

# DETECTIVE

FICTION

# WEEKLY

Formerly Flynn's



*Creepy Novelettes by*

Edward Parrish Ware

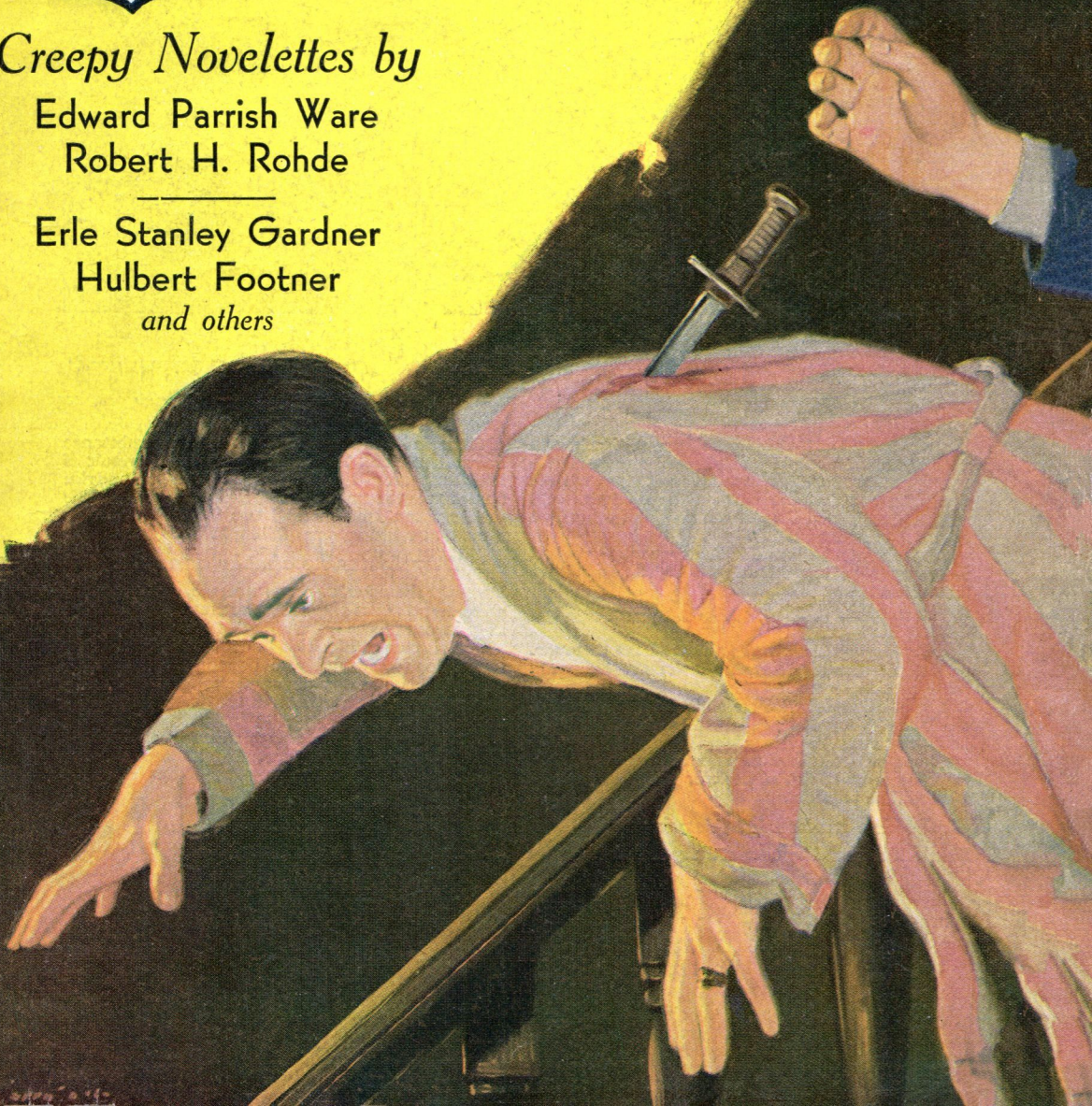
Robert H. Rohde

---

Erle Stanley Gardner

Hulbert Footner

*and others*



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# DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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*"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"*

VOLUME LXIX

Saturday, July 16, 1932

NUMBER 1

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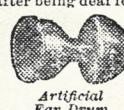
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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXIX

SATURDAY, JULY 16, 1932

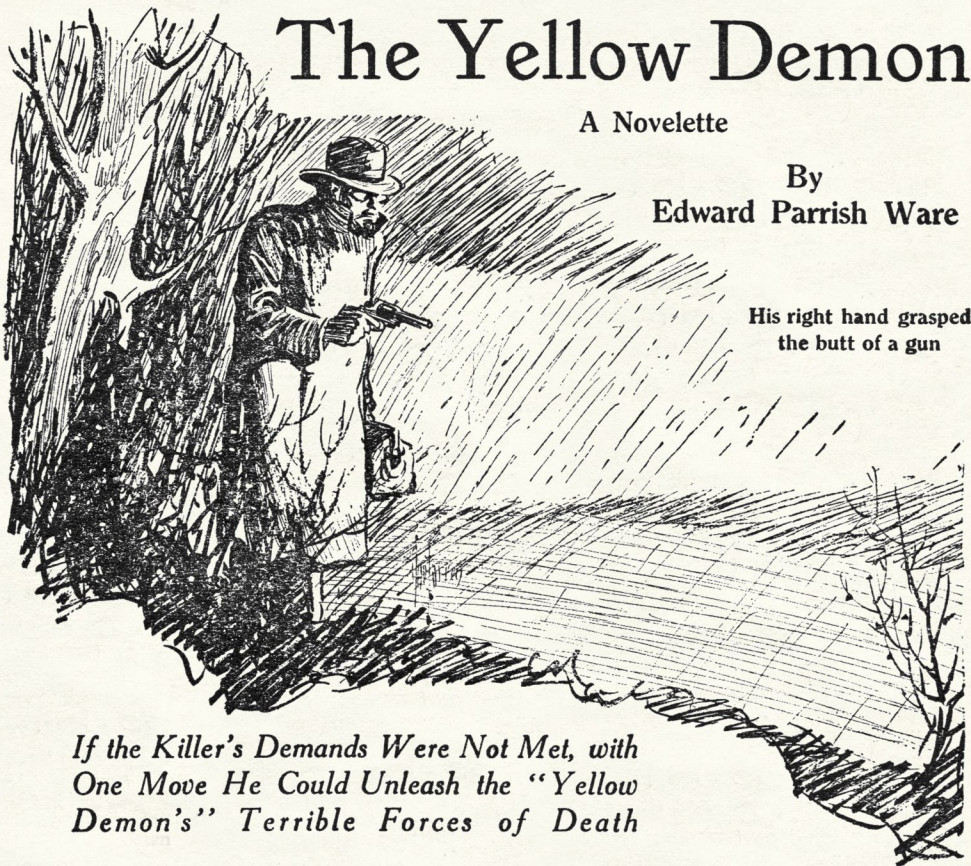
NUMBER 1

## The Yellow Demon

A Novelette

By  
Edward Parrish Ware

His right hand grasped  
the butt of a gun



*If the Killer's Demands Were Not Met, with  
One Move He Could Unleash the "Yellow  
Demon's" Terrible Forces of Death*

### CHAPTER I

#### Red Flags

**M**ALTED milk and chocolate  
éclairs won't satisfy appetites  
that crave rare beef and black  
coffee. Rare-beefers become explorers,  
frontiersmen, bridge constructors, rail-

road builders, seamen, airship pilots,  
soldiers, adventurers, cops — and  
crooks.

Perhaps the crook gets the biggest  
kick of all out of his rare-beef urge,  
but the trouble is the kick so often  
lands him in the smoky regions of  
Eternity.

The case I'm going to tell you about proves my contention nicely. It involved a rare-beefer who hooked up with the Yellow Demon, and here's what started me working toward his acquaintance:

TUG NORTON,  
KAW VALLEY DETECTIVE BUREAU,  
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

CAN YOU BE AT HOTEL GAYOSO  
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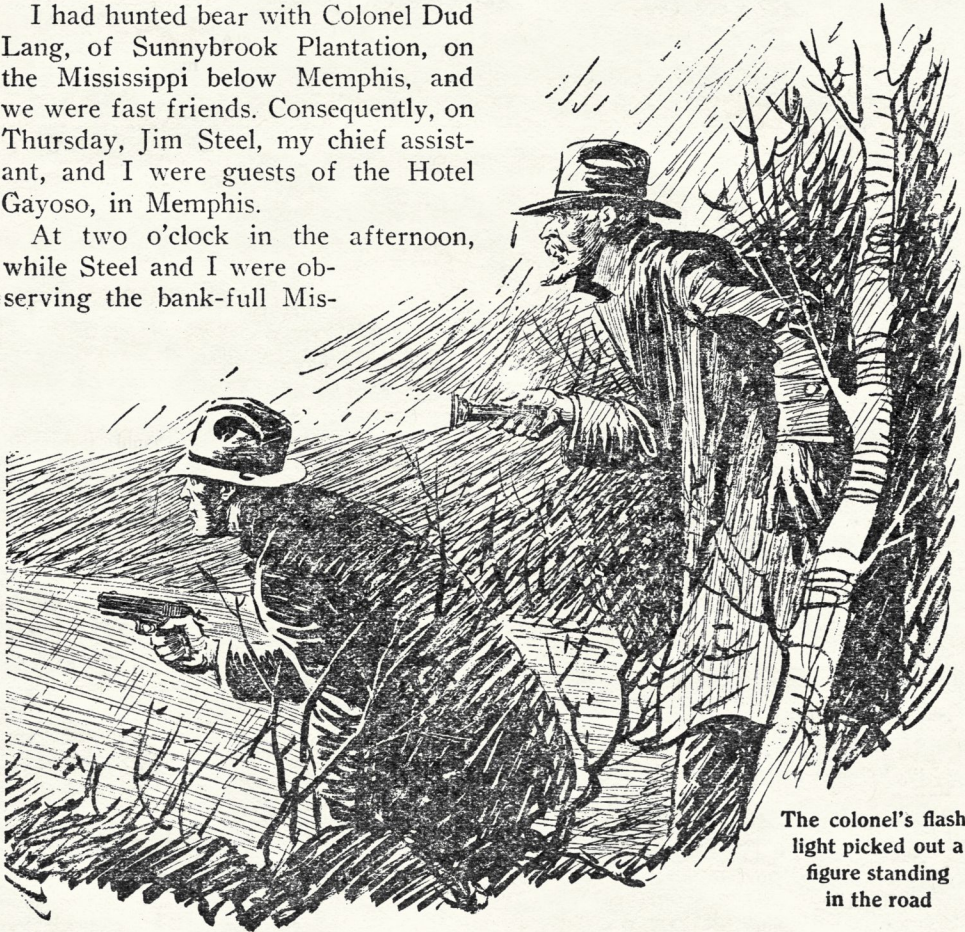
I had hunted bear with Colonel Dudley Lang, of Sunnybrook Plantation, on the Mississippi below Memphis, and we were fast friends. Consequently, on Thursday, Jim Steel, my chief assistant, and I were guests of the Hotel Gayoso, in Memphis.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, while Steel and I were observing the bank-full Mis-

Steel slipped into a bedroom and closed the door almost shut, and I called an invitation to enter.

A tall young chap, handsome, aristocratic, well-dressed, came in. He was not alone. Holding the door wide, he bowed a companion into the room. His companion was a girl, an example of brunette perfection.

"Mr. Norton?" queried the tall young man, in a barytone voice.



The colonel's flashlight picked out a figure standing in the road

issippi from a window of our suite, speculating on just when and where the heavily taxed levees would break, a rap on the sitting-room door announced a caller. That would be Dud-

"That is my name," I acknowledged, and invited them to be seated.

The young man stood, though, while he made himself known.

"I am Royce Colquitt, of Colquitt's

Landing, Arkansas," he announced stiffly. "I have a letter for you."

He handed me a sealed envelope, and I pulled out a sheet of paper, and read:

MY DEAR NORTON:

I am sending my daughter, Frederica, commonly called Fritz, to spill the beans to you. She may go a long way around the barn to get to the door, conversationally, but she'll get the facts before you—if you are patient and give her time. There may be a big lummoX along with her, Colquitt by name, but don't mind him. He's what Fritz thinks she's going to hand me for a son-in-law. Anyhow, I hope you will come to Sunnybrook, if you think there really is anything sinister in the business.

With much good friendship, I am

Yours,

DUD LANG.

"SO you're Dud Lang's girl," I said, looking at the delicious beauty with deeper interest. "You were away at college when I visited at Sunnybrook last, as I recall. All right. Shoot it. What's Dud got on his mind?"

Miss Lang smiled, carefully powdered a small spot on her delicate and wholly perfect nose, and asked what seemed then to be a silly question.

"Do you know what a red flag stands for, Mr. Norton?"

"What is this?" I demanded. "One of those quizzing things?"

"I am serious," she assured me calmly. "Please answer."

"A red flag, in almost any language, means danger," I said.

"Well," she drawled, "that is what we at Sunnybrook Plantation are up against. Not just one of them, though, but a bunch of red flags."

I looked at her keenly. This girl of Dud's was no fool, as I could see with one glance. Better to let her have her head.

"All right, Miss Lang," I said, "go

right along. You just spin the yarn in your own words, and I'll see how good a listener I can be."

"So sweet of you," she murmured. "I always like to tell things in my own words, and I do love good listeners. Now, Mr. Norton," she went on, "there is no need to describe Sunnybrook Plantation to you, for you have visited there more than once. There is, however, one part I wish to place vividly before you. Remember that Sunnybrook House sits on a rise, a small donnick, perhaps a quarter of a mile back from the Mississippi levee?"

I merely nodded, recalling what a fine old home it was.

"You will recall that father's land extends right up to the levee, and that just about half a mile from the house, and along the levee to the north, is the bed of what used to be Black Gum Slough. When the levee was built, the mouth of the slough was closed. You have all that pictured in your mind?"

I nodded again. She was going straight and fine, and no word of mine should start her around that barn of which Dud had spoken.

"This is Thursday, isn't it?" she asked so earnestly as to almost startle me into words. But I nodded instead.

She counted on her pretty fingers for an instant, then:

"Four days ago, on Monday morning, to be exact, the plantation foreman and some of the negroes came to Sunnybrook House and reported the finding of some unusual objects on the levee. They were found up around that part of the embankment which now closes Black Gum Slough. In fact, Mr. Norton, Black Gum Slough was bracketed by a pair of red flags."

She let me have the force of that,



then, getting nothing from me, went on.

"On the levee, at the spot where the old slough once emptied into the river," she elaborated, "tacked to white sticks set firmly in the ground about two hundred feet apart, the flags waved in the river breeze. Dad put the matter down to some sort of nonsense on the part of the plantation hands, and sent Bisbee and his negroes back to work. The flags were let stand where they were. Next morning they were gone."

She looked at me in speculation, then asked crisply:

"Well, haven't you any comment to make?"

I shook my head negatively.

"I'm beginning to think cops are difficult," she said, but picked up the thread of the yarn and went right on with it. "But we were to have more flags. A negro in a skiff, coming down the river, stopped to notify Bisbee that a pair of red flags were stuck in the levee, on the river side, just above the water's edge. Bisbee hurried up—and there they were. Both flags thrust into the muddy levee at points that corresponded to their former positions on the top.

"That made Dad mad, and he went up to see them for himself," Miss Lang went on. "He saw the red flags—and then, judging from his remarks, saw red everywhere he looked. A plow-boy was sent down for the flags, and they were taken to Sunnybrook House. Examination gave no satisfaction, however, and Dad just had to stew the rest of the day. When night came on, he finally decided to have Bisbee watch the levee at that point, armed with a shotgun—and Dad's orders were to shoot anybody seen fooling around on the levee or below it."

I wasn't at all prepared for what

came next, and I confess here and now that it gave me a jolt.

"Next morning," Miss Lang said, a note of regret and uneasiness in her voice, "a negro found Bisbee stretched on the levee near the slough. He was dead from a rifle-bullet. It had entered through the back of his head!"

## CHAPTER II

### Puzzling Pictures

"FOOTPRINTS on the levee?" I demanded, now keenly interested.

"The mud held lots of them. Dad says there's no clue in the tracks. Too many of them."

"How was Bisbee lying?"

"On his back, arms stretched wide, the rain—the eternal rain—beating in his face!" She shuddered, and her voice broke a trifle.

"We've had dark, moonless nights for the past ten days," I reflected aloud. Then, following a line suggested by the reflection, I asked: "What was the condition of the head where the bullet went in?"

Miss Lang covered her face with her hands, and shuddered.

"Badly mutilated. His hair scorched and burned by the flame from the weapon. I'll answer for you, Miss Lang. Now," I queried, "why did you say Bisbee had been shot with a rifle?"

She looked at me in puzzlement, then asked:

"How did you know what condition the back of Bisbee's head was in?"

"Dark night. The killer had to shoot at close range. There was lightning, probably, but he wouldn't have depended on that. Besides, accurate shooting from a distance cannot be

done by the chance glare of lightning. What about that rifle business?"

"It made such a terrible wound," she shuddered.

"Who made the coroner's examination?"

"Dr. Flick. He is plantation physician for Dad and several other planters in the vicinity," she answered. "He is the coroner for our county, also."

"Did Flick say the wound had been caused by a rifle bullet?"

"No. That seemed to be the general impression, though."

"Just what did Flick say?"

"Only that he had been dead since about midnight, as best he could tell. There was nothing much he could say, except what was obvious even to laymen."

"Did he dwell any upon the circumstance that Bisbee's hair was scorched?"

"Yes. He mentioned it."

"Deduce anything from it?"

"Yes. He thinks the killer crept up on Bisbee, and shot him from behind."

"Absolute rot!" I declared. "Bisbee was watching the whole of that levee, and not the top of it alone. His instructions were to watch for prowlers anywhere about it. Nobody could have crept up on him close enough to fire that shot almost against his head. Not unless he was deaf and blind."

"**W**ELL, what have you to offer about it?" she wanted to know.

"I'm not offering today," I grinned. "Do you know of anybody who was on that levee after nightfall except Bisbee?"

"I do not. And I am sure no one else does."

"Somebody was there, as the crime

establishes—but we'll pass that for later investigation. How did Bisbee treat the negroes on the plantation?"

"He was kind to them. Never was a driver, and never used a club, as many overseers do. Dad wouldn't have stood for that, even had Bisbee been that sort—which he was not."

"Nevertheless, it was generally known among the negroes that Bisbee was patrolling the levee at that point."

"Of course. Trust plantation negroes to know everything that goes on."

"He would have a lunch at midnight," I suggested. "Who was supposed to take it to him?"

"His boy, Tom. The boy says he took the lunch, and that his father ate it under a shelter which had been thrown up on the levee for his use the afternoon before."

"Was the body found near the shelter?" I asked quickly.

"No. A hundred yards away from it."

"Show Mr. Norton the drawing," Miss Lang requested, turning toward Colquitt. "It is the most mysterious thing of all. At least, it is to me."

Colquitt got up stiffly, and unwrapped a small section of drawing-board. He handed it to me without comment.

It proved to be a drawing in crayon, rather well done, without showing the thumb-marks of a finished artist, of Sunnybrook House, its fine old oaks, age-old shrubs, and, sketched into the background, the cabins which had been preserved as mementos of the days before the war.

"Well," I asked, "what about this thing? It's rather well done, but what is its significance—if any?"

"You may judge as to its signifi-

cance," Miss Lang said quietly. "It arrived in the morning mail yesterday. The day Bisbee's body was found. The address was carefully printed in ink, and read: 'Col. Dudley Lang, and Family.'"

"Postmarked at what point?"

"Memphis."

"Nothing but the drawing inclosed?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"Know anybody in the vicinity who paints and draws?"

"I do both painting and crayon work," Miss Lang told me. "But, if I do say it myself, this picture is crude beside my work. I'm giving you straight answers, and trying to make them enlightening—so don't mark me up as an egotist."

"Nothing like it," I assured her.

"Anybody else you know who does work like this?"

"Nobody. Yet there may be many. I mean, outside the circle of my acquaintance."

"There is a negro girl," Colquitt reminded, "living on the plantation, Miss Lang, who can do excellent work with pencil or crayon. Old Crawfoot's Jenny. If I am not mistaken, you have given her some help at times. Especially when she was a maid at Sunnybrook House."

"Oh, Jenny!" Miss Lang exclaimed, laughingly. "She is out of the question. She's just a little mulatto girl of fifteen. She would never think of doing a thing of this sort! Mailing the picture to us, I mean."

"But Mr. Norton did not specify white or black," Colquitt—showing good sense, I thought—reminded her. "He asked if there was *anybody* else who could do such work, and Jenny certainly can. Had she been a white girl, she might have gone far in art."

"I—I hadn't thought about Jenny," Miss Lang admitted.

I STUDIED the picture, noted the detail it exhibited, and knew, of course, that the artist had the advantage of a minute acquaintance with Sunnybrook House and its grounds. An old well-house, occupying a spot in the left foreground, and which had been transformed by vines and climbing-roses into a thing of beauty as well as utility, looked as natural as life in the picture, except that its roof had begun to sag badly. Everything was natural, and done by one with the eye of a true artist, whether or not the skill was there.

"I'll take care of this, although I cannot figure how it could bear on the case," I told Colquitt. "Any visitors at Sunnybrook House?" I asked Miss Lang, knowing the colonel's wide-open hospitality quite well.

"Yes," she replied. "There always is. The Culversons, Dick and Ena, are there. Jackson Lang, Dad's brother, is up for a visit."

"Culverson. That is a familiar name. Isn't there a plantation about ten miles or so above Sunnybrook that is called Culverson House?" I queried, throwing back in my mind.

"Yes, indeed," Miss Lang answered. "That is Dick Culverson's place."

"Dick been visiting at your place long?"

"About three months."

"Three—whats?" I exclaimed.

"Months. Calendar months, Mr. Norton," Fritz replied, regarding me mischievously. "What's odd about that?"

"Nothing. Only Culverson lives only about ten miles distant. Why the long stay at Sunnybrook?"

"Well," she explained, "poor crops

have hit Dick hard. He's a spender. Terribly fond of betting on the races, and all that. He hadn't enough cash to carry on this year, and the whole place is mortgaged to the hilt. He didn't put in a crop this year, and came down to visit with us."

Well, why not? Dick Culverson was in adversities, and his father's old friend, Dud Lang, was helping him out. Fair enough.

"Why didn't Dud put this matter in the hands of local authorities?" I asked.

"No confidence in them. What he wants—and I'm quoting him, mind you—is a hard-boiled cop who doesn't give a damn about next election, and will dig out the truth, no matter whose toes are tramped on. Dad says you're the man for the job. Are you going to take it?"

"Sure. You came up the river highway to Memphis, I suppose?"

"Yes. But we can't return that way. It's covered in places by back-water from the small streams, as well as threatened by inundation from the Mississippi. Our best way would be to go down to Sunnybrook Landing on the Lilly Lee tonight. She leaves from Wharf Number Five at six o'clock."

"All right. The Lilly it is."

"So you really believe the matter is serious enough for you to take up?" she asked, rising.

"Sure it is. The drawing, and those red flags may have no sinister significance, but the killing of that overseer surely has. Besides," I added, "if it does transpire that Dud has to pay out a wad of jack needlessly, why in Sam Hill shouldn't he pay it to me?"

"No reason why he shouldn't," Fritz replied, laughing. "We'll be seeing you at the wharf, then?"

"Absolutely!"

They went about their business, and

I sat back in my chair to consider matters. At that moment the telephone rang.

"Mr. Norton speaking," I called into the transmitter.

"Long distance wants you, Mr. Norton. Hold the line. Hello, Langston! Hello—here's your party. All right, Mr. Norton!"

Then Old Dud Lang's voice came to me crisply:

"Hello, Tug!"

"Well, Dud, what's on your mind?"

"My gal been to see you yet?"

"Sure. Just left. I'm returning with her tonight. LummoX will be with us."

"Glad your coming! Say, did Fritz show you a drawing in crayon?"

"Sure."

"Well, we got another this afternoon. Another, but not like the first. This one shows Sunnybrook House with only its upper story thrust up out of what looks like mud and silt. Windows all broken, trees all blown down or leaning badly—Sunnybrook House, in short, plumb desolated. What in hell do you make of that, Tug?"

"I don't make a damn thing of it, Dud! Expect maybe somebody is crazy. But I'll be down right away—and then maybe we'll make something out of it. Anything more?"

"Naw. Ain't that enough? G'bye."

**D**UD hung up, and I sat there staring out over the roof tops at the Mississippi, as it glided like an oily serpent through the lowlands. Sat there, staring out through the eternal, damnable rain, studying, combing my mind for an answer, or even a hint of an answer—and getting nowhere at all.

Then I snapped out of it. Jim Steel was reporting by phone.

"I tagged that pair, Tug," he said,

"to the Peabody. The young lady went in and up the stairs. Big Boy then went to the Dixie Club. They had another tail besides me."

"Did you make him?"

"Nobody I know, and that ain't all. He knows as much about tagging a guy as I do about the Einstein business—and I don't know nothing at all about it. He waited across the street in a taxi, and followed right on top of their back license plate. When the girl went into the Peabody, he followed the lad to the Dixie—and drove from there directly to Slug Bennett's agency."

"The hell he did!" I exclaimed, a bit surprised. "How long did he stay there?"

"He's there yet, for all I know. At least, he hasn't showed since he went in. But that was only a few minutes ago."

"Wait for him," I instructed. "Describe this amateur tagger."

"Wiry, middle height, all wrapped up in a raincoat with a black hat pulled well down," Steel replied. "Typical stage shadow, if you ask me. Wore horn-rim glasses, and sported a short sandy beard and mustache, although I got only a brief slant at that. May have been false spinach, but it looked real."

"You saw him walking, also," I reminded him. "Any peculiarity in his gait?"

"Nope. All regular."

"Pick him up when he comes out, and report when you've got anything else. Maybe you'll get a line on Slug Bennett, and find out where he comes in on this. That's all."

Jim hung up—leaving me with something to think about besides the flooding Mississip'. Slug Bennett, head of as crooked a detective agency as well could be, was playing a hand in the

game. And, having known Slug back in Kansas City, I knew that I could expect plenty of dirty work at the cross-roads—and everywhere else.

Steel reported at hourly intervals that afternoon, until I finally pulled him off. He was disgusted, as well as soaked and hungry. He had a grievance.

For the tag with the sandy beard, who had entered Slug's offices, had not come out again. There was no rear exit that would be available, and Jim had carefully covered the front. He simply entered the office, and was seen no more.

One of Slug's men, disguised?

That appeared to be the likely answer, although Slug certainly had no amateurs on his staff.

"Well, Jim," I consoled my operative, "Slug's in it, and he'll show his ugly mug sooner or later. It's your job to tail me to the boat tonight, and report when you can."

With me up among the passengers and officers of the Lilly, and Jim Steel masquerading as a scalawag roustabout on the boiler-deck, I felt pretty certain that Slug wouldn't do much sleuthing on board the boat that night.

### CHAPTER III

#### On the Hurricane Deck

PROMPTLY at six o'clock, the Lilly Lee's deep-throated whistle warned of departure. She lay alongside Wharf Number Five, brilliantly lighted from bow to stern, the tenacious last of a once great steamboat line.

When I entered the dining-salon I was not surprised to see that Captain Stone, the skipper, had placed Dud's gal in the seat of honor. If she was a looker in street-dress, how describe her in a dinner-gown? I'm not going

to try. She was lovely, and I reckon that tells enough.

The LummoX was, of course, at the same table, but some distance removed. He looked sullen. Across the cloth from Miss Lang sat a couple in their thirties, and they were dressed for the big act, believe me. That the man and his wife were quite well acquainted with Miss Lang was patent, they exchanging greetings and smiles across the table.

I occupied myself studying the guests, bent upon discovering if there was anybody on board who showed undue interest in Miss Lang or the LummoX. I was not long in spotting a bird across the table from Colquitt who evidently enjoyed the young chap's acquaintance.

A middle-sized man and a dandy, he was. Black hair worn a trifle longer than would have become the average man, but which set off his thin, olive face to advantage. He wore a small, well trimmed mustache, and the single diamond which shone on his left ring-finger must have totaled four carats at least.

When Colquitt, after the sherry had gone round, drained his glass and turned it upside down, this gentleman leaned across the table and kidded him about it.

When the man with the diamond arose from the table, he reached over, plucked a red carnation from the center-piece, thrust the stem through the button-hole in the lapel of his dinner-coat, then strolled into the texas.

That four-carat bird held my interest, and I strolled along behind, keeping him in sight. But he didn't make that difficult, merely going out onto the foredeck and standing under the overhang of the hurricane-top, intent upon nothing more important, it

seemed, than the rich cigar he was smoking.

I secured my raincoat from my stateroom and climbed to the hurricane deck. The rain was beating down upon its uncovered surface with a sound like millions of buckshot falling upon stretched canvas. Better the outdoors and the rain, however, than the heavily scented, over-heated atmosphere of either texas or dining-salon, the latter now being transformed into a ballroom. I went to the starboard rail, about half the length of the deck aft the pilot-house, leaned against it and puffed my pipe.

The illumination from the cabin windows, the running-lights, and the intermittently open boiler-doors on the lower-deck, revealed the surging current of the river. It seemed to boil, and frosty looking waves shot ahead, then receded. Over the Lilly's bow the boat's head-lights revealed the rain-pelted, rising tide in a manner that suggested a bit of the mystery, the just-around-the-bend possibilities of the Great River.

I shivered a bit, and buttoned the raincoat to the collar. I wasn't cold, either; too much good wine aboard to be chilled by the weather. I just shivered, for some reason or other—perhaps it was caused by the spell of the Mississippi, tawny, forbidding, almost at flood-stage; a spell familiar to all who know the river—and buttoned up my coat.

**A**RUSTLE of oilskins directed my eyes toward the pilot-house well forward, and a flash of lightning revealed a figure standing in the lee of the wall, on the starboard side. A slender figure clad in oilskins from top to toe—and alone.

What was Dud Lang's gal doing up

there on the lonely hurricane, her finery covered with an oilskin coat? I asked myself that, and right then got the answer—at least, what I had to take for answer.

The girl was presently joined by another figure; a man, also in oilskins. There came a murmur of words, a low laugh in the girl's tones—and when next the lightning flashed there was nobody in the lee of the pilot-house wall.

Well, what of it? If Fritz had slipped the Lummo's leash and dated up some guy there on the hurricane-top, what the hell did I care? Dud had said nothing in his letter or over the phone about watching his girl. For that matter, I figured that Miss Frederica Lang was amply able to take care of herself. I refilled my pipe, lit it, and turned again to observing what I could see of the river.

The lightning flashes began coming more frequently, and the downpour steadily grew into a regular torrent. I turned to hunt the pilot-house shelter—and felt myself gripped by powerful arms and thrust back against the rail. Arms like flexible steel, smelling of the oilskins that clothed them, grappled me with almost crushing force, and I felt my feet come up from the deck.

Then I got over the surprise of the attack, and did some grappling myself. There resulted a short, muscle-testing struggle, a choking cry, and a dark shape went over the side toward the mad torrent below. I reached out with both hands to catch him—and caught the front of the slicker instead. It ripped open, I felt the starched front of a dress-shirt—and when the body slipped from my grasp, and shot forward, I smelled the sweet odor of carnations on the wet air. Had, in short, a red carnation gripped in my hand!

Who had I seen put a red carnation in his coat-lapel, at table? A moment and I had him. The four-carat bird! And this man who had just gone over the starboard rail had on a dress-shirt, and had worn a red carnation as well! The carnation I then held in my hand!

I ran forward and down the companionway to the cabin-deck, thence to the freight-deck below. In the dim light I scanned the faces of the now sleeping roustabouts, and nowhere did I find wakefulness, or such excitement as would have been there had the falling body been seen. My assailant had, it appeared, gone to his death in the muddy Mississippi all unobserved. I raced back up the companionway, searched the deck along the guards and found nobody, then turned into the texas. I would inform Captain Stone at once of the circumstance.

In the doorway I stopped dead, my eyes fixed upon the well-groomed figure of a man in evening-dress who stood by a table and looked on at a poker game. The man was the dandified four-carat bird.

And he wore a red carnation in the lapel of his coat!

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#### CHAPTER IV

##### "Four Carats" Gets a Name

THE certainty that my hurricane-deck assailant had been none other than the four-carat bird was shattered by the sight of that red carnation. He had put it in his lapel when supper ended, and it was still there. Another thing, the fact that he was standing so calmly in the texas, smoking a long cheroot and watching a poker game, instead of being on the bottom of the Mississippi, was conclusive proof that he had not attacked me on the pilot deck.

Yet the attacker had unquestionably been a passenger. All officers of the boat wore blue uniforms with brass buttons, the jackets buttoning clear to the chin. Not one of them wore a boiled shirt, and the man who had sought to drown me had worn one. A passenger, without doubt.

Captain Stone was nowhere in sight, but it was my cue to find him, explain what had occurred, and have him check the passengers at once. That idea crossed the line of my thoughts neck and neck with another—and I acted on the other. An astounding idea it was, too.

Four Carats turned and strolled toward the door, and I stepped back onto the foredeck out of sight. Just as he emerged from the doorway, I crashed into him and, endeavoring to regain my balance, thrust out with both hands—one of them clutching the red carnation.

Before he spoke, which he did almost immediately, I knew my ruse had gotten me nowhere. For the carnation, now in my hand, was dry. Perfectly dry!

“Collecting carnations?” Four Carats asked, his voice quiet and steady. “You’ll find plenty of them on the tables in the dining-room, all nice and fresh.”

“And this one,” I replied, “is dry, almost wilted. Really, I thought you had just procured it from the dining-room. Pardon me. My mistake.”

He stood there, cheroot held delicately between the first and second fingers of his left hand, black eyes amused, a half smile on his lips, and I took occasion to observe the front of his dress-shirt. It was unsullied—which it would not have been, had my damp fingers trailed across it on the upper deck.

Palpably, Four Carats was not the man.

“My fault, perhaps,” he said after a moment. “I should have honked my horn.”

He stepped past me, and went around on the port guard. The chap was mocking me, kidding me, well aware that I had stumbled against him and secured that carnation on purpose. Perhaps he had expected me to lose my temper, in which case he would have, in some manner best known to himself, taken advantage of it.

Wheeling, I stepped around the corner of the texas and passed onto the port guard. Almost at once I stopped, for Four Carats stood only a few yards distant, his left hand held up to the light from a cabin window—and he was plucking a long splinter from the palm by digging at it with a penknife! I stepped forward quickly.

“Ugly splinter,” I commented, when he turned his head and looked over his shoulder at me. “In pretty deep. Can I be of any assistance?”

He laughed. “You should make the offer, at any rate,” he said, “since I owe its presence in my palm to you.”

“So I had inferred. Did you get it when you caught the guard-rail of the cabin deck, or maybe it was the boiler deck?”

He looked at me without even blinking his eyes.

“Neither,” he replied. “I got it off the door-jamb when you bumped into me a bit ago. Have you, perhaps, had too much wine?”

I disregarded that. The fellow was clever, no denying it.

“How about the splinter?” I asked him. “Want some help?”

He extended the left palm, and said: “Devilish nuisance, and if you can remove it I’ll appreciate it.”



I reached for the splinter with the first and second fingers of my left hand—and snapped the muzzle of a six-gun against his middle with my right. I was none too quick, at that. For when I reached out to help with the splinter, Four Carats had made a swift dive with his right for a gun. Beaten to the draw, he let the weapon slip back into his hip pocket, and laughed.

"I'd heard you were fast, Norton," he commented easily, "but I fancied myself your equal at least. Seems I was wrong."

I SAID nothing, but reached around and removed his six-gun, which I tossed overside. Then I frisked him all over, finding no other weapon. He stood for it quietly, and no doubt he did so because of that ring of steel pressing against his stomach.

"Now," I ordered, prodding him backward with my gun, "just pass on down the guard until we reach a spot not quite so public."

He obeyed, and a few yards farther we found a place to my liking. I dropped my gun into its holster.

"Now," I queried, "why the two attempts to murder me?"

An electric bulb in the ceiling beyond us gave sufficient light for me to watch the chap's expression. He registered astonishment, but whether genuine or not it was impossible to determine.

"Two attempts to murder you!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad, or just drunk?"

"Don't stall me!" I snapped. "You tried to throw me overboard from the starboard side of the hurricane deck, not more than twenty minutes ago. Instead, I threw you. You were saved from the river by catching on the guards, either cabin deck or freight. Probably the cabin deck, for you man-

aged to get into your stateroom, slip a false front over your soiled shirt, duck out, procure a red carnation from somebody, probably a woman friend, to substitute for the one I snatched from your lapel in the struggle. You wanted one a bit wilted, for a fresh blossom would have betrayed the fact that you were not wearing the one you originally had. So much for the first attempt.

"As for the second," I went on, "it happened a moment or so ago. It was in your mind to clout me over the head, and then slide me over the guard into the river. Do you deny that?"

"All of it," he answered instantly. "I drew, or attempted to, on you because I did not like the way you were acting. That's all. As for that stunt on the hurricane deck, I had nothing to do with it!"

"Mean to say you haven't been up there tonight?"

"I don't mean to say so!" he snapped, now showing fire. "If I have been there, it is none of your affair!"

"How does it happen you know me?" I asked.

"No puzzle about it," Four Carats came back. "I've been in Kansas City a lot, and remember when you were a cop on the regulars. Also have seen you about, since you established that crooked bureau of yours in the Sandstone Building. Recognized you at table tonight, in spite of your clumsy attempt to masquerade as a gentleman. That clear things up for you a bit?"

"About knowing me, yes," I replied, grinning at his slap about my masquerading as a gentleman. "But all the rest is still a bit cloudy. You admit, or have made a reply tantamount to an admission, that you have been on the pilot-deck tonight—"

"Why don't you tell him that you were, Tod, and why?"

I had been aware, from the look in Four Carats eyes, that somebody was approaching back of me. The silken rustle of a garment informed me that the person approaching was a woman. I was not surprised when the interruption came in the voice of Miss Lang.

"You keep out of this!" Four Carats snapped.

"Not so, my dear Tod," she mocked. "You came up to meet me in the lee of the pilot-house," she went on to remind him, "and why deny it? We saw somebody standing by the rail not far away, and changed to the port side. Why be so delicate about it, Tod? No harm, surely."

"How long did you remain on the hurricane, Miss Lang?" I asked.

"Not over two or three minutes," she replied. "We did it for the sole purpose of teasing Royce. Didn't we, Tod?"

"Exactly," Four Carats agreed, now his calm self again. "And we succeeded. He is sulking in his stateroom still."

"Yeah. I hear all that. But did you go down to the cabin deck with Miss Lang?" I asked Tod

"I did."

"Certainly he did," she seconded. "What is all this about, please, Mr. Norton?"

"Would you mind introducing this Four Carats hombre, who thinks I'm not a gentleman?" I grinned. "He knows me, but has forgotten to make himself known in turn. An unfair advantage, if you ask me."

"Why, I thought you knew each other!" she exclaimed. "The situation here was so—er—intimate, shall I say? Well, anyhow, the gentleman in question is Captain Todhunter Colquitt,

commonly called Tod. You have already met his nephew, whom my revered father calls the LummoX. Come Tod," she invited, "you have the next dance."

They left me there on the port guard, with nothing better to do at the moment than stare down at the muddy river. I'll admit that the wind had been taken out of my sails.

## CHAPTER V

### "No One Missing"

WHILE I stood there studying over the late developments of the case, I became aware of a scratching noise on the woodwork just below me, and, turning my attention to it presently saw a strong and hairy hand reach upward and grasp the lower rail of the guard. The hand was followed by a head, next a long, powerful body—and Jim Steel stood beside me on the deck.

"Tug," he said, panting a bit from exertion, "I figured I wasn't never going to git to contact you tonight. Lucky I heard you talking here. Slug Bennett boarded the Lilly a bit early, all wrapped up and pretending to be a sick man. He's in stateroom Number Ten, and you can bet he ain't showed up amongst the passengers, either—and won't. That's all I've got to report. See you after we land."

I nodded, and Jim returned the way he had come.

So Slug was already on the job! Well, crooked though he was, that hombre was always a fast worker—and a mean one to be up against. It could not have been Slug, however, who made the attempt on me on the hurricane deck. He was a man weighing close to two hundred pounds, and the man who tackled me was much

smaller and lighter than that. About Tod Colquitt's size, I'd say.

Somehow or other, I couldn't get the idea out of my mind that I had the right pig by the ear when I picked on the sporty Tod as being the man I sought. He had saved himself almost miraculously, and had the nerve to cover up as he had done.

But I had Miss Lang's word that he was with her on the deck, and that he returned downstairs with her—

But, the idea struck me, neither one of them, Miss Lang and Todhunter, had said whether or not they continued to remain with each other after returning to the deck. Tod could have escorted her to the texas, and then returned to attack me. There was plenty of time.

But what possible motive could he have in wanting to get rid of me?

The answer must be that he was concerned in the mysterious business at Sunnyside. The red flags, and the murder. There could be no other explanation. Yet, I knew, to accuse a Colquitt of anything underhanded would probably get me run out of the section. The Colquitts, of Colquitt's Landing, were above accusation of any sort, and had been, father and son, for many, many years.

But, for all that, I meant to have an eye on Tod.

Something on the deck near my left foot attracted my eye, and I picked it up. It proved to be a splinter, and the fresh blood on it identified it at once. Tod had managed to get it out of his hand at last, and had dropped it there. I broke the bit of sharpened wood in two, and flung it away. Tod had not lied about where he got the splinter. It was yellow pine, and the guards of the Lilly were good, seasoned oak. The superstructure, which means practically

all the upper part of a steamboat, was built of pine.

Another circumstance in my flashy acquaintance's favor.

I went into the texas, and as I passed through the doorway I glanced at the jam against which Tod had caught for support—and found a small unpainted spot from which a sliver of wood had lately been torn. Evidence for that hombre sure was piling up!

I then explained to Captain Stone about what had happened on the hurricane deck, and that officer hastily checked his passengers over. He did that by having them all gather in the texas. Not one was missing, and I observed that several men had carnations, both red and white, now withering in their lapels. Tod had not been the only one who fancied a flower for the evening.

"Well, Captain," I said, after the check up was over, "you have a passenger whom none of us have seen. A man in number ten. What of him?"

"But," the captain objected, "he is ill. Hasn't left his stateroom since he came aboard. It couldn't have been him."

"Better look inside," I advised. "And, Captain," I requested, "if he is there, will you hand him a note?"

The captain gave me a questioning stare, but, knowing me well, nodded. "Know the man?" he asked.

"Perhaps. What name did he sign on the book?"

"Horace Barnes."

I secured a sheet of paper and an envelope. On the sheet I wrote:

SLUG:

You'll be sicker than you pretend to be now if you don't take my advice and hustle back to that crooks' exchange of yours in Memphis. You're monkeying in bad business, take it from me.

TUG NORTON.

I sealed it and handed him the envelope. The Captain went away down the corridor. I could imagine the rage that note would raise inside that fat crook, Bennett. And I really wanted him to know that I was wise to him being on board.

**T**HE officer came back presently. "He's in his room, Norton," he reported. "What's wrong with you, anyhow? Head gone off a bit? You must have dreamed that business on the hurricane deck! Not a passenger missing. Do you still insist—" "Not at all," I interrupted. "It's just my idea of a joke, Cap, to help while away the tedious hours."

One thing I had learned that surprised me, when the passengers were checked over, was this:

The married couple who had sat across the table from Miss Lang at supper, turned out to be Mr. and Mrs. Richard Culverson. The Culversons, of Culverson House, supposed to be visiting at Sunnybrook Plantation for an extended period.

Why, I wondered, had not Frederica Lang informed me that they were in Memphis?

I needed an answer to that. She had failed to tell me that Tod Colquitt was in Memphis, also. And that was something else I meant to question the young lady about when we arrived at Sunnybrook.

We arrived shortly before midnight, and the Culversons, Miss Lang and I all went ashore. We were met by negroes with lanterns, and a closed car awaited our pleasure. We drove toward Sunnybrook House in the pelting rain, all four of us silent. It seemed to me that I felt a chill in the murky air that was not all of the weather.

As for Slug Bennett, he never

showed. Where, I asked myself, would he step off?

Somehow or other, I couldn't help but believe he would leave the boat at Colquitt's Landing. Yeah, that was about the mileage I figured he'd bought.

However, wherever he went he would not be lost. Jim Steel was on his tail, and that meant he would not have the faintest kind of chance to get to cover. Where he disembarked and where he holed up would be reported to me in due time.

So, certain of that, I dismissed that hombra from my mind.

## CHAPTER VI

### A Man With Sandy Whiskers

**A** RED-BRICK house of some fourteen or fifteen rooms, pillared and porticoed after the old fashioned Southern manner, its walls covered with ivy and climbing-roses, surrounded by grounds thick with shrubs and flowers—such was Sunnybrook House. It was the country-seat of a type of man now nearly passed, and of that type no better example ever lived than Colonel Dudley Lang.

He met us in person, his house servants grouped back of him. Tall, lank, sixty years old and looking not more than fifty, he might have stepped out of a book of "before the war" illustrations, clothes, goatee and all.

After he had welcomed his guests and conducted us into the welcome warmth of the huge sitting room, served some of his private stock and inquired the news of the river, he cornered me off and asked one question:

"Have you been able to get a line on this thing yet, Tug?"

To attempt to give his speech in the full richness of its Southern accent would be impossible. He neither

"suh'd" nor "sah'd," but he had it like Micky had the measles.

"I've got a line that I'm working on, Dud," I answered. "Where it will lead me is something else again. Anything new turned up?"

For answer he drew out a long white envelope, pulled out a sheet of paper and handed it to me. I recognized the brand of portable typewriter which had been used, but that meant nothing at all. Too many of them in Memphis, where, if the postmark meant anything, it was written and mailed. It was not long, but it was juicy. Here's the text:

DEAR COLONEL:

The two drawings you have recently received were designed to make you think. Compare the two, Sunnysbrook House as it is today, and the place as it would probably appear if a flood should devastate it. Observe the contrast. Add to that a similar calamity to many neighboring plantations, a large loss of human life and the perishing of thousands of head of cattle, then ask yourself if you like the prospect?

Do some thinking, Colonel. You'll hear from me again in the very near future.

Who am I? Well, I'm just a partner of  
THE YELLOW DEMON.

"Sounds like somebody had it in for you pretty strong, Dud," I commented, handing him the letter. "What about it? Got any enemies?"

"Plenty. Mostly over in Mississippi. You recall the big levee-break at Trinity, five miles below here, which occurred three years ago, of course. Well, Tug, somebody among the planters wiped out in that break have hinted around that I engineered it in order to save us on the Arkansas side. I have never been able to trace the dirt to its source, needless to say, else I would have reckoned with the lying scoundrel in my own way. However, I have thought that perhaps all this business is a threat on the part of a group across the river. Sound plausible to you?"

"Not any," I said promptly. "They would strike, if they planned to wipe you out, without any warning whatever. You see, Dud, that bunch, granting there should be one, would mean business. The writer of this letter does not expect to go to extremes."

"I don't get that, Tug," the Colonel said slowly. "Will you explain it?"

"You'll get an explanation tomorrow, and from the most authentic source possible. The actor in this drama himself. One of the actors, and, of course, the leading one. Maybe I'm mistaken in naming tomorrow as the day, but I think not. And, in the meantime, don't think this hombre is not dangerous, Dud. He is. One of the most dangerous, as well as shrewdest, men I have ever had knowledge of. Now," I requested, "let's join up in another drink all around. I want to study and observe."

