

DETECTIVE

JUNE 19
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FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S

MIDSUMMER MURDERS

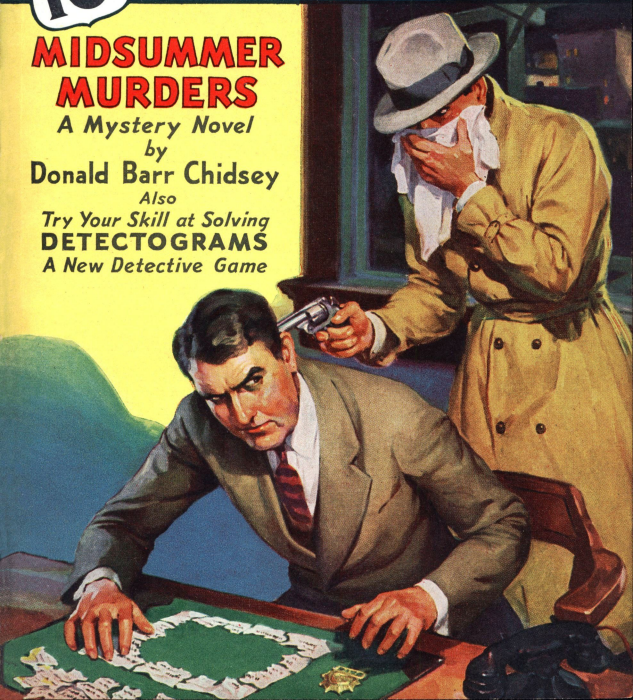
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DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY



TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

VOLUME CXI

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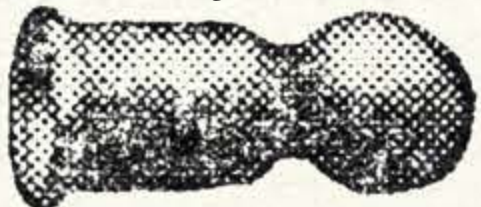


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Midsummer Murders



"There's something horrible going on," she whispered. "This is a dangerous place!"

CHAPTER I

Radio Alarm

IT WAS one of those hold-everything summer showers. I figured it couldn't last long, and as my car was parked almost a block away, I decided to stick around for a while under the marquee. I was still standing there when the girl crashed into me.

She came shoving out of the entrance right behind me, and she bumped me so hard that it spun her half around. But she didn't stop running. She gave

a sort of gasp, and I got a flash of two very big brown eyes, an open mouth, a face that was stiff with terror—and then she was off! Before I had a chance to stop her, or to say anything, she'd run half down the block and was climbing into a small sedan. The sedan started off right away. I didn't think to take the number. Why should I?

But on the other hand, people don't run like that for nothing. Especially on such a wet day, when she might have slipped and busted her neck.

It was a nice neck, too.

Well, I had nothing else to do; the rain was whamming down in broad nasty sheets, as if it was sore about something; and my car was still just



Murder Had Brought Sergeant George Ralph to That Hinterland Hotel; Instinct Told Him More Murder Was on the Way!

By Donald Barr Chidsey

Author of "Blood Won't Tell," "The Prize Dumbbell," etc.

as far away. So I moseyed back into the lobby and spoke to the boy at the switchboard. He knew I was cops. I had just finished tut-tutting and pooh-poohing a tenant who thought she was robbed and who insisted that Sergeant Ralph himself be sent from headquarters special—in spite of the fact that I'm homicide. But we'd humored her, me not having anything better to do. Her necklace, she had said, was worth every cent of thirty thousand dollars, and some super-crook had stolen it. Well, I'd looked around the apartment, and after a while I'd found the neck-

lace behind a radiator, and I'd handed it back to her. Personally, if I know anything about ice, the thing wasn't worth three hundred.

The dame, incidentally, had remembered her manners enough to say thank you. The manager too had said thank you, but with more feeling.

So now I jerked my thumb toward the sidewalk and asked the boy at the switchboard what it was all about. He shrugged, looked sidewise at the boy who stood in the elevator.



"Dunno. She came in a few minutes ago. I ast her who she wanted, but she said she was expected and she breezed right on in."

The elevator boy said: "She went up to the second floor. But she didn't come back down with me, just now. Must have come down the fire stairs."

"She did," said the switchboard boy. "I saw her come out."

There wasn't any real reason for me to get suspicious, but there wasn't any reason for me to get wet either, and these two kids weren't hot company, being dumb. So I stepped into the elevator and told the boy to take me to the second. There I mooched along the corridor, seeing nothing in particular and hearing the same. Once I looked back. The elevator boy was standing in front of his cage, staring after me. I suppose somebody had told him I was a detective.

The door of 2-L was open a few inches. I knocked, but there wasn't any answer. I pushed the door open wide.

It was a small, square apartment, and the stiff was right in the center of it, flat on his back, arms and legs stretched four ways. It was almost like a pose. There was blood just about everywhere. Must have been at least two quarts of it—on the stiff, on the floor, on the legs of the chairs, even on the walls.

It hadn't been a very scientific job. There were at least a dozen wounds in the top of the chest and in the neck, and the knife still was sticking out of one of these. The blood must have spurted from an artery—or from two or three arteries. It was plenty messy, anyway.

I turned my head. The elevator boy still was staring at me.

"Bring the manager here!" I ordered.

"The manager's going to—"

"Get him and bring him here!"

The boy jumped into the elevator, and I heard it start down. He hadn't been scared or anything. Just excited at seeing a real detective.

I WALKED into the room, stepping carefully to keep out of the blood. Maybe I'm getting callous or something. I don't know. To most people, this would have looked like a terrible tragedy; but to me—I've got to admit it—it looked first of all like a lot of work. Any murder's a lot of work, but it happened that in this particular case I recognized the remains.

The stiff, spread-eagled in its own gore, was what had recently been Chauncey R. McCabe, one of the biggest corporation lawyers in the country.

I leaned over, stuck a finger tentatively into some of the blood. It was still warm.

Then I got a chair across the back of the neck! I didn't know it was a chair, at the time. All I knew was that something smacked me very hard, pitching me clear over the legs of the late Chauncey R. McCabe and face-down upon the floor beyond. It hurt. In fact, it must have even knocked me out for a second there. I found myself struggling to sit up, and scrabbling for my gun. But my head cleared fast, and I jumped out of the apartment just in time to see the door of the fire stairs slam shut at the end of the corridor. I ran down there, my gun in my fist.

At the bottom were two doors. I swung open the nearer of these, found myself looking into the lobby. The manager was in the middle of the lobby, the elevator boy at his elbow.

"Did anybody come out here just now?"

They seemed to be too scared to say anything, or know anything. I swore at

them. I didn't realize, then, that I must have been a sight to frighten anybody. Not only did I have a gun in my hand and the gleam of battle in my eye, but I'd fallen across the body up there in 2-L, and on the floor beyond, and the whole front of me must have been pretty well splotted with red.

Still, I'd seen enough to know from their expression that nobody had been ahead of me. I swung back, threw open the other door at the foot of the fire stairs. It opened into a long, narrow alleyway. One end of this alleyway, on my right, was a blank wall. The other end was the sidewalk, and a man was just scampering around the corner there and out of sight. I yelled after him, fired two shots in the air. I would have fired at his legs, except that I was afraid of hitting somebody on the other side of the street or maybe somebody passing in a car.

At that, I'd have caught the guy if it hadn't been for the harness bull. It seems he had just passed the entrance of the alley a moment before, and when he heard the shots, he wheeled around and ran back. He got there just about as I came out on the sidewalk. We practically bumped into one another.

He saw the blood and the gun—but all I saw was the brown flash of a nightstick. He was a big thick fellow, Irish as hell—I later learned that his name was McGonigle—and he let me have it neatly just over the left ear.

I think I must have been cussing him even when I went down. Anyway, they tell me I was cussing him roundly when I sat up. McGonigle himself told me that, later. He had recognized me by that time, and he was scared white. Afraid he'd maybe killed me.

"Golly! I'm sorry, Sarge! Golly! I thought it was a stick-up, and I saw you with the gat and all—"

"All right. Save it. Now run to a box and give 'em this for the radio. Medium-sized man with a dark brown or black raincoat and a dark brown felt hat. He might have blood on his clothes somewhere."

"Golly! Can I help you up, Sarge? Here, let me—"

"Tell 'em at the same time to broadcast for a pretty girl about nineteen-twenty, large brown eyes, brown hair, in a dark raincoat and a small black felt hat over one eye. She might have blood on her, too. She's in a small dark sedan, with somebody else driving. That's not much, but make it fast anyway! And then come back and keep people away from the entrance of this apartment house."

Me, I limped into the lobby again, all blood and rainwater and with my ears doing grand opera on me—one opera in one ear and a different one in the other ear. Then I went up to the second floor to take a better look at that stiff.

HAGGERTY looked at me and asked sardonically: "And you mean to say you came in and leaned over him and all, without first fanning that bathroom?"

"I hate to admit it," I said, "but that's just what I did do."

He shook his head solemnly, stared down at the stiff again. I knew what he was thinking, because I was thinking the same thing. I was supposed to be the department's Number One sleuth. They were quite proud of me; and the papers had time and again boosted me as a regular Sherlock Holmes, making me into something that no cop ever could be, no matter how many breaks he got.

But lately, everything seemed to have been going wrong. The last two important cases I'd worked on, I had

flubbed badly. I don't know what had been the matter with me—I'd just missed up on things, that was all. Can't explain it.

And now here I was acting like a rookie again. I'm not superstitious or anything, but they say these things come in threes, and I was wondering if it meant that I was all shot. I wasn't so much worried about what the newspapers were going to print—I knew the boys pretty well, and I figured they'd go as easy on me as they could—but I was wondering if maybe there was something wrong with *me*. They say that when aviators have cracked up a couple of times, occasionally they go all to pieces. They lose their nerve, and are never any good any more. Gamblers are that way sometimes too. And crooks.

I was wondering if cops were that way.

"They'll laugh at McGonigle, of course, but in his case it don't make so much difference. But with you—right here in a little place like this, the murderer romps past so close he must have almost kicked you, and you never get any more of a description than you did—" Haggerty sighed.

He shook his head. "Not even a decent description of the dame, either," he grumbled as if discouraged.

"Oh, I saw her all right! Couldn't see much of her hair, but I could see it was dark brown with little specks of red. And she had the softest brown eyes I ever saw on any jane, and just a hint that maybe there might be some freckles *sometime* on her nose, and a swell little round chin, and a way of jerking her head up to stare at you—"

Haggerty was giving me One Look; and I braked it, feeling silly. Me, the department's hard-boiled bachelor, that was supposed to be hell on women. He must have thought I'd gone gaga.

"That's a lot of help," he said. "You sure were on your toes, boy, when you met her!"

We didn't let the manager come into the apartment for fear he'd mess things up. He stood in the doorway, with a face like a crumpled sheet of writing paper and eyes that were gray tennis balls.

Haggerty asked: "You know who this man is—was?"

The manager asserted he'd never seen him before.

"Well, who was it had this apartment?"

"Man named Arthur Bates. He only took it last Tuesday."

"Pay you?"

"He paid two months in advance."

"By check?" I asked.

The manager's eyes were getting bigger and bigger. He ran his tongue over his lips.

"No, he paid cash. Had the place all alone. He wasn't here much. I don't remember that he ever had any visitors."

"He sign a lease, or a renting agreement or anything?"

"No, he didn't. I wanted him to, naturally, but he said he might only want it for a little while but that he was willing to pay two months in advance. Not half our apartments are rented right now, and I had authority to take tenants that way if I couldn't get them to sign a lease. Bates rented this apartment furnished. This is all house stuff here. Only thing he brought was a small handbag."

Haggerty said: "What about that briefcase over there?"

"I never saw that before."

The switchboard boy and the elevator boy told us the only time they had ever seen Chauncey R. McCabe was when he called that afternoon, maybe

half an hour before the murder. He had given his right name, and Mr. Bates had said to send him right up. The switchboard boy was certain it was Bates' voice.

NONE of the house employees could remember ever having seen Bates in a dark raincoat or a dark overcoat. But then, this was July, and it hadn't rained since he'd taken the apartment—until today. They remembered that he did usually wear a dark brown felt hat. According to their description, he was roughly the same build as the man I'd glimpsed. They thought he was perhaps forty-five or fifty and not spry enough to toss bathroom chairs around or to run the way my man had. Still and all, you can't tell what a guy might do when he's just committed a murder and there's a cop chasing him.

We didn't learn anything more about the girl. None of the employees had ever seen her before today.

Sonny Castleton breezed in, with an assistant, and they started to work with those little camel's hair brushes, going over just about everything except the ceiling. There were plenty of prints. But the big thrill came when Sonny powdered the knife itself and began to raise ridges. We all got taut and hot-eyed as we watched him. Even the cops in the corridor forgot what they were supposed to be doing—with the result that a couple of newshawks managed to slip in.

"Oh-oh!" one of these called. "You getting anything there, Sonny?"

A cop shoved him back, muttering. Sonny Castleton said, without looking up: "Yes, there's prints all right. There's a complete set of them, if it comes to that. But they're a little smeared—"

The reporters didn't wait for the rest

of it. The body of a big corporation lawyer spread on the floor of a strange apartment, and a knife in his neck, and fingerprints on that knife—no wonder the boys got going like the bubbles in champagne! From that time on the papers all kept repeating that the police had found a complete and perfect set of prints on the murder weapon. Which wasn't strictly true. Sonny Castleton explained it to me. He hated to disappoint us, and he admitted that the smeared prints certainly bore a strong resemblance to the ones his assistant was bringing out all over the place—in the bathroom and everywhere—but he couldn't swear that they were the same.

"Still, it certainly looks like friend Bates," Haggerty said.

And it certainly did.

There were prints on the briefcase, but they were all McCabe's, and the elevator operator remembered that McCabe had been carrying that briefcase when he came to call on Arthur Bates.

There were prints on the bathroom chair with which I'd been beaned, but they were hopelessly smeared.

The knife itself was a large jack-knife with one very small and one very large blade, both operated by springs. It was the large blade which had been used.

There were some papers in the briefcase, but they didn't look important. None of them mentioned Arthur Bates. Still, you couldn't tell . . . I decided to give those papers a better going-over after I'd got in touch with McCabe's office.

Considering that it had been occupied for a week, the apartment contained precious little of a personal nature. In the bathroom were a toothbrush and a tube of toothpaste, a cheap shaving outfit, a steel nail file, a bottle of face lotion—insignificant things like that.

On the table was a cigarette case, thin, silver, with some kind of Indian design on it. There were no cigarettes in it, but there were some crumbs of tobacco. Sonny raised several prints on its surface.

There was no baggage. The bureau drawers were empty. But the waste basket and the ash tray gave us something.

In the ash tray was a crushed-out cigarette. It was a straw-tipped Melacha, and there were traces of lipstick on it. I wrapped it in some paper and put it into my pocket.

The waste basket held torn-up letters. They were torn into very small pieces. They all seemed to be in the same handwriting, and on the same sort of paper. It was a woman's handwriting, I'd say.

I put all the scraps of paper into the briefcase, which I was going to take to headquarters where I was to meet McCabe's office manager. It was about eight o'clock when I finally quit the murder chamber, leaving a harness bull in charge. The body had been removed, but the bloodstains were still there, and the whole place was covered with black-and-white fingerprint powder, and stank of flashlights.

CHAPTER II

Holdup in Headquarters

WHERE I parked the car, in the alley between the headquarters building and City Hall, it was pretty dark. I was walking past the garage toward the Franklin Street entrance, weaving my way in and out among the scaffolding supports, when somebody snatched the briefcase out from under my arm.

I think I must have been bellowing when I whirled. I was certainly sore!

It was a tall youngster, and as he

started to run away he slipped and fell. They were giving the building a sand-blasting, which was the reason why the scaffolding was there, and it was also the reason why the sidewalk was covered with fine white sand—and the youngster slipped in this sand.

He was up again fast enough, but I had him by that time. I grabbed a shoulder, swung him around. I saw him raise his left fist—or thought I saw him do that. Anyway, I let fly with my right smack to his chin. I'm a pretty strong man, and I was sore as hell, and the youngster went right over backwards, briefcase and all.

He looked like a college boy, or else a boy just out of college. He was tall and rangy, nice-looking, with nice clothes. I frisked him and found no hardware. He was coming to, and I helped him to his feet. He was blubbering a little, dazed, as I started to walk him toward Franklin Street.

"Don't you know you're not allowed to steal things from people?" I asked.

He didn't say anything then, but when I got him in at the desk he began to apologize. He was very decent about it, and he looked like a nice kid too. I sort of liked him, once I'd got over being sore. Socking somebody in the chin had helped relieve my feelings, anyway. I was beginning to think maybe I was a good dick after all.

"So chatter, son. How come you go around grabbing things?"

"I—I didn't know you were a policeman. You don't look like one."

That pleased me, right off. I've always been proud of the fact that I don't look like a cop. I don't smoke cigars, and I never wore a derby in my life, or rubber heels. I always try not to look grim, except when there's some good reason for it, which there isn't very often.

"All right. Who are you, and what's it all about?"

"I'm sorry I tried to take your briefcase," he said. "I didn't know it was yours. I thought it was mine. You see, somebody snatched mine from under my arm, over on Mulberry Street just a little while ago. When I saw you with this, I thought it was mine. I can see now, here in the light, that it isn't. But it looks a lot like mine."

"Did you report yours stolen?"

"That's what I was coming here to do. I was on my way here when I saw you. I—I guess I just grabbed the thing without stopping to think. You look something like the man who stole mine and then slipped away into traffic before I could catch him."

I didn't like that so much! I like to be told I don't look like a cop, but I *don't* like to be told that I resemble a cheap thief.

"At least, you're about his height and build and all. When I see you in here, of course—well, it's much different."

"Yeah?"

Joe Walsh, behind the desk, said: "Want to make a charge, George?"

The youngster had told us his name was William Westwall, and that he came from Montclair and worked in an architect's office here in Newark. He sounded straight enough, and looked straight.

"Get one of the boys to check up on him," I asked Walsh. "Let him use the phone if he wants, but keep him around. I'll make up my mind later about the charge."

Headquarters was crowded and noisy, downstairs. You can't have a guy like Chauncey R. McCabe murdered without creating a terrible fuss. Not only the Newark reporters, whom I knew, but also a flock of smart boys from New York, were surging around

me asking questions. I told them they'd have to speak to Haggerty. I got the man from McCabe's office and took him up to the room the homicide squad shares with the casualty squad on the second floor. It was quiet there—even after I'd opened the windows.

Reynolds, the man from McCabe's office, identified the papers in the briefcase, but he said they weren't anything very important. He said that McCabe's secretary hadn't had the boss scheduled for anything definite the latter part of that afternoon. In fact, he had just come back from Europe that morning, and had only dropped into the office after lunch in order to look around and to go through the personal mail that had accumulated for him. He hadn't planned to do any real work. When he had left the office at about three-fifteen—that is, about three-quarters of an hour before he was killed—the secretary supposed he was going home. Reynolds didn't know of any enemies McCabe might have had. McCabe never had been a county prosecutor or attorney-general or anything like that, and he'd never practiced criminal law at all. He had been fifty-six, prosperous, good-natured, happily married. Reynolds never had heard him mention the apartment house where the murder occurred, and never had seen any reference to this in his correspondence; he never had heard of anybody named Arthur Bates.

Reynolds volunteered to come to headquarters to answer questions, any time, night or day, and he told me that all the office records would be thrown open for police inspection whenever we wished.

He seemed to have been very fond of his late boss, and he simply couldn't understand why anybody should want to murder McCabe. . . .

LEFT to myself, I locked the door and began to assemble the torn-up letters we'd found in the waste basket. I could see it was going to be a big job. Most of the little pieces of paper had writing on both sides. It was like doing an enormous jigsaw puzzle—only much harder.

In fact, I think my jigsaw puzzle experience came in handy here. I'm pretty good at them, and I have a regular system which I used with these letters, starting off by segregating all the edges and piecing them together, that giving me at least an idea of how many letters there were, covering how many sheets of paper.

It looked like an all-night job, but this didn't bother me. I've worked all night before, plenty of times.

The edges, naturally, didn't give me much in the way of words. And most of the pieces were so small that it was tough going. I struck a lot of "the"s and "a"s and "said"s and "he"s, and a few word-endings like "mond" and "les" and "ratz," and also the beginning of one word, "com." Then suddenly, unexpectedly, I got four pieces together in a horizontal line. They read: "at the Hollingshed." The end of the piece was right at that "d," torn there, so that I couldn't tell whether there was an "s" on the end. It looked as though it might eventually work out as "at the Hollingsheds," meaning a couple by that name. But again it might be "at the Hollingshed Club" or "at the Hollingshed Theater." Not that I'd ever heard of any such places, but they *could* exist.

Well, I was working on this job, bent over double and forgetting all about the rest of the world, when something cold was put against the back of my neck, and somebody said, low: "Don't turn around."

My nerves are ordinarily pretty good, but I've got to admit that this made them jump. And I did turn around. Not much—I jerked my head just far enough to be able to see out of the corner of one eye a man *in a dark raincoat and a dark brown felt hat*. I didn't see his face because he was holding a handkerchief in front of it with his left hand. Besides, he stepped out of my line of vision right away. But I had seen the gun, at least. Oh, it was a gun all right! It looked about the size of a French seventy-five, to me!

"Do that once more, copper, and you're dead."

He meant that, too. I could tell by his voice. So I didn't do anything more until I got orders from the rear.

"Put your hands above your head . . . stand up slow . . ."

He was talking as though he had a walnut in his throat. I obeyed him, but I began to bluster in a loud voice—began to ask what the hell was the big idea, and how the hell had *he* got in here, and what the hell did he mean by—

"Shut up! Walk over to that locker and step in."

"Step *in*? Why, I can't fit into that little thing!"

"Try," he said.

As a matter of fact, I was just about able to squeeze into the tall steel locker with my arms above my head. The locker door had been wide open, and there was nothing inside or I wouldn't have been able to do it. Also I got some help in the form of a foot pushing against the seat of my pants.

Then the door slammed behind me, and was locked.

Sardines are what they usually bring up when they want to tell about being crowded, but I swear sardines prac-

tically joggle around in their cans compared with the way I was wedged into that damned locker. I was never so mad in my life! I guess I was about the maddest person in the world at that time.

At first, I tried to get my right hand down to my pistol, which was in a holster hanging from my belt on the right side. But it was no soap. Then I tried it with the left hand, having heard somewhere that a man's left hand is usually smaller than his right. But that wasn't any use either.

Then I started to yell. It almost smashed my eardrums to do it, but I yelled as loud as I could for a while. Nothing happened.

I tried to rock the locker back and forth. I did manage to shimmy it a little bit, but that didn't help.

I yelled some more. Then I went back to the job of trying to get one hand down to the gun. I knew that in the locker door right behind me, a little above the level of my head, were eight or ten ventilation holes. I figured that if I could get the gun up to them, and stick the barrel through one, I could risk a shot—which certainly ought to bring somebody from downstairs.

Imagine all this happening right in police headquarters! Boy, was I mad!

Eventually, maybe because I was so covered with sweat, I succeeded in getting my right hand down to the gun butt, and in getting the gun out of its holster. But when I'd got that far I found I couldn't get the gun up again, up above my head! My hand alone would make it, but not my hand with a gun in it, no matter how loose I held it. And of course I didn't dare take a chance of shooting at the floor. In that coffin of slippery steel, the slug might have gone anywhere!

When on the sixth attempt the gun

slipped to the floor with a clang—then I thought I was going to bust! I was hot as hell in August, and drenched with sweat, and the blood was whanging away at my temples as if it was going to leap right out of my face. I didn't even have the strength to yell any more.

I was so damned sore that if I'd been loose I think I could have eaten that locker! When I ground my teeth it must have made sparks.

Just one hour and forty minutes later, Cap Haggerty opened the door suddenly, and I stumbled out backward. I sat on the floor, because my knees wouldn't hold up underneath me.

"George! How'd you ever—? I came up to see how you were coming along with those letters, and when you didn't answer my knock I thought you'd fallen asleep, and I borrowed a key."

The letters? I moved my neck gingerly, to find out whether it would work. And I saw that a couple of reporters were there, but not the man in the brown hat, and not the letters—not a single scrap of the hundreds of scraps I'd laid out on the table.

The reporters were all grins. . . .

Haggerty felt terrible. "Golly, George! It's the lousiest thing ever happened! There might even be charges!"

I knew that. I had a good record; but how much did a good record count when the public was laughing its head off? If it had been simply political pressure I could have made a fight, and Haggerty would stick to me, because he's my friend. But bucking a thing like the laugh that was going to go up when the papers came out—that was something else.

"How 'bout if I resign?"

I was standing looking out a window, with my hands as deep down in my pockets as they'd go.

"Don't be crazy."

He figured I didn't mean it, and I'm not sure myself whether I did. But I was sure of one thing: and that was that I wanted to work on this case myself, alone. It was a personal matter with me. Why? It wasn't so much the giggles I was going to hear all around me, and the razzing I'd have to take from the boys big enough to dare to razz me. It wasn't so much the fact that I was afraid I was being jinxed. Those things counted; but it was something else.

Of course I couldn't tell Haggerty that I'd gone absolutely nuts about a girl I'd only seen for an instant there. I couldn't believe it myself, if it comes to that. But there it was. The girl was in trouble, and she needed somebody to get her out of it, and here I was appointing Sergeant George Ralph to that job. Tough old Georgie Ralph. Yeah!

"Suppose you suspend me then," I suggested, without turning my head. "Recommend that I be relieved of duty pending an investigation."

We were in his office. I heard him get up from behind his desk and walk across to where I was standing. He leaned against the wall next to the window; his head was right against the wall, and he was trying to look into my eyes; he was frowning in a puzzled way.

"I wish I knew what the hell's got into you, George. You know I wouldn't do a thing like that!"

"Not even if I asked you to?"

"No, not even if you asked me to!"

We were quiet for a while. I like Haggerty a lot, even though he is like a fussy old woman about some things; but naturally I couldn't explain to him how I felt.

He asked: "You haven't got some-

thing, have you, George? You wouldn't hold out on me, would you?"

I just shook my head.

After a while I said: "Why don't you do this: Why don't you endorse my application for an indefinite leave of absence without pay? If they ask you what for, tell 'em the request was because of personal affairs."

"You get worse as you get older. Do you know what everybody'd say, if I was to do that? They'd say you can't take it any more."

"All right, let 'em! Should I care?"

"Maybe I'd care though," Haggerty said quietly. He went back to his desk and sat down again. "I certainly wish you'd tell me what this is all about."

"I wish to hell I could," I snapped; and I went downstairs.

In the booking room, Joe Walsh asked me about that kid Westwall, from Montclair. Westwall lived where he said he did, Joe reported; came from a good family; worked in an architect's office; and though we only had his word for it that he'd been robbed, it was true that he usually carried a briefcase like McCabe's. His boss and a cousin, a pretty important local lawyer, had come to testify as to his good character, and the lawyer was demanding that we either make a charge or else let the kid go. It was up to me.

Maybe if there hadn't been so many people around just then, and if I hadn't felt the way I did, I might have made a charge of interfering with an officer. But I didn't want to hang around headquarters any longer than I had to! The story was out, and men were looking at me in a peculiar way, trying to keep from laughing. I could feel my whole head and neck getting hot.

"Oh, I guess let him go," I said, trying to sound careless. The story checked, and the kid himself seemed all

right. I certainly didn't have anything against him personally. Though, as I say, it might have been different if I hadn't been so anxious to get away. "Might ask Hag to put a tail on him, to make sure he goes home."

AS I went out, everybody was so quiet that it hurt. It was too dark to learn anything from the scaffolding; and besides, I didn't want to stick around while the crowd was so near; so I went out and got a cup of coffee and a hamburger, and then I went over to the *Star-Eagle* and borrowed their copy of the U. S. Postal Guide.

There was no post office named Hollingshed in New Jersey, or in New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania or Connecticut either.

I phoned a friend connected with the State Liquor Control Board and found there wasn't any place licensed in this district under the name of Hollingshed Café, or Hollingshed Tavern, or anything like that.

Then I went over to the Robert Treat and started looking through telephone directories. I did this until my eyes were sore. My head, which had been aching before I started, was aching worse than ever when I finished. I didn't get anything. All the towns and cities in Essex, Union, Bergen, Sussex, Hudson, Passaic, Morris, Monmouth, Middlesex—no Hollingshed. There were some *Hollingshead* residents in New Jersey and New York but nobody, no place, with the name *Hollingshed*, spelled like that. I looked it up in the classified books too, and in the city directory. Finally I asked the night clerk, a guy I knew slightly, for a peek at the Hotel Red Book. I didn't find anything there.

"What're you after, Sergeant?"

I told him, spelled it out.

"And you say there's a hotel by that name?"

"I don't know. That's what I'm trying to find out."

Those room clerks get around a lot. This one said he seemed to remember some place with a name something like that somewhere; and since I didn't have anything else to do, and since it still wasn't quite light enough to go over to headquarters and examine that scaffolding, I hung around.

After a while he got it, noisily.

"I remember! They were building it when I was working up in Pequanac one summer five-six years ago. It's all by itself, with its own private road and everything. It was going to be super-tony. But that was right about the time of the crash, and the whole business fell through. I guess they never did open it up."

I said: "That helps a lot."

"But wait a minute! Only the other day, over in New York, I ran into a fellow named Harry Gratz I used to know in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was the assistant manager there. And he told me, the other day, that they were opening up this Hollingshed Inn or Hollingshed Hotel or whatever it is. Said he'd got a job as the manager. Said some men were fixing the place up again, but it was going to be very quiet and conservative. I asked him a lot about it because I thought there might be something there for me maybe, but he didn't seem to want to tell me much."

He was looking for something under the desk.

"That was nineteen twenty-nine when I worked up in Pequanac, and they were building it then. I know because it was the year of the crash. Let's see if it's listed in the nineteen-thirty Red Book."

Well, it was. We finally found it alone under the heading of Mahattiqua—which was a place I had never heard of before but the night clerk said it was nothing really but a country store too small to support a post office.

The listing was like this:

(S) HOLLINGSHEED INN, 65 rooms, (A) \$15-\$25. S. H. Alexander, prop. June 15-Sept. 5.

"That 'S,' " my pal told me, "stands for summer, and that 'A' stands for American Plan."

"And does that fifteen to twenty-five stand for by the week or by the month?"

"Oh, by the day! You see, it was going to be a very swanky place. It was going to have its own golf course and everything. But they went into bankruptcy before they had a chance to get it open, I guess, from what I hear." He looked at me with a grin. "The rates wouldn't be as high as that now, of course. But I don't suppose you were thinking of spending a vacation there anyway, were you?"

I said: "Can't tell. I might. Now what did you say the name of this new manager was?"

"Gratz. I never really knew him very well. Funny guy. I always heard that there was something crooked about him. He left the place where I worked with him, in Knoxville, without any notice, and the talk was that he'd got bounced for swiping something."

Gratz. . . . Going through my memory were the tag-ends of names I'd seen on those pieces of letters. And one of the tag-ends was "atz." That might mean something, and then again it might not. But at least it was a place to start—the only place I had.

"Coming to think of it," I said, "I guess I will go there for my vacation at that. Thanks."

"When does your vacation start, Sergeant?"

I said: "It's started already."

CHAPTER III

Watch Your Step!

CAME the dawn and I was crawling around on rough boards eighteen or twenty feet above the City Hall alley. Sherlock himself. I didn't have the fore-and-aft hat, or the pipe, but I did have a magnifying glass, and I guess I must have looked like a nut. A uniformed man came out to squint up at me once, and he yelled "Hey!" as if he was insulted. I stuck my head around a board and pushed my hat back so that he could see my face, and I snapped "Well?" He looked flabbergasted for a minute, and then he said, "Oh, it's you, Sergeant! 'Scuse-it-please!" and he went back inside. I could see he was starting to laugh as he went.

Otherwise I wasn't bothered much. A few workmen passed, and some newsboys, and a flock of milk drivers, but most of them were too busy to look up, or too busy to stick around long even when they did.

I went over the whole scaffolding pretty carefully, and I found one thing. Which was a lot. I found a piece of brown Harris tweed ripped off by a disagreeable splinter near the window furthest from Franklin Street. It was a thin triangular strip, maybe three inches long but not more than about a quarter of an inch across the base—too small to get a good idea of the design. It was dry. The rain had stopped at about 7:30, and it had been about an hour after that when the hold-up man kicked me into that locker. So it looked certain that this was a souvenir of him. If one of the sand

blasters had left it there, it would have been wet. Besides, sand blasters don't usually work in Harris tweeds. At least, the ones we have in Newark don't.

I stepped in through the window myself, wrote a careful report, made out an application for a leave of absence, put the piece of tweed into an envelope and clipped this to the report, and went downstairs. The man on the desk didn't seem surprised to see me. I started to tell him: "When Haggerty comes in—" And just then Haggerty did.

He looked like hell. Looked as if he hadn't had any more sleep than I'd had; and maybe he hadn't.

"Here's the report and the request. I'm going to the country."

Hag said: "You can't go before the application's been acted on!"

"If they don't want to act on it right, there's something else they can do with it. I wouldn't break down and sob."

"Don't be that kind of a cop." He took my arm. "You know, George, if I didn't know you so well I'd think you were drunk—or in love—or something. Stick around. This isn't such a bad dump."

But I said no. I told him I wasn't superstitious or anything but I felt I just had to do something to change my luck. That was the way I put it.

Hag said: "Remember that kid you brought in here last night? You let him go? Well, I put a tail on him, the way you suggested."

"Yes?"

"He went to a parked car in Green Street, a small sedan. He got in and drove away. Drove right past the tail, who was calling a cab, and the tail says there was a brown briefcase in the front seat."

I said: "The lying hyena!" Then I said: "Go on."

2 D—19

"He didn't go toward Montclair. He took the road that goes up through Belleville. When he stopped in a lunch room around Nutley somewhere, the tail began to wonder whether he ought to keep after him like that, running up such a big taxi bill, so he called me up to ask. From the booth he could watch the front door of the place. But this Westwall kid went out through the back, and that's the last we've seen of him. I called Montclair and asked them to watch his house and let us know when he came in. Well, they been watching it all night, and Westwall hasn't appeared yet. I called them just now, just before I left the house."

I let out a ten-gallon sigh. "Well, that makes it a hundred per cent perfect for me. I did absolutely *everything* wrong, didn't I?"

"You certainly should have held onto that kid, I guess."

"I guess I should. I'm going nuts, Hag. I need that country air to restore my tissues and things. Goodbye."

"Where're you going, anyway?"

"It's a very swell place. Has its own private golf course and everything. I'll give you a ring now and then, and find out how the investigation's coming along. Toodle-oo!"

IT wasn't easy finding Mahatiqua, which was 'way up near the New York State line—a store and a dusty house, a few disconsolate chickens, a smudgy scarecrow of a gas pump, and a graybeard who wasn't any too sociable.

The Hollingshed Inn? Yes, that was open again. Some new people had taken it over—he didn't know who they were. But whoever they were, they didn't seem to be doing much about the place. Not advertising it or anything, and you almost never saw a car go in there.

No guests ever came down to the store either, which caused the graybeard much disgustment.

But he directed me. I'd have to watch sharp, he said. Where I turned there wasn't any gate or sign or anything. I'd just have to watch.

Well, I did that. And eventually I found the place. A private road that was nothing much more than a couple of wheel ruts led through nice, good-natured woods, always turning, always climbing a little. It was swell countryside. But you had to drive at least a mile from the highway before you even came in sight of the Hollingshed.

I don't know what I expected, but whatever it was I got a shock.

The Hollingshed Inn was no little comfy-cosy-cute place with rustic signs and a batch of andirons and hook rugs. It was enormous. The item in the Red Book had said sixty-five rooms, but it looked as though it contained at least three times that many. It had been built in the blissful days when men didn't care what they spent, and it had balconies and wings and an endless veranda and terraces and tennis courts and everything. It must have cost a pile of money. And here it was all by itself, looking absolutely deserted.

No, not really deserted. It looked haunted. Why a bright, white summer hotel set on a hill in the midst of a sea of rolypoly countryside all gay and green and breezy should make me shiver when I first looked at it, I don't know. But it did. I sensed right away, driving toward it slowly, that there was something almighty funny about this place.

When I got closer the droopiness of the building, its dreariness, became apparent. It badly needed paint. It needed a million small repairs. The driveway which seemed to encircle the whole

place had been laid out on a grand scale, like everything else there, but now it was twisted and choked by weeds. The terraces were weedy. Most of the windows were boarded up. The veranda seemed even bigger than it was—and it must have covered acres—because of the fact that by actual count there were only three rocking chairs on it. Three hundred wouldn't have overcrowded it. The great front door stood open, but at a slightly gaga angle, with no suggestion of sunny welcome: there wasn't any mat at all. The balconies were covered with thin dust, and the paint was peeling off them, and lots of their palings were broken. Even the eaves somehow looked bare and sinister, as though birds had decided against building their nests there, being afraid.

The five or six tennis courts had gone to weed even more emphatically than the driveway; there were no nets; and the backstops were rusty, leaning this way and that.

The only things that were neat and clean and cheerful were an oblong of lawn in front of the veranda steps, clipped as crisp and short as a putting green, and a man in white doeskins and a sport coat who was batting a croquet ball around on that lawn.

This man was of middle height, and bald-headed, and wore shiny nose glasses in front of beaming blue eyes. He turned a benign, bishoply smile upon me as I coasted past; and he waved, and called: "Hello!" He looked like a man who had amiably addressed many banquets.

I said: "Hello. Wonderful day, isn't it?"

"Wonderful," he agreed.

Then, as I passed, he started caroling:

I'm called lit-tle Buttercup,
Sweet lit-tle Buttercup,
Though I could nev-er tell why—

He didn't have a very good ear for music, and that was all of the song he seemed to know, but he sang it over and over again, and appeared to be having a swell time.

I stopped at the foot of the veranda steps, shut off the engine. When I started up the steps I saw a second man. He was seated in one of the three, count 'em—three, rocking chairs. He was thin, and had mean eyes and a sour face, and he glared at me as though he wanted to start something.

"Hello!" I said.

Sour-face grunted. He stirred in his chair, and a newspaper slipped out of his lap. He bent over to pick it up, and I bent over at the same time, and I got there first. It was a copy of the New York *Star*. I handed it back to him, and he said "Thanks," with a smile which must have hurt his mouth.

I'd been pretty close to him for a second there, with my head a little below the level of his chest as he leaned over, and I'd seen something.

Why, I was wondering, should a guest in a quiet country hotel like this want to carry a Colt .45 automatic under his left armpit?

Strong as hell, I had the conviction, as I walked into the Hollingshed lobby, that things were going to happen here very soon.

It was a good place for a cop to watch his step. . . .

"LOOKING for something?" This was a disagreeable, dark-eyed fellow of about thirty-five, who stood by the desk.

I said: "I'm looking for a manager, I guess."

"I'm the manager."

"Oh. Have you got a nice, quiet room? I've been working pretty hard lately."

As far as appearance went, I figured I was all right. I certainly ought to have looked tired, anyway, not having had a wink of sleep the night before.

"I'm afraid we're filled up."

The lobby was dim and large. There were some brand new rugs between the door and the desk, but otherwise the floor was bare, and the furniture on right and left was swathed in dust covers.

"Well, you can't be *all* filled up!"

"I'm afraid we are. All the rooms that are available. You see, most of them haven't been aired yet."

"That's all right. Plenty of time before dinner."

"I'm sorry. Afraid we can't accommodate you."

He didn't like me any more than I liked him. What he was telling me was sheer baloney, and we both knew it, and I certainly would have enjoyed pushing the heel of my hand into his mouth. He must have read that wish in my face, too, because he backed away a little.

What stopped me was the realization that I wasn't a cop now. I was just a private citizen. I had no right to get rough in this place. I didn't have anything but a name to associate it with the murder of Chauncey McCabe. No warrant, no authority of any kind.

"You mean you can't find one single room for a man?"

"I'm sorry. You should have made a reservation." He looked at his nails, the way only a hotel clerk can do. "There's a very nice place—"

"I want to stay here! This is just the kind of place I want!"

"I'm sorry," he said; but I'm dead certain he wasn't.

There didn't seem to be much I could do about it. But just as I was about to turn away, wondering whether it'd re-

lieve my feelings to paste the guy just once at least, there was a voice behind me:

"I think we should be able to fix the gentleman up, Mr. Gratz."

When I turned around I knew for the first time, definitely, unmistakably, that I had come to the right place.

I didn't think she recognized me. After all, we'd only been face to face for an instant, following a collision. But I couldn't be sure.

She was scared about something. The big brown eyes were rich with fear—not with panic, as they had been when I saw her before—but with a deep, tight fear. She looked like a girl who expects death to strike at any time. But it wasn't just that either—it was more than just physical fright. She was afraid of forces she couldn't understand, couldn't estimate, or anticipate. She was afraid not only for herself, but for somebody else. She was all alone; and that made her the more scared. She had to fight it out all by herself. She couldn't tell anybody else.

I can't tell you how I knew all this, just by looking at the girl. But I did. It must have been the eyes.

She gave me a swell smile, in spite of that. "I'm Mildred Grove," she said.

"Oh," I said. "Are you—uh—connected with the management?"

"My father is the owner. He's not here just now." She turned to the manager. "Can't we give the gentleman Number Seventeen, Mr. Gratz?"

"Oh, yes!" Gratz flashed a blatantly professional smile, and started fumbling for the register. "I'd forgotten about that room."

"It's my father's room," Mildred Grove explained to me, "but he won't be back for several days yet, maybe longer, and if you're still with us when he does come, I'm sure we can arrange

another room for him then. You see, we haven't been open long, and things are sort of topsy-turvey."

