sam does most of the work . . . this is a genuine offer by a reliable company . . . do not forget our blades are nationally advertised and known from coast to coast . . . we mail out checks by the hundreds to women all over the country," etc. But it is pertinent to remark right here that the checks weren't mailed unless the worker was able to prove that So-and-so had bought blades and that he or she was entitled to the commission on the sale. The company evidently maintained no checking system to determine which home-worker was entitled to commission on sales and they paid none unless a claim was made for it.

Following the issuance of the fraud

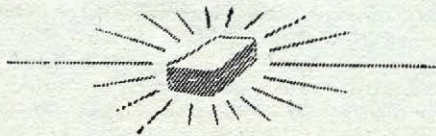
order the company was petitioned into bankruptcy and the creditors are now picking the bones. The principal owner of the company, Paul Greenberg, who formerly operated other schemes of the same nature, has been sentenced to a year in jail.

About the time all this was happening another Hartford company was operating a "Rejuvenation Creme" scheme on exactly the same plan. After previously promoting clocks and watches by the same methods. Being handy, the postal inspectors dropped around to see this operator and looked over *his* establishment, whereupon, so he told the Hartford Better Business Bureau, the operator hastily consulted his attorney and before the inspectors could complete a case against him the doors of the company were closed with a loud bang forever.

There may be some other Caspar Milquetoasts in this racket, who, upon reading this and learning that the postal inspectors have found a way at last to crack this scheme, will retire to their sanctum sanctorum, sharpen a pencil and go to work on a want ad that will eventually read something like this:

**For Sale. Going business. Must sell immediately. Owner leaving for an extended trip. Come with cash or certified check. No reasonable offer refused.**

So if you want to buy a going business that's almost gone, you'll have to hurry. But it's only fair to warn you that you will be sticking your neck out for the legal guillotine. There is no place in society for such racketeers.



# 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. O'HAVER  
Editor

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.

## †HONOR ROLL for 1937

(Continued from Last Week)

249—†My Pal; †Mrs. J. C. Saunders. 247—†Nertz. 246—†Gracias; °I-dan-ha; †Texocron. 245—†Alvancy. 244—†Peter Penguin; °Ike N. Wymme. 241—†Ajax. 237—†Mosback; †Loula Williams. 234—†Rena Patton. 233—†Gregory; †Abe C. Pressman; †Geo. Williams. 232—°F. E. Tinkham. 231—†Henry F. Dolliver. 230—†Curly; †W. A. Deen. 228—†Edward L. Kowalski; °Del J. McLane. 227—†Jay-En-Ess. 225—†John T. Straiger. 224—°T. F. B.; †G. Carder. 223—†Vasseur and †Danette; †Estece. 222—°Qpkwins. 221—°Kappa Kappa. 219—†W5FYL. 217—°W. F. P. 216—°Plantagenet. 215—†El Aguila Blanco; †Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman; °A. Traveller. 211—†Tau Pi. 210—†Charles L. Rohde. 208—†Neil Johnson. 207—†Tap. 204—†CanNaRev. 203—†Ciphersmith.

199—†I. Cipher U. 198—†Edward O'Connor; †Remdin; †Logan Simard. 196—†Edna D. Brooks; †Daffy Dill. 195—†Illy; °Ray Rasmussen. 193—†Soo-Ont. 192—†Alice. 190—°Mrs. W. C. Bird. 187—†Ixaxar. 186—°Mrs. Robert De Noyelles. 184—†Abuelo; †Arbny; †Segro. 183—†Myrtle Lee Bunn. 182—°Pearl Knowler. 180—†Etcoq; †Irene Friedman. 179—†Cecil T. Partner. 175—†Moliner. 174—†Bubbles; †Norm d'Plume; †L. E. S. 173—†Ernest H. Carling. 172—†H. M. Williams. 169—†Ruel; †Wash. 168—†Albert H. Alpert. 167—†Jay Essee; †G. N. G. 166—†Mrs. Altie Mather. 164—†A. B. I. 160—†Cliff II; †Herbert J. Huthwaite; †Leonard Price. 159—†O'Phan. 156—†H. J. Haewecker. 155—†John J. Brogan; †Iris Goldthorpe; †Al. Liston; °M. O.; †Edward F. Raiford; †R. E. Shipman. 152—†Elleau; †Charing X. 151—†luocus.