DUD gave me a look of perplexity, started to speak, then got up and ordered brandy served. That gave me an excuse to join the group about the huge fireplace. The Culversons, Miss Lang—and another whom I have not mentioned before, and for the very good reason that he did not make an appearance until after the Colonel had me cornered off.

The late arrival in the room was introduced to me as Jackson Lang, Dudley Lang's brother. About fifty, I judged, and a smaller man than Dud. Short, slender, wiry, he looked like a small reproduction of his brother. So much alike that, but for the difference in size and age, they might have been twins. He greeted me cordially, and seemed a likable chap.

The Culversons claimed my interest most, however. Dick Culverson, a long-faced chap of about thirty-five,

handsome in a manner attractive to most women, did not, on the surface at least, take his financial condition greatly to heart. He was merry, talkative, and, as I thought, very observant. At times it struck me that most of his gaiety was forced, and quite possibly it was. Maybe, after all, the chap was suffering in his mind because of his present position. He was a man hard to dope out.

But his wife, perhaps two years his junior, was not difficult at all to read. Blond, beautiful, she was as lacking in warmth as last year's ashes. Her blue eyes were a trifle closer together than common, and they had in their depths a cold, calculating stare that most people would find disconcerting. I noticed that, when she coolly sized me up, took my number, registered it and promptly forgot me.

An interesting couple, surely. The fact that they had been in Memphis over the past week end, going thence to visit a relative in the hills back of Raleigh for the succeeding three days, made Culverson most interesting indeed.

Dick Culverson was, in short, a mighty fine prospect for me to work on.

Dick Culverson and Tod Colquitt—with my money on Colquitt.

After a bit I had a chance to talk for a few minutes with Miss Lang alone.

"Why didn't you inform me that the Culversons were away from Sunnysbrook?" I asked.

She raised her fine eyebrows, stared at me for a moment, then demanded:

"How on earth could that interest you?"

"Listen, Fritz," I came back, "and get this straight from me in person: Just cut out arching your eyebrows at

me, and pulling the high-hat. It won't do you any good at all. I'm too tough a bird for you to dent—even if you use an ax. Now, why didn't you tell me about the Culversons, and about Tod Colquitt?"

She laughed, and came down to my level. "Really, Mr. Norton," she said, "I did not think to tell you that the Culversons were temporarily absent, and as for Tod—well, one never knows when and where he will bob up. He had been to St. Louis, he informed me, and stopped over in Memphis without being aware that Royce and I were there."

"Did he know anything about the trouble down here?"

"Not until I told him."

"Did the Culversons know about it?"

"How could they?" she countered.

"They damned well might!" I snapped. "Besides, I asked a question, and want an answer. Did they?"

"Certainly not," she answered, and seemed so highly amused that she had nettled me. "I informed them on board the Lilly. They were greatly surprised and shocked."

"Like hell they were!" I said to myself. "Dick might have been shocked, but that icicle wife of his couldn't be—and I'll bet my turnip on that."

"Fair enough, Fritz," I told her. "School is out. You may go and play with the other children."

She left me laughingly, and rejoined the group by the fire. Pretty soon, good nights were said and the group broke up. Dud, Jackson and I were left alone before the sparkling logs. We went over the case in all the details, and I got strict verification on every point Frederica Lang had disclosed to me. She had covered the ground thoroughly, as it turned out.

Then I told them about my experiences on the boat coming down, being careful not to stress my suspicion that the prime mover in the deviltry, this hombre who so melodramatically signed himself a partner of The Yellow Demon, might well be Captain Todhunter Colquitt, their neighbor. I'd be certain I had positive proof against him, in case it turned out to be he, before I ever made a crack like that, even to my friend Dud Lang.

To say that the Colonel and his brother were astounded upon hearing my relation would only state it partially. They were, to put it understandably, knocked into a cocked-hat. And while they were still in the said cocked-hat, the heavy knocker on the Colonel's front door began beating a loud tattoo through the empty hall. All the servants had been sent to their quarters, and the master of the house answered the summons himself.

He returned to the sitting room almost immediately, bringing with him a slender, wiry man in oilskins. A man about the size of Tod Colquitt, but unlike the gallant captain in that he wore a short, sandy mustache and beard, and horn-rimmed glasses.

"Doctor," the Colonel said, "shake hands with an old bear-hunter friend of mine, Mr. Norton. Dr. Flick, our sawbones in these parts, Tug," he finished, while we shook hands.

And there on the rug in front of the fire, a hot toddy at his lips, had materialized another prime suspect!

## CHAPTER VII

### The Old Well-House

**I**T developed that the doctor had gone fifty miles up the river highway on Thursday morning, to visit a relative who was ailing, and had been fool-

ish enough to drive back the same route. He had experienced a tough passage, and his car had broken down in front of the Sunnybrook gates. Hence his appeal for refuge at the house, where he was, of course, quite welcome.

He could hardly have been the man who attacked me on the boat, but he could easily have been the medium tall, wiry, sandy bearded spy whom Steel had described to me. And that was what aroused my suspicion.

Another thing: It was a peculiar fact that three medium tall, wiry men, all from approximately the same location, had been absent either in Memphis or near there for the past several days.

Who could say positively where any or all of those men had been? They might have good alibis, and they might have fixed ones, and, of course, the prime actor in the affair might not be a medium tall, wiry man at all. He could be, and might be, as big as I am—six feet and two inches, with one hundred and ninety pounds to carry around. But of one thing I was certain:

The hombre who had tried to dump me into the river had been a medium tall, wiry man. I couldn't be mistaken about that.

Dr. Flick had not only sandy hair and whiskers, but his complexion was sandy and his voice grated like he might also have sand in his interior system. A disagreeable personality, and I did not wonder that he was a salaried plantation doctor instead of a free-lance practitioner. A man like Flick would never build up a lucrative practice on his own.

I elected to go to bed, whereupon all of us retired. After I tumbled in, I dismissed the case from my mind and

went to sleep. I'd probably need all my energy on the morrow, both mental and physical.

I did not get much sleep. At daylight I was brought up sitting by a rapping on my door.

"Come in!" I called, and none too pleasantly.

An elderly negro thrust his head inside.

"Marse Cunnel, sah, dey's a gemmun wants to talk wid you on de tellempoam. He say it's right impo'tant, sah."

I was into my bathrobe and slippers the next instant, and followed the negro servant down the corridor to where there was a phone at the end. It just had to be Jim Steel—and it was.

"Tug," came in Steel's voice, and he spoke guardedly, "I'm reporting from a country store three miles south of Culverson's Landing. That cargo was put ashore at the landing last night, when the Lilly took on some freight there. I unloaded after it. It's now stowed snugly away in a room at the Big House. Negro servant, just one on the place it seems, looking after it.

"At two o'clock this morning, slender man in oilskins, black slouch hat, paid a visit," he continued. "Sandy beard and mustache. Betting it's that amateur spy I saw in the city. Couldn't hear what was said, and he didn't stay long. Left in a small car, and of course I couldn't follow. What's your orders?"

"Keep an eye on that cargo, and report to me again early tonight," I instructed. "Did you get the make of the car?"

"Couldn't find it in time," was the answer. "He came up a soft road, parked some distance from the house,

and my first knowledge anybody was near was when he showed up in the room while I watched through a window. I got the tire markings, though, and that may help some. Two new Firebrands on the rear, and a pair of Silvertreads on the front. That was the best I could do."

"Call me earlier, if there is anything more," I said, and hung up.

Well, that was that. It began to look more and more like the sandy doctor was up to something. We had his word for it that he had gone up the river to visit a sick relative. Maybe he had gone to Memphis instead, and for the sole purpose of spying on Miss Lang and Colquitt, and later getting in touch with Slug Bennett. Probably Slug had been acting for him on the Memphis end all along. In fact, it looked very much as though he had.

Then another thought struck me, as I was dressing. It was this:

Who could have had a better chance to get close to Bisbee on the levee than Dr. Flick? It certainly would not be unusual to find the doctor out at all hours of the night, calling on the sick, and he was a person Bisbee would not suspect of evil intentions.

The net began to close around Flick, and a few minutes later I was on my way down to the plantation gates to have a look at the tires on his stalled car. Identification of those tires with the markings described by Steel would just about spell curtains for the sawbones.

**I** FOUND the negro plantation mechanic already at work on it—and found something else. Dr. Flick's small car had four worn Duplex tires, and the spare was the same.

Yeah, just like that does investigation sometimes throw a monkey



wrench into the well lubricated mechanism of a theory!

There was no rain that morning, only clouds that looked like they might open up and spill their sheets of water at any moment. At the edge of the lawn in front I came upon the Colonel, who was out for an early morning constitutional.

We went together to the plantation office in a corner of the yard, and there I had Dud do some telephoning. When he got through, an alibi for Dr. Flick had seemingly been established.

"If Flick was in Linnville all day, as his sick relative told your friend he was," I told Dud, "then he wasn't playing spy in Memphis, and therefore isn't the man who shot Bisbee—"

"Shot Bisbee!" Dud's voice rang angrily. "What in hell are you getting at, Tug?"

"Keep your shirt on, old folks," I advised him. "I think maybe I'm getting warm, as the kids used to say."

When I called up Memphis, got in touch with the Toler Detective Agency and requested Fred Toler to check up on Dick Culverson during his supposed stay in Memphis recently, the Colonel's temperature rose to fever heat. When he had finished his somewhat pointed and pithy remarks, I got up and suggested that we go have breakfast.

"But what on earth are you having Toler's office check up on Dick Culverson for?" Dud demanded, as he followed me out onto the lawn. "My God, man! You surely don't think—"

"Yeah, I do think—a lot of things," I broke in. "One is that you are going to come through with a thousand cold, plus expenses, to get the shock of your life. Either way the cat jumps, Dud, you're due to get shocked. Now, about the Colquitt boys, Royce and Tod. Tell me about them."

"There's nothing to tell!" Dud almost snarled. "Tod is a younger brother of my old friend Clark Colquitt, now dead, and he is trustee for Royce, holding all authority over the estate, until Royce is twenty-five. He'll be twenty-five next month. Tod lives at the Colquitt place, as well as does Royce, and both of them are very fine men. Is that what you wanted to know?"

I did not answer. We had reached a part of the lawn from which the front of the old mansion was visible, and there at the left was the old well-house. My eyes were focused on it—especially the roof.

"That well-house roof was sway-backed in the first drawing you received, Dud," I reminded him, still eying the roof. "When did you have it repaired?"

The Colonel gave the matter thought for a minute, then replied:

"That gable-sill in the well-house dropped down during the night. Some time back in April. Been in bad condition for a while. Mandy, the cook, reported it to me and I had it repaired."

"How long after the cook reported it, before you had it repaired?" I queried.

"The following morning, bright and early, my carpenter and his helper set in on it," Dud replied. "I make it a point never to neglect repairs longer than necessary. Besides, the well is in daily use, and the roof, in its state of disrepair, was dangerous. Why all the questions about the roof of that old well-house?"

I didn't answer directly. Somehow or other, I couldn't take my eyes off that old well-house, nor my mind off it either. It had begun to impress me that in the vine-covered relic was a

clew that would lead me out of the morass.

A clew, in short, that would spell the gallows for somebody.

### CHAPTER VIII

#### The Killer Strikes Again

THE rest of that day was spent in prowling about the place, inspecting the levee, querying the negroes on the plantation, getting a line on things generally, as far as possible. That was not far. I learned, in fact, precisely nothing.

During the afternoon the Colquitts, Royce and Tod, came up to inquire if anything out of the ordinary had occurred, as well as to visit. Both expressed a willingness before departing homeward, to stand guard on the levee, at the house, or serve in any capacity for which there might be a need.

I did not click to either one of them standing guard anywhere about the place, and informed them so—politely, of course.

As a matter of fact, I had no intention of placing guards on the levee at that time. The levee, as I believed, was in no danger yet. It might never be. Nor did I think anybody at the Colonel's house need fear the crook. Not at all. I might be in danger, probably was at every moment of the day and night, but I figured I could take care of myself.

In late afternoon, while I stood frowning at that old well-house, feeling that I had something just about in reach, I got a call to the telephone. It was Steel calling.

"Tug," he said, his voice expressing considerable ire, "when I got back from telephoning you this morning, he was gone! Bag and baggage. My first thought was the landing, and I hot-

footed it down there—just in time to see him depart in a power launch up the river. Headed toward Memphis, Tug—hell-bent! What do you make of that?"

"A lot," I told him. "But you stick right there tonight," I instructed. "Slug has probably ducked for good, but I've got a hunch somebody else will show up there later. See what he's up to, in case he appears, but don't bother him."

"O. K." Jim hung up.

And Slug Bennett was on his way back to Memphis! Well, why not? I figured Slug this way: He had been hired to turn a trick on board the Lilly the night before, but the man who hired him saw what he thought was too good a chance to lose, so he tackled the job himself. That was when I had my little affair on the hurricane deck. The job fozzled, Slug knew me well enough to be darn sure he nor anybody else would get another chance. And Slug had taken the first opportunity to beat it. He wanted to get in the clear.

My note to him, delivered by Captain Stone, had had its effect.

My prediction that we would get another letter from the killer that day, failed to justify itself. The day passed without incident of note, and after supper the Colonel suggested that somebody stand watch in the house during the night. I felt no uneasiness about there being any danger to anybody, but yielded when he insisted.

"I'll take the first watch, Norton," Jackson Lang volunteered. "Say we retire at about ten, I watch until two, and you relieve me for the balance of the night?"

That was agreeable. I felt that if any danger materialized at all it would very likely come during my watch. About ten o'clock I turned in and, dis-

missing the case from my mind, promptly went to sleep. At two, Jackson Lang awoke me, reporting everything quiet.

"I really think Dudley is letting his fears run away with him, Norton," Jackson said while I slipped into my clothes. "Still, there is a certain satisfaction in knowing that everybody in the house is not asleep. Hope you have as quiet a watch as I did."

JACKSON retired to his room at the end of the main corridor, and I went down to the sitting room, switched off the lights, and sat down in a comfortable chair to wait for daylight. My reason for switching off the lights and waiting in the darkness was this:

If that bird really meant to enter the house for any reason, he would not do so as long as there was a light in the place. If the absence of light would tempt him to enter, then he'd be most welcome. That would be as good a time for a show-down as any.

During the next hour I sat there studying the problem over, but was careful not to become too engrossed. I kept in mind the possibility of danger—and it proved well that I did.

At three o'clock, or thereabouts, a sound somewhere in the house drew my attention. It was more like a hint of sound, really, than anything definite. I sat up, loosened a gun for action, and listened.

Again came the sound, and this time I identified it. A door across the hall was being opened, inch by inch. I got up and crept to the portière arch between the sitting room and the reception hall, then paused to listen again. Not a sound came.

Then I got the thought that a door might have been left ajar, and the

breeze from an open window had disturbed it. Most likely that was it. However, I couldn't let the matter rest there. I had to make certain.

With a gun in my right hand, my flash ready to unloose in my left, I slipped silently from back of the portières and started across the hall toward the drawing-room door. I did not cross it.

With a suddenness that almost jarred the breath out of me, I came up against a solid substance—solid, at least, as the human form can be. Warm, tobacco-scented breath flecked my face—then we were on the floor, rolling over and over, my gun and flashlight gone.

Whoever the intruder was, he proved strong, agile, hard as nails. I got a grip on the fellow's left wrist, bent it back, whirled him over with a powerful twist of my body—and brought my head in sharp contact with a mahogany hall-tree in a corner. It was a stunning crack, and for a brief instant I relaxed. It was long enough for my assailant.

I was not exactly out, and when the daze had cleared from my brain I found myself free to get up. I did so, and my foot kicked against my flashlight. Stooping, I picked it from the floor, and at that instant a terrific explosion from above, accompanied by a yellow flash of light, fairly shook the house to its foundations. Somebody had fired a heavy-caliber revolver near the stairhead, and I leaped for the stairway, drawing my second gun as I went.

"Help! Help!"

It was a man's voice, muffled. There was a sound of sharp scuffling, a groan, and then a heavy body struck the first tread of the stairs. Struck it just as my flash cut a path of light upward. Down

the stairs in that path of light, rolling loosely like it might be just a bundle of clothing, came the body of a man!

I reached the first landing just as the body struck it, cast the beam of my flash briefly upon the face, then leaped over it and took the rest of the flight in two bounds.

Jackson Lang lay there on the landing, and his killer was somewhere in the upper regions. As I reached the main corridor above I caught the sound of running feet receding along the passage toward the back. Afraid to fire, not knowing who among the now aroused household might be there ahead of me, I ran swiftly in the direction whence the sound had come. Jackson Lang's bedroom lay at the end of the hall, and I dashed into it just in time to have the door which gave on to a railed balcony slammed in my face. I yanked it open, leaped out and flooded the balcony with light. It was empty.

**T**HEN I saw a set of steps at one end, and raced down them. Confident that I was following the trail of the prowler's exit, and that I was right on his heels, I still did not hope to overtake him. Rain was falling drearily, the grounds black as tar, filled with bushes and shrubs. I circled the house, using my flash, chancing a bullet in the hope of getting a shot in return, but nothing happened. Except for the excited outcries in the house, all I could hear was the sullen roar of the river.

I reëntered the house the way I had left it, and found it now flooded with light. In a frightened, grief-stricken group at the foot of the stairs I came upon the members of the household. Colonel Lang, Frederica, the Culver-

sons and the two black servants who slept there.

Dud's eyes questioned me as I came down to them, but I bent above the sprawled figure on the rug before making any reply. Jackson Lang had died from a knife thrust that reached his heart. Died without uttering a word.

"Go into the sitting-room, all of you," I requested. "You can do no good here. No time now to explain."

They trooped away, and I went back to the phone in the hall. As I expected, it was dead. The killer, smooth article that he was, had seen to that. Somewhere along the line the wire had been cut, and to attempt to find the place and make repairs in the night-time would be a waste of effort.

Had that wire not been cut, would I have found the men I had meant to call at home? Would Dr. Flick have answered his ring? Would Tod Colquitt?

Time would give me the answer to the queries—if I lived to hear it.

Going back into the sitting room, I gave them all a good once-over. The Colonel and Fritz were out of it, of course. But what about Dick Culver-son?

He stood the test. If ever a man was completely surprised and horror-stricken, then Culver-son certainly appeared to be.

"Colonel," I said quietly, "Jackson got the knife-thrust by trying to stop the killer. It was he who fired, and, unfortunately missed. His gun is lying in the corridor above. Contrary to my expectation, the fiend entered the house tonight. I firmly believe that he hoped to kill me while I slept."

"God!" Dud cried hoarsely. "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing now," I answered. "We can only wait until morning."

"Morning! God in Heaven," moaned Frederica, while tears rained down her cheeks, "what will the morning bring? What more of this fiend's cruelty?"

I could only wonder.

## CHAPTER IX

### The Well-House Speaks

THE death of Jackson Lang cast a heavy gloom over the household, as well as brought swarms of sympathetic neighbors from far and near. The wailing of the negroes in their quarters was weird, and dreary in the extreme.

There was little I could do but mark time during the following two days, except to establish a strong guard around the house at night, and listen in on everybody I could. I learned nothing.

The fact that the shot had come from Jackson Lang's revolver was easily established, and that gave me the whole thing. The killer had entered through the Colonel's library, reached the hallway and encountered me in the darkness. Then he had leaped up the stairs, knowing that there was a good exit through Jackson's bedroom. Jackson, however, was still awake, or woke easily, and heard the sound of the struggle going on below. He had run out of his room, fired at what must have been a very vague target, then the killer had closed with him. The knife, silent weapon of the night-prowler, had struck him down.

During the two days before the funeral, nothing further came from the killer. He would quite naturally lay off until after the furor caused by his act had died down. I saw Steel twice during that time, and he had nothing to report.

On the morning after the funeral,

Dud came out and found me gazing once again at the old well-house. The thing fascinated me, and I still was haunted by the thought that sometime soon it would speak to me. And it began to talk, in its silent way, right then.

"Dud," I asked when he came up, "do you recall if there was anybody, an amateur crayon-artist for example, engaged in sketching hereabouts, on the day that well-house roof was sagging?"

"I don't. There probably was not, however."

"A little mulatto girl, name of Jenny, maybe she was?" I suggested.

"She was not!" Dud snapped. "I'd have tanned her hide, had I caught her in such impudence! Besides, that yellow girl, Jenny, hasn't been on the plantation since last March. Some city woman fancied her for a maid, and took her away. And that settles that."

"It does for a fact," I agreed. "And, incidentally, shows me an out I had not thought of before."

"What is it?" Dud demanded.

"Tell me something first," I said.

"Do you keep books on this big farm of yours? Strict accounts?"

"I do."

"Then your records would give the exact date upon which the well-house roof was repaired?"

"Certainly. But how can that date be important?"

"It isn't," I grinned at him. "But let's find out anyhow."

Dud accompanied me to the office and got out the record. The work had been done on the sixteenth day of April.

"Now that you know the date," he queried ironically, "and it is, by your own words, unimportant, perhaps you'll tell me why you had me look it up?"

"Certainly. In order to get the date preceding it—*which is important*. While the sixteenth of April means nothing in itself, the fifteenth of April does—"

"It ought to," Dud interrupted, grinning. "It happens to be my birthday. I was sixty last fifteenth of April."

"Any guests?" I inquired quickly.

"No. We didn't celebrate that day. Just the home folks, and the Colquitts. The Culversons, of course."

"Fine!" I exclaimed. "Now, Dud, we're getting somewhere. On the fifteenth day of April, last, somebody among you took a kodak picture of the front of your house. Who did that, do you know?"

"How do you know so positively that somebody photographed the house on that day?" Dud demanded.

"Because nobody sketched it that day," I answered. "And if nobody sketched it, then somebody most certainly did photograph it. You see, Dud, *the well-house gable-beam was only sagging one day*. Don't you get it now?"

"Damned if I do!" Dud exclaimed.

"Well, old folks," I said sarcastically, "you'd better quit having birthdays. Two or three more, and you'll be plumb dense. Don't you get it that that first crayon job sent you had to be sketched from a picture of the place, since nobody was here in person to sketch it? And that on only one day out of the whole three hundred and sixty-five could the kodak have picked up and registered that sagging beam?"

**T**HEN Dud got it, and his face went pale. He looked at me out of eyes suddenly aged and strained. Finally:

"Tug," he said, "you have got a

clew in that sagging beam, and no mistake about it. But, my God, man! Where will it lead to?"

"Do you want me to go on with the case?" I queried, feeling sorry for my old friend. "No matter where it leads?"

"No matter where!" Colonel Lang almost shouted. "There's murder in this thing, Tug—and, by Heavens, I'd punish the murderer, even if it turned out that he was my own kin!"

"So I thought. Now, who took a kodak picture of this house on that day?"

He hesitated only briefly. "Ena—Mrs. Culverson," he answered hoarsely. "She's a kodak fiend. But, Tug, what gets me is that she had me stand in front of the steps. It was me she was photographing, standing in front of my home on my sixtieth birthday. There is no figure at all in the crayon."

"Certainly not. The crayon artist was instructed to leave you out, because you in the thing would have identified it accurately—"

"But that sagging beam beat him after all!" Dud broke in excitedly.

"Exactly. The picture is identified positively. Now we have only to get the person who made use of that picture for his or her own ends, and this case is in the bag."

"Can you do it?" Dud asked hoarsely—and I knew he was half hoping I never could.

"Before I quit, yes," I said positively. "You see, Dud, we have narrowed the field nicely. I'm going to do a bit of thinking, and in the meantime you find out from Mrs. Culverson who did the developing and printing of that film, what she did with the photographs, how many she had printed—and, above all, who took the film up to Memphis, if Memphis it was, to get the

work done. Skedaddle, Dud, and don't overlook any bets. Don't let anybody suspect how close we are to the finish."

"And shall I come back here with what I learn?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll need that information before I get the picture-blocks in place."

Dud departed, was gone fifteen minutes, and when he returned his face looked blue.

"Mrs. Culverson remembers taking the picture on that date," he informed me, "and had one dozen prints made. She has none now, having mailed all but the one she gave me, and the one she gave her husband, to friends of ours in the East. The developing and printing was done by the Keppler Photograph Studios, in Memphis."

"Yeah?" I queried. "And by whom did she send the undeveloped film to Keppler?"

"She mailed it," was the reply.

And that was that! An unexpected answer, but a plausible one. Well, for that matter, it only made the trail a little longer. And, I was sure, I had plenty of time.

The Colonel and I reached the veranda just in time for the morning's mail from Langston. I waited, watching the Colonel while he sorted through his stack. When his face became a fiery red, and an oath escaped his lips, I knew that I had guessed right.

We'd soon know the motive back of the Sunnybrook matter!

## CHAPTER X

### The Motive Appears

COLONEL DUDLEY LANG'S face went the color of ashes, and his hand trembled as he opened a long, white envelope and fished out a sheet of typed paper. He read it

through, then beckoned me to a far end of the veranda.

"Read it, Tug!" he choked, thrusting the sheet of paper toward me. "By God, I believe I'm choking to death!"

"Nothing like it," I assured him. "You're just mad as hell, Dud—probably madder than you have ever been before in all your sixty years. Hold on to yourself, old folks, because you're going to need something in reserve for the really big shock."

While the Colonel choked and sputtered, I read the letter. Here it is:

DEAR COLONEL:

If you have not already reached the conclusion that the red flags on the levee, the shooting of your overseer, the suggestive crayon drawings, and the letter you received Thursday were all a part of a very definite plan, you are less intelligent than your fame makes you out to be.

Here is the solution, however, in case you have not already found it. If you wish to save Sunnybrook Plantation from complete devastation by the river, and save the plantations of your friends below you for many miles, you will respond to the following demand:

Draw out one-hundred-thousand dollars from your bank in Memphis, all in bills not above one-hundred dollars in denomination, and have the money ready to hand. Do that before night comes tomorrow. You will receive another communication in which you will be given accurate instructions as to how the money shall change from your hands into those of the partner of

THE YELLOW DEMON.

P. S. Sorry about Jackson Lang. I was after other game.

I returned the letter to its envelope, thrust it into my pocket, and then gave my attention to Dud.

"Well, that's that," I said. "Why get so het up over it, Dud?"

"Tug," he bleated splutteringly, "what are you trying to do, kid me?"

"Not at all. Haven't you seen this demand coming, all along?"

"No!" he bellowed, rage overcoming his shock.

"It was obvious. The red flags, bracketing a two-hundred-foot section of the levee, were significant of one thing only: That you might expect a breach in the embankment. The crayon drawings were sent to make you think of Sunnybrook all washed away.

"Then, and here he shows his utter heartlessness, poor Bisbee was killed to stress his ferociousness. Yes, just that. To impress everybody with the fact that he was not to be fooled with. All, Colonel, for the purpose of making you pliable in his hands when he made his demand. Cat and mouse, stuff, you know."

"But—but," the Colonel stuttered, "what does this scoundrel mean by that Yellow Demon business?"

I waved toward where the Mississippi could be seen over the top of the levee—lapping the top, in fact.

"Yellow, isn't it?" I queried. "Yellow as a lion's pelt. And what could be more demoniac than the Old Mississippi when it's unleashed? That's the idea, Dud—this hombre threatens to unleash the tawny menace on you. He's hooked up with the Mississippi, and means to use it to his own ends. I'll admit that the thought is rather stunning, but I'm betting the cards as they lay."

"Highly imaginative, that!" Dud snapped. "Fantastic!"

"Exactly. This hombre has been using a lot of imagination all along. Reveling in it. Having the time of his life. Naturally, he hopes he will not be called upon to go to extremes and actually cause the destruction he threatens, because he had much rather have the jack. But I have no doubt he would do it, if you failed to come

through—and that he'd get a whale of a kick out of it."

"Do you mean to say you advise me to meet this damnable demand?" came incredulously from the Colonel.

"I do not. Just you sit tight, and obey orders. By the way, could you have a few folks to dinner tonight?"

"Now, what the—" Dud broke off, and began again. "No use trying to understand your moves, Tug," he said resignedly. "Who do you want to be present tonight?"

"For one thing," I answered, "I want you to make sure the Culversons have no other engagement for the evening. Then I'd like you to telephone the Colquitts. Tell them there is an important development in the case, and you wish to discuss it with them after dinner. Then, Dud, I'd like for Dr. Flick to fill out the party. Can you arrange it?"

"I can. You expecting things to break tonight?"

"I hope to make them break," I answered. "Now for something else. Mrs. Culverson says she mailed out ten of those pictures she took, and that her husband has one and she gave you one. Can you contrive to find out whether Dick still has his, and do it without letting the Culversons know it?"

"I should be able to," he replied. "Dick and Ena are down in the morning-room now. Wait here."

**W**HEN the Colonel came back, after a lapse of ten minutes, he nodded affirmatively.

"The picture is in the sitting room of the Culversons' apartment," he announced.

"All right. Do you know where yours is?"

"Last I saw of it," he replied, "it



was in a frame on the mantel in my study. I haven't noticed whether it still is there—"

"Go and see," I broke in.

This time he came back with a mystified look on his face. "The picture and frame are both gone," he informed me. "And damned if I can understand it!"

"Your guests have access to your study, don't they?"

"Certainly. They go there to enjoy a quiet smoke, whenever they wish. It's always open."

"What kind of frame was it in?"

"A hand-tooled leather frame. Fritz gave the frame to me."

"Well, you needn't look for it," I told him. "But it may be I'll return it to you later on. Now, Dud, go and arrange for the gathering—and keep mum."

After lunch I parked in Dud's office in the corner of the yard, and waited for Toler to call me. At exactly five o'clock in the afternoon the call came, and the report was most satisfying.

Just after dark, a negro whom I had posted at the gate for the purpose of meeting Steel sneaked up the servants' stairs with him, and he looked like something that should be sneaked. No chance for him to clean up, however, for I had another hard job for him.

Having wised Jim to his part in the play I expected to stage that evening, I proceeded to dress for dinner.

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## CHAPTER XI

### Bait

THE persons I had named to Colonel Lang, gathered there for dinner that night, and after it was over, the Colonel, acting under my instructions, quietly gathered all the men of the party in his study. It was

a large, comfortable room, and easily accommodated us. Flick, the two Colquitts, Culverson, Dud and myself, represented the company.

"You gentlemen are all acquainted with the case upon which Mr. Norton has been engaged by me," the Colonel said, and pulled out the latest letter he had received. "Here is something which will discover the whole thing to you. I'll read it aloud."

Very slowly, and with rising anger, Dud read the letter demanding the hundred grand, and when he had finished there was a chorus of exclamations appropriate to the occasion. He let them comment for a moment, then broke in on them.

"This thing does not concern me alone," he told them, "and that is why I have gathered you here tonight. If the levee should be breached here, no doubt some part of Culverson's plantation would be inundated. There can be no question but what your place, Royce, would be wiped out. There are others, too, which would suffer. Now, gentlemen, Mr. Norton, who you are all aware is a detective, will tell you just what he knows about the matter, and what he plans to do."

Dud had done very well, so far, and it was now my cue to speak my piece.

"There is no question, gentlemen, that we are up against a gang, and that the gang has for its brains a man of a most desperate character," I told them. "It is my belief that the leader is one who either lives in the vicinity at present, or has been very intimate with it at some very recent time. Intimate enough to be able to steal a framed photograph from the mantel in this room, for instance. A photograph from which somebody, probably in Memphis, made a crayon drawing which he wished to use in his plans.

"Intimate enough," I went on, "to be able to keep tabs on everything that goes on in the neighborhood, and to know one resident here well enough to enable him to impersonate him very cleverly. That person, the one impersonated, is Dr. Flick."

Flick was on his feet instantly, a look of amazement on his face.

"What do you mean by that, Norton?" he demanded.

"I mean what I say," I told him. "You were a good subject for his purpose, since in your practice you may be expected to be out night and day, and appear most anywhere at any time. By disguising himself in your character and person, he was able to approach Bisbee on the levee—and blow his brains out."

"That's guesswork!" snapped Culverson, and nearly everybody else raised some sort of question.

"In his clever disguise, useful only at night, of course, or when he did not expect to stand the scrutiny of anybody at close range, he has gone about while the countryside was sleeping, arranging his little game," I went on, regardless. "Yesterday he was in Memphis, disguised for a time as Flick. He took care to be seen in a taxi, trailing Royce Colquitt and Miss Lang through the streets of the city. Fortunately, however, Dr. Flick has an alibi that is unquestionable. That alibi, gentlemen, cinched the thing in my mind. Made it clear that somebody was doing dirty work in the character of Flick.

"Now," turning to Culverson, "here is something that may give you a jolt, Culverson," I said. "A report came to Colonel Lang, early on Friday, that somebody is using your house as a hangout, while you are absent. The Colonel's informant reported that a big man, a stranger to him, was there at

night, and that a small car was driven up the driveway at a late hour. Rather, an early hour that morning. The informant peered under the blind of the room—and saw Dr. Flick in conference with the stranger—"

"That's a lie!" Flick cried heatedly.

"Naturally. Your impersonator was there in the room," I soothed him. "The informant also said that he had seen lights in the house on more than one night, and he has further observed men slipping in and out of the place. It is therefore obvious to me, gentlemen, that this partner of the Yellow Demon, as he styles himself, and his gang, has been using Culverson House for a hang-out for some time past—"

"Why didn't you tell me about that, and make a search of the house?" Culverson demanded, his face deathly white.

"We did not want to worry you, Dick," the Colonel told him. "Besides, we wished to discuss the matter as we are now doing tonight."

"Why discuss it?" Royce Colquitt asked quietly. "And, furthermore, why not raid that place tonight? If there is somebody using Dick's house, then he ought to have the privilege of investigating it."

"Not so fast, please," I said. "There is no immediate danger from this chap, as his letter today indicates. Night time is not suited for our purpose, as you must admit. Better to do it just at dawn tomorrow morning, when we will have light for it. A thorough search can be made then. If there is a dangerous crew laying up in hiding there, then we should take every precaution. And the sheriff should be there—"

"Are we not enough?" Royce demanded, giving me a look of scorn.

"We are, most certainly!" Flick

seconded. "I move we raid the place tonight—and immediately!"

Culverson glanced at the Colonel, then at me. We shook our heads negatively, and he addressed the rest:

"Mr. Norton and Colonel Lang are managing this," he said, "and it shall be as they say. We can gather here before daylight, run up the ridge road in cars and pounce onto the place whenever Norton gives the word. Do all agree?"

The two Colquitts agreed grudgingly, but the others made no outward show of disagreement.

"Then, until tomorrow before daylight, gentlemen," the Colonel said, "we had better disperse. We'll need some sleep, and the hour will come soon enough. Say at four o'clock?"

That agreed, the guests departed, and the rest of us retired to our rooms.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Trap

**A**FTER I heard the Colquitts' small motor-launch depart down the river and the doctor's little car chug away, I changed into an old suit of clothes and a pair of heavy boots. Then, after a careful examination of my guns, I stole down the servants' stairs into the rear yard. Five minutes later the Colonel joined me in the lee of the old well-house.

"All set?" he queried in a whisper.

I nodded, and we set out toward the back of the plantation, slopping over a cotton-road in the darkness. A mile distant we came upon Jim Steel in one of the Colonel's cars, and, getting in in silence, we were off.

Half an hour's going brought us to a gate which I got out and opened, and we passed through onto a road which followed the top of a slight ridge

toward the north. An hour later, Dud touched my arm and pointed ahead to where the lamps of the car had revealed a well-traveled side road leading toward the river.

"Culverson's," he said simply.

Steel kept right on, however, and parked in a side road on the right a full half-mile away. Then, still maintaining strict silence, we plodded up the Culverson road to the house. It was very like the mansion occupied by Dud Lang, and there was not a light to be seen, not a sound to be heard except the squash-squash of our feet in the mud, and the angry roar of the Mississippi.

Steel dropped out before we reached the house, and went to cover about one hundred yards down the road over which we had come, while Dud and I, after making certain there was no light anywhere in the place, continued along the road toward the river. Some three hundred yards from the house, we, too, stopped and went to cover.

Lang was trembling, and I knew that his excitement was at high pitch. I found a garden-seat back of the shrubbery which concealed us, and we sat down.

"God, Tug, this is hellish!" Dud groaned miserably.

"All of that," I agreed. "But it's necessary. Want this levee-breaking menace to continue at large?"

"No! You don't suspect Culverson?"

"Don't ask so many questions, Dud," I admonished. "Just wait."

"Why don't you tell me who it is?" he pleaded.

"Frankly, because I don't know!" I snapped. "I have suspicions, most certainly, but that isn't knowing."

Dud groaned, and I suddenly felt great compassion for him. My old

friend was due for a shock, so why not make it as easy as possible for him?

"Dud," I said, my voice low, "it may be any one of three of your intimate friends. The photograph of the well-house narrowed the field to those very intimate at your house."

"You think it's Culverson?" he asked faintly.

"Could be."

"But didn't Toler check his alibi?"

"Damn alibis! They can be faked, and cleverly."

"The night Jackson was killed, you chased the killer down the steps—"

"Only onto the balcony," I cut in.

"And I didn't notice until the next day that the same balcony is accessible from Culverson's bedroom. But I'm not saying it was Culverson. It may be one of two others—"

"We checked on Flick," Dud broke in to remind me.

"And that supposedly sick relative could easily have faked an alibi for him. As I have said, damn alibis. They are not to be depended upon."

"Then you were faking when you said the crook was masquerading as Flick?"

"Maybe. Either the killer masqueraded as Flick, or is Flick in person. The final suspect," I finished, "is the gallant Captain Tod. Maybe he was in St. Louis. Maybe he was only in Memphis. I'd prefer it to be him, because I don't exactly love him."

"Then you really don't know for certain who he is?" Dud asked miserably.

And I answered truthfully:

"I do not. I only suspect one person more than another. If I possessed proof incontrovertible, I would not be out here now. Why do you suppose I laid that bait in your library tonight,

if it was not to make this hombre show his hand?"

"Why are you so certain he will do that?" Dud asked. "Maybe he won't show up at all."

"He'll be here," I assured him confidently. "No question that he has used the house for a hangout, and there's bound to be evidence there that would stick him. He's wise to fingerprint evidence, you can bet. He'll be burning up to get that evidence in the clear before the search tomorrow at dawn—rather, today. For it's two o'clock now—and the time is drawing near."

DUD shuddered. I could hardly blame him. My ears strained to catch the slightest sound, I waited, cautioning Dud to be silent. Not to move so much as a hand or a foot except with care. The killer might come to the house in a motor car, or he might arrive by way of the river in a motor. Trouble with the motorboat possibility lay in the fact that the river patrolmen were out in force, and the pop-pop-pop of their boats could be heard at frequent intervals. No way of checking our man from the river. If he came by car, then we'd know it almost at once.

It was nearing half past two when, without the slightest warning of approach, a figure flashed by us, running on the sward toward Culverson House. We saw no more than a vaguely moving shadow, then it was gone. Dud gasped, and grasped my arm.

"Wait," I cautioned. "Just give him time. We won't rush things, Dud."

Five minutes later I saw the flash of an electric torch against a window in the sitting room of the house, then it disappeared. A few minutes after-

ward the light showed briefly in a room upstairs, then I saw it no more. I waited for five minutes, then spoke to Dud in a whisper:

"Step out close to the edge of the road," I instructed. "Have your flashlight ready for instant use. When I call to you, throw the beam on him—and for God's sake, keep it there!"

Dud gulped a time or two, then took the station assigned to him. I stepped out directly in the center of the road—and I was none too soon doing it.

My ears informed me that somebody was coming down the road, getting nearer.

"Now!" I called — and Colonel Lang's flashlight shot a white beam across the rain-swept darkness. It wavered, then picked out a figure standing stockstill on the road. He was not more than thirty feet off.

**A** MEDIUM tall, wiry man in a black slicker, black hat—with a sandy beard and mustache. Horn-rim glasses shielded his eyes, and his left hand grasped the handle of a physician's bag, and a square, black case. The other grasped the butt of a gun.

"Flick!"

Colonel Lang shouted the name—and, stunned by the revelation, let his flashlight swerve to the left, revealing me crouched low in the road.

Wham!

A pistol shot ripped the stillness, and a slug of lead seared my ribs. I dropped onto my knees, peering as best I could toward where my man had been seen.

At that moment the Colonel recovered, and his light began to search the blackness. A second, and he picked up the figure in the black raincoat.

Gun in hand, he was charging directly toward us!

Then I fired once—and the figure stopped in mid-stride, gurgled what might have been an oath or a cry, and crumpled down in the mud.

Steel came running up, gun in hand, and the Colonel and I ran forward.

"Flick!" Lang cried. "God, is it possible?"

"Hardly, Dud," I told him. "Focus your light on him," I ordered.

Then, when the dying man lay in the full exposure of the rays, I stooped over, caught the sandy beard in my hand and yanked it away.

The white face upon which the rain beat down was not Dr. Flick's. It was the face of Captain Todhunter Colquitt, his black eyes staring balefully up at me.

Colonel Lang groaned, then let the flash fall while he buried his stricken face in his hands. Steel picked up the light and directed its rays again upon Colquitt.

The Colonel knelt in the mud beside him.

"Why, Tod?" he pleaded in a broken voice. "Why did you do it?"

"For money," came from the man's pale lips. "Same thing other men go crooked for. Money to buy pleasure, excitement. That's all money's good for."

"But your fortune—" the Colonel began.

"Never was large," Colquitt interrupted wearily, his voice getting weaker. "Spent it. Lost some of it. Played cotton too strong. In one month, Royce comes into his estate. I've been using the income, being in sole charge, for my own purposes—"

"But Royce would have forgiven that!" Dud protested.

"Yes. But he never would have

trusted me again. My income would cease when he took over the reins. I knew it. Meant to collect a big sum, else wipe out a lot of you greedy ones who have more than your share," he ended vindictively.

He was near death now, his eyes glazing. I motioned the Colonel away, but he had one more question to ask.

"Would you really have blown the levee?"

A look of savagery that startled us all contorted his features. The stiffening lips moved.

"You're damned right—I would!" came in a low snarl. "I'd have turned—the Yellow Demon loose—on you!"

He did not speak again.

In the grip was the stolen photograph, a coil of fine wire, some detonators, and a portable battery customarily used in exploding charges of dynamite. The black case contained a small typewriter. No wonder Colquitt

wanted to remove the contents of his cache, every article of which bore his finger-prints!

Had he eluded us, I firmly believe that the Mississippi River would have had another devastating flood charged against it. For there has never been a doubt in my mind that, knowing the game was up with him, he meant to breach the levee that night.

Anyhow, I had caught him with the goods on him—which was about the only way I could have convinced anybody but myself that a Colquitt had turned murderer, gone partners with the river, and threatened to wipe out his friends and neighbors. When you grab one of those Southern aristocrats for a crime, you'd better have the goods on him!

But when the appetite craves rare beef and black coffee, no matter whose appetite it may be, it's going to get it, one way or another.



In next week's issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY Robert E. Pinkerton has a story, "Punk." Read what happens when two wolves of the city invade the wilds of the north!

# The Kid Passes the Sugar

By Erle Stanley Gardner

*The Police Knew Only One Fact About the Patent Leather Kid—Strange Things Happened to Men Who Tried to Get Him*



Three men ran toward the door of the store

THE police knew six things about the man who had killed Grahame. First, that he was short and powerful; second, that he smoked Chesterfield cigarettes; third, that he wore a wrist watch; fourth, that he was well tailored; fifth, that he had killed Grahame by mistake, thinking that his victim was The Patent Leather Kid.

Sixth and last, the police knew that this man would die. The enemies of The Patent Leather Kid had a way of vanishing from what has been so aptly described as "this vale of tears," and the manner of their vanishing was always somewhat unique, yet invariably effective.

Seated in his club, sprawled in a luxurious easy chair, Dan Seller discussed the matter with Inspector Phil

Brame. Listening in, were Bill Pope, the tropical explorer, and Renfroe, the banker.

"That Patent Leather Kid," growled the inspector, "gives us more trouble than all the rest of the crooks put together. Not for publication, I don't mind telling you that I sure wish that bird hadn't made a mistake, and that he'd gunned out The Kid."

Dan Seller seemed slightly bored by the conversation.

"How does The Kid make you so much trouble?" he asked.

"Keeps the whole damned underworld stirred up, and on the front page of the newspapers," growled the inspector. "He never lets things quiet down, keeps the department in hot water all the time."

Bill Pope, hard bitten explorer, skin the color of mahogany, eyes the color of steel, volunteered a comment.

"Seems to me he's doing society a favor," he said. "The man drifts through the underworld and rips it apart. If you ask me, The Kid's got a keen sense of humor, and does his stuff out of a love of adventure, just like I get a kick out of puttering around the head waters of the Amazon."

Dan Seller flashed him a swift glance, but the explorer was studying the tip of his cigarette, and his face was utterly impassive.

Inspector Brame growled a surly reply.

"It ain't doing the police any good to have the underworld stuck over the front page of the newspapers all the time."

Renfro, the conservative banker, nodded his approval.

Dan Seller, laying down his newspaper, arose, stretched and yawned.

"Well," he said, "I'm taking a little walk in the open air before I turn in. I take it, inspector, that you haven't any clues on the Grahame murder other than the description of the man who pulled the job?"

Inspector Brame chewed meditatively upon the end of a cold cigar.

"We've heard rumors," he said cautiously, "that's all. Grahame was to have met The Patent Leather Kid in that apartment. The Kid got wise and never showed up. The girl at the desk remembers seeing a man who was short, powerful, well tailored. He looked at his wrist watch to check the time, tossed a cigarette into the urn filled with sand, and barged into the elevator. Half a minute later the shots were fired. Grahame lived long enough to tell the police he'd been shot by mistake, that the man who did it thought he was The Kid, and was sorry. He didn't mention any names. The underworld never does."

Dan Seller yawned again.

"Oh, well," he said, "maybe the man'll turn up."

"On a marble slab," grunted the inspector, "and then there'll be some more publicity."

DAN SELLER walked out of the room, and Bill Pope, raising his eyes, regarded the doorway through which Dan Seller had vanished, with eyes that were mildly speculative.

Those gray eyes of the explorer had seen much of life, and, if there were any occupant of that exclusive club who suspected that Dan Seller, ostensibly a mere millionaire idler, was, in fact, none other than The Patent Leather Kid, Bill Pope would be that man. Yet there was no evidence of suspicion in his eyes, merely a speculative appraisal.

And if Dan Seller had been aware of that speculative appraisal, he gave no sign. He caught a cab when he had walked a matter of five or six blocks from the hotel, sent the cab in a figure eight around a couple of squares, making certain he was not being tailed, and then went to a fashionable hotel where he kept a room as Rodney Stone. The employees of that hotel knew him as a business executive who travelled extensively.

Shortly after eleven o'clock, Dan Seller, in his rôle of Rodney Stone, the business executive, slipped out of the hotel by a back entrance and service stairway. Within two doors of the place where he hit the street was The Maplewood, an apartment hotel.

Dan Seller entered this hotel, and became at once a creature of another world.

The man at the desk looked up. His face was twisted in a smile. His eyes



did not smile. The girl at the telephone smiled with both her eyes and her lips.

"Hello, Kid," said the man behind the desk.

"Hello, Kid," said the girl.

One and all in this strange new world, submerged beneath the business life of the city, they called Dan Seller "The Kid." It was not a mark of familiarity so much as a badge of respect. He was known in the underworld as The Patent Leather Kid, and by no other name. He was, after a fashion, as much of a mystery to the underworld as Dan Seller was to the fashionable club in which he lived the other half of his strange dual existence.

The girl at the telephone desk slipped off her headphones and came over toward the barrier. She was regarding The Kid meaningly.

"Didja hear about Grahame?" she asked.

The Kid didn't answer her question directly. Instead, he turned to the man who was standing back of the desk, just a little ways from the girl.

"A guy was telling me a hot one to-night, Winton," he said.

The clerk raised politely attentive eyebrows.

"Indeed?" he asked.