Gratz still didn't want to have me. "The rate on Seventeen," he said, looking at his nails and trying to sound careless, "is twenty-five dollars a day. American plan."

It's a good thing I wasn't chewing gum, or I would have swallowed it. Not that Sergeant Ralph would mind having the city of Newark pay twenty-five a day for his room and board—oh, my no! But this was different. I was going to have to pay this myself.

"It's pretty high, isn't it?" I managed to whisper.

"It's the regular rate."

The girl said quickly: "But I think we can make a ten-dollar rate, so early in the season. Get things started, eh?"

I said: "Good idea. Get thing started."

She tossed me a smile; but even then I could see the terror crowded in those big brown eyes. While Gratz was afraid I'd stay, this girl was afraid I wouldn't. And maybe that didn't make the Ralph heart do tricks! I know lonesomeness when I see it, because when I come to think of it, I'm a pretty lonesome guy myself. And this Mildred Grove wanted to talk to somebody she could trust. She was afraid of something, but it wasn't true. In fact, she was glad I had come.

I didn't look bad, either, in the new sport clothes I had.

Well, I registered as Gerald Ralston. In case there were initials on me somewhere. Gratz rang for a bellboy. At least I suppose he was intended to represent a bellboy. His costume was more like an automobile mechanic's. And from his general size and build, you might have taken him for a roll-your-own ad: put a ring in his nose

and lead him out into a pasture to bellow, you know.

This hulk gaped at me with amazement; and then, when Gratz gave him a dirty look, he scampered back into the darkness under the stairs, to reappear a moment later buttoning on a bellhop's coat. But he still wore greasy brown shoes and greasy brown pants.

"Take the gentleman's bag to Room Seventeen, and have one of the boys drive his car around to the garage. The little garage."

I said quietly to the girl: "Is something wrong, Miss Grove?"

She looked at me gratefully. "There's something horrible going on," she whispered. "I—I want to talk to you. This is a dangerous place!"

GRATZ bustled up, all phony politeness. He said he'd show me to my room, personally. He said the boy would bring up my bag right away. Then he just sort of stood there, gazing into space, not saying anything but standing close enough so that we couldn't talk without him hearing.

I gave him a fierce look, but it didn't take.

"Do you suppose the boy can get that rumble open?" I asked. "Tell him it's the little key."

Gratz went out on the veranda. He didn't go down the steps, just out on the veranda.

I said: "Yes?"

It came in a swift little burst, low and breathless.

"I'm so glad you're here. It—it must seem terrible to talk like this to a total stranger. Practically a total stranger. But I've just got to talk to somebody! There's a man here who—"

And then Gratz was back again. And he was back like a guy who's going to *stay* back, too. The bellhop came

after him, carrying my bag. While I was glaring at the bellhop, Gratz took Mildred Grove aside for a moment and whispered something to her. When I turned around she was walking away.

I started after her. "Could I talk to you for a minute, Miss Grove?"

She turned only her head, and she didn't turn that very far. "Not just now, please," she said. "I'm very busy."

Gratz was at my elbow again. He was all smiles. "Wouldn't you like to go to your room right away, Mr.—uh—Mr. Ralston? You must be tired after such a long drive?"

Well, so I went with him. . . .

It was a nice room, with a nice bath. It was on the ground floor, and the two windows opened upon the veranda which extended the whole front of the building. I could see that bishop-in-flannels knocking croquet balls around. He moved pompously, though he wasn't a big man, and he kept singing about being called lit-tle Buttercup. He was using two balls and two mallets, playing against himself.

Gratz went out, and the brass-buttoned orang-utan came in. He put the bag on the floor instead of on the rack, and when I handed him a dime he looked at it as if he didn't know what it was for.

"Oh!— Oh, yeah!" he said at last, reaching. He pocketed the dime, and shambled out, slamming the door. A moment later, he swung the door open again, without knocking.

"Tanks," he said, having forgotten that.

"Don't mention it," I said.

Well, I'd known lots of guys like him, and had talked with them lots of times—but usually in a back room at headquarters. What was a guy like that doing here? No wonder Mildred

Grove was scared. But she was scared of something more than just a back-alley tough.

So I unpacked, moving very slowly, for my whole body ached and my head still didn't feel any too good after the various things it had been socked with the previous afternoon. I stripped, got into a bathrobe, and stood for a while at one of the windows, watching the bishop.

Sure, I'll admit it. I knew I'd come to the right place, and I knew I was on something hot, but the truth is that I was thinking less about McCabe's murder than about Mildred Grove.

You see, they call me a pretty tough bachelor; but it isn't that I've ever had anything *against* women. As a sex, I guess they're all right. It's just that I'd never had time for them. There were a lot of years there when my mother was still living, and she was a hopeless invalid with only me to take care of her and see that she got fixed up right and all; and while I went out with a dame now and then I couldn't even think of marriage. My mother never said anything, but I knew it just couldn't be, so I never let myself think about it. And then when my mother died I'd been a cop for quite a while, and you more or less have to be crabby and suspicious to be a good cop, the way I figure it; and so I'd kind of got used to being that way.

I'd figured, up until the time I met Mildred Grove, that women—the real stuff I mean—were just something I'd missed. It was just the breaks. I wasn't either happy about it or sore about it. It was just the way things had gone, so what the hell?

But that was before I'd met Mildred Grove.

Well, pretty soon I snapped out of it. I went into the bathroom and blew

myself to a longish shower, first hot, then good and cold. It felt wonderful.

When I came back into the bedroom, drying myself, the first thing I saw was a square piece of paper on the bed. It hadn't been there before. One look at it was enough to make me jump.

The door was locked. I unlocked it, stepped out into the hall. Manager Gratz was coming down the corridor.

"Something you want, Mr. Ralston?"

I felt kind of silly, standing there with a towel wrapped around the place where you naturally would wrap it around; and I said something about ice water.

"I'll have the boy bring you some. I forgot to tell you that the room phones aren't connected. But there's a buzzer under the table."

I went back inside, crossed the room, stuck my head out of a window. The bishop was still engaged in a dreadful struggle against himself, with the red-banded ball two wickets behind the green-banded one. In a rocking chair down near the main entrance, perhaps fifty feet from my windows, Sour-face was an unmoving and expressionless spectator.

It was funny, all this peacefulness.

For you see, the paper I'd found had other, smaller pieces of paper pasted on it. The little pieces were words cut out of newspaper headlines, and they went like this:

ALL KNOW DETECTIVE
GO NOW IF WISH GO ALIVE

CHAPTER IV

Bonfire Evidence

THE old vanity was what was hit hardest. I wasn't scared; I was just hurt by the realization that I'd been

spotted. One thing I always prided myself on is the fact that I don't look like a detective. I had nothing but sport clothes with me, and I'd imagined I was giving a finished imitation of a tired business man. But somebody was wise already.

Who could have left this note?

The girl was out of the question.

The bishop couldn't have done it. Even if somebody had called or signaled to him that I was taking a shower, he couldn't have raced to the hotel, found the words in the paper, cut them out and pasted them up, entered my room by the door or by one of the windows, and then got back to his game again before I emerged from the bathroom. I hadn't been in that bathroom for more than five minutes.

The gorilla, who came with my ice water while I was sitting there thinking about this, was a possibility. But not a good one. I know men like him—it's my business—and I know that they're not the kind to do things that require fast thinking. They might be tough; but they take orders. This one was a born punk.

That left—of the people I'd seen or met—Gratz and the sour-faced baby outside. It could have been either of them.

Gratz had been in the corridor, coming *toward* my room, when I opened the door. But he might have heard me unlocking that door in time to turn around. He might originally have been going *away* from my room. And of course Gratz would have a passkey.

Sour-face, from where he sat, could hear me running the shower. He could have walked along the veranda, stepped right through either of the two open windows, left the note, and stepped out. Not only that, but Sour-face had been reading a copy of the New York

Star, and the words this note was made out of looked to me as though they'd been cut from the *Star*.

What did I do? Why, I stretched out on the bed and took a nap.

There was no sense even trying to think straight when I was so tired. But I was careful to put my gun under the pillow.

I'm one of those wonders you hear about who can sleep at any hour anywhere, and who can make up their minds when they go to sleep just exactly at what time they're going to wake up—and do it. It was about two when I stretched out, and I told myself that I'd get up at five, which I did. I dressed and strolled out to the lobby.

Miss Grove was at the desk, talking earnest and low to Gratz, who was scowling. But she went away before I came up.

"That this morning's *Star* I see there? Could I look at it?"

"Help yourself." Gratz was more sociable, but I think he still would have delighted in feeding me prussic acid with a spoon. "Seems to be only the second section . . . Don't know where the rest of it is. Had it here a little while ago."

I looked over the second section quickly. It's mostly classified ads and stuff like that, but what headlines there were hadn't been assaulted by scissors. The word "detective" didn't occur in any of them, nor the word "alive."

Gratz was muttering: "Can't understand what could have happened to that first part of it . . ."

"Doesn't matter," I said, and strolled outside.

"Dinner's at six," he called after me. "We bang a gong."

"Swell."

The bishop wasn't in sight. Sour-face still was sitting in that rocking

chair, glaring into the middle distance, and looking like a case of chronic indigestion. Same position, same expression. Only now he didn't have a copy of the New York *Star* in his lap.

I went down the veranda steps and sauntered along the drive, meaning to have a look at the back of this dump, with the excuse that I wanted to get something out of my car.

The garage I'd noticed during the winding approach to the Hollingshed was at least a third as big as the inn itself, and in better repair. It was long and fairly deep, and must have had accommodations for fifty cars. There was a concrete apron the length of it, the upper part tucked under the folding doors which comprised the whole front of the building. Those doors were closed. What's more, they were locked. With big locks.

REMEMBERING that Gratz had significantly said: "the *little garage*" when he commanded that my car be put away, I looked for that. It was far off to one side, in an awkward place, and it was nothing more than a three-car portable. The doors weren't even closed. My car was there all right, keeping company with a tired-looking middle-priced roadster. But why should they use a dinky little shack like this when they had such a fine big building in a better place?

A moving van rumbled around the end of the hotel and stopped in front of the big garage. It was a large, plain thing which could have used a coat of paint. "Collins Moving Service, Hackensack, N. J." it said on the side toward me. A man got out, opened one of the big garage doors, which functioned without a sound, and the van was driven inside.

I started for that door, but the man

from the truck was closing it as I got near.

"Hold it a minute, will you? I want to see something."

But he had the door shut by this time, tight. He shook his head.

"Sorry."

"What's the big idea?"

He shrugged.

"Them's orders. Have to get permission from the manager to go in there."

He was making this up as he went along. He wasn't very bright, and he didn't like the idea of me snooping around, but he was afraid to get nasty about it.

Before I had a chance to say anything else the door was opened again—though not far enough for me to get a look at anything inside—and a young man in a Palm Beach suit slipped out. He was thin, and had small blue eyes and a kind of funny way of holding his head back, his chin up. You knew right away, even if you didn't recognize him from his pictures, as I did, that he was somebody important, accustomed to getting a lot of attention. He nodded at me in a kind of superior way, his nose at the snooty angle, and started for the hotel. He started originally for the back door; and then he changed his mind and walked around the end of the building toward where the front door was.

I said: "That's Ellis Lapham, isn't it? The millionaire sportsman?"

The truck driver said, "Yeah," as if he hated to give me even that much information. He locked the garage door and made for the hotel.

It was beginning to get dark, and I walked all around that garage slowly. The big one, I mean. It was a well-built structure, like the hotel itself, and there didn't seem to be any windows. I was around back of it, sloughing

through some bushes there, and wondering whether there were skylights and how I could get up on the roof to find out, when I heard the dinner gong. I really was hungry, and besides, I didn't want to be suspiciously late, even if "all" did know I was a dick. I figured I could have a better look at this garage the next day. There was something funny about it. But then, for that matter everything was funny.

When I was walking across the clear space between the garage and the back of the hotel, I noticed smoke coming up from a trash barrel near the kitchen door. It was an ordinary steel barrel punctured with air holes near the top, such as anybody might use for burning up stuff, and I don't know what it was that made me stop next to it for a look inside. Just a hunch, I suppose.

The last little blue flame had flickered out. It was a newspaper—or at least a couple of pages of a newspaper—which had been burned. But it hadn't been crumpled. Where it had been white it was black now, and the black print turned gray. There was enough light so that I could see that it was a copy of the front page of the *Star*, and that some of the words had been cut out of some of the headlines.

"Hey!"

The truck driver, wearing a white coat, stood in the kitchen door.

"Oh, you're the chef now, eh?"

"I'm the cook. You better get in if you want anything to eat."

"Sure," I said. "Who was out here just now to burn up papers?"

The question seemed to startle him. He wasn't alarmed, he was just puzzled. And when he answered me, I'm sure he wasn't lying.

"Miss Grove," he said. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing," I said. "I just wondered."

BEFORE I went into the dining room, I made a telephone call. This was the best time to catch Captain Haggerty at his home, and I called him there. It looked perfectly safe because there wasn't any switchboard—only a dial instrument in a booth.

"Where the hell are you, anyway?"

"I'm studying nature, sweetheart. The kind that's seldom mild."

"Well, you better get back here, wherever you are."

I sang: "Come back, come back, wherever you are!"

"Feeling swell, ain't you? I wish I did."

"Things are happening, Hag. I don't know just what they are, yet, but I expect I'm going to have a lot of fun here pretty soon. I think people are going to start shooting or something."

"Well anyway, you better come back," he growled. "They're holding up that application for a leave of absence. There's something screwy going on here. I don't know what it is."

"There too?"

"Can't understand it myself, but I got orders to assign you to go to Atlanta tomorrow and pick up Socky McPherson when the Federals turn him loose."

"Hell! Why me? I've been to Atlanta before. Let one of the boys go who wants to make the trip."

"I know, but those are my orders."

"Why use a sergeant of homicide for a job like that?"

Haggerty was beginning to lose patience. He's a great guy, Haggerty, always worried about something, always morose, grumbling, but he'll stand with you through anything at all.

"Didn't I tell you I can't understand what's back of it? There's no sane reason why they shouldn't be glad to grant that application of yours. But no.

They're insisting that I send you to Atlanta."

"That comes from the Chief?"

"It comes from further back than that. From across the alley. Or maybe even further. Maybe all the way from Trenton. I wouldn't know."

It had me stumped. How could anybody else but Haggerty know that I was out working on the McCabe killing all by my lonesome? And Haggerty keeps a secret perfectly. Who was so anxious to get me away?

"It wouldn't be the Governor?"

"It's somebody in that neighborhood, George, if you ask me."

I said "Hell," and thought it over for a while. Then I asked Haggerty what was new on the investigation. He said nothing was. No trace of the Westwall kid. No trace of Bates. They weren't saying anything about Westwall, since it wasn't a matter of record anyway, but they'd sent out an alarm for Arthur Bates, with the best description they could get, over the six-state teletype circuit and over the state police circuit; and they were having posters printed. There was talk that the McCabe widow and some of McCabe's associates were going to offer a reward. The papers were blaring the thing all over the place, Haggerty told me, but as far as the cops were concerned they were just about where they'd been when they started.

"Sonny Castleton make anything more out of those prints?"

"No. We checked what clear ones we got with every loose burglar in the files. You knew there wasn't a complete set anywhere in the place, didn't you? That'd be too much to ask, of course. But we sent some single latents to Washington, thinking maybe the Battley files might turn up something."

"They only have big-time kidnapers

and extortionists and guys like that under the Battley system."

"I know, but we figured it was worth trying, anyway."

"Sure. How 'bout that piece of tweed?"

"Good tweed, but there wasn't enough of it for us to find out where it'd been sold. No stains on it or anything."

"How 'bout the straw-tipped Melacha butt we found in the apartment? That had lipstick on it."

"Sure. The laboratories tell us that it was so many ounces of white wax, and so many ounces of carmine, and so many grains of oil of sweet almond, and so many minims of otto of roses—whatever that is. I can get you the exact formula if you want."

"It wouldn't mean anything to me. What's the brand?"

"Senac's extra light. Blondes use it mostly, and red-heads. Listen: When are you coming in? McPherson gets out day after tomorrow, and if you think the city's going to pay for you to fly—"

"Sucky McPherson can get out and go and pick daisies, for all I care! I'm not working. I'm on a leave of absence."

"But it hasn't been granted!"

"All right. How am I to know that? I haven't been in touch with you or anybody else, and I haven't seen the papers. I've had a nervous breakdown, and I'm out in the country somewhere recuperating, and you don't know where it is, see? So why worry? That's one reason I called you at home instead of headquarters."

"But somebody knows you're out working on this thing!"

"Yeah, that's a fact," I said slowly. "Somebody does know that . . . Well, it's not on the official records."

"You're heading for a heap of trouble, George, unless you turn up something big!"

"I'm heading for a heap of trouble anyway, sweetheart. Toodle-oo! I'll call you tomorrow night again."

"You might at least tell me where you are!"

"Hag, you're such a slave of duty it might trouble you to know. I wouldn't want to put anything on your conscience. 'Bye."

IT'S the way being a detective is. You work like hell on a case, wracking your brains, chasing along dead-end alleys, following up hunches that dissolve like steam, driving yourself practically nuts—and then you find something right there at your feet. This time it happened to me literally. I'd hung up the receiver, and I was sitting there in that booth doing a lot of heavy thinking. I was anxious to get the thinking over with before I made my appearance in the dining room, partly because I hate to have to think when I'm eating, but mostly because I didn't want anything but cheeriness and light to show in my handsome countenance. Whether thinking really gives me any expression or not, I don't know; but my friends tell me it makes me look silly.

What I was wondering about was who the hell it could have been who pulled wires to have me sent to Atlanta? What was behind all this business anyway? The murder of a man like Chauncey R. McCabe ought to be a big enough case for anybody to handle without having unseen influences barging in from the shadows to make things that much harder. Now I didn't know where I stood. Who knew I was out here at the Hollingshed Inn? The girl whose father ran the

place was aware of the fact that I was a detective, but it was unthinkable that she was the one who had managed to exert influence enough to make Haggerty squirm. But if it wasn't her, who was it? Fighting the underworld was one thing—I was used to that—but fighting a force you couldn't find and couldn't name, was something else again. Give me an ordinary criminal, no matter how tough he is or how smart, and I know how to handle him. But a case like this—

And all the time there it was right at my feet. Right *between* my feet, as a matter of fact. I suppose I'd been staring at it all the while. And I almost got up and walked out of the booth without noticing it anyway.

It was a small piece of white paper, more or less rectangular in shape, and even before I picked it up for a better look I knew what it was. It was a torn scrap of a letter, a letter in a woman's handwriting, and it contained the end of a word, "atz." The last time I'd seen this piece of paper had been in my office at police headquarters just before somebody—somebody who was in this hotel now!—had stuck a gun against my neck and ordered me to squeeze myself into a steel locker.

And now here it was on the floor of a telephone booth more than fifty miles away.

It made me feel very close to the murderer of Chauncey R. McCabe. Whoever that murderer was, I'd be seeing him, or her, in a few minutes, when I went in for dinner.

I played wise about the piece of paper. I didn't pocket it. I examined it carefully, and then put it on the floor again in exactly the same position as it had been when I first saw it. There was just a chance that somebody was trying to find out whether I was the

celebrated Number One sleuth of the Newark Police Department. Just a chance.

But I couldn't stay in that booth forever; and if thinking really does give me a strained expression, as some of my friends claim, then the bunch in the dining room certainly must have known that I was thinking when I walked in there.

CHAPTER V

Unarmed!

THE born punk wasn't any more effective as a waiter than he'd been as a bellhop. He was mostly thumbs, and there were spots of blue paint on one of them. He put everything in the wrong place, and he spilled things, and he got things mixed up.

The food was terrible too. Especially for a place where they tried to soak you twenty-five a day. Overdone steak, lumpy mashed potatoes, and peas out of a can. Even the dessert, fruit pudding, had come from a can. Awful. But the coffee wasn't bad.

All this in a dining room which wouldn't have been small in the Waldorf-Astoria. It was the gloomiest place you can imagine. Most of the tables were crowded in the center and covered with dust covers. We ate along the walls—"we" being me, the bishop, Gratz, Sour-face, Ellis Lapham, a sad-looking dodo with nose glasses whom the waiter called Dr. Himbaugh, and a spectacularly red-headed wench of forty or so. An unsociable crowd. Each at a table by himself—except that the red-head, who was the remains of a mighty good-looking woman, was with the bishop. She talked all the time. I couldn't hear what she was saying, but I don't suppose I missed much. The bishop was being very polite.

Mildred Grove fluttered in a bit late, and when she started to pass my table I rose. She had to stop. But there was no smile.

"Is everything all right?"

"The food's pretty gosh-awful, but I'm not kicking. Sit down."

"I'm afraid it's the best we can manage. You see, we really haven't got the place in shape yet to receive many guests."

Well, I had made up my mind before coming into this dining room that if Mildred Grove acted like that I had no other choice than to arrest her. It would be the orthodox thing to do. I'd always been taught—not in that many words, but it amounted to the same thing—to arrest first and investigate afterward. And after all, I had seen this girl running out of the apartment house in which Chauncey McCabe was killed, just a few minutes after that murder. I could arrest her as a material witness and wouldn't get into any trouble at all.

I had told myself I was getting soft. I should have arrested her before. But I didn't like to do that.

And even now, in spite of her chilly manner, I still hesitated. I'm no Eskimo, but I can take it. The girl wasn't really disliking me. She was putting on some sort of an act, presumably for the benefit of somebody in this room. Whatever she said, and whatever her mouth expressed, there was still that look of stark terror in her eyes.

I leaned closer. I'm not used to trusting people; but in spite of all my good resolutions, I found myself trusting this girl.

"And when you do get guests," I said, "what do you do? You tell them to blow, if they don't want to be laid out on a slab."

"I don't understand you."

"Why all the beating around the bush? Why not come right up to me and warn me that I'm likely to get hurt if I hang around?"

She got very pale. She leaned a little against the edge of my table. There was nothing on her cheeks but powder, but her lips were rouged, and when the blood left her face the lips stood out bright.

I said: "Cigarette?" and offered her my pack, knocking a few loose.

She murmured: "Thank you. I don't smoke."

It was pretty convincing, to me. If she really was a smoker this was just exactly the time when she would have wanted a cigarette the most.

I said: "Sit down, Miss Grove. We have a lot of things to talk over. Don't be afraid of me."

She wavered, hesitated. I could tell that. As a matter of fact, I thought she was pretty near to fainting for a moment there, and I moved closer to her, ready to help her into a chair.

"I don't know—I don't understand—what you mean."

"Sit down," I invited again. "This is as good a place as any for us to hold a little conference. Sit down and tell me who you're afraid of."

"Well, maybe I—maybe if I did tell you—" She was moving toward a chair when the bishop appeared between us.

"Not very sociable the way we've been ignoring you, Mr.—uh—Mr.—" He turned to the girl. "Won't you introduce us, Miss Grove?"

She had snapped out of it now. The moment was gone. The bishop's presence had brought back the chilly manner; and she introduced us—and then walked off.

The bishop's name was Alvin T. Swainton.

I tried: "Kind of out-of-the-way place, isn't it?"

"I like it here," he said. He had a kind of dreamy way of talking, as if he was thinking nice thoughts all the time. "It's quiet. And the more I fool around in Wall Street, trying to recover, the more I lose. So I've decided to let things slide for a while, and I'm out here to play croquet and forget about business. Do you play croquet, Mr. Ralston?"

I said I hadn't played since I was a kid.

"We must have a game tomorrow," he said. "I'll probably beat you. Nobody else here will play with me, I'm so good."

He said this with a child-like pride, half kidding himself and yet half meaning it too. You couldn't help but like the guy.

"I suppose the others feel very much as I do about this place," he said. "It certainly hasn't anything wonderful in the way of service, or decorations, and the food's pretty bad, but it is quiet."

"Yes," I said. "It's quiet all right."

"And I hope it stays that way."

I said quickly: "What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean—" He waved pudgy white hands—"I mean I hope people don't begin to 'discover' the place, that's all."

THERE was some silence. He sipped his coffee, and I tried to get interested in the lifeless pudding. I was thinking that Alvin T. Swainton was about the nicest gambler I'd ever met. Because to me they're all gamblers, whether they do it over roulette tables or in Wall Street. The psychology's the same, and that's what counts.

"Charming girl, that Miss Grove," he said at last.

"Yeah, she's kind of nice."

"Her father's a charming man, too. Have you met him?"

"No. She said he's away for a little while."

"Ah, yes! I'd forgotten! Well, you'll like him when you meet him. More sociable than most of these people here."

"They do look like a pretty down-cast bunch," I said.

"They're friendlier than they look, however. You must let me introduce you, when you've finished with your dinner. Ellis—Ellis Lapham, the tennis star, you know?—that light-haired youngster over by the window—he's really quite pleasant when you get to know him. His nerves are bad, poor boy. Too much hard sport."

As a matter of fact, Ellis Lapham's nerves were celebrated, and if they had snapped at last it certainly wasn't amazing. Lapham was one of those pampered sons of the rich you read about, and he loved excitement and danger like some men love liquor. Always after a thrill. Tennis happened to be the sport in which he excelled, but it was hardly his favorite. Generally he went in for more perilous amusements. Speed was a passion with him. High-powered automobiles, racing boats, aeroplanes. Anything with danger in it. He was restless and discontented when he wasn't risking his life.

This made his presence at the Hollingshed all the more curious.

"And old Dr. Himbaugh, the one with the nose glasses over there, can really be very entertaining when he warms up. He's an excellent bridger. By the way, do you play contract, Mr. Ralston?"

"Never had time to learn."

"Too bad. We'd been looking for a fourth. Mrs. West is very fond of the

game. She's the lady I was sitting with a little while ago. Quite vivacious. A shade talkative at times, but she can be very charming."

"What about the baby with—I mean, what about the man with the down-on-the-world expression, over there?"

Swainton frowned. A very delicate frown, implying damn near anything you wanted it to imply. But it was evident that here was somebody whom he didn't consider "charming."

"He's a Mr. Beacon. From Philadelphia, I believe. I really don't know much about him. He keeps to himself mostly." He stood up, glancing at my empty dessert dish. "Shall we saunter around and meet a few of them? We might get up a game of racehorse rummy or something."

I said: "I'm going to bed early tonight. Dead tired."

"Oh, of course! You've been driving a long way, of course."

So he had been looking at the register? I had signed myself as from Chicago, praying that nobody would ask me whom I knew in Chicago, because as a matter of fact I didn't know a damn soul there.

Anyway, I met the gang. Himbaugh was affable, with a thick German accent. I could see that he was looking me over pretty carefully. He wasn't anywhere near as old a guy—when you got close to him—as he had seemed from across the room. Ellis Lapham stared at me down his nose, but he made an effort to be nice. Mrs. West gushed a lot, and was all fizzy over the fact that I didn't play bridge. I noticed that she smoked straw-tipped Melachas. Sour-face Beacon managed to be polite enough to ask me how long I was going to stay at the Hollingshed, and when I said it depended he asked what it depended on.

"Oh, mostly on whether I find it quiet enough here."

"It's very quiet," Beacon said. "And I hope it stays that way."

"I hope it does too," said Swainton, laughing a soft laugh.

"Well, as far as I'm concerned tonight, it doesn't make much difference," I said. "I'm going to bed right away and sleep like a log."

But of course I didn't sleep like that. I never do, no matter how tired I am.

And when I wake up, I wake up all over. That was how I woke up this night, along around three o'clock, knowing instantly that somebody was in the room with me. I couldn't see anybody, I couldn't hear anybody. I just *knew* that somebody was there.

Trying to be as quiet as I could, I reached under the pillow for my gun. It gave me a funny feeling down low in my stomach when I found that it wasn't there. . . .

Sergeant George Ralph feels murder in the air at the Hollingshed. What hidden under-currents—what hates and desires and enmities—are forcing these ill-sorted guests to a baffling mystery and a blood-speeding climax? Next week's smashing installment plunges into new intrigue and stranger adventure!

Criminals Sterilized

THERE is a growing movement for sterilization of persons considered unfit for society in several nations of the world today, the most notable being Germany. In that country 56,244 persons were sterilized in 1934. Sterilizations in the United States up to 1936 numbered slightly over 23,000.

In this country only about five per cent of the persons sterilized have been criminals. The bulk of cases has been among the insane and feeble-minded. More than half of all the persons sterilized have been insane and probably forty per cent were classified as feeble-minded. The laws are virtually inoperative in many States because of legal technicalities and the caution with which they are enforced. Prior to 1927, several State sterilization laws were held unconstitutional, but in that year the United States Supreme Court sustained the Virginia statute in the case of *Buck versus Bell*.

—Michael O'Hara



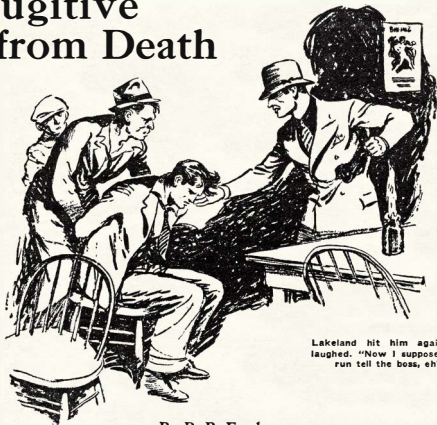
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UPDRAFT LATEST DISCOVERY
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Fugitive from Death



Lakeland hit him again and laughed. "Now I suppose you'll run tell the boss, eh?"

By B. B. Fowler

Author of "Safety Deposit," "Burn Old Pictures," etc.

OVER a cigarette and coffee, Red Blake watched the darkness deepen in the quiet Main Street of Carbury. Over his head a fan thumped, lazily stirring the steamy air into sluggish currents that swirled about his head.

It was Red's second cup of coffee, so hot that it burned all the way down. Perspiration ran in little trickles along his lean jaw. He rested an elbow on the counter, his wide shoulders slumped languidly. The second cup of coffee was to keep him awake. He intended to

With Gunmen Hot on His Trail, Red Blake Had to Hide Away a Beautiful Girl and Find a Master Criminal

drive the remaining three hundred miles between Carbury and New York before morning.

His gray eyes brightened at the thought. He was going back to New York after being away for a year. He had worked his way across the continent to Los Angeles, held a job there and then got homesick for the old Globe and New York. Back in Pleasantville he had run into a murder that was disguised as suicide. He had cracked that case open and handed the exclusive story to the Globe, thereby insuring the return of

his old job with a nice bonus waiting for him at the office. He wanted to get back, collect the bonus and slip back into harness again.

He watched the few pedestrians idly as they walked through the heat of the almost deserted street. Then his gray eyes narrowed. A boy dressed in overalls and sweat shirt was coming down the street. He hugged a bundle under one arm and kept to the shadows as he scurried along.

The lean fingers tightened on the handle of the coffee cup as the boy, meeting a passerby, ducked into a dim doorway. He scuttled out again, glanced up and down the street and ran across with a queer, awkward stride. At the back of Red's old battered roadster the boy threw a frightened look up and down the street, lifted the lid of the rumble seat and clambered in. The lid closed with a clang as Red set the coffee cup down and swore softly, "Well, I'll be damned."

It wasn't just a case of hitch-hiker trying to steal a ride. Red had seen more than that in the boy who crossed the street. Fear had been riding on his slim shoulders. Sheer panic had been in the furtiveness of act and gesture. And there was something else about the boy that made puckers between Red's eyes.

He walked out of the lunch counter slowly. He stood on the sidewalk before the door as a blue sedan pulled to a halt at the opposite curve. From up the street a man was walking rapidly. The driver of the sedan got out and waited for the approaching man to reach the car.

The pedestrian halted and said in a voice that carried across the quiet street, "She didn't pass me, Quade."

The man addressed as Quade said

harshly: "Damn it, she must have! When I saw her she was headed this way. She had to come this way."

The other man said in a surly growl, "But I'm telling you she didn't."

Quade gazed across the street. "Maybe she ducked into the hamburger joint. Let's go see."

The other man agreed: "Okay, let's go. I could stand a cup of coffee myself."

Quade was a long-necked, high-shouldered man with dull eyes in a sallow face and a mouth that looked as though it were tasting something sour. The other was little and sandy and furtive.

Quade let his dull eyes rest on Red as he halted at the lunch counter door. His voice was as dull and colorless as his eyes. "You see anything of a—" he hesitated, "a young kid dressed in overall and sweat shirt go by here?"

Red made his face very empty and vacant as he shook his head, and mumbled in a bucolic drawl, "No, mister, I ain't seen nobody."

The little man snarled, "Aw, hell, Quade, these small town dopes never see anything. C'mon get that cup of coffee." Behind him Red could hear them climbing the three steps to the restaurant.

HE waited till the screen door banged behind them. Very leisurely he walked across the pavement and with elaborate slowness lighted a fresh cigarette. He flicked the match into the street and as lazily crawled behind the wheel of his roadster. The noisy motor came to life under the pressure of the starter and Red let the clutch in slowly.

Memory had prodded the reporter as Quade had crossed the street. He remembered now where he had seen

him before. Quade had been strong arm man for a blackmailing rat named Kirk Lakeland. Lakeland had been a reporter on the Star with Red for a while.

Now Quade was out here in the sticks chasing a girl dressed in boy's clothes. And there was the threat of death in Quade's dull eyes. It made a mystery that narrowed Red's eyes speculatively.

Five miles outside the town he drove into a side road, jerked the rumble seat open and snapped:

"All right, sister, climb out!"

The girl's face was a white oval of fear as she clambered out of the rumble seat. Her eyes were dark pools of terror under the shadow of the hat brim. She clutched her bundle with shaking hands and stared at Red. The fear in her eyes made Red shiver deep down inside.

Her voice was a tight, strained whisper. "Are you—one of them?"

Red tried to make his smile reassuring. His voice was deep and soft. "No, kid, I'm not one of them. You can trust me. I saw you climb into my car before the two men came on the scene. Better tell me all about it."

The tremor in the girl's shoulders became a convulsive shudder. She dropped the bundle, sat down on the running board with her face buried in her hands and began to sob.

Red stood gazing down at her. The cold spot deep inside Red began to turn hot. His face was a rigid mask of rage. He thought again of the dull-eyed Quade and began to tremble with a deep consuming wrath. But his voice gave no hint of that as he patted the girl's shoulder clumsily and said in a voice that was curiously gentle: "Tell me what it's all about, kid. I'll see you through."

The girl shook her head and stared up at Red. Her voice was broken and faint. "I don't know! I don't know! I only know that those two awful men were after me. They wanted to kill me. I saw it in the eyes of the tall one. Why should they want to kill me?" she asked piteously.

The rage in Red's heart was cold and savage and terrible; she was an appealing sort of kid. But he kept his voice gentle and soothing as he encouraged her to speak:

"I wouldn't know that, kid. But I'm going to find out. You just begin at the beginning and tell me everything. Tell me who you are, where you came from and all the rest."

The story she told Red didn't fit with the spot she was in. Hired killers like the two in the sedan didn't go around trying to bump off girls like this one, who called herself Marion Handley.

She had lived in the town of Carbury all her life. For the past year she had worked in a soda fountain place. She had a few friends, no enemies that she knew about. It didn't make sense. But, just the same, Red sensed something big behind the events of the night. He smelled a big story.

Patently Red began to check on her tale. "Your father died two years ago. Your mother a year later. Where did they come from?"

"They weren't my real father and mother," Marion said weakly. "I called them Dad and Mom because they brought me up after my mother left me with them as a baby."

RED listened to that phase of her story. Her mother had arrived in Carbury, giving the name of Mary Smith, with her infant daughter. She was looking for a couple to board her

child. The childless Handleys were more than willing to take on the job.

Mary Smith promised to send money and come back in a year for the child. For six months the money arrived as had been promised. After that—silence. No more money came and Mary Smith never appeared again. That's all the girl knew of the circumstances.

Red checked on that first. "Haven't you anything to show who you were?"

The girl's voice was still weak and broken. "The baby clothes I wore when mother left me. And"—her voice broke—"a picture of my mother that she left with me. That's all."

She took the picture out of the bundle and showed it to Red. It was of a woman very slim and stately and lovely. The picture was old and cracked, but the beauty of the woman shone through all that. Gazing at the picture Red asked, "When did these two birds show up?"

The girl shivered and said in a whisper: "Three days ago. They appeared in town and began to ask questions. Then they came to me. The tall man came to the soda fountain and offered me a job in New York. He said he was a theatrical agent looking for new talent. I knew he was lying. There was that awful look in his eyes when he talked to me. It was as if he already saw me dead."

She gasped, and went on: "I refused to listen to him. Next day two of them tried to get me into their car. I got away somehow and hid. I was deathly afraid. I got to a friend's house and they called the police. The police said it was just a couple of fresh fellows trying to pick me up. But I knew it wasn't that. I got the boy in the house to give me some of his old clothes. Tonight I slipped out. I knew that they

were still after me. I was coming down the street when I saw the little man. I saw him before he saw me and ran back. Then I saw the blue sedan away up the street. I got in your roadster. It was my only chance. Now what am I to do?"

Red patted her shoulder again.

"You just leave it all to your old Uncle Red. Someone knows who you are. The way they've acted means you're damned important to someone. I've got a hunch that someone is in New York. There were New York license plates on the blue sedan. The two hoods had New York written all over them. I'm bound for New York. You come with me. I'll stake you and put you under cover while I untangle this mess."

He made his voice sound reassuring. He was almost certain that the core of the mystery was in New York. He had one chance to pull the mystery into the open.

He thought of that as he drove through the night, the girl huddled beside him. He had driven a couple of hours when she fell asleep. Red glanced down at the pale oval of her face, the red lips that trembled with fear even as she slept, and felt a lump in his throat. She was so little and fragile and lovely. He thought again of Quade and the savage rage wiped everything else out of his heart.

HE was haggard, his eyes red-rimmed with fatigue when he stalked into the Globe news room the following afternoon. He didn't look at the boys who shouted at him as he passed. He didn't stop until he slumped into a chair beside Griff Boyle, the City Editor.

Boyle glanced sideways, his heavy face heavier with some inner trouble

that shone in his hard eyes. He straightened as he saw Red and stuck out a beefy hand. "Hiyah, Red. It's good to see you back on the job. That was a swell piece of work you did on the Dawn case. We left all the other sheets in town stalled at the post. You've got a bonus of a hundred bucks waiting for you. Turn in some more work like that and I'll put you through a nice raise."

He lifted his head and stared across the newsroom and added morosely, "That is if I stay on this damn sheet much longer."

Red started to speak but Boyle cut him off. "This is just between you and me, Red. We've got a new owner of the Globe. Big Bill Sawtelle bought it and gave it to that no-good pup of his to play with. I guess he figures it might make a man of him. Hell!"

Red felt his heart sink a little. He had looked forward to coming back to the Globe. All the way across the continent from California he had thought of the old gang. He knew how Boyle felt. Cliff Sawtelle was the step-son of Big Bill Sawtelle, millionaire, one-time Governor, all-time big shot in the business world. Cliff was, as Boyle had said, a no-good pup. He had never brought his step-father anything but trouble.

Then he remembered his own trouble.

"Listen, Boss. I've got a story that I want to write. It's not damned important as it stands. But I want you to do me a favor and give it a front page spot."

Boyle listened as Red explained and shook his head heavily. "A gal dressed up in boy's clothes crawls into the rumble seat of your car and you bring her to New York. How could I rate that a front page spread?"

Red leaned over and said tightly: "Because I yanked her out from under the noses of two yeggs who were after her. They were hired killers, Boss. I know the type when I see them. Therefore somebody thinks she's important enough to kill. I want to know why. I think there's a hell of a big story behind it. I've got her under cover. I want to write a story that will lead them to me and make them stick their necks out."

Boyle stared at him silently for a second.

"If what you hint is true, you are the one who is sticking his neck out. When those boys get on your tail you'll be behind the eight ball. I think it's a dumb play." He shrugged heavily. "But I guess you want to play it your way. Go ahead and write the story. Make it snappy. You've got only a half hour between you and the deadline."

He glanced through the story that Red tossed on his desk twenty minutes later and shook his head slowly. "It's dynamite, kid." He glanced up his eyes questioning. "Where's the girl now?"

Red glanced around the newsroom and said: "I rather keep that under my hat for awhile. I've got her under cover. Let it go at that."

Then he stiffened with a jerk, his eyes going cold and narrow. The man coming across the newsroom was immaculate in white Oxfords and Palm Beach suit. He had dark eyes and full red lips that smiled sneeringly as he saw Red.

"What the hell is Kirk Lakeland doing on this sheet?" he asked Boyle harshly.

Boyle growled: "He's another reason why it's only a question of time till I blow this job. Sawtelle's first of-

ficial act was to give that rat a job on the staff."

LAKELAND'S sneer grew more pronounced as he halted beside the desk. "So the hero is back in town. And with another scoop already. My! My!" He threw a glance at the copy in Boyle's hand and the sneer spread to his eyes.

Boyle asked with exaggerated irony: "How about yourself? Have you got something, or are you waiting till next month to turn in a story?"

Lakeland laughed insultingly. "The big boss"—he accented the BIG—"has some special work he wants me to do. Red can take care of the small stuff till I clean up on that."

Boyle kept his lips clamped closely as Lakeland walked away. Then he said through clenched teeth, "One day I'm going to jump that parlor-trained poodle and kick his teeth down his throat."

"If I don't beat you to it," Red corrected. But his eyes were very thoughtful as he watched Lakeland cross the room. He wondered if he still used Quade or if the killer was working for another boss now. Surely, he thought, Lakeland would have no use for a strong-arm man on his Globe job.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'll soon find out," he told himself. Aloud he said: "I'm going over to the hotel and catch a couple of hours' sleep before that story hits the street. I'll need all my strength after that."