149—†J. M. F. 146—†Bea Em Sea. 145—†Y. M. Reyna. 144—†Thomas Dibbins; †Shalmaneser; †Woduva. 141—†Little Willy. 139—†Kadash. 137—†Charles H. Robb. 136—†Ian. 135—†Denarius; †Hitide; †Mrs. B. C. Squires. 134—†J. A. Jonassen. 133—†J. A. Callan; †Posius; †Sunny. 132—†S. B. Booth; †Lefty Did; †Isabella Grady; †Waltraw. 131—†Leo Crutehfield. 130—†Boston Bean. 129—†Carl H. W. Oestreich; †Charles E. Zirbes. 128—†T. E. McAlpine. 127—†W8FQN. 124—†Mono Verde. 123—†Argon; †Satex. 122—†Louis Stephens. 120—†Righty Did. †Elsie A. Turner. 119—†H. L. Evans. 116—†Jacy. 114—†Franthe; †Mrs. R. C. Herring; †Bert Hilton; †George F. Wiley; °Sam Wilson. 113—†Lewis E. Hall; †Pip; †Will Will. 112—†H. M. Hopkins. 108—†Geodetic; †Mrs. William E. Gilroy; †Nonagenarian II. 107—†GKC. 101—†Mabs; †Richard K. Trepane.

Current clues: The key to No. 91 runs 01234567. 89. In No. 92, note OLZO and OLR, also ZAS; then groups 7 and 23. No. 93 offers LTLTLM and LFLKCEM as helpful patterns. In No. 94, -LNON, LYOB, and DENB lead to groups 1 and 7. No. 95 provides endings -OY, -YOY, -LOYY, and -IBBA for entry. Asterisks indicate capitals. Send us your cryptograms, divisions, and other puzzles, fans! Any reader may contribute puzzles for publication in this department. And all correct solutions of puzzles will be duly listed each month.

No. 91—Cryptic Division. By †Alpha Bet.

MAIN) CHORD (M  
IANNM

HVMH

No. 92—Tonal Titans. By Re.

OLR BNPX VQ \*GZMART KP YRKAM TRUDZXRS KA  
UNYDKX QZHVT YF OLZO VQ \*YRROLVHRA, \*YZXL, ZAS  
\*POTZNPP. OLR URZE VQ UVUNDZTKOF GZP TRZXLRS VF  
\*GZMART PRHRA FRZTP ZMV.

No. 93—Imported Product. By †Gregory.

"GDVCV GFQ GEMQT," LFLKCEM \*PTNVGEQ YVWD,  
PTEQW FQCX "LTLLTM SVZD PTEZ." BTEM QFZ, XT  
RFKMPZ, XT TLVGKMT! UKVZT SDFCTWFPT!

No. 94—Old-Time Chiselers. By I. Givup.

DEFGHKLNON, KHULHQDE FGDXEDODYN, DOOHKVOHU  
OXDYNKZOLYP CDNH KHODEN LYOB PBEU; DENB  
NBZPGO ZYLQHXNDE VDYDFIID, KDUH AXDZUZEHYO  
FEDLKN, HROBXOHU KBYHS AXBK NBQHXHLPYN.

No. 95—Dangerous Dodge. By †Remdin.

BELT-BOTTOM BINGBUTWHOS BILTCUMBA BOIZOY  
BEMTULTY, BOUYCSOBA BUTWHY BINGY. BCSFULT BALK  
BCLTOY! BINGBUTWHOS BEYOY BIXULOYY, BOIGY  
BIHOSIBBA! BALK BEYOY BCLPW!

No. 96—Hot Spot! By †Sunny Tim.

FABDLE FVBD FVBFPL FVBXXE FVBX KGHY XSKFPPKAG  
FAROH. VRZH FSKLUL OKLV. \*OKGG NTZSO DBGFVRL  
OKGGE USRE, FVBFPL NSZOO KGHY FSRRP.

### LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

85—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
MEXICAN BOY

86—Barring accidents, we are good for a billion years yet, says a Chicago physicist. But prophetically inclined hens should not count milleniums before they are hatched.

87—Caesar crossed the Rubicon, Hannibal crossed the Alps; Washington crossed the Delaware,—what, no traffic cops?