"Yeah," said The Kid, casually, almost too casually to be casual, in fact, "he told me that the tip that I was going to be at the place where Grahame got rubbed out came from a leak from the hotel where I lived. That's a good one, eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

And, still laughing, he strode toward the elevator.

But the man behind the desk was not laughing. He was standing perfectly rigid, and the sudden pallor of his face emphasized the fact that he had not shaved that morning.

The elevator operator greeted The Kid with deference, whisked him up to his penthouse apartment. The telephone was ringing by the time The Kid had the door unlocked.

The Kid took down the receiver.

"Yeah," he said, "what is it, Gertie?"

The voice of the girl at the telephone desk breathed softly through the receiver.

"Just thought you'd like to know," she said, "that Winton went into a panic, took what was coming to him out of the till, and beat it. He's quit his job. Went out of the door so fast you could have played checkers on his coat-tails."

The Kid grinned.

"Thanks, Gertie, only I don't play checkers."

"No?" she asked, "What do you play, Kid?"

"I play fair," he said. "Gee, Gertie, I saw a swell platinum watch in the jewelry store on the corner. A lady's wrist watch, with . . ."

She interrupted.

"Gee, Kid, I saw it too!"

"Well," said The Kid, "maybe tomorrow night at this time you could tell what time it was without looking up at the clock."

Her choking exclamation of thanks was merged in a cautious comment. "Kid," she asked, "could I wear it in the open, or would it be hot?"

"When I give a woman anything," observed The Kid, in a voice of dignity, "she can wear it anywhere." And he slid the receiver back on the hook.

## II

**T**HE KID paused in front of the display window of the jewelry store. That window showed evidences of a business depression. A

series of brightly colored tags with prices marked on them, and red lines drawn through the prices, showed where articles of jewelry would repose in the daytime. The risk of unlawful abstractions was too great to leave the articles on display at night.

There was a little display stand for the platinum wrist watch. It was covered with black velvet. The watch itself had been carefully tucked to bed in the big safe in the back of the store. But the price tag and the display stand remained, waiting for the wrist watch to make its appearance with the opening of the business day.

"Lady's wrist watch—g e n u i n e platinum," read the price tag. "A marked down bargain at \$980.00" Then a red line had been drawn through the figure and another figure below it pencilled in: "\$795.00." This figure, in turn, had been crossed out with a blue pencil, and down below, in flaming red ink, appeared the latest bargain price \$599.99.

The Patent Leather Kid surveyed the window in gloomy meditation. Some subtle sixth sense caused him to turn suddenly and glance over his shoulder.

A touring car with drawn side curtains was swinging around the corner from the boulevard. It swung in close to the curb and slowed its speed, crawling along until it came to a stop before the Maplewood Apartment Hotel.

The Kid could not see the driver, but he remembered the sudden exit of Winton, the clerk, and he had an instinctive distrust of touring cars that cruised about with the curtains locked into position on the side. He slipped into the shadows of the dark store building next to the jewelry shop, moved upon swiftly silent feet until he came to the cross street and then broke into a light, swift

run. When the welcome mouth of the alley loomed before him he dodged into its inky blackness.

It was half an hour later that he entered a telephone booth in a cabaret and called the residence number of Sol Asher, the owner of the jewelry store.

It took three minutes before a sleepy voice answered.

The Kid let his own voice show that slight slurring of word endings which marks a certain stage of alcoholic conviviality.

"Sol," he said, "d'yuh wanta sell that platinum wrist watch bad enough to open up the joint?"

There was a moment of tense silence at the other end of the line.

"Who's speakin'?" asked the voice.

"A customer," said the Kid. "I gotta swell wren that's nuts over the wrist watch, an' I'm nuts over the wren."

"Would tomorrow do?" asked the voice. "The watch'll keep, y'know."

The Kid's voice was crisply determined.

"The wren won't," he said.

There was a moment of silence.

"The price is five ninety-nine, ninety-nine," said the voice over the wire, this time with a certain oily accent of keen alertness.

"Yeah," said The Kid.

"Okay," said Asher. "You got the cash?"

"I got a check that's good as gold," observed The Kid.

"This ain't bankin' hours," whined the voice over the telephone. "Me, I do a cash business, y'understand. That there watch is priced now so close that I'm losin' money when I make the sale. I ain't goin' to lose my sleep, y'understand, to lose money."

The Kid let his voice become cheerful.

"Well, it'll take fifteen minutes or so for me to get somebody to stake me to the dough. I'll give you a buzz if I make it."

The voice of Sol Asher was complaining.

"You want it I should wait up fifteen minutes in the cold to see if somebody cashes you a check?"

"Hell no," observed The Kid. "I want you to wait up fifteen minutes to see if you're going to ring up six hundred bucks in your cash drawer."

And he slid the receiver back on the hook.

HE left the telephone booth and went upstairs to the cabaret's private dining rooms. A waiter gazed appreciatively at the five spot which was pressed into his palm.

"Mabel?" he asked.

"That's the one I said," observed The Kid. "And a couple of Bacardi cocktails."

The waiter dropped the curtain into place, bowed deferentially. Exactly two minutes and thirty seconds later the curtain was pulled to one side again, and a big blonde with tired eyes stood on the threshold and gave The Kid a synthetic smile.

The Kid arose and held a chair for her.

The tired eyes lighted up.

"It's swell to meet up with a real gent," said the blonde. "Most of 'em don't know how to treat a lady."

The Kid grinned, patted her hand, sat down. The waiter arrived with the Bacardi cocktails, withdrew, paused to pull the curtain carefully into position, closing off every crack and cranny of the door so that the interior of the booth could not be viewed from the hallway.

The Kid raised his glass, smiled.

"Here's how," he said.

"I know," said the blonde, and grinned.

"How's the divorce coming, Mabel?" asked The Kid.

The blonde's fingers quivered. The smile faded from her lips. The tired eyes were startled. The glass tilted, part of the liquid slopped over to the tablecloth. The blonde lowered the glass just in time to keep it from dropping from the limp fingers.

"Who the hell are you?" she asked.

The Patent Leather Kid grinned.

"Just a bird who makes it his business to be in the know," he observed.

"What," asked the blonde, "do you know?"

Her hands were gripping the side of the table top now.

"I know," observed The Kid, speaking slowly and distinctly, "that you married Everett Winton, the night clerk at The Maplewood Apartment Hotel. I know that you separated two years ago. I know he gave you a raw deal and no money. I know that you had to earn your living and you tried fifteen or twenty things before you had to come to this."

And when The Kid mentioned the "this" he waved his hand in an inclusive gesture.

"And I know that you've met a chap that offers you everything you want in life, marriage, a home, a chance to be decent. I know that he's a good kid, and that he'll make you happy. And I know that Winton won't give you a divorce unless you slip him a nice piece of change, and that you're having a hard time getting your hands on the dough. Because of all this life here you can't get the divorce if he fights. He'll fight unless he gets his cut."

The Kid ceased speaking. The

blonde stared at him with a sagging mouth and eyes that were glassy in surprise.

The Kid sipped his drink.

"You . . . you sure as hell do get around, big boy!"

The Kid nodded.

"I keep my health by knowing what I know," he said.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"To you," said The Kid, "I'm just the big hearted guy that plays Santa Claus, the boy that's going to pass the sugar!"

"Yes?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"What's your cut going to be?" she demanded, cautiously.

"That depends," said The Kid.

"Well, spill it."

The Kid leaned forward and set down his Bacardi glass.

"Ever hear of The Patent Leather Kid?" he asked.

Her laugh was harsh.

"Naturally. You going to claim you're him?"

The Kid laughed, shook his head.

"No. I'm going to tell you where The Patent Leather Kid is going to be at precisely fifteen minutes past one o'clock. He's going to be buying a wrist watch at Sol Asher's jewelry store on the corner of Maplewood, down a half a block or so from The Maplewood Hotel."

Her forehead puckered.

"Well?" she asked.

"Winton, your dear husband, knows where that information can be sold for enough dough to give him his cut and more. He'll let you have your divorce for that information, maybe. Anyhow, he'll promise you."

The blonde's strident laugh showed what she thought of her husband's promises.

"And," went on The Kid, "if you'll trust me in this thing, I'll just leave you a cash deposit to prove I'm right."

And his hand delved into his breast pocket, took out a wallet, extracted a five hundred dollar bill from the wallet, passed that bill over to the blonde. The Kid scraped back his chair. The blonde stared at the bill.

"You can tell him," said The Kid, "that you overheard The Kid telephoning from here, asking Sol Asher to come down and open up the store so he could buy the wrist watch for a wren. It won't cost him anything to check the information."

She blinked her eyes rapidly.

"I can get him at The Maplewood?" she asked.

The Kid shook his head.

"No," he observed. "I think you'll find him hanging around Garibaldi's speake. That's the hangout of 'Bull' Bogetti and his mob. Winton's been sorta friendly with them lately."

And The Patent Leather Kid bowed to the blonde, and slipped through the green curtain which shielded the interior of the booth from the view of those who might pass in the hallway.

### III

THE back of Sol Asher's store was designed to furnish a certain amount of safety for the property which was on the inside. It was, however, only a comparative amount of safety. Under the skilled hands of The Patent Leather Kid, the locks betrayed their trust with no noise, and no great amount of inconvenience to the gloved hands of The Kid.

The Patent Leather Kid was careful to leave the back door of the place unlocked. He wanted a ready exit. He was also careful to avoid going near the safe. But he took from the pocket

of his overcoat a rather strange device. It was a screw socket similar to the sockets which furnish the base for incandescent globes, and which screw into the wall or cord connections. But this socket did not support an electric globe. Instead it furnished the connection for two dangling cords with insulation running almost to the ends. The ends, however, were bare, mere naked wires with the ends frayed out.

The Kid borrowed a chair, climbed up on it, unscrewed one of the incandescents, inserted the socket with the two wires, arranged those wires so that they were not readily discernible, and then went into the little office, sat down at Sol Asher's desk, and lifted the telephone with his gloved hands.

He called Sol Asher's number.

The voice which greeted him was no longer sleepy.

"Okay, Sol," said The Kid. "I got the money. You get here just as quickly as you can. I'll be ready to close the deal at exactly quarter past one. She's a swell wren, Sol. You'd oughta see the way she wears her fur coat! And talk about complexion! Say, she's got the sort of complexion that . . ."

Sol Asher's voice interrupted the flow of praise with a commercial question.

"The complexion be damned," he said, "you got it the money?"

"I," proclaimed The Patent Leather Kid, with that degree of jubilation which is the result of alcoholic stimulation, plus the natural reaction aroused by the appreciative appraisal of a wonderful figure and a good complexion, "have got the money, six nice crisp one hundred dollar bills, and the wren says if you don't want to make the sale . . ."

Sol Asher's voice when he interrupted, was filled with that degree of

mild reproach which was a sales technique of its own.

"Listen," he said, "you wouldn't want it a man should get up in the middle of the night to make it a sale, and then have the customer back down on him, y'understand?"

"Come on down, then," invited The Patent Leather Kid, his eyes twinkling.

"Right away," said Sol Asher.

The Kid waited until the line was free, and then called police headquarters. His voice, when he talked was a very fair imitation of Sol Asher's.

"Listen," he said, "this is Sol Asher, an' I got it the jewelry store on the corner below the Maplewood Hotel, on Maplewood Avenue. And I got it a lowlifer that gets me out of bed to come down and open the safe because he's got it a wren that wants a wrist watch, and I want it to have some police protection, so if it should be a stick-up . . ."

**A** VOICE interrupted.

"Well, what're you crabbing about? We told you we'd give you protection when you called the first time. There's a whole car full of hard boiled babies headed out your way now."

The Patent Leather Kid chuckled.

"That," he said, "makes it okay," and hung up the telephone.

The Kid smoked a cigarette or two, crouched down in the shadows back of the safe, seated in a chair that was tilted back against the wall. Minutes passed.

A touring car slid quietly along the curb, stopped. Steps pounded the pavement. A dark blotch of shadow loomed against the front door. There was the sound of a key in the lock. The Kid moved his chair so that he was

completely concealed from the front of the store by the big bulk of the safe. He pinched out his cigarette.

A light switch clicked and the place blazed with light.

The Kid blinked his eyes.

Sol Asher walked heavily toward the back of the store. He paused to scrape a match along the sole of his shoe as he lit a cigar. He was breathing heavily, after the manner of fleshy men who have taken exertion.

Sol Asher walked in to the office and sat down. He waited a full three minutes, then started muttering under his breath. The Patent Leather Kid, attired in evening clothes, with shoes of patent leather, got to his feet.

"Okay, Sol," he said. "I got the money."

Sol Asher gave an exclamation which was like the wheeze of a col-lapsing tire.

"Hey!" he said.

"Right over here," observed The Patent Leather Kid. "Six one hundred dollar bills. Come and get 'em."

Sol Asher moved cautiously.

"Say," he demanded, "how'd you get in here? And what d'yuh mean coming into my place of business without letting me know—"

"Do you," asked The Patent Leather Kid, "want to sell me that watch or not?"

Sol Asher approached the safe.

"Vel-I-I-I," he said, "since you're here, once . . ."

He twirled the dials, and he stood so that he was plainly visible from the street, through the plate glass windows which looked into the interior of the store, blazing as it was with a brilliant light, designed to show the sparkle of the gems to the best advantage.

The Kid hugged the protection of the steel box.

Sol Asher jingled keys against the steel of the inside safe door, made fumbling motions with his right hand. He pulled out the wrist watch from the interior of the safe, and saw the six one hundred dollar bills which the Kid thrust into his hand.

**T**HEN The Kid stepped out into the open and took the wrist watch. Whereupon things happened with a sudden swiftness. The touring car disgorged three men who ran purposefully toward the door of the store. One of the men held a sub-machine gun in a position of readiness. The others held automatics.

Sol Asher gave vent to an oath.

There was the roar of a gun. The Patent Leather Kid pressed the two wire ends together. The naked wires, making a contact, gave forth a blue spark of flame, and then, as the fuse burned out, every light in the place was extinguished.

The submachine gun rattled into action. Bullets sang through the store, crashing glass, smashing plaster, ripping long wood splinters.

But The Patent Leather Kid, taking advantage of the darkness to move the single step which had been necessary to put him behind the safe, listened to the racket with an almost impersonal abstraction. His ears were attuned for another sound.

It came.

Running feet on the pavement. Nearby doorways disgorged broad shouldered men who ran forward, blowing police whistles. There was the roar of gunfire, the wail of a siren.

The Patent Leather Kid moved calmly. He walked out to the back of the store, slipped out into the shadows of the alley, and vanished into the night.

An hour later he dropped in to the Maplewood.

"Hello, Gertie!" he said.

She regarded him with wide eyes.

"Gee, where you been? There's been a sweet mess down the street. Some outfit tried to hold up Asher's store, and the bulls were put wise. They'd planted themselves, and they smoked up the gang until there ain't enough left for the ambulances to cart away . . . Knowing what you said about the watch . . . Gee, Kid, I was a afraid they'd put you on the spot. God, but I'm glad you're okay."

The Patent Leather Kid slid out his hand, along the counter.

"Present for you, Gertie."

The girl's hand slipped over his. The fingers gave a gentle pressure, then she started as the cold metal of the wrist watch pressed against her palm.

She opened her fingers, stared at the watch with bulging eyes.

"Gee, Kid . . . Gee . . . I . . ."

She stopped, choked for words, staring, incredulous, grateful, mystified, and her eyes showed not only gratitude, but an emotion which is infinitely more personal and warm. But there was a trace of awe in her manner, a respectful adoration which was almost a worship.

"Kid, how could you do it? The bulls were right there and . . ."

The Patent Leather Kid laughed.

"Just passing the sugar, honey. This is my night to pass the sugar. Be a good girl. I got an engagement."

#### IV

**H**E stepped from the Maplewood, moved two doors and vanished into the service entrance of the hotel where he was known as Rodney Stone. He slept there, and was ready

to appear at his club the next afternoon, freshly shaven, well groomed, his eyes twinkling at the world with lazy humor.

He happened to get in on the tail end of a discussion between Inspector Brame, Bill Pope, the explorer, Renfro, the banker.

"And this guy," grumbled the inspector, "was short and powerful, and he had a case filled with Chesterfield cigarettes in his pocket, and he wore a wrist watch. So we called in the jane that had seen the guy that killed Grahame."

The inspector paused, sighed.

"Well?" asked Bill Pope.

Inspector Brame shrugged his shoulders.

"The same guy," he said.

There was a moment of highly significant silence. Then Bill Pope chuckled.

"So the police were the ones that killed him," he observed, and his eyes, turning speculatively to Dan Seller, known in other circles as The Patent Leather Kid, regarded him in meditative appraisal.

Inspector Brame nodded.

"Trying to stick up the jewelry store?" asked the explorer.

The inspector frowned.

"That, of course, was what we thought at the time. But we ain't so sure now. You see, there was a guy that slipped in the store somehow, and was buying a wrist watch. He was visible from the street. Sol Asher can't give a very good description, but he wore patent leather shoes, and evening clothes."

Bill Pope threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"An accomplice?" he asked, at length.

"No," said Inspector Brame, "we

can't even pin that on him. He bought a wrist watch, and he gave six perfectly good one hundred dollar bills for it.

"Of course, we ain't sure. You see, there's only a few people that ever have really seen The Patent Leather Kid. He's a name to most of the underworld, and that's all.

"We had a line we understood we could develop. A man called in, said his name was Winton, and offered to tell us where The Kid hung out, but . . ."

Inspector Brame paused to make an exclamation of annoyance.

"But what?" pressed Pope, the explorer.

"But the damned fool got killed," said Brame. "Those boys that raided Asher's place had a submachine gun, so my men didn't give 'em very much of a chance. This guy, Winton, was in a touring car. When the battle started, he hopped out and started to run. The boys yelled at him and he didn't stop. So they did the natural thing."

It was then that Dan Seller made a suggestion.

"Perhaps this man, Winton, left a widow or some one that he'd confide in."

Inspector Brame sighed.

"That's out," he said. "He left a widow, all right, and she's so damned glad to get rid of him that she got completely plastered when she heard the good news. Celebrating, you know. She's had a hard life, and she's got a chance to marry again."

"Well," said Pope, "you can't blame her."

Dan Seller chuckled softly, as though at some very pleasant memory, and Inspector Brame regarded him with that degree of austere disapproval which the busy man of affairs regards a rich idler.

Renfroe, the banker, also frowned. The laugh, to him, seemed to be out of place. But Bill Pope, hard bitten tropical explorer, joined in the chuckle. Only his eyes, as they fastened upon Dan Seller, were thoughtfully speculative.



Next week watch for "The Devil's Do-All," by Edward Parrish Ware. It's a *Tug Norton* story.

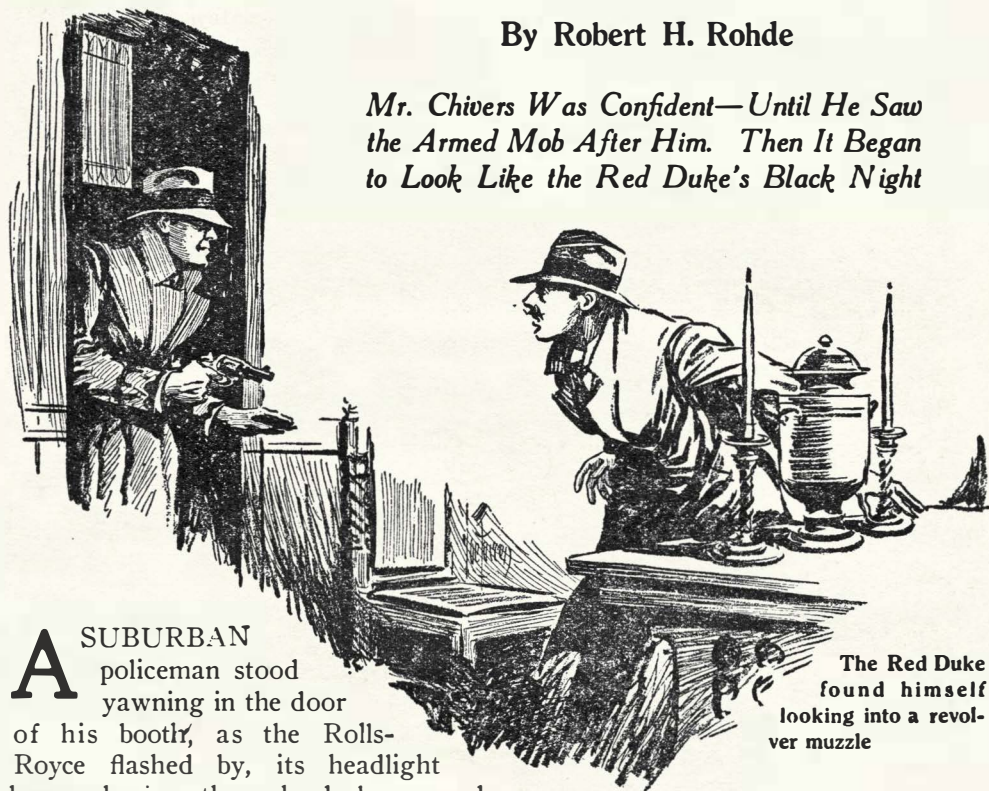


# The Red Ledger

A Novelette

By Robert H. Rohde

*Mr. Chivers Was Confident—Until He Saw the Armed Mob After Him. Then It Began to Look Like the Red Duke's Black Night*



The Red Duke found himself looking into a revolver muzzle

**A** SUBURBAN policeman stood yawning in the door of his booth, as the Rolls-Royce flashed by, its headlight beams boring through darkness and drizzle like silver antennæ feeling out its course for some monstrous sleek beetle racing the storm to cover.

Mr. Reggie Chivers, lolling in the limousine's beautifully-appointed interior, lifted the speaking tube and said, "Faster!"

In that hilly Westchester terrain, where great estates sprawled plutocratically over mile after mile of the drenched landscape, a Rolls on break-neck flight was nothing to make a policeman bat his eyes. Millionaire residents thereabouts were in the habit of suiting their speed to their mood with a fine baronial disregard of the written statute, and the swift passage of Mr.

Chivers failed to command even a second glance from the booth.

At sixty-five an hour, though, he had seen only the blue uniform and not the yawn. The glimpse was sufficient to bring him up tense.

"Why crawl, Barlow?" he complained through the tube. "If that bobby took a notion to come after us, where'd we be?"

The chauffeur, jamming down on the gas, lifted a gloved hand from the wheel and snapped it to his visor in a smart and soldierly salute.

"Skiddy road, sir," he murmured defensively into the tube beside him. "And that last police constable was

positively *not* a motorcycle chap. He 'ad one of those bloomin' Tin Elizas parked by 'is kiosk. Couldn't hover-take us in a month of Sabbaths in the beastly thing."

"Very good," said Mr. Chivers. "But have a sharp eye and a swift heel for the motorcycles, Barlow. It'd be quite the same as giving yourself the sack, you know, to let one of them catch us. This kit of burglar tools might be a trifle hard to explain, what?"

Lighting a cigarette, he watched the speedometer needle creep past seventy and half way to eighty; then he settled back comfortably again. At that clip a skid would mean inevitably a plunge through one of the stout stone walls that lined the road—sudden death. But such chances as that were all in the game, part of a night's work. They could be faced with equanimity, just as the chance of being nabbed red-handed on that prospective little enterprise of house-breaking must be faced.

Blue eyes narrowed, Mr. Chivers projected his thoughts ahead as the flying Rolls-Royce tossed the wet miles over its gleaming shoulders. Would he be coming back over these same roads a couple of hours from now, enriched by fruits of his daring—or would this be the night when he came a cropper?

His luck couldn't last forever; he had always known that. Some time, soon or late, the law was bound to trip him. There would be a flare of headlines for the newspapers then, promotion for a policeman or two, a dismal end to the career and fame of the "Red Duke," master cracksman. Neither police nor press nor prosecutors would ever see life his way. They wouldn't recognize that the worst he had done had been to snatch, here

and there, the negotiable equivalent of a slice of leisure from Midases already overburdened with it. Never in Barlow's "month of Sabbaths" would they.

Not a bit of it. The headlines would shout, "Red Duke, Society Crook, Trapped at Last!" The police would take their bow and the law its toll. For Reggie Chivers, after that, prison and oblivion. So read the handwriting on the wall.

Up in front, Barlow's foot was on the brake. They were coming, the Red Duke saw, to the turn they had marked on their scouting expedition the night before. As the limousine swung around it, sure-footed at a comparatively tame fifty-five, he asked himself the question once more. Was *this* to be the night of his crash? And would it—ironically—prove to be a fool's errand that had brought him down?

And would the game, anyway, measure up as worth the candle? What substance was there, after all, to his hunch that the gloomy old mansion on the hill held a prize that would repay the risk of the seeking? Well, dammit, there was only one way of finding out!

**H**IS objective finally had come into view, a square graystone patch against the storm sky, grim and inscrutable, frowning down from its knoll on a red-brick lodge behind iron gates set into a wall of granite. Following orders, Barlow overran the gate by a quarter mile, and brought the Rolls to a halt opposite the boundary of the adjoining estate.

In the tonneau, Mr. Chivers slipped into a waterproof of black rubber that would not only fend off the rain, but provide him with a protective coloration in the darkness.

"Give me an hour, Barlow," he

whispered, materializing out of the night alongside the driver's seat. "Exactly one hour, mind. If I haven't returned by half after three, you will proceed back to New York."

"Very good, sir. And then?"

"And then," Mr. Chivers said lightly: "why, then it might be advisable for you to begin casting about for another berth, Barlow. Wherever I fetch up, be sure I shall be only too glad to give you the best of characters."

He stood twisting a tip of his crimson wisp of a mustache, smiling thinly under it, as the chauffeur gasped:

"Wherever you fetch up, sir? You're not—not hanticipating a hupset? In that case, sir, for God's sake, don't—"

Mr. Chivers shrugged a dripping shoulder.

"Buck up!" he snapped. "Was I ever one, in India, to ride into a tiger-shoot on an elephant's back? Have you found me *that* sort since? Rot! What'd be the jolly sense to this profession we've adopted if it didn't carry a spice of danger? Having come thus far, certainly I shan't be turned off now. You're to wait one hour, remember. No more, no less!"

He swung away, crossed the road, and leaped nimbly over the ditch.

The granite wall was lower there than nearer the gate. Mr. Chivers, although smallish in stature, could reach the top of it with his finger tips; an easy jump gave him a grip, and the rough stone a convenient toe-hold. Ten seconds after he had turned his back on the Rolls he was over the wall, and not more than a minute later he was at the summit of a grassy slope, sloshing over the lawn surrounding the manor house he had marked for raiding.

The windows behind the broad ve-

randa were dark, and so also were the windows above. A cautious circuit of the bleak gray pile revealed no light anywhere within. Mr. Chivers, assured that no time could be better suited to his purpose, tip-toed onto a rear service porch and went to work at a window.

The rest was simplicity itself. A thin blade of steel slipped between the sashes; the catch slid back and the window slid up. Mr. Chivers, all ears for a breathless moment, transferred a small pistol to a pocket of the raincoat, where it would be readier to hand.

The gun wasn't loaded, for the Red Duke had his code and held rigidly by it. A hundred times in his swift-paced career he had shot it out with men as desperate as himself, and as far outside the pale; but never would he pull the trigger against an adversary who had the law with him—not though his freedom or his life should be the price of his forbearance.

## II

LONG ago he had made the vow, and the empty pistol pledged its solvency as Reggie Chivers stepped over the sill into the dark pantry beyond. A sweep of his electric bull's-eye showed him two inner exits from the room. One door stood open on an immaculate big kitchen, the other led into a panelled dining-hall that might have been lifted bodily out of some Old World castle.

Circling again there, the bull's-eye rested for an instant on a sideboard weighed down with a proud array of burnished silver. The Red Duke shook his head over it and started toward a further door. He hadn't come to *that* yet, thank heaven! Plate didn't interest him; the stuff could stay where it was until some crude cracksman with

a stubble of beard and a burlap bag came calling for it.

Through folding doors that rolled back noiselessly, he made his way down a broad hall, dimly lighted; then across a luxurious drawing-room into a library where tall bookcases hugged a vast fireplace and shadows, weirdly alive, danced in black corners to the crackle of a glowing back-log.

A rectangle of rich tapestry attracted Mr. Chivers to one of the corners. He found, as he had expected, that it hid a safe. Crinkles of a smile formed about his eyes as he surveyed the squat steel block. It was an antique—would be, as certain of his American associates might quaintly phrase it, a push-over.

Kneeling in front of the safe, he whistled softly as his slim and sensitive fingers twirled the dial. One bar, two bars—open!

Mr. Chivers plucked a waxed end of his fiery mustache and sighed deeply as he stared into the exposed interior. Closed, the safe had been a museum piece; open, it was a flop. No dazzle of diamonds or gleam of gold shimmered upon the explorer's eyes, nor did hasty search of drawers and compartments reveal any prosier treasure of stocks and bonds.

There were only dull records pertaining to business transactions in which Mr. Chivers had not the faintest interest. One moderate column of figures, such as might be included in a tailor's bill, had always been a bore to him. Acres of figures—and the venerable safe appeared to hold endless acres on stored ledger sheets—made him dizzy. He arose in haste and kicked the iron door to.

"Sold!" he murmured. "Jolly well serves me right for poaching on another chap's job!"

Then he suddenly stiffened, chin up, listening. He had not been, evidently, as quiet as he thought. At any rate, someone else was stirring now in that slumbrous house!

THE premonition that had haunted him in the Rolls gripped him again as his hand closed on the unloaded pistol in the raincoat. Not only had he come here on a wild goose chase, but he probably would be having a hair-raising time getting out, empty-handed though he was.

Straining his ears to catch the direction of those faint and stealthy footsteps, he heartily repented the festive impulse which had prompted the night's excursion. What he was coming up against in the next few seconds was only too painfully apparent. Any establishment so extensive as this one he had invaded must have at least half a dozen servants under its roof; and evidently one of the servants, sleeping lightly, had heard some slight sound from the lower story and was coming to investigate.

A loose floor board creaked somewhere in the rear of the house, and corroborated the deduction. A servant, of course—and he had descended, naturally, by way of the back stair that led down into the short hall between the pantry and the kitchen. That made a complicated situation worse—put an enemy, probably armed, between Mr. Chivers and the pantry window he had thoughtfully left open as an avenue of flight.

The library was no place in which to be trapped. There were no closets, no curtained recesses, no crannies in which even so diminutive a malefactor as the Red Duke could hide himself away. Nothing but books, books and more books—books in rich bindings

that represented a frozen fortune—books, as Mr. Chivers scornfully surmised, which were just a low-browed millionaire's vulgar display, standing there year after year with leaves uncut.

And the shelves that the books filled were fastened solidly to the walls. The cases couldn't be budged. Discovering that, Mr. Chivers beat a hasty retreat to the drawing-room. At the door opening on the great center hall—the hall where the dim night-light burned—he paused to listen again.

He could hear nothing; but after a moment a whirring sound from above came to him. He gave a start and then he grinned. A clock on a landing of the main stairway had begun to strike. He was being informed that half of the hour assigned to his nocturnal prowling was gone. It was three o'clock, that was all.

The one thought in his mind then was to get back to that open window, and get there fast. If he had to duck a bullet or two, well and good. That would be better than dodging about until the fellow back yonder had raised an alarm and he had the whole household stalking him. A few hundred yards away, Barlow would be waiting with the Rolls, and the Rolls could do ninety miles an hour under persuasion. Once he made the limousine, wounded or not, his thumb could be at his nose.

Mr. Chivers had served long enough with His Majesty's army in India to cultivate a habit of acting promptly on a decision. With this one arrived at, he stepped boldly out into the hall.

### III

**I**F he had been aiming at a disastrous result, the movement could not have been more accurately timed. At precisely that same instant a stalwart figure was emerging from a door op-

posite—and not by any means such a figure as Mr. Chivers had anticipated meeting.

This was no house-servant in bathrobe and slippers who faced him, but, more likely, a member of the family—a good-looking young man, athletically built and clean cut, whose eyes went round with alarm at sight of the stranger.

Nor had he come, as Mr. Chivers had calculated, from above. Obviously he was just in out of the storm; water was dripping from the low-drawn brim of his hat and from the shoulders of his raincoat. And—making things worse—he was a gun-toter. Rooted by the surprise appearance, Mr. Chivers sensed that at once.

The young man's right hand was deep in the pocket of the wet coat. It flashed out, and the Red Duke found himself looking into a revolver muzzle that strikingly reminded him at the moment of the opening into one of those cavernous under-river tubes in New York.

"Up with your hands!" snapped the young man with the gun.

His arm was steady, his voice was steady, and so—most discouragingly—were his eyes. In a fraction of a second, Mr. Chivers had completed a study of prospects. Intuitively, he knew he might just as well have left that futile automatic in the car. A butler or a houseman could perhaps have been bullied, armed or not. Not so this husky and steady young fellow in the raincoat. Sure of it at a glance, Reggie Chivers let go of his pistol and brought his hand from the pocket empty. He'd have to employ subtler strategy than a bluff to wriggle out of the hole.

"You have the advantage of me," he remarked, mustering what *sang froid*

he could with both hands high above his head.

"And I'm going to keep it," the master of the situation promised grimly. "If you raise your voice, I'll pull the trigger. I mean it!"

Mr. Chivers looked at him hard for a long moment.

"Raise my voice?" he repeated, blinking. "That's rather good, now. I say, old bean, what makes you think I'd be likely to?"

His smile, meant to be wholly engaging, was half one of perplexity. Very plainly, the young man with the revolver was not as intelligent as he looked. His reasoning, at least, was impossible to follow. Mr. Chivers could imagine nothing more preposterous than the idea that he should kick up a disturbance at a moment so delicate. What would it gain but to bring the entire household down upon him—give him a dozen foes to deal with instead of one.

"No go, my friend," his captor said shortly. "I'm not going to be drawn into any argument. My time's limited. Keep your mouth shut, please, while I figure something out. Now that I've got you, what am I going to do with you? That's the first question before the house."

**M**R. CHIVERS, in still a deeper mental boggle, drew a long breath and suggested hopefully:

"Why shouldn't we both take a sporting attitude? No harm has been done, so there need be no hard feelings on either side. Certainly, you can't be anxious to be dragged around a lot of filthy police stations and paraded through the criminal courts—and that's what you'd be letting yourself in for, you know, if you insisted on going through with this."

A perceptible shudder ran over the well-knit frame of the youth with the gun, then his teeth clicked together and his jaw squared.

"Nevertheless," he said softly, "I'm going through with it."

He pursed his lips and looked Mr. Chivers over with a closer attention than he had previously given to him. For the first time, apparently, he was struck by the fact that his prisoner also wore a hat and a raincoat. "Devil of an hour for people to be chasing around!" he remarked. "Just coming in—or just going out?"

"Both," Mr. Chivers earnestly assured him. "How about my proposition? Shall we shake hands and say good night? Or must we have the police in?"

The gun lifted menacingly, and the eyes behind it went steely.

"You're cool," rasped the young man in the dining-room doorway. "But I warn you that you'd better watch your step with me! If you make one move to call the police, it'll be the last act of your life!"

He had screwed his more than ordinarily pleasant face into a scowl as he spoke; but even before the frown had passed his eyes lost their savagery and were bulging.

His effect on the little red-headed man had been exactly the opposite of that intended. Just one explosive gasp had escaped Mr. Chivers as light came to him; then, soundlessly but heartily, he was laughing—laughing until tears were rolling down his cheeks.

The youth across the hall turned beet-red.

"Stop it!" he commanded in a desperate whisper. "If those hysterics get away from you—by Jupiter, I'll—"

The revolver muzzle snapped up again and Mr. Chivers, fearing an ac-

cident, exerted a mighty effort of self-control.

"Don't be an ass!" he spluttered. "My dear chap, *I'm* a burglar, too!"

## IV

THE revolver wavered, and the jaw of its owner dropped.

"A burglar?" he questioned weakly. "You—you're joking!"

"Never more serious in my life," said little Mr. Chivers. "And never more relieved."

"I can't believe it," the young man stated flatly. "You don't look like a burglar."

The Red Duke shrugged.

"Neither do you," said he. "May I ask how you got in?"

By the best possible evidence the second intruder was beginning to believe him. He let the hand that held the gun drop to his side.

"Found a window open at the back of the house," he replied after a moment's hesitation.

"*I'm* the one who left it open," smiled Mr. Chivers. "Haven't been long at this trade, have you?"

The glimmer of a grin—his first—lighted the young man's face.

"I don't make a regular thing of it."

"Thought not," observed the Red Duke. "As a matter of fact, I sort of got that impression last night."

"Last night?"

Mr. Chivers nodded briskly.

"Yes. I happened to be motoring through here. Noticed a chap lurking in that woods over the way, and decided it was somebody planning a house-breaking job, getting the lay of the land in advance. Thought it might be good sport to beat him to it."

There was still a dazed blur in the gray eyes.

"Looks as if you *had*. Yes, I'm the fellow you saw in the woods—and your guess was right, as you see."

The young man passed a shaky hand over his forehead. "I—I'll have to admit I'm not up on burgling ethics. What's the proper thing for the second man in to do in a case like this? Apologize for intruding and get out?"

"No, no!" little Mr. Chivers generously protested. "If any apology is due, it's I who owe it. I really shouldn't have come here. Ought to have shut my eyes to what I saw last night and gone on about my business. But possibly I can save you a little time by letting you know that the place is a dud. On this lower floor at least, there isn't a thing worth lifting—not unless silver appeals to you. There's a safe back there in the library; nothing in it but stacks of ruled sheets covered with figures."

The gray eyes lighted.

"You've had the safe open?" their owner demanded eagerly.

"As a matter of course. Only thing in the place that interested me."

"You didn't notice a small account book bound in red leather?"

"In the safe? No, I didn't." The Red Duke's eyes narrowed. "So it's that way, is it? You've a rather good idea of what you're after?"

The amateur's face had clouded. "Are you sure?" he insisted. "*Sure* that little red book isn't in the safe?"

"Positive. No book of any sort."

They had spoken back and forth in low whispers, but there was no curb on the groan of disappointment that escaped the newcomer.

Casting an apprehensive glance up the stairway, Mr. Chivers put his finger to his lips.

"Softly!" he breathed. "Don't forget there are people asleep just above

us. Let's be just a bit considerate of them, what?"

The young man with the now-forgotten revolver directed a tragic stare toward the library.

"If it isn't here—then—then I'm beaten!" he muttered.

**T**O Mr. Chivers the matter of the little red book had all the earmarks of being somebody else's private affair, and so no concern of his. It was the stamp of his breeding that he pointedly turned the subject.

"I think," he said, starting lightly across the hall, "that I shall be going. Possibly you prefer to stay and look about a bit? Well, best of luck to you!"

The larger burglar sadly shook his head. "No use staying, and no use looking. If the book isn't in the safe, it isn't in the house. It's where I'll never be able to reach it. That means ruin for all of us. My father, my sister—lastly, myself."

He followed the Red Duke back through the house to the open window in the pantry, out the window and into the rain. Shoulder to shoulder, both silent, they descended the soggy hill to the estate wall.

"Which way for you?" Mr. Chivers asked when they were over the wall and on the road.

"New York—when I can get a train."

"Don't bother about trains. Let me give you a lift."

The gleam of its parking lights through the rain guided Mr. Chivers to the Rolls-Royce. His guest stared at the limousine and its trimly-uniformed chauffeur before climbing in.

"Now I know better!" he said as the Rolls slipped smoothly into gear. "You had me half believing that a

burglar could be a man of culture—but *this* is too thick."

Mr. Reggie Chivers lifted an expressive shoulder and smiled.

"Easy come, easy go. I gather and I spend—and I detest cheap motors. Tonight was an off night, you see. Sometimes I do better—much better." He offered his cigarette case. "Permit me to introduce myself. My name is Reginald Chivers. I'm another one of those visiting Englishmen, but I don't write books at home and I don't make lecture tours over here. Your newspapers have pinned another name to me which may be more familiar. They call me the Red Duke."

His guest's gray eyes widened.

"The Red Duke!" exclaimed the other burglar. "And there really is such a person!"

"Most unhappily," said Mr. Chivers, "there is. I assure you that any pride I take in my fame is purely professional, not at all personal."

There was a space of silence as the Rolls-Royce rushed city-ward through the night. The young man at Mr. Chivers' side at length put out his hand.

"As burglar to burglar," he said with a wry smile, "let me say, Chivers, that you look like a darn good sport. My name is Bingham—Clay Bingham, Jr. That place where we met belongs to a former partner of my father's."

Mr. Chivers blew out a thoughtful blue ribbon of cigarette smoke. "Ah! Then you were on familiar ground."

"Not exactly. I'd been in the house only once before. But I knew where the safe was, and I had the combination. You see, that safe used to be my father's. You should be able to judge for yourself just how familiar the surroundings were. I thought *you* belonged there!"



Mr. Chivers regarded his companion with a heightened interest.

"Clay Bingham?" he repeated. "I've seen the name somewhere recently, I'm sure. Pardon me, but wasn't there something about a failure? Wasn't there a Bingham firm that went under in the Wall Street crash last month?"

The young man nodded.

"Yes. Bingham, Gore & Company. They went bust just three weeks ago today. Shouldn't have, either. John Gore is no better than a crook. That's the short of it. It was his home where we met. You'll probably agree that he lives pretty well for a man who's supposed to be broke."

"Rather!" drawled Mr. Chivers. "And how about your father?"

"He staked every dollar he had in the world to keep the firm afloat," the junior Bingham said bitterly. "Now, for his honesty, he's out of the country, in hiding. A fugitive from justice!"

The Red Duke flipped his cigarette end out into the flying rain.

"The world," he observed, "unfortunately does not run true to the copybook formula. Too often the Gores prosper and—please excuse the personality—the Bingham go to smash. May I ask what you hoped to accomplish by tonight's visit?"

"I mentioned a little red account-book. I wanted it. I'd give my right arm, right now, to get hold of it. The book is a secret ledger listing transactions under cover between my father's partner and Simon Gore, his brother."

Mr. Chivers' blue eyes sharpened.

"Simon Gore, eh? I've read about that fellow. Pressmen call him the 'Great Bear.' It's the same Simon Gore, what?"

"The same. It was his operations that started the break in the market—and without my father's knowledge, Bingham, Gore money helped to bring on the crash. John Gore made heavy loans to Simon on collateral that were worse than worthless. It was a carefully rigged-up deal between the Gores. Of course, they divide the spoils."

"Rotters!" growled Mr. Chivers. "Now that you've given me your confidence, one of the great regrets of my life will be that your little red book wasn't in that safe." For a quiet moment he stared out into the storm. "You tell me the safe in Gore's library belongs to your father, Bingham?" he queried at length.

"Yes. It was in father's private office until the firm suspended. He had come across that secret ledger of Gore's and locked it up in the safe. It would have given him not only a clean bill of health with the Stock Exchange Governors and the police, but could have been used in court to win back every penny misapplied by the Gores. But overnight the safe was spirited away.

"Through the people who moved it, I traced it out here to Westchester. By that time, though, a warrant had been issued for father and he was on his way to Mexico. With Brother Simon behind him, and unlimited money at his command, John Gore stayed in New York to brass things out. You can see the construction that father's flight places on the whole business."

## V

A FARAWAY light came into those blue eyes of Mr. Reggie Chivers, and his mouth was set in a straight line.

"Well I know it," said he. "Once

upon a time, Bingham, I had to get away in a hurry and leave a nasty-looking mess behind. Otherwise, we probably shouldn't have met as we did tonight." He drew deeply on a fresh cigarette and shrugged off the dark memory. "But let's keep to the case in hand. You think you know where the little red book is?"

"I'm certain I know," nodded young Bingham. "If John Gore had meant to retain possession of it, he'd have left it in the safe. And there's only one person he'd willingly surrender it to. That's Simon Gore—and what Simon Gore has he keeps."

The Red Duke looked up quickly.

"So?" he questioned gently. "You intrigue me, Bingham. What's so impregnable about Simon Gore?"

"Everything. Inside a half hour—if we don't climb a telephone pole and break our necks first—I'll show you exactly what I mean."

He was allowing, at that, a larger margin of time for the return trip to New York than the capable Barlow needed. They climbed no poles, never once had even a dangerous skid; but in twenty minutes flat, the Rolls was flitting down Park Avenue and Bingham was directing Mr. Chivers' attention to a large and showy apartment house towering over that broad thoroughfare in the Eighties.

"See those twin doormen?" he asked. "See that squad of flunkies in the hall? They are just part of the reason why I can't get at Simon Gore. He owns the building—occupies the whole tenth floor of it. Has his office there as well as his home. A man he didn't want to see couldn't even get his foot in an elevator. And if he did manage to get upstairs, he'd find a steel door between him and Gore."

Mr. Chivers cast a glance over his

shoulder at the rococo citadel of Simon Gore.

"Steel or otherwise," he observed sapiently, "doors must open. Absolutely, my dear chap. If they didn't open, you see, they wouldn't be doors!"

Bingham shook his head.

"I'm reliably informed," he said, "that Gore's door is wired against burglars. In addition to that, his butler is an ex-heavyweight prizefighter. And at least a couple of the housemen have been in the ring—and also, I am told, in a gunfight or two."

"There's nothing," murmured the Red Duke, "like surrounding oneself with congenial people. By-the-by, Bingham, what does your little red book look like? For instance, what size is it? I mean, is it something a fellow could slip into his coat pocket?"

The question startled Bingham. He was slow in replying to it.

"Yes, it's pocket size," he said, looking questioningly at Mr. Chivers. "It has a brass clasp and a lock, and John Gore's name is on the front cover in gold letters."

"Quite easy to recognize, what?" the Red Duke murmured. "Well, I'll keep it in mind, Bingham. If I ever happen to call on Simon Gore and see it, I'll surely pick it up. Just on the offchance, you must let me know where I can reach you."

Bingham's eyes were skeptical; he was past hoping.

"Where I'll be after the first of the month," he said glumly, "I don't know myself. Until then, my sister and I are staying on in Sutton Place—but the house has been sold over our heads."

Mr. Chivers sighed. "So goes the world, Bingham," he said, and brought the speaking tube to his lips. "Sutton Place, Barlow," he ordered. "We're driving the gentleman home."

It was nearly five o'clock, but a light was burning behind the lower windows of the attractive little brick house in front of which the Rolls-Royce presently pulled up. As Bingham climbed out, a door was opening directly above, and for an instant Mr. Chivers was looking into brown eyes which he still declares the loveliest his own have ever met.

"My sister," whispered the amateur burglar. For a moment he hesitated, and then his shoulders squared as if some inner battle had been fought and won. "Darned if I don't like you, Chivers—and why should anything else matter?" he blurted. "Shall I present you?"

The Red Duke flushed and drew back deeper into the limousine.

"No, no, old chap!" he said hastily. "You're really too kind. But—I sha'n't forget the address!"

**T**HOSE direct brown eyes haunted Reggie Chivers. Their fugitive glance continued to warm him through the short journey to his penthouse apartment on the Drive. Women like the girl of Sutton Place belonged to a chapter in his life that he felt was closed for good and all; closed and locked tighter than that little red book of secrets that had lured young Bingham to Westchester.

A hundred times he had tried to tell himself that he didn't miss them, that it was really by preference that he lived wholly in a man's world. But when he eventually turned in that morning, it was to a sleep broken by dreams of another brown-eyed girl whom the brief stop in Sutton Place had brought alive again to him—that one a girl back in India, the wife of a gouty Colonel with a title and a terrific income from home, miserable in her luxury.

"Do something!" she seemed to be pleading. "Do something for those poor youngsters!"

And when he came out from under his shower at noon, Mr. Chivers knew that his next adventure outside the law—even if it must be his last one—would be dedicated to the swindled Bingham.