It was three hours later when he strolled into the Globe newsroom to meet Boyle's bellow. "Hey, Red, I've been phoning your hotel for half an hour! Sawtelle wants to see you on that story of yours."

Cliff Sawtelle jumped up from his

desk as Boyle and Red came into the room. His eyes were gleaming, his thin face slightly flushed. "Do you realize, Blake," he snapped excitedly, "that you've got something big here. This story has everything, mystery, drama, human interest! Man, there may be dynamite behind this."

"I know there is," Red said evenly. "I'm going to find out where it is."

A voice at Red's elbow said: "The big, bold hero. He's going to do it with a brass band and banners."

Red's lips thinned as Lakeland sauntered up to stand at the end of Sawtelle's desk.

Sawtelle snapped: "Nonsense, Blake. This is too big for any one man to handle. Supposing the men you want to pull into the open pick you up first. What's going to happen to the girl? We can't take that chance. We've got to handle this right."

He put slim hands on the desk and stared at Red. "We'll move her into the best hotel in town. We'll demand police protection for her. We'll make a feature of it. I'll put Lakeland on the story with you. Where is the girl now?"

Red answered: "That's something I know and won't tell. This is my story and I'm handling it."

Red saw the muscles in Sawtelle's face tighten. Then Lakeland drawled: "Hell, can't you see how it is. Look in Red's room. I'll bet you find the gal there. Especially if she's pretty."

Red hardly shifted on his feet as he whipped his right over in a smashing blow that landed squarely on Lakeland's mouth.

Red blew on his knuckles as he watched Lakeland pick himself up. The dapper reporter held the back of his hand across his split lips and stared at Red with eyes that were venomous.

Red grinned tightly, "You asked for it!"

He swung back to face Sawtelle and said harshly, "I suppose I get the can for that. Well, okay! It was worth it."

SOMETHING in Sawtelle's eyes puzzled him. Then he forgot that and turned away. He caught Boyle's eyes and saw mingled pleasure and rage there. "So long, Boss," Red said lightly, "I'll be seeing you."

He was half way to the door when Sawtelle's voice brought him around with a jerk.

"Hold it, Blake! Don't be a damned fool! I admit you acted outrageously. But, after all, perhaps Lakeland had it coming to him. We'll forget all that. We have the makings of a big story on our hands. The main question is how to handle it."

Red swung around. His eyes went from Boyle's puzzled frown to Sawtelle's tense alertness. "It's my story," Red said harshly. "I handle it my way or not at all."

Cold rage welled up into Sawtelle's eyes and his hands on the desk clenched convulsively. Then he shrugged and laughed. "All right, Blake, have it your way. Go ahead and handle it. But I warn you, if you fall down on it I'll have your head."

"If I fall down on this story," Red retorted dryly, "you won't get my head. I'll have none to get!"

Boyle followed him out of the room. His voice growled, "Why the hell should everybody get excited about a story?" His tone changed. "Boy, that did my heart good! Only I wish I could have kicked him in the face before he got up."

Before Boyle left the news room he said earnestly: "Listen, Red, let

me in on this! Hell, if you do get bumped the kid is left without a chance in the world. At least tell me where she is. I won't spill it unless something happens to you. You can trust me."

Red shook his head. "I know I can trust you, Boyle. But I'm working out a hunch. I've got my own hand and I'm going to play it out. But thanks just the same, Boss. You'll get your story."

From the Globe office Red went down the street, stopping in a drug store to telephone the hotel where he had left the girl. Her voice came to him over the wire, eager and excited. "Have you found out anything yet, Red?"

Red smiled into the receiver. "Not yet, Marion. This is just a call to let you know I'm all right. Stay right there till I give you word to move. That's all."

He hung up and walked slowly along the street. A block further along he slipped into an alley, flattened against the building and waited. When Lakeland stopped and peered down the alley, Red stepped out swiftly, caught the front of his coat and with his left whirled him around and smashed him with his right.

"Another one for luck," he said harshly. "If you keep on following me, I'm going to get tough."

Lakeland got up more slowly than he had in the office. One hand was in his coat pocket. His eyes were murderous; broken lips pulled back from his white teeth.

Red knew what the hand in the pocket meant. For a second he braced himself for the shock of lead. He could see the intent in Lakeland's eyes. But, even as he watched he saw the murderous notion swallowed by something cold and crafty and calculating.

Lakeland's voice was as thin and cold as sleet. "I'll get you for that, Blake! I'll have your heart for that! But I'll have it at my own time and in my own way."

"Yeah," Red drawled, "I know how that is. When my back is turned."

His voice was steady, but in his throat a pulse began to hammer. Now he knew that Lakeland was in on the deal. But behind Lakeland there must be someone else. It was that someone else Red wanted.

He was fishing for cigarettes in his pocket when he thought of something that made him swear softly. He had taken the picture from Marion and had forgotten what he had wanted to do with it at the office. He turned and ran back.

POP HARGRAVES was in the morgue, peering nearsightedly through a folder of clippings. Red slapped the photograph on the desk in front of Pop and said: "Go to work on that. See if you can match it with anything that appeared in the papers eighteen years ago. If you find it, keep it under your hat till I get back. If I don't come back give it to Boyle."

As he came back into the newsroom, Sawtelle was just leaving Boyle's desk. He stared at Red inscrutably. "I hope," he said thinly, "that you intend to do something yourself about that story."

"I'm on my way now," Red snapped as he stalked out of the newsroom, through the empty corridor toward the street. He whirled as he heard a stir of movement in the shadows behind him, only to meet something that sent him crashing down into darkness.

He came out of the darkness in the twilight of a bad dream. He was sitting at the top of a high peak. Some-

thing swung like a pendulum over his head. He tried to duck the swing, but he couldn't seem to avoid it. It smashed with rhythmic precision against the side of his head. He struggled to avoid it.

Then the twilight faded and he found himself sitting in a chair. Someone was gripping his arms from behind. The pendulum was Lakeland's open hands smashing him methodically left and right.

Lakeland's split lips twitched and his eyes glittered. "I told you I'd get you, tough guy."

Red said thickly, "So you're in this, are you, rat?"

Lakeland hit him again and laughed. "Now I suppose you will run and tell the boss and have me fired. That's a laugh."

Someone at the back of the room came forward. It was the little sandy-haired thug he'd seen on the street in Carbury. He had a gun in one hand. With the other he pushed Lakeland away. At the same instant the man behind Red loosened his grip and walked around to stare at him. It was the high-shouldered man with the dull eyes.

He stared at Red with his dead eyes and said hoarsely, "Well, are you ready to talk? Or do we have to make you?"

The little man snickered and said: "I was afraid you'd hit him too damn hard, Quade. I was afraid he'd never come out of it."

"Well, he came out," Quade said thickly. "Now he'll talk."

Red licked his lips with a tongue that felt as if it were covered with fur. The top of his head seemed to be rising and falling in throbbing agony.

Quade hit him in the face and Red's head felt as if it were going to ex-

plode. "Well, are you going to talk? What did you do with the girl?"

Red's voice sounded thick and hopeless. "All right, I'll talk." He cringed away from Quade's poised fist. "She's at the Colton up on Forty-Sixth. Registered as Mary Belden. Room Two-Fourteen."

Without turning his head, Quade said to Lakeland, "Call the Colton and check that."

Lakeland's voice was sharp and thin as he talked to the Colton. "You say Miss Belden is registered? In Room Two-Fourteen, eh? No, I don't want to speak to her now. I was just checking up to see if she had arrived all right. This morning, eh? Thank you."

He hung up and turned slowly. "I guess the guy is giving it to us straight. It checks."

"It had better," Quade said harshly. He stared at Red, swaying in his chair. "You, Pete," he said to the sandy-haired man, "stick here and keep a gun on this bird. I think we slugged him nutty. But don't take any chances. Put a slug through his leg if he starts anything. But don't kill him. We may want to ask some more questions if the gal isn't there."

Red began to chuckle as Lakeland and Quade closed the door. Pete stared at him, amusedly at first, but with mounting curiosity as the chuckles grew in volume and craziness.

Red let his head loll as he laughed thickly. Pete stepped closer, alert, the gun held in a tense hand. "What the hell is so funny?" he demanded.

HIS curiosity deepened into something like wonder as Red's crazy chuckles grew and expanded. Red let his head bob on his chest as he laughed; vacantly, madly.

Pete took a few steps away, lean-

ing forward from the waist. He snarled and got nothing in answer but the same crazy chuckles. He changed his tone and tried to be cajoling. "Come on, guy, tell me what's so funny? C'mon."

Red began to mumble thickly. "Quade's walking into it. Cops at the Colton waiting for him."

Pete took another step forward, his mouth sagging, ears flaring to catch Red's almost unintelligible mumble. "What the hell are you gabblin' about? Come on. Tell me."

Red's only answer was a thick chuckle and another babble of words that strung together into gibberish. And Pete took another step forward, his face twisted into a mask of wonder and suspicion.

One of Red's feet snapped up viciously as Pete came within range. The toe of the shoe hit its mark, the wrist of Pete's gun hand, and the gun sailed across the room.

Whirling, Pete jumped back. But he wasn't fast enough to get away from the fist that came like a flung rock to land on the point of the jaw. Left and right, he took the swings of Red until he went down to lie motionless on his face.

Without a backward glance, Red leaped for the door. He raced down the flight of stairs and out through the shabby lobby to the street. The drug store sign half a block away drew him on the run.

In the telephone booth, he listened while the operator at the other end told him that Miss Belden didn't answer. His heart felt like a lump of ice in his chest as he hung up the receiver and staggered blindly out to the street. Something had gone wrong. He had a scheme that had seemed almost perfect. And somehow it had gone hay-

wire. And he couldn't figure how. He had checked the girl in at the Colton. Then she had walked out to go to the Governor Brett. But she was not at the Governor Brett now.

Flugging a cruising taxi, he flung himself into the seat, gruffly giving directions to the driver. Now he had to begin all over again. But now all the ends were loose once more. His only hope now lay in the photograph he had given Pop. If Pop had checked that with anything in the files he would have something to go on.

He barged through the news room, past Boyle who stared at him in gaping amazement. He flung the door into the musty morgue wide and halted, frozen in his tracks.

Pop Hargraves was lying on his face, one arm doubled under him. Beside him lay a heavy metal paper weight. A trickle of blood ran from the back of Pop's battered skull to swell the widening pool on the floor.

Kneeling, Red turned Pop over gently. He held a hand to his heart, shook his head, and felt for a pulse that was not there. There was blank amazement in his eyes. He knew that Lakeland had not done this. Lakeland had been with him. And Pop had not been dead many minutes. His body was still almost as warm as in life.

Rising slowly, Red glanced around the room. One of the file cases was standing open. Pop must have been searching there when the killer came in behind him. It was somebody who had access to the news room and the morgue. And it hadn't been Lakeland.

Bafflement swept over Red even as cold disappointment touched him. The photograph he had given Pop was gone. And Pop must have had it handy while he looked. A slight noise in the doorway made him glance up.

Boyle was standing there, his heavy face blank with amazement. He swore hoarsely.

"What happened to Pop?"

"Somebody slugged him," Red said tersely. "Somebody in the building is in on the game."

Boyle's voice was harsh. "Well, Red, you *would* play it alone! You wouldn't give anyone else a hint of what it was all about."

"How the hell could I know," Red snapped, "that this damn case would move so near home? Hell, Boss, use your head! Who could have come in here and slugged Pop?"

BOYLE shook his head again. He balanced the slug of type metal in his hand and said heavily: "Damn it, Red! I've got a good mind to slug you with this. You should have spilled what was on your mind."

The answer on Red's lips became a gasp as he glanced at Pop again. The fingers of one skinny hand were tightly clenched about something. Kneeling, Red gently unclasped the fingers and smoothed out the piece of newsprint he found there.

It was a clipping that Pop had held in his hands when the killer had crept up behind him to strike. He had gone down gripping it in his death agony.

Red stared at the picture and the half column of printing that followed. He raised his head and stared fixedly at Boyle for a long ten seconds. Then he pushed past him into the newsroom, throwing back over his shoulder, "Come on, Boss. I think I've got it now."

With Boyle at his heels he strode into Cliff Sawtelle's office. He flung it open and halted in the doorway, staring at the white-faced man who stood up, his hands out of sight beneath the

desk. Red's voice was brittle as he held up the clipping. "Here it is, Sawtelle! You didn't get all the stuff from Pop!"

Sawtelle's hand came from beneath the desk with a jerk. For a split second Red faced the menace of the gun. The something whizzed past his head to land with a sodden crash on Sawtelle's forehead.

Red jerked around to face Boyle's hard stare. "Some day," he said dully, "you'll learn to tell what the hell you're trying to pull around here. If I hadn't followed you, you'd be a damn dead coot right now. Maybe you'll tell me now."

Red had crossed the room to stare down at Sawtelle's staring eyes before he spoke. Then he repeated, "How the hell could I know that it would come right back to the Globe to roost?"

Boyle commented somberly, "Trouble always comes back home. I'll call the cops. Then you can tell me what the hell it's all about."

"Don't call them yet," Red said. "They can wait." He stared at Boyle with eyes that had lost all their life and sparkle. "The girl is missing. She left the place I had her hidden."

Boyle's hardness melted as he smiled. "I wondered when you'd get to that." He stared at Red and then said: "She was as worried about you as you were about her. When you didn't call she got jittery and came down here looking for you. I took her home for the old lady to look after. Now, will I call the cops?"

Red's sigh of relief seemed to come from his shoes "No, boss, don't call 'em yet. There's another move we can make first."

He closed the door of Sawtelle's office gently and walked across to Boyle's desk. He rifled through the pages of

a telephone directory, then dialed the number he found and waited.

When the voice he wanted came on the wire he kept his eyes on Boyle and talked: "Mr. Sawtelle, this is the Globe office calling. Your stepson was killed a few minutes ago. We haven't called the police yet. We want you to come here first."

He hung up, his eyes still on Boyle. "The girl is Big Bill Sawtelle's daughter by his first wife."

Boyle's eyes narrowed. "I don't quite get it. I remember that Big Bill was married to Lily Lander. I'd forgotten there was a child. I remember now that there was. When Lily divorced Big Bill she disappeared with the kid. The papers were full of it at the time. No one ever found out where she'd gone."

"I guess," Red hazarded, "that she wanted the kid all to herself. She left it with the Handleys and died somewhere before she could get on her feet."

BIG Bill Sawtelle himself, staring at Red and Boyle with his eyes black smudges in his haggard face, supplied the rest. "I hired Quade years ago to try and locate the pair of them. We knew that Lily was dead. But we could get no trace of the child. I kept Quade on the job, paid him thousands to continue his search."

He stared across at the closed door of his step-son's office. "Quade must have located her and sold his information to Cliff through Lakeland. Then"—he swallowed painfully—"Cliff must have offered Quade a big reward to kill the girl and wipe out the threat to his inheritance."

He turned to Red. "I won't forget this, Blake." Then he straightened and said, "Now, where is my daughter?"

Long after the presses had stopped rumbling and the edition that had scooped the city on the dramatic story of Marion Sawtelle had swept the streets, Red and Boyle sat with their feet on a battered desk, a can of beer between them.

Red grinned happily. He was thinking of a white-haired man with hands that trembled, and a slip of a girl with a radiant face from which all the terror had vanished.

"The cops got Pete. They'll pick up Quade and Lakeland. I wonder how Lakeland horned in on the game?" Boyle asked.

"Quade used to work for Lakeland, just like I told you," Red answered. "Old man Sawtelle hired Quade to find

the girl. When he had her spotted he used Lakeland to reach young Sawtelle and get a bigger offer to bump the girl off." His voice was very bitter. "Those rats didn't care what game they played. It was just a question of which paid the biggest return."

Boyle reached for the can of beer and drank deeply. He stared across the rim at Red. "Let this be a lesson to you, smart guy! The next time you get hold of something don't be afraid to let your boss in on it. Learn that and I may make a newspaper man out of you yet."

Red reached for the can as Boyle set it down. "A swell business, this newspaper game. Sooner or later all trouble gets around to calling on you."

Police Business

AT THE corner of Julian Place and Morris Avenue at the step of Silverman's cigar store I shot a dog to end his suffering. He had no home, but he had many friends, particularly among the cab drivers and policemen.

"About noon Saturday he was badly hurt somewhere near the railroad, but he managed to make his way to the Silverman doorstep where he always felt at home and where he met most of his friends, including myself.

"He was only a dog, but everybody loved him—only a 'bum,' but he was a man's best friend."

Such was an entry on the Police Headquarters blotter at Elizabeth, N. J., on March 29 this year; it appeared over the signature of Patrolman John Dubish. "Bum" was buried in Dubish's back yard.

—Michael O'Hara

100% Genuine Orange Pekoe

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GOLD LABEL TEA



Ask your grocer. For special introductory offer—of 1 Lb. tin Ridgways Gold Label Tea, \$1.20 inc. parcel-post charges, send check or money-order (no COD orders) to Ridgways, Inc., 230 West St., N. Y.



DETECT

A GAME
SOLVE THE

by Lawrence Treat

March 8th 1937

Dear Jim

Just got back from my Western trip and this is my first evening home. The blessed glory of being back again with Alva and my birds! But first before going to bed, I want to thank you for your help in swinging the Overton deal.

I'm afraid that after all I won't be able to finish this to-night be

LESTER WILLIAMSON'S WIFE, ALVA, SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH SHE RUSHED DOWNSTAIRS WHEN SHE HEARD THE SHOT, THE KILLER WAS GONE.

WHO COMMITTED
THE MURDER?



Coming Soon—The Mud Puddle Mystery

NOVEMBER 1934

PROGRAM

OF SKILL

BIRDCAGE

MYSTERY

EXCERPT From DETECTIVE'S NOTEBOOK

Alva Williamson, wife-

23 yrs old, 5'1", 93 lbs.

George Frazer, Alva's lover


29 yrs. old, 6'1", 192 lbs.

Anton Dietz, former business
associate with admitted grudge

47 yrs old, 5'6", 207 lbs.

Mark Seely, discharged
employee with grudge

44 yrs. old, 5'2" 117 lbs.



LESTER WILLIAMSON
WAS FOUND DEAD IN
HIS STUDY AT 11.30
AT NIGHT. POWDER
BURNS SURROUNDED
THE WOUND IN HIS
FOREHEAD. HIS PET
CANARY WAS FOUND
STRANGLING IN ITS
CAGE.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Does Williamson's letter indicate any fear for his life? YES NO
- 2 Did he write the letter with a fountain pen? YES NO
- 3 Do you think he was interrupted while writing the letter? YES NO
- 4 Was he fond of his wife, Alva Williamson? YES NO
- 5 Do you think he saw the murderer? YES NO
- 6 Was he killed while in the act of writing? YES NO
- 7 If Alva's story is true, was the canary strangled before the murder? YES NO
- 8 Do you think Williamson witnessed the death of the canary? YES NO
- 9 Was the canary choked? For hate of Williamson Hate of the canary To cover up the murderer To suggest suicide
- 10 Which of the suspects could have strangled the canary? FRAZER DIETZ SEELY
- 11 WHO KILLED WILLIAMSON? ALVA FRAZER DIETZ SEELY

Correct Answers Appear on page 144

The Case of the Flying Junkmen

By Eric
Howard



*What Goes Up Must Come
Down—Even a High-Flying
Society Slicker!*

FELIPE'S place is a chili joint, and I'm practically boarding there. It's cheap and filling. You can get a French-dipped sandwich, with a slice of meat you can actually see, for a dime, a bowl of chili for fifteen cents, and all the coffee you can drink for a nickel.

The joint has caught on. Everybody from the powerhouse mechanics to the picture mob comes there. It's crowded any hour of the twenty-four.

I'm sitting in a booth, nursing my hard luck, chinning with one of the waitresses—she's a nice little Mex and she's going to marry Speed Alvarado,

the featherweight demon, as soon as he wins a few more bouts—when these two gents in flying togs come in.

"Who's that?" I ask Carmencita.

"The tall one is Cyril Dudley," she says. "You know he's a polo player and society man and he owns that airport out on Mission Road. He stops in here after a flight. I don't know who the other one is, just one of his pilots, I guess."

Dudley is a tall, good-looking man, about thirty. I've heard about him and read about him. They run his picture, mounted on a polo pony, on the sport pages. He sits down at a table not far

from me and smiles and rubs his hands. Carmencita goes over to take his order.

"Hello, *querida*," he says. "Bring me about three sandwiches, a bowl of chili, some potato salad and a glass of beer. What'll you have, Dink?"

Dink is a little, thin sour-pussed mug with a leathery face and black eyes. He doesn't look like a right guy to me.

"Bring me the same, but only one sandwich," he says out of the left corner of his mouth. He don't look at Carmencita, and there's something wrong with any man who wouldn't look at her.

"You need more exercise," Dudley laughs. "Then you'd have an appetite like mine."

"I get plenty," says Dink, "flying your cockeyed crates in rotten weather."

Tonight is rotten weather, for a fact. I wonder if they've been up. It's dark and cold and rainy. There have been three crashes during the last month. Up in the mountains—and you have to fly over mountains to land in any airport in town—there's snow and sleet.

Dudley shows his white teeth and laughs. "You made it," he says, "and that's that."

"I made it this time," says Dink sourly. "But how many more times—"

Dudley must have given him a signal of some kind. Dink pipes down with a growl. Dudley glances at me. I'll bet he knew I was listening in.

When Carmencita carries their order over to them, I can see that he's asking her who I am. She looks at me and smiles.

Sour-pussed Dink gives me a mean look. They go on eating, then.

Carmencita drifts over to my booth, to fill up the sugar bowl that's already full.

"Mr. Dudley wanted to know who

you were," she says, "and I told him you're the greatest private detective since Sherlock Holmes."

Carmencita likes me. I got Speed Alvarado out of a nasty blackmail jam, not so long ago. But she's wrong. I'm a private dick, all right, as sure as my name's Casey, when I can get clients; but as far as for being great at the racket, that's another story.

Having no place to go, and nothing to do, I dawdle in Felipe's. Dudley and his pal, Dink, put away their food and pay their checks. They're at the cashier's desk and I'm wondering why a man like Dudley tolerates the company of Dink—there must be some pleasant pilots in the world—when he gestures to Dink and starts for my booth. Dink goes out and Dudley, showing his white teeth, sits down across from me.

"Mr. Casey, I believe," he says.

"Right! How'd you guess?"

He shook a finger at me and winked. "Just psychic," he says, "that's all. Mr. Richard Casey, late of the police department, now engaged in private detection."

"The description fits me, brother. I'm psychic, too. You're Cyril Dudley, polo star, man about town, aviator, and so forth. What's on your mind, Cyril, old boy?"

THAT'S pretty brash. I'll admit, but I'm past caring. I've been broke so long I feel like a Bolshevik. Cyril's smile fades, then he recovers and laughs.

"I've got a job for you, Dick, old pal," he comes back. "Perhaps you know, being psychic, that I own the Valley Airport. Most of it. Somebody's fussing around the hangars at night. I need a good man, like you, on the job."

"A night watchman? I'm a detective, Cyril. I think I am."

"There may be some doubt about that, but let it pass. I have a night watchman. He's deaf, dumb and blind. I need a detective. Do you want the job?"

"How much?"

"What's the usual?"

I named it and he nodded. "All right. Report at the field tomorrow evening, about seven. I'll be there."

He got up and grinned at me. He shucked a few bills off a thick roll. Then he went out.

"See!" said Carmencita, who had watched the whole business. "I got you a good job, Senor Casey!"

"Thanks, sweetheart. Tell Speed I'll bet my roll on his next fight."

I went out, too. I smelled something like dead fish. You can't be in this racket as long as I've been without developing a nose for queer smells.

Dink is at the wheel of a big, black Cadillac roadster. Dudley climbs in beside him and says something. I'm in the shadow, near the bright entrance to Felipe's.

A trolley car comes by. Dink starts the motor, the roadster moves off. It turns into an alley, a little distance away. That's funny. The alley doesn't go anywhere, except up to a warehouse and into another alley. Why should my old pal, Dudley, take such a funny way home?

I cut and run for it, through Felipe's kitchen, into his back yard, over his fence.

The roadster, with lights out, swings past me. It stops, not far away, in the rear of an old wreck of a building that must have been there since the town was an Indian village. I've often noticed that building. It faces on the same street as Felipe's. It looks like a Mexi-

can laborer's shack, with potted geraniums in the window, but with a general run-down, dirty look. Sometimes I've seen kerosene lamps burning inside, behind torn lace curtains.

The car swings into a shed. Dink shuts the doors on it and then the two men, Dudley and Dink, go in the rear door of the old house.

"Well, well," I said. "What have we here?"

My new employer, for a guy of social standing, frequents odd dumps and no mistake.

But my curiosity does me no good. There isn't a chance of looking into that house, except in the front room. I prowled all around it. The front room is empty, but a kerosene lamp is burning on the table. The interior looks like any Mexican laborer's house, and I've seen plenty.

What is Cyril Dudley doing in there?

There's no answer, so I drifted back to Felipe's for another cup of coffee. It's about time for Carmencita to go off duty. Speed Alvarado is there to take her home. He's jealous, the bantam, and if anybody so much as looks at his girl, he gets killing mad. Except me. Speed likes me. He says I'm to be best man at his wedding.

We have a beer together until Carmencita shows up with her rabbit coat on and tells Speed she's ready.

"Say, babe, that guy Dudley?" I asked her. "What else do you know about him?"

"Dudley!" snaps Speed. "You been seeing him?"

"Just here, Speed. He comes in to eat. I've got to serve him, don't I?"

"I don't like him," Speed says. "Let him go uptown where he belongs."

Carmencita smiles. She likes to make Speed jealous, if he doesn't get too violent.

"I don't know anything about him," she says, "except what I told you. He's rich. Mr. Casey is going to work for him, Speed."

"You want to watch him," Speed says. "I wouldn't trust that guy."

"I been watching him," I said. "Good night, kids. Don't do anything I wouldn't do—and that gives you all the liberty in the world."

Carmencita laughs. She's a lively kid; and she's crazy about Speed. But she tries to keep him from guessing it.

I WALK up the street to the dump I call a hotel. I pass the house Dudley and Dink went into. It still has me guessing. But I sleep on it, and the next evening, at a quarter to seven, I'm at the airport.

There's nobody there except the night watchman, and Dudley was right when he said he was deaf, dumb and blind. Especially dumb. He's a big, tow-haired boy with a mouth that's always open. I tell him Dudley told me to show up and he says, "Huh?"

Dudley arrives a little after seven. He's as happy as ever, showing his teeth with every smile.

"Now, Casey, my friend," he says, "I want you to nab the man—or men—that have been getting into my hangars and tampering with the motors on my planes."

"Any idea who they are?"

"Not an idea," he says. "But something funny is going on here."

"And not only here," I said to myself.

It's a fine night, for a change; a good night for flying. Clear and cool. But Dudley isn't using any of his planes tonight. He leaves pretty soon, and I prowl around the hangars. Nobody comes near the place, but I'm earning wages again.

The next night is also clear, but nobody flies. The third night, though, is a wet, wicked one, with a ceiling so low that a man would have to be crazy to take a plane up. About eight o'clock Dink and Dudley show up. The ground crew is still on the job. They roll a plane out of a hangar and Dink warms it up.

"This is a hell of a night for flying," I said to Dudley. "Too bad you couldn't have made it last night."

He gave me that same toothy smile and said, "Dink doesn't mind. He likes it. Say, Casey, run down to the drug-store on the boulevard and get me a quart of Old Ruddy. Dink likes to have a bottle in case it gets cold up there."

I went. But when I came back, Dink had already taken off. I put the bottle down in front of Dudley, on the desk in the office.

"Thanks," he said. "Dink had his own bottle." He turned to the crew. "About half of you boys can go home," he said. "The rest you wait till Dink comes back."

"Where'd he go?" I asked.

"San Francisco," Dudley said, with his usual smile.

Anyway, Dink made a fast trip. He left about eight and he landed again a little after four in the morning. He could have made Frisco in that time—the plane was a high-speed, tri-motored job—but it wouldn't give him a lot of time to call on his friends. If he had gone a shorter distance—

But my job was to catch prowlers.

Dudley had left the airport, but he was back again before Dink landed. Dink was cussing the weather, but without giving him a chance to pull off his flying clothes Dudley hustled him over to the black roadster. They went away and the ground-crew rolled the plane into the hangar.

"He sure made a quick trip," I said to one of the boys.

"Yeah," he said. Talkative, like that.

"The boss must 'a' sent him to Frisco on important business," I went on. "This is a rotten night to take the air."

"This weather suits Dink and it suits the boss," he growled and walked away from me.

Pretty soon the place was deserted, except for the tow-head with the open mouth. The lights were all on, though, and I wondered how anybody could get into a hangar with them all burning.

A little before dawn, as I was prowling, I saw a man duck toward the small, side-door of the hangar where they had put Dink's plane. He got the door open—with a pass-key I guess—and slipped inside.

I grabbed my automatic and ran over there. . . .

THE door was unlocked and I got inside. This mug had a light on in the cabin of the plane. Otherwise, it was dark in the hangar. He wasn't tampering with the motor, but he was sure going through the cabin.

He had his coat collar turned up and his hat down. I couldn't get a look at his face.

I stayed in the dark and waited for him to climb out of the cabin. He switched off the light, muttered something and stepped down.

I bored into him with the gun. "March out, friend," I said. "I want a look at you."

I've handled some tough ones, but this fellow was slippery. He let out a gasp, like I had scared him to death, and put his hands up.

"Don't shoot!" he begged.

I thought he was going to faint. He sagged against my gun hand. I shifted it to catch him.

Then he cut loose. He slipped down, all right, but he wasn't fainting. He caught me around the knees, pulled me down, socked me hard and drove his knee into my stomach. I was gasping for air when he slugged me across the head. Then I was out.

I remembered, when I woke up and looked at the tow-head, what the fellow had felt like. Slender, not very tall, but wiry and strong.

"What happened to yuh, mister?" asked the tow-head. "Did yuh stumble over something?"

"Yeah," I said. "I stumbled over my foot."

"I've done that myself," he said.

When I reported to Dudley, he gave me the usual smile. "Maybe you'll catch him next time," he said. "If I may make a suggestion, Mr. Casey, the next time you might shoot first and ask questions later."

"I like to know who I'm shooting."

Dudley shrugged. "He's a murderous scoundrel," he said. "He might disable a plane and cause a pilot's death."

"He wasn't working on the motors," I said. "He was searching the cabin."

"That's consoling, anyway."

After that there was some day-time flying—short hops. Dink and Dudley both flew, and some of Dudley's friends who kept their planes there. He knew the right people.

No more night flying until another dirty, muggy night came along. They sure liked filthy weather for their sky work.

This time, Dink and Dudley showed up about eight. Dink was coughing and had a thick muffler around his neck.

"Dink's sick—or thinks he is," said Dudley to the head of the ground-crew. "I'll take the big ship."

"Off to San Francisco again, Mr. Dudley?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said, without the usual flash of teeth.

He made it in even less time than Dink had on his last trip. Fast work, if he went to Frisco. But I was betting he had gone south, instead of north. Across the border, down on the coast of Baja California, somewhere, where he picked up whatever he wanted.

They didn't haul Chinks in those planes. It must be dope. And that's why the slippery gent who clubbed me was searching the cabin.

That's also why they picked such rotten flying weather. They took a chance, of course, but there was less chance of being picked up by the Border patrol planes on such nights.

Why so many trips? You could bring in a hundred grand worth of junk without adding much weight to a plane. And why had Dudley hired me, a dick, to guard his hangars?

Dink had showed up at the port an hour before Dudley landed. I tried to talk to him. No dice. He wouldn't talk; he just growled.

When Dudley hit the field—a perfect three-pointer; the guy could fly—Dink seemed excited about something. He jumped out of the roadster and stuck his hand in his coat pocket. He was crouching like a trigger-man and staring at the plane. I thought he was sore at Dudley, for something, and I watched him close.

Dudley came over to the roadster, on the run, in his flying suit.

"Let's go, Dink! Quick!"

"Just a minute!" somebody said.

I TURNED. A man was running toward the roadster. He wasn't very big. But he was fleet. I had a hunch I had been close to him before. In fact, I would have bet my week's pay he was the slippery mug that slugged me.

He had his gun out.

"Hold it!" I said.

"Stay out o' this, copper," he told me.

"Step on it, Dink!" said Dudley. "Let's go!"

Instead, Dink muttered some words he didn't pick up at Sunday school. I saw him stand up, lean out of the roadster and then I heard the shot.

The slippery fellow answered, as he fell. But he fell and lay there.

"Drop that gun!" I yelled at Dink, and fired into the air.

Dudley was out of the car, then, moving toward the man on the ground.

"Now you have done it!" he muttered. "Help me with him, Casey. We'll run him to a hospital."

"It's too late," I said, after one look.

The bullet had done things to his head.

"Help me!" Dudley snapped. "Lift him up."

I didn't like his tone, but I helped him. We put the dead one in the car.

"Get in and drive," said Dudley to Dink.

Some of the ground men had started over.

"It's all right, boys," said Dudley. "Casey caught a prowler and winged him. We're taking him to the hospital."

Dudley had a hold on my arm. He jerked open the rumble seat lid.

"Get in!" he said.

I still didn't like his tone. I pulled back.

"What's the idea?" I asked. "Tellin' him I winged this mug? And where are we going?"

Dudley has strong hands. From polo, I guess. One of them closed over my wrist and I dropped my gun. He kicked it under the car. I felt something boring into my side.

"Get in, Casey," he said.

Well, we went away from there.

We hadn't gone far when Dudley laughed and said to me, "You shouldn't have killed that man, Casey. He was a Federal narcotic dick."

I jerked back. I didn't say anything.

"The way you shot him, without warning, without trying to find out who he was—no, that was bad, Casey. They still hang people for things like that."

"All right," I said. "I shot him. Go on from there."

He didn't say anything for a while. Then, with another mean laugh, he went on: "It wouldn't do for my good friend, Dink, with his swell flying record, to be accused of shooting this man. Or me. You're elected, Casey, old pal. Dink saw you shoot him, tried to stop you. So did I. If there's been any dope smuggling through my airport, you must have had a hand in it. Otherwise, you wouldn't have killed that poor man the way you did."

"So I'm tossed to the lions," I said. "You can't make it stick."

He gave me that cold laugh. I pitied his polo ponies.

"Private dicks are in bad odor in this man's town," he said. And that was the truth. Some of the boys had tried to shake down picture stars. A couple of others were deeply involved in the disappearance of a shyster who was the mouthpiece for the burg's biggest gambler. The cops had nabbed them. They'd believe anything about me.

"Your disappearance certainly makes it look bad," Dudley said. "'The guilty flee when no man pursueth.' That's out of a book, Casey, my friend."

"Did you hire me just to frame me?"

"I thought you might be useful. The narcotic boys were getting curious. I thought a zealous cop like you, eager to earn his salary, might make it tough

for them. You disappointed me, Casey, when you didn't shoot that fellow the other night. But it's all right now." He paused and then said: "We're through with dirty flying for some months."

"Oh, you've brought in all the junk you need for a while, huh? Now all you have to do is peddle it? That's a hell of a racket for a man like you to be in!"

"It takes money," he said callously, "to live in the style to which I am accustomed."

THERE was a red light ahead of us. Dink was slowing down. I decided I'd be better off somewhere else, all by myself. I got ready to leave the roadster.

Maybe I gave myself away.

Dink surprised me. He swung a corner, speeding up, as I was jumping. Dudley pulled me down, swore, cracked me with his fist. I swung for his jaw and missed. Then he hit me over the head with his gun. I slipped down, out of sight, and he put his feet on me. After a minute, I didn't know or care what was happening.

The next thing I knew I was waking up on a soft divan in a strange room. There were two floor lamps burning, shedding a soft light over the odds and ends of expensive furniture.

Dudley was sitting in a big chair, opposite me, smoking a cigarette and fiddling with a high-powered radio set. He had a tall drink at his elbow.

He gave me that white-toothed smile.

"Here we are!" he said. "I sent Dink out for something to eat. This will be your home for a while."

"Yeah? Not for long. What did you do with the narcotic dick?"

"The man you killed? Left him at the hospital. Reported to the police that you killed him and got away. They're

looking for you. But they won't find you—here."

A trolley car rolled by, outside. I had a hunch where we were. It was verified a few minutes later when Dink came in. I'd know Felipe's sandwiches anywhere, and Dink brought in a bagful, as well as a jug full of chili and another full of coffee. We were in the back end of the old house. I heard somebody moving around the front rooms.

Dudley pushed a small table up to the divan where I was. He and Dink pulled up chairs and Dink spread out the food. Dudley poured drinks all around.

Dink kept sniffing like his nose itched. He didn't look as mean as before. His flying nerve was partly cocaine.

"You're going to crack up some time if you use happy dust when you fly," Dudley said to him.

"Wouldn't that be tragic?" Dink asked, like he didn't give a damn. "Why keep this cop alive?"

"The police want him for murder."

Dink laughed. "Okay. Let 'em have him."

"If necessary," said Dudley. "He may be an ace in the hole for us—at least until we get rid of the stuff."

"That won't take long. All we have to do is fly to Seattle, with stop-offs at all the stations. Then back by way of Reno and it's unloaded."

Dudley nodded. "I'll get up a party—just a few intimate friends not even a narcotic squad man could suspect. Let's see! Stuart Irvine, of the bank. His wife, Sue. John Underwood. His sister, Alice. Yes, Alice, by all means. I'd like to have her along."

The people he named were all top-notch, socially and financially. He was right. With them along, not even a nar-

cotic man would suspect him of unloading junk. From what they said, I guessed they had stations all up and down the coast. A nice little business. I had stumbled on something the narcotic boys would have paid money to know about.

I knew better than to think Dudley was going to turn me over to the cops or going to let me live. He had laid a good foundation for clearing himself. If he could make the cops believe I was mixed up in the smuggling and had killed the narcotic dick on that account, he would still be in the clear. If necessary, I figured that he might also toss Dink to the lions. There was nothing Dudley wouldn't do. I was sorry for the girl he mentioned, Alice Underwood.

It it came to the worst, for him, I was betting he would kill both Dink and me, then slip out of the jam himself by claiming he had discovered we were using his planes and his airport for smuggling and that we had put up a fight when he had accused us. With his standing and his connections, he could get away with it, too, unless the narcotic boys already had plenty on him. But they hadn't—or the slippery gent wouldn't have been prowling around the hangars.

Somebody knocked on a door and Dudley said, "Come in."

A fat Mexican, dressed in working clothes, stepped into the room. I caught a glimpse of the front of the house while the door was open. It was the house near Felipe's, all right.

The Mexican grinned. Dink and Dudley got up and went into a huddle with him on the far side of the room. I couldn't hear what they said. The Mexican kept nodding and grinning, glancing at me in a way that meant they were talking about me.

I KNEW better than to make a move. Dink or Dudley would have stopped me before I got to the door. I sipped a drink, reached for a sandwich and ate it. In my vest pocket I found a pencil stub. I started stacking the paper plates from Felipe's. I didn't think it would do much good, but I scrawled a note to Carmencita on one of the plates. Then I put another on top of it. She probably wouldn't see it; but she might.

"Had enough to eat?" asked Dudley, walking back to me. "Stand up, then, and turn around."

He tied my hands behind me, quickly, with strong twine.

"All right, Miguel!" he said. "Take him down."

Miguel went into another room, leaving the door open, and lifted a trap door. He beckoned to me.

I shrugged and went over to him.

"Then you can take all that stuff back to Felipe's, Mike," said Dudley. "Good night, Casey, old pal. Don't let out any yells or Mike will tape your lips."

I went down the stairs, into the cellar. It was big and cool. On one side there were six wine barrels. Nearby, on shelves there were a lot of bottles. On the other side of the room there was a row of metal lockers.

"Full of junk," I thought. "Here's where they store it until they can distribute it to their stations."

Mike hustled me over to a cot in a corner and hobbled my ankles. Then he went upstairs.

He left one small light on. I sat on the cot and looked around. It must have been a wine-cellar, in the early days. The old house may have been in the middle of a big vineyard. Now it was right in the industrial section.

I had a curiosity about those lockers. I hobbled over and turned my back, fid-

dling with the knob on one of them. It was locked. I tried some more. All locked. I was willing to bet there was enough junk in them, of every kind, to hop up an army. Boy, how'd it feel to tip off the narcotic squad to a haul like this!

But there was nothing I could do. Even if Miguel took all the stuff back to Felipe's, including the used plates, there wasn't much chance of Carmencita seeing my note.

I heard the hum of the smooth motor in Dudley's roadster. Dink and Dudley were going places.

I hobbled back to the cot and sat down. Tied as I was, it wasn't too comfortable. Nothing to do but wait. For what? For Dudley to come back and fix me up.

There was a commotion upstairs. I sat up and listened. Miguel and somebody else were telling each other things in Spanish, fighting while they talked. One of them went down right over my head. The other ran.

I heard the trapdoor open and knew the winner of the fight was coming down. I crawled under the cot. If it was Dink, coming back to finish me, I didn't want him to see me.

It was Speed Alvarado!

I was never so glad to see anybody in my life.

"Speed!" I called.

He came on the run, breathing hard, and helped me up. Then he cut the rope off my ankles and snapped the twine around my wrists.

"Nice work, boy," I said. "How'd you know I was here? Carmencita tell you?"

"No," he shook his head. "I saw Dudley turn into the alley. I knew he had this hang-out. I saw 'em pack you in. I didn't have a rod, so I had to wait—till they blew. Then I tangled with

Dopey Mike. He's heavy, but slow. Come on. We scam!"