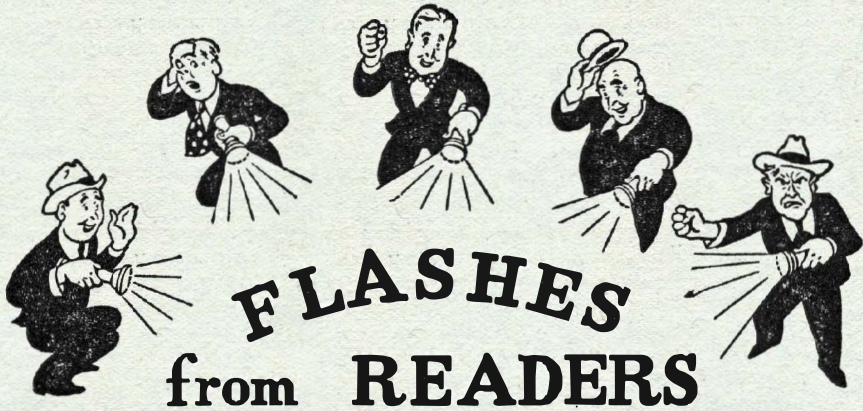
88—Daily dozens, diet light, bedtime early every night, make young women nicely slim, also help to get their "him."

89—Wily prestidigitator shoots skyward toward flying ducks. Twin rabbits drop earthward. Flock continues south. Audience gasp.

90—Two tramps, drunk, stretch strong strings 'twixt chasm walls. First catch stork carrying baby. Next smash auto-gyro. Caught by hick sleuth. Shot.

All correct solutions of the current puzzles will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for April. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.





**W**ITH a thick sheaf of letters from readers in our hand, it is clear that this is no time for philosophic shilly - shallying. First comes a long message from

**KENNIE MacDOWD**

which arrived while we were wrestling with the schedule and had an effect like adrenalin on us.

DEAR EDITOR:

I've got to get this cigarette going first—I'm one of those dopes that think I can think better when smoking—then I'm going to give you, all unasked I know but maybe not so awful unwelcome, my own particular slant on *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*. Click! Click! I surmise that you know what these here devices they call "lighters" are. Lift one out of your pants on a street car to offer a light to some honey that's wafted in and sat down in front of you and wants to have a couple lungfuls herself there, and it's as fireless (and not half so hot) as the well known cooker. Get home—after you've seen some other dope provide the gal with a blaze simply by having a workable match on him—and chances are you get results your very first click. Well, I'll be—! My wife handed me this one for Christmas, but I'm blamed if it hit me before that she wanted me to ease up a little on the coffin-nails!

There, finally! Say, you don't know anybody who'd be interested in a good cigarette lighter, do you? Maybe I could give it to Judson P. Philips—only, if I should up and offer him it, he might get wrong ideas: Like, maybe, that I didn't think his *Park Avenue Hunt Club* was very hot, either. When, actually, *The Park Avenue Hunt Club* rates aces with me! I—and

this also goes for my wife—have very much enjoyed every story portraying the activities of *Geoffrey Saville*, *John Jericho*, *Arthur Hallam* and *Wu*.

*The League of Disaster* had everything—interesting characters (simply as a matter of course), motivation developed on recent puzzling happenings, exciting and progressive involvement of characters arrayed in dramatic contrast of action, a high peak of climactic point which was reached by means plausibly within the scopes of the story actors. I particularly admire Philips for the nice restraint he displays, in describing the more-or-less unlawful (if one were splitting hairs), but certainly very *admirable* adventures of his four most popular characters. This applause for Philips is doubly appreciation of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*'s good judgment in "picking" him for one of its headline authors. The magazine is one of the best, and like Shakespeare—"I would not change it."

While I'm about it—I'm like a phonograph when once I get started; would, if I continued a sufficient length of time, no doubt ultimately reach a groove where I'd just scratch—I want to mention a story which seems not to have excited the high praise that should have singled it out. I mean *Copper*, by Kenneth L. Sinclair. Here, we have a story with a build-up over a long period of time, and psychologically as sound as anything I have read. Its suspense was bunched in whether education, training, an uplifted viewpoint and decent associates and environment, would or could win out over a fierce hate crystallized in a life so early as practically to have become the bone and sinew of that life. It was a touch-and-go situation, dramatically handled throughout, solved to the satisfaction of the reader—and I am as sure, to the boy (and man) himself. Stories of this type are what makes *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* stand forth amongst magazines.