He had Barlow drive him up Park Avenue in the Rolls, and from the opposite curb he spent an hour studying the too-gorgeous façade of the Emperor Apartments, stronghold of Simon Glore. The first five minutes of the hour convinced him that any frontal attack would be foredoomed to failure. He gathered in that time that the Emperor was an abode popular with the newly-rich; in no other way could he account for such an astonishing array of hall-servants as manned the elevator approaches. There were at least a dozen of them, gayly plumaged; and Mr. Chivers was not too far away to observe that no caller was taken aloft until he had been announced by telephone and authenticated as a desirable.

"But," he remarked to Barlow, "the house is not everything in life, be it ever so gaudy. People must have food, as well as shelter. Funny, isn't it that there should be such a to-do over bolting and barring and chaining the front of a house when the back door stands wide open? Far as I can see, the Emperor keeps absolutely no check on comings and goings through that service-entrance around the corner. It's something I shall jolly well keep in mind!"

And Mr. Chivers was keeping it very well in mind when presently he had Barlow pull the Rolls-Royce around the block and draw up with a flourish in front of the Emperor's canopied main entrance on Park Avenue.

Glittering and opulent, the imported car stamped its master as a person of consequence. Both doormen sprang to salute as Mr. Chivers alighted, and the superintendent came bowing when he had indicated an interest in the "Vacancy" discreetly advertised by a small brass plate beside the door.

Mr. Chivers cut short a glowing description of the apartment. It was on the eleventh floor, just above Glore's and that was enough for him to know.

"I'll have a look at it," he said.

Painters were working on the eleventh floor, revising the decorative scheme of a tenant who had succumbed to the depression; but Mr. Chivers had less curiosity for their operations than for the service end of the apartment. He tapped his walking stick against a door in the rear hall.

"What's this?"

"The laundry chute, sir. Linens are dropped into a large bin in the cellar when soiled."

"And *this*?" The Red Duke, hastily putting the laundry-chute out of consideration, opened another door beside it. "Ah, I see! The dumb-waiter—and quite commodious it is!"

The dumb-waiter had been all that he wished to see. Once located, it represented an ace in the hole which could be played in the event of a later necessity. Further inspection was a bore, and he curtailed the tour.

"I have seen enough," he said quite truthfully; and he added with equal veracity, "I shall return when I have thought it all over."

## VI

**E**VEN before he entered the Imperator as a prospective tenant, little Mr. Chivers had laid his plans for insinuating himself into the presence of the tight-fisted Simon Glore.

Parting company with the Rolls late in the afternoon, he proceeded to put the plans into execution. As a first step, he bought a grocer's apron and a basket; then he added to his purchases an impressive assortment of fable luxuries in glass and tin, and was ready for adventure.

Wearing the apron and carrying the basket, he passed unquestioned through the Emperor's service gate. A few minutes after that, still unchallenged, he was riding smoothly upward in a service elevator run by a sleepy-eyed young fellow who had just said to him, "New, ain't yuh?"

Mr. Chivers admitted being new. He admitted it again when a heavy-jawed footman opened the rear door of the Simon Glore apartment to him—a door, he noticed, that was also of steel.

"Hell of a time for deliveries," grunted the footman. "Whatever you've got, though, drag it in."

"Thank you kindly," murmured Mr. Chivers, and meant it.

Under the frowning eyes of a chef who looked as if he might have gone a round or two himself in younger days, the groceries were duly deposited in a roomy pantry. Mr. Chivers, basket on arm, started blithely away, whistling. But when he opened the rear door, he had got as far as he intended going. He threw his basket into the service hall, then stripped off his apron and chucked it after the basket. Directly after that, he gave the door an energetic shove.

But he was on the inside when it slammed. On the inside and darting for a closet he had marked when he came in. The closet was on a short hall between the kitchen and a large, barely-furnished room in which, he judged, the household staff took their meals.

The closet, he discovered, was al-

ready filled to bursting with heavy overcoats—the property, evidently, of Gore's massive servants. Mr. Chivers found just enough room to squeeze in, no more; but for a suffocating hour he remained there.

During that hour he learned from snatches of conversation drifting to him from the servants' hall that Simon Gore was dining at home, and dining alone. That was encouraging. All in all, he preferred that Mr. Gore should be present when the high moment came. It would, he thought, simplify matters.

To know when Gore had finished dessert and coffee and risen was the slightest of problems in deduction for Mr. Chivers. A scuffing of chairs in the room opposite the kitchen gave him the signal. The servants, finished with their ministrations in the main dining-room, were drawing up to their own dinner.

**M**R. CHIVERS opened the closet door wide enough to verify with his eyes the evidence of his alert ears. Quite right. The long table in the servants' hall was lined—and from the Red Duke's brief glimpse of the beetle-browed company assembled, it might have been a training-table in some pugilistic camp.

Dropping his trimly-shod feet like feathers, Mr. Chivers deserted his hiding-place. Through an intersecting corridor and a swinging door he made his way into a refectory no less magnificent than the one he had lately invaded in Westchester.

A table that would have comfortably accommodated twenty had been set for one. At the end where Simon Gore had dined in solitary state, there was a litter of cigar ashes and a crumpled napkin. Gore had moved on, heavy with food.

Mr. Chivers paused to sniff at the neck of an open bottle of port and to decide that the master of the house, with all his wealth, was no judge of a vintage. Then he, too, moved on.

He took note during his progress that the layout of the apartment was strikingly similar to that of the house of John Gore in the next county north. There was a broad hall beyond the dining-room, then a luxurious living room, and finally a panelled library.

Simon Gore, paunchy and droop-jowled, sat alone in the library with his back to the door. With a reading lamp beside him, he was studying a stock-table in an evening newspaper. He wheeled at Mr. Chivers' apologetic cough close behind him.

"Who the devil are you?" he shouted irascibly at the red-haired intruder.

"Just the grocer's boy," smiled Mr. Chivers. As Gore stared, he produced a small blue automatic that could not have looked more formidable had it been loaded. "Let's be calm about this, Simon," he begged. "For your own sake, keep a grip on yourself. A man as much overweight as you should avoid emotional outbursts—particularly when he's getting into middle age."

The warning was in vain. Simon Gore's flabby cheeks slowly turned a rich purple. A long vein stood out on his forehead like a crimson scar. When he could speak, his voice was a choking rattle.

"What do you want?"

"What have you got?" Mr. Chivers asked practically. He motioned with his pistol toward a small safe between two windows. "For example, what's in *that*?"

Simon Gore pushed himself erect in the morris-chair. His expression as he surveyed the dapper little red-head

betrayed the direction of his thoughts. Plainly, he was trying to decide whether it was really a robber who had broken in on him, or whether the uninvited guest was a stray lunatic. Mr. Chivers' chilly blue eyes gave him the answer. There was menace in that frigid stare, but certainly not madness. Glore moistened his lips.

"In the safe?" A fat hand crept toward a buzzer-button at a corner of the library table. "Nothing you would want. Just records."

Mr. Chivers hadn't missed the movement of the hand. When it was no more than an inch from the button he rapped out:

"Hold it, Glore! And—thanks for showing me where that buzzer is!"

As Glore snatched back the hand, Mr. Chivers moved briskly to the table and broke the bell-wire with a quick jerk. Panic had caught Glore by the throat and started a lardy rippling through the creases under his chin.

"Be careful with that gun!" he cried huskily. "You're barking up the wrong tree, young man—but don't hold that against *me*. I keep nothing of value here. Never any money. If you want to look into the safe, you're welcome to."

The Red Duke beamed. "Thank you ever so much," he murmured. "I'll take advantage of the offer. Let's have the safe open, Glore."

## VII

**W**ITH a shaky low moan, Simon Glore got up. A light pressure of the pistol barrel against his back expedited his progress across the room. He bent over the safe, fumbled for the combination, and drew back the thick door.

"See for yourself!" he growled. "There isn't a dime here."

His eyes sparkling, the Red Duke leaned forward.

"But what's this, Glore?" He had plucked out of the safe a small book with red-leather covers locked together. "I'm rather a connoisseur of bindings, you know. Don't tell me that as handsome a thing as you have here is a mere account-book!"

Glore caught his breath. "Nothing but. See here! You can't take that book! Put it back!"

The little red book remained in Mr. Chivers' pocket, and he was retreating toward the door.

"It's seldom, believe me," he said, "that I bark up a wrong tree. This seems to be one, as you promised. But at least I can carry away these few leaves as a souvenir!"

He had reached the library door then, and he turned and went racing through the drawing-room. But he wasn't to have the minute's grace he had counted on. Behind him, Simon Glore had sprung for a second alarm buzzer, hidden near the safe, with an agility belied by his girth. A clamor of bells filled the apartment, and as the Red Duke reached the front hall there was a thunder of running feet at the rear. Off to a flying start ahead of the other servants, the big-jawed footman who had opened the service door for him came rushing at Mr. Chivers.

The time for using the pistol as a threat had passed. Reversing it, the Red Duke employed it as a weapon. He had to go up on his toes to reach the footman's temple with the butt.

As he struck, he sidestepped. The heavyweight plunged past him, out on his feet, and crumpled against a hall-clock that came crashing down upon him, frantically chiming an hour still many minutes away.

Through the lofty dining-room the other servants were sweeping in a beefy wedge that for an instant took Mr. Chivers' mind to those Rugby rushes he had faced in irrecoverable days on the playing fields of Harrow. He gave a jerk to the folding door. It slid promptly to on well-oiled rollers when only a split second's grace remained to him, and the flying wedge went to smash against the stout oak.

A bellowed chorus of curses drowned out the thunder of the alarm gong. In the library, Simon Glore had put a weight on the button to hold it down. He came puffing through the drawing-room, brandishing a heavy brass poker snatched from the library fireplace. Mr. Chivers ducked under an annihilating blow, and tapped Glore expertly behind the ear with the pistol butt. Then there were two on the floor with the industriously musical clock.

"Sweet dreams!" called the Red Duke, and with two jumps he was through the steel door at the front of the entrance corridor and into a marble hall where the shafts of a battery of elevators faced him. A stairway spiraled around the shafts. Mr. Chivers, automatically deciding to proceed afoot, went up instead of down. As he fled, bedlam was loose at his back. The door of the vacant apartment stood open, but there was still an easier and quicker way out.

Mr. Chivers kept going, and on the twelfth floor caught an elevator just discharging a plump and highly perfumed passenger with a fluffy little dog on leash. With a polite bow to the dowager and a murmured, "Charming evening!" Mr. Chivers stepped into the car.

"Down," he said. "And no stops, if you please.

The warning was well-advised. On the tenth floor, as the elevator descended, there were many people anxious to get aboard. The needle in the indicator-box was jumping excitedly, and hard knuckles were pounding on the glass of the shaft door.

"We're playing a game," explained Mr. Chivers. "Keep right on and we'll fool 'em!"

The elevator operator grinned appreciatively as the gay passenger crumpled a bill into his palm.

"Well, it's sure a surprise," he said. "Believe it or not, this is the first wild party that Mr. Glore has ever thrown, as long as I've been workin' here."

**H**E was rolling back the gate at the ground floor then, and Mr.

Chivers saw before it was half open that he was a fraction of a minute late. Evidently the telephone had been busy. The entire hall-staff of the Emperor was drawn up in battle array at the foot of the shaft, an impenetrable barrier of gold braid. Behind the gorgeous double rank a doorman was just entering with a policeman in tow, gun in hand.

Hand on the gate, the rear admiral in charge of the elevator was in a convenient position for dismissal. Mr. Chivers lifted a spatted foot, shoved the operator forward with it, and had the cage to himself. He slammed the gate and wrenched the control handle. Up shot the car.

At the eleventh story he stopped. Jumping out of the elevator, he started it downward and slammed the gate.

The entrance door of the vacant apartment stood open before him, emitting fumes of paints and varnishes, and just a step beyond it was that buried ace of his, the dumb-waiter. He raced for it gratefully, and

a moment later was swearing wholeheartedly. The dumb-waiter was still there, of course, but it might have been in another building for all the use it would be to him. The door leading to it refused to open; it had been "painted shut," and with all his desperation Mr. Chivers hadn't the strength to break the seal.

He was not one, however, to cry over spilt milk or carelessly-applied paint, either one. Once convinced that the dumb-waiter was inaccessible to him, he darted back to the dark service hallway and gave the elevator button a hard jab.

The car was already on its way up then, and as it stopped at the eleventh floor Mr. Chivers saw that it carried two passengers in addition to the operator.

He had judged from the shadows on the glass that the passengers were large men—and that was no mistake. They were policemen!

The Red Duke, leaping back as they pounced from the cage, slammed the service door of the vacant apartment against them. With only the faintest fraction of a second to spare, he found and closed the heavy bolt.

"Detour!" he called, quoting road-signs remembered from his many tours in the Rolls. "Men working! Pass at your own risk!"

Then he was scurrying through the apartment to try his luck again at the front of the Emperor. But even as he ran, he became acutely aware that he was trapped. Lights flashed on in front of him, showing a glint of brass buttons in the entrance hall. To make it worse, he had been heard.

"We've got him!" a bass voice shouted. "He's in this here flat—can't get away! Where's the light switch, Sweeney?"

In a hasty backward glance, the Red Duke couldn't recollect having been in a tighter spot. A young army was after him. This looked like his Waterloo. It was the Red Duke's black night, indeed. He saw capture only seconds away—then prison for endless dreary years, a swift and sordid end to the gay career.

A hundred times he had sworn that he would never be taken alive; now, with those two policemen thundering at the back door and the others closing in, he thought of that second door alongside the dumb-waiter, and one last desperate chance recommended itself. There was a laundry-chute connected with the apartment, the renting agent had said. Well, whatever a laundry-chute might be, Mr. Reginald Chivers would soon find out all about it!

Dashing back to the service hall, he made a final trial of the dumb-waiter door. When it still would not budge, he yanked open the door beside it and dived into blackness.

**I**N another instant he was in swift descent, whirling around and around like an airplane in a tailspin. Clear thought was unattainable in the dizziness that came upon him. All he could believe during the first horrible seconds of the plunge was that he was catapulting to his death—due to keep that grim vow of his, whether it was his will to or not.

But, strangely, no fear of a quick finish at the bottom of the chute oppressed him. High spots of his life did not march in speedy review, as they were said to when a man stared eye to eye with death. On the contrary, it was a pair of brown eyes he seemed to be looking into as he whirled down to meet his fate—eyes that had briefly



smiled on him not long ago. No specter of death arose; he could see nothing, and think of nothing, but that girl in Sutton Place. No regrets for his duels with the law oppressed him. There was only one regret in his thoughts and in his heart—the poignant realization that the little red book in his pocket would never get to the Bingham. Glore, of course, would now reclaim it. Faster and faster he spun. He became aware that parts of his body were being overheated by friction. One instant wondering why he shouldn't be worrying about his lot in Eternity, he found himself in another, second frightfully distressed lest the seat of his trousers be no more than charred tatters when they found him broken and still at the bottom of the shaft.

But it wasn't a shaft he was dropping through. A chute was something else. This thing evidently was some sort of spiral tube, like those amusement devices he had seen at Coney Island.

Mr. Chivers came down easy where he had been expecting to meet his own finish. The laundry chute had its end in cottony softness. Landed sitting, the Red Duke was amazed that he had suffered not even a spinal jar. It was pitch-dark where he eventually came to rest, and something moist had wound itself rather unwholesomely around his neck.

He struggled up, made for a streak of light across a pulpy footing that reminded him forcibly of John Glore's rain-soaked Westchester lawn, and opened a door. Light came flooding in from the cellar, and identified the new neckpiece as a bath towel.

Mr. Chivers' first act was to pat his coat-pocket and assure himself that the little red book with John Glore's name on the cover remained with him.

He was standing knee-deep in soiled linens, and he didn't have to search long through the pile before he was in possession of an apron that would serve in his emergency.

It belonged, he thought, to somebody's chef. At any rate, the owner was several sizes larger than Mr. Chivers, who had to make a large gather under the tie-strings before he could step out without risk of tripping.

He had the Emperor cellar to himself, and as he moved toward the exit he came upon a basket leaned against a white-washed pillar. He thought it would help to get him by.

It would and did. A policeman standing at the head of the cellar stairs gave him only a casual glance. He was looking upward, straining his eyes. Mr. Chivers hesitated to give him a small earful of information.

"They're chasin' a burglar upstairs," he whispered. "Got him surrounded on the elevent' floor. I heard it, comin' down from Mrs. Van Schooten's penthouse."

The Red Duke didn't know that the Emperor sheltered any Mrs. Van Schooten; wasn't sure, even, that there was a penthouse. But the policeman didn't know, either.

"Eleventh?" he repeated, and went racing away, tugging at his gun. Mr. Chivers saw him dash into the Emperor's marble hall, then calmly stripped off his apron and lifted a finger as a taxi came trundling through the side street with the meter flag up.

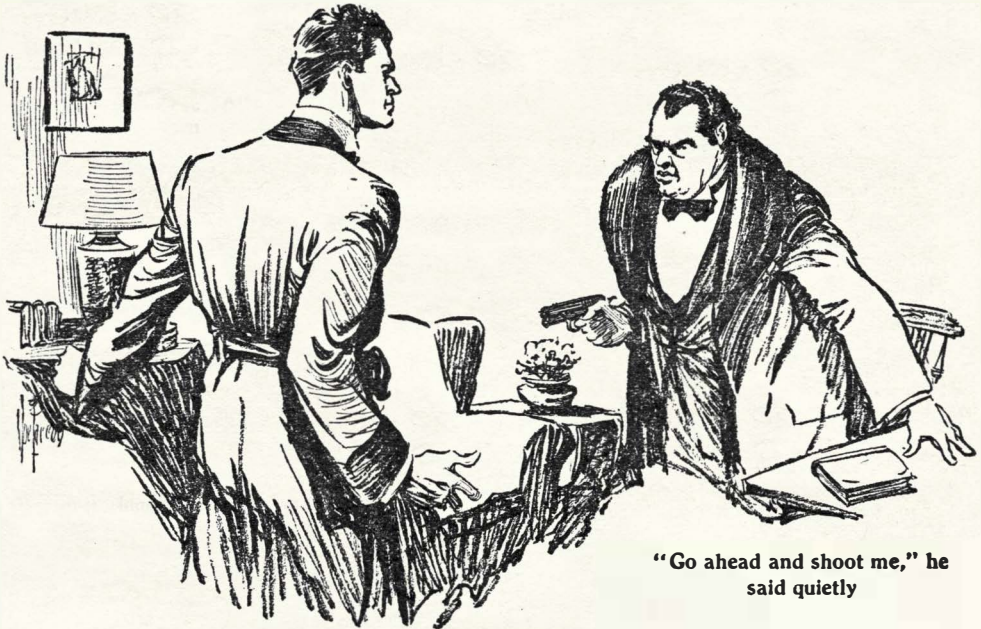
"Sutton Place," he said, "and make it snappy!"

Then, lighting a cigarette, he leaned back luxuriously with his hand on the little red-bound book that was to figure so conclusively for the plaintiff a few weeks later in the case of Bingham vs. Glore.

# The Dead Man's Hat

By Hulbert Footner

*Betrayed and Forsaken, Irvin Beekman Turns to Fight,  
Single-Handed, the Lord of New York's Underworld*



"Go ahead and shoot me," he  
said quietly

## DON'T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE

**J**IM MANN, chief of New York City's underworld, was moving to seize control of the Chambers National Bank, of which Irvin Beekman was president. Beekman did not suspect that his own vice president, J. J. Stuart, had betrayed him to Mann.

Meanwhile an underworld gang was trying to get possession of an affidavit accusing one Jim Yuma of a murder. The affidavit had fallen into the hands of Paula Wrenn. Trying to help Paula, Dave Westover became involved with the police and the underworld. One of the latter, a man named Pom-

pey, virtually kidnapped Dave, and took him to Baltimore.

## CHAPTER XIV

### The Adversaries

**I**RVIN BEEKMAN was dressing for dinner in a gracious old house on North Washington Square. His bedroom was a large, square apartment with two big windows filled with little rectangular panes. It conveyed a sense of the serene, old-fashioned luxury that has almost disappeared nowadays. Though the house possessed a modern heating plant there was a

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fire of cannel coal burning in the grate because Beekman liked to look at it. He looked around him now with eyes full of quiet pleasure.

"How I do love this house!" he said.

His wife answered him through the open door of the dressing room which filled the middle of that floor. Her bedroom was in the front of the house. Her voice was querulous. "And I have to dress in this poky hole! I haven't even a boudoir where I can receive my woman friends!"

"You have one of the most beautiful bedrooms in town," he replied good-humoredly. "With the park outside, and sunshine in the windows all winter."

"Nobody in our position lives so far downtown. If you must have a house, it ought to be in the Sixties or Seventies."

"Those narrow streets are dark as the tomb, my dear!"

"Well, an apartment is smarter anyway. There is no lack of sunlight in a penthouse."

"Penthouses are so new!" he complained, smiling. "The increment of four generations is stored in this old shebang! My great grandfather built it. When my Dad lost his money and it had to be sold, there was weeping and gnashing of teeth in Gideon! It was that which spurred me on to make some money of my own. And I bought it back!"

He was answered by an impatient exclamation from the next room. "You won't be serious about anything!" she said.

There was a discreet tap on the door from the hall, and Croydon the Beekman butler, entered. "If you please, Mr. Beekman, there's a gentleman calling."

"Somebody calling at this hour?" said Beekman in surprise. "Who is it?"

"A Mr. Mann, sir."

Beekman was arranging his tie before the mirror. "I don't know any Manns," he said calmly. Then his expression changed. "You said a gentleman, Croydon?"

"Well, he is expensively dressed, sir," answered Croydon in distress. "It is hard to tell nowadays."

"What does he look like?"

"A dark person, sir. Italian looking. Fat."

Beekman's face turned red with anger. "Send him away," he said quietly. "Tell him if he has anything to say to me he can write it."

"Very well, sir."

Beekman became thoughtful. "Wait a minute," he said. "I'll tell him myself." He picked up a smoking jacket and slipped it on over his dress shirt.

"What's the matter, dear?" came the voice from the dressing room.

"I am honored by a call from Mr. Jim Mann!" said Beekman sarcastically. "I'm going downstairs to put him out."

"Jim Mann!" gasped Mrs. Beekman. "Oh, be careful, Irvin! Be careful! . . . Wait a minute!"

Beekman was already on the stairs. "Where is he?" he asked Croydon, who was at his heels.

"I scarcely knew what to do with him," stammered Croydon. "A . . . a person like that. I showed him in the library. If I had known it was *Jim* Mann I should have closed the door in his face sir!"

"He might have sent a bullet through it," said Beekman with dry humor. "I should have been sorry for that. It's a good door."

"Shall you . . . shall you require my assistance, sir?"

"I think not, Croydon."

The butler with a relieved face continued on to the basement. The library was under Beekman's bedroom. He paused on the threshold. Jim Mann, wearing a black overcoat with a rich sealskin collar, was standing with a negligent elbow on the mantelpiece, and a smile on his thick lips. The man's infernal aplomb took Beekman aback for a moment. They surveyed each other without speaking. Then Beekman said dryly:

"So this is what you're like!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Mann with a good humored chuckle. "You're a good guy, Beekman. You and me ought to be working together."

"Thanks."

"Mind if I sit down?" asked Mann.

"Just as you please."

Mann looked around, and chose the most comfortable chair. "Better sit yourself," he said. "It's more easy like."

"Thanks, I prefer to stand," said Beekman. "What do you want?"

"Me, I don't go to see no guys no more," said Mann with cool arrogance. "I don't have to. I send for them to see me, and they're damn glad to get the chance. But I knew you was a proud man, and I come to see you to save your face."

"Well!" said Beekman with assumed surprise. "Decent of you! Did you think I'd come if you sent for me?"

"No. I knew you wouldn't. And that would have been too bad."

"For you or for me?"

"For you!"

"Indeed! What's the object of your visit?"

Mann looked around the room with a good humored sneer. "Swell place you got here. I never seen anything just like it before. Old-timey!"

"Get on with your business," said Beekman.

Mann's face hardened. The heavy brows drew down, the glittering eyes fastened on Beekman's face like those of a bird of prey. "I got you sewed up, Beekman," he said harshly.

"What's this?" cried Beekman.

"I own over 5,500 shares of your bank."

"You lie!" cried Beekman, flushing red.

"Yeah? It'll all come out tomorrow morning."

"Stuart told me only today that . . ."

"Yeah, Stuart," said Mann with an evil chuckle. "You was foolish to leave it to him. He has the proxies for my shares all made out in his own name."

All the blood left Beekman's face. He dropped involuntarily into a chair. It was a hideous shock, and the hardest thing to bear was that he had to take it in the presence of his enemy. His chin dropped on his breast. It was not his loss which crushed him, but the fact that he had been betrayed. "Stuart!" he murmured incredulously; "*Stuart!*" Mann's eyes were fastened on his face, eagerly and greedily sucking up his triumph. The thick lips moved as if they were rolling a cigar.

Beekman's confusion was only momentarily. He jumped up with a laugh, took a cigarette from a box on the table, and lit it with a steady hand. "If you and Stuart have got it all fixed up together," he said coolly, "what do you come to me for?"

Mann looked disappointed. "Aah!" he growled. "Stuart ain't good enough for me. He's a small town banker."

"You're a little late in finding that out, aren't you?"

"Cheese, I can get plenty better men," said Mann coolly.

"What do you want of me?"

Mann did not answer immediately. He took a cigar out of his pocket, looked at it, and put it back again. His face smoothed out. He smiled. There was a world of cunning behind it. He said slowly: "My policy is, when I meet a good, strong guy, I try to make a dicker with him before I fight him. Saves a heap of money sometimes."

"Well?"

"How would it suit you to go on being president of the Chambers National?"

**B**ECKMAN'S face hardened like steel. "So," he said, "that's it!

You're ready to kick Stuart downstairs now, after he's done your dirty work!"

Mann shrugged. "What's that to me? I ain't beholden to Stuart any, nor to you, neither. I do what I like!"

"Stuart has the proxies now."

"Aah, we can make out new ones with a later date. Or I can have my men present at the meeting to vote for you in person."

Before Beekman could answer, a rustling sound at the door caused both men to turn their heads. Cora Beekman floated into the room, tall, blonde, willow slender. Coming direct from the ministrations of her maid she brought an air of fresh loveliness with her that seemed magical. She wore an all-revealing gown of soft white satin without any touch of color. Pearls were hung around her neck. Both men, being men, were affected by the vision. Beekman's face softened, and Mann's hardened. Into the latter's eyes came a look of rapacity partly veiled by his drooping lids.

Cora bore herself with a consciously unconscious air, suggesting that she knew precisely what effect she was

creating. "Oh!" she said to Beekman with charming surprise, "I didn't know there was someone with you. I'll fly!"

"Don't go!" said Mann in a purring voice.

Cora's eyes darted from one man to the other, trying to read what was happening. "Why, Mr. Mann! What a surprise to find *you* here! Nice to see you again!" She swam towards him with outstretched hand.

Beekman abruptly turned his back on them. Mann glanced at Beekman covertly, and took her hand. An insolent desire blazed up in his eyes. Cora's eyes skated away.

"Say, you've got them all beat!" he purred.

Cora through her lashes made sure that her husband's back was turned. Suddenly she gave Mann the depths of her lovely eyes—a glance to drive men mad; and quickly lowered them again. Then she abruptly turned her back on him.

"Would you like a drink?" she asked, addressing Beekman.

"No, thank you," he said, without looking at her.

Cora looked hurt; this was for Mann's benefit. "There's nothing wrong, is there?" she asked, glancing from one to the other.

Mann laughed comfortably. "Wrong!" he said "That's funny, that is. Me and Beekman's got a little business to talk over, that's all."

"Business!" said Cora. "Then I'll run!"

"Don't you do it," said Mann. "Stay and talk on my side. I'm putting the chance of making money in Beekman's way." He wagged his hands back and forth. "A whole lot of money! All the money there is!"

"Oh, Irvin!" murmured Cora in a tone that forced him to look at her.

"Oh, Irvin!" That was all. She stood before him for a moment, unspeakably lovely and wistful, while the man looked at her painfully and hungrily. Then she went quickly out.

Beekman looked moodily at the floor. Mann's eyes followed Cora, full of a shameless, carnal amusement. His look said as plainly as if the words had been spoken: "I may not be used to high society, but I got *that* doll's number all right!"

A silence followed Cora's departure. Both men were listening to her running upstairs. Her perfume lingered in the room. Finally Mann said meaningly:

"Where would you be with her if you lost your job?"

"Damn you! Leave her out of it!" said Beekman tensely.

"I'll leave you and her to talk it over," said Mann smoothly. "You can call me up."

"Take your answer with you!" said Beekman violently—but not loud enough to carry upstairs. "The hell with you, do you hear? The hell with you!"

Mann recoiled, snarling. "Aah, you're a fool! You got no money. You got to work for somebody!"

"All right! I'll choose my master!"

"You won't get no other job. Your rich friends will rat on you when you're down. Just like Stuart did. All men are the same!"

"All right! I'll fight alone! For decency's sake!"

"Aah, boloney!" sneered Mann. "Ain't nobody here but us!"

"All right! I'm speaking to ease my own mind! You dirty thug! You murderer! Get out of my house!"

Beekman took a step forward as he spoke. With a movement so quick the eye could scarcely follow it, Mann

whipped a gun out of the pocket of his overcoat and pointed it. At sight of it Beekman stopped short; his face broke up; he laughed harshly.

"True to form!" he said.

There was a moment's silence. A new and powerful look came into Beekman's eyes. "Go ahead and shoot me!" he said more quietly. "That would win my fight for me, though I passed out of the picture! Shoot me! You couldn't get away with that!"

Mann, with the gun in his hand, was cool and sure again. "I'll plead self-defense," he said, grinning.

Beekman turned his back on him, careless of the gun. He crossed the room and pressed a button alongside the fireplace. Croydon must have been waiting close outside, for he appeared almost instantly in the doorway. The butler was pale and shaken, but his eyes were steady.

"Croydon," said Beekman casually, "I want you to take note that this man has a gun in his hand. I want you to take note that I'm not touching him, nor threatening him in any way."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go to the front door, set it open, and come back here so that the way will be quite open for our friend to retire."

Croydon disappeared. Beekman and Mann watched each other. Losing confidence in his gun, Mann began to waver. In order to conceal that fact he scowled like a gorilla.

The butler returned to the doorway. "The front door is open, sir."

"Step inside out of his way," said Beekman. "Now get out!" he said crisply to Mann. "Or shoot me if you'd rather."

Pressed against the wall, the butler watched them, as pale as death.

With his little eyes darting from one

to another, and his lips drawn back like an animal's, Mann backed out of the room, gun in hand. He backed down the length of the hall, the other two following him slowly. He disappeared through the door.

Beekman closed the door, and leaned against it, laughing a little wildly. "Just like what you read in the newspapers!" he said.

Croydon, white-faced, stared at him as if he had become demented. Beekman, seeing his face, laughed afresh.

"Can I . . . can I get you anything, sir?" stammered the butler.

Beekman, sobering, clapped a friendly hand on his shoulder. "You're a good fellow, Croydon," he said. "The bravest man is the one who sees it through when his knees are knocking together. I shan't forget that you stood by me."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

"Now go downstairs and say nothing about what happened."

Neither man noticed the blond head peeping around the turn of the stairs. Croydon disappeared below, and Beekman, returning to the library, dropped into a chair, and pressed his head between his hands.

## CHAPTER XV

### The House in Baltimore

DAVE WESTOVER came to himself in the dark. He discovered that he was lying naked on a mattress with a sheet pulled over him. The place was warm. Above his head was a mysterious pale oblong that he puzzled over for a long time. It was just a little lighter than the surrounding blackness.

Getting out of bed, groggily at first, but gradually becoming stronger, he

felt around the walls of the room. He stumbled against a table, a bureau, a chair, and finally came to a door. It was locked. Feeling up and down the wall alongside, his hand struck an electric switch. He pressed a button and his prison was flooded with light.

It was a small, common looking bedroom, furnished with what appeared to be the cast-off articles of a household; a scarred iron bed, a rickety little table, a cheap bureau; two broken chairs. There was no window and but the one door. The oblong overhead resolved itself into a scuttle in the roof filled with corrugated glass. The room looked as if it had not been used in some time. There were no personal belongings visible. Table and bureau were thick with dust. A swift search soon satisfied Dave that his clothes had been taken away.

Like any creature finding itself trapped, he instantly set to work to discover a way out. First the door. It was a heavy affair of oak, and it opened inward; no hope of bursting it out. In any case if he tried to smash his way out, the people who had put him in there would come and beat him over the head again. His hands were empty.

This put the thought of a weapon into his mind. He looked around him. The table! It was a small, antique table, strongly built, but rickety after years of service. Dave turned it upside down, and standing on it, wrenched off one of the legs without making too much noise. This provided him with a good hardwood club about three feet long. He stood in the middle of the room, grasping it in both hands and trying it, a man reduced to the simplest elements.

He looked up at the scuttle. It covered a low trunk in the middle of the ceiling, and was hooked down at

one end. Dave planted a chair on the bed and gingerly climbed on it. He unhooked the scuttle, and gripping the edge of the trunk, drew himself up, lifting the frame as he rose. He climbed out on the flat roof.

The November air struck a chill to his bare skin, but he couldn't stop for that. Moving quickly to keep up his circulation, a hasty survey showed him that he was upon the roof of a large, three-story mansion facing on an old-fashioned street with trees and other old houses with mansard roofs across the way. At one side there was a yard with a driveway in from the street; at the other side the blank brick wall of a modern building towered over his head.

He was soon satisfied that there was no way of escape from the roof. Neither could he call for help from passers-by in the street below. The people inside the house would get to him first. But there was another scuttle in the roof, not far from the one he had climbed out of. Dave returned to his prison; procured the club, and the sheet from the bed; and climbed out on the roof again.

Using the club as a lever, he wrenched the hook from the old wood without difficulty, and laid the frame back on the roof. He peered into the well of blackness below, and spoke softly: "Anybody there?"

No answer; no sound of movement. Tying a corner of the sheet around the hinge of the scuttle, he dropped it into the hole, and let himself down, gripping the club between his teeth. He landed on a bare floor.

He found the door and a switch beside it, and turned on lights. It was a room similar to the one he had left, and must have adjoined it. This room was completely empty; the floor was

thickly covered with dust. He saw the key in the door, and a breath of blessed relief escaped him. He switched off the lights again.

Opening the door with infinite care, he peeped out. He found himself looking into the central hall of the big old house, with the top of the stairs at his left. It was dimly lighted by a single bulb in a wall bracket, and comfortably carpeted. The house was occupied then. There were doors all around the hall, all closed. Behind some of those doors there must be clothes. One door towards the front showed a crack of light beneath it. Dave's face hardened when he saw it. He crept towards it, grasping the club in his right hand.

Half way to the door, he heard voices approaching from below and hastily retreated into the empty room, closing the door and putting his ear to the crack. Two persons came up the stairs, and passing the door, opened a door in the front of the building and closed it behind them. Judging from the sound, it was the door of the lighted room.

Dave waited a moment, and ventured out again. He turned towards the stairs. Since there were at least two of them, and perhaps armed, he had no intention of troubling these newcomers. But a murmur of conversation arrested him. After all it was important for him to learn what kind of a house this was, and what he was up against. He stole back to the lighted room. He opened the door of the dark room adjoining, so that he could slip in if necessary. He put his ear to the door of the lighted room.

The first words he heard caused him to forget everything else. It was the clipped, husky voice of Pompey speaking. "Walter Wrenn, the guy's name was; Spider Wrenn they used to call



him; a little guy. It was Rudy had the job of stopping him, and he balled it all up."

"HOW?" asked another voice. Dave recognized the Maryland accents of the blond Claude.

"Rudy tailed the guy to his wife's flat. He found him sleeping there in a chair, and stuck a knife in his back."

"Why didn't he smoke the guy?"

"Because his wife was sleeping in the next room. What a dumb play!"

"Why? Didn't it stop the guy?"

"Sure, it stopped him. Don't you read the papers? But Rudy went away and left him there."

"What's the difference?"

"Because them two women, Wrenn's wife and his daughter, were the only two people in New York who knew him, see? He had just lately come there. If Rudy had smoked him anywhere's outside, and just left him lay, there wouldn't have been no trouble. He wouldn't have been identified. He left him in the only place where he could be identified."

"But he wasn't identified."

"That was just because the girl didn't want no fuss. She got her fellow to carry out the stiff and dump it in the street. It's no thanks to Rudy he wasn't identified. That guy's gone yellow. He's sniffing snow. He washed out on this job absolutely."

"How?"

"Wrenn had the affidavit on him when he croaked, and Rudy never found it."

"How do you know he had it?"

"Because I searched Wrenn's room while Rudy was tailing him, and it wasn't there. He had it inside his hat. When I put it to him Rudy had to admit he forgot to look in his hat. That guy is cuckoo."

"Did the police get it?"

"Nah! The hat was stuffed inside the coat of the policeman whose neck was broke. Well, I got good connections at Headquarters. I hooked up with a guy who was present when the dead cop was brought in and laid out there and searched. He told me how they found the hat and opened it up, and there wasn't nothing inside it. Either the girl got the affidavit or this guy Westover."

"Well he ain't got it on him, that's certain," said Claude with a laugh. "There's his clothes."

"I frisked him twice now," said Pompey. "I thought maybe she give it to him today . . . Well, she has it then. I'll search that flat tomorrow."

Hearing this, Dave clenched his teeth until the muscles stood out in lumps on his jaw.

"But first-off I got to see Rudy," Pompey said in a casual, deadly voice.

"What!" said the startled Claude.

"That guy is dangerous. He's turned yellow. He's cracked up. I got to put him out before he does harm. He sleeps at the Darius Hotel on Bleecker Street."

"Gee, Pomp, what a guy you are!" murmured Claude in accents of awe.

Dave could hear Pompey's voice thicken with gratified vanity. "Me, I'll never crack up! I got no nerves. Nerves was left out of me. And I got a skin so thick nothing can get under it!"

There was a brief silence, then Claude asked: "What for did you bring Westover down to Balto for?"

Dave pressed closer to hear the answer.

"Aah, he's a dunkhead," grumbled Pompey. "I'm sick of nursing him. Me, I got something better to do. I'm going to put him where the police will

never find him. I couldn't let him be found anywheres around New York or the girl would raise hell, and it would all be spread in the papers. So I brought him down here."

"You can't smoke him in there," said Claude nervously, "or the niggers downstairs would hear. And if you put a knife in him . . . the blood . . ."

"Cheese! There's other ways of putting a guy out," said Pompey coolly. "A cord around his neck; twisted. I'll show you the trick. We can both be holding him down. No noise, and no mess after. We'll tie him up in a sheet with weights inside—Got anything for weights?"

"Plenty of stuff in the cellar."

"Okay. We'll carry him to some bridge, and heave him over into deep water. He'll never be found."

"Okay, Colonel. There's plenty bridges round Baltimore."

"I'll show you how to make a noose . . ."

**D**AVE waited for no more. He shivered as he crept away towards the stairs, and it was not because he was cold.

The sight of the key in the door of the room where he had been confined gave him an idea. He left that key where it was, but softly opening the door of the empty room adjoining, he took out the key, locked that door, and carried the key with him. Thus if his enemies when they found he had flown, should undertake to follow him over the roof and into the empty room, they would find themselves trapped there, at least for a moment or two.

He went slowly down the stairs, peering over the rail to the floor below, and pausing often to listen. The second floor of the house was luxuriously furnished; the central hall was but

dimly lighted. Instead of doors there were arched openings on either side. The rooms beyond were dark. No sound of movement reached him. From outside the house came the faint noises of the city.

Reaching the foot of the stairs, he kept on around by the rail, wary as an animal. On this floor there was but one big room on either side the hall. He saw tables covered with dust cloths. A gambling house; roulette on one side, and different size tables for various games on the other. All dark. Dave threw the key under a sofa.

He looked down the last flight of stairs. Nobody in sight. He started down, step by step. He could hear voices from below now, but muffled as if there was a door between. The lower hall was brightly lighted. There was an opening on the right leading into a dark room. Opposite, an opening immediately at the foot of the stairs, and a lighted room within it.

In order to avoid showing himself in this opening, he went over the stair rail, and dropped noiselessly to the floor below. Snaking along the floor, he looked around the lowest step. From this point he commanded a view of part of a restaurant or dining room filled with small tables. The room was empty, and only one table showed signs of having been used lately.

While Dave looked, a young mulatto waiter came through a swing door with a tray, and started to gather up the soiled dishes. Dave crouched and gripped his club. It was the man's clothes that his eyes were fixed on covetously. However, there were two or three others behind the swing door; those were the voices he had heard. Any unusual noise would bring the gunmen springing downstairs. Dave sank back, gritting his teeth helplessly,

and the waiter carried his tray into the pantry.

While Dave crouched alongside the stairs, scowling in uncertainty, he heard a sound from below that galvanized him into action again. It was the shake of a furnace grate, a sound everybody recognizes. Under the stairs at the back he found a door. It led, as he foresaw, to a cellar stairs disappearing in the darkness below.

Softly closing the door behind him, he stole down, testing each step before trusting his weight to it. He found himself in a widespread cellar extending under the whole house. It was dark except for a single bulb hanging in front of the furnace at the far end. Under the light a heavily built white man in rough, soiled clothes was shovelling ashes from under the furnace, and emptying them into a can.

Dave's eyes brightened at the sight of him. Coal had not yet been put on the fire, and he had plenty of time. The wooden beams of the floor overhead were supported on square concrete pillars, and he dodged from one to another of these, always drawing closer to the furnace. Crouching, moving without a sound, a triangular furrow fixed in his forehead, and his eyes fastened on his prey, he had become a creature of pure instinct.

Straightening himself behind the last pillar, he awaited his chance. The furnace man went about his work apathetically; a middle-aged man with a heavy, dull face. The coal bin was against the back wall under a window, and he had to make half a dozen steps with each shovelful of coal. Each time he returned for more he presented the broad of his back to Dave, but the latter did not move; he was afraid of the clatter of the iron shovel on the concrete floor. There was another stair-

way at the back leading to the kitchen. The servants could be heard moving overhead.

The man was slow in all his movements. He finally leaned his shovel against a post on the other side of the furnace, closed the door of the firebox, and adjusted the drafts. He pulled smoking materials out of his pocket, and slowly filled his pipe. When he got it going he seemed to fall into a daze, staring at nothing. At last he turned away to pick up the old sheepskin coat he had thrown down. Then Dave, coming up behind him on noiseless feet, raised the club in both hands and brought it down on the man's head.

He thudded limply on the concrete without uttering a sound. Dave's face showed neither regret nor pity. Always keeping half an eye on the door at the head of the rear stairs, he started dragging the man's sweater over his head. He unlaced his shoes; he pulled off his overalls together with the woolen trousers beneath. These he judged sufficient to keep himself warm, and he left him the rest of his clothes. The man was breathing stertorously, and Dave expected to see him open his eyes at any moment.

Dave gathered up what he had taken from him, together with his outer coat and ragged cap. A few steps at the back and a door showed how the man was accustomed to enter and leave the cellar. A minute later Dave found himself under the blessed free air of Heaven. He put on the clothes.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### The White Beauty

**I**N the house on North Washington Square Irvin Beekman sat in his library, thinking hard. The fighting look was in his face. He was lost to

his surroundings. The sound of Cora's light step on the stairs recalled him to actuality. His face turned toward the door eagerly.

She came in with a white fur evening wrap over her arm, and a pair of long, white gloves dangling. There was a half smile on her childlike lips, her blue eyes were 'carefree, and she hummed snatches of a song under her breath. Laying wrap and gloves over the arm of a chair, she moved around the room making believe to put things in order. She appeared not to look at her husband.

Beekman followed her with eyes full of appreciation, but wary. He had been married to her for twelve years; he knew her pretty well; and he suspected what this seeming gayety was leading up to.

"We'll have to start in fifteen minutes," she said lightly. "Hadn't you better go up and finish dressing?"

"Must we go to that damned dinner?" said Beekman.

She laughed. "It would be a little late to decline now, wouldn't it?"

"Same old people! Same old food!"

"Would it be any better staying home?" she asked casually.

He suddenly pounded the arm of his chair. "You are right!" he said decisively. "We'll go, and we'll brazen it out!"

Cora made believe not to hear the last remark. She came and stood in front of him, slim, white and ravishing; looking at herself in the mirror over the fireplace, turning her head this way and that, patting her shining hair. "Like my new dress?" she asked, off-hand.

"Lovely!"

"You're not looking at it!"

He didn't answer.

She moved to the table behind him,

and getting a cigarette from the silver box, presented it delicately to his lips, and afterwards lighted it. Beekman inhaled deeply. Cora perched on an arm of his chair, flung an arm around his shoulders, and couched her cheek in his hair. Beekman drew her hard against him.

"That's nice," she whispered.

There was a silence.

"It's all right between you and Jim Mann, isn't it?" she said with an innocent air.

"You know very well that it's *not* all right," he said quietly. "Why make pretenses with me?"

Cora jerked herself away from the chair. Her beautiful face broke up like a child's, and angry tears came into her eyes. "Why don't you say at once that I'm a liar!" she cried. "You're always hinting it!"

Beekman looked into the cold fireplace. "Won't make things any better for us to quarrel," he said.

"Why don't you tell me what happened?" she demanded. "Or is it none of my business?"

"It is most decidedly your business," he said gravely.

"What kind of a proposition did Mann make you?"

"He has secured control of our bank," said Beekman. "He came to offer me the presidency."

Cora allowed her face to clear beautifully. "Well," she cried, "that's all right, isn't it? He couldn't very well do anything else! Of course he wants you to be president. He's asking a favor."

Beekman looked at her straight and hard. "Cora, you're no fool," he said quietly. "Why make out that you are?"

Tears threatened again. She stamped her foot. "There you go! Always insinuating that I have a mean

and horrible nature when I don't happen to agree with you!"

"Don't let us get into a wrangle," he said reasonably. "This is the biggest thing I was ever up against in my life. The question is, are you going to stand by me?"

"Why should I stand by you if you take a course of which I don't approve?"

"Listen, Cora," he said patiently; "would you like to see me become Jim Mann's man? After I have sworn to break the power of that scoundrel and put him behind the bars, what would you think of me if I turned around and humbly accepted my job at his hands?"

She shrugged angrily, and pressed her lips together.

"What sort of a figure would I cut in the eyes of other men?"

"It would soon be forgotten," she said impatiently.

"Yes," he muttered; "that's the trouble with this damned world! Everything crooked is soon forgotten!"

"What did you say to him?" she demanded.

"I showed him the door."

"Oh, you fool!" she cried, twisting her hands. "Jim Mann is riding on the crest of the wave. Nobody can stop him now! He'll ruin you!"

"I doubt it," said Beekman stubbornly. "And in any case I'd sooner be ruined than ruled by him. It will be a good scrap."

"You can't fight a man like Jim Mann. If you get in his way he'll simply have you shot!"

"Well, I'm not going to stop fighting him just because it's dangerous."

"That's just talk!" said Cora angrily. "Tall talk! How men like to reel it off! Jim Mann isn't deceived by it. He's a practical man . . . Call him up before we go out."

Beekman looked at her in surprise.

"Call him up!" she urged. "He'll be expecting it. He'll overlook what you said before. You can't insult a practical man. He'll laugh it off. Call him up and leave the way open."

"Cora, you miss the point of this," said Beekman quietly. "It is futile to argue with a man when his back's against the wall. He's got to fight then, not argue. *I will not knuckle under to Jim Mann!* There's no argument."

Her attitude changed subtly. She glanced in the mirror and rubbed out an imaginary spot of powder on her cheek. "The shareholders' meeting is tomorrow, isn't it?" she asked languidly. "When will you lose your job?"

"If the directors elect a new president tomorrow, I'll be out tomorrow," he said dryly.

"Then what will you do?"

"Get another job. What the devil! I'm known. I've got plenty of friends!"