"As far as a phone," I told him. "Upstairs. I want to pull the narcotic boys down here. I want to show 'em this layout."

"Do it from somewhere else! They may come back."

"Don't worry, boy. They've gone for the night."

WE went upstairs. Miguel was on the floor, out. I gestured to Speed and he stood over him, ready to kick him in the head if he moved. I ambled over and sat down, reaching for the phone. This was going to be good! McNulty, head of the narcotic squad, turned down my application for a job, not so long ago; said I was through, washed up; being a private dick had spoiled me for taking orders. I'd make him eat those words; I'd make a deal with him.

I had my hand on the phone when Dudley's voice cracked: "Drop it!"

He was standing in the doorway, gun pointed, covering Speed, too.

Dink was right back of him.

I pushed the phone away. "You win another round," I said. "How come you're here?"

"We saw this ham and egg fighter hanging around. Friend of yours, huh? Come on, Dink. Show the champ some boxing."

Dink stuck his gun in his pocket, grinned and stepped up to Speed. He socked him right and left. Speed tried to cover up, but he was watching Dudley's gun, too. Dink backed him against the wall, driving his fists home.

"That'll do, Dink. Now let's find out whether the dumb Mr. Casey knows more than we think he does."

Dink pulled his gun again, while Dudley pocketed his. He came over to

where I was. I saw his fist coming and ducked. He feinted and hit me with his left. It knocked me half out of the chair. As I kicked at him and tried to get up, he swung again with his right.

As I'm ducking, covering my head to avoid the dynamite, I see a tow-head sticking in the door. It's the watchman from the airport, the dumb mug that stumbles over his own feet, and he also has a gun. I can see where Speed and I stay here. I'm sorry for Carmencita. She's going to miss Speed.

Dudley swings and my chair goes over. I hit the floor on my shoulder.

Then Dink also sees the tow-head.

"You!" Dink said.

There were two shots—quick.

And Dink doubled up in front of Speed.

"All right, Dudley!" says the tow-head. And he doesn't sound so dumb now. "The show's over. This is the curtain. Get your hands high."

Dudley looks at him, over his shoulder. He's surprised.

"Why, Peters," he says, "what—?"

"Not Peters," says the tow-head. "Patterson, narcotic squad."

Dudley slowly eases his hands up. His face is drained white. He has a wild look in his eye. He looks around. He's facing the tow-head. Speed is on the other side, I'm opposite Speed.

"Take his gun, Casey," says Patterson, "and tap him for other weapons."

I got the gun and frisked him. I found a bunch of keys.

"Downstairs," I said, "I think you'll find plenty of junk, Patterson."

"That's my guess. The boys will be here in a few minutes. This is going to be quite a smell for Dudley, the high-flyer. We'll give you plenty of credit, Casey."

Dudley suddenly twisted, thudding

into me, knocking me between him and Patterson. Then he ducked and ran.

Speed leaped after him.

"I want him alive!" yelled Patterson. "I want him alive!"

I saw then that Speed had Dink's gun in his hand. When he heard Patterson, he tossed it aside and dived for Dudley's legs. He brought him down, and then, for a minute or two, it was a mix-up between a featherweight and a heavyweight.

But Patterson jumped in and landed. He had him alive!

"I've got to make him talk," he said. "We've got to get a list of all his agents, up and down the coast."

The squad men were piling in. "Hello, McNulty," I said. "You're late again. We did your job for you."

McNulty gave me a sheepish grin.

"Come and see me, Casey, I'll try to square it. Nice work, Pat."

I waited just long enough to look into the lockers. I was right. The junk in there was worth a couple of hundred grand.

"Come on, Speed," I said. "Let's get us a sandwich and a cup of coffee."

We go in to Felipe's and Carmencita dishes out her best smile.

"What have you boys been doing?" she wants to know. "You look all ruffled. Speed, your hair's all mussed up!"

"Playing post-office with some people that didn't know the rules," says Speed.

"Post-office?" Carmencita giggles. "I know that one."

And proves it by kissing him right on the lips.

"If that was post-office," I said "give me polo."

Ingenious Diamond Thief

IN one of the diamond mines of Borneo there was once a laborer who managed to steal several valuable diamonds. As he wore no clothing when at work, and underwent the usual examination on coming off shift, he was considered entirely safe. He escaped with his prizes and became a rich man. In his old age he revealed the secret of his success as a diamond thief.

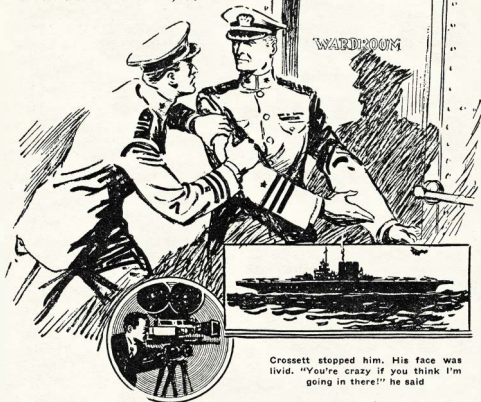
He had prepared himself for the work with the assistance of a surgeon, who shared with him the proceeds of the enterprise. The surgeon placed a ball, somewhat larger than a pea, in the fleshy part of the man's thigh, kept down the irritation as much as possible, and allowed the flesh to grow over the wound, or nearly so. The ball was then taken out, leaving a comfortable cavity a quarter of an inch below the skin. A small opening was made, and the skin at the opening was allowed to grow around a steel rod about half as large as the diameter of the cavity. In this way a very fine receptacle was formed for the deposit of the diamond.

It took some time to perfect, but when finished it proved entirely satisfactory, and the man was sure of having his pocket always about him. When he found a diamond that could be crowded into this cavity, he would contrive to stow it away; and then, at the earliest opportunity, he repaired to the office of the surgeon, where the diamond was removed with the aid of a pair of forceps. They did not strike for the largest diamonds, and were doubtless more successful in this mode of working than if they had planned their enterprise on a grander scale.

—J. L. Considine

By Steve Fisher

Author of "Death on Set 13,"
"Murder Game—With Mirrors," etc.



Crossett stopped him. His face was livid. "You're crazy if you think I'm going in there!" he said

I

"Batten Down That Killer!"

*When He Felt the
Handshake of Guilt,
Tony Key Knew Who
Was Dealing Death on
That Giant Aircraft
Carrier!*



WHEN the speed boat moved past the Honolulu breakwater he saw the giant hulk of the *Lexington* on the horizon ahead, her seventy-five planes resting on the expansive flight deck, her stacks belching smoke, and it amused him to think of a ship so huge and costly standing still in the water waiting for him to come aboard. Because a long time ago he had gone to Annapolis, and he had been an officer, and when he had resigned all of them had loathed him. He had deliberately been an hour late because it gave him pleasure to think of the captain fuming and the navigator mumbling under his breath, and the

rest of the fleet lying out in LaHaina Roads, Maui, waiting too, wondering were the *Lexington* was.

He smiled and puffed at a cigarette. Of course his director would not like it too well either; nor the fat producer. They always made fools of themselves going out of their way to be nice whenever the navy permitted them to make pictures aboard ship. But neither his director nor producer could say much to William Crossett. His name in lights meant cash in box offices and there were plenty of other companies waiting to grab him up.

But as he kept watching the *Lexington* something cold and unpleasant shuddered through him, and for the first time in his life he felt as though he were a man going backward. He threw the cigarette away and shifted a little uncomfortably. He tried to purge his mind of the nostalgia of his youthful emotional hysteria, the kind he had known in Annapolis. The kind he had afterward called rot.

But as the boat sped through the water and the *Lexington* loomed bigger, the horror of his past crowded deeper and deeper in his mind, and it occurred to him now that this would be the first time he had been aboard a navy boat since he had resigned. Perhaps that was the reason for his feeling and it would wear off. He would become himself again and thrust the spear of his success into the hearts of the men who gave their lives to the sea. He would pretend as though they were all shipmates as they had once been, but he would be careful to say things that would show them the futility of their drab existence. He would mention life in Hollywood, and casually let them know the staggering weekly salary he had collected now for six consecutive years.

Yet his ambition to do this, for a while riding high, now was flagging. He was terrified. His old fear, the one he had fought through Annapolis, came choking up through his chest. The fear of guns and planes and regulation. He was afraid of the ship. He could not understand what had come over him. He was suddenly looking at his whole life as though he were not William Crossett but somebody else. Someone who stood back and viewed the whole thing from the very beginning. Someone who knew the thoughts that had been in his mind. The schemes of intrigue and treachery; his methods of cold and selfish ruthlessness.

And now he was frightened that they would not see him as the great William Crossett, but the weakling of his class, the cheat among gentlemen; the man who had not what it took to be a sailor. He looked at the uniform he wore. Neatly tailored, and glistening white, with gold wings over his chest. In stage clothes he was a lieutenant-commander. He leaned forward and kept watching the *Lexington* and he was conscious suddenly of the beating of his heart.

Desperately, as the man who stood on the side and viewed his life, he tried to find reason and quality; but there was none. Not a shred, nor had there been any since the beginning. He had pleaded with Senator Hall to appoint him to Annapolis because he thought a uniform was glamorous, and he remembered with the shame the flagitious lies he had told to convince the Senator he wanted to be a great naval officer. And from that time on he had glibly lied his way through life.

HE HAD not thought of it like this before because he had been able to delude himself that everything

he did was right, and he had made up excuses for even the most cruel of his acts. Like Martha. It was not pleasant to think of Martha now because she was the ex-wife of one of the officers and he would soon have to face the man and shake hands with him as though they were friends.

Water splashed about the stern of the boat where he sat in cushions, and he wiped his face with a handkerchief and did not look at the *Lexington* any longer because they were too close to it. He looked at the handkerchief. There was sweat on it. He laughed, but the laughter made no sound over the motor of the boat.

"I am being a fool," he said aloud. "I will be the most celebrated man they ever had aboard, and they'll be glad enough to forget. They'll honor me."

But he was aware that even as he spoke the words, he would not be talking aloud to himself if he were not more frightened than he had ever been before in his life. He saw the side of the ship in a blur of gray before his eyes. He saw the white gangway. The boat swished alongside.

Two sailors stood at the bottom of the gangway to help him aboard, and he was trembling as they lifted him to the platform. He climbed the ladder quickly to top side. There were no side boys, no officers. Only the producer waddling across toward him.

"Well, I must say, Crossett, you took your time."

"Sorry," he murmured. "I was held up."

The producer took a cigar out of his mouth. "Yes? Well you're going to be held up once too often some of these days. Do you realize—"

William Crossett lifted his hand. "Please! I'm in no mood for your banter. Where is the first shot?"

"We were going to take one on the bridge, but it's all off now." He turned. "Mr. Johnson."

Crossett suddenly saw Tom Johnson step from a hatch and move across the deck. He swallowed as he saw the gray at Johnson's temples, the deep lines in his face, and the lieutenant-commander bars on his shoulder straps. He tried to smile, and put out his hand. His whole body was trembling.

"Well, if it isn't good old Tom!"

Johnson shook his hand, though he did not press it, and he said: "It's good to see you again, Bill. How's everything?"

The question was pointless; born of confusion and embarrassment. "All right," Crossett answered. "And you?"

"Oh—all right," Johnson said quietly. "Want to come below? We're having coffee in the wardroom."

Crossett could feel the stiffness in Johnson's voice, and he detected a coolness in his manner that might have been sheer hatred. There was no cheering. No congratulations upon his screen success. He had the feeling that he was in for something he did not expect.

"Coffee's what I need right now, Tom," he said.

The producer left them, and they went below. Tom Johnson walked a pace ahead, as though he disliked walking with Crossett. For quite a long while as they moved through the compartments he said nothing. Then:

"Martha's here. Since this is a cruise for the movies, the admiral let her come along."

For a moment the meaning of the words did not hit him, but when they did, Crossett stopped; he caught his breath. All bets were off now, the cards were on the table. He looked at Johnson through burning eyes.

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"I mean that Martha is here," Johnson said quietly.

Crossett shook his head. "But she isn't even divorced from me yet."

"Yes she is. She got a decree in another state instead of waiting a year in California. We're together again."

For a moment Crossett could not speak; his throat seemed parched. "You mean—"

"She came back to me," said Johnson.

CROSSETT sagged, almost visibly.

Of course she would come back. She had always loved Tom. Divorcing Tom, and marrying him, had been impossible madness. He had won Martha with glamor and intrigue; not because he loved her, but because she was beautiful and the navy was proud of her, as Tom Johnson had been proud of her; and William Crossett's great rotten ego, wounded that the navy would have none of him, won her, and married her because he had wanted to show them he was better than they.

But that was not what bothered him. It was that he and Martha had not gotten on well, and once or twice in drunken rage he had hit her, and another time he had thrown her down a flight of steps so that she was in bed a week. She had stuck to him through that because she had a fierce determination to make a go of the marriage; because she too had pride and it had been disgrace and shame enough that she divorced Tom—without letting the world know, through the eyes of the hungry press, that she could not stay married to William Crossett either. But she represented the navy he hated, and he had been utterly rotten with her. He had want-

ed to make her suffer. It was a quirk in his nature. The selfish revenge of wounded vanity. And at last when he had crushed all the pride and respect out of her, he had come home from location one day to find her gone. He had laughed when he read her note. He had been cruelly satisfied. The turn of events rounded out the plans he had made from the beginning.

And now Tom Johnson was saying softly, "She came back to me," and in a few minutes he was going to see her, and have to face her; and he knew that she must have told Tom everything. How he had treated her.

He looked at Tom now and he wanted to lie down on the deck and scream for mercy. He wanted to turn and run the other way. His blood seemed to have turned to ice, although he was sweating.

He managed to say: "I will be glad to see her." He did not know how he got the words out, or where he got the strength to move away from the bulkhead and continue walking through the shiny corridors of the ship.

Tom went on: "Remember the first week we were on board ship out of the Academy and you jammed the five-inch gun that almost killed three of the seamen?"

Crossett nodded, but he could not speak. It was like a nightmare, with his past suddenly parading hideously before him.

"Remember," Tom Johnson went on, "how you pleaded to George Reed, who was your room-mate, and told him about how your folks wanted you to be a great naval officer; how you cried and put on one of the acts the movies pay you for doing now, until you convinced George, because he was idealistic and sentimental and noble, and because he had been on the same

gun with you and you pointed out how he might have been partly responsible for what happened, that he should shoulder the blame for what happened and clear you? Remember?"

Crossett choked.

"They let George back in the service after the dismissal," Tom Johnson continued, "but of course he could only come in as an enlisted man. It didn't matter, so long as he was in the navy. He—he loved the navy."

"So—he's—back—in?" Crossett managed.

"Yes. He'll be in the wardroom, too. He's a chief petty officer now. Oh yes, and remember how you took Ducky Wilson ashore with you one night and got him drunk? That was when you were dismissed, and Ducky, who had a clear record except for that, had to remain an ensign two years after the rest of us were promoted."

"And—he's in the wardroom, too?"

Tom Johnson nodded. "Yes. And here the wardroom is." He put his hand on the knob of the door.

Crossett stopped him. His face was livid. "You're crazy if you think I'm here to make a picture, not rehash your petty tragedies. You aren't going to get me in there and—and—"

He did not know what he was saying. He was scarcely aware that he lived. He saw Tom jerk his hand away and open the door. He saw the faces of Martha and Ducky and George, and there were more. He had never screamed in his life. But he was a coward, and he screamed now. literally and terribly, choking until his face was blue. He gurgled a jargon of incoherent words about getting off the ship and that he would not stay here. And then he turned and ran. He did not

know what he was doing. He wanted only to get away.

II

THAT messenger boy who worked in a Hollywood Boulevard office of the Western Union was smart, and he would one day be a great columnist, or actor, or cameraman, or movie scout; it was even possible that in his old age he would be a fat producer like Mr. Jonas and smoke cigars. The boy had his eyes open all the time, and he never missed anything. He was a walking news bulletin. He knew when whose option was up and why, if it was not to be renewed. He knew who was going to get married, and vice versa. He even knew who was going to have a baby, and where old stars were and what they were doing. He read Winchell, of course, and Louella Parsons, and listened to Jimmy Fiddler, but these celebrated persons were only the most obvious sources. He had devious ways of digging out information that was never published, or would be published some time in the future. He forecast events for his friends and kept a record of his scoops.

And now that messenger boy was very close to uncovering a fact which only a dozen of the mightiest Hollywood people knew. He walked into a Hollywood Boulevard building and got into the elevator, and then he pulled out a faded column and read the question, the answer of which the columnist himself didn't know.

What well known Hollywood agent is, on the hush, really not an agent at all, but the world's highest paid detective, assigned to solve all studio naughties including murder, and squash unfavorable publicity on the same?

He read that again, and he felt quite sure he was on the right track. He

looked at the messages he was to deliver. One was quite plainly an official government communication from the Naval Intelligence; and the other was a cable from Honolulu, the source of the official message. Paramet was shooting "Men of the Fleet" aboard the *Lexington* in Hawaiian waters. What, he reasoned, could be more logical than a crime of some sort occurring on board ship during the making of the film, and the detective who was a movie specialist being called to the scene to help solve it?

He got off the elevator on the fourth floor and walked down the padded hall to a door on which were written in bronze letters:

ANTHONY KEY
Artist's Representative
Motion Pictures.

He entered. He had not been in this office before and he was amazed at the luxury that suddenly surrounded him. A rug into which he sank as deeply as his heels; soft, expensive divan and chair set; a pure teakwood reception table. Directly ahead of him and behind a sliding glass he could see a woman. And she too made the smart Western Union boy catch his breath, for he had seen a lot of beauty in Hollywood, stars and starlets, and he thought he had never seen anyone quite so beautiful as the woman behind the glass. At least one didn't expect to see her sitting at a typewriter.

She was a perfect platinum blonde, and she wore a black patent leather dress which contrasted with her hair, and accentuated the white of her skin, and the size of her soft blue eyes, and the crimson red of her lovely curved lips. The messenger boy had to stop and shake his head. It was as though he had been suddenly transformed into

the pleasurable world of a cinema dream.

He saw the glass sliding back now. The girl said: "Those tels for us?"

"Tels?"

"Telegrams," she said, smiling.

He said: "Yeah. You sign right here. One's from the Naval Intelligence." And now he took a chance. "I guess it's another crime for Mr. Key to solve."

The platinum blonde looked up quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Why I—ah, isn't Mr. Key an amateur detective on the side?"

She shook her head. "He certainly is not. Wherever you got that foolish notion get rid of it. When Mr. Key feels he must play, he draws pictures."

The boy gulped. He had known there was a great possibility that he was wrong, but you never got to be a great scoop artist by being afraid to ask questions. He took the signed sheet and left the office. When he got outside he looked at the clipping again, then threw it away in disgust.

"You fake news maker," he muttered.

But he walked to the elevator with a little misgiving, because he still could not understand why the Naval Intelligence would be sending a Hollywood agent official communications.

AS SOON as the boy left the office Betty Gale got up and hurried back to her boss' office. She had opened the door and was halfway through it when he said:

"Stop!"

She halted as though she had been shot. He went on: "Hold it that way. Chin up a little; that's it, sweetheart. A little frown on your forehead. One foot through the door. Let's see how fast my candid pencil can sketch you."

She held it, because she knew the kind of fits he threw when he wasn't humored, but her scowl increased. She said: "This is great exercise—for you. Maybe it would be easier if I just got Mae West's sculptor to model me in marble. And of course there isn't the faintest possibility that a cable from the romantic islands of atmosphere would be important."

"Nothing so important as beauty in action," he replied, working feverishly with a special leaded pencil. He was a dark man who had smoothly combed hair, and he was very young. He had high cheek bones, and green eyes that reminded one a little of glossy jade. He was clad in a neat blue suit, white shoes, and open polo shirt. A year ago he had been a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation assigned to Hollywood. But he had retired to devote all of his time to studio and movie location cases. He was paid magnificently from a pool that was taxed from each studio, and the Western Union boy had been right; as an agent he had no clients and sought none. But he had to have an office and since for a number of reasons it seemed advisable that his identity be kept secret he was listed as an artist's representative.

"There," he said at last, "I've got it. How's that, Betty?"

She looked at the sketch, and it wasn't bad considering the speed with which he had done it. She had seen some of his sketches in the newspapers before he quit the F.B.I.; sometimes they had helped find men, and other times they had been used as evidence.

"If the worst ever comes," she told him, "you can always get a job with Walt Disney."

"Thanks," Tony Key replied, "I'll make a note of that. And now to the grimmer aspects of life. Did you say

you had something for me; or were you just getting lonesome out there by yourself?"

She laid the telegrams on the mahogany desk in front of him. He glanced up at her, then opened the first one. It was the one from the Naval Intelligence:

**KEY—WILLIAM CROSSETT HAS VANISHED PERIOD LAST SEEN IN PASSAGEWAY BELOW DECKS ON LEXINGTON BUT CANNOT BE FOUND PERIOD AS SEVERAL HOURS HAVE PASSED THIS MIGHT BE SERIOUS
BRENNAN**

"When Brennan gets excited," Tony Key murmured, "there's no doubt whatever about the seriousness of the case." He opened the cable:

COME AT ONCE ON CHINA CLIPPER STOP CROSSETT HAS DISAPPEARED STOP OUR HALF FILMED PIC IS PARALYZED STOP SUSPECT FOUL PLAY STOP HURRY STOP HAVE YOU ANY IDEAS WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO THAT S&P BESIDES MURDER STOP IF SO CABLE THEM.

JOHN JONAS

"It seems," Tony went on, "that Jonas has worked himself up in a lather which must have cost him a lot of dough at the current cable rates."

Betty Gale was reading the cables. "This is all right," she said. "I hope that honey and syrup boy stays hidden until we get there. I've been wanting to leave Holly for the Coral Shores of yonder islands for more months than it would be polite to mention."

"What do you mean: you've been wanting to leave?"

She put her hands on her hips. "Don't tell me I don't get to go along?"

"Did the cable mention you? Besides, who is going to take care of the office?"

She said: "The office will probably rot. What good would it be anyway, without you here? And as for the cable, I'm part and parcel of this business

as much as Curly Conley and Max White, your two half-wit strong arm men, am I not?"

"Conley and White are not half-wits. Anyway, you can't go." He got up.

She turned. "Okay. I'll spend the time over at the Columversal lot. I think they have a pic they can—"

"Listen, I'm paying you eighty a week to stay out of pictures. And you wear the diamond engagement ring I gave you. Haven't you *any* respect for me?"

She smiled. "I'm going to phone for our China Clipper reservations. Do you want to make a candid pencil sketch of me doing it?"

He resigned himself with a shrug, lighting a cigarette. "Okay, sweetheart." As she went to the phone, he walked over to the window and looked out. He stood there for several minutes listening to her efficiently making all the necessary preparations; and he kept watching Hollywood Boulevard: girls with slacks walking up and down, street cars that moved lazily along their tracks, the two-story buildings of stores, and the sunshine that tumbled across the expansive street.

He had settled down to quiet concentration on how many people might want to kill William Crossett, when a bell ringing brought his attention back to the room. He saw Betty getting up and leaving the office. She returned presently.

"Another cable—and a Western Union boy who keeps insisting you must be a detective."

He did not know why there should be another cable and he was a little excited. They had probably found Crossett's body. He said: "Give me the message. Use your own judgment about the boy."

The slim platinum blonde disappeared again, and Tony Key tore open the envelope. He read it with a great deal of awe for it was from the Intelligence, and more startling than he could have possibly imagined:

KEY—LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER TOM JOHNSON COMMA FRIEND OF CROSSETT COMMA FOUND MURDERED PERIOD WILLIAM CROSSETT STILL MISSING PERIOD IT APPEARS THAT THINGS ABOARD THE LEXINGTON ARE IN SOMEWHAT OF A MESS

BRENNAN

III

IT WAS four in the afternoon, and the ship's bell gonged eight times. The huge gray hulk of the *Lexington* listed lazily to starboard, and churned through the green-blue water in the direction of the tranquil island of Maui. The crowded flight deck was curiously empty of life.

There was confusion in the enlisted compartments. Schedules had been badly disrupted. The movie company aboard had taken no pictures, nor had any seamen seen the great star, Crossett. They did not know what was wrong, and yet a tense and uneasy cloud hung over the vessel, so that there was not the usual amount of laughter, nor even fights. Sailors sat about looking at magazines, or listening to the radio.

IN the contagious room of the sick bay Peter Brennan said: "The body doesn't look very nice, does it, Key?"

Peter Brennan of the Naval Intelligence was a tall and very pale young man who had brooding dark eyes, and short clipped black hair. He wore blue uniform trousers, and a leather jacket. A .45 was strapped about his waist.

Tony Key looked at the pajama-clad figure that once had been Tom Johnson. The gray sideburns on the

temples were crimson with hard blood, and the firm, rather strong mouth gaped open. The eyes were closed. Key leaned forward and examined the three roundish marks that surrounded the bruises that had broken Johnson's skull.

"No body looks nice," he said. "Brennan, what do you make of the wounds?"

"They are peculiar. Gun butt or club, I'd say."

Tony Key's green eyes were thoughtful with a faraway look. "Uh-huh. Johnson had his back turned. The killer crept in and let him have it—just as he was buttoning up the top of his pajamas. Right?"

"That's the way I put it together."

Tony looked up. "All right. You ought to know this: would an officer upon retiring to his room, lock the door?"

Peter Brennan's pale face was creased in a faint smile. "Hardly."

"But under the circumstances I mean," Key insisted. "He knows Crossett is missing. Probably around somewhere. Doesn't trust Crossett. Hates him, as you explained. Would he go to bed, leaving his door unlocked?"

Brennan shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Tony Key said: "My guess is that he wouldn't. So far so good. Is it logical Crossett would know where to find Johnson's room? Since he was in hiding he wouldn't dare ask. If he didn't know where the room was, and he didn't have a key to unlock the door—"

"You mean you don't think Crossett killed him?"

KEY'S eyes flickered. "Definitely not. From what I know of Crossett he hasn't enough courage to

kill. I think an enemy of Johnson is taking advantage of the situation. Further: Johnson wasn't killed with a gun butt or club."

"What the hell then was he killed with?"

Key showed his hand. "Now you're going too fast. I don't know." He pulled a pad and pencil from his pocket, glanced again at the curious small round wounds that had broken Johnson's skull, and started sketching them.

"We don't know," said Brennan, "and you don't know that Crossett isn't guilty. Personally, I think you're showing off. World's highest paid dick making quick deductions. But it's okay with me. What we want to do is clear this thing up, so if you work your angle, and I work mine, between the two of us we ought to stumble across something hot enough to give us the solution."

Tony Key was still working on the sketch. "Stick to your ideas, Brennan," he said. "Pedal your own bike. But before you shove off, do me a favor and put me up to date on this situation. Anything happened since the murder?"

"Nothing. I've handled everything according to routine. You know that it's regulation to keep a ship at sea when a crime occurs aboard, and that no one is permitted to leave. More: we keep the publicity angle as closed as you and the Hollywood gang try to. So the crew isn't aware of what has happened, although they'll have to be if we don't clean up the mess pretty quickly. We could turn the men to searching for Crossett, for one thing."

"But don't. Not yet. And listen: I'm putting my two trigger finger lads in uniform. How's to let them wander around?" He finished the sketch.

Peter Brennan looked at it over his shoulder.

"Sure. Anything you say, Key. Only I'll have to admit I was kind of floored when I saw you trot that blonde aboard. I didn't expect that you'd bring her."

Tony Key grinned. "Neither did I. But she's here. And maybe it's just as well because she's got a lot of savvy in matters like these. I have her in pumping your suspects in a nice lady-like way. She has more patience than I. Let's go up and see how she's making out. And listen: if I catch you making any passes at her, I'll do my damndest to hang the murder around *your neck*."

They left the contagious ward, and Brennan locked the door. They started down the corridor at a fast pace.

When they arrived in the wardroom, Betty Gale was sitting in one corner with her arms crossed. Her notebook lay thrown across the table. Martha Johnson was crying, and the officers in the room seemed bleak and unsympathetic.

"Hello, boss!" said Betty. "I've got a present for you."

Tony Key said: "Swell."

He glanced back as John Jonas waddled into the room and sat down. The fat producer seemed very nervous; the cigar in his mouth was out, though he did not appear to be aware of it. Lieutenant George Reed and Junior-Lieutenant Ducky Wilson looked at him significantly, then over at Martha Johnson.

Reed appeared to be perfectly confident of both himself and the situation, but Ducky Wilson, red haired and pale, was keenly observant, and in spite of his flip rejoinders, gave clue to his nervousness by his mannerisms: tugging at his collar, as though he suffocated; rubbing the back of his fingers, which seemed grayish and not exactly

clean. Tony noticed that Betty seemed to like Ducky; he observed this not a little jealously. But if she were prejudiced in Wilson's favor, she made up for it in her obvious dislike for the cold and distant George Reed. Reed was frigid. You would have thought he had slept all night between two pieces of ice.

Key sat down beside the naval officer's dark wife.

SHE was slim, and dynamic, and very pretty. Her hair was a rich and shining black, coiled on the back of her neck; the beauty of her face was pale and exotic, with a kittenish slant to her eyes, and a thin nose, the nostrils of which were wide. Her lips were a flare of red. Key had met her once as Crossett's wife. It was at a premiere at Grauman's Chinese, and she had looked stunning. For the rest he had picked up gossip about her from Hollywood's wise boys who were always in the know of such things.

She had a Latin temper; hot blood that needed a constant stimulant of excitement. No one knew how much Latin there was in her, however, they only knew she was inclined to be dramatic, and extreme to the point of being unbearable in everything she did. It had not been a secret that Crossett treated her badly, for more than once she had worn smoked glasses on the boulevard to cover a black eye, but here again the Latin seemed to answer the question of why she stayed with him; for although such women will scream for freedom and equal rights, Key thought, it is tradition with them to be bossed by the male, to have iron-clad law laid down to them; and in their secret heart they admire a man who will do this, even if he is ruthless, more than they do one who will

let them have their own way. Until the day she disappeared from Crossett's household everyone had believed she worshipped him.

She looked at Key now. "It is terrible," she said, and she daubed at her eyes. "But I must be brave."

Betty Gale was grinning. Tony Key looked at her.

"The present I have," Betty said, "is in that notebook. Only it happens to be in shorthand, which you wouldn't understand. Shall I whisper it?"

Peter Brennan said: "What is this—a game?"

The platinum blonde nodded toward Martha. "She has confessed the murder."

There was silence. Martha Johnson kept crying softly.

"But that's not the complete payoff," Betty Gale went on. "William Crossett is—Mr. Jonas will be glad to hear—alive. Living and breathing, just as you and I. He's hiding in the empty stateroom Mrs. Johnson was given to sleep in last night."

IV

TONY KEY looked at Peter Brennan. Neither of them spoke. Jonas and the two officers, Wilson and Reed, seemed not in the least surprised. Brennan started moving toward the door. There was still silence, and Tony Key could feel the gentle list of the huge ship. At last Martha Johnson leapt to her feet.

"Well, gentlemen? What are you going to do? I killed my husband. I had reason. He was going to murder poor Bill Crossett. There was only one way I could stop him from doing it. So I—" She sank down in the chair again.

Key said: "Look, Betty, you show her some card tricks or something to keep her interested. If she thinks she

killed Johnson humor her along. I see that you already have. Brennan and I are—"

"You mean you don't believe it?" Betty snapped.

"Oh sure, we believe it," Key answered, "only we are very methodical detectives and we like to hear everyone make his little speech. We like to have reasons for things, and logic." He was backing.

"So, as I say, keep the folks amused until we come back. You might get up and recite the Shooting of Dan McGrew; that always goes over big. Or try standing on your head. No, on second thought, you'd better not. Just recite. We'll be right back."

He slipped out into the corridor and caught up with Peter Brennan.

"She might have done it, Key," he said.

"Sure she might have," Tony agreed, "but in the event she hasn't why encourage the killer by making him think we're giving up the chase? The trail will turn into a piece of ice if he thinks he's in the clear. He'll shut his trap and let us railroad the pretty Latin."

"Yeah. I see your point. Personally, I'm much more interested in play-games. Such as third degree, with Bill Crossett."

"Strange, but I had the same thought," said Key. "You know where this room is, don't you?"

"Sure."

In the next moment they had stopped in front of the door. Brennan turned the knob, grunted: "Locked," and brought out a string of keys. The third one he tried clicked back the lock. Tony Key reached inside his coat to the shoulder holster that carried his Colt automatic. He had a strange premonition.

Brennan pushed the door open, and for a moment Key and the Intelligence Officer stood in the passageway and looked in. The room seemed empty, bleak. Brennan stepped in first, and Tony Key followed.

Almost immediately, shots roared from behind. Peter Brennan went down as he tried to turn about. Tony Key saw the strained look on his face. But he saw it for only a fraction of a second. For he, too, was turning, but both he and Brennan had been taken off guard and he was not quick enough. Another shot roared.

Key felt pain sear across the tip of his shoulder, and though the bullet did no more than furrow him, he went careening across the room. He crashed against the bulkhead, and thudded down into a sitting position. He had struggled to keep his mind clear, and even as he hit he was raising the automatic in his hand.

IT jumped as he pulled the trigger, and for the first time now he saw the face of the man before him. It was a face livid with fear, yet unmistakable: William Crossett. The dark eyes were blazing. Tony Key triggered the automatic a second time. He saw Crossett's body jerk and quiver against the bulkhead. He saw the actor grasp his side. A scream broke from his lips, but died in a choking that came from his throat. He started going down, his feet sliding out from under him. And yet he was desperate enough to hold the gun steady in his hand. Another bullet blasted from its muzzle.

Key heard the metal slug clang into the iron bulkhead an inch over his ear; and he returned fire, two rapid shots. He missed because Crossett suddenly fell quickly across the floor of

the stateroom. For a moment he lay still and Key watched him. At last the Hollywood detective grabbed the corner of the bed and hauled himself to his feet.

He saw Peter Brennan holding his stomach and writhing in pain. Crossett stirred. Tony Key drew a slim pair of handcuffs from his coat pocket and bent over the actor. He grabbed his hand.

But in the next moment he was being jerked off his feet. Crossett had been acting again; and now he was a living fury. He grabbed Key's arm, jerked him headlong over his body; and as Key fell, slid out from under him. Tony Key struggled to get to his feet. He saw Crossett standing again, saw the gun in his hand.

He dove at the weapon, but Crossett lifted it, and bashed the butt into Key's forehead. For a moment Tony could not see and he staggered back. The gun butt hit again. Crossett laughed as though he had lost his mind. Tony Key groped out blindly. He heard the door slam and stumbled toward it. His vision was clearing now, but his head was throbbing, and blood was running from the top of his skull down into his eyes.

He opened the door and plunged out into the corridor. He reached in for the gun he had put away when he started to handcuff Crossett. The weapon slid into his hand, but as he looked to take aim, he saw a blurred vision before his eyes. There seemed to be not one fleeting figure, but three.

And then—quite suddenly—everything was clear. He saw Crossett trying to run, and still holding his shoulder. Tony Key moved forward; he lifted his gun and aimed at the shoulder. The weapon jerked in his hand. But the bullet clanged into an over-

head beam ahead of Crossett, and now the actor had rounded a corner. Tony Key, his mind standing on the brink of blackness, started running. A cry broke from his lips.

In the next moment his legs gave out, and he pitched forward on his bleeding head. The bullet wound, and the slugging he had taken, had weakened him. He lay writhing on deck, cursing; he told himself he had to get up and keep going. But his muscles would not respond.

PLATINUM Betty Gale carefully washed his head with a warm cloth that felt like something just short of paradise. He was in the sick bay, and Peter Brennan lay in the bunk just opposite Tony's chair.

"As for me," said Betty, "I'll take Charlie Chan any old time. Or a nice six-reel program pic where a flatfoot named Kelly rescues his daughter by jumping through the rafters onto a table, where the six gangsters are playing stud poker to see which one is going to kiss the little gal. Kelly kicks three of them in the face, and shoots the other three. It looks very simple. There's nothing to it. But what do you super men do? The two of you let a weakling actor put you in the sickbay of a ship."

Tony Key grinned.

"It's not funny," she went on, "when the world's most conceited detective, who charges more for his time than Jean Harlow, falls for the old gag of someone hiding behind the door as it is opened."

"I tell you it wasn't the door. It was a closet on the other side of the door, that you don't see as you enter because it's right smack up against the bulkhead. He waited until we were in, had our backs turned, and then he

jumped out and let us have it. Hell—any guy can—"

"Yeah, I know. Explain that to the moguls on next pay day. And just *try* and keep your job if you press charges against Crossett for this—if he doesn't happen to be guilty of the Johnson murder. Remember, he's still the box office syrup that little girls go to bed and ask Providence to send them, and remember—"

"I tell you he's lost his mind!" Tony Key said.

"What? Because he shot you? Don't be silly. I've felt like doing it myself. By the way, if you are interested, Martha Johnson still sticks to her confession, and Miss Betty Gale, your blonde admirer, still thinks she is guilty."

"That's the cat in you, Betty. Trying to frame a beautiful woman."

"What do you mean: trying to frame?"

He put a cigarette in his mouth and lit it. "Did it occur to you to ask her what kind of a weapon she used?"

"No. And hold still while I get this last bandage tied."

Key glanced over at Brennan. "How you feeling?"

"Rotten."

"Think you'll live?"

But Peter Brennan was too sick to appraise humor. He closed his eyes. Tony Key got to his feet.

"Hop back to the wardrobe, Betty. Get some officer to gather our guests again; I'll want to see them. I'm back to just where I was before: trying to get a lead on Johnson's murder. But since Crossett prefers to stick around the officer's rooms, and since Martha is undoubtedly giving him all the help she can, I have an idea where he might be. It's worth a check at least."

"Okay. I'll see you in the wardrobe."

THE ship's bell gonged six times. It was seven o'clock, and the *Lexington* moved silently through the calm night sea, in line now with the rest of the fleet; huge red and green running lights glowed from the port and starboard side; the planes lay quiet and alone on the flight deck. The tiny lights of Maui glimmered faintly far off shore.

Tony Key moved through the lighted passageway to the room in which Tom Johnson had been murdered. It had come to him while he was being bandaged that this room, being around the corner from where Tony had fallen, might easily be used as a hideout. The murder room had to be undisturbed because of any clues that might be in it and would have to be used later to prove the crime against somebody.

But it was only a hunch, coupled with the logic that Crossett was not likely to take his chances running around a ship he did not know much about. He was so famous that any sailor would be able to spot him. The ironic twist to it was that since the ship was unaware of the murder, Crossett could have walked any deck he wanted and the sailors, aware that he was aboard, would have thought it was perfectly natural for him to look around, and would not have bothered him. But maybe Crossett did know this. Tony decided that if he did not find him in the stateroom, he would have Crossett's disappearance announced through the loudspeakers with a request that when found he be brought to the wardroom. He was tired of hide and seek and although he had honestly believed Crossett innocent of Tom Johnson's murder, he was now by no means so sure, and he wanted to get Crossett's whole story.

He attributed Martha Johnson's confession to hysteria, and yet it brought home a curious fact of which no one had been aware: she still loved to the point of worship—William Crossett.

He arrived at the stateroom door and glanced up at the card: *Lieutenant-Commander Thomas Johnson*. He thought of Johnson lying in the contagious ward. He tried the door. It was open!

It should have been locked. He reached for his gun, and, green eyes curiously hard, he shoved open the door. He slipped into the room, keeping his back to the bulkhead this time and looking first behind the door, and toward the nearest closets. But he could see little through the light from the passageway, and he snapped on the switch in the room. A figure lay in the bed, cover over him. It was Crossett.

Key walked over to him. He felt the ship sway gently to the starboard. A green wave broke over the closed port hole and water dribbled down. He kept looking down at Crossett. The actor did not move, and Tony Key felt his face. Suddenly he drew his hand away and pushed back a pillow which covered the top of Crossett's head. The pillow gave hard, for blood glued it to Crossett's hair.

Crossett was murdered.

The silence in the room was ominous. Water kept dribbling down the port hole. The ship creaked a little as it swayed. Tony Key put his gun away and bent over the corpse. He saw two small, roundish marks on the skull. The same kind of wounds he had seen on Johnson.

He pulled back the covers. There was the bullet wound that he himself had put in Crossett's side, and there was much blood around it. One of

Crossett's hands was still pressed over the side.

Tony Key thought the air in the room was close, and somehow damp—almost soggy. He lit a cigarette and moved away from the body. He stepped out into the passageway and quietly closed the door.

V

MARTHA JOHNSON said: "While Bill was on location, Tom Johnson came to see me every day. He was on leave. He said he knew, everybody knew, how Bill treated me. He made me think I was in love with him again, and that we could make a go of it. So he took me away, and I got a quick divorce from Bill. But I was always sorry for it. I loved Bill Crossett."

"So you thought he had murdered Tom Johnson and you were trying to be noble by taking the rap for him?"

"Yes. You see Tom knew how I felt about Bill Crossett and he said we were going to have it out in this wardroom when Bill came aboard. But Bill never came in the wardroom. When he found my room later, he told me Tom had threatened to kill him. He was in a terrible condition. He was out of his mind."

"What time was this?"

"About four in the morning. He said he had run into the first room he came to, to hide, and it happened to be Tom's room. He heard Tom Johnson tell an officer what room to take me to, and then he stayed hidden and Tom did not find him. He said he didn't remember much of what happened in the hours that followed, but that when he came out of the closet the door of which had been tightly closed, Tom was on the floor dead."

"But you thought in his dilemma

he—Crossett—had killed Tom and was just telling you that?"