Eric Howard's *Case of the Flying Junkmen*, was another story that answers the question why more and more men and women crowd the magazine stands to buy DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. His talent is sure, is Howard's (sounds like Gertrude Stein!) and the wife and myself you may be sure will continue to buy the magazine that gives us stories by:

Donald Barr Chidsey, Richard Sale, K. Krause, Victor Maxwell, Frederick C. Davis, Hugh B. Cave (he's top hole!), J. Lane Linklater, Cleve F. Adams, Roger Torrey (another one that's tops!), T. T. Flynn, and Cornell Woolrich—to mention just a few of those whose characters have for us assumed the aspect of "real people."

Many thanks for fine stories that help make life pleasant.  
Denver, Colorado

From Albany, New York, we have received this letter from

**GEORGE F. MARLOW**

a veteran reader and—thank goodness!  
—a veteran booster.

DEAR EDITOR:

This is my first letter to your department, although I've been a constant reader for many years and in addition, a constant booster of DFW, the best of its type on the stands. In fact, I've been responsible, directly and indirectly for between forty to fifty new readers and never have I heard anything but praise for it. I notice that you have from time to time some fans who in their letters to you are critical to the point of insulting—as in the case of Mr. Nelson in February 5th issue, where he in no uncertain terms gives his opinion of your proofreaders (who had I imagine some very choice words to throw Mr. Nelson's way after perusing that letter). It's too bad that every one can't be as intelligent as Mr. Nelson, then

no one would ever make such a terrible mistake as to misconstrue the meaning of a word. Tsk-tsk, how horrible! He should read proof sometime, trying to make a deadline and see what cinch a proofreader has. More power to you and we will let the editors edit the mag, they're doing a fine job.  
Albany, New York

Our authors—hard-working gentlemen to whom we're very grateful—  
find in

**ALBERT FERRARE**

a strong champion.

DEAR EDITOR:

I have just finished reading *The League of Disaster*, by Judson Philips and I believe it to be the greatest story ever written. I read about some sap from South Bend, Ind., concerning *The Park Avenue Hunt Club*. To my opinion he should have his head examined. Where is he going to find a better author than J. P. Philips and a better team than Geoffrey, Jericho, Hallam, and last but not least Wu? The story was both exciting, thrilling, romantic—in fact it had everything a reader could wish for. I do hope you receive no more complaints. As for me I could read about the *Park Avenue Hunt Club* every week. Here's hoping these stories never stop. I can't see why some of these smart alecs are always kicking about the technical parts of a story. After all an author can't expect to know everything. They try their best and I think should be given credit even when slight mistakes occur once in a while. I must confess I didn't like the story entitled *The Knot*, by D. B. McCandless. *Me, Crook*, by Frederick C. Painton was great. I close hoping for many of your true stories in the future and I must here say: Long live *The Park Avenue Hunt Club!*  
Providence, R. I.