"Every man has plenty of friends when his star is rising," she said quickly. "But when he collides with a bigger star what happens to him? And where are his friends then?"

"That's what Mann said—in slightly different words," answered Beekman coolly. "We'll see who's right. After all, decency has not been done away with."

SHE cast a glance of irritation in his direction. "In the meantime I suppose we'll be very poor," she remarked.

He arose and approached her, smiling. "For awhile, perhaps. We can stand that, can't we?"

She evaded him. "You must go and finish dressing!"

"Give me a kiss," he said warmly.

"And I can lick my weight in wild-cats!"

She looked at him inscrutably through her lashes—but at the same time obediently raised her lips.

"That's not much good," he complained. "Give me a real one!"

"It's the best I can do now," she said, leaving him. "I don't feel loving."

"Cora," he said cajolingly, "when we started we were poor."

"That was different," she said with a glance in the mirror. "I'm thirty-five years old now."

His face changed as if she had unexpectedly stabbed him. His eyes widened; a vein stood out on his forehead. "Cora," he said hoarsely, "what do you mean by that?"

"Take it as you please."

"It sounds," he said slowly, "as if you were suggesting that you hadn't much time left to get another man!"

"Don't be crude, Irvin!"

"No!" he went on, passing a hand across his face. "That couldn't be! Not after these twelve years! I love you more now than I did in the beginning, though I would never have believed it possible then. For twelve years you've been letting me love you. You have been encouraging me to go all out. And for twelve years you've been making me believe that you loved me. I can't believe that you're no more than a boarder in my house who is prepared to move as soon as the accommodations are no longer satisfactory!"

"Must you be melodramatic?" she asked sarcastically. "It went out ages ago. Everybody is practical nowadays. They say what they think."

"That's what I'm doing," he said somberly. "What do you think?"

"I refuse to be catechized."

"This is a vital matter to me. I've got to know where I stand."

"There's the telephone," she said delicately.

"No; by God! You've got to tell me plainly what's in your mind. If Mann wins the first round, if I am downed for the moment, do you mean that you will leave me?"

A look of fear came into her face. She hesitated.

"Cora, answer me!" he cried in a powerful voice.

"I . . . I don't know," she stammered.

"Oh, God," he groaned, "that's answer enough!"

She was standing by the mantelpiece with her graceful head hanging and the toe of her satin slipper tracing a pattern in the rug. Half raising her head and turning it, she looked at him as she knew how to do, wistful, passionate, maddeningly seductive. "Irvin," she murmured, "am I not worth keeping?"

He did not melt to that look now. "I've got to deal with Mann first," he said harshly; and left the room.

Cora's face broke up. She looked like a beautiful fury then. Her eyes darted insanely this way and that, longing to smash and destroy. But she caught them in the mirror and was frightened by what she saw. A beauty of thirty-five couldn't afford it. She quieted down, and fetched her compact to repair the damage.

When she heard her husband moving about overhead, she went to the telephone. The instrument in the library was on a private wire. She quietly gave a number, and when she got an answer spoke close to the transmitter.

"I couldn't do anything with him. He's like a madman." She listened to a communication over the wire, and

said: "All right. Tomorrow afternoon."

## CHAPTER XVII

### On the Road

**A** DOOR in the back fence let Dave into an alley, and the alley in time brought him to a street with trolley cars running up and down and an occasional store sandwiched among the dwellings. A sign on the corner informed him that it was Fremont Avenue, but that meant nothing to him. He turned in the direction of the brightest lights.

One of his first acts was to search through the pockets of his borrowed clothes. They yielded a partly used packet of cheap tobacco, a box of safety matches, and various odds and ends that were of no use whatever to him. Not a cent of money.

A mirror in the window of a drug store caught his eye, and he paused to survey himself with a rueful look. Ragged cloth cap; worn leatherette jacket with sheepskin lining; dirty brown trousers ragged at the bottoms, and clumsy workman's shoes. However, it was a pretty good disguise for a wanted man. In order to improve it, Dave pulled a lock of hair from under the brim of the cap, and let it blow in his eyes.

A young lad with a vacant stare came gangling along the sidewalk, and Dave stopped him. "Say, fellow," he said, "where's the railway station?"

The lad stared. "Railway station! Which one?"

"Oh, anything you've got," said Dave cheerfully. "Trains to New York preferred."

"Say, you must be a stranger here!"

"You've guessed it!" said Dave dramatically. "Alone in Baltimore!"

"Union Station's clear across town. Take a car down to the center and transfer North on Calvert."

"Much obliged, pal. Unfortunately I lack a dime!"

"What good is a railway train to you if you ain't got carfare?"

"I'll tell you," said Dave confidentially. "I just like to look at the trains. It's my hobby!"

"Say, you feel pretty good, don't you?"

"Sure! So would you if you had just escaped being strangled. By the neck, see? Cllk! Just like that! Gee, it's good to be breathing!"

With a frightened face the lad moved away crabwise, his head over his shoulder. "Say, I think you're looney!" he whimpered. "Leave me alone!"

Dave went on laughing. The only thing that troubled him was hunger. When he passed a bakery or a lunch-room he turned away his head.

He reached the station at last. A sign informed him that an express for New York was due to leave in a few minutes, but a ticket taker guarded the stairway that led down to the platform. Dave quietly set about to explore the station. He discovered that the baggage room on the floor below opened directly on the tracks. There were only two baggage handlers on duty at this hour. Choosing a moment when they were both engaged, he slipped across the baggage room and gained the platform. When the train came in he boarded the smoker.

Upon the conductor, when he came through for tickets, Dave exerted all his eloquence. "I was kidnapped in New York and carried down to Baltimore," he said. "All my clothes were taken from me, and my money and everything. I had to knock a guy out

to get clothes. That's why I look like this."

"Yeah?" said the conductor dryly. "That's a new one. You ought to be writing fiction, fellow." He passed on.

Dave was thrown off at the first stop an hour later. "You've had near sixty miles ride at the company's expense," said the conductor. "The story was worth it."

"Much obliged," said Dave. "Truth is stranger than fiction."

The town proved to be Newark, Delaware. It appeared to have gone to bed by this time, and the only life that Dave could find centered about an all-night restaurant on the main street. He hung about the door, looking receptive. He couldn't bring himself to the point of begging, but he hoped that somebody might offer him a meal. The majority of the customers were motorists. The cars passing up and down bore the license plates of various states, and Dave judged that he was on a main motor route. Having in mind that Pompey might well pass in one of the cars, he pulled down his cap and turned up his collar.

A small blue sedan, wanting paint, stopped in front of the restaurant and three men got out, all young or youngish, and all looking a little wall-eyed. One said:

"Where in hell are we?"

Another replied: "Damfino."

The third said with an air of dignified surprise—he was as tall as a stork and had to bend down to address his companion: "You're driving, aren't you?"

The driver replied: "Well, I just follow the other cars."

They went into the restaurant without noticing Dave, and took a table near the door. They were in there a long time, though they ate but little.

All produced pocket flasks, which were indiscriminately passed back and forth with much business of toasting. They were all right as long as they remained indoors, but as soon as they struck the outer air again they went to pieces. They leaned against the show window of the restaurant, supporting each other. The one who had been driving was the worst off, a little fellow with heavy eyebrows and close-set eyes like an ape. He pursed his lips.

"Cheese, I'm drunk!" he whimpered.

The stork bent over him protectingly. "That's all right," he said. "I'll drive!"

"You're as drunk as me! I wouldn't trust you!"

"I can read every word on that sign yonder."

"Yeah, when you close one eye!"

The third member of the party began to laugh uproariously. "Well, I know I'm drunk!" he cried. "Good and drunk! No question or doubt about that!"

He suddenly began to stagger sideways. Dave caught him, and leaned him carefully against his friends.

"What you waiting for?" demanded the middle one of Dave suspiciously.

"Trying to bum a ride," said Dave.

"Where to?"

"New York or any way station."

"Can you drive?"

"Sure!"

"Fellows," said the little man impressively, "here's our chance! Just like . . . like manna from Heaven."

Both the others objected. "No! No! We don't know this guy. Leave him alone."

"He's sober."

"How do we know if he's sober when we're drunk?"



"Haven't had a drink since yesterday," said Dave laughing.

"We got to get home 'fore morning," whimpered the little man.

"He might be a gunman," said the stork hoarsely. "Leave him be!"

"Search me," said Dave, holding his hands over his head. "I haven't even got a five-cent piece on me!"

The little man gravely patted him all over. "No gun," he said.

The third one, who was long on nose and short on chin, murmured pensively: "We could all sit on the back seat and sleep!"

That decided them. They started for the car. "Come on, fellow!"

"I haven't eaten since noon," said Dave casually.

They were all so busy climbing into the rear of the car, and quarreling over the rug that was to cover them, that nobody paid attention.

"Aw, the hell with it!" said Dave philosophically. He slid under the wheel, turned the switch, and stepped on the starter.

**A**T the first main crossing he stopped to get his bearings from the road signs. Wilmington was the next town on his route. The engine of the little car was running sweetly, and he pushed it for all there was in it when he could see his way ahead. His three passengers, fast asleep in the rear, troubled him neither with directions nor admonitions as to speed.

It was good to get a steering wheel between his hands, to feel the wind on his cheek, and to eat up the miles that separated him from Paula. He kept glancing at the speedometer in satisfaction. His headlights made a funnel of light in the dark, picking up the endless ribbon of the concrete road, and rolling it under, sharply delineating the

fences, telegraph poles, trees, that sprang towards them and faded past. The fields smelled good.

There had been heavy rains, and in places the water was over the road. They cut through it, sending out a wide silver sheet on either side. Past the occasional farmhouses or through a silent village street without slackening speed. The whole countryside seemed to sleep under the heavy sky, but traffic on the road never ceased altogether; an occasional big truck, a bus full of sleeping passengers; a passenger car driven at wild speed. Night birds.

The cities offered the principal bar to fast time. First Wilmington, then the endless suburbs of Philadelphia, and the Quaker City itself stretching for mile after mile across its flat plain. Dave had heard that there was a way to go around it, but he could not find it in the dark. The street lights beamed down innumerable vistas of empty pavements. It seemed to him that he lost hours in Philadelphia.

Every sight of a policeman made him nervous, for he feared that such a rough looking character as himself driving three well dressed drunks through the night might arouse the suspicion of the law. And if a policeman started to question him who could tell where it might end? However, his passengers were all hidden behind, and nobody bothered him.

On the other side of Philadelphia, another stretch of open country, then the Delaware River, and a tortuous course through the city of Trenton, another city of the dead with thousands of lights shining in the empty streets for nothing. Beyond Trenton he struck an express highway across the state of New Jersey, with scarcely a curve in it, and never a town to make him slacken speed.

Some time later the lack of sleep and food began to make itself felt in Dave. The swift journey through the night lost its zest for him. In spite of himself his eyes would begin to close, and the car veer erratically. Finally he came to with a start to find that he was careening wildly down the wrong side of the road. He stopped and beat himself violently to drive away the desire to sleep.

But each time he started again it would be the same. The broad concrete path seemed to have a hypnotic effect. His eyes were dragged down as if by leaden weights. He crawled along the edge of the road at fifteen miles an hour, and when he saw the lights of a town off to the left, he turned out of the through highway, and went in search of it.

He stopped in front of what used to be called a lunch wagon. They have grown, shed their wheels, and become "Pullman Diners" now. Flashing with lights from every window, it appeared to be the only thing awake in town. Dave slid out stiffly, and opening the rear door of the sedan, started shaking the man who happened to be nearest him. It was the stork.

"Hey, wake up! Wake up!" cried Dave. "I'm all in. I got to have coffee and grub if you want me to drive you through!"

It was a weary business to bring him back to consciousness. Finally the stork thrust a hand in his trousers pocket, groaning, and pulling his hand out, offered it to Dave full of loose change. Dave chose the largest coin he could see, a half dollar, and the stork shoved his hand back in his pocket, spilling part of the change on the floor. Settling back in his corner, he immediately went to sleep again.

Dave entered the lunch car. Fam-

ished and chilled as he was, the hot steamy atmosphere laden with the smell of cooking food, made him feel a little dizzy. He gratefully expanded his lungs with it. "Gee, is this Heaven?" he asked, looking around with a grin.

Only a truck driver down at the end of the counter busily stoking a late supper, or early breakfast, got it. He grunted appreciatively. The other three men in the place ignored Dave.

Dave seated himself on a stool. "Ham and eggs and French fried," he groaned; "and coffee for the love of Mike!"

TWO smartly dressed young men topped with pearl Fedoras looked around at him coldly, and continued their talk. Dave, reminded that a roughneck is not expected to push himself forward in better dressed company, said no more. The two young men were not eating, but merely gossiping with the man behind the counter. Dave looked slightly bewildered upon discovering that they were talking about himself as if they were his personal friends.

"Dave's a smart guy," said one. "The police ain't seen hide nor hair of him since he drove away in the gray car."

"And they won't, neither," added the counter man. "Let me tell you Dave is smart! I mean he's smart, all right!"

"Dave's a dandy looking guy and a swell dresser," said the second young man with envy in his voice. "Cheese! Fellow like that must get a great kick out of life! Working in a bank all day, and leading his mob at night!"

"Where you get a kick working in a bank?" objected his friend.

"That was just to put up a front,

naturally. Nobody would suspect a guy working in a bank."

"Pretty tiresome price to pay for your fun at night. Dave could had his fun just the same without working in a bank."

"Yeah, if you ask me, that looks funny," put in the counter man. "Working in a bank. I'll say it's funny."

"This is how it was as I see it," said the second young man. "Dave, he was a respectable fellow. He had his family to think about. He wasn't aiming to be an out-and-out crook."

"Yeah, I can see that. When he bumped off a taxi driver or a cop he didn't mean it serious."

"Yeah, nobody wouldn't never have known it, if he hadn't been found out."

"Yeah. Reckon there's plenty of respectable guys in the daytime goes out nights with a mob. They get a double kick out of it."

"Yeah. You said a mouthful!"

The truck driver, having finished his meal, approached from his end and threw money on the counter. He winked at Dave, and jerked a grimy thumb in the direction of the Fedora hats. "Gas-heads!" he said hoarsely. "It's only the weight of their feet keeps them on the ground!"

The two young men glared at the truck driver fiercely, but did not speak. When the door closed behind him, the first young man jumped up.

"No guy can say that to me and get away with it!" he cried.

However, he allowed himself to be pulled back on to his stool. They smoothed their ruffled feathers, and the conversation was resumed.

"Funny thing," said the counter man. "Every man, woman and child has seen Dave's pictures before this, but he ain't been found."

"Aah, some doll is giving him a hideout," said the first young man. "They fall for those guys."

"Yeah," said his friend with some bitterness, "a fellow's got to be a bad actor nowadays to please the women!"

"Dave might come in here some night, Joe," said the first young man. "What would you do if Dave come in that door?"

"I got it all doped out what to do," said the counter man confidently. "Me, I wouldn't touch the guy. He prob'ly carries four guns. He's six foot one inch tall, and weighs 175."

"Brown hair with lighter shades in it," added the second young man, "and gray green eyes."

"Yeah," said the counter man, "I'm watching for him. He won't get by me, that guy!" He began to dramatize the scene. "Dave comes in that door. I'm alone here maybe. I don't let nothing on. I take his order, and I begin to fool with my stove, see? I says: 'My gas ain't flowing right, fellow. Excuse me a minute, and I'll fix it outside.' I slips out the end door, closing it after me. I runs into the house and wakes the little woman. I tell her to call up the police and tell them Dave Westover is eating in Joe's diner. In less than a minute I am back here cooking up his eggs or his hamburger or what the hell. When a guy comes in here to eat he's good for ten or fifteen minutes. Dave will never get by me!"

Dave threw his half dollar on the counter. "Take it out of that, fellow," he said.

The counter man, still talking, rang up his cash register, and taking fifteen cents from the drawer, threw it on the counter in front of Dave with scarcely a glance in his direction. Dave turned away without hurrying. As he went through the door the man was saying:

"Yes, sir, Dave Westover will never get by me!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Hoboken Ferry

IT was five o'clock in the morning and as dark as midnight when Dave drove into Hoboken, and the mouth of the Holland Tunnel yawned before him. Fearing to venture into the brightly lighted tunnel with policemen stationed every few hundred yards, he turned into a side street and drew up at the curb. Opening the rear door, he shook the stork violently.

"Hey! Wake up! We're here! Hoboken!"

"All right, fellow! All right!" murmured the stork sleepily.

As soon as Dave let go of him he fell asleep again. Dave left the three of them with a silent blessing and went his way.

He crossed the river by ferry and called up Paula from a booth on the New York side. The wire ran direct to her bedside, and he could say what he wished. When he heard her anxious voice over the wire such a rush of feeling overcame him that he could not answer for a moment.

"Paula! This is Dave, honey!"

"Dave!" All her heart was in that cry. "Oh, Dave! You're all right?"

"Right as rain! And you?"

"Yes! But nearly crazy wondering what had happened to you."

"I'll tell you. Was it all right for me to call you so early?"

"Why, of course!"

"It didn't scare your mother too much?"

"No. She's right here listening. She's for you, Dave. But she says you must give yourself up to the police."

Dave grinned into the transmitter.

"Tell her I'll think it over . . . Listen, honey, could you get right up and dress, and come meet me?"

"Surely!"

"The reason I suggest it is, they would never expect you to leave the house so early, and I don't think they'll be watching. Did you pawn the watch?"

"Yes."

"Bring the money with you . . . Listen, you must make sure that you are not followed. If you find you are followed, turn around and go home again. It would near break my heart not to see you, but if you don't come I'll know why it is. Take a taxi to some hotel, then change to another taxi, and come to the Barclay Street ferry house."

"Yes, Dave."

"And, Paula, bring the affidavit with you."

"Oh, why?"

He did not tell her the real reason. "Those guys have searched me twice for it, and they won't expect me to be carrying it now."

"Very well."

"Paula, I must tell you I look terrible now; all ragged and dirty. I haven't been able to wash. I haven't even got a shirt on."

"Dave! Do you think that makes any difference to me?"

"Well, I thought I'd better warn you . . . Listen, have you got any old common clothes you could put on?"

"Why?"

"Well, if anybody was to see a nice little lady like you kissing a common tramp it would certainly attract attention!"

"All right," said Paula with a crinkle of laughter in her voice, "I'll manage something. I won't disgrace you."

Dave laughed. "Good!" he said. "All's well if you can still make a wisecrack!"

Dave slept in the ferryhouse while he waited. He awoke to find her standing before him. A guard shoving back the door to admit passengers to the boat, was watching them, and Dave swallowed the laugh that made his throat shake. In a funny long coat, shoes bursted out and run over at the heel, pale, streaked face and battered hat pulled over her hair, she looked like a little cleaning woman on her way to work. She was dismayed at Dave's condition, for his rags and dirt were very real; but she did not shrink from him.

"Don't kiss me," she said nervously. "The man is looking."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Dave grinning. He was eating her up with his eyes. "Come on, let's go over to Hoboken."

Embracing her arm within his, he led her on the ferryboat. "You look so comical in your old clothes!" he murmured. "I wish I could keep you like that! Nobody but me to know how pretty you were!"

Paula seemed scarcely to know what she was saying. "Oh, Dave! The shoes were the worst. I had to spoil a good pair! . . . Oh, Dave! I'm so thankful to have you close to me again!"

There were but few passengers on the boat. On the upper deck nobody in sight. It was still dark out of doors. Dave held her close.

"My Paula," he murmured brokenly. "I laugh, but I'm hard hit! I never knew there was a girl so square and plucky as you! You have made a new world for me!"

"Don't!" she protested. "I give nothing; you give all."

"Nothing to it!" he said. "I reckon we're both lucky. It doesn't come to many like this."

When they returned to earth they sat on the bench outside the cabin with Paula nestled under Dave's arm. While the ferry crossed the dark river he had to tell her in minute detail of his adventures in Baltimore. Paula listened with breathless attention, exclaiming in horror at the dangerous parts.

Dave laughed again. "Gosh! It's great to have such a sympathetic listener. I only wish I had more to brag about."

"It's terrible," she murmured, "to have you in danger, and me just working at the office!"

"You needn't feel sorry for me," he said. "I wouldn't change with any man. Within the past two days I have learned what it is to be alive!"

Paula pressed herself against him. "I'm the lucky one," she whispered. "Every woman dreams of it and few find him."

"What?"

"A reckless lover!"

"Paula, when you admire me I feel like a king!"

"If we could only be together through it all!"

"Together! Don't, honey. You make my head giddy!"

THEY had still much to discuss when the boat entered her slip in Hoboken. A deckhand came along to see that all the passengers were off. He took their fares for the return trip with a quizzical glance that seemed to say: Funny time of day to go cruising! It was too cold to remain sitting down, and they walked slowly around the deck, arm in arm, heads close together. The day was beginning to break, and the unquiet river heaved

under the pale sky, showing the lights and shades of blued steel.

"Is there anything new up here?" asked Dave. "Do the police suspect that there is any connection between you and me?"

"No," said Paula. "They questioned Mother while I was at the bank, and she put them off so well they have never troubled me."

"Good. When you leave the flat today, honey, you had better lock the door behind you."

"Why, Dave?"

Not wishing to alarm her too much, he said carelessly: "Well, after having searched me again, I think they might try to search the flat next."

"Very well, I'll do it."

"If your mother heard them trying to break in, she could telephone for a policeman," said Dave lightly.

"Surely . . . Dave, now that you have a little money, you ought to get out of New York again. I can get more."

"No," said Dave firmly. "I'm not going to let them keep me on the run indefinitely. I'm going to take the offensive now. Don't laugh when you look at me! I've already found out who killed Walter Wrenn and they can't put me in the hot seat for it. I'm no detective, but I'm going to work to find out what is behind this whole business. It's the only way I can clear myself."

"But every policeman in New York is looking for you!"

"That doesn't bother me as much as it did. I have learned that most men can't see what is under their noses."

"Have you any plan, Dave?"

"Yes. I'm going to get in touch with Rudy. I know where he lives. I'm going to try to win him over to our side."

"But if he's the actual murderer he couldn't come in with us. He couldn't admit anything."

"I don't expect him to incriminate himself, but when I tell him that his gang has put him on the spot he will certainly turn against them. He ought to tell me enough to blow up the whole racket."

As they were rounding the shore end of the boat, a line of five or six cars was slowly moving on board below. The first was a big, old-fashioned limousine, and at the sight of it Dave stopped as if he had been rooted to the deck. On the front seat he had a glimpse of a blond squarehead at the wheel, and beside him a yellow mask with a drooping cigarette. Then the car passed under the deck.

"Good God!" he muttered. "There they are!"

"Who, Dave?"

"Claude and Pompey. They're crossing on the ferry to avoid observation in the tunnel!"

All the color faded out of Paula's face. "And you're not armed!" she murmured. She pressed close to him. "Oh, I'm glad I'm with you!"

He flung an arm around her. "You're the real thing!" he whispered warmly. A rueful smile flitted across his face. "Just the same, I wish you were safe home in your little bed!"

"What shall we do?" she asked anxiously.

"There's very little danger," he said. "The trip is so short they're not likely to get out of the car. We'll be safe on the upper deck . . . But we ought to keep an eye on them."

They hastily returned to the other end of the deck. The limousine had come through below, and they looked straight down on its roof. It was impossible to see inside, but a wisp of

cigarette smoke floating out of the front window, satisfied them that the men were there. Dave and Paula moved back from the rail.

"If I could follow them," muttered Dave, "I'd find out what they were up to!"

"Follow them?" echoed Paula, dismayed; "how could you? Before you could get a taxi on the other side they'd be far away."

"There are other cars on the boat. Perhaps I can hire one of them."

"Dave!" she protested, "it's too dangerous!"

He pressed her arm under his. "You said you wanted a reckless lover," he reminded her.

"A man can be *too* reckless!" she pleaded. "Think of me?"

"Have you got your taxi fare home all right?"

She nodded miserably.

"I'll call you up at the flat at twelve-thirty if it's humanly possible . . . But don't worry anyhow. I'll turn up like a bad penny!" He kissed her, and hurried away.

He went down to the main deck, and made his way among the cars from the rear.

Beside the limousine, there were five cars on the ferry boat. Three of these were trucks on their way to work in the city, and obviously they wouldn't serve Dave's purpose. The fourth car was a sedan containing a couple on tour. The rear compartment was piled high with their miscellaneous effects, and the wife looked sour; so Dave passed them up too. The fifth car was a Ford runabout driven by a young man who looked like a salesman or a collector. This was more promising. Dave said to the driver:

"Do you want to earn a couple of dollars?"

The young man looked him over quizzically. "Yeah?"

"Never mind my clothes," said Dave. "I can pay for what I order."

"What's the big idea?"

"There are two crooks in that limousine at the head of the line, and I've got to tail them."

"A detective, eh?" said the young man with more respect. "Disguised!"

"Yeah," said Dave dryly. "I've got a hunch those guys are going to report to their boss. I want to learn where he hangs out."

The young man was interested. "Fifty cents a mile," he said indicating the speedometer. "It's a fair offer."

"Okay," said Dave, "if you stay with them. Put on your side curtains, will you, so if they look through the back window they won't recognize me."

THE ferryboat made her slip on the New York side. The limousine turned north in West Street, and continued uptown at a high rate of speed. The Ford held her.

"Gosh!" said the young man. "If a cop gives me a ticket I'll get in bad with the firm."

"He'll have to stop them first," said Dave.

"I don't know," said the other doubtfully. "That car carries a Maryland license. They always bear harder on the local boys."

They mounted the elevated highway. The men in the limousine, unaware that they were followed, or perhaps indifferent to it, led them directly to the middle of the town, and east to Park Avenue. The big car drew up before one of the side doors of the Surrey Towers, the newest, the greatest, the most sumptuous; New York's wonder hotel, covering a whole city block and

rearing its twin towers more than five hundred feet towards the sky.

Dave was puzzled. "What the devil is he coming here for?" he muttered.

"Some hangout!" said the driver laconically.

Pompey got out and appeared to be giving his chauffeur some instructions. The limousine moved on.

"Want I should follow the car?" asked Dave's driver.

"No," said Dave; "it's the guy in the blue overcoat I'm interested in . . . Say, do something for me?" he asked suddenly. "You're dressed all right and that guy doesn't know you. Follow him inside the hotel, and try to find out who he came to see."

The young man had quite entered into the spirit of the chase. "All right," he said. "Anything to see a bit of life!" However, he took the precaution of removing the key of his car.

He was gone three or four minutes. Returning to the car, he said:

"The guy in the blue overcoat seemed to be known there. Didn't send up his name, but went up in one of the elevators that serve the tower apartments. I noticed by the indicator that he stopped at the forty-seventh floor. When the elevator come down I asked the operator where he took him, but he was a fresh guy. Told me it was none of my business, and threatened to call the starter."

"Forty-seventh floor," said Dave; "that's something."

"Say, them servants in there act like they was dukes or something," the young man went on bitterly. "Just as soon as I get fifty dollars I'm going to stop there for a day just for the pleasure of telling them where to get off at!"

"Drop me off at some cheap lunch counter, will you, fellow?" said Dave.

"I feel a little out of place in this swell neighborhood."

## CHAPTER XIX

### Too Late

HAVING stopped for a meal on the way downtown, it was about a quarter past eight when Dave got to Bleecker Street. Lined with ancient tenement houses which have broken out into bright modern stores and spaghetti palaces on the street floor, Bleecker is one of the most colorful streets in New York. It serves as Main Street for one of the several little Italys scattered about the island. The sidewalks were well filled, and a stream of traffic moved over the asphalt.

The most imposing building west of the elevated railway was Darius House, one of several hotels built for workingmen by a famous millionaire of the previous generation. He built so well that his hotel is still an ornament to the town. Dave entered it with a good deal of uneasiness; it was so much finer than he expected. A handsome marble corridor was filled in with an office at the end that shone with plate glass and polished brass. However, he soon discovered that his rough clothes attracted no attention whatsoever. Darius House was used by all sorts and conditions of men.

There was no use stopping at the office, because he didn't know whom to ask for.

He kept on up a half stairway at one side, which brought him to an immense lobby or lounge forming one of the interior courts of the building. Windows opened on it all around, tier above tier, and it was lighted by a glass roof high above. It was well filled with men, since times were hard and many



of the patrons obviously had no work to go to.

Dave slowly circulated amongst them. Every type of man was represented, from the seemingly well-to-do to the humblest workman; white collar men and no collar men; only the incorrigible bums were excluded. A cloud of tobacco smoke hung over them. Dave did not find Rudy; he did not expect to; Rudy would certainly be in bed at such an hour. He was looking for somebody who might know Rudy.

Among the unexpected types in the place Dave saw a clergyman in the habit of the Episcopal church. He was smoking an old briar pipe, and moving about talking to one man and another, doing a little missionary work perhaps. His manner was friendly and unpretentious, and he appeared to be a general favorite. Dave approached him.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "do you happen to know a young man living here by the name of Rudy?"

The clergyman was immediately interested and friendly. "What's his other name?" he asked.

"I don't know," confessed Dave. Feeling that some further explanation was required, he added: "He told me he lived here. I was to meet him here at eight o'clock."

"What does he look like?" asked the clergyman.

"Nineteen or twenty years old, but looks older. Black hair, gray eyes, Irish type. A handsome lad, but looks like a bad one. Dresses very smartly. When I saw him yesterday he was wearing a gray suit, gray hat, gray spats and a gray tie with a big emerald pin in it."

The clergyman looked at Dave as much as to say: What do you want with such a one? But he was too polite

to ask it. Instead, he said: "What's his line?"

"I reckon he's a sporting character," said Dave with a twinkle in his eye.

The clergyman marked the twinkle. He was an understanding man. "Ah!" he said.

"This is a funny kind of place for such a fellow to live," remarked Dave.

"Oh, all kinds live here," said the clergyman. "It's cheap, and it's first class in its own way. It's the most democratic place in the city of New York. Nobody feels out of place here . . . I live here myself," he put in dryly. "I'm a curate in St. Barnabas' Church. This is a great place to see life. I expect there's more than one 'sporting character' amongst us. You see it's so safe and respectable. Even a sporting character wants a place where he can lay his head in peace and quiet."

"You're right," said Dave. "I never thought of it that way."

"Your friend may be known under another name here. I'm sorry I can't help you more."

"Much obliged anyhow," said Dave. "I'll just keep on inquiring."

"Let's go ask old Gus Eichler," suggested the clergyman. "He's the oldest patron of the house, and proud of it. He watches all who come and go here, and makes friends with as many as he can."

He led Dave into a long room opening off the lounge in front, where they found a respectable old German workman playing draughts with a friend. He left the game while he listened to Dave's description of the man he was looking for. As soon as Dave came to the emerald pin old Eichler clapped his thigh.

"Sure, I know that young guy," he said. "I marked the pin. I never see such a pin anywhere. It was carved in the shape of a beetle, like."

"That's my man," said Dave.

"Don't know him personally," said Eichler, "because he's a surly lad. Close-mouthed. But I seen him coming and going, and I asked who he was. He passes here by the name of Tim Ahearne."

"Much obliged to you both," said Dave. "I'll ask at the office for him."

THE office of Darius House was arranged more like a banking office than a hotel. The counter running across from wall to wall was topped by a glass partition with several small openings in it, each stopped with a brass grille. Inside, several clerks and bookkeepers were at work, and through a door at the back the manager could be seen sitting in his private office.

To the clerk who came to ask what he wanted, Dave said: "I'm looking for a man called Ahearne, Timothy Ahearne."

"Number 321," said the clerk. He ran his hand smartly along a row of letter boxes, and slapped it in a certain one. "Key's here," he said. "He's out."

"Oh," said Dave, disappointed.

"Have you looked through the public rooms? He may be sitting there?"

"I've looked."

"Come to think of it, he went out just a few minutes ago," said the clerk. "I didn't see him myself, but I found the key lying on the desk."

"Well . . . I'll wait for a little while," said Dave, at a loss. He scarcely knew what to do next.

He was still standing by the desk,

watching the procession of men passing in and out of the corridor, when he saw a cleaning woman come through a door at the back of the office. Her wild appearance instantly arrested his attention; ghastly pallor, staring eyes, a clenched hand pressed hard against her mouth.

She entered the manager's office, and said something to him, afterwards clapping a hand over her mouth as if to hold back a scream. He pushed her into a chair, and came hastily into the front office.

Thus far Dave was merely an interested spectator. But when he heard the manager say sharply: "Number 321; who's got that room?" all his faculties leaped to attention.

"Ahearne, sir, Timothy," said the young clerk. "He's just gone out."

"Oh, no," said the manager in a queer voice, "he's up there."

The clerk stared. "What's the matter?" he stammered.

The manager said something Dave could not hear. The clerk staggered back a step. "Why . . . why, this man was just asking for him," he stuttered, indicating Dave.

The manager came through a door at the end of the counter. "Do you know Timothy Ahearne?" he asked in a shaken voice.

Dave made his face a blank. "Yes," he said at a venture.

"What is he to you?" demanded the other suspiciously.

"No relation, if that's what you mean. Just a fellow I know."

"Well, you'd better come with me. There's been an accident. For God's sake keep quiet. We don't want to start a stampede here."

Dave, conscious that he was being watched, betrayed nothing; but his mouth hardened with the realization of

danger. He followed the manager into the elevator, and they were carried to the third floor. A porter was awaiting them there. When the elevator went back, the manager asked the porter: "Have you been in the room?"

"No, sir. Waiting for you . . . Who's this?" he asked with a jerk of his head in Dave's direction.

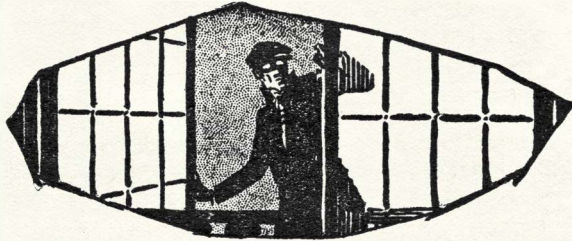
"He's a friend of the fellow's."

Both men regarded Dave with suspicion, for no reason except that his clothes were rough and worn. Out of the tail of his eye Dave marked the

position of the stairway in case of need. He followed the two through a cement paved hall. The manager tripped along on smart, neatly shod feet. He wore a well tailored cutaway and elegant striped trousers like the manager of a fashionable hotel. The porter slumped heavily like a gorilla.

They stopped before the door marked 321. The manager put the key in the lock, and turned away his head. His face was all screwed up with repulsion. "Go in first," he muttered. "I can't stand it."

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK



## A Whole Town Ransacked by Bandits

**F**OUR bandits swooped down on the little town of Trevor, Wisconsin, recently, and staged a raid in old-time Indian style. They merely substituted machine guns and an automobile for arrows and horses.

Trevor is a hamlet of fifty souls. At midnight the bandits speeded into the village, cut the telephone and telegraph cables, the little town's only connection with the outside world, and then proceeded to ransack it.

At the office of the Wisconsin Livestock Company they knocked the caretaker out with a revolver and then split the safe open with nitroglycerine. After that, they marched into the six-room hotel owned by James M. Zmersly, and robbed Zmersly and his two daughters, who had wakened in terror.

Henry Christofferson, manager of the stockyards, who was sleeping in the hotel, jumped out of a window and ran four miles in his night shirt to the neighboring village of Wilmot. He left \$200 behind him in his trouser pockets, which the raiders got.

The bandits finally set off a tear gas bomb, and fled. Their loot was \$400. It was the most thorough ransacking since the days when Wisconsin towns lived in mortal dread of massacre by the Indians.

# ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

By STOOKIE ALLEN

## CANADA'S SWAMP MURDER

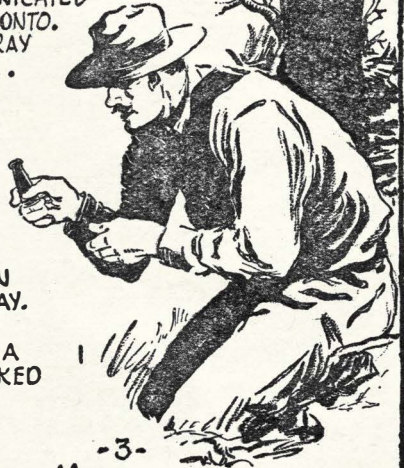
ONE MORNING TWO WOODSMEN GOING THROUGH A LONELY SWAMP STUMBLED UPON THE BODY OF A MAN. HE HAD BEEN LATELY KILLED—SHOT FROM BEHIND. THE MEN NOTIFIED THE LOCAL POLICE WHO IN TURN COMMUNICATED WITH THE POLICE OF TORONTO. DETECTIVE J.W. MURRAY WAS PUT ON THE CASE.



.2.

MURRAY FOUND THE BODY TO BE THAT OF A YOUNG MAN—ALMOST A BOY—AND IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WAS OF A GOOD CLASS OF SOCIETY. MURRAY RECOGNIZED THE CLOTHES AS OF A KIND MADE ONLY IN ENGLAND—BUT EVERY DETAIL THAT COULD POSSIBLY AID IN REVEALING HIS IDENTITY HAD BEEN REMOVED. THE LABELS IN THE SUIT AND HAT HAD BEEN REMOVED AND EVEN THE BUTTONS HAD BEEN CUT AWAY.

AT THE SCENE OF THE MURDER MURRAY SEARCHED ON HANDS AND KNEES FOR HOURS FOR A CLUE. AT LAST HE FOUND A CIGAR HOLDER MARKED "F.W.B." HALF BURIED IN THE MUD.



-3-

MURRAY GAVE PICTURES OF THE DEAD MAN TO THE PAPERS IN THE HOPES THAT SOME ONE WOULD RECOGNIZE HIM. A FEW DAYS LATER A SUAVE MAN NAMED REGINALD BIRCHALL CALLED ON THE DETECTIVE

AND IDENTIFIED THE PICTURES AS THAT OF

A YOUTH NAMED BENWELL WHO HAD BEEN A FELLOW PASSENGER ON A BOAT FROM ENGLAND TO NEW YORK. BIRCHALL WAS ANXIOUS TO HELP THE DETECTIVE, A LITTLE

TOO ANXIOUS, MURRAY FELT. ACCORDING TO HIM BENWELL WAS A MERE ACQUAINTANCE. IN CANADA BENWELL HAD LEFT BIRCHALL TO GO TO ONTARIO. MURRAY FELT THAT BIRCHALL WAS LYING!



A REGULAR PICTORIAL FEATURE



- 4 -  
MURRAY AND  
ANOTHER MAN  
SLIPPED INTO BIRCHALL'S

APARTMENT ONE NIGHT TO  
SEE WHAT THEY COULD FIND.  
IN A BUREAU DRAWER THEY  
FOUND AN ENGLISH NEWSPAPER  
AD CLIPPING WHICH READ:  
"CANADA.-UNIVERSITY MAN HAVING  
FARM WISHES TO MEET GENTLEMAN'S  
SON TO LIVE WITH HIM WITH A VIEW TO  
PARTNERSHIP; MUST INVEST 500  
POUNDS:" THE AD BORE  
BIRCHALL'S NAME.' MURRAY THOUGHT  
THAT THIS WAS THE LURE THAT BROUGHT  
BENWELL TO HIS DEATH.



- 5 -  
ONE DAY HE  
PLANTED THE CIGAR  
HOLDER ON A TABLE,  
THEN HID TO WATCH  
BIRCHALL'S REACTION.  
BIRCHALL RECOG-  
NIZED IT AT ONCE,  
FEAR SHOWED ALL  
OVER HIS FACE.

- 6 -  
HE WAS ARRESTED AT ONCE. AT THE TRIAL  
ANOTHER YOUNG ENGLISHMAN NAMED PELLY  
TESTIFIED THAT HE ALSO HAD BEEN LURED TO  
CANADA BY THE AD AND BIRCHALL HAD TRIED  
TO DO AWAY WITH HIM BY SHOVING HIM INTO  
NIAGARA FALLS. HE HAD CAUGHT HIMSELF JUST IN TIME.  
A FARMER LIVING IN THE VICINITY OF THE SWAMP  
IDENTIFIED BIRCHALL AS A MAN HE HAD SEEN ENTER-  
ING THE SWAMP WITH YOUNG BENWELL.  
HE WAS CONVICTED AND HANGED.



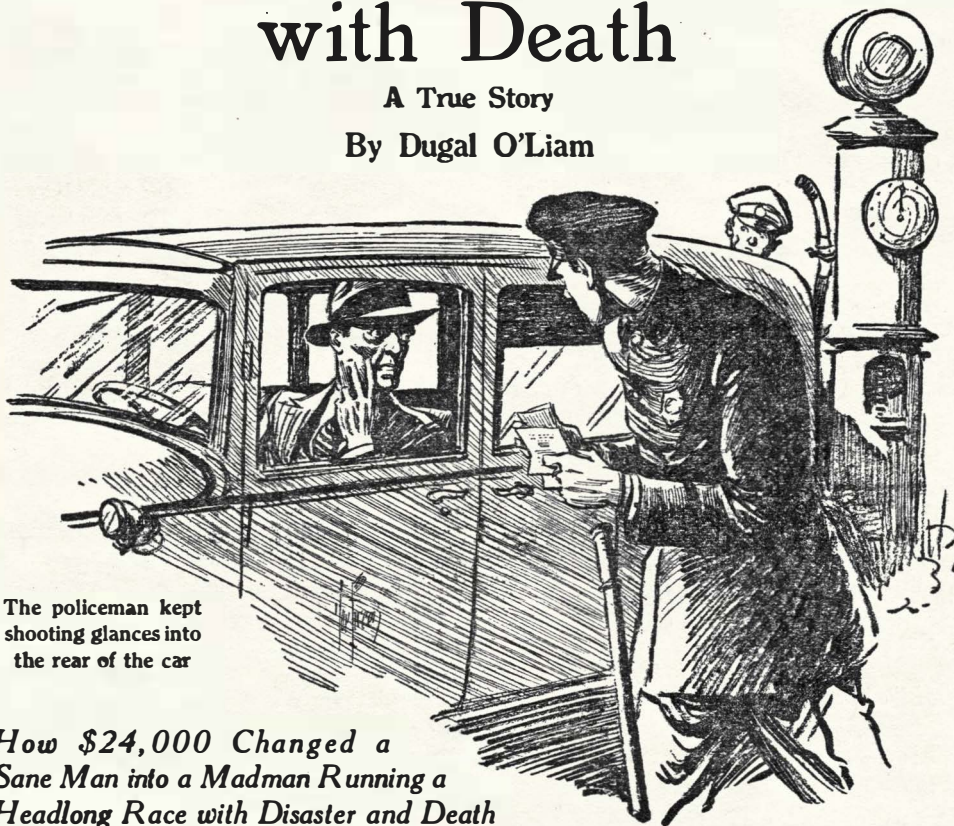
REGINALD  
BIRCHALL

Next Week: REBUILDING THE DEAD

# The Man Who Rode with Death

A True Story

By Dugal O'Liam



The policeman kept shooting glances into the rear of the car

*How \$24,000 Changed a Sane Man into a Madman Running a Headlong Race with Disaster and Death*

**I**N March of 1930 William Frazier was a modest young man with a beautiful family and a comfortable home, living in a cheap section of Rahway, New Jersey, going to work every day, faithful to his wife, adoring his children, steady and ambitious.

In March of 1931 he was a man about town, living on his money, owner of a new home and a new automobile, a blossoming devil with the women, a typical example of repressions released.

In March of 1932—that's another story, a short, vivid story filled with the hell-bent-for-election plunge of a creature freed from an unconscious

captivity down the gaudy path of pleasure.

William Frazier was an assistant manager of a restaurant in the Pennsylvania Station in New York in 1930. The job paid only fairly well and his family took much of his income. But he did well and supported his wife, Hilda, and two daughters, Evelyn, eleven, and Irene, eight.

He was a handsome man, neat and careful about his appearance, a little shy with a shyness that was attractive. He was twenty-nine years old and his mind was alert and his conversation well chosen and convincing. He neither drank heavily nor gambled. In all, an

excellent father and husband, by the yardstick of human behavior.

Then, out of nowhere, for he'd never even suspected that it was coming or that there was anything in life for him except what he earned by his own hard work, came a legacy.

It wasn't a great fortune to some, but it was a mint to the modest man of Rahway. It was, in fact, \$28,000.

It came from an unknown estate of his father's. The father had died several years before, supposedly penniless. Now came this money—half for William Frazier and half for his mother.

His wife was unbelievably happy. The skimping and privations were gone. The children could dress, she could dress, they could have a big car and a new home.

They got the new home at once.

"Exactly \$8,000 of this goes into a home," said William Frazier. "A good home, here in Rahway, one of the Colonial places over in the new subdivision. A place with a yard and some trees and rose bushes."

A week later, the Fraziers were in their new home, a frame Colonial house with a little hedge about it and plenty of yard and a garage.

Now something had to be done about the garage. It was, immediately. A little too much, for Hilda's peace of mind, if she'd been thinking of anything but the great good luck that had come to them.

For William Frazier came home, not with one modest car suitable to their needs, but with two cars. One for his wife and one for himself. And the roadster, which was small and light and easily handled, was for his wife, strangely enough.

Hilda Frazier protested a little, but her husband cut her off short.

"Listen," he said, "I've slaved for you and the kids for thirteen years—since I was a boy that should have been in high school. Now I intend to live. Hear me? Live! Like a man, not like a mole."

For the first time the wife began to worry. Bill Frazier didn't even wait to take her and the two girls out in the big car. He turned the key to the smaller car over to her, established her credit at the gas station and garage, showed her how to drive, and told her to live as he intended to live—like a civilized person.

Then began the dance down the gaudy lane.

From a man who'd never had a thought for another woman, Bill Frazier suddenly developed into what is known in the American nomenclature as a skirt chaser. He developed a phobia. A woman didn't have to be beautiful, or young, to attract Bill Frazier and his \$20,000. She merely had to be a little receptive to Bill—and \$20,000.

Bill found that his job interfered with his social career. He discovered that it was necessary to choose between the two, so he quit his job. He began taking hunting and fishing trips. Hilda thought he was going alone, but she seemed to be the only person among those who knew Bill who thought so. Always Bill had feminine company on these trips, and it wasn't Hilda.

He became a hopeless woman chaser. He flirted with everyone of the female sex, from fifteen-year-old school girls to graying grandmothers with high heels and rouged cheeks. If he didn't have one woman in his car, he had several.

He grew bolder. He'd drive up in front of his own home with his women in his automobile, get out, go in, and,

when Hilda protested, ask her what she intended to do about it.

"Let me live my life," he would snarl. "It's my money. I'm taking care of you. Let me alone."

Then he met Phœbe Stader.

**H**E was calling on his mother. She lived in a two-family house near the railroad station in Rahway. She was inordinately fond of her son and extremely proud. She had to call the neighbor, the occupant of the other half of the house, down to meet him. She wanted Mrs. Stader to see what a handsome boy she had.

Mrs. Phœbe Stader was a woman of thirty-six. She still was attractive. Very attractive, in fact, with rich, dark brown hair and deep-set, luminous eyes. Her figure was round and well molded and her ankles were beautifully turned.

Moreover, she had what Bill Frazier called style. She was the wife of a welder, Phillip Stader, but she had her own business, a hair dressing shop, or had had when she was married. She'd always taken the best of care of herself and now she was back at the work and had money to buy clothes and take care of her appearance.

Bill Frazier had suddenly begun to realize that he was attractive to women. It didn't make a great deal of difference who the woman was, just so she looked presentable—and liked Bill Frazier's looks.

Phœbe Stader was a romanticist. She was bored with life as the wife of Phil Stader. He worked hard, came home tired and grumpy, and seldom wanted any of the extraneous pleasures of life. Theaters, dancing, bridge. The old, old story, as old as human relations, as old as the human family itself.