"Yes. Naturally, having heard where I was, he came to me. He thought then that I hated him, but he didn't know where else to go and—and he had always been able to bluff me. He thought he would bluff me again. But he didn't have to."

Tony Key nodded. It was very simple. "And when he left your room after our little battle, he went back to the only stateroom he knew—Tom Johnson's"

"I—I guess he did."

Key pinched out his cigarette. His green eyes were hot. "Look Mrs. Johnson. Think hard! Didn't someone else know of Crossett's whereabouts? Didn't someone else offer to help him?"

"I don't know. He didn't mention anybody."

"Think hard. It is quite important. Because that *somebody* whom he thought had befriended him, is more than likely the person who murdered him."

She repeated: "He didn't mention anyone. But as I said, he was out of his mind. He talked wildly."

Tony Key looked up at Lieutenant George Reed, then at Junior-Lieutenant Ducky Wilson.

"You two gentlemen," he said quickly, "you have been very patient, but it won't be necessary any longer. We are getting to you right now. You see, this thing has narrowed itself down beautifully. We look for motive in murders and the party responsible for the two that have happened aboard this ship must have a motive that includes both an officer and an actor. Since you two were the only ones familiar with Johnson and Crossett; that is, could have reason for wanting

either one of them killed, it puts you on somewhat of a spot. Which of you wishes to confess first?"

REED spoke first. He was tall and blonde, definitely Nordic. He had suspicious blue eyes, and his expression was one of highbrow tolerance with proceedings that did not greatly interest him. He seemed no more moved than he had during Martha's confession a little earlier.

Key did not particularly like him because he was so prim and dandy, with his immaculate appearance and his lack of emotion. Apparently murder did not even annoy him. He was as unlike Ducky Wilson—whom to Key's regret Betty Gale still smiled upon—as sun and moon.

Wilson was untidy. As time passed he seemed to become less interested in personal appearance: since dinner he seemed to have spotted the cuff of his coat with grease but he was totally unaware; or he just didn't give a damn. His hair cut seemed to have suddenly grown shaggy because he was unkempt.

But now Reed was talking and Tony had to pay attention to him. Reed, his fingernails carefully manicured; his face beautifully groomed: sitting, playing with a watch chain and talking. He was saying:

"I had no feeling of friendliness for Crossett. He caused me to resign the navy for an accident on a five-inch gun for which he was responsible. But that was my own fault. I was young and idealistic. I thought at that time that he was worth taking the blame for. Johnson told Crossett I was now a chief petty officer, and that day when he was to bring Crossett in, he asked me to wear a chief's uniform. Johnson was my friend, so I humored him.

But the fact is that when Crossett finally went out of the navy he wrote out a confession of the gun incident, explaining the entire circumstances, and that, with a petition of the ship on which I had served, brought about my reinstatement in the service as an officer."

"The idea being," Tony Key said, "that Mr. Johnson was deliberately trying to scare the daylights out of Crossett and took advantage of his not knowing you had been reappointed."

"That seems to be the idea."

"I see. And you felt no malice toward Crossett?"

"None whatsoever. As a matter of fact I was rather thankful he wrote the confession." The blonde officer's blue eyes flickered.

Tony Key looked at him for a moment, then he swung toward Ducky Wilson. Wilson had red hair and bright black eyes. He was thin, and pale; but he had a strong jaw.

"Me," he said, "I hated Crossett like hell, and I don't mind telling you."

"You were the man who got drunk with him?"

"Yes."

Tony's right eyebrow arched. "But you didn't kill him, of course. You wouldn't do anything like that?"

"You're right," said Ducky Wilson cheerfully, putting a cigarette in his mouth and lighting it, "I wouldn't."

Tony Key did not reply, and for a long moment there was silence. Betty Gale tossed her notebook to the table and exercised her fingers back and forth.

"At this point, boss," she said, "in keeping with the best pic policies, Charlie Chan would put an empty gun on the table and let the killer grab for it. Or was that Nero Wolfe?"

John Jonas, the fat producer, who had said nothing for a long while, grunted and touched a match to his cigar. "I wish you'd do something, Key. The picture is lost without Crossett. I might as well get back to Hollywood."

Tony Key took in the flabby face of the producer curiously. He looked into the beady eyes that seemed to be lost in mountains of flesh. "You aren't married, are you, Mr. Jonas?"

"No."

"But you were thinking of it?"

"No."

"Yes, you were thinking of it. Nice new starlet. Young and ambitious. But she met Crossett."

"You're making this up. Are you going to try and accuse me? I'm one of your employers!"

Tony Key was restless. He walked from one end of the room to the other. Presently he swung around, shot his finger out.

"No. I'm not accusing you, Mr. Jonas. I'm not accusing anyone. I don't have to. Inside of an hour I'll know without a bit of doubt who committed these crimes. Whoever did it will be locked up. You see, Mr. Peter Brennan of the Naval Intelligence picked up a clue from Johnson's body that had to be analyzed—set in a chemical for a great many hours. But it's almost ready now, and that clue combined with another Brennan has, will pin the crime definitely on the right party!"

JONAS sucked in his breath. Lieutenant Reed's blue eyes seemed suddenly troubled, the first emotion he had registered since Key had been watching him. Red-haired Ducky Wilson shifted uneasily. Martha Johnson stared, wide-eyed.

"And so," Tony Key went on, "until we are ready, I believe you people may as well go back to your rooms. I want to shake each of you by the hand and wish you my best, because the next time we meet, well—"

Lieutenant George Reed said: "Isn't this just a bit ridiculous?"

"It won't seem that way an hour from now. There were just certain things I had to learn from you people, and I think I know as much as I need to know. Mainly, motives. Miss Gale has the written testimony witnessed by all of you. The testimony of one of you will be used for a conviction of murder in the first degree. That is all."

Jonas got up and went to the door. Tony Key shook his hand. Reed and Ducky Wilson followed. He shook hands with both of them. Martha Johnson departed last.

Key closed the door, and wiped sweat from his forehead.

Platinum Betty Gale said: "Well, I see you took the hint and laid the gun on the table. What's the plan?"

He put his handkerchief in his pocket. "Betty, was it convincing?"

"You mean the clue that's pickling in vinegar? It's marvelous. Where did you get it?"

"Out of the air. But I think the murderer fell for it. I'm sure of it. Now, look: we've got to work fast. Curly Conley and Max White are wandering around the ship somewhere in sailor uniforms. Get them. Send White here with the make-up kit at once, and send Conley down to guard Brennan. He must guard him with his life. Brennan's a sick man, and I don't want anybody fooling with him."

"Oke. But I still don't know what the plan is."

"Do you have to know everything?"

She shrugged. "I just happened to

think if you were killed there would be no one to know what course of action your genius had decided to take."

"If I'm killed there'll be no one to care, because the murderer will be caught killing me."

She had started for the door, but now she turned. "Boss, you mean to say—"

He grinned and showed her his hand. "Go ahead on your errand, hard-hearted; until you got so nasty I was going to tell you who the killer is. But—"

"You mean you know?"

"Yes, I know."

She was incredulous. "You're absolutely positive?"

"Absolutely."

"Then why don't you—"

"Because the clue I got might not be strong enough to hang the guilty party; but the new scheme, if it works, will bring the killer right into our hands."

Betty Gale said: "What clue are you talking about?"

"The clue I got when I shook hands with them," Tony Key replied.

THE ship's bell gonged four times. It was ten o'clock and the *Lexington* was following the *Saratoga* and *Ranger* and drawing near the dark tropic island of Molokai; the lights of portholes were out now, and marines walked guard on the flight deck. The black, silken water rippled and gurgled against the side of the monster vessel as it nosed into the silver light of the moon.

Taps had blown and the enlisted men who were not on watch were in their bunks. But even a whisper can become a scream that has no sound, and there was very little sleeping. Low toned voices echoed.

"Hey, Butch. I was on watch. You know what I heard?"

"What?"

"Crossett's been murdered."

"You said that before. I still don't believe you."

"Yeah, well get a load of this: Commander Johnson's been murdered too."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said, Butch. I heard that both Crossett and Johnson have been murdered."

"That's scuttlebutt talk."

"No. I got it from the bridge. Heard a chief quartermaster telling a signalman."

"Did the chief know for sure?"

"Well, no, he didn't. Not exactly. But if you ask me, Butch—"

"I'm not asking you. For cripes' sake go to bed."

VI

ONLY a blue stanchion light shone from one corner of the sick bay, and in its eerie glow a figure was silhouetted on a white cot. A figure who lay there alone, unmoving. The ship swayed to starboard and bottles rattled from the shelves, but there was no other sound.

Presently there was another figure. One who opened the door and peered in. A flashlight gleamed across the bunks, and at last rested on the one in which a man lay. The figure crossed the room silently. He put the light down on the face. Then he turned it off.

"Brennan!" he whispered.

"Yes?"

"What happened to your clue?"

The man in the bunk blinked. "Clue?—Oh. It isn't ready yet. Will be pretty quickly."

"Where is it?"

The man on the bunk said: "I

haven't told anyone where it is. Why should I tell you?"

"You haven't even told Tony Key?"

"No. Of course not."

The man with the flashlight laughed softly. "And you aren't going to tell anyone."

He put the light away and lifted his fist. Tony Key rose from the bed, grabbed at that fist, and cried out. The lights went on. Key threw the killer across the bed, and to the floor. He tumbled out on top of him. Curly Conley rushed from his hiding place, a gun in hand; Max White, also armed, stood guarding the door. Betty Gale watched from a corner of the room.

The killer struggled desperately. He struck out at Key, but the Hollywood detective was pinning down his arms. Suddenly the murderer's legs swept up, got a grip on Key's shoulders and started tugging back. The place where Tony had been wounded was ripped open and began bleeding. The shoulder felt numb.

Conley and White could not shoot or intrude without harm to their boss either physically, or by getting awkwardly in the way. It was a breathless moment in which everything depended on Tony Key's ability to extricate himself.

Key was swung back by the grip of the other on his shoulders. He felt the killer writhing free, and crawling back. He rolled, saw an upraised arm, a glitter of brass. The blow fell for his head, but Key ducked so that it missed by an inch, hitting him just below the base of his neck. It had come within a fraction of hitting his spinal column.

He saw the fist raise again, but he swung his own right, crashed it into the murderer's face. Reaching behind

him and grabbing the bunk, he pulled himself to his feet. The killer started to rise also. In that split second, almost on his feet, Tony Key brought up his knee with all the impact he could force behind it. It thudded under the killer's jaw.

The murderer fell back, groggy. Tony Key moved across to the other side of the bed and Curly Conley and Max White moved forward and picked the man up. In a moment he was wearing handcuffs.

Betty Gale wet the end of her pencil. "Any little statement you'd like to make at this point, Mr. Wilson? Or should I call you Junior-Lieutenant Ducky Wilson?"

THE red-haired officer stared at her, and gulped. Sweat was drenching his face. His black eyes were livid. He looked from Betty to Tony Key who was removing the thin mask that make-up expert Max White had moulded from Brennan's face. He blinked as though he could not comprehend.

"Then you weren't Brennan?"

"No. Unfortunately Brennan was too sick to play the part."

"Part?"

"Yeah," said Betty Gale, "you know: gun on the table, and you reach for it. Same thing. You stuck your neck out."

"Mainly because I needed those brass knucks to convict you with," Tony Key added. "I was afraid when I saw the tarnish where you wore them across your hands—the tarnish and the creases and marks they left—that if I arrested you there in the ward-room we'd never find the knucks. So I invited you to come down here. There was no clue, except that one. I knew from the beginning that it hadn't been

a gun or a club that had bashed in Johnson's head. I've taken sketches of heads that were like that, and the sketch I made of Johnson's head wasn't the same. The marks where you cracked the skull were too round, not blunt enough. And they were too small.

"But that isn't all," Tony Key went on smoothly. "You were a give-away almost since the beginning." He glanced at Betty, arching his right eye-brow. "A point you seemed to have missed, my pretty; you were all giggles and blushes over Wilson."

"That's not true, papa," she said. "I had a hunch from the beginning that he was the bogy man, and I treated him nice so he wouldn't take a swack at me. I think I smell what you're coming to; let's see if my reasons for suspecting him coincide with yours. Almost from the beginning, he was trying to rub the grayish tarnish off his paws. It looked like he had dirty hands. But the tarnish came from the old brass knucks. Second, after he bumped Crossett he didn't have time to dandy up and he looked—if you will pardon my Southern accent—like hell. Hair not combed, shirt dirty, collar open. Yeah—and the spot on his coat that looked like grease because he had washed it. It was blood, wasn't it?"

"Betty," Tony sighed, "you're marvelous!"

She said: "You will be too, if you keep me long enough."

Key sobered and looked around. "Savvy now?"

The handcuffed officer looked down at the brass knuckles on his hands with which he had just tried to kill Tony Key.

"Uh-huh," he breathed, "I get your idea all right."

"And then," Key went on, "motive

helped point you too. You should have let Crossett live. When you saw him dash into Johnson's room after the shooting, you should have just left him there. In time, if he didn't call for help, he would have bled to death of the bullet wound in his side. And he wouldn't have called for help because his fright, and the added weight of Johnson's murder, had unbalanced his mind, temporarily at least. As I say, you should have left him, but you didn't. You went and killed him. You should know better, Wilson."

"Know better than what?"

"Than to take a woman of Latin temperament seriously under such circumstances. After Martha had been married to Johnson again for awhile, she knew she didn't love him, and although it was not possible by that time to go back to Crossett, she was by no means going to suffer in silence. She was hot-blooded and romantic. She must have dazzled you awfully. Oh, I know you probably had some small personal motive—probably jealousy—for killing Johnson; and that you had another motive for Crossett, which was that he was responsible for you still being a JG—I know that, but your main motive was to get them out of the way. You wanted Martha for yourself. That's why you killed them."

"You're only guessing that I love her!"

"No, I'm not guessing. It's the only sane motive you could have for being so eager to get Crossett out of the way. You realized too late that she loved him, so you were intent on doing him in. But your error was in mistaking Martha's loneliness and affection for love."

Ducky Wilson looked down, still rubbing at the tarnish. "Yes," he said, "fatal error."

Backlash



By Harold de Polo

Author of "The Red Lure,"
"The Two Strangers," etc.

*For Chan Buzzell, Who Knew
Sportsmen, It Was a Lead Pipe
Cinch to Catch a Sneaking Re-
venge Killer*



Jerked backward, Ab completely
lost balance

HERB BENSON, manipulating his paddle, bolstered the opinion of Chan Buzzell and other Loon Lake inhabitants when they maintained that he was the slickest guide with a canoe that this remote Maine logging settlement had ever known.

There was a brisk ripple slapping against the starboard gunwale, but without apparent effort, without lifting his paddle from the water, Herb managed to keep his craft parallel to the shore line so that the city sport up in the bow could cast to the bank without having to twist his body into position.

This was a decided help to the fisherman in front, for he was a chunky fat man with a big bulge of stomach over his belt. Herb, however, always took particular pains with this particular customer, who was an unusually popular sport with all the guides and the local people. Mr. Clive Haynes, said Loon Lakers, always had a pleasant word for everyone—with a cigar or a box of candy—without appearing to be patronizing backwoods hicks. Too many city sports had that attitude.

There wasn't, at that, anything con-

descending in the makeup of Clive Haynes, as any guide, and especially Benson, would have averred. He was a true fisherman who always insisted on his paddler changing seats when he thought that he himself had had his fair share of fun. His work with the paddle may have been awkward, as he would laughingly remark, but his handling of a four-ounce, five-foot bamboo wand was a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

It was after midnight, and they had been out for somewhat more than an hour under a dazzling June moon that was almost full, and Clive Haynes had yet to tangle up his line in a backlash. Perfect casting, as Herb well knew. With a graceful snap of his wrist the fat man would flip his rod, sending his top-water plug within six inches—an inch or two, sometimes—of the shore. It went under over-hanging branches, between rocks, alongside logs, with a precision that was a real art. His retrieving of the lure, his thumbing of the line onto the reel spool, was equally faultless.

He hadn't taken a bass yet, either. Hadn't even had a strike for that matter.

Herb must have felt chagrined that his favorite customer had not connected. He said:

"Tough luck, Mist' Haynes. Git one up to the Point, most likely. Mebbe that big one we lost last year'll be waitin' for us."

"Fishing, aren't we?" Haynes rumbled with a happy chuckle, shooting his plug beneath an alder limb. "Hell, man. wasn't it Grover Cleveland who said that the next best thing to going fishing and catching fish was going fishing?"

Herb agreed with this statement. Ordinarily, he never sympathized with an

employer when luck was lean. He did occasionally give verbal sympathy when the bass were not hitting, though, to a man he considered a brother sportsman.

"Well, it's about time—"

Chung!

That happens to be the only arrangement of letters that will form a word weakly describing the sound made by a small-mouth bass hitting a top-water plug.

"Got him, Herb," chortled the fat man, as he deftly sank his hooks home.

"Hold him, Mist' Haynes," was the guide's time-honored retort as the bronze-back made his first arching leap in the moonlight.

ANOTHER canoe, propelled by a guide and with a fisherman up in the bow, came from around the Point.

The guide, Herb Benson saw, was Abbott Lassiter; the sport was one H. Chisholm Broughton—as he styled himself—from down Boston way. Ab Lassiter was counted a jealous and mean man, locally, while Broughton was known to be a fish hog who didn't care how he got his fish so long as he got them. He was a bass devotee, and he always came to Loon Lake—as Mr. Haynes did—on the first day of the bass season, the twentieth of June.

The red-eye that Haynes had hooked was a good one—a four-pounder at least. Herb had seen this when he had broken water. Herb also saw, as he backed with his paddle to give his customer more chance to keep a taut line, that Lassiter was calmly paddling on. If he continued in the direction he was going, he would cross between Mr. Haynes and the shore. Would do the unpardonable thing of going over a fisherman's line and very possibly fouling it.

"Wait a minute, Ab," Herb Benson

called out in his quiet but firm voice. "We got a fish on."

There was another dip of the paddle, that was all.

Clive Haynes spoke, now, and his voice didn't sound like that of a jolly fat man:

"Tell your man to hold back, Broughton!" he snapped.

But H. Chisholm Broughton, as a sportsman, was an out-and-out swine. He couldn't stand seeing another man hook a fish, bring down a bird, when his bag was empty. He spoke savagely, using a petty phrase:

"Yeh! Think you own the whole lake?"

It was enough for Ab Lassiter. Of the same stamp as the man who had hired him, he dug down with his paddle and sent the craft swiftly ahead. As he reached the spot where he judged the line to be, he started jabbing furiously in the water.

Herb Benson did his best and so did Clive Haynes, but that jabbing paddle finally found the line. Tugging at it with his paddle, Ab easily snapped it. The bass, freed from its taut pull, gave a last flip into the air and disappeared below the surface to no doubt entangle the plug hooks into a sunken log and pull them from his incredibly tough jaw.

"Bass get away, Haynes?" Broughton had the added bad grace to call out.

Clive Haynes didn't answer. He didn't dare. He didn't like to give way before anyone for whom he had no respect, and had he once opened his mouth he knew that an extremely vitriolic torrent of language would have rushed forth.

Herb Benson, however, did answer. Not verbally, though.

Hastily dropping his paddle, he

reached down into his canoe for the short steel casting rod, with reel and line and heavy top-water plug attached, that he always carried when out at night with a man like Mr. Haynes who would allow him to do some fishing himself.

Herb wasn't as expert a caster as his customer. Herb knew that. Herb however, was a mighty good man in any kind of a pinch, the type who could outdo himself when the occasion demanded.

The canoe piloted by Ab Lassiter was perhaps seventy or seventy-five feet off, traveling away from him. Herb, snapping back his rod, made an overhand cast that went out like a bullet.

The white plug, in the moonlight, sailed through the air smoothly. Herb had aimed for Ab's left arm, and he didn't miss by much. The plug, with three gangs of hooks on it, caught into Ab's light flannel shirt at the shoulder. As it did so, Herb reeled in as fast as his fingers could work, got his line taut, and yanked his rod toward him with all the force that the tubular steel could take.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, Ab Lassiter let out a howl of surprise, of pain, and tried to jerk forward from this thing that was pulling him back. H. Chisholm Broughton, at the commotion, turned in his seat. The canoe, not built for these twistings and lungings, began to teeter perilously from side to side.

Herb, for the fraction of a second, slacked his line. Then, as Lassiter started to reach for the plug with his right hand, Herb gave a final heavy yank.

It did the trick.

Ab, jerked backward, completely lost

his balance and started clawing in the air. Broughton, in the bow, began moving his body this way and that in an attempt to keep the craft on a somewhat even keel. He was yelling out as he did so:

"You damn fool, Ab, keep still! You'll tip us over, I tell you! You'll tip—"

They did tip themselves over. As they did, Herb Benson gave a last yank with his rod, a small sigh coming from him as he realized that he would lose his plug and some line. He did suffer this loss, for the braided silk parted.

"Canoe git away from you, Ab?" he dryly called out, as he watched the two figures swimming wildly for the shore that wasn't more than twenty feet away from them.

Ab didn't answer. Broughton did answer, for just then he found out that his feet could touch bottom and that he consequently could stand on them.

His answer was not printable.

"Yah! Think you own the whul' lake?" complained Herb with an exaggerated whine in his voice. "Judas Priest, you're disturbin' the water so's a feller can't even fish! . . . Let's paddle us over Farrington Cove way, eh, Mist' Haynes?"

"Looks as if these noisy people force us to do it, Herb," agreed Clive Haynes gravely.

"Don't it?" drawled the guide, immediately heading his canoe away from there.

ALTHOUGH the incident would never have been exactly forgotten, it probably would not have made as bad feelings as it did if Clive Haynes hadn't recounted it at breakfast the next morning in Brown's sporting camp up by the headwaters of the lake.

Abbott Lassiter, naturally, would have remained mum about it, and so would the naturally chagrined H. Chisholm Broughton. As for Herb Benson, he was conceded to be as chary in giving out information, good or otherwise, as was his friend, Chan Buzzell, the game warden.

Clive Haynes can't be blamed for telling it. Haynes, after all, had lost an exceptionally beautiful bass.

Lassiter discovered that the story had gone the rounds when he showed up at the Loon Lake store and post-office the next day for the noon mail.

"Tryin' to copy these here sassiety people, I hear, Ab?" queried Skip Babcock solemnly.

Skip was the town buffoon; the boy who was said to be "not quite right"; the resident that every village boasts or deplores, depending upon its mood at the moment.

"Copyin' society people?" echoed Ab, sincerely puzzled at the remark and yet canny enough to realize that popular opinion didn't want him to offend Skip too harshly.

"Sure," said Skip blandly, apparently having one of his good days. "Don't these here sassiety people in the movies allus go in swimmin' on parties in the moonlight?"

The guffaws alone, derisive as they were, would have undoubtedly not have been enough to instill the germ of taking life—of murder—in Abbott Lassiter's heart. Undoubtedly he would have gone on hating Herb, as he had always hated him for being a better guide, a better man; but Herb Benson happened to suddenly put in an appearance.

Herb drove up with Chan Buzzell, his friend, in the battered old flivver belonging to the game warden.

The porch loiterers became silent, expectant.

Again the precise thing happened that inflamed Ab Lassiter's brain. Had Benson quizzed him, made some remark about the upsetting of the canoe, Ab would probably have unloosened his anger in a verbal tirade and just gone on hating the other man.

Herb, however, did the natural thing that is ingrained in a sportsman. He nodded casually, and Ab could see that Herb hadn't even told Chan.

"Lo, Ab," said Herb, and went on into the store.

It was this generosity, this refusal to gloat over a worsted opponent, that definitely planted murder in the brain of Abbott Lassiter.

There were no guffaws, now, but Lassiter took the silence as a far worse insult than he would have taken laughter. Probably, he told himself, they were cooking something up on him. All right, damn them, *let* them cook something up on him. He'd show 'em where they got off, the fools!

He waited to do this showing, out on the porch, for a good dozen minutes or more. Nothing seemed to occur, so he finally went in to procure whatever mail there might be for him.

There wasn't any.

This further angered him. He'd hoped to get a letter from a city sport he had in mind, engaging his services for the second week in July. Damn his luck, the whole *world* was against him, was it?

Herb Benson had set it against him, had he? Well, he'd get even with Herb Benson! He'd—*he'd kill* Herb Benson!

HE didn't know exactly how he would accomplish this. He knew only that he'd better hide his feelings. He'd better appear to take his ducking of last night as a joke.

He slouched up to a counter and approached a clerk, a wry smile on his face that was calculated to be humorous:

"Hi, Tom! Lemme see a flannel shirt, will you? Herb wet one for me las' night, an' it takes two-three days to dry!"

"What size neck, Abbott?" asked the clerk.

Lassiter wasn't listening. He was listening, rather, to have Herb say something, from over there by the tackle counter where he was standing with Buzzell and a few others.

Herb said nothing.

"What size neck, Abbott?" repeated the clerk.

Lassiter told him. He didn't know how he remembered the number, though, for the red he was seeing. The clerk calling him "Abbott" instead of "Ab," and the silence of Herb and Chan and their crowd, showed him that he wasn't popular.

It was all Herb Benson's fault. He'd get Herb Benson, somehow. He'd—

Then Herb Benson's voice came to him. He was speaking to some youngster who was buying a spinner or plug, apparently attaching it to his line before going out fishing from the wharf in front of the Loon Lake store:

"Don't tie your knots that way, Bub," Herb was saying. "You allus got to cut the line, when you want to get a plug or spinner or hook off, if you do that. Look here—"

Ab saw red. Damn Herb for being an uppity know-it-all. Trying to show some kid how to make one of those crazy knots, was he? Yeah, that was just like Herb, all right. Always a certain way to do a thing; always the only way to do it; always trying to *tell* people how to do it, too.

In reality, the youngster had asked

Herb the best way to tie a knot so that it would be firm and easy to unravel without wasting line, for Herb did know a lot about such things.

"See how much better that way is?" Ab heard Herb saying. "Jest a pull at the end and it's loosed. Harder the fish pulls on the *other* end, though, the tighter the knot stays. Got the trick o' doin' it, Bub?"

"Sure. Wait a minute. I think so, Herb. Like this, eh?"

It made Ab sick, that's what it did, always playing to the gallery the way Herb did. Trying to get in with kids so's they'd think he was a big man, was he?

But Dick Anderson came in then, and Ab heard Herb call cheerily out to him:

"Jest the man I'm lookin' for, Richard. Lemme take your seine net, will you? Chan thinks I'm right in sayin' there's too many suckers up to Farrington Brook. They guzzle up all the salmon spawn. Want to net some o' them out o' there, the fu'st night I got free without any guidin' to do."

"Ain't got a seine net," Ab heard Anderson say. "Got a big gill net, that Pa used 'afore the law went on ag'in 'em. Welcome to take it, Herb."

"Reckon I will. Reckon we can work the brook with a gill net, all right. Got to git one o' the boys to help me. Chan's too busy nights, jest now. Thanks, Richard," said Herb.

"Help you myself, anytime you want, Herb."

"Thanks, Richard. Prob'ly call on you."

Ab Lassiter knew something about gill nets. Knew a great deal about the illegal use of them, in fact. His brain, bent on vengeance, began to connect gill nets with the murder of Herb Benson.

"You can come up with me after I git the mail an' I'll give you the net," Dick Anderson was saying.

"Good idee. I'll take you up, Richard," said Herb.

Ab's plan—as a good many murder plans do—came to him suddenly with all the details perfect. He told himself that he was clever enough, though, to make it seem that he wasn't sore at Herb. So, as he went to the door, he turned with a grin that was calculated to be sheepish and spoke:

"Say, Herb! Don't think I'm sore about the duckin' I got. Had it comin' to me, I reckon!"

"Reckon you did," drawled Herb gravely.

ABBOTT LASSITER, a few hours later, told himself that the Gods of luck were with him. It began to rain. Ab, like most guides, knew the weather in his section. He knew, at once, that the rain would continue, hard, all the rest of the day and night. He was certain of that as he was that Herb Benson would be a dead man before morning.

There would be no bass casting to-night, either for his own city sport or for Herb's Mr. Haynes. Bass simply do not strike plugs in the rain. There would, also, be no one on the lake, especially as the regular run of campers, of summer people, usually did not come up until the first of July or later. The few that were here, now, would not be out in the rain. Yes, he'd have the lake to himself, all right.

One thing in particular that pleased him, about the death he had planned for Herb Benson, was that it would look as if Herb had accidentally been killed—drowned—while illegally netting fish. That tickled Ab, for Herb was one of these fool guides who never

took a fish out of season, never shot a deer or even a pesky partridge while the law was on. That was one reason he was so friendly with Chan.

Chan? Damn *him*, too. He hated him almost as much as he had always hated Herb. Well, Chan would be shocked, he guessed, when he found that his pal had been fooling him all along. Illegally gill-netting fish. What a beaut!

The worst part of the whole thing, to Ab Lassiter, was the waiting until dark came. He sat in the ramshackle house, inherited from his father, where he lived alone, watching the rain pour down and thanking his luck that it was pouring down.

Dark finally came.

Herb, he knew, would also be alone. A great hand to stay alone, Herb was. Always fussing with guns or fishing tackle, or else reading some of those outdoor magazines that the city sports he guided gave him. A good thing, too, that Herb's little two-room log cabin was up there by Little Cove Channel. No other camp or dwelling within a mile of it, and the channel was one of the only two places in the whole of Loon Lake where you could properly set a gill net.

Ab knew that. He'd set enough, in his time.

Luck was with him in one other way, although he hadn't called it luck when he'd had to buy a bottle of chloroform a year back, when his 'coon hound had taken sick. He'd loved that 'coon hound—about the only living thing Ab Lassiter had ever loved—and when he'd seen that the poor dog was doomed he'd wanted to put him out of the way as easily as he could. He couldn't bear to shoot him, he remembered. He still had the rest of that bottle tucked away.

It would have been hard if he hadn't had it. If he'd had to knock Herb out

with a club, or some other sort of weapon, the wound would show on the body. Now, when he could sneak up on him from behind and put him to sleep with chloroform, it wouldn't even be noticed when he was found in the water. No trouble sneaking up behind Herb either, once Herb had let him in. Herb was a trusting fool, as everyone knew. Herb wouldn't suspect anything.

HE started out through the rain, anyway, with a soft rag and his bottle of chloroform.

He elected to travel by canoe. By cutting across the bay, by skirting Farrington Cove, he could get to within a quarter of a mile of Herb's house in around twenty minutes or so.

He did so. There, pulling his craft onto the shore, he hid it in the trees just to be on the safe side. Then he walked briskly through the woods to Herb's cabin.

He knocked on the door:

"Hi, Herb! It's Ab Lassiter."

"Come right in, Ab," said Herb.

Ab opened the door and did so. He stood there, for a moment, looking very much abashed as he gazed at Herb sitting in the rocker with a book on his knees.

"Herb," he finally blurted out, "I got to thinkin', sittin' to home in the rain all day. I been a dirty skunk, Herb, cuttin' off your sport's fish last night. I—I come over, Herb, to ask you to forgit. Us guides had ought to be friends, I can see. Yeah, I been sort of a damn fool!"

Herb Benson put his book on the table. He looked a trifle surprised, for a mere moment, and then his face turned gravely thoughtful. Again, after a moment, a slow smile lit up. He got to his feet and stuck out his hand:

"Shucks, Ab," he said, for he was a

trustful man, "that's all right with me. Forgit it yourself. Sure we'd ought to stick together."

"Reckon I learned my lesson, Herb," grinned Ab as he took the outstretched hand.

Herb, making some laughing rejoinder, changed the subject. The talk turned to bass, to salmon, to all types of Loon Lake fishing.

Ab, after a few minutes, suddenly asked:

"Git that net from Dick Anderson, Herb? Reckon I can dig one up for you if you ain't."

"Thanks, Ab. Got it today, all right when I left the store with him after mail time."

"Glad to help you out gittin' them suckers from Farrington Brook. Eat up a heap o' good spawn, they do, like you an Chan says. Sure, lemme know when you need a hand."

"Thanks, Ab," said Herb with sincere gratitude, as if he were telling himself that Abbott Lassiter *had* changed completely, and much for the better.

They talked more fishing and hunting, and the conversation, as it eventually did between guides, went to their favorite deer rifles.

"Lemme see that .351 you use, Herb. Like that .303 myself, but that automatic, I got to admit—"

"Shucks, jest lemme show her an' explain her to you, Ab, an' you'll never use no other," cut in Herb good-naturedly, going over to his cabinet where he kept his firearms.

As he stooped down to unlock the glass door, Abbott Lassiter decided that the time for which he had been waiting had come. Yanking out his rag, he got out his bottle of chloroform, extracted the cork, and soaked the cloth with the fluid. Then, while Herb was still bend-

ing over, just about to take out his rifle, Ab got a strangle hold on him from behind and slapped that sodden rag over his mouth and nose.

THERE was, of course, a slight struggle. A very slight one, however. Herb Benson was caught at too much of a disadvantage. He did succeed in making Ab crash down to the floor with him, but after a moment his twisting and squirming ceased and he lay inert.

Ab Lassiter wasted no time. Shouldering the body, he walked down to the lake with it through the teeming rain. Arriving at the shore, he waded into the shallow water and held Herb Benson under by the simple expedient of standing on him and pushing him down. He stayed this way for ten minutes, fifteen, twenty. That, he decided, was enough. Herb was dead, drowned.

Still he would take no chances. Getting a rope from his pocket that he had brought along, he took a heavy rock, secured the rope about it, and then hitched it to Herb's belt. After that, he shoved the body out into slightly deeper water. It stayed under.

He raced back to the cabin, then, in search of a net. Herb, an orderly man, would probably have kept it in the garage he used for his small car. Ab was right, as far as that went. He found it there. When he did find it, though, he swore.

It was a gill net, but it had not been used for gill netting by Dick Anderson. There were no lead weights at the bottom of it, and no man could or would go gill netting without lead weights to his net.

Panic, for an instant, overtook him. But not for long.

In the rear of the garage, laid out on the floor, he saw exactly what he

wanted—several long lengths of lead pipe. He remembered, then, that Herb must have had them left over when he had rigged up a gasoline engine, last fall, and piped his water from the lake.

He glanced over at Herb's work bench along one side of the garage wall, with the tools methodically hanging above it, each on a separate hook. Yes, there was a hack saw there.

With the hack saw he hastily got to work. Stooping down, his right knee on the floor, he laid the pipe across his left knee and began sawing it off in sections eight or ten inches long. He cut about twenty of them, for he wanted to have the net look right in every way. Finally he was finished with that part of the job. Dusting off the lead shavings from the trouser knee, he got to his feet and put the hack saw back on its nail.

He took up the sledge hammer, then, that had been lying on the work bench. With this he bent the sections of pipe over in the middle so that they would be easy to attach to the bottom of the net. *He* wasn't going to slip up in any way. Here was one time when that smart aleck of a Chan Buzzell who thought he knew it all was going to be fooled, he guessed.

After fastening the lead weights along the bottom of the net at fairly even intervals along the mesh that was perhaps a hundred and fifty feet long, he carried it down to Herb's landing. The first thing he did, here, was to tie one of the ends of the heavy rope, already attached to the net, to a tree that was close to the shore, jutting out over the water. He tied it securely—three times, four times. Then, removing the stone that held Herb Benson's body on the bottom, he brought the corpse ashore.

He smiled then. Here was the clever

part of his plan. It tickled him to think just how clever it was.

DISENTANGLING the net, he got hold of it at just about as near as he could judge the middle. Through the mesh, he thrust a boot of Herb's, thrust an arm, wound the body all up in it. When they found the body it sure would look as if Herb, in stretching his net from the shore to shore, had tipped over in his canoe, gotten tangled up in the mesh, and drowned trying to find his way out.

Pretty clever, pretty clever.

He placed Herb's canoe in the water, then, and put Herb's body and the bulky net into it. Lucky, he again told himself, that Herb had lived right near Little Cove Channel. The Channel was no more than eight rods across, and the net would be about the right size. The best spot in the lake for gill netting.

Ab liked gill netting. It was a lazy man's way of making easy money. The net was stretched across a narrow part of the lake like this, the top of it under water so that it couldn't be seen. The lower part, heavily weighted, sagged and held it down. The fish, running up against it from both sides, tried to push their way through when they met the obstacle of the mesh. The bigger ones, when you used the right mesh, always got caught. When they found out that they couldn't get their whole body through, they tried to pull back. In trying to pull back, their gills became hopelessly caught, so all a man had to do was to pull up his net and take his fish. Good business. Salmon, particularly, were easily sold. Ab wished, in a way, that he was setting this net tonight for actual fish.

But he was a fool to think of that. There would be many more nights.

There would be easier nights, now that Herb was out of the way. Herb didn't believe in gill netting, and Ab had never dared set one here since Herb had built his cabin in this place a couple of years ago. He'd had to go way up to Head-water Cove, instead.

He shoved off in the canoe carefully. It was slow work, for he had to handle the paddle and pay out that heavy, cumbersome net so that it would all look natural. The net kept getting caught on Herb's body, and Ab happily realized just how easy it *would* be for a man to get caught in the mesh.

Yes, pretty foxy, pretty foxy, all right.

He came to the middle of the channel, presently, and here he stopped with a sigh of relief. He was wet through already, and more wetting wouldn't matter much, so he didn't mind sliding into the water. From there, holding onto the canoe, it was a simple matter to shove the craft over so that it would upset. Fascinated, he watched Herb's body fall into the lake, all tangled up in the net. It floated at first, and then began to sink as the weight of the net dragged it down.

That was enough for Ab Lassiter. Slowly, coolly, he struck out for shore.

Reaching shore, he made his way to his own canoe, shoved it into the water, and paddled for home.

In another thirty minutes he was in bed for the night.

ABBOTT LASSITER'S luck, as he assured himself gleefully, kept right on. The rain stopped just before sunup. Mr. Broughton, who confined most of his fishing to night casting for bass, had nevertheless said that he might take it into his head to try the trout some day up on Misty Brook. So Ab, remembering this, got into his

flivver when he saw that it was to be a clear day and headed for Brown's Sporting Camps. Mr. Broughton, furthermore, decided that this was the day for a crack at some trout, and he mentioned that the fishing fever was in his blood and that he wanted to go after bass again during the night. It meant two days' pay in one for Ab, one might say, and Ab, liking money as he did, was in especially good spirits when he drove home for supper before going back to get his sport for some night fishing. But, as Abbott Lassiter reached his dwelling, he wasn't quite certain that his luck was holding out. He was never lucky, when he had to meet that damned Chan Buzzell, and the Loon Lake sheriff was waiting there for him, in company with the worshipful Skip Babcock. Dick Anderson, Ab noticed, was also along.

Ab tried to be casual. Getting out of his car, he waved a hand.

"'Lo, Chan. Say, me an' Mr. Broughton caught us a nice mess o' trout t'day, on Misty Brook. Ought to try it, right about now, Chan. Mr. Broughton was using a Professor. They was takin' it great."

Chan was nodding his head gravely. "Glad your last day o' fishin' was a good one, Ab," he said. "I allus like to see *any* human have a good day o' sport, 'afore he gives it up for life." "Gives it up for life? . . . Golly, Chan, dummed if I *do* git your jokes, sometimes."

"Ain't no joke," sighed Chan. "A man can't fish when he's got to spend the rest o' his life behind bars, can he?"

"Spend the rest o' his life behind bars?" echoed Ab, his voice sounding more foolish—more panicky—than surprised.

Chan, for a moment, didn't answer.

Chan, lean and long and tanned, was gazing solemnly at Abbott Lassiter with his wide gray eyes that had an odd somberness in them. They seemed, as people had frequently said, to look at and into and through a man. There must have been some truth in it, for Chan had frequently made a guilty game law evader confess merely by looking at him.

Chan spoke again. He didn't answer Ab's question, this time. He branched off onto another topic. His voice was apologetic:

"Sorry we had to break down your door. Ab. Well, not break it down exactly—jest force the lock."

"Force the lock?"

Ab was becoming hypnotized, dulled, by Chan's manner and by Chan's words. Chan, presumably, wanted him to become this way.

"Yes," said Chan, no doubt thinking that the proper time had come to begin his definite accusations. "We had to force the lock so's we could search the house. I reckoned I'd find *some* clue here, after I got to suspicionin' you. Know why I suspicioned you? Know why I suspicioned Herb didn't go and set that net hisself?"

Abbott Lassiter asked, trying to be casual:

"Yeah? Why?"

"O' course," said Chan gravely, "I knowed it wa'n't like Herb, him bein' square an' honest like he were, to go an' set a gill net. Still, I knowed that men 'll do funny things, sometimes. When I looked at the way that gill net rope were tied to that tree by Herb's landin', though, I *knowed* Herb hadn't done it. Herb never would 'a' tied them four knots like that, hard and jest like ordinary knots—Herb would 'a' tied one o' them slick sailor knots he *allus* tied everything with, whether it were

a fish line or a canoe painter or anything he——"

Chan deliberately paused. As he did so, Abbott Lassiter's facial muscles tautened.

"When we went up to Herb's cabin an' smelled that lingerin' smell o' chloroform, hows'ever, we *sure* suspicioned something funny. Mebbe I didn't jest suspicion *you* fu'st off, Ab, but I come close to it. I knowed you hated Herb, 'cause he was a better man an' a better guide than you was, an' I knowed you'd hate him heaps *more*, after that duckin' he give you. No, your talk to the store didn't fool no one none, I reckon. Well, knowin' you'd hated him, I done some questioning 'bout had you bought any chloroform recent. You know what I found out. You know that I found out you got some over to the junction. You even left the empty bottle in the pocket o' the mackinaw you wore last night, Ab!"