## NEXT WEEK

**FREDERICK C. PAINTON** introduces Dr. Jason Quirt, globe-trotting detective, in a long new novelette

## MIDNIGHT CALL

**SAMUEL TAYLOR**  
**CONVICT 12627**  
**DALE CLARK**

**CHARLES ALEXANDER**  
**ARDEN K. PANGBORN**  
**B. B. FOWLER**

**CYRIL PLUNKETT**  
**ROGER TORBEY**

~~~~~  
**DFW**

# VACU-MATIC SCORES AGAIN!

**BOB MCKENZIE**  
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION  
COAST TO CHICAGO

**WESTERN UNION  
TIMED**

NEW YORK  
LOS ANGELES  
42 hrs 42 min

LOS ANGELES  
NEW YORK  
37 hrs 33 min

CANADA  
18000 miles  
18 days

LOS ANGELES  
NEW YORK  
48 hrs 30 min

WASHINGTON, D.C.  
MEADO CITY  
36 hrs 30 min

LOS ANGELES  
PHOENIX  
4 hrs 18 min

MURK DAVENAGE  
1937 Buick 41

LOS ANGELES  
BAYVIEW, GA.  
48 hrs 30 min

LOS ANGELES  
LIVER, N. C.  
48 hrs 30 min

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.  
7617 W. State St.  
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a 1936 Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 59.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 19 1/2 miles per gallon on gas-line.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3 1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

After this experience with Vacu-matic, you can depend that on my future speed runs across country that I will be depending on Vacu-matic to give me the same added performance it has proven on this last record breaking drive.

Yours very truly,

*Bob McKenzie*



**Sets New  
Coast-to-Chicago  
Record**

**New Supercharge  
Principle  
SAVES GAS**

**MORE POWER - MORE SPEED  
FASTER PICK-UP - - NEW LIFE**



**ESTABLISHING** new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic again scores in a new speed record established by Bob McKenzie transcontinental automobile champion. Los Angeles to Chicago — 2,322 miles in 39 hours and 42 minutes— driving 75 and 80 to maintain a speed average of 59.7 miles per hour!

Here is speed—a gruelling grind—where quick acceleration, greater top speed — and less stops for gasoline mean those precious moments saved that make new speed records possible.

The same Vacu-matic that helped Bob McKenzie establish this speed record and gave him such fine gas savings is now available for all car owners. It is positively automatic—simple to install—inexpensive—and pays for itself many times over in gas savings.

**AUTOMATIC - - Nothing Like It!**

Vacu-matic is entirely different! It operates on the super-charge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely **AUTOMATIC** and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing automatically as required. No idling troubles—no carburetor adjustments necessary. It is so simple it will amaze you—so practical it will save you many dollars on gas costs.

**Fits All Cars**

VACU-MATIC is constructed of six parts, assembled and fused into one unit, correctly adjusted and sealed at the factory. Nothing to regulate. Easily attached in ten minutes.

**Agents and Salesmen**

VACU-MATIC offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Valuable territories now being assigned. Check and mail coupon.

**The VACU-MATIC Co. Wauwatosa, Wis.**

**Guaranteed Gas Savings**

VACU-MATIC must prove itself on every car. It is guaranteed to give worthwhile gas savings, quicker pick-up and more power, or it costs you nothing. "On my V-8 Ford it works miracles," says Ralph Fields. James Seely—"On an International Truck on a round trip to Cleveland, 385 miles, it saved 19 gallons of gas." A. V. Grove—"On the Buick it showed 5 miles more per gallon." F. S. Peck—"I average 22 miles per gal. on my Plymouth, an increase of 7 miles, for a saving of \$15.00 a month, or \$180.00 a year." Wm. Lyons—"Averaged 25 miles on a gal. with a Model A Ford at 40 miles per hour."

**Free Details**

You owe it to yourself to know all about this remarkable discovery. Mail the coupon below. Start saving gas with VACU-MATIC and enjoy a new driving thrill! There's no obligation—so get the facts now! Write today!

**---FREE OFFER COUPON---**

THE VACU-MATIC COMPANY  
7617-381 W. State St., Wauwatosa, Wis.

Gentlemen: Please send me full particulars concerning the Vacu-matic and details of your Free Offer. This of course does not obligate me in any way.

Name .....

Address .....

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

Check here if interested in selling proposition.



**-DO YOU ENVY OTHERS' LUXURIANT HAIR GROWTH**

**Do You Want to Grow Hair? Do You Want to Check Excessive Hair Loss? Do You Want to Decrease Dandruff? Do You Want to Keep Hair Soft and Lustrous?**

What joy there is in luxuriant hair growth! Only healthy, potent roots can grow hair. Are your hair roots dormant? If so, read what others have to say about KOSKOTT.

"I think Koskott is fine," writes Harry M. G. "At present I have no dandruff, and new hair has come where the old hair fell out. I have considerable more hair than I did before I started Koskott and I am very pleased with the results."

"I have nice glossy hair now," writes Mrs. A. B. W. "I had measles and my hair started to fall out. I am quite an old lady now, but since I used Koskott my hair is soft and glossy again."

"Before I started using Koskott" writes Mrs. N. H. "my hair was dry-looking and I had dandruff. I just can't tell you how much my hair has improved."

"I had falling hair, itching of the scalp, and dandruff for a year or more until I ordered Koskott some time ago," writes Mrs. A. B. V. "I used it according to directions and it has proved wonderful. I too can praise Koskott for what it has done for me."

"I find Koskott extremely good," writes Mrs. N. J. H. "When I began using Koskott, I had a large bare spot on the back of my head. It is remarkable the way Koskott does the work because my hair is growing back."



**KOSKOTT COMPANY,**  
A-93, Station F, New York

Please send me a trial box of KOSKOTT in accordance with your free offer.

MY NAME .....

MY ADDRESS .....

A-93

**FREE OFFER**

Do you want, FREE, a trial box of KOSKOTT which satisfies so many people? If so, you need only answer this ad by post-card or coupon, asking for FREE BOX. This famous preparation is for dandruff, thinning hair, and hair loss preceding several forms of BALDNESS.



KOSKOTT is used by men and women. Often highly endorsed by enthusiasts after a few days' use.

**KOSKOTT**  
To encourage Hair Growth