Mrs. Frazier didn't notice that her son held Phœbe Stader's hand over long. She only noticed that Mrs. Stader seemed very much impressed, and she was proud. Her son impressed people. He was handsome, intelligent and likable. And he had a big car and knew how to wear his clothes.

Bill Frazier left the home of his mother. He drove around the corner to a cigar store, went in, bought a package of cigarettes — and called Phœbe Stader on the telephone.

"Please excuse me," he said, in his best man-about-town manner, "but I just couldn't help calling you. I had to call you. I hope you won't think I'm presumptuous."

Bill Frazier listened eagerly for the reply. There was silence for a minute, a heavy, tugging silence.

Then—

"Why, I'm so glad you called," said the voice on the other end of the line. "I—I—I wanted you to."

## II

**F**IFTEEN minutes later Phœbe Stader swung down the street. She found Bill Frazier waiting in front of the cigar store. He opened the door of his car. She smiled and got in. He went around the car, got in behind the wheel, kicked the starter, meshed the gears.

The ride down the gaudy road had begun for Frazier.

The affair with Phœbe Stader became an open scandal. They were seen everywhere together. No longer did Bill Frazier parade his many loves about in his car or park them in front of his home while he went inside to taunt his wife, the mother of his children.

He was seen only with Phœbe Stader, and Phœbe was seen with brilliant



new clothes and jewels, and driving Bill Frazier's car.

Word of the affair came to Hilda Frazier. She remonstrated.

"This is my life and my bank roll," said Bill Frazier. "You keep out of it. I don't bother you, do I?"

Then came more serious complications. Phil Stader, a powerful man, short-tempered and fearfully jealous of his handsome wife, learned of the affair. He summoned his wife. She denied it. He threatened Frazier. His wife laughed at him, taunted him as a jealous fool.

Phil Stader met his wife coming home late one night. He threatened to deal with her and her lover—as soon as he found out who her lover was.

He didn't have long to wait. Hilda Frazier went to Bill's mother. The mother let a hint drop about the woman that lived in the other part of the house. Hilda Frazier called on the Staders—and found Phil Stader, gloomy and morose and ugly, muttering his imprecations on the man who was ruining his home, on his wife, on the whole dirty business.

Hilda Frazier saw the man's hurt. She saw, too, his fury. She may have thought she was taking the right steps to save her husband. Whatever her motive, she told Phil Stader, told the powerful welder with the suffering face and the eyes that were deep with the hurt of a tortured soul.

Trouble had been piling up on Phil Stader. He had lost his job, hadn't been able to find work for weeks. The rent was overdue. A dispossess notice lay on the table before him as he talked to Mrs. Frazier. His cup of bitterness was, indeed, filled to overflowing.

"I'll stop it—By God, I'll stop it," he told Mrs. Frazier.

Mrs. Frazier went home. She'd done

everything she could. If she couldn't reclaim her husband in one way, she could in another.

Phoebe Stader came home late that night. It was somewhere in the middle of February of 1931.

"Phœbe," Phil Stader told her, his face white and his jaw firm, "I've learned what you're doing. I know who the man is. If you ever go out of this house alone at night again, without me, I'm going to—"

He paused here. Decided to allow that to have its effect. He felt he didn't need to say more.

Phoebe Stader was an independent woman. She'd grown more so since she'd attracted the Frazier man, with all his money, and her husband had been unable to work. She didn't know how near Bill Frazier was to the bottom of his pot of gold.

"How dare you talk to me like that?" she exploded. "You who can't support me, even, and then talk like that when I find someone who's willing to show me a good time."

She flew into a tirade. Women do that when they convince themselves that they are being abused and mistreated. She raged up and down the floor.

"So I can't go out, eh? Well, who's going to stop me from going out? Who's going to stop me?"

Phil Stader confronted his wife.

"Phœbe," he said, with a desperate calm, "I told you that if ever you went out again without my knowing where you were going—"

"You would what?" she demanded, unaware of the dynamite that lurked in the bruised soul of her husband. "You'll do what? Go ahead and say what you'll do, you coward. Beat me, I suppose. Well, you will not."

She threw some clothing into a pair

of grips. She continued to berate Phil Stader as she packed. He stood in the middle of the floor, a little dazed. He said nothing.

Phœbe Stader finished packing the grips. She seized one in either hand, stalked out the door. At the threshold she paused to throw back these words:

"Well, what are you going to do? Make me stay here until the law puts us out of this hovel?"

Rahway never saw her again.

**P**HIL STADER stood in the middle of the room, staring dumbly at the door. He stood there for five minutes, never moving. Then he went out, in time to see Phœbe getting into Bill Frazier's car at the corner.

Rahway saw Bill Frazier early the next morning. Somewhere around two o'clock it was. He appeared at the door of Ira Jensen, his twenty-two year old cousin, a nervous, shy youth, God-fearing and industrious, but possessed of an almost fanatical affection for Bill.

Ira Jensen was in pajamas. He saw trouble on his cousin's face with the first look. He saw dark despair, stark, unreasoning terror.

"What's the matter? What in the world has happened, Bill?" the youth cried. "You look like you'd seen a ghost."

Frazier suddenly covered his face with his right arm and staggered back from the door. Ira caught him by the shoulders, shook him vigorously.

"What in the world's happened, Bill? Tell me, quick."

"Ghost—that's it—ghost," was all the agitated man could say.

"Ghost!" exclaimed Ira Jensen. He concluded his cousin had been drinking too much. "Don't be foolish, Bill. Come on in and let your nerves settle

down a little. You're all worked up about something."

"Great God, Ira," Bill Frazier was stammering. "It's Phœbe."

"Phœbe? What do you mean? What's happened?"

"She's dead—she's dead."

"Dead? What happened? Phil Stader?"

"I don't know. I just heard a shot and there she was, slumping in the seat beside me."

"With you? She was with you?"

"Yes, yes. Great God, what'll I do?"

"Where is she now? What did you do?" Ira Jensen was trying to make heads and tails of the situation.

"She's out—she's out in the car, there."

Ira went into the house and put on some clothing. Bill went inside with him. He sat before the boy, his hands clasped between his knees, moaning.

"I was in the back seat when I heard a shot and saw Phœbe slump down."

"I thought you were in the seat with her?"

"No, I was getting some things in the back seat. We were starting for Florida. And I heard a shot and down she slumped."

"I got into the front seat and started driving for a doctor. Then I felt her and she was cold. Good God, Ira, what shall I do?"

"Go to the police right away," said Ira Jensen, regaining his calm. "Tell the police about it right away."

"Oh, I can't do that," remonstrated Frazier. "I can't. They'll want to know why I didn't tell them when she was first shot and then they'll arrest me, because I don't know why I didn't."

"Can't you tell me why you didn't?"

"Well, I was excited and afraid. I heard another shot, and heard some-

thing sing through the air, and I drove away as fast as I could. I just drove. All I wanted to do was to get away from there."

"Then I started to hunt a doctor. Then I found out she was dead and I knew they'd arrest me then, because I didn't take her to a doctor right away."

They were out at the car. Phoebe Stader was lying over in the front seat, sort of slumped against the carriage work. Her mouth was open and her eyes were staring glassily and there was a small, blue spot behind her left ear from which blood ran down onto her neck.

"Let's get her into the back seat, Ira," Bill Frazier was suggesting. "Come on, help me get her into the back seat."

"No, Bill, I won't do that. That would mean that I was a party to this thing and I wasn't, Bill. I can't get into it, Bill, but I want to help you all I can."

"What the hell's the matter? Is everyone turning against me?"

Ira Jensen said nothing. Bill Frazier dragged the body over the back of the seat and dropped it on the floor of the tonneau. He threw a robe and some papers over it. Then Ira got into the front seat with him and they drove to his mother's home.

He put the car in the garage and locked it. Then he and Ira Jensen went inside. Ira remained with his cousin that night and through the day. Late the next day, they went to Hilda Frazier. Ira had persuaded Bill Frazier to tell his wife what had happened.

### III

**H**ILDA FRAZIER was cold. "I knew something like this would happen," she said. "It's your place to go to the police. You

have a wife and children at home. When you encroach on other men's rights, you must take the consequences. Go to the police before it's too late."

Frazier began to whimper again. He protested that they would arrest him.

"Didn't you say you were innocent?"

"Yes, but I have to prove it. And if I'm arrested it'll kill Mother. And think of the babies."

"You didn't think much of the babies and of your mother, to say nothing of me, when you were flouting this woman all over town. It's a poor time to start thinking of them now. I'm advising you to go to the police. I'm through with you, forever. Take your medicine like a man."

Frazier began to plead with his wife. Finally he fell on the floor before her, tugging at her gown.

"My God, Hilda, I never was in anything like this before. I never was in trouble before. I'm afraid of the police. I didn't see who did it and I can't tell them. They'll electrocute me."

"They don't electrocute innocent men, Bill," Hilda said. "If you want to save yourself, you'll tell the police now so they can find the real murderer."

"Great God, every one wants to see me in trouble," the distracted man cried. "What have I done to be tortured like this?"

Ira Jensen was moved by his cousin's hysteria. A moody, sympathetic boy, he understood better than Hilda Frazier, who'd long brooded her wrongs. He went with Bill Frazier, back to his mother's home. They went into the garage. Bill Frazier unlocked the car. They got into the front seat together.

"What are you going to do, Bill?"

"I don't know, exactly, Ira," Frazier said, much calmer now. "I think I'll drive around and then take the body to the police and tell them the story."

He stepped out of the car suddenly, went into his mother's house. Ira saw a light go on, then saw shadows as his mother got up and moved about the kitchen.

"You look ill," the aged woman said to her boy. "You haven't looked well for two days. What's happened to you?"

"Oh, nothing," Bill Frazier said, "just a little nervous headache. By the way, have you seen Phil Stader today?"

"Why, yes. Why?"

"I think I know where there's a job for him. Did he seem upset—that is, about no work and his wife being away?"

"He seemed moody, but he said nothing about Mrs. Stader. Just came here to get some things he'd left with me when they moved."

His mother noticed his agitation, as mothers will.

"Son," she said in alarm, "you're trembling. You're ill."

"I feel lousy," Bill said, trying to be casual. "I'm going to run over to the hospital and see what's the matter with me."

He kissed his mother good-bye and stalked out of the door.

**O**UT in the car, Ira Jensen waited for him. Bill kicked the starter and they roared out of the yard. He turned the car south, headed for Woodbridge and the open country along the lower coast.

Ira Jensen was protesting vigorously. He insisted that Bill Frazier take the body to the police.

"I am," said Bill Frazier. "I'm go-

ing to Trenton, though. I don't want any deals like I'd get from the police here. I'm going to play safe and go right to state police headquarters."

South of Woodbridge, he stopped the car. He asked Ira Jensen to get out. The boy refused.

"What's the idea?" the youth demanded. "Tell me what you're up to and I'll get out."

Bill Frazier was half hysterical again. He began wringing his hands, frantically. Tears ran from his eyes. The nervous strain had made a mewling weakling of the Rahway ladies' man.

"I can't stand this any longer," he blubbered. "I can't face this. If I give her up, they'll take me to jail and then they'll never try to find the murderer. All they want in Jersey is to electrocute someone for every murder. They don't care who it is, just so they electrocute someone."

He was a little wrong there. Jersey justice is swift. There's never been any question about that. But there isn't a proven case on record yet where it was in error. Perhaps its swiftness precludes error. Whatever it is, it's famously rapid and straight shooting.

"What if they do lock you up for a while? You can prove you didn't do it, can't you, Bill? After that Hilda will take you back and you can start over again. If you run away, you're a hunted man for life. Running away is an automatic admission of guilt. They certainly wouldn't hunt for another man if you ran away. They'd *know* you did it."

Frazier shook his head.

"I can't face the music. Here's what I want you to do. Wait here while I drive into the field here. When you hear a shot, come over to the car. I'm going to end it all."

Ira was horrified. He tried to protest. Frazier, suddenly frigidly calm, with steel in his harried blue eyes, pointed a rifle at him, told him to stand off.

"Do as I say," he hissed. "If you follow me, I'll blow both of us to hell. Stay here until you hear the shot. If I see you coming toward the car, I'll shoot you on sight."

Ira Jensen said nothing. He was frozen with horror. Bill Frazier got into the car. He held the gun on Ira Jensen with one hand and drove the car with the other, turning it into a field grown high with weeds and shrubbery.

Ira Jensen looked up and down the road. There wasn't a soul in sight. The car labored into the field. Then he heard the motor stop. His heart beat wildly. He felt a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Why couldn't something happen? Why couldn't Bill go on if he was going to? Why didn't he do it? Why didn't it happen?

Ira Jensen could stand the suspense no longer. He ran into the field, daring the threats of his cousin. As he stumbled over the trail the car had left, blindly, half hysterically, he heard the auto horn sounding. It sounded like a call for help, like the baying of a hound that has treed more than it can handle.

He plunged on through the shrubs and dead weeds. He could see Bill now. He was standing beside the car. His face was hidden in his arm. His shoulders were heaving. The gun lay half across the running board, against his leg. His right hand gripped the front door of the car.

Ira took his cousin's arm. He turned him around.

Bill's eyes were red and swollen.

"I can't even kill myself—I can't even end my own suffering. What am I going to do?"

"Go to the police," said Ira. "It's the only thing, Bill."

#### IV

BILL still refused. He wouldn't go to the police. He mistrusted the police. He had another plan. He'd get out of the way. No one ever would know what became of Phoebe Stader. Her husband hadn't mentioned her absence.

"I'm going to Florida," said Bill Frazier. "I'll take the body with me. You meet me in Raleigh, North Carolina, with all the money you can get. Get it from Mother. She has some of my money and she'll give it to you. Tell her you and I are going to Florida, that I'm going to open a restaurant there and you're going to help me. Tell her Hilda and I have quarreled."

Ira hesitated. Finally, because he wanted to help the distracted man, he agreed.

Thus began one of the most gruesome and extraordinary rides any man ever took, a ride of horror, of fear, haunting fear.

Of narrow escapes and challenges, of nightmares such as few men have to endure.

Bill Frazier took Ira Jensen to a bus line, so that he might go back to Rahway. Ira Jensen protested once more.

"If you go through with this, Bill, and they ever do catch you, you haven't a chance. There certainly will be no looking for the real killer. You'll convict yourself."

"I'm going to do it," said Bill.

He left Ira Jensen standing beside a hot dog and coffee wagon. He turned his car to the south, toward Florida,

ignoring Ira Jensen's last pleading gesture.

He drove frantically. He forgot about traffic regulations. He forgot about speed cops, forgot everything but his frantic desire to get away from Rahway and New Jersey.

The gruesome load bounced and lurched in the tonneau. He tucked the robe carefully about it, dropped a pair of suitcases that he had packed casually over it. Then he continued his headlong race with death.

At Trenton he was delayed by traffic, although it was late. A red-faced policeman held him up at the bridge that leads from Trenton into Moorestown, Pennsylvania, over the Delaware River. He went directly through Philadelphia, avoiding the downtown section, into Chester, Pennsylvania. He knew the route. He'd taken it on fishing trips, into the Chesapeake Bay country.

At Chester he stopped for gasoline. A policeman sauntered past the car. He stopped to converse with the station man. He looked at the New Jersey license plate. Then at Bill Frazier. Bill Frazier's face was white and set. The policeman sidled over.

"What's the matter, buddy?" he ventured. "You look pretty peaked."

"I'm sick," said Bill Frazier, in a hollow voice. "I'm trying to get south for my health—if I can make it."

The policeman looked at him again, searchingly.

"Sick, eh?" he said. He seemed to drawl the words with maddening care. Then he added: "Well, I reckon you are, all right. You look like someone had stole your pants."

Bill Frazier tried to laugh. It sounded hollow and mirthless. He got into his car and started to drive off. The station attendant called to him.

He'd forgotten to pay for the gasoline. The policeman shuffled up again, a little more animated this time.

"That ain't amneesy you got, is it, doc?" he asked, meaningly.

"No, no," Bill Frazier protested. "I was nervous, that's all."

He started to pay the attendant. The policeman began pulling out a pad and paper, at the same time peering into the rear of the car.

"Better let me see your licenses," he said. "Anything might happen to a sick man like you."

**B**ILL FRAZIER'S hand shook as he fished out his licenses. He handed them to the policeman. The man took them, examined them coldly. He kept shooting surreptitious glances at the rear of the car.

The cold sweat stood out on Bill Frazier's forehead.

His palms were wet.

The policeman held the licenses in his hand. He looked at the rear of the car again. Then he ejected a large quid of tobacco.

For God's sake, why didn't he do something? Why didn't he ask what was in the back of the car, or tell him to open the door, so he could see—and get it over with?

Frazier said to himself, "I'm going to tell him—I can't stand any more of this."

He looked at the policeman. His hand shook frightfully. His tongue was stiff and clove to the roof of his mouth. But he could speak.

"Officer," he said, "I—"

The policeman grinned knowingly, a little satisfied with himself.

"It's all right, Rahway," he said. "A lot of them tourists are carrying their own beddin' and sleepin' out this year. A cop knows depression when

he sees it, doc. So long and good luck."

On down the Washington route toward Baltimore Bill Frazier drove. The awful thing in the rear seat became more and more appalling as he drove on. At no stop was he safe. Someone, a farmer, a policeman, an urchin, a bum seeking a hitch-hike, looked into the rear of the machine everywhere he stopped.

He picked his way through Washington in the early morning. He was so weary he could scarcely sit behind the wheel. His shoulders sagged, and now and then his eyes closed in spite of him. He stopped wherever he could and drank black coffee, so that his mouth was sore from the hot liquid.

He reached Alexandria, drove on through. The dawn was breaking. He could go no farther. He pulled his car into a little lane.

He dropped over in the seat of the car. He closed his eyes. He fell into a fitful slumber. Frantic dreams assailed his sleep.

He felt cold hands on his throat. Dead hands, with the flesh fallen away. He saw Phoebe Stader's glassy eyes, accusing and horrible. She was saying, over and over, "Why do you take me away? Am I not to be avenged? Must no one pay for my life? I gave it to you. You must make someone pay. You must make someone pay. Someone *will* pay."

He awoke with a start. His neck was stiff. His body ached from the dampness of the night and his cramped position. The sun was up. It was broad daylight. He felt a pair of cold eyes upon him. He whirled about. His heart leaped into his mouth.

A policeman's motorcycle, with a Virginia state shield on the license plate, stood beside his car.

The policeman was staring at him. At him and the rear of the car.

He rubbed his eyes, foolishly. The policeman continued to stare. Bill Frazier wanted him to speak. He couldn't go through another experience like that in Chester.

The young policeman grinned. Then he shook his head.

"Didn't mean to wake you up, partner," he said amiably. "Just thought I'd better sit here a while and see that nobody rolled you in your sleep, not having anything else to do."

Bill Frazier was amazed. He looked at the young man, unbelievably. Then he said, infinite relief in his voice:

"Do you mean it?"

"Sure," said the youth. "Why not? It's better to watch a man while he catches a little nap than to make him drive while he's half dead. That's the way they have accidents on these busy roads, men fallin' asleep at the wheel."

Bill Frazier offered the youngster a \$5 bill. He didn't have many such bills, but the relief, and the soothing effect of the soft southern voice was worth it.

"Thanks, no," said the policeman. "You're mighty welcome and sho' look like you needed that shut-eye."

Bill Frazier drove on. The world looked brighter, even with the awful burden that haunted his waking hours and assailed his dreams. He didn't care to stop at a hotel. Not with the body in the car. He'd have to be getting rid of it soon, though. It had been in the car more than thirty hours. He couldn't keep it there much longer.

## V

HE was near the little town of Bowling Green. He saw a culvert. He got out and examined it. Then he saw a man watching him.

He pretended to light a cigarette. He got back into his car and drove on.

He reached an open field. He drove into it, stopped his car beside a fallen tree, almost stripped of its bark. He tugged the body out. He could roll it under the tree trunk and throw some leaves and grass and dirt over it.

The body was heavy. It wasn't stiff. Rigor mortis had passed. He dragged the body about ten feet, to a spot beside the tree.

Then he went back to the car and got a pair of scissors which he used for patching tires.

He cut the clothes off the body. He ripped them into shreds, leaving the body absolutely nude.

There was a ring on her left hand. It held a large aquamarine stone. He'd given it to her. It might identify her. He took a pair of pliers from his pocket and broke it. That was the only way he could get it off, the fingers were swollen so.

Then he took a silver necklace from the body. He put the ring in his pocket. The necklace he buried in a tiny hole that he dug with the scissors and his heel. He stamped the dirt down over it, kicked a few leaves over the place.

He gathered more leaves. Leaves and twigs. Then he pushed the body as far under the fallen tree trunk as it would go. He threw the leaves and twigs over it. He pulled up some dead weeds and threw over the twigs and leaves. Then he got into his car and turned it south toward Raleigh.

Twelve hours later he met Ira Jensen in Raleigh. Ira Jensen had \$260. He'd borrowed it from Bill Frazier's mother.

"What's new in Rahway?" Frazier demanded, eagerly.

"Nobody knows where Phil Stader is," said Ira Jensen. "You ought to

have taken the body to the police. Everything would be all right now."

"It's all right, anyway," said Frazier. "I'll be back soon. Tell mother I'm going to Florida to start a restaurant. Tell Hilda that if anyone asks for me, I'm going to New Orleans. Tell her that if anyone says anything to say that I left her for another woman."

Poor Bill Frazier. A great knowledge of woman's psychology the ladies' man of Rahway had.

Ira refused to go on to Florida with Frazier. Instead, he went back to Rahway in a dilemma. He believed Bill was in the clear and wanted to do something to bring him back home.

Frazier waited in Raleigh for several days. He took a room there, joined in the recreations about his rooming house. He was a good bridge player and a jolly companion. The young women of the place found H. G. Devlin, as he called himself, a very desirable sort of an addition to their social life. Especially since he had a nice car and plenty of money.

One day he went to the post office. He expected a letter from Ira, and he had one to mail. He pulled the letter from his pocket to put it in the slot. Something rattled on the post office floor.

It was an aquamarine stone of large size.

He stooped to pick it up. A stocky man stepped up to him. Something clamped over his left wrist. It rattled as it went on, and grated, like a cog wheel.

He straightened suddenly, looked at his wrist.

Then he looked into the cold, gray eyes of the man on the other end of the handcuffs.

At first he attempted to appear in-



dignant. The stocky man only smiled at him. Another man slipped up on the other side. The two took his arms and started walking him toward the sidewalk.

They took him to his rooming house. He got his clothing and made arrangements to have his car left in the garage. Then they started back to Rahway.

On the train, Bill Frazier talked easily. The first thing he asked was where Phil Stader was.

“STADER?” said the stocky man. “Why, he’s in Rahway. He’s been there all the time.”

He learned a great many things then, very rapidly. He learned that Ira had gone home and told Hilda Frazier where her husband was. There had been a conference of relatives, including his mother. Ira and his mother were certain he was innocent and they wanted him back.

Hilda Frazier seemed to want him back, too, but not for the same reasons, she afterward admitted.

They decided to go to the police.

They went to the police. To their horror, they discovered that Stader had never even been wanted, that he had been staying quietly in a rooming house. His wife had left him, he said, when asked why he had not reported her absence. Even Phœbe’s sisters vouched for that.

Then the police arrested Ira. Ultimately they announced that he would be a material witness. The boy remained in jail at Rahway, heartbroken and half out of his mind, until Frazier was brought back and tried.

Then began a hunt for the body. A man named Twiggs, living near Bowling Green, found it. He’d lost a dog. One day he saw buzzards circling above a spot near his farm. He thought

that explained the whereabouts of the missing dog.

He went to the spot above which they appeared to be circling. He found the body of Phœbe Stader, exposed, because the twigs and leaves and weeds had blown away.

Then a man named Charles Collisin said he had seen a man driving a New Jersey car looking under a culvert on the preceding Thursday morning, early, and that the man had seemed nervous. He identified Bill Frazier as the man.

With this evidence against him, Frazier told a new story, a story entirely different from the story he had told Ira Jensen and his wife.

He said that he had met Phœbe Stader after she’d left her husband. He said that she already had agreed to go to Florida with him. They were ready to go, he said, and he was finishing packing the things in the rear of the car.

He’d put a rifle in the rear of the car, he said, because Phœbe had told him that Stader had threatened her and him. He didn’t want to be caught without some kind of defense, because Stader was a powerful man and he feared him.

While he was putting the gun down behind the cushions, he said, it went off.

The bullet struck Phœbe behind the left ear. She toppled in the seat.

He tried to find a doctor, but couldn’t.

Then he found she was dead and went to Ira Jensen. He admitted he hadn’t told Ira the truth.

The police asked him why he hadn’t come directly to them. He said that he knew he had been carrying on an unlawful relation with the woman and was afraid of what the police would

do and afraid of the shock to his mother. After he found out the woman was dead, he lost his head completely.

He cut the clothing off, so the body could not be identified. He took the ring for the same reason, but retained the stone—as a sort of keepsake. When he was asked why he had told Ira Jensen and his wife that they had better not talk or they would be held as accessories after the crime, he said he didn't remember saying that, but that if he did it was because he had lost his head completely.

When he got back to Rahway, his mother rushed to his defense as did several fraternal organizations. They hired Alexander Simpson, brilliant court strategist and famous in the Hall-Mills case, to defend him. County Prosecutor Abe J. David had charge of the state's case.

In court Frazier's case collapsed completely. He couldn't remember, at first, any more than he'd told the policemen who brought him back from Raleigh.

Under cross-examination, he unwittingly admitted that he and Mrs. Stader had quarreled the night of her death.

"What did you quarrel about?" David demanded.

"She didn't want to go to Florida with me," Frazier sputtered. "She said she was going back to her husband, that she was through with philandering with me."

"Why did she do that?"

"I don't know; she just did it."

"Wasn't it over money?"

"Why, yes, I guess it was," Frazier admitted, hopelessly looking at Simpson, who was objecting violently. "I guess it was something about money."

"Just what was it about money?"

Come on now, get this mess off your chest, Bill." David was friendly and cajoling. Simpson was unable to stem the tide; Frazier was breaking down completely.

"I'd spent all my money," he blurted out. "I just had a few dollars of my inheritance left and she said she was through with me, that she had a husband and was going back to him. She said the joy ride was over and it was time to be sensible."

"That was a rotten trick, Bill," said the wily David, amid Simpson's objections. "I don't blame you for getting sore. What did you do then?"

"I was heartbroken because I loved her. I was crazy about her. I couldn't see her turn me down that way. I wanted her to go to Florida with me. I told her I'd get more money from my mother.

"She said she had a husband who could promise—and then I guess I went out of my head—"

"And shot her." David's voice was heavy with challenge.

"No, no," Frazier was crying above Simpson's objections. "I don't know how it happened, I tell you—"

The jury was out two and a half hours. Then they came back, slowly, ominously.

Frazier knew his fate then. He sat with his old mother. His eyes were deep sunken, with great black circles under them.

His light brown hair was streaked with gray, gray that had come through two months of horror.

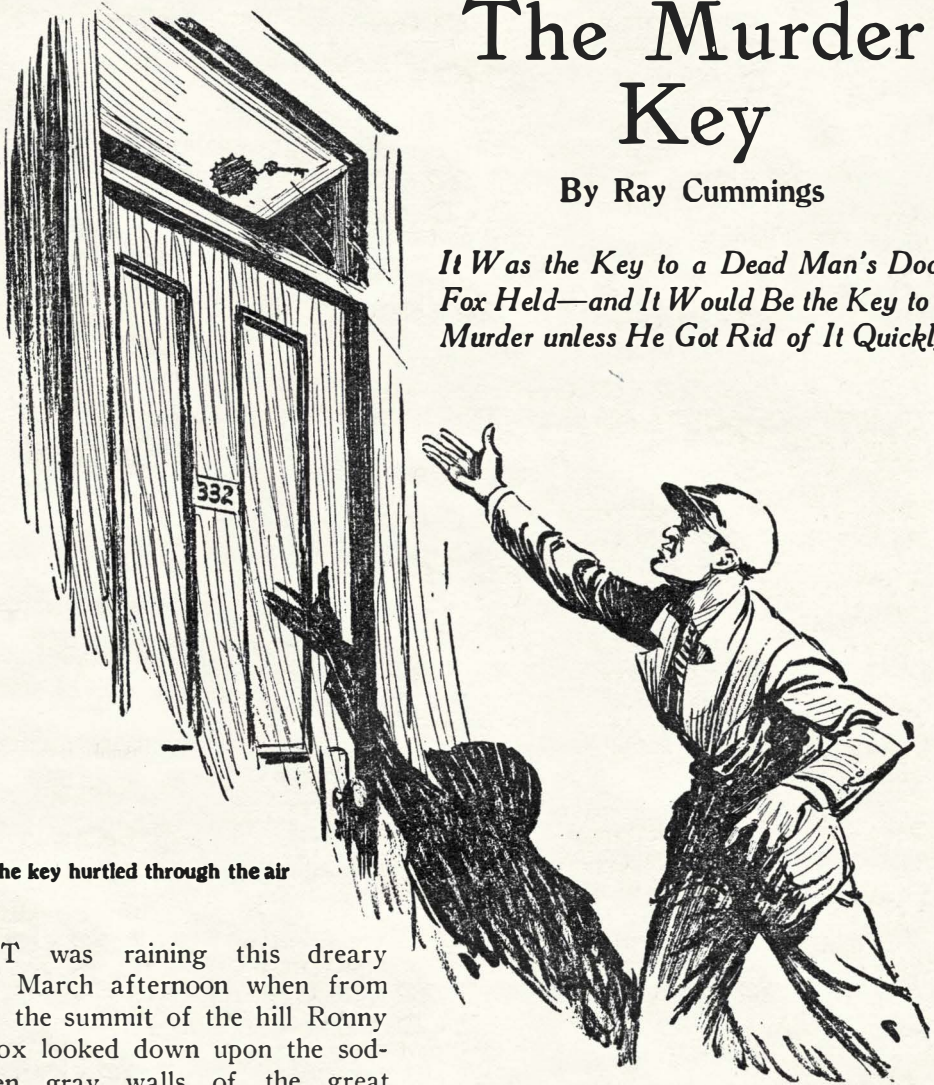
He slumped in his chair as the verdict of guilty was read. His head fell on his mother's shoulder. He appeared to sleep.

On April 1, 1932, they led him to the electric chair in the state penitentiary at Trenton.

# The Murder Key

By Ray Cummings

*It Was the Key to a Dead Man's Door Fox Held—and It Would Be the Key to a Murder unless He Got Rid of It Quickly*



The key hurtled through the air

**I**T was raining this dreary March afternoon when from the summit of the hill Ronny Fox looked down upon the sodden gray walls of the great prison. The sight of the huge quadrangle with its sentinel towers made him shiver. This was the place he had so narrowly avoided.

Ronny was tense and grim as he halted his taxi and sat for a moment, gazing. He had waited two years for this afternoon when Jennings was coming out of the prison, released, square with the law. But he wasn't square with Ronny! That was still to come.

"Go on down," he told his taxi driver. "Near the front gate—I want to see a fellow come out." He handed the man a five dollar bill. "Want to see without being seen, get me? He'll be taking the four-eighteen to the city, I guess."

It was now about half-past three. It hadn't been hard for Ronny to get the information that Jennings was coming out about this time. And Jennings knew nothing of Ronny's movements

—probably had forgotten all about him by now.

With his cap pulled low over his eyes, Ronny's slim figure lounged in the back of the taxi, hidden behind its rain-splattered windows. His hand in the side pocket of his coat caressed the cool, sleek revolver.

There was a taxi waiting close by the gate and presently Jennings came out. No friend was here to greet him. What the hell—Jennings had no friends left. He looked, as he stood shaking hands with the prison official, just about as he had always looked. Flabby and paunchy. A little pale from the prison life.

The gate clanged open, and then closed. Jennings climbed into his taxi and it started for the hill.

"After it," Ronny murmured. "Keep it in sight."

This was a visiting hour. Ronny's taxi had attracted no attention; there were many other cars waiting here. Easy enough to stay on the trail. Jennings wouldn't be suspicious . . . In the railroad station Ronny was close enough to see Jennings buy a ticket for New York.

**T**HE McIlroy House wasn't much of a hotel; yet hardly a dump either. Ronny was close enough to hear the number of the room which Jennings had gotten. 332. He saw the big, old-fashioned key with its large oval metal tab bearing the name and address of the hotel on one side, and the room number on the other. Ronny could almost read the number as the clerk tossed out the key and the colored boy picked it up. But he didn't have to read it, for the clerk called out the number. And now he was writing it after Jennings' name in the hotel registry book.

Ronny lounged around for nearly an hour. No hurry. No need to watch Jennings' movements any longer. Jennings had followed the colored boy upstairs. The hotel had no elevator; apparently just these front stairs which came down within sight of the desk. That was all right. Ronny had no intention of making any hurried getaway. When he left he would check out openly. There would be nothing to connect him with the crime. It wouldn't even be considered a crime; an accident, probably, the way Ronny would fix it up. There were only men in this hotel, most of them transients, plenty coming and going all the time. Nobody would ever notice Ronny. He wondered if a hotel like this would have a house detective. Probably would, but Ronny couldn't spot him.

And this hotel, which Jennings had selected for his first night of freedom, had a Police Station immediately across the street. Ronny had chuckled at that. Fair enough! Jennings' first night of freedom. It would be his last night—for anything . . .

Ronny came out of his wandering thoughts and saw that it was after seven o'clock. He was hungry. Time to get a room here. And Jennings might be coming down any minute to go out to eat. It wouldn't be a good plan to encounter him here in the brightness of the lobby.

Ronny verified, as he signed the name John Green in the registry book, that Jennings had been given room 332. That would probably be on the third floor. What he wanted was a room on that floor, or above—preferably above. Far enough away so that no one would think of him, even as a witness.

"Don't care much, except the price, what you give me," he told the clerk.

Luck was with him. He didn't have to stall, or raise any objections. He got a room on the fourth floor, which was the top. And he saw, as he climbed the stairs, following the colored boy who carried his small suitcase, that Jennings' room on the third floor, was close to the stairs. Easy to spot it by the big metal numbers tacked to its door-panel. The old-fashioned glass transom over the door showed a glow of light. What luck! It was necessary to pass Jennings' room to get further upstairs. That gave Ronny a perfect excuse for being in this part of the hotel if by any chance he should be seen here.

Ronny went out once or twice, and then waited in his own room, reading, until nearly midnight. Jennings had been out to supper, had come back and perhaps now had gone to bed. Ronny slipped the bottle of whiskey into his side coat pocket and his revolver in the other. He drew his cap low over his eyes, put out the light in his room and locked his door as he left. He was wearing on his right hand a thin black silk glove to guard against leaving fingerprints. He kept this hand in his right coat pocket, gripping the revolver.

No need for particular secrecy; if anyone happened to be in sight when he got down to the third floor he would keep on going. But no one was in sight. The stairs and the hall were empty. The transom over Jennings' door still showed an interior light. Jennings probably was awake.

Ronny paused at the turn of the stairs for a moment. The long hall was dim, with only an occasional small electric bulb illumined. A red glow at the further end marked the fire exit. Near the stairs a hall side-window, partly opened, looked out over an angle

of the adjacent alley. Easy to walk quietly—there was a strip of carpet down the center of the hall. But the place was comfortably noisy anyway. The roar of the clattering city came in that opened hall window. Some of the room-transoms showed lights; twenty feet down the hall it sounded as though a card game were in progress. Noisy, raucous voices; laughter; the clatter of poker chips.

Ronny decided that now was as good a time as any to chance it. A few seconds getting into Jennings' room without being seen; and a few seconds unobserved when he came out. That was all he needed.

## II

HE stood at Jennings' door . . . Have to remember to close this transom. Jennings would make a little rumpus, of course . . . Ronny tapped on the door very softly. No answer. Very carefully, with his gloved hand, he turned the knob. The door yielded. Jennings hadn't locked it.

A second and Ronny was in the room, with the door softly closed behind him. And Jennings' startled voice was saying,

"What you want? Oh—"

Ronny's swift gaze in that second took in all the details of the fair-sized bedroom. No bath. Only this one hall door. Two windows with drawn down shades. Bureau, washstand, chairs and table. Matting rug of straw on the floor. Small electrolier, lighted; Jennings had evidently shifted it from the table to a chair beside the bed. And Jennings, in pajamas, propped up on the bed, with newspapers on his knees.

A second, while Ronny stood backed against the closed door and Jennings gazed with startled surprise. He didn't recognize the intruder, of course.

Ronny's cap was pulled low down; it was dim here by the door, out of the yellow circle of the electrolier's illumination. But that yellow circle fell upon Jennings' flabby face. It went pale. The jaw dropped with astonishment, then with fear as Ronny's black-gloved hand whipped out with the revolver.

And Ronny's low voice hissed, "Keep quiet! One shout—or move—and you'll be dead. I mean it. One move's your last."

Ronny's left hand was fumbling behind him for the transom-lever. He found it and shoved the thing closed. The big key was in the lock. Ronny turned it and locked the door. He saw the fear on Jennings' face mingled now with a vague relief. Jennings thought this was an ordinary stick-up. His eyes swung wildly about the room as though for help. But he did not move.

"What you—"

"Shut up!" hissed Ronny.

"What you—I—I have no money here." Jennings spoke with obedient softness. "Don't shoot. I'll give you—give you what I've got."

Then as Ronny shoved back his cap, Jennings knew him.

"You!"

**T**HERE was fear on his face now. Stark terror. Triumph surged over Ronny. This was the moment for which he had been waiting two years.

"Yeah. Know me, don't you?" Ronny padded forward to the foot of the bed. "Keep your hands up there on your knees."

"I haven't—haven't got—"

"Well, keep 'em up, anyway." He shifted along the side of the bed and sat down on it close by Jennings, who drew back in terror against the pillows.

"Ronny — that gun — what you want? Are you crazy?"

He was squirming with terror.

"Keep your voice soft, damn you, Jennings. I'll—"

"I am keeping it soft, Ronny. I'm glad—"

"Glad, are you? Well, you won't be in a minute. Thought you'd double-cross me, did you?"

"Ronny, no—"

"Just because you got caught—an' I didn't—tryin' to put 'em after me—"

"No! I swear I didn't, Ronny; listen—" He was terrified, squirming. Ronny sat with leveled weapon. Gloating. This was worth waiting for.

"Go ahead," he urged. "Tell it. Let's hear it—gettin' off with two years—"

"Because they knew I wasn't the one who tried to kill her."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah." Jennings dared to mock him. He dared to show a little spirit. Ronny, with narrowed eyes saw that Jennings was tensed, watchful.

"Ronny, if I'd told them about you—you know damn well I saw you stab her. An' suppose she'd died—we didn't plan murder—I didn't—"

"You're a liar."

"I'm not, Ronny. I could have told, but I didn't. I could tell now—"

Tell now! But that's just what he couldn't do! Ronny saw with a sudden vision like a light striking into darkness how futile and unimportant had been all his plans for vengeance. This was his real motive. Jennings knew what really had happened that night in the lonely cabin; he could send Ronny up for it any time he liked.

"Ronny, I've learned my lesson. I'm going straight—"

"Straight? Straight to hell!"

There was an instant when Jen-

nings must have seen his death coming. The knowledge of it swept into his eyes. His tensed body hardly moved as Ronny suddenly struck with the revolver muzzle which he had been holding within a foot of Jennings' face. It caught Jennings on the temple. He did not cry out. He made hardly a sound as his body pitched forward, tumbled sidewise and slid through Ronny's outstretched arms to the floor. The electrolier went down; the light in the room went out.

Ronny straightened and stood panting. This was not just what he had expected should happen, but it was good enough. Jennings was dead. Or was he? This damn room-light being extinguished, would that attract attention from the hall? Had there been too much noise?

Ronny was startled by the confusion of his whirling thoughts. There seemed a dozen things that he had to do all at once, and above them all was a great urge to get out of here. People might come, begin pounding on the door. Through that door was the only way to get out. He'd be caught in here like a rat in a trap.

Ronny stood fighting his rising panic. No one would come—there hadn't been much noise. He saw now that there was still light enough in the room for what he had to do. The hall light came through the glass of the transom, and a yellow glow of nearby electric signs showed through the drawn window shades. And in a moment Ronny's eyes were accustomed to the new dimness.

The pajama-clad body of Jennings lay with outstretched arms on the floor. One cheek was against the matting. From the upturned temple blood was welling, darkly red on the pallor of the face. The electrolier lay near the

bed. Ronny saw that in falling one of Jennings' legs had struck against the dangling wire and had ripped the wire completely out of the electrolier so that the two copper ends of the wire now lay on the matting. The paper-shade electrolier hadn't made much noise as it fell. It wasn't broken; the bulb was still intact. The ripping out of the wires was what had extinguished the light.

Ronny's thoughts steadied. Could he make this look like an accident? A drunken man, getting out of bed, tripping over a light wire, pitching forward and sidewise, striking his temple against something sharp? Worth taking a little time to fix. Ronny figured that if anyone had heard any noise, and wanted to investigate, they'd have come already. He would chance a minute or two.

### III

HE padded softly to the windows, cautiously pulled the shades aside an inch or so. A sheer drop to the street. Both windows were closed and locked. He did not touch them. Was Jennings dead? Ronny gripped his revolver around its middle with his gloved hand and stabbed the muzzle again into the red wound of Jennings' head. Grewsome business. It made Ronny's senses reel, so that he leaned back against the bed to steady himself.

Jennings was dead; no doubt of it now. Ronny took off his black glove carefully. He wiped the bloody revolver muzzle with the glove and laid the weapon and the glove on the floor. . . . Mustn't forget to take them with him, and find a place outside to dispose of them. The blood on the glove would dry in a moment, and then he could safely put it in his pocket.

So much for him to guard against!

He had left no fingerprints yet. He was sure of it. Was any blood on his clothes? He stood in the yellow glow of one of the window shades, examining his appearance. Nothing wrong. In the bureau mirror, as he turned back to the dim, eerie room, he caught a glimpse of his reflection—slim fellow with gray cap awry on his head. His white face was contorted, strained. God, what a way to look! Was he so frightened?

He faced the mirror, straightened his cap. Nothing wrong. And he smiled into the ghastly reflection of his face. Why all this excitement? He had no expectation of facing the police; there would be no way for him to be drawn into this thing at all. But he mustn't linger here. Must fix the body to look like an accident.

The bed was of iron, painted white, with brass trimmings. Brass balls ornamented its corner posts. The two at the foot of the bed were much lower than those at the head. Ronny stood by the outside foot-corner and with the tail of his jacket he unscrewed the brass ball. It came loose, exposing the threaded iron staple. It was just about the size and shape of the end of a revolver muzzle. This was what the dead man would be supposed to have struck . . . It would need blood on it.

Ronny had the brass ball clutched in the flare of his jacket. What should he do with it? He knelt, dropped it to the floor, kicked it gently with his foot. It rolled under the bed, struck one of Jennings' shoes and lay motionless. Ronny took a look and left it there.

With the black glove dipped into that grewsome temple of the dead man, he smeared blood upon the point of the bed-post, and put the glove back on the floor with the revolver . . . Mustn't forget to take them with him.

A haste was on Ronny now. It seemed that he had been here an interminable time since the killing, but in reality it had only been a minute or two. The body wasn't lying in the right position. He gripped it under the shoulders and hitched it nearer the foot of the bed. Careful of the blood! Had blood gotten to the floor matting in the other position? He saw that it had not.

He wiped his whiskey bottle with his jacket to avoid fingerprints. He put a little whiskey on Jennings' lips, spilled more on the floor and some into a glass which stood on the table. And then he laid the bottle on the floor with its neck against the fingers of Jennings' outstretched right hand. The whiskey gurgled out on the matting for a moment and then stopped.

Ronny was finished. He stood surveying the grewsome, tragic scene of the dim bedroom. A drunk fell out of bed and killed himself. Fair enough. Much better than an unsolved murder; with a hue and cry after everybody who ever knew Jennings . . .

Now to get out of this damned room . . . Ronny abruptly stiffened. He crouched back against the foot of the bed with all the blood in his body seeming to have turned into ice water. Voices and footsteps sounded in the hall! Men coming! God! He was caught here red-handed, caught like a rat in a trap! The door was locked on the inside—Ronny remembered distinctly that he locked it. But the men would try the door. Pound. Shout. Alarm the hotel.

A panic of terrified, unreasoning thoughts swept Ronny as he crouched in the yellow dimness, holding his breath, listening to the approaching men. A few seconds. Where was his damned gun? Must get it. Fight his



way out of here. Fight—never get taken—this—this was premeditated murder . . . Death penalty . . .

The footsteps came to the door—Ronny suddenly breathed again and felt himself smiling weakly. He was trembling and cold all over—cold with sweat. But safe. The footsteps had not stopped. The voices were nothing but casual talk. Just a couple of men passing on their way upstairs.

What a fright over nothing! The sounds were gone in a moment. Silence out there now. He wiped his dank forehead with the back of his hand and tried to grin. This accursed room—the body lying there weltering—once away from here, this feeling of being in a trap would vanish. Now was the time to get out.

**H**E stood listening at the door. Silence. No, he could dimly hear that card-game down the hall. He turned the key quietly in the lock. Had he better open the transom? Why bother? What an idiot! Of course he had to open the transom, in order to toss Jennings' key back in! He was sure he could toss it so it would land on the bed. A drunk was liable to do anything. The police could figure that this drunk had locked himself in and taken the key to bed with him. Ronny fought to keep his mind on what he was doing. So many things, all of which must be done just right. He gently opened the transom. Its glass panel tilted inward from the top six or eight inches. O. K. He took the key from the lock. Careful of fingerprints on the doorknob—and on the key. Big metal tab, easy to put fingerprints on it. He dropped the key in his jacket pocket and wiped it off with the cloth of the pocket.

He turned the doorknob with the

tail of his jacket. Silence outside. But in that second of hesitation it seemed to Ronny that he dared not chance going out. Was someone lurking silently out there, ready to jump on him? Nonsense!

Then another wave of terror swept him. He was going out, leaving his revolver and the bloody glove here on the floor! He turned back and found them. The blood on the glove was only damp now. He stuffed them in his pocket, opened the door an inch. Silence—

He was in the hall. He closed the door without touching the knob. There was just a little faint click, and another as he turned the key in the lock and withdrew the key. And they were both drowned in a burst of laughter from that room at the end of the hall.

Safe! The damned thing was over. But was it? Footsteps sounded. Someone coming up the nearby uncarpeted stairs! And he had the key in his pocket—the key to the murder, unless he got rid of it in a hurry!

Ronny fled from the door. He reached the stairs, silently mounted a few steps and drew back in the shadows of the mid-landing. He was really safe now! If this fellow came past the third floor Ronny could go on up to his own room . . . The footsteps reached the third floor and went along the hall and away into silence. Ronny breathed again. This sort of thing was easy. He went back down the few steps to the third floor. The hall was empty. He saw the opened hall window. The alley below was piled with a litter of rubbish; Ronny had noticed it earlier in the evening. A good place to throw the revolver and glove. They might not be found for days . . .

It only took him a second or two to reach the locked door of Jennings'

room and get rid of the key. He held it gingerly by the end, drew back from the door and threw it through the opened transom. It would drop on the bed—now he must throw the revolver and glove out of this hall window . . . God! Was it possible to see through the transom of Jennings' room from the upper stair landing? The realization of such a possibility—someone having been on the stairs and seeing the murder—flashed with a vagrant stab of thought into Ronny's mind in that split second while the dead man's key was hurtling through the air in Jennings' room . . .

The key struck in the room—but not on the bed. Ronny heard the faint rattling clank of metal. It had hit something hard. But what had it hit?

What was this? The hall went dark. Blackness. Had he gone suddenly blind?