Abbott Lassiter plainly showed that he knew that he was doomed, but he made a supreme effort to bluff, to fight for even a little time in which to think:

"Are you *crazy*, Chan Buzzell?" he asked, as many another murderer has wanted to know. "Golly," he added, "can't a man have a bottle o' chloroform to put a dog out o' the way with?"

"Sure he can, sure he can," soothed Chan. "No, Ab, I'm not crazy, but *you* are, thinkin' you can commit murder an' git away with it. There allus seems to be some mistake, Ab. O' course, you made a lot o' mistakes, but you made one that went an' pinned it plumb onto you. Hanker to know what it were, Ab?"

Chan, as he waited for an answer, looked very somber. Herb Benson had been one of his best friends.

Abbott Lassiter didn't reply. He was

looking around the room, in the manner of a man searching for escape.

"There was your mistake, Ab," said Chan quietly.

HE was pointing to Dick Anderson. The latter, slowly, had taken a pair of corduroy trousers from behind his back—the wet, soggy trousers that Ab had worn last night.

"You can't bluff *me*," cried Ab suddenly.

"Ain't tryin' to, Ab," said Chan. "When we found that empty bottle o' chloroform, after breakin' in here, I says we got to find somethin' else. I says that empty bottle didn't hang it onto you, like I also says that there 'ud be *some* clue that would. Well, I got that other clue. I got it when I looked at your clothes. I see that the left knee of them cord'roy pants had had some kind o' metal held onto them real hard; I see that there was even a few lead shavings worked into the material, that you couldn't notice good unless with a magnifying glass. I done even more than that, Ab. I had Skip take them pants over to the junction, with some lead shavin's from the floor o' Herb's garage, to Doc Bogart. He an'lyzed 'em, like I asked, an' he says that the shavin's that come from the floor was the same as was into your cord'roy pants an' that they both came from the lead pipe that—"

But Chan had to stop then. Abbott

Lassiter, in blind and insane fury, leaped straight out for him with a cry like that of a man whose brain has snapped.

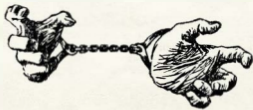
As the murderer did so, a faint smile of satisfaction seemed to play about the lips of the game warden. He did not, strangely enough, step in and knock his man out with the first blow as his boxing skill—his terrific punch—would have made it simple for him to do. Instead he slashed at Ab's jaw, with deft knuckles, and opened the skin. His next effort also brought blood. It cut the cheekbone of the murderer as if a razor, indeed, had been drawn across it.

Briefly, Chan Buzzell did a mean piece of work, although a very picturesque piece of work, on Abbott Lassiter's face and body. Finally when Abbott Lassiter was about to sink down from exhaustion, Chan Buzzell mercifully sent a fist clean into the solar plexus, and Abbott Lassiter went out like the proverbial light.

Chan, with a sad shake of his head, turned to Skip and Dick Anderson as he got to his feet after having put the handcuffs over the wrists of the unconscious man:

"He sure did resist arrest, boys, didn' he?" he gravely queried, as he looked at the battered features of the murderer.

Skip Babcock and Dick Anderson nodded silently. Chan, they knew, had thought a great deal of Herb Benson.





"What's the idea?" asked Moore as the Sheriff examined the horse's hoof

Hoofprints to Doom

By Edward A. Dieckmann

Detective Sergeant, Homicide Squad, San Diego, Calif., Police Department

From the Ashes of Murder Sheriff Jennings Chooses Clues Which Enable Him to Trap a Remorseless Desperado

HENRY DUNHAM had been watching the thin, wavering column of smoke ever since he'd topped the last hill. It worried the sixty-three year old ranch blacksmith because it came from the direction of Jacob J. Veitinger's ranch; old Jake who lived alone in his tiny frame cabin in the foothills of Lee's Valley, San Diego County, California. Dunham mopped the perspiration from his bald

head. It was hot that July afternoon of 1899; hot and dry. Staring at the smoke, Dunham muttered aloud as is the habit of those who live alone.

"Wonder what the devil Jake's up to; burning brush this time of year? Darn old fool! Gosh, he ought to know better. Not a drop of rain for months; everything's as dry as tinder." Again, Dunham cursed the heat; crammed his bandana into the hip pocket of his overalls and started toward the smoke, hurrying a bit now.

When Dunham reached the top of the next rise he saw the cause of the fire.

**TRUE
STORY**

With a wild yell, reminiscent of his old enemies of Civil War days, the veteran blacksmith broke into a stumbling run. A Grand Army comrade was in terrible danger, or already dead!

The Veitinger ranch house was a smoldering ruin! It had been a small place, built entirely of thin siding with the exception of the sheet-iron roof. This had fallen and now formed a coverlet to the hot embers of the flooring and the remnants of rough furniture. The walls had been consumed, parts falling outward and setting fire to the grass about the place. Tiny tongues of flame licked out from beneath the sections of roofing, darting at Dunham as he lumbered around the heap of blackened ruins.

"Hi, Jake," he called, his voice breaking slightly. "Where the heck are you?"

There was no answer other than the excited cackling of the terrified chickens in their yard next the house, the fence of which was beginning to blaze. Dunham glanced about. In the pasture, west of the ruins, Jake Veitinger's two horses and a colt lifted their heads, ears pricked forward, at his yell. Again he called, shrilly, then, snatching up a shovel, he threw dirt upon the darting fire tongues that were creeping along the grass, and beat out the fire on the fence rails. This accomplished, he examined the ruins.

The heat was terrific but Dunham got close enough to see all that remained of Jacob J. Veitinger, 73-year-old retired naval man. The German rancher lay face down in what had been the combination living-room and bedroom of the little house. Both of his legs were gone; burned away at the hips. Only the stump of the shoulder remained of the right arm, and the back of the prone man's skull had dis-

appeared. The left arm was doubled beneath the body, which had contracted with the heat to about half its original size. This much Dunham saw before he turned and ran for the ranch of William H. Cooper, two miles away across the valley.

COOPER had just hitched up his team to the Mountain Springs wagon when the excited Dunham panted into the stable yard.

"Jake's dead! Jake's dead! Burned to death!" the old man gasped. "What'll we do, Bill?"

"Sure he's dead?" Cooper asked, climbing into the wagon seat.

"Burned to a cinder." Dunham clambered up beside the younger man as he replied.

Cooper clucked to his team and the spirited animals tore through the gate and away on the dusty road. When they arrived at the Veitinger ranch, the two men cleared away the hot embers from about the body of their friend. Cooper shook his head sadly.

"Can't figure this out, Hank. Jake was a careful cuss. I wonder what happened?"

"Going to tug him out of there?" Dunham asked.

"No sir! Not while Fred M. Jennings is Chief Deputy Sheriff of this county. You ought to know better than that." Cooper's face was tight-lipped. "If there's to be an investigation, Jennings will be up here before long. We'll touch nothing. I'm going for the Constable at Jamul, and to phone the Coroner."

"Think it's a murder?"

"Don't know. Not my job, but you never can tell."

Dunham nodded.

It was about one o'clock that afternoon when Henry Dunham found the

body. In these horse and buggy days it took several hours for Cooper to make the round trip between the Jamul Store and the Veitinger ranch. When he returned two more rancher friends of the dead man accompanied him. So did Deputy Constable A. T. Moore of Jamul Township. Cooper had phoned Coroner H. P. Woodward but that official was out of the city and could not arrive at the mountain ranch until the following morning.

The embers had cooled a bit by the time the men arrived so they laid a few planks over the burned flooring of the cabin and gently removed the body from its funeral pyre. A few of the boards directly under the chest of the dead man had not been burned and these, adhering to the body, were removed with it. The whole thing was placed in an empty bee hive and all of those present agreed that it was the body of Jake.

"Sure, that's Jake," Cooper declared. "Ain't much left of him but I'd know that jutting jaw anywhere. See those teeth snags? No question about it, men."

The others nodded silent agreement. They all knew old Jake.

When they lifted the shriveled body into the bee hive they noticed a curious thing. The left arm that had been beneath the body and therefore somewhat protected from the flames had not been badly burned. As the men turned the body on its back they saw that this arm had been broken a few inches above the elbow; a ragged, irregular break that exposed the bone.

"Huh!" Deputy Constable Moore exclaimed. "Now how do you account for that?"

"Don't know," Cooper replied. "Better be careful. That seems rather important, eh?"

That night Jake Veitinger's body lay in the ranch honeyhouse while the ranchers prowled about the place, seeking any clue that might cast some light upon the circumstance of the fire.

IT was shortly after daylight on July 29 when Coroner H. P. Woodward and Deputy Coroner W. W. Whitson arrived upon the scene. With them arrived several more ranchers whom the County Coroner immediately swore in as jurors for the inquest that he began at once. Cooper told him all he knew of old Jake.

Jacob J. Veitinger was a Civil War Veteran, having served throughout the conflict in the Union Navy. He had been badly wounded when the U. S. S. Philadelphia, upon which he had been serving, had been blown up in an engagement with several Confederate vessels. He was a rather frail man; had a crooked back that caused one shoulder to be much higher than the other and usually hired neighboring ranchers or Indians to do the heavy work about the place. He was receiving a fifty-dollar-a-month pension from the government and had homesteaded the one hundred sixty acres upon which his house had been built.

"Was he popular?" Woodward asked.

"Everyone liked old Jake," Cooper replied. "He didn't get around much; went to Jamul 'bout once a month for groceries and smoking, and to get a hair-cut. He raised about everything he needed right here; had an orchard over the hill there and a truck garden."

"Did he have any money?"

"Sure. Just a few days ago he paid me for a hay-cutting job. He had a lot of gold and bills in a red leather pocket-book then; one of those kind with two pockets and a double snap."

"Ever bank any?" the Coroner went on.

"By gosh, now. That's funny. I never heard him mention a bank and he ought to have a lot of money. He bragged that he could live on twenty dollars a year." Cooper glanced at the others of the group for confirmation. They nodded silently.

"Who saw him last?"

"Dunham, I guess," Cooper replied. "He was over here yesterday because Jake had some sort of dingus, an instrument to restore hearing, and a book of the treatment of deafness. Hank's a bit hard of hearing you know."

"What were his habits; what did he do all day?"

"Old Jake had Navy habits; that's what he called them anyhow. He used to get up 'bout four o'clock every morning and brew himself a pot of coffee. Then he worked awhile; the morning watch he called it, and he'd cook breakfast about seven o'clock. Along about eleven, he'd cook up his dinner and have his supper at five o'clock. Some days he'd sleep after his noon meal. I've seen him sound asleep in his big chair when I'd drop over to visit with him."

"Hum," Woodward mused thoughtfully. "Do you know if he used coal oil or candles for lighting purposes?"

"Oh, he had a lamp. He kept his spare coal oil in a lean-to alongside the house. There's the cans." Cooper pointed to the blackened remains.

Dunham told how he'd arrived at the ranch about one o'clock. "The house was all burned down then. It must have been burning an hour or two before I got there," he continued.

While Woodward had been questioning the two ranchers, Deputy Coroner Whitson had raked all of the metal pieces he could find from the ashes.

These were few. An old nicked clock with its face oddly intact; parts of a rifle, or shotgun, and a few scattered shotgun shell bases. Beneath the crinkled bed springs, one of the men found a few Mexican copper coins and the clasps of a purse. That was about all except the reservoir—with the wick fitting still attached—of the coal oil lamp, and a matted mass of what had once been dishes.

THE clock hands rested at twenty minutes to eleven o'clock, Coroner Woodward noticed. "Fire started a few minutes before that, I reckon," he remarked. "Now we'll look at the body again."

Between the bits of floor boards and the body, Woodward found some bits of cloth; part of the man's clothing he knew but it was strangely damp. He wondered about that. That arm, too, it was queer that it should be broken that way but fire does odd things. This was a compound fracture. The Coroner shook his grey head as he listened to Dunham.

"Maybe it was an accident," the old blacksmith was saying, "but Jake was a careful old cuss. Remember how we found that the chicken house had been cleaned out yesterday morning? That's just how he was, finicky about his jobs."

"What else could it be but an accident?" another rancher; a juryman this time, cut in. "Who'd kill him?"

"If you're ready for your verdict, gentlemen," Woodward began, "I'll make a note of—" A yell from the edge of the burned building where the salvaged metal lay choked him off. It was Bill Cooper.

"Wait, wait! There's something wrong here!"

"What do you mean?" Woodward said, turning from the jury.

"Old Jake had two guns. One was an old Springfield musket that he cut down and had re-bored; made a shotgun out of it. Here are the pieces of that. But he had another gun; a breech-loading, single barrel shotgun and that ain't here!"

"When'd you see it last?" Woodward snapped.

"Day before yesterday." It was Henry Dunham who answered. "I saw it when I was over here."

The men again pawed through the pile and three of them conducted a search through the outbuildings. No sign of the missing gun. Grim faced, they stared at each other.

"Murder!" someone said hoarsely.

"Yes. That broken arm too. He never did that in a fall!" another exclaimed. "And we was just going to vote accidental!"

"Any ideas, men?" Coroner Woodward and Deputy Constable Moore spoke together.

"I have," Cooper snapped.

"Yes?"

"We'll look for Vicente Rosario, that drunken Indian who's always prowling 'round these parts. He's cantankerous enough for a job like this."

Leaving the Coroner and his deputy to remove the body of Jake Veitinger to the county seat at San Diego, the self-appointed posse set out on the search for the "bad Indian," Rosario.

THAT night Doctors C. C. Valle and J. F. Escher performed a post-mortem on the body of Veitinger at the W. W. Whitson Undertaking Parlors in San Diego. Once more, the Coroner's Jury gathered to hear the surgeon's evidence.

The testimony was brief and pointed.

"This was not accidental death,"

Doctor Valle reported. "Veitinger's left arm was broken by some smashing blow. No doubt he received other wounds also but because of the condition of the body we were unable to determine just what these wounds were. We base our opinion relative to the other wound, or wounds, from the fact that the bits of cloth found beneath the body had been soaked with blood."

"Go on, Doctor," Woodward urged as the surgeon hesitated.

"The arm was broken before fire touched it. Furthermore, Veitinger was dead before any fire reached his body."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because we found no evidence of the inhalation of fire, or soot as would be the case if the man had been alive when burned," Valle replied.

And so the jury brought in the only verdict they could: "Death at the hands of a person or persons unknown," and Coroner Woodward telephoned the Sheriff.

FRED M. JENNINGS had a talk with the autopsy surgeons and the Coroner before he started his long ride to the murder scene. He studied the clock, the coins, the remains of the lamp and the purse clasps and shook his head.

"Dang it, I get these cases when they're as cold as ice. I mean it, even though this is a cremation job," he grinned at Woodward. "Here it is, July 31 already. Whoever killed Veitinger might be in Mexico and heading straight south. Why does that Jamul bunch think that Rosario might have pulled this job?"

Woodward shook his head. "Don't know, Fred. Better find out up there."

"Yes, yes. You're right. No use getting stuff second hand. Well, I'm on

my way but before I go I'm going to put the San Diego Police on to Rosario. He's probably in town and that's their bailiwick. So long." Jennings strode from the funeral parlors.

He found Constable Moore at the Veitinger ranch when he arrived.

"How's the hunting, Moore?" he asked.

"If you mean about that Indian, there's no sign of him at all. He was 'round here on Friday, the day Jake was killed, but no one's seen him since," Moore replied.

"What've you got on him?"

"He's a no-good cuss. Drinks like a fish and he was 'round this valley on Friday. He worked for Jake several times and might have seen the old fellow's money."

"Where does he live? Permanent. I mean."

"Nowhere. He sleeps wherever night catches him," Moore replied.

"Boys still hunting?"

"A couple of them are trying to round him up but we think he vamoosed; gone to Mexico."

"Has he a horse?"

"Not unless he stole it, and none have been reported stolen since Jake was killed."

Jennings surveyed the ranch surroundings. To the east was the dirt road leading through the isolated valley, traveled only by those living there but now cluttered with the tracks of the ranchers' horses. To the westward was Flat Top Mountain, brush covered and boulder strewn. Behind the ranch house site, toward Flat Top, Jennings could see that Veitinger had put in an orchard. The trees climbed a slight hill and vanished over the crest.

"What's up that way?" he asked, nodding toward Flat top.

"The old man's orchard. It goes over

the hill and down into a basin for quite a ways." Moore replied.

"You fellows been prowling that way?"

"No. Why?"

The deputy grunted, noncommittally. "Let's look over Veitinger's horses. Who's been looking out for them?"

"Cooper."

Carefully, Jennings lifted the horses hooves and closely examined each one while Moore looked on curiously. "What's the idea?" he finally burst out.

"Just saving myself a job," Jennings explained with a smile. "Sort of checking up on something that I'd be likely to wonder about later on."

"What'd you find?"

"Both horses are shod," the deputy replied with a grin, and the Constable grunted.

Other ranchers began drifting in. Jennings questioned them all, particularly about Vicente Rosario. He learned that the suspected Indian was a big fellow, and that he looked like a Mexican. "He has a crescent-shaped scar on his left cheek and a big, black mustache," one of the men told him. "You'd never miss him."

"Been in jail a dozen times," the Deputy said. "I didn't recognize the name at first."

Slowly, Jennings drifted away from the group; from all except Constable Moore. The two officers circled the blackened ruins, widening their circle as they walked. Jennings, his eyes on the ground, plodded on. Suddenly he halted. "Look at that," he said.

THE ground was soft at this point and Moore could see the imprint of a horse's hoof. It was almost round and was unusually small. The track was headed west toward Flat Top Moun-

tain. As the men advanced they picked up the track again and again. It passed through the orchard and over the brow of the hill and into the wooded basin. It was here that they found the clearest print.

Carefully Jennings studied it, squatting on his heels. The ground was harder here and the track was plain.

"That's a funny track, Moore," Jennings remarked. "It's not been made by any of old Jake's stock; not even the colt. I never saw a rounder horse track."

"Why didn't Veitinger's horse make it?"

"'Cause these are the tracks of a barefooted horse; barefooted on all four feet."

"Some stray," Moore ventured.

"No."

"Why?"

"Ever since we picked this track up, back there by the barn, it's gone in a straight line. Strays don't do that. Did you ever see a loose horse that didn't wander off to graze?"

"By gosh you're right, Fred. Now what, going to follow it over Flat Top?" The Constable jumped up.

"No. I'm going back to my buggy," Jennings replied. "I've a scheme that beats mountain climbing all hollow, and takes less time."

The deputy stopped long enough to obtain a thorough description of the missing gun from Cooper before he left the ranch. It was a single barrel, 12-gauge, Cooper explained, with a lot of nickle-work about the breech. "I don't know the make," he continued. "It was a cheap gun."

"Hundreds like it around, a mail order gun I'll bet. Ain't there anything odd about it?" Jennings asked.

Cooper twisted his heavy mustache. "Seems as though there is, Fred. Wait

a minute now. By gosh, I've got it! Old Jake had trouble with the gun; it missed fire several times and he brazed a chunk of metal on the hammer to give it more weight."

"Good." The Deputy gathered up his reins. "See you later," he called as his team clattered down the dusty road.

It was twelve hard miles, by road, to the opposite slope of Flat Top Mountain where it tumbled down into Lyon's Valley. At the road intersection between Jamul and Dehesa, Jennings jerked his tired team to a halt and, after tying them up, headed for the foot of the mountain. He soon found that which he was seeking, the track of the barefooted horse. So he'd been right! No stray horse had made this track. The animal had a rider; a rider who didn't want to be seen—otherwise he'd have taken the easier route along the road. All of these things passed through the Deputy's mind as he squatted on a rock and smoked a brown paper cigarette. It was getting dark now and he returned to his team and hurried on, stopping at two ranch houses on his way toward the Sequam Indian Reservation. At each of these places he inquired about any strange horsemen who might have passed through on Friday, July 28. None had been seen.

WHILE Deputy Sheriff Jennings had been trailing the barefooted horse, there had been great excitement at the Indian camp of Francisco Sepulveda alongside the El Cajon road, near Dehesa.

Deputy Constable Harry Hubble of El Cajon Township had hurried to the camp when Sepulveda galloped into town with the news that there'd been a shooting. It had happened some time before, the Indian said, but he'd hid

out; afraid of the man who'd done the shooting.

"Who is he?" Hubble asked. "Who'd he shoot?"

"He shoot at Jorge Muniyo. No hit him. Then Jorge take gun away and shoot that fellow two times. He fall down. We run like hell."

"What's his name?"

"Ramon Tapia. He's much bad!"

Hubble found the wounded Indian asleep in some brush a short distance from the camp. He'd been shot twice; once through the neck and once through the arm. In a gunny sack beside him, the officer found three shotgun shells and some .44 revolver cartridges. In the man's hip pocket was a soiled purse, containing four silver dollars. He couldn't speak English, Sepulveda said.

"What caused the shooting?" Hubble inquired.

"This man"—Sepulveda pointed to Tapia, who glared back—"come to camp and try to take Jorge's squaw. Squaw scream and Jorge go fight this man. This man, he pull big gun and shoot two times at Jorge. No hit him. Then Jorge, he take away gun and shoot Ramon Tapia."

"Where is Jorge?"

"He scared. He run away to Palomar Mountain, I think."

"That's bad," Hubble said. "Why'd he run if Tapia shot first?"

"No sabe?"

"You sabe going to jail, eh?"

"Si!"

"Come on then." the constable ordered Tapia.

The wounded prisoner said not a word during the ride to the jail at El Cajon. After his wounds had been dressed, Hubble telephoned the sheriff's office and also communicated with the constable near Palomar to be on the

watch for Jorge. The sheriff's office instructed Hubble to turn his prisoner over to Fred Jennings when that officer arrived at El Cajon.

Late that same afternoon, Jennings arrived tired and dusty.

"I've a prisoner for you, Fred," Hubble informed him after a cooling drink. "A bad Indian."

"There's another bad Indian I'd like to find," Jennings replied grimly. "I've tracked a barefooted horse over half the county, Harry; a barefooted horse that was last in a creek bottom near the Sequam reservation; a horse that had been there some time judging from the amount of manure and the way the grass was clipped."

"Veitinger's killer rode that horse, you think?"

"Darn near sure of it." Jennings related what he'd found on either slope of Flat Top Mountain. "I've got to head back to San Diego, Harry. Scout around this section and see if you can find anyone who's seen an Indian with a shotgun; an Indian on horseback. This fellow's bound to've been seen because he came along from the northwest slope of Flat Top straight to Sequam. Those roads are traveled a lot." Jennings described the gun.

"Why an Indian, Fred?"

Jennings laughed. "Simple enough. There is a great deal of difference between the actions of a white man and an Indian following a crime. The white man tries to cover up his crime some way or other, usually by hiding out or getting out of the country. Indians don't try to hide 'till they're scared, or warned somehow. 'Till then they'll frequent their usual hangouts. Mark my words. Whoever killed Jake Veitinger is close by if we only knew it and we don't want to scare him out."

"What about Vicente Rosario?"

"That's why I'm heading back. They've got him in town and I want to talk to him," Jennings replied.

IT was late on the night of August 1 that the Deputy arrived at San Diego with his wounded, tight-lipped prisoner. Before he slept he talked to Police Sergeant George Cooley of the San Diego Police Department.

Cooley had been checking up on Rosario.

"That Indian was in town on the night of July 28, Fred," the officer said. "He's been on a bender; drunk as a monkey and he had plenty of money. We tracked him all over town and finally picked him up in Till Burns' saloon. He's in our jail now."

Vicente Rosario was a sick Indian when the two officers entered his cell. He knew Fred Jennings and staggered to his feet, the movement sending a breath of liquor-laden air toward the deputy.

"Drunk again, eh?" Jennings said. "When'd you hit town, Vicente?"

"Me damn drunk, I think," Vicente held his head. "I come to town on Friday, I think."

"You have plenty of money. Where did you get it?"

"Me work, hay baler near Jamul. Just catch payday on Friday."

"Who you work for there?"

"Mr. Johnson, on ranch."

"When did you leave the Johnson ranch on Friday, Vicente?"

"In morning time."

"Day time?"

"Si."

"You didn't go by Jake Veitinger's ranch on your way to town did you, Vicente?"

"You think me crazy, I think. That other way *from* town."

"Where did you go after you hit

town; the first place, I mean? Think hard, Vicente."

"No can think very hard; head too much ache. Wait now, I think." The bleary-eyed red man grinned.

He had gone to buy some clothing, Vicente finally told the deputy. Then he'd visited a Chinese cafe where he was well known. "After that place. I get some booze. Then, I don't know much, I think."

It only took the two officers a few minutes to verify the Indian's statement. He had arrived in San Diego only a short time before two o'clock on the afternoon of the murder. That, of course, put him out of the picture.

The next morning Jennings was on his way once more, heading for El Cajon and the Sequam to take up the trail of the barefooted horse.

Jake Veitinger's murder was the talk of the "back country" by now. Everywhere that men gathered they mulled the case over and it was into such a group that Fred Jennings pushed his way in the general store at Dehesa, near El Cajon. The officer had not informed anyone other than the officers of his suspicions that an Indian had committed the crime. Now he began to ask questions of the group in general.

"Any of you fellows been out in the country the last few days?" he asked.

"Long about Friday, July 28, eh, Fred?" an oldster chuckled.

"Uh-huh."

"What's on your mind, Fred?"

"Any horses been stolen lately?"

The men glanced at each other. One by one, they shook their heads. "Wait a minute, though," the storekeeper cut in, "there was a fellow from Campo in here several days ago; a fellow named Howard Gaskell. He asked me the same danged thing. Said he'd seen an Indian on a horse near Campo."

"How come he noticed that horse?"

"Gaskell said the horse was fat. Indians don't usually have fat horses so he gave a good look," the storekeeper replied.

"Which way was the Indian headed? Did Gaskell say?" Jennings asked.

"Toward Mexico."

"What day?"

"You'll have to ask Gaskell."

ON THROUGH the hills, Jennings rode asking questions; receiving vague replies in most instances; once in a while a bit of information trickled through. W. A. Williams saw a strange Indian near Jamacha, a few miles east of El Cajon, on July 30. The fellow had a gun, Williams went on; a shotgun with nickle plated trimmings. "The gun looked new. That's why I noticed it, I guess," he said.

"Which way was he heading?"

"Toward El Cajon."

"Mounted?"

"No."

Jennings groaned, then brightened. Jamacha was between Sequam reservation of El Cajon. Those horse tracks at Sequam! He'd work back from there.

Investigation at Sequam reservation would be worse than useless, Jennings knew from previous dealings with the reticent Indians. His best chances were with the white men along the valley, so he headed directly for the big ranch of J. J. Canfield at Jamacha.

"Looking for Jake's killer, Fred?" Canfield asked as the deputy dismounted.

"Yes. Him and a horse. Lose any stock, Canfield?"

"No. There's most of them." The rancher pointed to a large corral.

Jennings led his horse to the watering trough near the corral. While the animal drank, the officer scanned the

trampled ground. It was second nature now. A jumble of horse tracks near the trough. Then he leaned forward, dropped the reins and squatted down, staring. On the hard ground, a few feet away from the trough, was the print of a barefooted horse; a print that formed almost a perfect circle!

"Find something?" Canfield asked.

Jennings pointed. "That track," he said. "leads toward your corral. I'd like to find the horse that made it. Come on."

There were a dozen animals in the corral. All but three were well fed; well cared for. "Indian horse, eh?" Jennings remarked, indicating the scraggly ones.

"Yes," Canfield replied. "They belong to Francisco Sepulveda and his gang. They're grubbing brush for me. Want to go in?"

But Jennings was already at the gate. Swinging it open, he started forward and stood hands on hips. "The Indian nags are out. So are the bigger horses," he mused aloud. "Any strange horses in here, Canfield?"

"Can't say that. They're all mine, or Sepulveda's."

"Shod?"

"Uh-huh."

"Let's see now." The persistent officer began to examine the hooves of the smaller animals. "Look here," he exclaimed. "Whose horse is this?" Canfield stepped closer. The hoof Jennings held up was without a shoe!

The horse was young; about two years old. It was a sorrel with white markings on it's face and a wide, white stripe down the forehead. The mane had been trimmed close. There were no saddle marks.

"Must be one of Sepulveda's horses," Canfield said. "I remember now, I first saw that horse here yesterday and had him run in with the

rest of them. I think he belongs to the Sepulveda crowd."

"Too fat," Jennings remarked. "Keep him away from the others. I'll be back." Leaping into the saddle, the officer headed for Sepulveda's camp.

Here he learned little. Neither Francisco Spulveda nor any of the other Indians knew about the sorrel with the roached mane. If he was with their horses he must have mixed with them in the pasture field. He hadn't been seen before, they all said.

"What about this fight here a few days ago?" Jennings asked. "How'd that Ramon Tapia get here? Did he have a horse?"

"No see horse," Francisco replied.

"Where is Jorge, the man who shot Tapia? You sabe, I want him too?"

SEPULVEDA shrugged his shoulders. "He go Palomar, I think. Officer hunt him there, I think."

"How'd he go? Where's his horse?"

"No take horse. He run by foot, I think."

Jennings grunted in disgust. He knew that the Indians could tell him more if they wished. That word they used, "think," meant nothing. Neither did anything else they said, for that matter. The only way to obtain information from the tribesmen was to be in a position to prove to them that he *knew* that they held information. That meant more plugging; more questioning of white, and Mexican ranchers; that and the help of a certain member of the Indian police named Tom Napa.

The gun-fight at Sepulveda's camp began to interest Jennings. Was it as the camp-boss had stated; as the other Indians had testified? Had Tapia been the aggressor, or had Jorge Munijo tried to kill the other Indian because he knew too much? Why had Jorge ran away?

All of these questions had to be answered. He turned to the frightened camp boss.

"You were arrested, eh?"

"Si. I let out again same day."

"You're arrested again," Jennings informed him roughly, "you and the rest of your crowd. Come on!"

Herding the group of Indian men and the two women before him, the officer rode into El Cajon and turned his prisoners over to the constable. "I'll take 'em along to town in a day or two," he said. "Now, I'm heading for Campo to see that fellow Gaskell."

Five hours later the deputy pulled up at the Gaskell ranch. It was after midnight but Jennings did not wait. Over a bit of food he learned that it had been on July 20 that the rancher had seen the horse. The Indian was known to Gaskell by sight as well, having worked for the rancher.

"Tell me about that horse, Howard," Jennings requested.

"It was a sorrel with a white face, Fred. There's another thing too. That Indian had a gun strapped on him."

"Hum. Anything about the horse's mane that—" the deputy began when Gaskell cut him off.

"Yes, yes. The mane had been roached!" the rancher replied.

"Know the Indian's name?"

"No."

With that, Jennings had to be content but he slept better that night.

During the long ride back to El Cajon, Jennings mulled the case over. A barefooted horse crossed Flat Top on July 28. The trail headed north and east. Then those barefooted tracks at Sequam, and the evidence that the horse had been there several days. An Indian with a nickle-trimmed shotgun on the Jamacha road on July 30; an Indian heading toward El Cajon. The

barefooted horse, with the roached mane and the white face, in Canfield's corral; the same animal that Gaskell had seen near Campo on July 20, beyond a doubt, with an Indian rider and, Jennings was sure, the same horse that crossed Flat Top. No Indian bearing a shotgun had been seen in El Cajon, Jennings knew. That meant that he'd stopped somewhere between Jamacha and El Cajon, and Sepulveda's camp held the only group of Indians in that vicinity. That fight at the camp! Where did that strange Indian, Ramon Tapia, come from that day? Had he been the rider of the barefooted horse or was it Jorge Munijo now in hiding somewhere on Palomar Mountain? One thing Jennings knew. The answer lay somewhere between Jamacha and El Cajon, a large bit of territory, but the deputy sheriff had a shot in the locker. Indians like to brag to those of their race of brave deeds done. Jennings spurred his horse into a gallop.

TOM NAPA, Indian police officer greeted his brother officer cordially when Jennings pulled in at the Sequam. He'd heard of the murder of course and was curious.

"Why you come here, Mr. Jennings?"

The deputy explained the situation. "If that Indian stopped here, Tom, he visited someone; a girl maybe. See what you can do."

"I fix 'em. I get Estanislao on this thing. He plenty smart. You wait, eh?"

Jennings knew Estanislao, a young buck who'd graduated from the Mission school but who'd returned to his tribe, and was satisfied. "I'll go on, Tom. You let me know, eh?"

At El Cajon, Jennings called a conference of the deputy constables and the white ranchers. He explained his

theory. "Get busy men and comb this country from Jamacha to El Cajon. *We must find that gun.* It's cached away under some brush in a well marked place. Begin your search near Sepulveda's camp and work northward."

"Why north?"

"That barefooted horse has been in this district since July 28, I'll swear to that. There's no place that an Indian'd go to the south," Jennings explained.

For days the search continued and Jennings received no word from Sepada or Estanislao. The officer's endless questioning of ranchers continued but nothing came of it until August 15 when the barefooted sorrel was identified by a Mexican from a ranch twenty miles away. The horse had been stoler early in July, he said.

Ramon Tapia had been questioned repeatedly by Jennings. An interpreter was used but the silent red man refused to talk about himself at all. He said that Jorge Munijo shot him in an argument over a card game, using Sepulveda's revolver. He denied ever owning a gun and wouldn't explain how the .44 caliber cartridges came to be found beside him, or the shotgun shells.

"Where do you belong, Ramon?" Jennings asked.

"Mexico," Ramon replied through the interpreter, and there it ended.

Three more days passed and then, one afternoon Tom Napa and Estanislao came to the sheriff's office.

"I have news," Estanislao said. "An Indian did come to Sequam on July 29. He was riding a sorrel horse with white face and roached mane and he had a single barrel shotgun with nickel trimming. He was there until July 30."

"Who said this?" Jennings asked.

"Delores, an Indian woman who knows this man."

"Who is this man?"

"He is Chewish Buscadero. Sometimes they call him Chaviz, and Estudero. He have brother called Antone, both bad. This man Chewish is thief and brag about how he never work. Just go 'round and make people give him food. All Indians fear him so much they no tell on him. All this time they know but afraid to talk. He is gun fighter. So is Antone."

JENNINGS grinned. "So that's it, eh. We had him all the time. He's Ramon Tapia isn't he, Estanislao?"

The Indian nodded.

"What else?" Jennings asked.

"This man come to Sepulveda's camp. Things happen as those fellow said but they not talk all. This Chewish, you call him Tapia, tell Sepulveda that he kill old white man and this Tapia have money and gun. He say that he first shoot old man because he no give him food and then beat him with big club. Then he set house on fire and go away."

"Sepulveda see the gun?"

"Yes, he see it. This Tapia, he leave the camp with gun and come back right off. No got this gun."

"How about the money?"

"He give some to Sepulveda to change for him at El Cajon."

"How much?"

"Ten dollar, paper. He want white money for it."

Jennings shook his head. That didn't account for all the wealth that Jake Veitinger was supposed to have. Had the rest of it burned with the shack? It appeared so.

"Where this Tapia get the money, Estanislao? Did you find out?"

"Si. He tell Paula, the Indian woman, that it come from the pants of the dead man. He say to her that he steal the shotgun too."

"How the heck did you get all of this information when we've had Sepulveda, Paula and all the others here in jail?" Jennings asked, although he knew the answer.

Estanislao grinned. "Those Indians, they talk all 'round to each other. You get that Sepulveda and Paula here. They talk now, I think."

They did! Sepulveda talked about Ramon Tapia. How he'd arrived at the camp riding a sorrel horse with roached mane and white face; how he'd told about killing the old American, shooting him with a revolver and then beating him to death and burning his house. Tapia had the shotgun, too, and some money that he'd taken from his victim's clothing. Paula told how Tapia had bragged to her about the murder. "A bad man," she said, shaking her head in judgment of him.

With the approximate location of the gun known, the rest was routine. Searchers concentrated about the Indian camp and J. J. Canfield found the weapon; rusted a bit but with the brazed bit of metal on the hammer. Veitinger's gun beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Tapia made but one admission when confronted with the evidence against him. He admitted having the bare-footed sorrel horse. He denied everything else but that one admission sent him to San Quentin Prison for the rest of his life; that and the result of the evidence gathered together by the man who said:

"I'm no detective!"

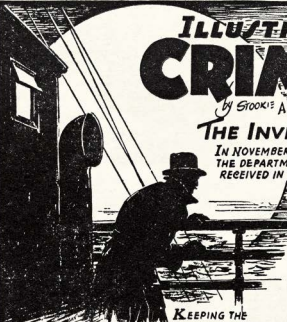
ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN

THE INVISIBLE "F" INK

IN NOVEMBER, 1917, WHEN SPIES WERE KEEPING THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BUSY, WORD WAS RECEIVED IN WASHINGTON FROM ENGLAND THAT

A SECRET AGENT—NAME UNKNOWN—WAS BOUND FOR AMERICA FROM SPAIN. IT WAS KNOWN THAT HE HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO PAY \$10,000 TO ANOTHER AGENT DESCRIBED AS A LODGER IN A HOBOKEN, N. J., ROOMING HOUSE. THE LATTER DISAPPEARED, HOWEVER, BEFORE FEDERAL AUTHORITIES CLOSED IN.



KEEPING THE HOBOKEN HOUSE UNDER OBSERVATION, THE SLEUTHS INTERCEPTED A SECOND LETTER SOME DAYS LATER. LIKE THE FIRST, IT CONVEYED ONLY CONVENTIONAL TIDINGS, BUT CHEMISTS, WITH A BRUSH DIPPED IN CHEMICALS, BROUGHT OUT A MESSAGE IN SECRET INK WHICH DISCLOSED PLOTS FOR PLACING BOMBS ON BRITISH SHIPS AND BLOWING UP OF AMERICAN MUNITIONS PLANTS.

ON THE ENVELOPE WAS A RETURN ADDRESS—OF A HARLEM ROOMING HOUSE. THE NAME USED PROVED FICTITIOUS. BUT SUSPICION CENTERED UPON ONE OF THE ROOMERS, A STEWARD ON A NORWEGIAN SHIP.



THE SUSPECT FINALLY ADMITTED THAT HE HAD MAILED THE LETTERS AFTER SMUGGLING THEM INTO THE U.S. — HE EXPLAINED THAT A PORTER IN AN OSLO HOTEL HAD PAID HIM HANDSOMELY AFTER EXACTING A PROMISE THAT HE WOULD POST THE LETTERS ON HIS ARRIVAL IN NEW YORK. THE MAN FURNISHED A SECOND ADDRESS—THAT OF A WOMAN—TO WHOM HE HAD REMAILED ANOTHER LETTER. IT PROVED TO BE THAT OF A DESTITUTE WIDOW, USED BY THE PLOTTERS AS A COVER ADDRESS. THIS WOMAN GAVE A DEFINITE LEAD, A NAME SHE HAD NOTICED ON MANY OF THE MYSTERIOUS LETTERS—THAT OF A MME. MARIE DE VICTORICA!

Coming Next Week—



A CABLE TO BRITISH AUTHORITIES DREW A REPLY DESCRIBING HER. SHE WAS 35, A GERMAN NOBLEWOMAN WIFE OF A SOUTH AMERICAN. SHE HAD ENTERED THE U.S. ON A BRAZILIAN PASSPORT, TRAILED FOR MONTHS. THE ELUSIVE SPY ALWAYS KEPT A JUMP AHEAD OF THE SLEUTHS. A BREAK FINALLY CAME IN JUNE, 1918, WHEN ANOTHER SUSPECT, A YOUNG GERMAN GIRL, WAS OBSERVED LEAVING A FOLDED NEWSPAPER IN A PEW IN ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL IN NEW YORK.

AS SHE DEPARTED A MAN PASSED, PICKED UP HER PAPER AND WALKED OUT. HE WAS TRAILED TO LONG BEACH, L.I., WHERE AN ATTRACTIVE WOMAN RECEIVED THE PAPER FROM HIM. FEDERAL MEN SEIZED THE WOMAN. SHE WAS MME. DE VICTORICA. FOLDED IN THE NEWSPAPER WERE TWENTY \$1,000 BANK NOTES — PAYMENT FOR HER UNDERCOVER WORK.



IN HER POSSESSION WERE FOUND TWO SILK SCARFS WHICH HAD BEEN TREATED WITH THE FAMOUS GERMAN "F" INK. BY SIMPLY DIPPING THE EDGE OF THE SCARF IN WATER, SHE OBTAINED INVISIBLE INK. CONFRONTED WITH EVIDENCE OF HER ESPIONAGE WORK, MME. DE VICTORICA CONFESSED. SHE WAS NEVER TRIED, FOR HER HEALTH BROKE. SHE DIED OF PNEUMONIA TWO YEARS AFTER HER ARREST.

Cought By a Heelprint

Murder Caravan

By T. T. Flynn



Every step he took, Savage expected a shot from the cabin.

Tony Savage, the trailer sleuth, follows murder's path from Florida to New Mexico to solve the mystery of strange deaths and to rescue a girl in danger

WHAT HAS HAPPENED—

ANTHONY SAVAGE, ace private investigator for the Pan-America Insurance Company of New York, and his assistant Briggs, were driving northward along a Florida highway in their coupe towing a new trailer, equipped with a short wave radio set for sending and receiving. Suddenly a hatless, bearded man stumbled onto the macadam road and fell, wounded by a rifle bullet fired from the thicket along the highway.

Savage stopped the car, rushed to the

man's side in time to hear him whisper, "Bellamy," before he died. To Savage this was a significant coincidence, for he and Briggs were on their way to visit "Flamingo Groves," the Florida Estate of Roger Bellamy, a heavy policy holder with the Pan-America Company and president of the Arcade Steel Company. Leaving the corpse at the side of the road, Savage drove on only a short distance, when he was stopped by an indignant girl in a coupe who accused him of the hit-and-run death of the stranger. At the point of a gun the girl, Rita Carstairs, reporter for the New York Star, ordered Savage and Briggs to drive on to "Flamingo Groves" to surrender to the sheriff who was investigating Roger Bellamy's death.

At "Flamingo Groves" Savage identified himself and took up the investigation of Bellamy's death for his company. Bellamy's body had been found under a capsized boat. Savage concluded from

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his investigation and the coroner's report that Bellamy had been murdered.

At "Flamingo Groves" he met Joan Bellamy, daughter of the slain man, and Jerry Goddard, her fiance. From Anne Teasdale he learned that Goddard has been overheard calling Clark, the gardener on the estate, "Father." Savage asked Clark to row out to the scene of Bellamy's death with him. There Clark assaulted Savage, but was mysteriously killed by a gunman hidden in the dense forest on the shore.

Savage learned that Bellamy had been in financial straits and had lost control of his Arcade Steel Company to James Larnigan, but the financier had left for New Orleans. He asked his office there to investigate the man, but a short while later is informed that Larnigan's charred body had been found in the wreckage of his car near Torrington, close to the Alabama line.

At the scene Savage became suspicious when he failed to find Larnigan's rifle in the wreckage. Informed that Larnigan had phoned a Miss Moira Sullivan, his confidential secretary, Savage continued on to New Orleans, knowing that Rita Carstairs, the reporter, had been one jump ahead of him so far.

In New Orleans in Larnigan's residence he met the girl, accompanied by Larnigan's butler, Jasper, who had seen Larnigan pick up his clothes at the house!

Savage located Moira Sullivan and, while interviewing her in her apartment, she received a telephone call and unwittingly exclaimed "Jim!" when she answered it.

In Larnigan's house Savage had also run into a gunman who escaped but was traced to a home in New Orleans. Raiding the place with the aid of police, Savage found Goddard and Anne Teasdale together.

When Moira Sullivan took a plane to El Paso, Texas, Savage decided to follow with his trailer, hoping that she would lead him to Larnigan who apparently had the key to the entire mystery.

Savage was told to report to the Tri-State Agency in El Paso which had been ordered to watch Moira Sullivan in a hotel

there. A short distance outside the city a man identifying himself as Van Duesen told Savage that he was from the agency and would guide him to Moira Sullivan's rendezvous after she had left the hotel. Shortly afterward while driving on a dark country road Savage and Briggs are overpowered and made prisoners.

Briggs, forced to report by radio that he and Savage arrived safely, got a message from New Orleans reporting that G-men identified fingerprints in Goddard's place in New Orleans as belonging to John Black, alias Bob Hutton, and of Rudolph Coston, alias Sam Jenkins, who was wanted in San Francisco for murder. Fingerprints from Torrington were identified as belonging to Daniel Van Drake, alias Buck Clark. Savage recognized the last two as his captors.

They forced Savage and Briggs into the detective's trailer and while Van Deusen stood guard, Sam drove northward. When the trailer slowed up for a rough spot on the road through the desert, Savage lurched against the only light in the trailer, smashed it and leaped out the door followed by Briggs. They escaped in the night and the next morning were picked up by a farmer in a truck and taken to El Paso. In the escape Briggs had been shot in the leg and was taken to a hospital.

In El Paso Savage found that Miss Sullivan had disappeared and that a man, whom he recognized as Parker, assistant gardener at Flamingo Groves, had impersonated him and called the Tri-State Agency off her trail. He learned, too, that Miss Sullivan had met R. L. Chatham, of Chicago, Larnigan's business associate.

Knowing that Van Deusen and Sam had talked of someone named "Limey" as their boss, Savage tried to learn more about him from Starbuck, Tri-State agency man who took him to Jim Considine, inspector of the Customs Border Patrol. Considine recognized "Limey" as Limey Drake, notorious smuggler.

A telegram from the New Orleans office relayed from Rita Carstairs in Hollywood informed Savage that Goddard had met

Loretta Armond in Hollywood when he was a writer there and had told her he had a half brother named Black. Savage recognized Black as Bob Hutton, alias Parker, the assistant gardener on Bellamy's estate and Clark as his foster father. The telegram stated that Rita is flying to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Knowing that two trailers carrying Van Deusen, Sam, and probably Bob Hutton are headed that way, Savage fears that Rita will walk into a trap and be killed. With Starbuck he rushes to Juarez to get Considine's assistance.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XXVI

The Chase Begins

THE Mexican customs officials waved the taxicab past the south end of the International Bridge into Juarez. The bright morning sunlight was drenching the shabby stuccoed buildings, was splashing golden light over the dust, the dirt, and squalor in the narrow side streets of the Mexican border town.

The Juarez plaza had not changed since Savage had last seen it. Tall trees shaded the worn seats and little wooden bandstand. The tall gray cathedral dominated the west side of the plaza. The little curb stands across the street on the south side were already selling their fruits and vegetables, their breads, cakes and *dulces*. Cigarette vendors were out with their small trays and stands of cigarettes. Ragged natives were loafing on many of the plaza seats and standing on the walks soaking up the sunshine.

Anthony Savage hardly saw any of it when he and Starbuck dismissed the cab. His thoughts concentrated on Rita Carstairs only.

Already Rita might have rushed into trouble. If not by now, then any hour,

any minute from now on. And Rita was hundreds of miles to the north, and there wasn't a clue as to how to reach her!

John Black, alias Bob Hutton, alias Parker, the Bellamy gardener, was the single thread that might be followed to where Rita was going. And that thread was so tenuous, so uncertain that the slightest failure on the part of Jim Considine here in Juarez would destroy all hope.

"You've got the jitters," said Starbuck from the bench where he had dropped. "Sit down and take it easy."

Savage realized he had been pacing a beat of half a dozen steps back and forth, puffing furiously on a cigarette. He sat down.

"Why the devil doesn't Considine hurry?"

"He'll do the best he can," encouraged Starbuck.

Five minutes—ten minutes—fifteen minutes dragged past. Savage was pacing again, smoking cigarette after cigarette. When a child, not more than seven, sidled up, Starbuck waved him away impatiently. "*Vamos! Nada!*"

"*Viva Mexico*," said the urchin.

Savage heard it and wheeled around. "Eh? What's that?"

"*Viva Mexico*. You wan' wan guide?"

"I guess it's all right," said Starbuck. "Sure, sonny, go ahead. We'll follow."

The boy trotted ahead of them, up the hill on the south side of the cathedral, to the left past a big brick market building and the bee-hive activity of street stands outside.

Beyond the market building they entered a section of dusty streets where the house fronts formed one unbroken stucco wall along the narrow sidewalks. Doorways gave back into vague, mys-

terious inner courtyards; narrow alleys led back between other buildings; the odors of chile, fried meat, animals and close-living humanity were on the air. And without a word the trotting boy ducked into an open doorway, led them back through an inner room, across a small inner patio into a dim cool back room.

JIM CONSIDINE said quietly as they entered:

"I had more luck than I really expected. This is Rafael Torres—and his throat won't be worth a plugged *centavo* if he's caught here with me."

The boy had vanished.

The low-ceilinged room held an old brass bed, a rickety unpainted chair and a chest of drawers. The small thin man who sat on the bed with a cigarette in his fingers looked whiter than Considine. More American. But he spoke in Spanish, rather glumly: "*Buenos dias,*" and stared at the floor.

"Torres has his reasons for being frank with me," said Considine mildly. "I think we can take what he says as gospel. He's worked with Limey's crowd off and on for years. He knew this Bob Hutton before Hutton went to the pen. Hutton owned a small ranch up in New Mexico. Up toward the Inscription Rock country. An uncle had died and left it to him, and he'd sold the cattle and come to El Paso and met Limey Drake some way.

"Anyway Hutton's value to Drake was in the ranch. The nearest neighbors were miles away, and they were Spanish-Americans. There was flat land for a plane to land. Limey uses planes a lot to get stuff over the border. We catch one now and then, and spot landing bases and close them. But the traffic goes on. It's a long border. A plane that can get far enough up in

New Mexico, Arizona or Texas is usually safe.

"So on Hutton's ranch Limey had a landing base, with a road out to highways that led over into Arizona and back to the Rio Grande Valley and to Albuquerque. An occasional car going out didn't attract any attention. But one of our planes followed one of Limey's planes up there one day, saw it land, and we had the place spotted.

"Hutton was in the pen by then; he'd been picked up in El Paso with a wad of counterfeit money in his pocket, so he couldn't be connected with the smuggling. The place was ruined for Limey after that and not used any more. Hutton has been back here since he got out of the pen, but not to work for Limey. This Van Drake is a distant cousin of Limey's, and hasn't been with Limey for some time either. That seems to be the layout for what it's worth to you."

"It may be worth somebody's life," said Savage with relief. "It sounds like the break I had to have. Where is this ranch? I've got to get there as quickly as possible."

"Think Hutton's there?"

"Where else?"

Considine nodded.

"Your road from Alamogordo goes on up north through Tularosa to Carizozo; and a good fast road from Carizozo cuts across the Oscuro Mountains to the Rio Grande Valley at San Antonio, about ten miles from Socorro. And a highway runs west from Socorro through Magdalena and across the San Agustin Plains past Pie Town, on the edge of the Cibola National Forest; and a little road not on the maps cuts north from Pie Town to El Morro and Inscription Rock. The ranch is back in there.

"With all night to drive, and taking

it fast, a car could get west of Socorro before daylight. And past Magdalena it's all empty country. Yes, if they went that way, they had a chance to hole up before there was much daylight around them. Especially if they ditched the trailers somewhere on the road."

"It would be an all day drive?" asked Savage.

"A long hard day's drive," said Considine.

"Isn't there any way to get there quicker? A plane? Couldn't a plane find that same landing field?"

"I was thinking of that," admitted Considine. "Rafael's flown in there. . . . Yes, he's a pilot."

THE man on the bed, who had been staring glumly at the floor through all the talk, looked up quickly and spoke in fair English.

"I don't do that, Considine, an' you damn well know why!"

"He's wanted on the other side," explained Considine, smiling slightly. "Don't know that I blame him."

"But I tell you," Savage bit out, "a plane has *got* to get in there! I've had a wire since you left us. A young woman, a newspaper reporter, is headed toward that ranch, I have every reason to believe. And *her* neck won't be worth a plugged *centavo* either if she meets that bunch. Not to speak of the fact that they're apt to get away from there before night, after they get together and compare stories. Today, before noon, before they're expecting anything, is the time."

Considine shoved back his hat.

"*Amigo*," he said to Torres, "if I took you along—and brought you back here into Juarez *muy bueno*—would you show us the place?"

"No!" exclaimed Torres passionately, leaping to his feet and gesturing.

He broke into rapid Spanish. Jim Considine answered him softly. Torres glared at him for a moment, then shrugged, spreading his hands out, palms up.

"He'll go," said Considine calmly. "You'll have to pay for the plane, Savage. And I'll have to go along too—shall we say—protect Rafael from any officers on the other side. My official scalp may get singed for doing it. But, gentlemen, it's been singed before. Suit you, Savage?"

"More than I hoped for!"

"Let's get back across the river then and see about a plane," said Considine.

CHAPTER XXVII

Flight Northward

THERE was the matter of authority to act in the State of New Mexico. Savage brought it up as a taxi carried them back to El Paso.

"My man and I were kidnapped and carried across a state line," said Savage. "That's a Federal offense. The snatch happened inside the El Paso city limits, so the local police are involved. New Mexico authorities also have a part in it now. Florida wants Van Drake and Sam Jenkins for murder. But word would have to be gotten to Florida. No customs regulations have been violated, which rather lets you out, Considine."

"Too many cooks will mess this up," was Considine's immediate opinion. "I can get a plane at once, I think. These men *may* have violated customs. My outfit once raided the place. That's good enough grounds for me to drop in and inspect the ranch again."

Considine rubbed his chin and smiled bleakly.

"If this Miss Carstairs is there and in any danger, we won't need authority," said Considine. "And if we meet

the chaps who kidnapped you, anyone can take them. And if anyone starts shooting, we'll certainly defend ourselves. Suppose we report it from Starbuck's office, notify the sheriff at Reserve and at Gallup to move in on the ranch from the north and south and look around. We'll take off from here and let the devil laugh at whoever gets there first?"

"Bulls-eye as far as I'm concerned," Tony Savage agreed promptly. He would have agreed with anything which promised to save a few minutes of time. His fear for Rita Carstairs' safety was like a growing fever, whipping him on to furious haste.

On the Texas side of the bridge—the west bridge, which carried traffic out of Juarez—Considine had the driver turn over to the Border Patrol Headquarters near the river.

Considine entered the building alone. And while they waited, Rafael Torres slumped down in the seat with his old Stetson hat tilted over his face.

Savage spoke to him. "This shouldn't worry you too much."

Torres pushed the hat up and stared at him with an expressionless face.

"You better worry," said Torres ominously. "Me—I know those *hombres*. All I want is a good gun when we get near them!"

A smile, half mockery, half contemptuous, came on Torres' face.

"The cops," Torres sneered, "are a long way off up there in the Inscription Rock country. Maybe you don't like it so well after you get there, with those boys waiting for you."

"Maybe not," said Savage.

Considine was quickly back, carrying a rifle and two gunbelts which held large calibre automatics.

"Just in case," said Considine briskly as they drove on. "I telephoned the air-

port. We're in luck. They happen to have just the plane for our purpose. By noon it would have hopped over to Tucson. It'll be ready for us."

In the Tri-State office Considine telephoned the sheriffs at Gallup and at Reserve, New Mexico. He knew the sheriff at Gallup. The Reserve sheriff was in bed with a broken leg. A deputy took the message and promised to do what he could.

Savage telephoned Police Headquarters. Word had just been received from the Alamogordo sheriff that the big silver-hued trailer and car hooked in front had been found parked beside the highway between Alamogordo and Tularosa. The two men had vanished; there was no word about them.

"The girl waited for them with the other car and trailer," Savage guessed after he hung up. "My outfit was too easily recognized and remembered, I suppose, so they abandoned it."

"They went that far on the right road," Starbuck commented with satisfaction.

ANOTHER taxi rushed them out to the airport. A trim cabin plane was waiting for them with its motor turning over slowly. The pilot, pacing back and forth under the wing, was a thin-faced young man who introduced himself as Fitzpatrick.

Fitzpatrick took a map from his pocket and marked their destination with a pencil. Looking down at the map, Savage realized just how empty was the country into which they were going.

"I can take you up the Rio Grande to Socorro and west from there," Fitzpatrick said, moving his pencil over the map. "There'll be a highway under us all the way. Or I can cut over from Hot Springs here, between the Black

Range and the San Mateo Mountains. A crack-up over in there might mean several days of walking."

Considine looked at Savage for a decision.

"You'll save time cutting through," judged Savage.

"Some," the pilot agreed.

"That way by all means! As fast as you can!"

A few minutes before nine A.M. the trim cabin plane flashed up through the clear sunshine. Swiftly it climbed to cross the low barren mountain which thrust to the very edge of El Paso. The horizon retreated into hazy infinity. Far below, the parched earth lay in tortured convolutions. The serrated crests of the Organ Mountains paralleled the glinting river and network of irrigation ditches that radiated through a narrow band of green fields in the river valley.

They were flying high and fast when they passed over Las Cruces, forty miles north of El Paso. Soon the farms ended, the harsh dry hills pressed against the river. Presently the plane swung over into the northwest, and massive mountains bulked ahead. The land below was vast and empty; once in a while they glimpsed the meandering ruts of some little ranch road coming from nowhere and seeming to go nowhere—but that was all.

Considine was testing the bolt of his rifle, inspecting the sights. He broke open a box of cartridges. Catching Savage's eye across the aisle, Considine handed over one of the gunbelts.

"Sorry I couldn't get a rifle for you," Considine called. "Rifle country down there."

Savage nodded, examined the gun. The clip was empty; he filled it with cartridges from the belt loops. The calibre was .45—a big, heavy, power-

ful automatic that could knock a man down and out the first hit. The feel of the gun was comforting in view of what might be ahead.

About ten-thirty the mountains drew away into the distance; a great plain dotted with tree clumps lay below. The pilot passed back a map.

Savage judged they were over the San Agustin plains. They crossed a road on which a tiny automobile led a plume of dust; a few minutes later they passed over another road, and turned to follow it for several miles. Suddenly there was a little cluster of buildings on the road, and another road striking off into the north.

That would be Pie Town, Savage guessed, as the pilot swung north. Trees now were plentiful below; there was a greener look to the landscape, and here and there white patches that Savage realized were snow. In less than two hours they had come from spring into the edge of winter. Savage had not noticed it because the pilot had turned heat into the cabin.

The ship was of modern design.

Rafael Torres was studying the ground below. He reached for the map, pored over it, stood up and talked to the pilot. The pilot cut his motor, lost altitude rapidly; they were little more than a thousand feet up when the motor roared again and they went on.

WITHOUT warning, hell itself seemed spread below them!

Long black fingers crawled in sinuous lines over the landscape. The black areas from which they came grew broader, merged together. A smooth-sided volcanic cone lifted up. The black areas were lava, solid beds of it as far as the eye could see. Raw bare lava, twisted, folded, piled on itself, running out in frozen rivers that once had been

tongues of molten rock pushing across the landscape.

There was something brutal, depressing about that vast sweep of lava. Grass, trees grew to the lava edge, and over some of it; and the living growth only emphasized the grim desolation of the frozen rock.

The plane banked back to the edge of the lava. And down there the twin threads of two road ruts ran into the northeast beside the lava. Considine, looking from the window, energetically pointed at the ground.

"Auto down there!"

Savage looked, saw the car in the road like a miniature crawling beetle. He stepped up to Torres.

"How far is the ranch?"

Torres held up the fingers of both hands.

"Ten miles?"

Torres nodded.

"Any other ranches ahead?"

Torres moved his shoulders in an expressive Latin shrug.

"*Nada*," he said, and added the English equivalent: "Nothing."

Savage asked:

"Then that car's heading for the ranch?"

Torres nodded again. Savage turned forward, spoke over the pilot's shoulder. "Did you see that automobile?"

Fitzgerald nodded.

"Can you land along here near the road?"

Fitzgerald frowned.

"Bad business, mister. That man Torres says the ground down there for a dozen miles out from the lava is thick with lava chunks that were scattered out during eruptions. We might crack up. The landing place he's guiding us to has the worst of the stuff cleared away."

"We've got to intercept that car!"

"It's dangerous business, mister. At this altitude I have to land fast."

"There may be a woman in that car who's driving into danger and doesn't know it! There's time to stop her!"

The whip of urgency in Savage's voice did more than his words. The pilot searched Savage's face with a quick look.

"Tell 'em to fasten their safety belts," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

The automobile was already far behind as the pilot dropped nearer the ground. Once he circled fast, came low over a long open stretch; but there was a gully through the middle almost invisible from the air; he zoomed up sharply and went on.

Several minutes later he dropped again, circled another open spot, zoomed up, circled, headed back toward it. He looked over his shoulder, lifted a warning hand, closed the throttle.

In silence broken only by the chuffing cough of the idling motor and the rush of the descending plane, they swooped down. There was a breathless moment in which the ground looked rougher than it had from the air; and then the wheels struck hard, bounded high, struck again, and they rolled to a quick jolting stop.

The road lay almost a quarter of a mile away.

"We may as well all go," Considine decided.

"Good idea," Savage said.

Savage led the way at a run through a fringe of trees, over a low rise of ground, through another scattering of trees where the honeycombed, reddish-colored lava chunks lay thick.

He heard the automobile coming as he neared the road and put on a burst of speed that carried him ahead of the others. The car was a black sedan, bouncing toward him when he stopped,

breathing hard, between the two rough ruts.

He saw the driver behind the wheel; there seemed no one else in the car; and as it stopped and he stepped hurriedly to the side, Savage was disappointed—and elated!

CHAPTER XXVIII

They Swoop to Capture

YOUNG Jack Goddard sat behind the wheel. His face was a study in astonishment, quick uneasiness—and a sudden rush of anger.

"So it's *you* again?" Goddard burst out angrily. "What now? What are you doing out here in New Mexico? You came out of that plane, I suppose? Have you been following me all the way from New Orleans? Who are these men?"

Jim Considine asked:

"Who's this fellow, Savage? One of them?"

"So it seems," Savage replied.

"One of whom? What the devil is all this about?" Goddard blazed. An undercurrent of fear was visible behind the anger.

"Get out," said Savage.

Goddard flushed.

"I'm not taking orders from you! Didn't I make that clear back in Florida?"

"Get out," said Savage brusquely.

Goddard stared at him a moment and then got out sulkily. Savage frisked him, found a revolver in the right hand coat pocket.

"Expecting trouble, Goddard?"

"I bought that in Albuquerque—didn't know but what I might need it on this trip."

"So you went from New Orleans to Albuquerque?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get this automobile?"

"I rented it; and once more—what's this all about?"

"Where is Miss Teasdale?"

Goddard scowled at him.

"You're going to talk, you know," suggested Savage.

"Third degree, eh—out here where you can have your own way?" sneered Goddard. "All right, you magazine detective—I don't know where Miss Teasdale is. She said she was going to California. I hope she's gone to Tibet!"

"Who is she?"

"I don't know," said Goddard. "Once I thought I did; I don't know now, dammit, d'you understand—I don't know anything about her! Except that she got me in one hell of a mess in New Orleans! Arrested! The first time anything like that ever happened to me! It'll probably smash up my life!"

"Indeed? Well, you're arrested again—right now. Your ignorance about the woman falls flat in the face of the quick trip you made to meet her in New Orleans."

"I didn't go to meet her. I didn't have any idea she'd be within a thousand miles of that house! I didn't know she even knew the house was there or had ever had any contact with it."

"Then what brought you to the place?"

"I'd written letters to a man at that address and I wanted to see him."

"His name?"

Goddard hesitated again.

"You're in trouble," said Savage. "Better tell the truth!"

"His name is Black."

"And what are you doing out here in New Mexico? Trying to find Black again?"

"As a matter of fact, that's just what I'm doing. I found he'd left New

Orleans—and I had a hunch I might catch him out here.”

“Why the hunch?”

“He used to live out here.”

“With his uncle,” said Savage, “who willed him the place. And Black went to prison for possession of counterfeit money. And later on got a job at Bellamy’s place as the assistant gardener. And worked there close to the man who had married his mother. I’m speaking of Clark—the old man at the boat-house. Your father! Your half-brother’s foster-father! Right?”

YOUNG Goddard wilted as he stood there.

“I don’t know how you discovered all that,” he said huskily. “But—it’s correct. John got the job there under an assumed name—to annoy me, I think. He’s never liked me.”

“And at the same time you were living under an assumed name at Palm Beach—and getting ready to marry Miss Bellamy under false pretenses.”

“You’re a liar!” Goddard flared. “My father got that job there because he liked Florida, and he liked to keep busy! Goddard’s the name I wrote under in Hollywood! I had a right to use it!”

“And tell about your father who was a banker?”

“Perhaps I did invent a good story now and then. You get used to doing it in Hollywood.”

“Did Miss Bellamy know who Clark was?”

“She did. I told her after we were engaged. And it didn’t make a bit of difference to her. That’s the sort of girl she is! Only—we agreed to keep it quiet until we were married so as to avoid cheap publicity!”

“You know,” said Savage thoughtfully. “I believe you.”

“I don’t care whether you do or not!” Goddard declared.

Jim Considine broke in.

“Very interesting. But what about this girl—this Miss Carstairs?”

“Have you seen Miss Carstairs?” asked Savage.

“She was in New Orleans. She tried to get a story out of me. I didn’t tell her anything.”

“You haven’t seen her since?”

“No.”

“Which brings us to Roger Bellamy’s death,” said Savage. “We know now it was murder. So was your father’s death. And your father, Goddard, was closely connected with Bellamy’s death. He tried to kill me when he thought I was getting too close to the truth.”

“I can’t believe that!”

“Nevertheless it’s true.”

“My father,” Goddard insisted, “was one of the most lawabiding men I’ve ever known. As for his killing Bellamy—bah! Why should he have killed the father of the girl I was going to marry?”

“Perhaps to make sure Miss Bellamy would at least inherit substantial insurance.”

“Damn you!” Goddard sputtered angrily. “You can’t smear him like that!”

Savage dodged, parried the younger man’s fist. Considine caught Goddard from behind.

“Let him go, Considine,” Savage said. “Goddard, losing your head isn’t going to help you. Why didn’t you speak up when your father was killed? Why didn’t you help us, tell us what you knew?”

GODDARD gulped and fumbled for a cigarette. His hands were shaking.

“I didn’t know anything,” he said

thickly. "I only knew that Joan's father was dead—and my father had been shot. And nothing I could have said would have helped. The truth about him and myself and—and John, would only have brought an avalanche of publicity on Joan. John had spent time in prison. The whole mixup would have made a dirty mess in the papers—at the one time Joan shouldn't have had it to face. I tried to spare her."

"Why didn't you go to Cleveland with Bellamy's body? Why did you go to New Orleans looking for John Black?"

"I stayed behind to see about my father's body. And, when John quit and left without a word, I began to wonder what he knew about it. He'd turned out bad. He didn't like me, didn't like my father. I decided I had to talk to him." Goddard drew nervously on the cigarette. "And when Anne Teasdale answered the door at that New Orleans address, I knew I had to see John. She wouldn't tell me anything. We were quarreling about it when that detective tried to push in."

"You and Miss Teasdale were close friends?"

"Once. I met her in Palm Beach. Matter of fact she met me, now that I look back on it. She must have known who I was—since she seems to have some connection with John. But I didn't know it then. We got rather thick. Went everywhere together. And then she introduced me to Joan—and I fell for Joan—and in New Orleans Anne didn't trouble to hide the fact that she hated me."

"Couldn't have fallen in love with you herself, could she?"

"How do I know?" said Goddard irritably. "I'm not so much to fall in love with. Maybe she did. I don't know what to think about her."

"But you think your half-brother knows something about Bellamy's death?"

"I don't know that either. I came out here to talk to him."

"You evidently have your own ideas about it. Now what about James Larnigan—and the Armona girl in Hollywood whom you begged over long-distance to intercede with Larnigan?"

"So you know about that too?" Goddard muttered. He sighed. "My apologies. You're smarter than I thought. Joan told me about the mess—and what Larnigan had done because of Armond. I'd known her rather well in Hollywood. I handled script on a picture she worked on. I thought I might get her to do something about it—since Mr. Bellamy was dead and any revenge Larnigan could take in highjacking Bellamy's interest in the Steel company would fall on Joan. Loretta Armond asked me what it was worth to intercede—and I couldn't pay her anything so she refused to have anything to do with it. Probably she couldn't have done anything anyway."

"And then Larnigan was—murdered."

"I didn't know that until I was told in New Orleans."

Savage asked sharply:

"Did Larnigan know your brother?"

"Of course not," said Goddard instantly, and then qualified it: "I don't know. They may have met in New Orleans. I'm willing to believe anything now."

"You didn't know Larnigan?"

"No."

"Your half-brother," said Savage, "has made money by blackmail since he got out of prison."

"I'm not surprised," said Jack Goddard.

"What made you think your brother might be out here?"

"Miss Teasdale said he was not in New Orleans. After we were arrested, it occurred to me the police wanted John—and the one place he might choose to hide was here."

"Nice reasoning," said Savage. "Now we're going to borrow your car. Walk to the plane with this man. Torres, tell the pilot to wait about ten minutes, and then take off and fly to that other landing place. I want him to make a circle or two over the house, and then go to the field and land."

"And then what?" demanded Torres. "No one knows!" said Savage.

CHAPTER XXIX

Closing-In

SAVAGE drove fast, fighting the wheel as the small sedan pitched and bounced in the ruts. The earth was just damp enough to hold wheel marks.

"This isn't the first car along here in the last day or so," Savage observed.

Considine nodded. He was in the front seat, Starbuck in the back. Considine lowered his window and thrust out the rifle barrel, so that it could be used instantly. He was intently scanning the landscape ahead.

"Not much chance of a sheriff being here so soon," said Considine. "We're on our own—and there's too much cover around here to suit me."

The ground was rolling, broken. They bounced up steep little rises, and saw other rises beyond. The irregular fringe of the lava was off to the left. Several times they bumped over low flows of the dark, honeycombed rock; once they raced for a quarter of a mile beside a fifteen foot wall of the raw fire-scarred rock.

Piñon trees, taller pines were scat-

tered in clumps and single trees. The sun was high, warm, but the air was crisply cool and white patches of snow gleamed in sheltered spots. Savage was cold in his thin suit, but he forgot that when he heard the rising drone of the airplane coming up behind.

The plane flashed past not five hundred feet up, rocked its wings in a salute, kept on.

"It can't be much farther," Starbuck said. His voice sounded strained.

"Getting nervous?" Savage asked, chuckling.

"I'm like Jim," said Starbuck. "There's too much cover around here. They'll be watching. You can bet on that. And they won't be throwing cream puffs at us. I'd rather have dropped down with the plane and had 'em there in front of me. I wish I had a rifle. What good is a hand gun out here?"

"Good enough if you get close enough," said Savage. "I'm hoping they'll jump to meet that plane and leave the back door open—so to speak—for us."

"You're damned hopeful," declared Starbuck without much conviction.

"Look!" said Considine sharply.

Half a mile to the left, beyond the scattered pines on the next rise, the airplane flashed up against the sky in a high, steep zoom. Still visible against the turquoise backdrop of the sky, the plane banked sharply and began to circle.

"There's our ranch!" Considine exclaimed.

Savage had already jammed the accelerator down for a fast dash across the long open stretch that ended at the ridge. The speedometer moved to sixty, and he held it there. The light car was bouncing, lurching violently in the ruts.

Without warning the road abruptly

dipped into the shallow bed of a dry arroyo. . . .

The wheels left the ground as they shot over the edge. The car landed with a crash in the arroyo sand, lurched, skidded violently, half turned over as Savage wrestled wildly with the wheel.

Then the spinning wheels caught. In second gear the car hurtled up the other side and rocketed above fifty before Savage shifted into high gear.

"Hi-yah-h-h!" shouted Starbuck exuberantly in the back seat.

A glance in the rearview mirror showed Starbuck's hat jammed crookedly on his head, his face flushed, a broad grin of excitement on his face. Starbuck had not been afraid; he had merely been tense. On the verge of action he was ready.

A SHARP slap of metal rang against the motor. Considine heard it. He looked questioningly at Savage. But a sound didn't matter. A moment later a violent rap struck the windshield. Something flicked like a knife edge against Savage's taped cheek. A small round hole radiating jagged cracks appeared in the windshield glass.

"Rifle bullet!" yelled Considine, peering hard at the rise of ground ahead.

Eyes glued on the road, hands gripping the twisting wheel, Savage pushed the accelerator clear to the floor.

There was another clang of metal under the hood—then a loud tearing clatter. It sounded like a bent fan blade striking as it turned.

Automatically Savage estimated the distance to the ridge. All of four hundred yards at least. Perhaps more. He shouted:

"That gun shoots like my Halgar rifle! Must be Van Drake! Duck down! You know what to expect now!"

"Duck hell!" retorted Considine. "He can perforate the car!"

A man might be hidden in a hundred places on that ridge ahead. But by the way the bullets were striking, he was close to the road. The circling plane was swinging farther out, across the line of the road, to the right—and turning back in a descending glide that carried it down out of sight beyond the tree tops.

Metal smashed again at the corner post of the windshield. Considine ducked as the windshield cracked along the edge. But it was safety glass and held together.

Considine was gripping his rifle, butt down on the floor now. His right hand was on the door handle, ready for a dive out. They were doing sixty-six. The wildly bucking car threatened to pile over in a wreck any instant. Somehow Savage held it straight; he didn't dare lift his eyes from those flashing parallel troughs which led straight ahead. He could feel blood wetting his cheek where a flying fragment of glass had cut. That didn't matter—for the low ridge was leaping at them. . . .

More glass flying against his face made Savage jerk his head and almost lose control of the car. But the glass missed his eyes. A big chunk of it was out directly in front of him.

The bullet hadn't come straight at him; at an angle it had struck down to the window ledge at his left, and ricocheted harmlessly out into space. The enameled metal was gashed there where the bullet had glanced. That put the gunman off to the right, near the top of the ridge, shooting down at them.

The racing automobile struck the rise of the ridge and leaped and bucked up the rough steep slope with the effect of a field gun shell rushing high in its flight.

"I see him!" Considine shouted.

Savage saw him too an instant later—kneeling behind a rock some fifty yards over on open ground alongside the road at the crest of the ridge.

Van Drake—no mistaking that tall, spare figure bringing up a rifle to aim carefully at them as they passed.

Savage acted on impulse—jamming into intermediate gear, yanking hard on the wheel. The car leaped off the road in a skidding, reeling turn and shot toward the rock. Van Drake fired as they made the turn. Starbuck cried out in the back seat. Considine threw a look over his shoulder—but Savage couldn't look. Van Drake had leaped to his feet, feverishly reloading.

The swerve and charge of the car seemed to have unnerved Van Drake. He threw the rifle to his shoulder, fired hastily. Considine ducked low before the shot. Savage ducked too, far down behind the wheel—and glass broke out of the windshield and fell on the wrenching steering wheel.

WHEN Savage straightened up, jamming on the brake, the car was out of control on the rough ground, and Van Drake was running for the shelter of the nearest trees.

Considine leaped out as the car swung in a sharp drunken arc, over on two wheels, and came to a jarring stop as a front wheel crashed against a boulder.

A rifle shot spat out behind the car. Van Drake plunged forward, rolled several times, lay still.

From the back seat, Starbuck said:

"Get on to the house before another one opens up on us! He only smashed my shoulder. I'm all right!"

Considine appeared at the door.

"He asked for it," bit out Considine. "Let's get going!"

But the front wheels were badly twisted out of line; the car wouldn't roll. Savage killed the motor and leaped out as soon as he made that discovery.

"I'll get that rifle and come after you!" he called across the car.

Van Drake lay there on the sparse grass. And the rifle *was* the fine Halgar gun. A handful of extra cartridges was in Van Drake's coat pocket. Savage ran after Starbuck and Considine. Having the rifle again was like finding an old friend.

Starbuck was trotting slowly, an automatic in his left hand and his right arm hanging useless. He was pallid with pain when Savage caught up.

"Go on!" gasped Starbuck. "I'll come along!"

The ridge was not wide. Considine was already in sight of the drop to the other side, and he turned and gestured over to the left and ran that way.

The rising roar of the airplane motor beat toward them from some distance away. The plane seemed to be taking off again.

And then Savage saw the drop ahead of him and what was happening.

CHAPTER XXX

The Roundup

THE ridge crest dropped lower some distance off to the left and met the lava. The lava had flowed around the end of the ridge and filled the end of a wide draw beyond with a rocky wall some thirty feet high, so that the draw was a protected pocket at that end.

An old log house with lava rock chimneys stood in that pocket, where it was protected from the northwest winds and received the winter sun from the south and east. There was an old corral, a tumble-down shed, fallow

ground where a garden had once been made.

The road ruts dipped down the slope and swung left to the house. And clustered in front of the house, invisible, like the house, until one was right on top of the spot, were three automobiles, one of them hooked to a red trailer.

The grassy draw sloped gently from the front of the house, widening fast to its mouth a quarter of a mile away. Beyond the mouth of the draw on a level flat the airplane was rolling fast away in a take-off. Racing after the plane in a futile attempt to draw closer was another automobile.

All that was spread out below, to right and left in one panoramic sweep—and Considine was running to get abreast of the house. Savage followed him, cutting back from the edge so he would not be seen from the house.

The plane had decoyed someone from the house, but it was impossible to tell how many remained.

Considine and Savage were slightly to the back of the house, running side by side, as they burst down the slope between several stunted piñon trees.

Savage saw as he ran that the automobile down there beyond the mouth of the draw had stopped. Two men had jumped out and were staring after the rising plane, which already was starting a wide circle.

Every step he took, Savage expected a shot from the cabin; they reached the back and no one seemed to have seen them. The back door was standing slightly ajar. Savage drew the heavy automatic, shoved the door in and jumped inside.

And found himself in a small warm kitchen, with an opposite door opening into a front room where Rita Carstairs was sitting stiffly in a straight-backed

chair. Rita's wrists were tied in front of her. She had never looked so small, so helpless and forlorn.

A lump came into Tony Savage's throat—and a surge of relief that Rita was still able to look at him, to open her eyes wide in stunned surprise.

As Considine came in at Savage's heels, a woman called in the next room: "That you, Buck?"

The voice was sharp, hard, familiar. Savage reached the doorway as the young woman named Jessie crossed the room to look into the kitchen.

She gasped at sight of him. She was bringing her hand up with a small automatic. Rita reached her in a step and pushed her roughly, as the gun blasted—and missed.

Savage grabbed the weapon an instant later and was forcing the struggling girl back into a chair.

"Close!" he panted. "Thanks, Rita. I should have shot her."

"I wish you had," said Rita unsteadily. "She's a cold-blooded hussy." And then Rita's voice wobbled. "Tony Savage, you blessed angel! I'm g-going to cry! Did you come in that plane?"

STILL out of breath, Savage nodded. He was staring at the others in the room. Moira Sullivan and the man named Chatham were in chairs against the end wall, their wrists also tied. Chatham's nerves let go also.

"Get us out of here!" he stuttered. "They're going to k-kill us! There's no d-doubt of it—they're going to—"

"Who else is around?" Savage asked Rita, as he opened a pocket knife, freed her wrists and turned to the others.

"Three men," said Rita. "And one of them worked on the Bellamy estate. Three of them jumped into a car and drove to the plane. Tony, how did you get here so quickly?"

"Wished myself here," said Savage over his shoulder with a faint grin. The plane roared back over the cabin and swept around in a circle overhead.

Savage stared down at Moira Sullivan.

"Where is Larnigan?" he asked.

She had changed. The bloom of happiness had left her; the outer shell was there, but something had died inside. Her eyes were dark with misery.

"I don't know," she said. "He must be dead—after all. Jim would never have done—*this*. Never have known these people."

"Haven't you seen him?" Savage asked sharply.

"No."

Starbuck came in. "That auto's coming!"

"What's behind Chatham and you rushing to El Paso as you did?" Savage asked Moira.

"Jim told me to notify Chatham only there, and to come myself. At least—at least I thought it was Jim. He gave me directions only Jim could have given, and said someone would meet us there and bring us to him. And the men came, and drove us all night to this place."

The plane droned back over the cabin.

"Here they come!" warned Considine, turning away from Jessie. "Starbuck, put your good hand over this woman's mouth. If she tries to warn them, knock her over the head! This isn't any time for gallantry."

"Gallantry?" said Starbuck. "With this shoulder they gave me? I'll take care of her!"

The plane was swinging out in another circle as the automobile rushed up to the cabin and skidded to a stop. The front door flew open. The man who rushed in was saying: "*That*

damned plane is spotting us. We've got—"

Considine's automatic knocked him staggering across the room. . . .

Sam Jenkins was in the doorway a moment later, looking smaller, more vicious than ever in his anger and haste. He saw Savage, and leaped back outside, grabbing under his coat.

Savage jumped for the door, shouting: "Stand still! I'll shoot!"

But he knew even such a brief pause for a warning was dangerous. Jenkins was going to shoot. He was a killer and his mind reacted that way.

The gun was coming out from under the coat when Savage squeezed the trigger of the big .45 automatic. The recoil was terrific—and the big bullet knocked Jenkins sprawling back against the automobile. His eyes were wide, but his face was vacant as he slid to the ground.

THE plane returned overhead as Savage stepped out. It was low enough to see the faces staring down. He waved his arm for the plane to land. The wings wobbled acknowledgment; the plane headed for the landing field.

Jenkins was already unconscious. A quick look showed nothing much could be done for him. Considine brought out Hutton who had been known as Parker, when he was the assistant gardener at Bellamy's estate. Well dressed now, Hutton looked used to money and the good things of life. But he was pale, unnerved. He moistened his lips, swallowed as he looked down at the wounded man.

Savage said: "I hated to shoot him."

"He got more of a break than I'd given him," said Considine; he spoke to his prisoner. "Well, what about it?"

Hutton shook his head, not speaking.

The plane was coming in to land as

Savage reentered the cabin with a quick question for Moira Sullivan.

"Why did Larnigan want you to come to El Paso?"

"He wanted some papers that I had, and that Mr. Chatham had."

"What papers?"

"Two lots of certificates and papers that covered control of Arcade Steel."

"Arcade Steel! Wait a minute—was Larnigan's part of the papers in his safe?"

Moira Sullivan nodded.

"He left them there when he went to Florida."

"And you removed them from the safe when you visited the house?"

Moira Sullivan nodded again.

"You got the papers. Larnigan called you up to see where they were, and when he found you had 'em, he asked you to bring them to El Paso?"

"Yes."

"How did he account for the fact that he was alive?"

"He said it mustn't be known; he'd explain to us out here. I was to warn Mr. Chatham not to say a word."

"I didn't," said Chatham sourly. "And look what happened!"

"Larnigan telephoned you, Miss Sullivan. Why didn't he come to you? It was as safe."

"I don't know why," said Moira Sullivan wearily.

"Larnigan was a prisoner, of course," said Savage. "And if he was a prisoner and is still alive, he was carried out of New Orleans in a trailer. Has anyone looked in that trailer outside?"

Young Hutton shrugged. "Okay—he's out there."

Moira Sullivan faltered: "Jim's out there?" She ran for the door, sobbing: "Jim! Jim!"

Savage followed her into the trailer. She was kneeling by the bed where a

bound man lay. She was weeping: "Oh, Jim! Jim, my dear! You're not dead!"

Larnigan was unshaven, weak when Savage cut the cords that bound him, Larnigan set up with an effort and took his secretary's hand.