#### IV

**R**ONNY fought, in a panic with flailing hands, at the blackness. It drowned him. He turned in it, vaguely with his sense of direction gone. Blind? Rot! He was all right. Easy! Find the stairs! Get away from here! Away—

All the lights in this part of the hotel were extinguished. The hall, and all these rooms, had gone suddenly dark. Voices were rising; footsteps; a clatter; doors opening; people groping into the hall.

Ronny tried to hold his wits. He heard the rattle of poker-chips. The card-game! To the left! He turned and started; he felt the strip of hall carpet under his feet. Other men were in the hall. A match flared briefly, to show a man in a bedroom doorway.

Then Ronny saw the glow of light in the hall window. The gun in his jacket

pocket thumped his hip as he moved. Must get rid of it—and the bloody glove. Throw them out the window . . .

He reached the window and felt somebody beside him; they bumped. Hands gripped him. Ronny's heart was in his throat. He still had this damned gun and bloody glove.

A voice demanded, "Shay, got a match? 'Scuse me—hittin' you—damn dark."

Ronny shook him off. "No, I haven't."

Spots of yellow light were appearing in the hall. Voices were demanding that somebody find the stairs and go down and get the damned hotel clerk. Then suddenly from the card-game came the sound of a table overturning. A crash of bottles and glasses and chips. And a loud drunken wail.

The fellow beside Ronny clung again. "No match? Stew bad. Gotta get a can'le. Stew damn dark'n my room."

This accursed bloody glove! Was he doomed to be caught with it? Would the electric lights flash on?

Ronny twisted sidewise at the window. He was still in shadow. In another second he had the gun and glove out of his pocket—and dropped them over the sill. Or on the sill? No, they fell down into the alley. No doubt of that. Down into a big pile of rubbish. He could see it down there.

What a relief! Ronny stood with the drunk clinging to him. The glove had been moist with blood; Ronny could feel it sticky on his fingers. He spat on them, wiped them off on the leg of his trousers.

"Let go of me, you idiot." He shoved away the drunk. Everything was all right now. He was just another bystander. He turned and saw that he was only a few feet from the stairs.

He could say—if anybody bothered to ask—that he had just come down the stairs from his room and was on his way out of the hotel. He was wearing his cap; it would be perfectly plausible.

**H**E started for the stairs and met the beam of a white flashlight—the house detective coming up on a run, with the night clerk after him.

“What the hell’s all the rumpus here? Who put out the lights? What was that crash?”

Somebody said, “Lights went out, all at once. Guess a fuse blew out.”

The group gathered solid at the stair-head. Ronny couldn’t see how to get past them without attracting attention.

“Clerk, I say, get your electrician.”

“Lad’s right. Ain’t this damned hotel got any ’lectrician? We’re in a game—can’t play poker in a dark—”

Three uniformed figures came up the stairs with a rush. The police from across the street!

“Hey, Greggson, you here? Need any help? What’s the trouble?”

The hotel detective swung around. “Damned if I know, Bill. Fuse blew out—that’s about all.”

Ronny’s breath stopped. He stood against the wall of the hall, frozen, transfixed. Somebody had said:

“From that room—over there, 332.”

Greggson’s flashlight beam swung to Jennings’ door, and clung.

The man added, “Seemed like I saw a splutterin’—a flickerin’ light over that transom—”

A little momentary flickering glow had been visible through Jennings’ transom after the lights went out. And there was a smell of something burning. It was faint, but even now everyone in the hall was aware of it.

“From in there!”

8 D—16

“A short circuit—”

“Who’s in there? Is it occupied—”

Greggson was at Jennings’ door. He tried it. Found it locked. Began pounding. And shouting:

“Hey, you, in there! Wake up!”

“Drunk, maybe—”

One of the policemen stooped at the keyhole.

“No key in here.”

The clerk was saying, “I rented it. I was on when he registered. Man named Jennings. He came in to go to bed coupla hours ago.”

Ronny stared, fascinated. But his thoughts were saying, “Get away from here. Away—”

He took a step. A policeman was at the stairs. No chance! No innocent bystander would leave now. It would look suspicious, draw attention. . .

“George, get the pass-keys.”

The pale-green colored boy rolled the whites of his eyes and dashed down the stairs. In a minute he was back. They opened Jennings’ door. The flashlight beams swept in.

“God! Look at ’im!”

“Dead? Is he—”

“Dead drunk, you mean.”

“Dead, you damn fool. Look at his head.”

“Lord, Greggson, look at this! Easy, man! Don’t touch it!”

“The fuse blew—no current now to—”

“Well, don’t touch it anyway. Get the sergeant. An accident? How do you know what this is? Hey, you fellows, keep back out of here—”

“Get a doctor, somebody. He might not be dead—”

**R**ONNY was in the group that crowded forward to stare into the room. Queer mischance, caused by his tossing the dead man’s key

through the transom! The key had fallen, not upon the bed, but on the floor. It had slid and landed on the naked ends of the ripped-out electro-lier wires! The key and its metal tag had short-circuited the current, caused that momentary blue flickering, and then blown the fuse. The straw matting under the key was charred a little. It had smoked for a while and then stopped of itself.

Weird mischance that by tossing the key he had brought this sudden discovery of the crime. But what of it? No danger to Ronny. And they could see that all this was only an accident anyway.

Ronny was herded back with the others from the door. Nothing to do now but stand here and act natural: watching with natural curiosity what was going on . . .

Time passed. Other officials came. Inside Jennings' room they tramped about and whispered. The door closed. Then later it opened again.

Out in the hall the bystanders stood in little groups, excitedly talking, gathering what they could from what snatches came from Jennings' room. Not a person had made a move to leave the scene; more had tried to arrive, but the policeman on guard at the stairs stopped them.

"—an' what the hell," Ronny was saying to the group which he had joined. "I was on my way out from upstairs. Gonna keep us here all night because a drunk fell an' killed himself?"

"—sayin' now it might be murder! The clerk jus' said—"

Might be murder! Ronny stiffened. He mumbled, "Jees—this is the real thing, huh?"

Fragments of information came trickling into the hall. Looked like murder. The body wasn't in the right

position on the rug matting to have hit the bed-post . . . Somebody had shifted the body. You could tell that because the whole rug had shifted with it and was twisted under the body . . . A post mortem would tell whether Jennings really had been drunk or not . . . The clerk said that the maid certainly would have replaced that brass ball, not left it under the bed. All the rooms were in good order, always . . .

Murder? Well, what of it? Ronny had covered his tracks all right. He'd just as soon, now with all this rumpus, that they called it murder as anything else . . . He had a chance now to verify that from the hall stairs it was impossible to see down through Jennings' transom; the angle was wrong. Besides, if there had been any witness, he would have spoken up long ago . . .

The blow fell upon Ronny as unexpectedly as though someone had thrust a knife into his back. From the now open doorway of Jennings' room a policeman's voice said:

"—named John Green? Who is he? Is he here?"

And the clerk's voice: "Sure—that fellow with the gray cap over there."

The hall was bright now. It went abruptly silent, with every eye upon Ronny.

"Come here, you. Come in here."

He stumbled into Jennings' room. The door banged closed on the murmurs of the crowd in the hall.

The thick towering figure of a policeman confronted him.

"What's your name?"

"R— John Green."

God, he was frightened!

"We know this is murder, see? He's got the wound in the right-hand temple. But that's the wrong side for hittin' the bed-post an' fallin' the way he did, 'less he was a contortionist."

Ronny's thoughts were pounding. The wrong temple! Evidence of murder. What difference? It didn't say who did the murdering . . .

He was so horribly frightened! He was stammering:

"Y-yes, sir. You say—murder—"

A voice said, "Locked the door as he came out of here—then threw the key back in—"

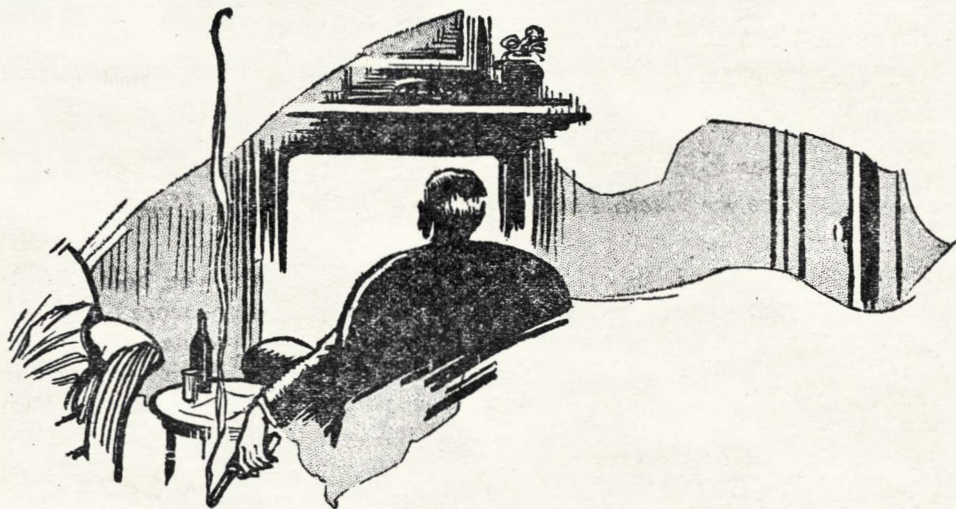
Ronny saw the key still lying on the wires; the current was cut off now by the plug having been pulled from the base socket.

That key lying down there . . . Ronny stared, with all his wits gone and his tongue sticking in his dry mouth. Hands were plucking at his pockets.

"Here's his own key—"

It wasn't in his trousers pocket where he thought it was, but in the side pocket of his coat. The big policeman drew it out. Held it under Ronny's face. But his gaze passed it, and clung to the key on the floor. The dead man's key. But it wasn't! It's tag bore his own room number! He could read it from here. 407. And the key the policeman had taken from Ronny's pocket was Jennings' key! The fatal numbers — 332 — dangled under his eyes.

Realization rushed upon Ronny. In that panic when he had almost been caught at Jennings' door, he had come back from the stairs, reached instinctively into his trousers pocket, and tossed through the transom, not the dead man's key, but his own!



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# Blow-Out

By F. N. Litten



"Y' know gas, do yuh? An' who are you?"

## *Bean-Eye Knew Oil Wells and Men—and He Knew Too the Death That Was Waiting in the Boiler House*

"IF he don't find oil, he's through," Layne said, leaning forward to make his words audible above the chugging of the launch.

Old man Garner stared at him from the center seat. He did not answer, but the wrinkles in his hard face deepened into seams. The launch moved on down the sluggish Bayou Nezpere; the racket of her exhaust volleying back and forth between the walls of moss-draped gum and cypress trees on shore.

Layne spoke again, impatiently yet with friendship in his voice.

"Can't see why you hold him, Ed. Dan Yelverton's got more black marks than any driller on the A. T. payroll. It's making your district—making you—look bad." He paused. "I've got to tell you, Ed, Rand's been talking of a new super in this district; you've junked too many holes on Bayou Nezpere, he says. But I know it's Yelverton's to blame."

Ed Garner moved his gaunt frame about uneasily, but his reply was colorless.

"I've been a company man a long time; be hard to lose out now."

But if it comes, I'll have to take it, boy."

"Get rid of Yelverton!" exclaimed Layne sharply. "You're letting him knife you—"

He stopped. Garner's face under its leathery tan had grayed. His hands, resting on his knees, clenched the oil-spattered cloth convulsively. He sent a frightened stare past Layne—as if he saw a sinister, terrifying thing behind in the black water. Layne, startled, cried:

"What's wrong?"

Garner broke into a sudden jarring laugh, but that was all.

Layne's lips tightened angrily. He was puzzled too. Garner always had been hard to figure out, silent, brooding, but a good friend. A smart oil man too, until he took this Dan Yelverton to nurse. Arch Layne hated the thought of losing Garner, but his chief, Jack Rand, was hard. "Produce or make room," was Rand's slogan.

The launch pushed on another hundred yards. She rounded a bend in the stream and Layne snapped upright suddenly. Just ahead, moored to the right bayou bank, lay a barge piled with steel bents, cross girders and oil drilling tools.

"Converse Oil!" he cried. "They're bringing in a rig—they mean to drill an offset hole beside us, Ed!" Garner watched the barge crew sliding a heavy pipe-joint down the plank runway to shore.

"They had a scout on our floor last week," he muttered. "An' every oil man in the country knows about this job, 'count of that big gas-pocket Dan run into. Dan was into the oil sand on Friday. He *sure* must have hit oil by now."

"He's out of luck unless he has," Layne answered grimly. Spinning the

wheel, he turned the launch inshore, and shut off power.

**F**IFTY yards below the barge, where a path led through the woods, the boat grounded in the mud and cypress knees. As the keel scraped, a man, emerging from the gloom of the tree shadows, hobbled forward. He gripped the painter, dragged the boat ashore.

Garner climbed stiffly out over the bow, the man stepped close. A queer scarecrow he was; thin, hollow-cheeked, but what marked him was his left eye. A strange and ghastly thing, gleaming a fish-belly white, the eyeball rolled so that no pupil showed. Garner glanced at him curiously. The man spoke, an eager rasping whisper.

"Brother, how about a job, for the smartes' bit-runner that ever made hole in these parts?" The stranger thumped his chest, nodded. "Bean-eyed Jacobs himself, who done it better at Jennin's, Sour Lake, Burkeburnett, an' Bakersfield. Yeah, an' way down to ol' Tampico in Spigotty land. An' many others. How 'bout it, brother?"

"Full up," said Garner shortly, and made to push by. But the other reached uncertainly for his jumper sleeve.

"Hey, wait!" he urged, but the assurance had faded from his voice. "You got a place in the boll weevil corner, ain't you, er rackin' pipe, er firin' yer steam pots?" His fumbling hand struck Garner's cheek. The superintendent brushed it away threateningly, then checked. He stared at the man for a long moment.

"Why, you're half blind," Garner said at last. "No place for you round a rig. Takes all the sight a man's got to keep from under, when the drill-stem's traveling."

"Dammit, I'm a driller!" cried the thin man, his voice shaking. "I kin make hole, I tell yuh. Blind, am I? I see with my nose and with these here meat-hooks"—he lifted his two hands—"better'n you with yer two eyes. Fack, brother. An' I smell with my eye, too."

"Full up," repeated Garner. But he reached for his wallet, drew out a bill. "A stake. You better hit for Berwick."

The man's chin quivered.

"Lissen, I don't want no charity. This here wile-cat hole's brought you no oil—just a gasser, ain't it? That's what the papers said. That's why I come. I *savvy* handlin' gas; might save yuh a blow-out. Yuh got gas in these woods now. I smell it."

Garner's voice hardened as he answered.

"You *smell* it. And you *savvy* gas. But there *is* no smell to 'natural.' So you're lyin', Jacobs, or whatever you call yourself."

The man, lifting his hand, touched his ugly, sightless eye.

"No, I ain't lyin', brother. Sure, y' can't smell casing gas—not with yer *nose*. But my *eye* tells me pronto if there's just a trace about; it begins to sting an' burn. And I say again, there's gas in these here woods."

Garner shrugged. He pressed the bill into Jacobs' hand.

"We're full up," he repeated. Then with a nod to Layne he turned and strode up the path between the trees. But Layne held back a moment. He had heard somewhere that gas *could* be detected as the man had claimed.

## II

"**Y**OU say there's gas here?" he asked curiously.

"Er my name ain't Bean-eye, brother," answered the thin man, con-

viction in the words. "I ain't blind, neither. I see fair in sun; just these damn black woods bothers me. But when this here eyeball starts atingling, that spells casin'-head gas. An' when she begins to weep, I leave the place, pronto! 'Fore the stuff can knock me cold . . . Say, ain't you got work fer me? Tool nipper, mixin' the mud?" He twisted the bill in his skinny fingers. "I'm broke, but no pan-handler, at that."

Some impulse he did not understand made Layne reply:

"Fall in then. I'll see if we can't fix it."

He started after Garner, now almost hidden in the gloom ahead. It was nearly sundown of a short winter day. The rival crew on the Converse Oil Company's barge quit work, the clang of pipe-joints rolling down the runway ended suddenly. The woods were still. Garner vanished round a turn in the path as Layne passed the rig boiler-house, a tin-sided shed in a hollow.

Beyond, over a dome-like ridge, he could see the derrick frame where Garner's man, Dan Yelverton, was drilling. He noted a line of new two-inch pipe, red lead still bright on the joints, which ran snake-like down the hill and into the boiler house by him. It was a gas line from the well, fuel to fire the boilers.

But the boiler fire-boxes were cold and dead, and there was no one on duty in the building. It appeared that even the gas had quit flowing. A sign at the edge of the path read: "Danger — Leave M a t c h e s Here." Layne searched his pockets, dropped a box in an empty tin can tacked to the post below the sign, and went on. Behind him he heard Bean-eye Jacobs call:

"Gas here—plenty, brother."

Then a sound of angry voices reached



Layne—Garner's and a heavy deeper rumble that was Dan Yelverton's. The voices rose to higher pitch. Layne broke into a run. He reached the hill ridge, halted.

Below, on the derrick platform at the bottom of the draw, stood Garner and the driller Yelverton, facing each other breast to breast. The crew were grouped behind them on the floor. As Arch Layne watched, Yelverton, a thick-set, bull-necked man, shook a heavy fist in Garner's face.

"Gimme a pink ticket, hey? Lessee yuh do it . . . Come on now."

He stuttered thickly. He was drunk. Some of the men about him laughed, silly, off-key sounds. Others turned away to pick up wrenches or fiddle with the tools that lay scattered on the platform. One, more sober than the rest, kicked a stone jug off into the slushpit where it sunk with an oily splash. Layne's eyes narrowed. He hurried down the slope and climbed the derrick floor. Dan Yelverton turned and, seeing him, laughed, a loud sneering laugh.

"By cripes, if here ain't Jack Rand's gum-shoe lad! Th' 'sistant field boss of the Anglo-Tex. Th' guy that sneaks up, looks an' lissens, an' runs home to Papa Rand to tell on a driller that twists off a bit, er sidetracks a bad hole. Y'come too close, Starchy-collar, an' I'll send yuh t' th' laundry."

**H**E lurched across the platform, lost his footing on the mud-slick planks and fell heavily. Layne sent a quick glance at the branched pipe, called a "Christmas tree," which capped the well-casing that rose up through the derrick floor. If a well came in with gas, the Christmas tree with a valve on every branch controlled the pressure. But the gauge on the branched pipe showed zero. The set-

ting pit beside the platform held not a drop of oil. Yelverton was scrambling to his feet.

"You brought in another duster, a dry hole," Arch Layne said coldly. "It'll be your last test for the Anglo-Texas, Dan. If Ed won't fire you, I will . . . You're through now."

The driller cursed, his lips quivering with rage. He rose to a crouch, rocked back and forth. Suddenly he dived at Layne. The younger man sidestepped, and as Yelverton charged past, swung quickly, a hard, down curving hook that caught the driller just behind his ear. He crashed, head on, into a corner column of the derrick, slid to the floor, out cold. Layne turned from him to Garner. Pointing down the gully to where a pile of timber marked the location of a second rig, he said:

"The Converse Oil are putting up their derrick. Listen, Ed. *They* wouldn't start an offset unless they knew we had the oil." He waited. Garner's eyes were hopeless, but he did not speak. Layne went on, choosing his words: "Ed, Yelverton has—sold out. He's drilled through the gas pocket, past the oil sand, to cap rock."

He wheeled on the rig crew, singled out a man who had drawn back into the crowd. "Boyd, you follow Yelverton on the night 'tower,' and you know oil, too. Was there oil showing in the returns these past ten days?"

The night driller would not meet Layne's glance. He muttered something under his breath. Layne smiled coldly.

"How much did *you* get out of the deal?" he asked. "Did Converse pay you well to spoil this hole?"

**D**AN YELVERTON was struggling to his feet again. He staggered forward, still groggy with the fall and the liquor he had drunk.

Blood ran in little oily beads from under his matted hair and down his forehead. His eyes were venomous.

"Sold out, hey?" he croaked. He shot a quick malignant glance at Garner. "Am I fired, Ed? You're the boss here, not this stuffed shirt of old Rand's . . . Have *you* got th' nerve to fire me, Ed? Talk up, I want to hear yuh say."

Garner groaned; the knuckles of his clenched hands whitened. The crew stared at him. They were all sober now. Garner's face was the face of a man in torture. Twice he tried to speak and failed. At last he said defensively:

"You oughta swabbed the hole. Did you try it? Or put the air to her? Pressure might have brought her in. There *must* be oil under this dome, Dan."

The driller wiped blood from his forehead. Still swaying dizzily he answered, contempt, hate in his voice:

"Oil! Who says there's oil here? A damn geologist, another of Rand's pets. A crew of pencil-pushers dynamited the ridge, took a lot of phoney figgers off the seismograph. But *I* know. An' I tell yuh there ain't no oil; nothin' but salt under the cap-rock and some pockety gas."

A thin reedy voice behind him shrilled:

"Pockety gas? When y' git gas in *pockets*, brother, there's oil somewhere about. I know gas well."

Yelverton started, whipped around. He had steadied suddenly. Thrusting out his heavy jaw he stared at the queer scarecrow figure by the derrick rail. Finally he laughed, a harsh jarring sound.

"Y' know gas, do yuh? An' who th' hell are you?"

"Bean-eye, they call me, brother. Lookin' fer work. Not a job, under-

stand, but *work*. An' say there's gas here, brother. My eye kin smell it plain. I savvy gas."

"Th' bo's goofy," muttered Yelverton as if to reassure himself. But his eyes were narrow, speculative. Then he said: "We got no work—full-handed."

Turning once more to Ed Garner, with a sneer he asked: "Want me to try a bailin' tool in her? All right—in the mornin'. An' why did we lay off, yuh ask? Fer th' reason I didn't think 'twas any use. I'd junk this hole, myself . . . Yeah, we got a leetle bit corned up while we was waitin' fer yuh. But what of it?"

He turned with an ugly leer at Layne. "Fire me, huh! I'm goin' now to get some hay. An' after that I'll see you agin, an' take yuh apart like a watch."

### III

HE moved to the platform ladder, climbed down it heavily. Layne watched him in the fast descending twilight cross the gully to the bunk shack and disappear within. The rig crew melted away and followed. Until only Ed Garner and the one-eyed man were left.

Bean-eye murmured: "This gang of roughnecks looks all wrong to me, brother. Here's a pipe-line strung from well to boilers. But no gas. Here's a pressure head—a C'ristmus tree—made onto th' well casin'. But no pressure. Still they's *been* gas flowin'. My eye felt gas when we come down the path. 'Course they was gas, or why run that boiler line, er set the C'ristmus tree? Somebody buggered up this hole a'purpose, brothers. That bull-necked driller might have run solid pipe down past the oil sand—"

"You say you've been a driller?"

Layne interrupted. "Well, do you know enough to clear this hole? Where'd you work last? Any references?"

"Nary one," said Jacobs. "I'm a floater, brother, a ten-day man. But I kin make hole, drive the pipe er pull her with th' best. See me work, that's my reference."

Garner broke in hoarsely: "You ain't gointa fool with this bo', are you, boy? I'll make Dan start bailing—or do it myself, tomorrow. Y' wouldn't risk spoiling what's done?"

"Dan won't set foot on this rig again," Layne said. "You're boss here, Ed, but I'm acting for the chief. And I know what Rand would say. Yelverton's fired—Boyd too. That leaves us short-handed. You start a side track, a new hole alongside this one. I'll follow you on the night tower, and try out this Jacobs in Boyd's place. The gang is *all* rotten, but we'll have to use them till I can bring in a new crew."

Bean-eye Jacobs rubbed his hands. His white eye seemed to shine in the darkness that now shrouded the rig floor.

"Thanks, brother, thanks," he said heartily. "I'll show you something too." Crossing to the branched Christmas tree he ran a hand over it. Red lead smeared the joint of vertical well-casing where the heavy main valve was screwed on.

"This lead's set," he muttered. "It's been made up fer a week, this C'ristmus tree. I kin tell by the feel. That's what you learn when yuh don't see so good—to make eyes outa yer mitts." He lifted his voice.

"Brothers, that C'ristmus tree spells gas. It's been cased off; still, it leaks a little. They've left the valves open so's it won't build pressure. They went down past the oil and gas, for I kin

feel a gassy tremble in the pipe. An' my eye says gas is a'leakin', seepin' up. *Must* be oil behind that gas. Somebody buggered up this test, brothers, an' Bean-eye aims to find out who."

With uncertain step he followed the pump rail to the ladder and swung down. As he vanished in the twilight Layne turned to Garner. He could not see Garner's face, but every line of Garner's body spelled despair. Suddenly Layne stepped forward grasped his shoulder.

"**E**D," he said, "why are you plug-ging for a man like Yelverton?"

A booze-head, and now gone crooked. He's sold out to the Converse crowd. I'm sure of it. They're a wrong bunch, Converse Oil. But they're wise, too. They wouldn't drill an offset well beside a dry hole. They know we've hit oil sand, Ed. Dan told them. He brought this well in dry, cased off the oil, and for a price. You *know* it, Ed!"

Garner was breathing hoarsely. Again Layne urged:

"Ed, there's something else—something back of this. What?"

A half checked groan, then Garner broke out, his voice harsh:

"What? Murder, is what. I'll tell you, boy. It's been on my soul for long enough. I—I—killed a man. And—Yelverton was there. He saw it done. That's enough, I guess."

Layne took an involuntary backward step. Then as there came to him the long clean record of Ed Garner he straightened, once again laid a hand on the superintendent's shoulder. He felt it quiver at his touch.

"Not enough, Ed," he said quietly. "You killed a man, you're paying blackmail. I want to hear the rest. A friend is asking you, Ed."

For a time Garner stood silent, his gaunt frame trembling, fighting to gain self-control. Layne waited with his hand on the other's shoulder. At last Garner began:

"I'll tell you all—all. It's the finish anyway. You'd have to know. Twenty years ago it happened—in the big days at Spindletop. I was a boomer then, roughnecking at the field. Yelverton was there, too—and others. A tough camp, Spindletop, gone crazy for quick money, liquid gold. All on the make, with rotten women, tinhorn gamblers, crooks of every sort to fill the hand. No one knew any man's name or his game. And so one night, we were sitting to a three card draw in the tool shed—just Dan and me—and the *other*.

"I'd been slicing a bit of plug. My—my knife lay half open on the table. The—other—had the cards. He did a queer flutter shuffle, makin' the deck fly back an' forth between his hands, an' then began the deal. Dan had been drinkin'. He said the other was siftin' the cards—that he'd planted 'em. That flutter shuffle done it, *he* said. The other jumped up, a fight began. And Dan was takin' it. Dan was thin then, all skin and bones. But I had hard muscles coverin' my frame. You'd not known either of us in those days. So the years change a man."

**G**ARNER stopped. When he began again his voice held a dreary, hopeless note.

"I got to my feet—to keep this fellow off of Dan, for Dan was limp with drink. The two of us fought hard. The table went over. Then I caught him fair with all my weight behind the fist. His knees folded and he went down, down on his face. He did not get up. And after a time I turned him

over. My knife, that had laid half open on the table—was sunk, blade-deep, close to his temple. Dead."

He paused, did not go on until Layne said: "And then?"

Garner roused. His voice was flat, drained of emotion.

"We got away—left him—as he lay. My knife, with 'Ed Garner' cut in the bone handle—I left it, too, forgettin' that my name was on it. I wonder that they never traced me by the knife. But Garner, it's a common name, and those were heedless days. Still, even then they had begun to bring the law to Beaumont. Dan says they've looked for me . . . Now it will be known. I will still pay."

"Twenty years," repeated Layne. "Garner, you're a fool. A court would clear you in a single hearing. An accident. Not pleasant to think back on, still, an accident. It might have happened—why, to me. You've let it get you down, brooded over it. The law can't—"

"Wait," cried Garner harshly, "there is Dan!"

"Dan?" echoed Layne. "Well, what better witness could you have?" He felt the man's shoulder twitch.

"Dan—tells another story now," Garner shivered. "He tells me he knows I did the killing in cold blood, for the money this man had. He found me two years ago and told me so—said that unless I helped him he would turn me up . . . His word would be good. There is that knife."

Layne gazed out across the dark flat at the lights twinkling in the bunk house, and visioning Yelverton within, swore bitterly. A cur—lower than a cur.

Feeding on the terror of his friend, threatening his betrayal. Garner was a fool to have listened. He could easily

be cleared. Then as Layne thought on, doubts began to cross his mind. Yelverton's word . . . The knife . . . No doubt it had been found. Damning evidence, linked with his word. Twenty years had passed, but the testimony would be hard to shake. Yet he knew that Garner had told the truth. Slowly he shook his head.

"Ed, somehow there's a way out. We'll find it. You won't be marked down by this blackmail. I'll make sure of that."

"You believe me, boy?" Garner said, an almost pleading whisper.

Layne took his hand, gripped it. "You *are* a fool, Ed. Why wouldn't I? Let's go down to the shack."

#### IV

TEN o'clock. In the lean-to office of the bunk house Layne and Ed Garner were studying the driller's log, Yelverton's daily record of the drilling he had done. The tally told them nothing. Yelverton had drilled the hole down to four thousand feet; he had set screen—a perforated joint of pipe through which the oil should flow into the pipe—in a strata of sand above cap-rock. Layne tossed the book away.

"Dan's too smart. He's covered up. But he *had* found oil and was ready to set screen when he began the bargain to sell out. My guess is he ran the hole down another pipe length, and sealed it off. Why, a week ago he had a gas line to the boilers. He must have been sure then that he'd have gas or oil to fire the boilers."

Garner said nothing. His face was gray, deep-lined. It was plain he too believed the driller guilty. A shadow fell across the table and Layne raised his head. Yelverton stood in the doorway, his shoulder pressed against the

frame. His eyes were bleared, shot with red veins, but humble. He spoke, a harsh apology.

"I—was likkered up this evenin'—talked too much. But I been waitin' a week fer yuh t' come and tell me if we wuz to junk th' hole. We got res'less . . . Mr. Layne, hope yuh won't hol' what I said agin me—er take it pers'nal."

"Not a bit, Dan," Layne answered. "Just the same, you're fired."

Yelverton jerked upright. He stared at Layne, his face a mirror of ugly, shifting thoughts. With a slow movement he swung to Ed Garner.

"*You* know what this means, I reckon," he said. Then turning on his heel, went out.

Layne rose instantly, but Garner gripped his sleeve. And at the door Layne halted. Yelverton had gone on to a round table in the center of the bunk house where a noisy card game was in progress.

"Gimme a stack o' blues an' make room, rough-necks," Yelverton called harshly. "It's m' last night with yuh. T'morrow I'm stagin' a big blow-out—an' I'm celebratin' in advance."

A man whose face Layne couldn't see shoved chips across the table. He spoke and Layne recognized the voice of Bean-eye Jacobs.

"Sit in, brother," he greeted Yelverton. "I'll deal yuh a hand yuh can bet up to the roof . . . I want to ask yuh somethin', too. 'Bout that wile-cat hole. Whyn't yuh shoot her—give her a dose of soup? I seen many a gusher brought in round the Oklahomy fields that way."

Yelverton laughed. "Y' poor simp, they don't shoot wells no more, 'less they wanta risk spewin' the whole pipe string up through the crown block of the derrick." His voice changed, be-

came ugly. "What's it to yuh, anyway, bo? Who ast yuh to horn in? Your name ain't on no payroll around here."

"Wrong, brother," remarked Bean-eye, placidly. "I'm night driller, drawin' wages from tomorrow on. An' if they's any soup er powder on the job I'm bound to give advice to use it in th' hole. Th' brass collar—that young Layne—he'll listen t' me . . . Mebbe quicker'n he would to you."

LAYNE could see Yelverton's face change as he listened; at first reddening with furious anger, then as a new thought came, eagerly malignant. But when he spoke, the driller's voice was silky smooth.

"Why, funny face, y' know that ain't so bad a idee after all. Shoot th' hole—sure. Might bring her in. I'm not with th' outfit no more or I'd mebbe try it. But there's a new case of powder, sixty per cent stuff, in th' tool house. Caps, too, a full box. Dynamite crew left 'em here; they never been opened. Drop some powder down that pipe. Th' well's no good anyhow, y' couldn't do no harm. An' if you *was* to bring her in! Bo, they'd give yuh a new eye. But y' oughta use plenty powder, give her a heavy shot."

"Heavy as yer guts, ole timer," responded Bean-eye. "I might do as y' say . . . Now, sit down while I muss these cards, an' then fall to an' bet 'em high."

A roughneck stood up to give Yelverton his chair. The driller slid down into it. He smiled, too, evilly. Layne knew why. Yelverton had planted something in the boomer's mind. "Shoot the hole and bring it in." Dangerous. Though it might start the oil flow, ten to one the well would be ruined instead. But Bean-eye might

try it "on his own," hoping for the off-chance of success. He owed responsibility to no one; he was a "ten day man." A ruined hole meant nothing to him. In fact, for all Layne knew, Converse Oil might have sent him out to wreck the well in case Dan Yelverton's trick failed.

His thoughts were interrupted by a sudden splintering crash. Yelverton had kicked back his chair. Springing to his feet, he glared at the men about him, at the cards falling by his hand. There was terror in his face—wild, insane fear. He made sounds deep in his throat like the whimpering of a beast. With a desperate spring he whirled, darted to the door. He wrenched it open and was gone.

THE crew stared. Then a roughneck spoke, his voice ironic: "I was expectin' this. Too much rot-gut. Dan's been hittin' it some fur'ous—an' long. He's got snakes."

Another said: "Las' night he holered like hell in his sleep, y' 'member? I had t' sock him twice 'fore he flopped outa it."

"Come on, brothers," complained Bean-eye. "If the big lad's seen' pink el'phunts an' green taggars *we* can't help none. It'll wear off. But *I* got half a sawbuck beggin' fer fast action. Le's go."

Garner had risen. He stepped to the door at Layne's side.

"Oughta go look for him. He *has* been drinking—hard, an' for long. He wants revenge, an' no one's at the rig . . . Might do harm."

Layne gave an incredulous laugh. "Harm! He might fall in the bayou or shoot himself. The best thing that could happen."

But Garner shook his head. He started for the door.

"Wait," argued Layne. "Don't follow him. It only means more trouble. Listen, Ed, I'll go. His brain's on fire with booze. But I've got something here"—he patted a bulge under the left breast of his coat—"that'll make him behave. Leave him to me."

Garner had lost his grip. His face was pathetic, dead. He allowed himself to be persuaded. Layne left him at the bunk house door and strode out into the night.

Clouds overcast the sky; there was not even starlight. He moved through the darkness, pausing often, listening for a sound that would betray the trail of Yelverton. For an hour Layne's search continued and another hour. Then he retraced his steps.

He found the crew asleep in the double-decker beds along the wall. But Garner had waited, head pillowed on his arms, at the round table. He started up as the door creaked. Layne said:

"Couldn't find him. Sleeping it off in the woods. Not at the rig. We should have a watchman there. Still, it means a long jail sentence to do damage to a rig. Dan wouldn't chance that, with his trap for you all ready to be sprung."

Garner's lips twitched. Layne put a hand on his shoulder again.

"He can't make it stick. Buck up, Ed . . . Tomorrow I'll have it all thought out. And now turn in; you've got to sleep."

## V

**S**EVEN-THIRTY. Fog rising from the bayou in the night had rolled down through the swale, shrouding the derrick tower and platform. Now with daybreak it was slowly drawing off, leaving the planking wet.

The rig crew had turned out on time and stood shivering on the platform.

But Dan Yelverton had not appeared. A roughneck sent to the boiler house to fire up found him asleep before the ash door. He reported, too, that the boilers were both drained and an hour would be required to fill them from the gasoline pump on the bayou bank below. Layne sent him back to start the pump.

"Stay by it," he ordered. "Keep the water going through. Let Yelverton alone, just where he is. He's not wanted around this rig."

"A pious notion, brother," Bean-eye Jacobs said.

Layne gave him a hard glance.

"I'm wondering about you; whether *you're* needed either. I heard you giving Dan your ideas about shooting this well. Last night—you remember. Dynamite—that's something else I never want to see around here. 'Try it on your own,' eh?"

"Shucks, brother, I was just givin' that fat-neck a stroke or two of air," Bean-eye remonstrated. "I wouldn't fool with no powder."

Layne nodded.

"I'll keep my word. But after last night I like you better when you're not so close. I'm going to send you to the tool shed. You can check the tool joints and supplies."

"I ain't gonna pull the pipe?" Bean-eye's shrill voice was brimful of disappointment. He took a rearward step, slipped, bumped against a projection of the Christmas tree. He caught at the main valve wheel, clung desperately. But the wheel turned, and he slid slowly to the planks. Layne frowned.

"Never do to have you on the rig floor today," he said. "I mean to sidetrack this hole, go down beside it at three thousand feet. Risky—you'd be crippled before night."

But the one-eyed man did not seem to hear. He was running his skinny fingers over the big main valve.

"My mitts is seein' things," he muttered. He held up his hand, peered at it, blinking in perplexity. Layne saw a smear of red lead on the palm.

"Cripes, am I dreamin'?" asked Bean-eye. "This here red lead was *dry* yestiddy." He inspected the big valve again. "An' this valve was *open*, too," he added. Bean-eye got up, stared at the valve. Then, shaking his head, stumbled to the platform ladder and climbed down.

**G**ARNER with two of the crew had dragged a seven foot chain tong to the vertical well pipe in the center of the floor on which the big valve was screwed. The superintendent wrapped the tongs around the pipe for a "back-up." Another gang of three caught a second wrench on the big valve itself, with the bite of the jaws reversed. The crew divided to bend backs and strain on the tong handles, trying to break the joint so that the valve could be screwed off.

"Put beef into it," Garner called impatiently.

Layne nodded grimly. The superintendent seemed to have gained courage with the new day. But for himself, Layne had only lost assurance. He could see no way out. That knife, and the evidence of Yelverton! After twenty years, still they were damning.

The crew, spurred by Garner, wrestled with the pipe, rocking back and forth on the heavy tongs. But the red lead held the joint and the valve refused to turn. The men brought sledges, pounded the valve, put on a third tong above the second. All without avail. At last Layne called a halt.

"We'll have to wait till steam's up,"

he said, "and break her with power on the rotary. Meanwhile—"

His sentence never ended. A sharp cry came echoing across the flat. Layne swung to see Bean-eye Jacobs' scarecrow figure running toward the derrick. He plunged ahead, a blind driving sprint—stumbled, went down. He rose and charged on. To Arch Layne came a premonition of disaster.

He swung down from the platform, ran out to meet Jacobs.

"What's wrong? Talk, man, talk!"

Bean-eye gasped in great lungfuls of air. Then, still running, he spat out words like bullets.

"Powder case—it was full, Yelverton said . . . *That* was last night . . . They's three—sticks gone this A.M. An' that *new* red lead on the valve—an' the valve closed! Brother—you was shot with luck—to have me here!"

**B**Y now the two had reached the platform ladder. Bean-eye climbed up, crossed the floor to the big valve, crowding the men away. He stared at the valve.

"A spanner, brothers!" he begged, fumbling at the clean-out plate in the valve bonnet. Garner handed him an end-wrench. Bean-eye set to work feverishly, feeling for the plate-screws where his cloudy vision failed. One by one the screws dropped to the planks. He twisted out the last, and the plate fell with a clang. Into the clean-out hole Jacobs thrust his arm. The crew, ringed about him, watched spellbound. Until, with a queer grimace, Bean-eye cried:

"I found 'em, brothers! Dynamite! I kin feel the butt of one stick, a crimped cap in the end—but there is two more. His reach was longer'n mine—they're far inside!"

"What—" began Layne and stopped.



The man, still reaching in the valve, shook his head.

"I can't reach them last two sticks. Brothers, that bull-necked driller done a dev'lish trick. Wired three powder sticks with caps on 'em into the valve stem. So's when you opened the valve the discs would roll back on the caps, and shoot the sticks. Dynamite, sixty per cent. A blow-out, that *would* 'a' been, with purgatory at th' other end th' ride."

"Yelverton!" exclaimed Layne. Still, he could not believe Bean-eye. What motive had Dan Yelverton to kill a dozen men—and ruin his own scheme of blackmailing Garner? Bean-eye continued working his arm inside the valve, talking.

"He slopped the gravy for himself when he told me yestiddy about the case of dynamite, that it was *full*. Fer I found three sticks gone just now. An' the lead on the valve plate this mornin'; *frersh*—not yet set. An' I had reasons fer suspectin' Dan might want to rub me out. He figured I be up here workin' on the floor today. I knew he'd fix some hellish trap. Yer mind sees many a thing when yer eyes can't do it fer yuh, brothers."

He reached his arm in farther, strained.

"I can't reach 'em . . . Ah-h—"

He sprang back with a cry.

"They got away—the dynamite's fell into th' casin'—Run—"

## VI

**A**MUFFLED deep explosion drowned his voice. The casing head clanged—a shudder like an earthquake shook the derrick floor. A screaming whistle, a vibrating chatter in the big valve at his side. With a sudden rush a slug of mud vomited from the valve-mouth. It ceased, suc-

ceeded by the howl of gas escaping under pressure. The sound grew heavier, changing to a mad bellow that ripped the eardrums of the startled crew.

This ended too. There was an instant of suspense. Then, with gurgling mutter, a black ropy fluid, fountained from the valve. It shot in a spraying stream a hundred feet above the derrick crown, spattering down on the clay soil of the gulch.

And with the sight Ed Garner shouted:

"She's in! A gusher! The shot caved the pipe. Don't shut the valve, boys—let her gas!"

The rig floor was instantly a welter of black oil in which the crew ran back and forth like wild men. They slipped, falling, shouting to each other above the blastlike thunder of the flow. Layne, after a moment, moved back to the pump rail. The well was in. Bean-eye had done it. Garner would be cleared now with the chief.

Only the thought of Yelverton was a dark spreading cloud. But Yelverton was a potential murderer himself. Layne remembered Bean-eye had said Yelverton meant to rub *him* out, but Yelverton had never seen Jacobs before. Layne pondered this. No, it was he, Arch Layne, on whom the driller hoped to take revenge . . . Either way, if he *had* placed that powder in the valve, he was finished as a witness against Garner. Layne scowled. He'd call the driller to account—and how!

Striding to the ladder he dropped down, sprinted up the rise behind which lay the boiler house. He reached the summit, halted, muscles rigid.

In the doorway of the boiler house stood Yelverton. He held a rifle at his hip. And he was smiling, a smile that carried hell in its reflection. The leer

of a trapped beast who means to strike one lethal blow and die.

LAYNE whipped his automatic from the shoulder holster and advanced a step. Yelverton called something, but the scalding roar of oil from the well drowned his voice. He raised his rifle. Layne slid back the safety of his gun. Then Yelverton cried out—shifted his rifle to the left. The bead no longer lined on Layne.

He turned. Bean-eye Jacobs had just topped the hill, and it was Jacobs Yelverton was covering. But Bean-eye seemed unconscious of his danger. He stumbled in a blind, unsteady run along the ridge. Until, a half-score yards from Layne, he stopped, called stridently. Layne caught fragmentary phrases:

"Wait—I want Dan Yelverton—He dasn't fire — blow himself up — well's makin' gas—it's comin' through the line into the boiler hou—"

Suddenly the man's body jolted—as though a fist had struck his breast. Layne whirled to see a gray smoke ball lift from Yelverton's poised rifle muzzle. A split second, then the man—the boiler house—were swallowed in a searing vivid flame. A fierce concussion hurled Layne from his feet. He staggered up. The roof, in the clutch of that hurricane-like blast, whirled high above the woods, shearing tops from live oaks as a scythe blade cuts.

Layne, transfixed by the quick disaster, stared at the ruined building, watched the iron siding twist and curl. Yelverton he did not see, but there was a blue-hot flame that ran great forked tongues through the mass.

And then Layne understood. Gas from the well had filled the boiler house, ignited by the driller's rifle when

he fired. Gas under tremendous pressure, racing through the pipe-line from the well, its noise covered by the oil's metallic scream. Gas—odorless, invisible both to eye and ear. Yelverton had not known it, but the very air within the boiler house was death. Jacobs *had* known, had told Layne the driller's rifle fire would touch it off. Layne turned, looked for the one-eyed man.

Jacobs lay on the down slope of the hill. Layne ran to him, lifted his head. He heard the harsh breath rattle in his throat. Layne knew then that Bean-eye would not live. But the man smiled. He moved his head, a sign he wished to speak. Layne bent close. The words came faintly, each a fearful effort.

"Brother—the blow-out's come. Dan didn't know me—not until—last night. The flutter shuffle, he remembered that. Yes, a man changes—in twenty years. An' my eye looks queer. I carried a grudge, brother—for too long—account of that bean-eye. But—it's all—washed up—"

Bean-eye coughed and a trickle of bright crimson flowed from his lip corner. He fumbled for his breast, clawed at his faded coat, thrust his hand inside. Aimlessly, Layne thought. But when the hand came way there was something clutched within it. The task seemed to have quenched the last spark; the man's breath checked, and the lid closed slowly on that ghastly eye. Suddenly Jacobs spoke, so softly Layne could scarcely hear:

"The blow-out's come—for me, too, brother. Give this to Ed—tell him—all's square—"

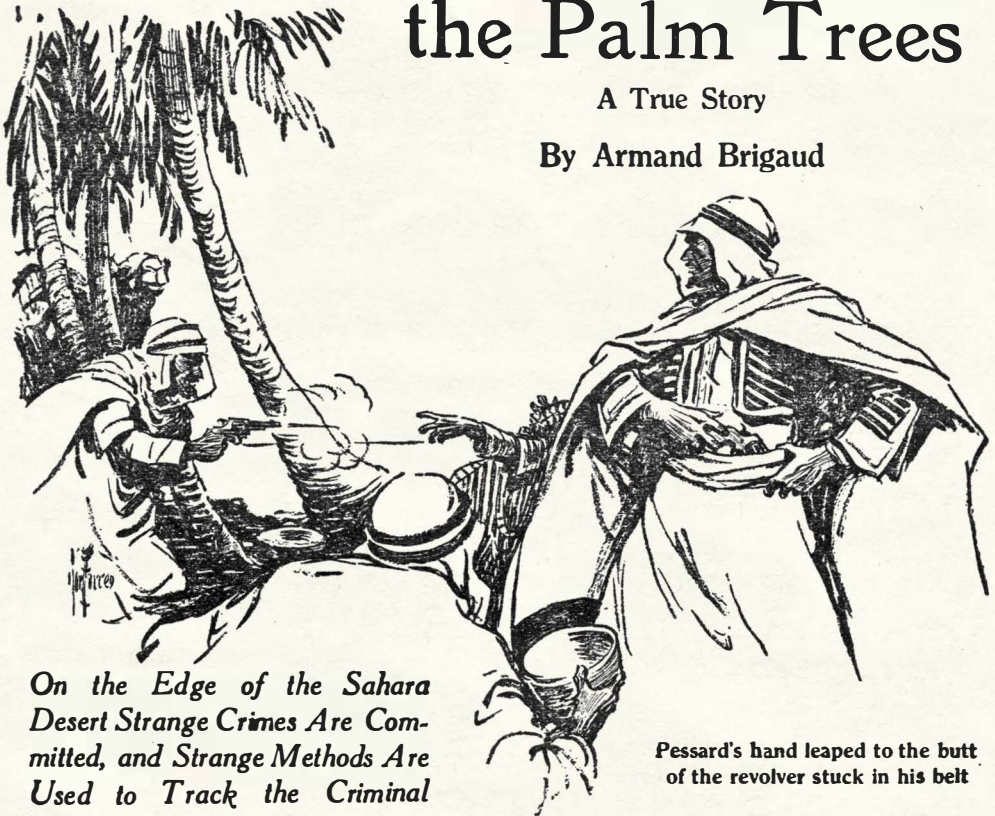
His head sank back, the clenched hand opened. From it fell a knife, an old bone-handled knife. On the side was cut in script:

"Ed Garner, Spindletop, '02."

# Murder Under the Palm Trees

A True Story

By Armand Brigaud



*On the Edge of the Sahara Desert Strange Crimes Are Committed, and Strange Methods Are Used to Track the Criminal*

Pessard's hand leaped to the butt of the revolver stuck in his belt

THE Arabian town of Touggourt marks the end of the Algerian railroad. Farther stretches the oven-hot immensity of the Sahara desert, home of scores of nomad tribes. But the swift action of Touggourt's strong garrison and the fact that the neighboring sandy wastes are closely patrolled by Meharistes, or Camel Corps, renders Touggourt and the adjacent oasis perfectly safe at all hours of day and night.

Therefore, one morning Lieutenant Combier, commander of the local Gendarmes, heard with amazement the excited blabbering of a native, who came breathlessly from the oasis to report

that the body of a murdered white man lay in a lonely clearing outside of town.

Combier at once notified the officers in charge of the various units composing the garrison, who hastened to join him.

Half an hour later the party arrived on the scene of the crime. By common agreement, Combier alone first approached the body to examine it and to look for foot-marks before the ground was disturbed by his companions. He discovered almost immediately a trail of slippared feet and bare feet mixed with imprints of shoes, and stains of blood. The trail led from the tortured corpse to a nearby thicket, where he

found another victim imbedded in the dense growths. He recognized the second body as that of a local magistrate, a Monsieur Barras, president of one of the Chekaias, or tribunals for natives, of the district of Touggourt.

Still following the trail of foot-prints and splashes of blood, Combiere reached at length the bend of a path close to a hollow of the ground where five natives had lurked in ambush, as proved clearly by the neat and deep tracks of three pairs of bare feet and two of sandaled ones. The imprints left by the leather soles of the shoes of Barras and his ill-fated companion showed that the two Frenchmen coming from Touggourt had leisurely strolled up to the hiding place of the murderers, unaware of the danger which lay in wait for them. Suddenly attacked by the five scoundrels they had fought desperately while they were being dragged to the bushes.

Having checked out what we shall call the general setting of the crime, Combiere proceeded to reconstruct its appalling details from the story told by the tracks in the soft soil of the oasis.

It was evident that Barras and his companion had kept on struggling all the way to the clearing, where, badly wounded and exhausted, the magistrate had been forced by his captors to sit and watch the horrible death of the other white man. As soon as the unfortunate fellow had been killed, Barras must have been pulled into the thicket where his body was found, and slain.

Both bodies were stripped naked. In the breast of Barras was imbedded a long straight poniard with a cross-shaped hilt—a typical *telaka*, one of the weapons used by the Touareg, a marauding race which roams the very innermost of the Saharan wilderness.

With infinite care, cast-takers made plaster models of the various foot-prints, photographers took pictures, and surgeons inspected the bodies, marking down all the peculiarities of the murders.

The other officers then inspected the scene of the crime, with Combiere pointing out to them all its outstanding features. They agreed with him as to the reconstruction of the last struggles of Barras and his companion but when he advanced the theory that the culprits were Touareg, Captain Sigourney of the Camel Corps shook his head in denial.

He said, turning to the doctors, "The points where the daggers of the murderers tore into the limbs of Barras and the other can't be connected by straight lines with the issue-holes produced by the blade tips emerging from the opposite side. That suggests the sloping stab of curved poniards like the Arabian ones, rather than the straight thrust of Touareg *telakas*."

"I agree with you," one of the surgeons approved. "Both the Justice and the other poor devil were killed by blows of *matraques*, or native clubs, and stabs of curved knives."

"Then it is obvious that the Touareg poniard was just driven into the breast of Barras after he had been killed, to mislead us," Combiere acknowledged.

THE greatest clue to the identification of the suspects were the casts of the foot-prints of the murderers. The imprints made by one of the men who wore slippers were unusually deep; that meant that one of the Arabs was a heavy man, and a very tall one as well, for the intense heat and the scarce food and drink makes all Arabians lank, so that their weight

is almost entirely accounted for by their height. One of the sets of bare-foot prints was that of a lame man whose left foot dug deeper than the right.

Therefore the Gendarmes were instructed to hunt for a gang of five Arabs, one of whom was exceptionally tall, and another lame.

Not long after, they found the owner of a caravanserai, or native hostelry, who had given food, shelter and hay for their camels to a group of tribesmen which included two men who fitted the above description.

"They were nomads who said they came from the East," the innkeeper stammered, anxious to avoid any suspicion of implication in the murders. "But judging from their way of speaking Arabic, they belonged to the Bedquins of central Sahara."

This explained why the murderers happened to have a Touareg weapon with them, because many Touareg tribes have their headquarters in the central Saharan wilderness too. But as a clue it was an exasperatingly wide one, because it opened to investigation a desert territory about two hundred square miles in extent.

To render the riddle harder to solve, not only had the culprits left the caravanserai without disclosing their destination, but the identity of the other dead man found with Barras was something of a mystery.

A thorough check-up showed that none of the white functionaries, soldiers and civilians of Touggourt was missing. The man was a stranger and must furthermore have arrived in town after sunset, otherwise his papers would have been presented for the customary examination by the local command of the zone.

All together the case seemed so baffling

that one of the best officers of the Algerian Intelligence Service, Captain Arnaud, was placed at the head of the inquiry.

He soon came to the conclusion that the unknown victim could not be identified by his fingerprints.

Judge Barras would not have associated with him if he had had a criminal past, and as he was obviously over thirty he belonged to the military-age group when neither government employees nor recruits were obliged to have their finger-prints taken as future means of identification. His face had been slashed beyond description, and his body had been almost deformed by the same horrible method. The survey of his remains disclosed, however, his approximate height, weight, age, and color of hair and beard. He had a scar on a knee and a large black mole between his shoulders.

With these few scattered clues at his disposal, Captain Arnaud sought as an opening the motive of the murders.

Keeping in mind the horrible desecration of the bodies, he finally came to the conclusion that it was a case of vengeance, aimed at the unidentified rather than at Barras, who had no known enemies.

"The Justice did no more than pay the penalty for walking through a lonely place with a man marked for death," he said to Lieutenant Combier, who was in charge of the Touggourt end of the investigation.

"Then we must try to find out who that man was," Combier replied wearily. "But where shall we look?"

"In our military posts and administrative centers in desert territory," Arnaud replied. "I feel reasonably sure that he was connected in some capacity with one of them, and that he incurred there the enmity which resulted in his

death. Let us send out a circular with a full description of the case and see what comes out of it."

## II

A FEW days later a reply from the forlorn desert center of Ain-Salah fully justified Arnaud's theory. The dead man was definitely identified as a certain Bedhera, an Algerian interpreter, of Spanish descent, and a former adjutant of the Camel Corps. The finger-prints on the dagger matched with those of a Mehmed Yusouf, a Bedouin who had recently finished a three years' jail term for theft with his fellow culprits, a lame half-breed called Yahouia, and a certain Moktar el Idriss.

The motive of the murder was tentatively established too. Bedhera had acted as interpreter at the trial which culminated in their sentence, and also had identified Mehmed Yusouf as one of his former troopers of the Camel Corps who had been dishonorably discharged for bad temper and habitual rebelliousness. Attributing their stiff punishment to Bedhera's disclosures, the three Bedouins had been loud in their threats of retaliation.

To tighten further the net of circumstantial evidence, the three ex-convicts had been seen in Salah on the eve of the departure on camel-back, of interpreter Bedhera and a party of non-coms who planned to spend their prolonged leave of absence in Algiers and were eager to get to the railroad center of Touggourt.

But to catch the guilty ones was by no means an easy matter. The immensity of the Saharan sands where they had sought refuge turned the search for them into a sort of search for the proverbial needle in the haystack.

For several months the murderers eluded the vast net of desert units on the look-out for them. Their racing *meharas* covered without effort more than sixty miles a day. Expert Bedouin stalkers, they managed to sneak into the oases when the soldiers were not there and got away in a hurry if troops were approaching. To go from one of those desert havens of palm trees and cool wells to another they cautiously rode in immense looping circles, avoiding the more frequently travelled short-distance routes.

But at length they apparently decided that they had eluded detection and pursuit. Misled by the belief that the past was the past and that they could now travel without worries, they grew tired of making long roundabout journeys to get to places.

One night Lieutenant Pessard, of the Camel Corps, bivouacked in the open desert. He had ridden all that day on his long-limbed racing camel and covered seventy-five miles. A similar distance to be negotiated during the next day would bring him to the nearest garrison-fort with the news that the rebellious sheik, Kader el Afid, had been convinced of the error of his ways and asked forgiveness for himself and his hard-bitten followers.

Pessard wore Bedouin attire and had only two men with him. His dress and lack of powerful escort had reassured the surly sheik and made him well disposed toward the lieutenant, who on his trip across the desert had felt safe from attack because unprovoked, wandering Bedouins seldom turn against fellow Bedouins.

When toward midnight the officer saw a party of four men mounted on camels approaching his camp from the west, he was not in the least worried. It seemed a peaceful enough group

riding leisurely along with guns slung across their shoulders. However, Pessard thought it wiser not to lie down and go to sleep until he learned more about the oncoming tribesmen.

A little later the four were within hailing distance. They greeted the disguised soldiers with a rumbling, "Bismillaten ar'essa," which means, "The blessing of Allah seven times on you," and is a recognized Saharan greeting of peace.

As it was the courteous thing to do, Pessard invited them to alight and partake of *kuscous* and minted tea, an invitation which they accepted. They were ill-nourished and ravenously hungry. They attacked the food spread out before them with such zest and abandon that for a time they failed to notice how intently their host was staring at them.

The lieutenant's attention had been attracted by the limp of one of his unexpected guests, who was undoubtedly a negroid. His suspicions were awakened and a searching scrutiny of the face of the apparent leader of the group disclosed thick eyebrows uniting over a rapacious nose, and squinting eyes which corresponded to the features of the much talked about and much wanted Mehmed Yusouf. However, in his eagerness to obtain further proof, he made a fatal mistake.

Instead of covering the men with his gun and declaring them under arrest he asked Yusouf how long it was since he had left the Camel Corps.

"Four years," the Arab blurted out, taken by surprise. Then a sudden doubt and a frantic fear seized him. He almost choked on a mouthful of *kuscous* he was just swallowing and upset the bowl he held on his knees.

Pessard's hand leaped to the butt of the revolver stuck in his belt, but be-

fore he could pull out his weapon a shot rang out.

One of the wanderers, who later proved to be a tribesman named Tahil, a relation of Yusouf, had been watching the officer closely. A former soldier himself, he recognized the Caucasian features under Pessard's skin, in spite of the fact that long years of exposure under the desert sun had tanned him to a saddle brown. He also noticed that Pessard's Bedouin costume was a travesty which ill-covered his military mannerism, particularly as he became excited. The gesture of the lieutenant towards his gun had confirmed his discovery and spurred him to sudden action.

His bullet brought down one of the two soldiers comprising Pessard's escort. The officer had barely time to fire back at Tahil, killing him, when the lame Yahouia threw the *kuscous* bowl at his head with such a force that it stunned him.

Mehmed Yusouf and Yahouia then fell on him, throwing him to the ground. While he fought fiercely to shake them off, he heard the sound of other shots and a cry from the one remaining soldier. A moment later the third of the original group of Bedhera's enemies, Moktar el Idriss, joined the two who were struggling to overpower Pessard, and with a blow of a rifle barrel on his forehead, knocked him into unconsciousness.

HE knew nothing more until he awakened with the morning sun shining in his eyes. He was stark naked and fettered hand and foot. Rolling first on one side and then on the other, he saw the bodies of Tahil and that of one of his soldiers, both stripped of their weapons.

Far away in the sky black specks

hovered. Pessard knew they were vultures, who would soon sight the bodies with their unbelievably far-sighted gaze. They would come to tear the corpses to pieces and himself too, unable as he was to fight them off.

The fact that the criminals had taken everything he had, leaving him to die of hunger and thirst or by the beaks of the buzzards instead of despatching him with their knives and guns, was perfectly clear to him because of his knowledge of Bedouin customs. No Bedouin will ever kill with his own hands a host shortly after enjoying his offering of food. The law of Allah, however, does not say that the death of the host, if he proves an enemy, may not be effected in other ways, which in Pessard's case were these paralyzing fetters in a land where every force of nature is pitted against the life of man.

For several minutes Pessard tossed, frenzied and helpless. The black specks on the sky were increasing in size, hovering nearer and nearer. He knew that in a half hour, at the most, the vultures would alight all around him, and he wished that he were dead.

Then a broken, halting voice came to him through the thin desert atmosphere. Shifting his body, then lying still and listening intently, he finally succeeded in locating whence the sound was coming, and replied with a shout. At length, the head and shoulders of the other of his two soldiers appeared above a nearby knoll, then his long, burnoused body slid painfully toward him.

Pessard realized that the man was badly wounded, and only by a tremendous effort had managed to come to the aid of his helpless officer. Fearing that the man would collapse at any given moment, Pessard could not take his eyes from him and the seconds

seemed like hours. However, crumpling face down on the ground every few yards on account of exhaustion and severe pain, dragging himself agonizingly on hands and elbows, the soldier crawled nearer and nearer. After an eternity he reached the side of Pessard just as the vultures came hurtling from the sky like great, feathery bullets.

Chasing the birds away with weak gestures of his arms, moaning all the time, the faithful trooper managed to work with his knife at the fetters around Pessard's wrists. So weak that all he could do was to saw feebly at the rope, he managed at length to sever it. The lieutenant succeeded in tearing his arms loose. His deliverer collapsed.

Pessard flung his arms about to start the circulation of the blood and chase away the vultures as well; then he took the knife the trooper had dropped and cut the rope from around his ankles.

He turned next to the blood-stained trooper, saw that he was dying.

"I was wounded at the beginning of the fray," the soldier wheezed. "Knowing that I was unable to fight because the bullet had gone through my belly, I climbed on a camel, attempted to get away, to enlist help from the camp of Sheik Kader. I succeeded in escaping unseen, but some hundred yards further I lost consciousness, and dropped from the saddle.

"I awakened only a couple of hours ago. The camel was gone. I thought that before I died it was my duty to crawl back here, to see what had become of you, Sidi. I'm glad I came in time. May Allah lead you to safety!"

Pessard uncovered the man's wound, hoping that he could somehow cleanse it and staunch the blood. A single glance at the torn body of the gallant Arabian trooper convinced him that he



was past help, that only his tremendous stamina had enabled him to survive so long. The effort of dragging himself back to his superior had also sapped the last of his vitality; not long after he died in Pessard's arms.

There was only one thing for the lieutenant to do. He retrieved the clothing and weapons of the man and buried him with the other soldier under the soft sand, facing East as every Arab likes to lie for the supreme sleep.

Without a camel, food or water, he had little chance to reach the nearest oasis, which was more than seventy miles away. Thinking that one direction of march was as good as another in his present predicament, he resolutely struck out along the tracks left by the marauders, who had now two of the three camels of Pessard's party, besides their four original ones.

Luck was with him. Early in the afternoon a group of camel riders appeared on the extreme edge of the horizon. From the top of the dune where he stood Pessard waved his burnouse frantically at them.

There is an unwritten Bedouin law that stranded wayfarers on the Sahara may either be killed and robbed of every bit of clothes on their backs or rescued, but they must never be left to die of hunger and thirst. The newcomers, who were men of Sheik Kader's tribe, spurred their long-limbed mounts toward Pessard.

A few minutes later the lieutenant confronted their leader, a gray-bearded old nomad, who had fortunately heard of the compact between the officer and his Sheik. Learning that the men who had attacked Kader's honored guest and killed the troopers of his escort were Bedouins of a strange tribe, he drew up his big, scrawny frame in righteous rage.

"How dare they to slay and steal in our own territory!" he exclaimed. "Inshallah, Sidi! Let us ride after the accursed ones!"

Pessard agreed eagerly. He drank his fill from a skin of sun-warmed water, which seemed like precious nectar to his parched throat, then he climbed on a spare camel and placed himself at the head of the party.

THE fugitives had no idea of the lucky encounter of the lieutenant. Fearing no pursuit they rode leisurely. Following the hoof-prints left by their mounts, Pessard and his rescuers came in sight of them early the next morning.

The officer intended to overtake them and order their surrender at the point of the gun; but his savage allies, stirred by the sight of their quarry, let out a shrill cry of "Allah Akbar," and charged, firing from the saddle.

Mehmed Yusouf and his companions reacted to that challenge in Bedouin style; outnumbered and unable to execute a successful counter-attack, they spurred their camels and tried to out-distance their pursuers. At the same time they swung their rifles under their left arm-pits, muzzle above the rump of their mounts, and began firing as fast as they were able.

Their noisy and inaccurate volleys failed to inflict any damage on the hard-bitten tribesmen who rode after them. The distance which separated the two parties quickly lessened, because the camels of the runaways were no match for the white thoroughbred *mcharas* raised by the tribe of Sheik Kader.

The lame Yahouia was the first to be overtaken. The tribesman who caught up with him shot him through the head before Pessard could interfere.

From a distance of a few score yards Mehmed Yusouf and Moktar el Idriss saw the death of their companion. As soon as a high dune offered them a favorable position they rode quickly to its top, dismounted, threw themselves on the ground and began firing.

A typical desert sniping fight followed, which dragged on into the afternoon. At length only a single rifle answered to the fire of Pessard and his companions, giving evidence that one of the two defenders had been killed, or wounded so badly that he could no longer press a trigger.

But Pessard considered that it was up to him to bring at least one of the culprits to a regular trial. Regardless of the fact that in so doing he made himself an excellent target, he tied a piece of white cloth on the muzzle of his rifle and waved it as a signal of truce.

The reports coming from the summit of the dune ceased instantly. Pessard found it harder to convince his wild allies to cease firing, too, yet at length he succeeded. In the deep Saharan silence which now followed the uproar of the combat his voice rang clear.

"I give you a choice. Either to surrender to me, an army officer, or I leave you to the vengeance of the desert warriors who are with me."

From the top of the dune the voice of Yusouf answered:

"Moktar is dead, too. Kismet (fate) was against us. I am your prisoner, Sidi.

One month later Mehmed Yusouf was brought to trial in Touggourt. His confession confirmed the theory of the officers of the Intelligence Service. Savage hatred against Bedhera had moved Yusouf, Moktar and Yahouia to plan his murder. They found ready allies in Tahil, the cousin of Yusouf, and in a gigantic cut-throat called Bou Abbas, who had joined them for the sake of booty. But the opportunity had come only in the oasis of Touggourt, where Bedhera promenaded with his old friend Justice Barras, unaware of the ambush which lay in wait for him. And Barras, a total stranger to the plotters, was killed, too, to still his tongue.

The next day, in open desert, a fierce argument had arisen at the division of the spoils.

A fight ensued, when Bou Abbas was stabbed to death and buried at the foot of a dune.

That story and Lieutenant Pessard's relation rendered a capital sentence mandatory. The next day Mehmed Yusouf was hung in that very oasis which saw the death struggles of his victims.



The murder of the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary shocked the world and baffled police. Here is the story of one of the world's most sensational crimes. Read "The Mystery at Mayerling," by Maxwell Hawkins, next week in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

# DO YOU READ THE ARGOSY?

---



Howling, the mob closed in on Ames

## Titans of the North

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

*That bomb Ross Ames tried to intercept on a far Northern island was to splatter molten seeds of hatred and start a fierce lumber war*

### CHAPTER I.

#### TREACHERY.

THAT was a night to make any sensible man want to hug the stove in the lumberjacks' bunk house; a night of gale and sleet and driving rain, such as only that far northern island of Temouskami could produce.

"Just my confounded luck to be on shift at the loading-towers to-night!" thought Ross Ames as, head bent and

fists jammed into the pockets of his heavy oilskins, he plodded down the long pier. Suddenly he stopped in mid-stride as a figure darted stealthily forward, placed a bundle near the tower, and disappeared. With a leap he reached the bundle, picked it up. It was ticking—it clicked as Ames knew a bomb would click when it is about to explode. What would he do?

Read this gripping woods story in next week's (July 23) ARGOSY, on sale July 19.

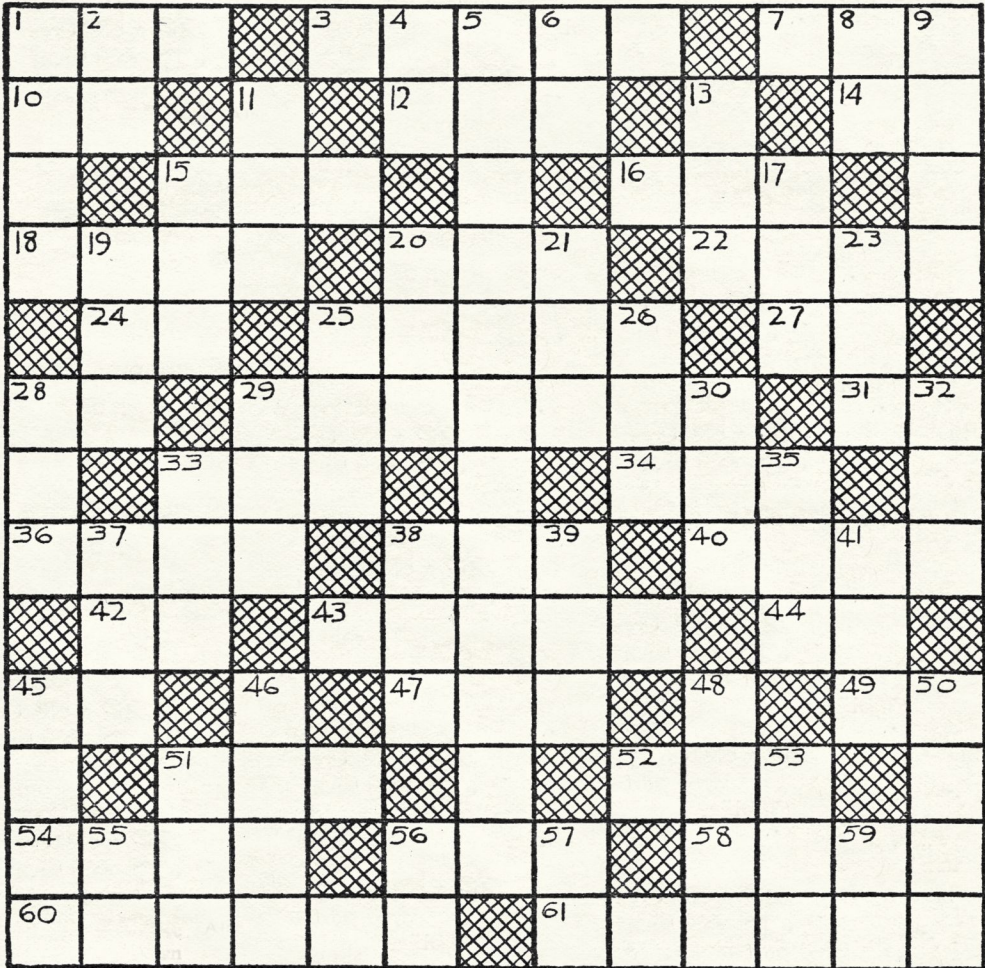
**ARGOSY—THE GREAT ADVENTURE WEEKLY—10c**

# Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

## PATROLMAN EGAN WAS ON THE JOB

By Richard Hoadley Tingley

PUZZLE NUMBER 72



**A-ACROSS**

**D-DOWN**

- D 26      The ticket office in front of the theater at ..... Moines, Iowa, was of the regulation type, about as ..... as a box. Seated .....
- A 7 A 42    this diminutive enclosure, ..... afternoon, was the cashier, a comely, ..... young dame, with a stack ..... bills before her,
- D 48
- A 10

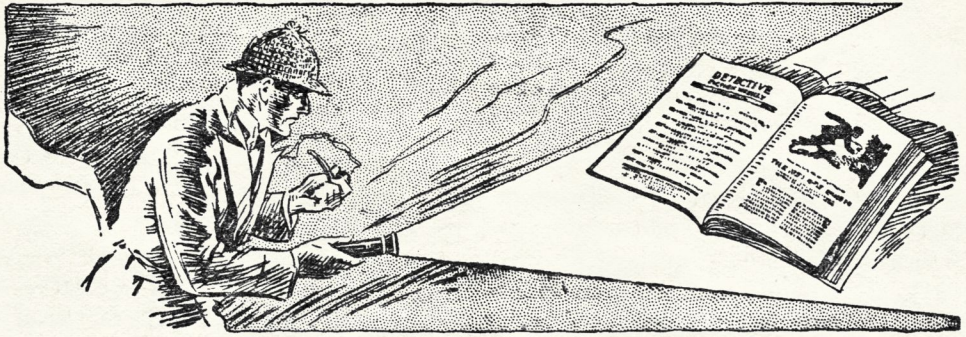
- D 33      ..... in hand, busily engaged in balancing her accounts. A chilling
- D 59(abbr.) wind was blowing from the ....., and she had closed the window.
- A 22      The time was ..... minutes before six. She was ..... to be relieved from duty by the night cashier, and anticipated nothing to
- A 54

A 16 . . . . . the pleasure of the evening,  
 A 40 for she had a . . . . . with her  
 D 45 . . . . . boy-friend. Though often  
 A 29 A 12 . . . . . to commit the . . . . . of  
 D 51 abstracting a few dollars . . . . .  
 her own private use, she had  
 A 56 learned, long . . . . ., that it did  
 A 43 not pay, and she . . . . . more for  
 her reputation than for money. It  
 D 19 was her . . . . . to be scrupulously  
 exact in her accounts, and in this  
 A 38 A 25 . . . . ., as she had . . . . ., had  
 won the confidence of the manage-  
 D 38 ment. It . . . . . known that she  
 and the night cashier were wont to  
 D 37 . . . . . with each other for ex-  
 cellence in their work. For the  
 opinion of others she cared not a  
 A 1 . . . . . To herself she would say,  
 A 24(cont.) " . . . . . be a fool to be anything  
 D 6 D 46 but . . . . . honest clerk. . . . .  
 A 28 is a good job, and I . . . . . going  
 D 39 to keep it for awhile . . . . . A  
 A 58(cont.) good job . . . . . as easily picked  
 A 45 up nowadays as it used to . . . . .,  
 D 28 now that the times . . . . . so  
 D 55 hard, and, . . . . .! how badly I  
 D 2 would feel . . . . . I lost this one. I  
 A 51 certainly would be in a bad . . . . .,  
 D 11 with not a . . . . . cent coming in."  
 But a thrill was in store for  
 D 25 . . . . .  
 D 20 "Ready, Ed?" whispered . . . . .  
 to his pal, from where they had  
 D 8 been watching. "Now . . . . . our  
 D 57 A 20 chance . . . . . never to . . . . .  
 that pile of bills. We'll run little  
 D 23 D 13 risk now that . . . . . a . . . . .  
 is in sight."  
 And straight to that box they  
 went with the stern command:  
 A 49 A 3 "Stick . . . . . up, . . . . ., and  
 make no noise!" Looking up from  
 her work, the girl found herself  
 confronted by a pistol aimed  
 D 56 straight . . . . . her head.  
 A 34 D 53 "Yes, . . . . ., since you . . . . .  
 me," meekly answered the dame,  
 not at all disconcerted by the  
 A 60 . . . . ., as she raised her hands.  
 She was prepared for this kind of

A 61 a . . . . ., and at the same instant  
 D 41 down went her feet, the . . . . . of  
 one shoe touching the burglar  
 alarm. She confidently expected  
 the shrill note of the siren to re-  
 sound through the air, but the  
 siren . . . . . not wail! All she could  
 . . . . . was to . . . . . still and  
 D 30 wait till she was . . . . . of the un-  
 A 27 A 47 welcome intruders.  
 D 17  
 A 44 It was . . . . . great stunt for  
 the thugs to burst open the door,  
 and for Ed to reach in with his  
 D 50 . . . . . and grab the cash and  
 away. The last the girl saw of the  
 D 5 pair they were . . . . . around the  
 D 9 D 4 corner and were . . . . . just . . . . .  
 the night cashier arrived at six,  
 as . . . . . schedule. Less than  
 . . . . . minutes had been occupied  
 in the . . . . .  
 A 33 "Now we'll go to our . . . . .  
 D 29 speakeasy—the one where the  
 A 18 . . . . . is off—and see what this  
 D 21 haul amounts to," breathlessly ex-  
 D 15 claimed Ed as they . . . . . "My  
 D 35 guess is three or . . . . . hundred  
 D 1 dollars at least."  
 A 36 But . . . . . as they ran they  
 bumped into Patrolman Egan.  
 A 52 A 14 " . . . . ., boys! Why . . . . .  
 A 31 much haste? Guess I'll have . . . . .  
 A 15 arrest you on suspicion and . . . . .  
 you tell the lieutenant all about  
 it."

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

P	R	O	M	P	T		A	N	S	W	E	R
R	E	N	O		O	W	N		H	O	M	E
O		E	R	A		O		S	O	N		A
P	O		E	G	O		P	A	T		A	S
R	U	N		E	A	S	E	D		H	I	S
I	T		T		F	U	R		R		M	E
E		C	A	N		R		J	O		J	O
T	R	A	P		A	P	T		B	E	S	T
O	U	R		E	R	R	E	D		T	H	E
R	I		A		T	I	N		V		I	D
		N	O	N	E		S		M	I	E	N
H	E	L	D		N	E	W		A	N	D	Y
A	D	D		D	O		E	H		D	Y	E



## FLASHES FROM READERS

*Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip  
and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind*

**D**ETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is having no trouble with its platform because it is sticking to its policy of one hundred and forty-four pages of the best detective stories published, and selling for one dime.

Since its beginning, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY has never changed that price.

Our competitors were selling at a higher price, and publishing no more and sometimes fewer pages. Now some of them have come down to our price. But they have not been able to do it without sacrifice. There is not one single ten-cent or fifteen-cent detective magazine today printing as many pages as DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

And we are printing the BEST stories of the BEST writers in the field. We are able to do it because our greater circulation has enabled us to buy the BEST.

We are not going to have to trim sails; we are not going to have to bring out a cheaper product. Our price is the same. Our quality is the same. And that's our platform.

### HE SAVES THE SERIALS

DEAR SIR:

I have been a constant reader of DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY for the past five years, and I enjoy the magazine very much. I like the *Lester Leith* and the *Señor Lobo* stories the best. I also like the serials; they are all very good. I always wait till I have the complete serial together before I start the story.

Keep up the good work you have been doing and I wish you all the luck. Thanking you in advance for the Artist's Drawing, I am as ever,

Yours truly,

CARL RAPPELT,  
Tiffin, Ohio.

### A NEW HOUSE AND A NEW VIEW

DEAR SIR:

Having moved into a new house, I found an old number of your very interesting magazine lying on the floor, and having nothing else to do, I read it from cover to cover. So great was the delight I derived from reading same that I have decided to buy it every week. Owing to the great number of detective mags now existing on the market I failed to come in touch before with the good old DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

I am inclosing herewith five answers of the cryptograms, in order to join the June Solvers' Club.

Anxiously waiting for your next issue.

Very sincerely yours,

EDWIN SLYTHE,  
Highland Park, Mich.

### GETS ON HIS NERVES

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading your weekly for some time, and, as a whole, like it very much.

Here are some of the things that I like and dislike about the same: I never read any con-

tinued stories, but as others like them it's O. K. with me. I like your true stories.

My reason for writing this letter is to tell you what I think about the stories written by Sidney H. Small, featuring *Jimmy Wentworth*. I think it's time that he either catches *Kong Gai* or that his superior officer puts him back in the "sticks." If the author would write individual stories about Chinatown it would not be so bad, but to hear him always harping on the one character must certainly get on any reader's nerves.

I also wish to say something about his superior officer, *Captain Dunand*. It must be some police force when you have men of his type at the head of one of its chief departments. If you will look at your issue of May 21, at the top of page 61, you will find this officer swearing that he would descend so low as to actually frame a person and string him up.

We may have men of this type on some of the police forces throughout the country, but d— few of them are bold enough to actually brag about it.

Even though the story is fiction I am inclined to believe the writer is giving the readers an idea of conditions that exist in and around Frisco, and if this is his object then I must say that he does not speak very well of its police force.

I should like to hear what others think of this story.

Wishing you the best of luck, I am,

Yours truly,

L. E. McL.,  
Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

**SURPRISED AT SUCH STUFF**

DEAR SIR:

I am inclosing ten coupons for a drawing. Been reading *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* for a long time and was certainly surprised to find such stories as "Night in Murder Castle" and "Alias the Mongoose." I hope you've printed the last of such stuff. And just to prove it's no pleasure to slam your judgment, my compliments for "I Looted Broadway," "Change of Ten," and "Canned Justice." I enjoyed all these and wish you'd use more short stories. I, for one, can get along very nicely without the illustrated crimes.

On the whole, I think *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* about the best magazine of its type.

Truly yours,

M. H. BINDLEY,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

**THE BIGGEST 20c WORTH**

DEAR SIR:

I inclose coupons from 10 consecutive issues of *D. F. W.* Please send me the artist's drawing as offered.

I enjoyed "Men of Prey" very much.

Most of the true stories in recent issues have been very good also.

I like all of the *Mongoose* yarns; hope there will be more of them.

I have been reading *D. F. W.* and *ARGOSY* for about three months. The two of them make the biggest 20¢ worth of reading material on the stands, in my opinion.

With best wishes for your continued success, I am,

Sincerely yours,

IRA SWINDALL, JR.,  
Gatesville, Texas.

**IT DOESN'T PUT THEM TO SLEEP**

GENTLEMEN:

Since we have gotten into the habit of reading *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* together, my wife and I have found it hard to settle down to sleep, as we read in bed only. Please ask your writers to slow down the action of their characters in their stories, as we will otherwise have to discontinue this reading habit.

Yours with appreciation,

L. P. DANIELS,  
Los Angeles, Calif.

**"HERE'S MY VOTE"**

Editor,

*DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*,  
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* drawing.

This coupon not good after Oct. 15, 1932.

# SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

*A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has*



M. E. OHAVER

*used x to represent e, x will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. For instance, affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first puzzle each week is the easiest.*

AS an interesting variation in cryptic division, Blackbird offers No. 168, which employs only nine different letters instead of the customary ten. A 9-letter keyword has been used, representing the digits in regular order from 0 up to 9, but with one digit missing from the series. The subtraction of D from RT provides a good opening clue.

No. 168—Nine-Letter Division. By Blackbird.

```

A E ) R T R A P A ( E A R I
      D O
      -----
        Z A
        E I
        -----
          E P
          A E
          -----
            R D A
            R D A
            -----
    
```

Clues were none too plentiful in Jack's No. 167, last week's Inner Circle cipher, the answer to which is given on the next page. Probably the most vulnerable spots in the armor of this message were in the twice-used ending -AFP (with relative frequencies of 6-9-3) and the four-letter word BLCH (frequencies, 9-1-8-6).

The commonest ending having a

low-frequency final letter, as in -AFP, is -ing. Similarly, over is the commonest four-letter word with a low-frequency second letter to fit the group BLCH. This latter probability was heightened in this instance through the fact that symbol C was used several times as antepenultimate letter, a position favorable to e.

The accuracy of these suppositions could be checked at once, of course, by substitution in BMFCH (o-ner) and in the phrase QBCAFP OBFH (-oeing -orn), evidently owner and hoeing corn. DOHGZOQ (-cr-ch) would then follow as scratch. And QBEBOGJDZ (ho-oca-st), which could only be holocaust, would complete words 10, 11, and 12; and so on.

This week we welcome three new contributors to this department, the authors of Nos. 169, 170, and 172. In Lillian Michael's crypt you will note that the one-letter word W occurs as second letter in the four-letter word BWZU. Compare the latter with EBU and EG. Proceed next with WVH (between long words) and WFU, which will all but decipher ENFVUH; etc.

GEYG, used five times in succession, should not be hard to guess in



Beau Ned's cryptogram! Not also the prefix KR- and the suffix -KRH. These leads will supply all but two letters of YRBKURG, after which YRX, AYKX, and ABEVVW-XYZ should readily drop into place. The asterisks here and in No. 171 indicate proper names.

In Old Nick's cryptogram you might make the group AQPSUQAE your first objective, attacking through AQH, AQHW (note that W occurs only as a final), and DQP. The short words 'ADFE, HXHL, and FLH should come next, providing nearly all of the letters for FKPMUEA and ADNGNUQA. The rest will follow by substitution, etc., in the usual manner.

Hyphens, initial N's, and final W's hold forth in Mack's cryptogram. Note the paucity of different symbols in the second position, and their combinations with each other in groups 3 and 11. Viking's Inner Circle cipher is an admirable construction in all ten-letter words! A solution of this number will be given next week.

No. 169—Speed. By Lillian Michael.

LMAPASUR, XGFYUFSP W AGYYGV  
ZUBMASU, WFU V GJ NRUH YGRES P  
LP ABMSHFUV. EBU OFGJV-NCR GX  
EGHWP BWZU ENFVUH EG WNEGYG-  
LMSUR WVH WMFCSWVUR.

No. 170—Reminiscence. By Beau Ned.

SUBURG \*FOYMUSKAE SUNYISM  
FOKRGQWKRH "YRX" SUBYWVA  
YRBKURG ABEVVW-XYZ GSKBM,  
RYNUWZ: "ZVO AYKX GEYG GEYG  
'GEYG' GEYG GEYG ABEVWYS QYS-  
AUX LYA KRBVSSUBGWZ QYSAUX."

No. 171—Simile. By Old Nick.

'ADFE \*BLFMJNE \*CFJPM DQP EFN R:  
"ESETN JN PME FKPMUEA A QPSUQAE  
FLH GNVH CFAE FKPMUEA CNLRE,  
AQHW HXHL BGW CW ADNGNUQA,  
AQHW JGPSR AQH KNMR."

No. 172—Job Lot. By Mack.

NTPNDMHZYTX N WVN OXMYOE LUS-  
VUZXE RUQEK: N Z Q E W - P Z Q E W  
NZQQW-K L Z Q Q W, NZQHW-CZQHW,  
NUAOW-VUAOW, NMXAW-VMXAW,  
NULZK-VULZK, NUTYW-YUTYW, NZS-  
VYW-EZSVYW, NMQZS-KLMQZS.

No. 173—Misfortune. By Viking.

PLACOBKEHS RHKVUAOQXI LEDNA-  
QKISM LNIHKTBO MX HLEMISACKT  
LMWNHKIOTQ ULAMXORPNH MWAN-  
EULCKT. TSOQXELAHV MWANEULCST  
BOMWLN AKQS WLCRHKOTIM.

## LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

162—TESLA was a great man. He would not STEAL the LEAST thing, nor would he eat STALE cakes. He raised many TEALS, and once paid five TAEELS for an old SLATE. Many are the TALEs about him.

163—We get all excited when these ciphers are hard, but with patience we can solve any one of them.

164—"Alice in Wonderland" should be read annually by those who desire to attain and retain perpetual youth.

165—Cipher enthusiasts constructing formidable crypts omit articles, conjunctions, etc. Fortunately they cannot eliminate endings!

166—Try your luck with subjoined model words: addenda, baggage, bonanza, calculus, cocoon, divided, fluffy, footstool, knickknack, plus syzygy.

167—Tableau: Six men hoeing corn. Fight over work. Scratch, claw, cut until owner ends holocaust. Six men hoeing corn.

Enroll in the July Solvers' Club by sending in your answers to any of this week's puzzles. The answers will appear in next week's issue.

## COMING NEXT WEEK!

**T**HE thin white paper ribbon ran smoothly through the ticker in the signal room of the Hall of Justice. The signal clerk, Sorenson, glanced up at the clock. It was almost fourteen minutes after ten in the morning—a spring morning in San Francisco, peaceful, cheerful. At exactly ten fifteen the captain of the guard at the Federal Reserve Bank, half a dozen blocks away, would pull a lever, and the tape would record, under Sorenson's eyes, that all was well at the great financial institution.

All would be well, of course. Anything else was unthinkable. Never had anything been wrong. Never could anything be wrong—not at a bank whose vaults were so doubly and triply protected, whose guard was so heavy, whose precautions were so minute. Sorenson waited.

The clock hand crept to ten fifteen, crept past it. Nothing disturbed the unprinted whiteness of the ticker tape. Sorenson's eyes widened. Five seconds too long! Seven! Nine! It was unbelievable, but his orders were precise: "If a delay of ten seconds occurs, communicate immediately with the captain of the guard at the Federal Reserve Bank."

Sorenson lifted the telephone. "Federal Reserve!" he called. "Federal Reserve!" There was no answer.

Every sense strained, Sorenson reached forth his hand towards the button he had never pressed. He jabbed his finger down.

The powerful gong on the main floor of the Hall of Justice began to issue its brazen summons. In the basement the drivers of the riot cars revved their purring engines up a bit.

The siren of the first riot car screamed and wailed. A powerful voice rose above the excitement. "Let's go, O'Toole," shouted Dunand, captain of detectives. "Get in, Jimmy! In, boy! Let's go, O'Toole!"

Siren screaming, the car tore out and down towards the Federal Reserve—where the guard had not reported.

General Alarm! The warning that brought every unit of the San Francisco police into action had been sounded!

But what was wrong in that great bank, whose vaults hid millions? Who could have penetrated into the closely guarded treasure rooms? In a very few minutes they were to find out—men dying, killed diabolically, and over all the sinister, unmistakable signs of Kong Gai, the King of Evil. Don't miss this thrilling *Jimmy Wentworth* novelette—

## The Black Cobra

By Sidney Herschel Small

Also stories by ROBERT PINKERTON, EDWARD PARRISH WARE, TIP BLISS, MAXWELL HAWKINS, and others, next week in

**DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—July 23 (on sale July 19)**

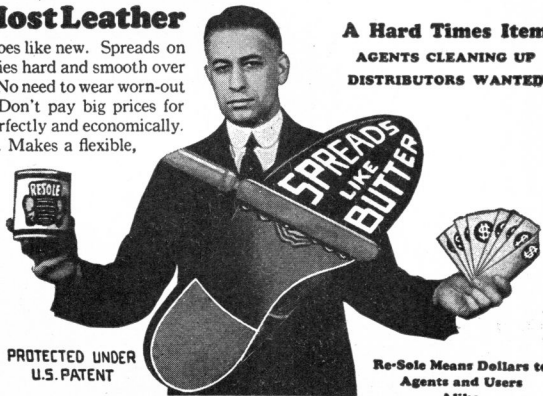
# Now! NEW SOLES as low as 9¢ a pair!

## Resole Wears Better than Most Leather



Leather-like substance makes old shoes like new. Spreads on like butter in just a few minutes. Dries hard and smooth over night. Its action is almost uncanny. No need to wear worn-out shoes or rubbers with leaky soles. Don't pay big prices for shoe repairs. Re-Sole does the job perfectly and economically. So easy to put on a child can do it. Makes a flexible, non-skid waterproof sole. Saves time, money and health.

So widespread is the white hot interest in Re-Sole everywhere—so overwhelming is the demand that we now need more men and women to make deliveries and demonstrate in their communities. Agents everywhere are making big money—get in now on the best profit item of the year. Easy to sell—big repeat business—get started today. Re-Sole is the original genuine plastic product for repairing shoes and is protected under U. S. patent.



**A Hard Times Item  
AGENTS CLEANING UP  
DISTRIBUTORS WANTED**

PROTECTED UNDER  
U.S. PATENT

**Re-Sole Means Dollars to  
Agents and Users  
Alike.**

## RE-SOLE PAYS UP TO \$47 A DAY

### HERE'S PROOF

Schmidt of Iowa wrote as follows: "I have been wearing Re-Soles for over a month, and there is not the slightest sign of wear. These Re-Soles are pliable and easy on the feet, yet are tough almost beyond belief. And the price is less than a shoe shine." Lindsay of Neb.: "Express 157 cans Re-Sole. Ship following day 104 cans and third day 200 cans—All 3 orders sold—Will be selling 600 weekly." White of Maine: "Received sample today and have 14 orders to deliver right away." Gallant of Conn.: "Sold 12 cans Re-Sole the first day." Ball of Pa.: "Wears better than leather soles." Ben-shoof of Wyo.: "Tested Re-Sole against leather on an emery wheel—the cows have got to grow tougher hide to make an upper last as long as Re-Sole." Smith of Mich.: "Filled a big hole in auto tire with Re-Sole. Drove the car 3,000 miles. The patch is still there and by the looks it will run another 3,000 miles yet." Cooperrider of Ohio: "Used one can to advertise among the neighbors and now they advertise it for me. Was out 3 hours among farmers and sold six cans." Clifford of Wash.: "Sold 7 cans first day and am enclosing a 25 can order." We have hundreds of letters in our files from agents making big money with Re-Sole. Sell only the original and genuine. Men and women wishing to make real money should write immediately while good territory is still open. Use coupon below for full particulars.

Hundreds of voluntary letters testify to big cash profits for Re-Sole sales people. Men and women making big money. Customers delighted. Wilson of Wisconsin made \$76.00 one day—Blenhart handled 1182 cans first two months—Lake of Minnesota sold seven orders in three hours. Schmuher of Va. sold 6 orders first hour on seven calls. Hundreds of others. Re-Sole nationally advertised in U. S. A. and in 130 countries all over the world.

**WE HELP YOU.** Full co-operation given agents and simple easy sales plans enable beginners and experienced salespeople alike to double and triple income. That's why Abbe of Mass. handled over 400 orders first month.

### Hundreds of Other Uses

Re-Sole is also excellent for repairing rubbers, overshoes, boots, cuts in tires, auto tops, etc. It has hundreds of other uses for renewing leather, rubber or cloth products. Tremendous sales field makes easy sales—big profits.

### FULLY GUARANTEED

My 100% satisfaction money-back guarantee protects you and your customers. Re-Sole needed by every man, woman and child. No wonder distributors are making up to \$47.00 a day. Be sure to mail coupon today for full details.



Nearly every home has several pairs of shoes with leaky worn-out soles and run-down heels which the shoe-makers would charge several dollars to repair.

With Re-Sole you can repair them quickly for only a few cents. Flexible. Waterproof. All cracks, breaks and holes filled and covered with Re-Sole.

Sole gives first class job at less than one-tenth ordinary cost.

### Hard Times Necessity

### Cash In Now on Re-Sole—Rush Coupon

Re-Sole is so truly uncanny in its action—it soles shoes and repairs worn spots so quickly, so easily, so perfectly and is such a genuine hard times necessity that distributors are coining money every day. Get the facts at once. A quick half minute demonstration amazes prospects and compels them to buy. Sure repeat business. Good territory still open. Rush coupon for FREE SAMPLE on leather and exclusive territory offer.

**UNIVERSAL LABORATORIES, Inc.**  
431 W. RANDOLPH ST., CHICAGO, ILL.

## Mail for FREE Sample

MERROLD S. JOHNSON, Pres.,  
Universal Laboratories, Inc., Dept. 90  
431 W. Randolph St., Chicago, Ill.



Dear Mr. Johnson: Send me a Free Sample of Re-Sole applied to a small leather sole and tell me how to make up to \$47.00 a day. I am not obligated.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
Territory Preferred \_\_\_\_\_

"Cream of  
the Crop"



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## "LUCKIES are my standby"

**CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK**  
Be sure to see Doug Fairbanks Jr.'s latest FIRST NATIONAL PICTURE, "IT'S TOUGH TO BE FAMOUS." Doug has stuck to LUCKIES four years, but didn't stick the makers of LUCKIES anything for his kind words. "You're a brick, Doug."

"LUCKIES are my standby. I buy them exclusively. I've tried practically all brands but LUCKY STRIKES are kind to my throat. And that new improved Cellophane wrapper that opens with a flip of the finger is a ten strike."

*Douglas Fairbanks Jr.*

# "It's toasted"

**Your Throat Protection-against irritation-against cough  
And Moisture-Proof Cellophane Keeps that "Toasted" Flavor Ever Fresh**