"I shouldn't have asked you to do it," said Larnigan unsteadily. "They had a gun at my head. I was afraid if I didn't follow directions, something worse might happen when they tried to get the papers from you. I hoped something would happen before you got to El Paso."

SAVAGE interrupted. "I'm with Pan-America Insurance: the name is Savage. This is an aftermath of the Bellamy matter which I was investigating. Just what happened, Mr. Larnigan?"

"They crowded my car to a stop on the road," said Larnigan. "I had a man riding with me, a chap I'd picked up on the road. They killed him I think, since I was supposed to be dead."

"Yes," said Savage. "And the same for you, eventually, of course. But what about Arcade Steel? I wonder if I'm right about it."

Larnigan passed his hand over his forehead.

"I think they've been drugging me," he muttered. "I've been asleep a lot. I can't understand the matter. They made me tell them how Arcade Steel might be turned back to the Bellamy estate. They forced me to tell them how the papers that Chatham and I had might be manipulated to undo the deal. Then they wanted the papers. When they didn't find them in the safe, they threatened to kill me.

"I thought the papers might have been moved, and told them to go back and look further. But someone was in the house. Moira here was the last hope

I had of buying a little more safety with those papers. They took me to a house that had a telephone, and told me what to say. And since then they've questioned me endlessly about how to use the papers. They brought them into the trailer this morning. I knew Moira must have come, but they wouldn't let me see her."

Larnigan's voice wavered. "Moira—I've been a terrible fool. Did you know I'd been in love with you for a long time? I didn't know it—until this happened."

Savage stepped out and closed the door.

The pilot had remained with the plane; but Torres and young Jack Goddard were almost to the cabin. Savage waited for them.

"Your half-brother's inside, Goddard. Come in. I want you to hear this."

Hutton was startled, unnerved, resentful when Goddard walked in. He started to flare out at Goddard, and Savage cut him off.

"Never mind that! Who put the chloral where Bellamy would get it while he was out fishing? You, I suppose, since you had access to the boat-house."

"Chloral?" Hutton asked. "What's the idea? Are you kidding me?"

"The idea," Savage said, "was to kill Bellamy so his daughter would get the insurance. And the idea that followed was to get Larnigan, force him to turn back Arcade Steel to the Bellamy estate, and make Miss Bellamy a wealthy girl again."

Hutton tried to sneer. "Why tell me? I wasn't marrying her!"

"Your brother was. It would, in a way, have been in the family, waiting to be shaken down at your leisure. In line with the blackmailing stunts you've been pulling."

"Nuts."

"Van Drake—or Buck—is dead," said Savage. "You can see Jenkins outside there. Larnigan's going to testify. You know by now that fingerprints, footprints, tire marks are on record. The whole thing has been about as cold-blooded a scheme as I've ever met. Even to killing your foster-father. Even a rat lets the rest of the rats in the nest alone."

Thickly, Goddard said: "*Did he—*" Stung, Hutton denied it.

"Buck did that! The old man was worried. He thought he had proof that I had something to do with Bellamy's death. I kidded him along and told him that Jack had asked me to do it, so Jack would have money after he was married."

SAVAGE dropped a warning hand on Jack Goddard's arm. "And Clark believed you?"

"It nearly wrecked him," Hutton said nervously. "But it stopped him. He wouldn't do anything to make trouble for Jack. I guess he lost his head out on the water when he thought the truth was coming out, and Jack was done for if he didn't stop it. Buck had heard the boat coming and slipped over to see what was happening. He saw the old man blow his nut and figured everything would be wide open if he wasn't shut up. So Buck shut him with a rifle."

"The same way he'd shut up Peckham a few hours earlier?"

"That fool walked up as Buck was starting out to see how Bellamy was. Sam grabbed him. They walked him to their boat and took him back in the swamp. But he broke away when they landed. Buck followed him to the highway before he could stop him."

"And before they got away in their trailer, you got word to them that Lar-

nigan was starting back to New Orleans and they could catch him on the road."

"You'll have to prove it," was the surly answer.

"It won't be necessary. Now let's see—the Teasdale girl had been working with you. She looked your brother up in Palm Beach, introduced him to Joan Bellamy. You evidently had planned everything."

"Yeah?"

"Yes," said Savage. "Or you wouldn't have taken a job of hard work at Bellamy's when you didn't need the money. There you could watch the progress of everything from the inside. You'll probably draw the electric chair for it. I hope so. Murder for insurance always turns my stomach. Considine, don't you think we'd better send the plane out with word of this?"

"I think so," agreed Considine.

"And I," said Rita Carstairs, "have got to get to a telephone with this story. You know you promised me, Tony."

She looked at him wistfully.

Larnigan and Moira Sullivan came in from the back at that moment. And Larnigan's arm was around her; Moira Sullivan was looking up at him; and the glory was in her face once more.

Tony Savage looked at them, and then at Rita Carstairs. He was smiling sheepishly.

"I know I promised," he said. "But can't you wait a little? I was a fool not to mention it sooner—there's something I want to tell you—outside."

Rita looked at him, and color came into her cheeks.

"I think I want to hear it," said Rita. "Quickly. I've waited too long already."

THE END

Burglar's Bones

THE famous Green Vaults of Dresden, with their collection of crown jewels—the richest in Europe—and objects of art, estimated altogether at \$50,000,000, were for more than two centuries a temptation to all ambitious burglars. Once twenty burglars came from Vienna with a plan to undermine the vaults, which had no inside night watchman, but one was tempted by a big reward to betray the plot. Sixteen escaped, but two went to prison, and another took poison in his cell.

About a century ago changes were made, involving the laying of a new interior wall of brick. An enterprising Dresden burglar secreted himself in an unfinished part of the wall, with the design of getting out at night and helping himself to a fortune in diamonds. Unfortunately for him, the masons worked more swiftly than he had anticipated, and walled him in completely. Years later, the wall was reopened, and a skeleton found. It was then recalled that about the time the original work was done a noted malefactor had disappeared permanently.

As an object lesson, the skeleton was given a conspicuous position in the vaults, but failed of its intended effect. In fact, there were more attempted burglaries in the next six months than for years before.

—J. L. Considine

Practical Finger Printing

*The First Steps To-
ward Making Big
Money from Finger-
prints*



How to Read Fingerprints

By Lieut. Charles E. Chapel

*U. S. Marine Corps; Member, International
Association for Identification*

DO you ever read the reward notices in Post Offices, police stations, and sheriffs' offices? Ten thousand dollars for the capture of a killer! Five thousand dollars for a forger! Four thousand for a burglar! These amounts are actually paid to those whose information leads to the apprehension of fugitives from justice. You, too, can some day claim one of those rewards if you learn how to read fingerprints and have average good luck.

We remember a farm boy in a Western village who needed money to go to the agricultural college of his state. His parents were unable to help him and the few cents he saved by working for his neighbors would not pay carfare, to say nothing of the amount he would need for books and tuition. Curiously enough, in his spare time he gazed at the reward notices in the post office, and tried to master the science of fingerprints from an old book in the public library. When a suspicious-act-

ing stranger asked him for a drink, he carefully polished a glass, gave him some ice water, and then hurriedly powdered the glass when it was returned. On it were the five prints of the man's right hand. Compared with the impressions on a reward notice, they tallied. That night he spent his last fifty cents for a telegram. One week later the stranger was in jail; a month passed and the farm boy was in possession of five thousand dollars, far more than he ever expected to possess at one time.

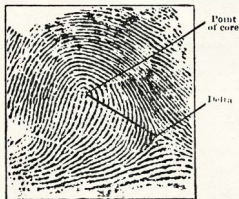
This is not an isolated instance. Dozens of men and women have profited by close observation, backed up by at least an elementary knowledge of fingerprints. To help you, both as a good citizen, and as a prospective claimant of a similar reward, we shall explain the fundamentals of fingerprint characteristics.

Throughout the English-speaking world, the standard fingerprint system is that perfected by Sir E. R. Henry, whose text on the subject is still the Bible for fingerprint experts. Others have amplified his teachings, and tried to make them more interesting. Probably the best of these is Frederick Kuhne, whose **FINGERPRINT INSTRUC-**

TOR is an invaluable reference for beginners and oldsters alike. Kuhne was at one time in the Bureau of Criminal Identification, Police Department of New York City, which should be sufficient recommendation for any fingerprint specialist. Throughout our course, we shall follow the Henry System.

Henry divided all fingerprints into four types: Arches; Loops; Whorls; and Composites. Arches were split up into Ordinary Arches; Exceptional Arches; and Tented Arches. Composites include: Twinned Loops, Central Pocket Loops; Lateral Pocket Loops; and Accidentals. With this sub-division we find nine names in all for fingerprint types.

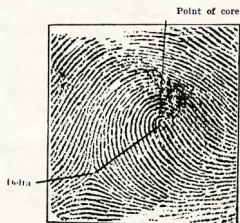
Fixed points are the very root of fingerprints. A delta, or Outer Terminus, is abbreviated "O.T." The point of the core, or the Inner Terminus, is abbreviated "I.T." We shall meet these terms often because each Whorl has two deltas. A Loop has a delta and a core. A Composite has two or more deltas.



Radial loop, right hand, or Ulnar loop, left hand.
RIDGE COUNT—16

A delta is caused by the split, or forking, of a ridge line in your fingerprint. The word "delta," of course, is Greek for the letter "D" and was

chosen because it is a triangular-shaped character, very much like the delta in your fingerprint. Actually, a fingerprint delta is not always triangular; sometimes it is hardly more than a dot. Its importance lies more in its location than in its actual shape.



Ulnar loop, right hand, or radial loop, left hand.
RIDGE COUNT—18

In deciding which is the delta of importance in your fingerprint, choose the one nearest the center of the print, for there may be several places where a line forks, or where two parallel ridge lines suddenly come together.

A Whorl looks like a number of rings, one within another. The center of the first ring is taken as the point of the core.

A Loop is a pattern in which the ridges enter from one side, curve upward, and then go back the way they came. The core of a Loop may have a number of unjoined ridges called "rods", or it may have two ridges joined together to form a "staple." If there is an odd number of rods, take the center as the point of the core. If there is an even number, consider the middle two as joined together, and consider the core as being at the end of the rod which is farther from the delta.

If two rods are really joined at the top, the point of the core is taken at the shoulder of the staple, farthest from the delta.

Fingerprint science, like other studies, is not all fun; let us examine the nine types of patterns, and see how many of them we have in our own fingers.

A Loop is a pattern with the ridges starting at one side, running up to the upper corner on the opposite side, and then down again to the side of entrance. Loops account for about seventy per cent of all patterns. Since there are many Loops, we must find a means to break them into groups. This will be explained later.

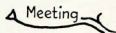
An Arch is a design in which the ridges extend from one side of the impression to the other without recurving, but with an upward bulge in the center. There must be no recurving ridge between the delta and the point of core to fall within this rule for Arches. In the Tented Arch, ridges thrust themselves upward in the center, giving us the characteristic name for this pattern. If the pattern has a delta without recurving lines, or recurving lines without a delta, we call it an "Exceptional Arch."

We have already referred to a Whorl as a pattern in which rings are within each other. That is merely a rough definition. Scientifically, a Whorl is a design in which ridges make a complete turn, forming ovals and spirals. As they flow away to each side, they form deltas. Whorls, next to Loops, are the most numerous. To make them easy to handle, we split the Whorls into groups.

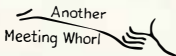
Tracing the ridges in Whorls gives us a good means to split them into bunches for easy recognition. Start with the lower ridge of the left delta,

follow this ridge until it stops; now take the next ridge below the end of the first one; if it suddenly forks; take the lower branch of the fork.

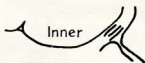
If the ridge we are tracing meets or goes either inside or outside the right delta ridge, with not more than two ridges in between them, we call it a "Meeting Whorl", abbreviated "M".



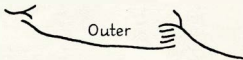
An illustration of another type of "Meeting Whorl", with more ridges between, is shown here.



If the ridge traced goes inside the right delta with three or more ridges intervening, we call it an "Inside Whorl", abbreviated "I".



When the ridge traced goes outside the right delta ridge with three or more ridges intervening, it is an "Outside Whorl", abbreviated "O".



Now we come to Composites. These include Central Pocket Loops, Lateral Pocket Loops, Twinned Loops, and Accidentals. These are combination patterns. Loops, and Whorls, and Arches may be found in the same design. A Central Pocket Loop, for example, looks as though it had a Whorl in the center of a Loop.

To tell Loops from Central Pocket Loops, fingerprint experts have agreed that if the ridges around the core form a spiral as they recurve, and then pass between the delta and the core at right angles to their direction of departure, we call it a Central Pocket Loop. If these conditions do not exist, we have an ordinary Loop.

A Lateral Pocket Loop occurs when the ridges that constitute an otherwise normal Loop bend sharply downward on one side before recurving, thus forming on that side a pocket, which is filled by the ridges of another Loop. We can describe this pattern in another, and easier way, by saying that the ridges seem to be two Loops, one surrounding, or overlapping the other.

Twinned Loops have two Loops which lie on one another, or surround each other, but the difference between Twinned Loops, and Lateral Pocket Loops, is that in the latter the ridges containing the point of the core have their exits on the same side of either delta, while in Twinned Loops, the ridges containing the point of the core flow out of the design on different sides of the deltas.

If you find a fingerprint which meets none of these descriptions, if it appears to have gone stark crazy, with Whorls sitting on Loops, and Loops with their arms around Whorls, you can safely say that you are dealing with an "Accidental." This pattern is all that its name implies. This type is extremely rare.

You will remember that we found that Loops take up seventy per cent of all patterns. We can break them into two big classes as "Ulnar" and "Radial", abbreviated "U", and "R". These names come from the bones in the human arm which extend from wrist to elbow. The ulnar bone is on

the same side as the little finger, while the radial bone is on the side with the thumb.

Three Types of Whorls



O (Outer) Seven Ridges



M (Meeting) Exact Meet



I (Inner) Six Ridges

Remembering which side the ulnar and radial bones are on in the arm, we can easily describe our Loop patterns. If the downward slope of the ridges around the core is from the direction of the thumb toward the little finger, we call it an Ulnar Loop. When the downward slope is from the little finger toward the thumb, we call it a Radial Loop. We not only abbreviate these as "U" and "R", we go further and use

the symbol / to represent a radial in the right hand, or an ulnar in the left hand. A diagonal line slanting the other way, thus, \, is the symbol for an ulnar in the right hand, or a radial in the left. This is because the direction of slope is opposite for the same Loop appearing in opposite hands.

It might seem that "Ulnar" and "Radial" divisions would be enough. This was true in the very beginning of fingerprinting, but as soon as Henry, the father of the science as we know it today, saw the large number of files containing Loops, he devised a further means of subdividing Loops. This was ridge counting.

Ridge counting is the counting of the ridges which cross a line drawn from the Outer Terminus to the Inner Terminus, excluding in the count the terminal points, themselves. The fact that a ridge almost crosses the line does not cause it to be counted, but if a ridge forks just before crossing the line, then both of its branches which actually cross the line are counted. This line from "O.T." to "I.T.", incidentally, is merely a pencil line when you are beginning; when you become proficient you will not draw a line, but merely connect the terminals with a ruler to make your ridge count.

The only instruments you need for ridge counting are a magnifying glass and a "ridge counter", which is nothing more than a pin or needle jabbed into the end of a penholder. In fact, you

will not even need the magnifying glass if your eyes are good. Professional fingerprint men, to save their vision, employ a "linen tester", which is a magnifying glass set in a frame and placed over the fingerprint, leaving both hands free.

You now know everything required for the successful reading of reward notices, and the comparison of the fingerprints in these wanted-circulars with the fingerprints of any suspects who may fall into your clutches, but there are several details which you must keep in mind.

First, examine the patterns for Loops and Whorls. Taking one print at a time, count ridges between Inner and Outer Terminals if they are Loops. If they are Whorls, trace the bottom ridge of the left delta to the right and decide if it is "I", "M", or "O".

Examine the print to see if the forkings in the reward agree with those on the suspect, in the same part of his fingerprint pattern. Follow ridges to see if they end abruptly. Count the rods in the core; see if any are joined. Identification is complete when ten points on one print agree with ten points on another print. Identity between one print in the reward notice, and one in the hand of the suspect is enough, but to satisfy your mind as to the accuracy of your work, compare all ten prints. If they check, *claim that reward!*

GOOD LUCK!



The gendarmes, hastily summoned, had to break through the locked door!



The Episode of the Dead Man's Eye

By James W. Booth

IN Lyons, France, one morning in the early 1900's, wealthy old Emil Zorn was found dead in his bed, a suicide apparently. It was when his efficient house maid received no response to her repeated knockings on his bed-chamber door that the grim discovery was made. The door was locked from the inside, making it necessary for the gendarmes, hastily summoned

by the frightened servant, to break through it in order to force an entrance.

The old man lay with a bullet hole in his forehead. Tightly grasped in his left hand was his own revolver. Aside from bloodstains on the sheet and pillow, the bed was tidy. There were no indications that a struggle had taken place. The windows, like the door, were all locked from the inside. On the nightstand by the bed was a note. It appeared unmistakably to be in the

handwriting of the dead man. It read, "Life no longer interests me. I am tired and want to rest."

The theory of the police was that Zorn had sat up in bed, fired the fatal shot and then, as life was instantaneously snuffed out of him, had fallen back against the pillow.

And all except the famous Dr. Lacassagne, whose scientific sleuthing had previously solved several baffling crimes, shared the view. The locked door, the locked windows, and the suicide note; all tended to substantiate it.

The appearance of the dead man's eyes, however, told Lacassagne that the case was one of murder. And to prove it, and trap the murderer, he set about making methodical investigation.

First, he made scientific tests which completely contradicted the theory, then universally accepted, that muscular reaction following sudden death was too rapid to allow time for a discharged weapon to be placed in the hand of a corpse and murder made to appear suicide.

Then he obtained bonafide specimens of old Emil Zorn's handwriting and turned them over to a handwriting expert, for comparison with the handwriting appearing on the suicide note. The expert ruled that the writing on the note was an ingenious forgery.

Lacassagne was next faced with the problem of determining how the murderer had made his escape from the old man's bed-chamber, with the door and windows locked from the inside. Above a narrow ledge outside of one of the windows he found the answer. On a nail, a small fragment of brown tweed fluttered in the breeze. It had been torn from a man's coat.

The murderer, Lacassagne saw instantly, had escaped through the window and, balancing himself on the narrow ledge, had used a knife blade or some similar object to force the window latch in place. What was more important to him at the moment, however, was the fact that the killer had worn a brown tweed coat.

Lacassagne now asked himself the question, "Who profited most by Zorn's death?" When he found that the slain man's eldest son, August, would inherit the greater portion of the estate, he nodded grimly, and stated with certainty, "He is the murderer."

So it proved. The police took August Zorn into custody. In his apartment they found paper identical with that on which the forged suicide note had been written. They also found a brown tweed suit. It was the same pattern and fabric as the small fragment discovered by Lacassagne on the nail outside of the murdered man's bedchamber, and the arm of the coat was torn.

The murderer confessed, but he cheated the guillotine by swallowing poison before the gendarmes could drag him away to jail to await trial.

His heinous crime was almost a perfect one, but he made his mistakes, as the smartest criminals invariably do, and they proved his undoing.

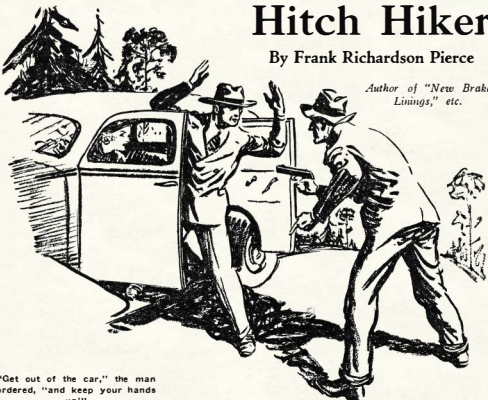
But they might not have had Lacassagne not known, as all medical men know, that in cases of sudden death the eyes of the deceased always remain open. Old man Zorn's eyes were closed, however. The murderer had deliberately closed them. By doing so, he had enabled the brilliant laboratory sleuth to realize instantly that the case could not possibly be one of suicide.



Hitch Hiker

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "New Brake Linings," etc.



"Get out of the car," the man ordered, "and keep your hands up!"

THE man was tall and poorly dressed. He held a cheap suitcase in his left hand. His right thumb jerked down the highway in the familiar signal of the hitchhiker. The woman at his side—hardly more than a girl—looked sick and beaten. As Dan Elliott slowed down, he noticed a brassy-looking wedding ring on her finger. He brought his sedan to a stop. "Hop in," he invited.

"You'll never know how much we appreciate this," the man said, as he opened the rear door and put the suitcase in. "If it's all right with you, my wife would like to ride in the front seat. She gets car sick."

"Sure." Dan agreed. "These big cars sway a lot in back when you're

Is the Power of the Thumb Stronger Than the Arm of the Law?

whipping around curves."

The woman sat down beside him, smiled faintly, and relaxed. She looked pretty sick, Dan thought. And there wasn't a service station in miles. The country was mostly rolling rangeland, with an occasional ranch house located several miles off the highway. Traffic was infrequent until late afternoon, and even then there were long intervals between cars.

"This is a poor place to be afoot," Dan observed.

"When you're broke," the man said, "you've got to take chances. If we can get to the West Coast, there's a job for me. We've been ten days on the road now. We're Middle Western folks. A rancher picked us up around

midnight. It was quite a lift, but he turned off a couple of miles back. The wife ain't any too well, and I'm telling you, your big blue sedan looked mighty good to us. We were afraid you mightn't stop."

"You can't very well leave people stranded out here." Dan said.

"Some folks are afraid to take a chance on hitchhikers," the man commented. "I can't say that I blame them." Dan Elliott glanced into the rear-vision mirror. His passenger was lighting a cigarette. As he leaned over to drop the match in the ash tray, his coat opened—revealing an automatic pistol in a shoulder holster.

"YES," the passenger continued, "I don't blame drivers for shaking their heads when they get the thumb. Every now and then some poor devil gets knocked in the head. But when you're up against it, and haven't train or stage fare, it's pretty tough to be turned down."

"How far are you going?" the woman asked. "I'm almost frantic for fear that my husband may have to leave me at some hospital and go on alone."

"I can give you a hundred mile lift," Dan said. His eyes, fixed on the road, were narrowed, speculative. It seemed, he was thinking, that he had picked up a pair of hitchhikers wanted for murder in three different states. In each case a lone motorist, driving one of the better grade cars, had been found shot in the back. His car had been invariably found, abandoned, a hundred miles from the point where his body was discovered. So much time had elapsed before any connection between car and body was established, that the murderer, or murderers, made good their escape each time.

Robbery was considered to be the motive. No attempt had ever been made to sell the stolen cars, but each body had been stripped of money, jewelry and valuable papers.

"If I've picked up what the newspapers are beginning to call The Phantoms," Dan reflected, "I won't be ignorant of their methods much longer. If it is them, and my murder is intended, it won't happen in the car. Not a single abandoned car contained a bloodstain. Wise rats—some service station man might notice the bloodstains and start some kind of investigation."

"What's the country like ahead?" the man asked when he had finished his cigarette.

"We'll be at the summit in half an hour," Dan answered; "then there's a series of gentle grades. You can coast ten miles. Beyond that there are long straightaways, like the road we're on now."

He recalled that the murdered men had been found near high points on the main roads. It was significant that high points commanded views in both directions. The murderers were thus assured against the possibility of cars suddenly appearing before the job was finished.

Dan Elliott looked ahead and saw the white board that gave the name of the summit and its elevation. The woman stirred herself. "I must look a mess," she said, and then surveyed her face—using the rear vision mirror which she turned toward her.

"That was a smooth move," Dan thought. "It prevents the driver from observing what's going on in the back seat."

They gained the summit, and a breath-taking panorama lay below them. The road lay like a mighty coil-

ing snake, disappearing in the mists which rose from a narrow, walled-in valley. Not a car was in sight.

"Put on the brakes, buddy," the man suddenly ordered. "Slip her into neutral and leave the motor running."

Dan Elliott felt a gun jabbed against the back of his neck. "It looks like I've got myself into something," he said. "What a devil of a way to treat a man decent enough to do you a favor."

"Shut up! I told you to leave the motor running," the man shouted. "You cut the switch."

"I'm kinda excited," Dan said nervously. "Nothing like this ever happened to me before. Give a guy a break, won't you?" he begged. "Don't do to me what was done to . . . the others."

"Shut up!" the man tersely ordered.

"You can take my money and ring," Dan said in a desperate voice. "You can be two hundred miles from here before anybody even knows I'm afoot."

"Get out of the car," the man ordered, "and keep your hands up! Move fast! I'm not expecting any cars at this hour, but you never can tell." Dan stepped onto the highway.

WHILE Dan held his hands in the air, the man followed him from the car, keeping him covered with the automatic pistol. The woman, suddenly active, shed her pretended illness and joined her partner. "Search him," the man said. "Don't step off the pavement. We don't want any footprints to give the cops a lead."

The woman expertly removed Dan's billfold and ring. She tossed the billfold to her partner and thrust the ring over her thumb for temporary safe-

keeping. Suddenly Dan's meekness ended. He grasped the woman's arms, twisted his body, squatted, then came up with her across his back. Her body offered a brief protection from her surprised partner's automatic. There wasn't a chance in the world that Dan could get completely beyond the range of the weapon. But he hoped to lessen the bullet's impact, or force the man to miss.

A brush-choked canyon yawned below him. Dan headed for it, with a fighting, biting hellcat on his back. The woman fought herself free a hundred feet from the highway and threw herself flat on the ground. Her partner now took deliberate aim and fired. He might have been indulging in target practice.

Dust puffed from the center of Dan's back, and he fell headlong into the brush. His knees jerked up and his body rolled over a hillock, crashing into a thicket five feet beyond. A convulsive shudder ran through him. He slid a few inches and stopped.

The woman picked herself up and walked over to the car.

"I've warned you to be on guard against that very thing," the man said coldly, as the woman joined him. "He had heard of our other jobs, and knew who we were the instant I pushed the gun against the back of his neck. He knew he had his life to gain and nothing to lose by grabbing you. Never be so careless again!" His tone sliced like a knife.

"Well, I bit his wrist and he let go," the woman said defensively. "I knew you'd hit him up to fifty yards, but . . . is he dead?"

"When dust spurts from the center of their back at that distance, they're dead. A bullet may glance off the skull, but not the spine." He glanced

at the brush concealing Dan's sprawled figure, then opened the bill fold.

"Damn 'em," he growled, "they don't carry much on 'em any more. A man driving a car like this one should be good for a couple of grand in money, checks and jewelry."

He drew on a pair of gloves and said, "Get in!" As she settled herself, he released the brake, let the car coast several yards, then slipped in the clutch. A sign warned, "Descend in second gear with ignition off." He left the gear in high, but turned off the switch. The highway sped under them like a ribbon.

DAN ELLIOTT climbed slowly towards the highway. Each movement hurt him all over. He stopped near a patch of brush, struck a match, and ignited the dry tinder wood. A high column of smoke mounted into the air. He crawled along the edge, beating out sparks and preventing the fire from spreading. A half hour later a battered sedan drove up. A man jumped out quickly and ran to the fire.

"I thought smoke would bring you," Dan said. "You ranchers always have to watch brush fires."

"What happened? There's a bullet hole in the back of your coat, and you're covered with blood," the rancher said in a worried voice. "What happened?"

Briefly Dan related what had happened. The rancher whistled. He whistled again—even louder—when Dan told him what he wanted to do. "All right," the rancher agreed. "I'll do my part. But you'll sure have to go through with yours."

Dan climbed into the back seat of the battered car and covered up with a blanket. The rancher started his car

and began the descent. "I can see a blue sedan down in the valley," he said a few moments later. "It's parked off'n the road."

"That'll be them," Dan answered.

"But this sedan has a New York license," the rancher argued, as he neared the car and slowed down. "And the folks are well dressed."

"License plates and clothes can be changed," Dan observed. "That's them."

The cheap clothing they had worn when Dan picked them up probably covered the modish suits each wore now. "They'd have to do something," he reflected, "poorly dressed folks driving a fine sedan would make highway patrolmen and filling station men ask questions. This pair certainly play their game carefully."

The man waved the rancher to a stop. "Can you give us a lift, old man?" he asked cheerfully. "My motor has quit on me. My wife isn't very well, and I'd like to get to the next town as fast as possible. I'll pay you for your trouble."

"It's all right with me," the rancher said, "but I ain't so sure you'll want to ride. Maybe you'd rather have me send a service car back. You see, my uncle Enoch died last night, and I'm taking his corpse to the undertakers. We *could* crowd in on the front seat, though." He looked somewhat dubious.

The woman glanced curiously at the blanket-covered figure lying on the back seat, then stepped in. Her partner followed. Little was said as the rancher's car roared over the highway. He turned off the highway toward a fair-sized town built around a railroad division point.

The woman screamed as Dan sat up. And she shrieked again as she rec-

ognized him. "Tony!" she cried wildly. "It's the last one. You said bullets don't glance off spines and . . ."

"Shut up!" Tony snarled.

He raised his hands as Dan dug him in the back with the rancher's forty-four. "This is where you get out. The jail isn't large, but it's modern and escape-proof, and it'll hold you until a first degree murder warrant can be served by Eastern officers."

DAN hustled the prisoners into the jail building. Several uniformed highway patrolmen were there to receive them. "Nice going, Dan," one of them said. He turned to the prisoners. "We didn't have much to go by, as dead men tell no tales, and you made certain your victims were all dead. The authorities figured you might head West. And not knowing which one among the thousands of hitch hikers you might be, we had to resort to the live decoy method—send out a prospective victim in an expensive car.

"We shook dice," Dan put in, "and I won. I'll bet I've hauled a hundred

hitch hikers during the last two weeks. And if you think it's fun driving day after day, wearing a bullet proof vest. . . ."

"Bullet proof vest?" Tony exclaimed. "So . . ."

"That's why your bullet didn't put me under the sod. As it was, the impact against the vest damned near paralyzed me. And I took a fine beating rolling down that canyon." Dan said. He shed his coat with the bullet hole, removed a shirt with a similar hole, then tossed aside the heavy vest.

"Even so," said Tony thickly, "if that car hadn't quit. . . ."

"That car was fixed to quit," Dan explained. "We took full advantage of your trick of bumping off your victims near a summit. So when I stopped the car, I kicked over a valve that shut off the fuel from the main tank and drew it from a tank holding a quart of gasoline. I knew that by the time you reached the bottom of the grade, the fuel would be sucked out, and you'd have to wait until somebody came along. And I had a hunch . . . I'd be that somebody."



Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman
Police Detective
Policewoman
Fingerprint Expert
State Trooper
Crime Prevention
Investigator
Probation Officer
Criminologist
Police Radio Expert

Special Agent (G-Man)
Secret Service Operative
Post Office Inspector
Customs Patrol
Immigration Patrol
Anti-Narcotic Agent
Parole Investigator
Prison Keeper
Internal Revenue Agent
Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.



The Casualties Were Heavy



IN a recent city test taken by clerks, grade 1 (salaries \$800 to \$1190 annually), for promotion to clerk, grade 2 (salaries \$1200 to \$1799), 76% of a class of 360 candidates failed to attain the passing minimum mark of 75%. Many of those who failed to pass, protested to the mayor and to newspapers that the test questions were too hard for clerks and called for knowledge required of university presidents. The civil service commission responsible for the test got up on its hind legs and made public some of the questions and a great many of the wrong answers, together with the spicy comment that "clerks already equipped with practical experience should have known better than to make such weird errors as were disclosed."

This much-criticised test is reproduced below. Key answers and some of the wrong answers said to have been made by the experienced clerks who failed will appear next week. There are 100 questions in all.

To pass you must attain a minimum of 75.

Mental test. In some of the sentences below one word has been misspelled. If, in any sentence, you find a word spelled incorrectly, write the word CORRECTLY in the correspondingly numbered space. If all the words in a sentence are correctly spelled, write the letter C. You will be penalized if you rewrite the spelling of a word which has been correctly spelled.

Q 1—Accuracy is absolutely necessary in clerical work. —

Q 2—The best of advise is frequently not heeded. —

Q 3—Good clerks are all ready for any emergency. —

Q 4—It is apparant that honesty is a fundamental requirement. —

Q 5—It is desirable that there be association with good minds. —

Q 6—Praise makes some people swell up like a baloon. —

Q 7—You're to see Mr. Smith at once and introduce yourself. —

Q 8—It is not easy to sepearate the good from the bad personnel. —

Q 9—The Mayor is the principle official in the city government. —

Q 10—Tardiness is the equivelent of shirking. —

Q 11—To say that A is independent of B is to say that they are disparte. —

Q 12—Multiplication is a kind of extension of addition. —

Q 13—It's difficult because of the complexity of the arrangement. —

Q 14—Some knowledge is occasionally more than none. —

Q 15—Clerks should not be easily lead. —

Q 16—A mineature is a type of reproduction. —

Q 17—It is difficult to believe a person who is a perennial liar. —

Q 18—A little is not to much. —

Q 19—It has occurred in a variety of circumstances. —

Q 20—Won't you avail yourself of this opportunity? —

Q 21—The secretary seized his opportunity to speak. —

Q 22—Parellel situations possess many common elements. —

Q 23—Hypocrisy is a very objectionable trait. —

Q 24—Power carries with it a wealth of privileges. —

Q 25—Luck is not a sizable factor in the production of the successful person. —

Q 26—All a man's energies should not be bent toward a single end. —

Q 27—The committee affords an excellent technique. —

Q 28—Our magnificent harbor is one of the finest in the world. —

Q 29—The extent of a clerk's knowledge bears a distinct relation to his efficiency. —

Q 30—Those who study are better equipped to tackle intricate problems. —

Q 31—To be awkward is to be handicapped. —

Q 32—A democracy demands intelligence on the part of the citizenry. —

Q 33—The affect of constant distractions is to lower the quantity and quality of output. —

Q 34—Crying for vengeance is a juvenile form of behavior. —

Q 35—Propaganda is a device for the manipulation of opinions. —

Q 36—Pleasant people in an office are well liked by their colleagues. —

Q 37—A sargeant ranks higher than a corporal. —

Q 38—A wide range of skills is undoubtedly usefull in clerical work. —

Q 39—There is little sense in assigning a superior mind to trivial work. —

Q 40—Accuracy is to be preferred to speed. —

Four possible answers are suggested to complete each sentence below. One of the answers lettered (a), (b), (c) and (d) best completes each sentence. Write in the corresponding spaces the letter of the best answer.

Q 41—It is generally considered best to include in one sentence (a) at least two ideas; (b) a single thought; (c) a subordinate clause; (d) a single verb. —

Q 42—The best of the following sentences is (a) He don't know the rules; (b) He is unacquainted of the rules; (c) He does not know the rules; (d) He has not been learned with the rules. —

Q 43—The best of the following sentences is (a) Whenever I meet him he greets me; (b) Whenever I meet him he always greets me; (c) He always greets me whenever I meet him; (d) Whenever I meet him, he always greets me. —

Q 44—The best of the following definitions of "infraction" is (a) when you break a rule; (b) to break a rule; (c) the act of breaking a rule, (d) breaking a rule. —

Q 45—The best of the following sentences is (a) Everybody did as they pleased; (b) Everybody acted as they liked; (c) Everybody did what they pleased; (d) Everybody did as he pleased. —

Q 46—The best of the following sentences is (a) He is a most unique person; (b) He is a very unique person; (c) He is a unique person; (d) He is an extremely unique person. —

Q 47—The best of the following sentences is (a) Who did you talk to? (b) To who did you talk? (c) Whom did you talk to? (d) To whom did you talk? —

Q 48—The best of the following sentences is (a) Having filed the papers, the drawer was closed; (b) Having filed the papers, we closed the drawer; (c) Upon filing the papers, the drawer was closed; (d) We, having filed the papers, the drawer was closed. —

Q 49—Punctuation marks (a) are a means of expressing thoughts; (b) modify substantives chiefly; (c) are unrelated to grammatical elements; (d) are unrelated to logical elements. —

Q 50—To express simple futurity, one says (a) I shall go; (b) I will go; (c) I should go; (d) I shall have gone. —

Q 51—"Style is the man himself" means (a) It is difficult to acquire a good style; (b) Some people write poorly because they are poorly educated; (c) Expression is a reflection of individuality; (d) A good phrase is half the battle. —

Q 52—The best of the following sentences is (a) I can't hardly do this problem; (b) I can't do none of these problems; (c) I can hardly do this problem; (d) I can't hardly do none of these problems. —

Q 53—The best of the following sentences is (a) He only wrote on one side of the paper; (b) He wrote on only one side of the paper; (c) He only did his writing on one side of the paper; (d) He has only written on one side of the paper. —

Q 54—The best of the following sentences is (a) I believe that I can do that work equally as well as he can; (b) I believe that I can do that work equally as well as he (c) I believe that I can do that work as good as he; (d) I believe that I can do that work as well as he. —

Key answers to this test and additional questions will be published next week; also some of the common errors made by the 76% who failed.

Q. and A. Box

Questions pertaining to civil service examinations will be answered without charge. If personal replies are desired enclose stamped, (3c) addressed envelope.

A New England reader submits the following: "My question is: can a person who has been arrested and pleaded guilty to a felony, and who received probation, making good thereafter and later, at the end of the probation period, again appeared before the judge and changed his plea from guilty to not guilty, thereby having all charges dismissed, and all rights restored, become eligible to the civil service examinations?"

"The crime was stealing an automobile. This was the first offense. Since then this person has committed no crime and never will again. I am the person and I have become deeply interested in fingerprinting. I have taken and passed a fingerprinting course. Is it possible for one in my circumstances to go on? Does the civil service commission make exceptions? I would like to have questions in a test for fingerprint expert. I saw those questions in the Dec. 5 issue but they were few and easy for me. I want real tough questions."

In this unusual case, pleased we are to offer all the assistance at our command. Concerning criminal proceedings, an official of the U. S. Civil Service Commission once said, "Minor offenses, such as traffic violations, are usually regarded, when facts are truthfully disclosed, as being of no significance. In case of conviction of more serious offenses, the commission may grant eligibility after full consideration of circumstances."

And about a tough fingerprint test—say, brother, in a few weeks, DFW will print one as tough as they come.

CIVIL SERVICE Q and A IN BOOKLET FORM

SAMPLE questions given in previous civil service tests are now available to readers in booklet form. THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH REQUEST. Coupons mailed later than TWO WEEKS after the date below will not be honored.

JUNE 19, 1937

G-2, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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Coming Next Week—Clerk Test (Continued)



They're Swindling You!

Crazy People

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the eighty-ninth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial, and commercial associations.—The Editor.

SOME of the rackets patronized by the great American public are actually beyond the comprehension of a normal mind. In proof of this rather startling statement I am going to set down the history of the somewhat brief existence of the "Sureway Security System" of Long Beach, Calif.

Promising the impossible return of 40 percent a day on money invested with him, Willis Sylvester Rogers established himself under the above trade name in Long Beach and in some inconceivable manner succeeded in inducing apparently sane people to turn over to him "for investment" sums of money ranging from one to fifty dollars each.

For a few days Rogers *did* pay a 40 percent return to the early "investors" but, of course, this was paid from the money which came to him from later victims. His plan, so far as it can be explained, is outlined in a letter to me from the manager of the Long Beach Better Business Bureau, who was instrumental in scotching Mr. Rogers—but suppose I quote his letter:

"He would go to 'Mrs. Jones' and

obtain a sum of money and with this money he would go to a merchant and place it on deposit and obtain credit slips for the amount of the deposit. He would take these credit slips to a wholesaler or manufacturer and presumably trade the retail credit slips for a larger amount of merchandise at wholesale prices, and then use this larger amount of merchandise—which he purchased at wholesale—and issue other credit slips to new customers for cash, and then start the process over again. He had the crazy idea that he could build this up to such a volume within forty-eight hours so that he could pay 40 percent to the original 'investors' and then keep the plan circulating in an endless chain.

"He made good to his original customers by paying them their 40 percent for a few days, until we caught up with him, but of course it meant that the volume of income was on the increase and he was able to get enough new money to satisfy the few people who had started him out. The scheme was spreading so from mouth to mouth that, had we not apprehended him when we did, he would have been the center of a colossal fraud.

"While we were interviewing him in the District Attorney's office, one of the investigators thought he recognized Rogers as being the man who

had operated a similar scheme in a suburban community about a year previous, which resulted in his commitment to the state asylum. The investigator, acting on this hunch, spoke to him and asked him about the previous scheme and Rogers then admitted his identity, and in checking the records we found that he was then on parole from the state institution but had escaped from his guardian. Within two hours, Rogers had been re-committed to the State Asylum at Patton, California, and the present chapter in his activities was brought to a close.

“ONE woman who had put in two \$5 deposits and had received two 40 percent payments was ready to cash a \$1,000 trust deed which she owned and to put the entire proceeds into the scheme, figuring that she would get \$400 a day, but Mr. Rogers was sane enough to figure that he could not use this larger sum of money and told her to wait until he was ready for it. In all, he had obtained about \$300 up to the time he was arrested. I think P. T. Barnum would have turned over in his grave if he could have heard of this present scheme.”

After reading this letter I pondered over one thing that still puzzles me. Did they put the right man in the insane asylum?

The whole thing is so unsubstantial, so visionary—and distorted vision at that—so unexplainable to any person of average intelligence, that it serves to emphasize the absolute necessity of getting a clear and understandable idea of exactly what is to be done with your money before you give it to anybody

on any kind of a proposition. It is certainly a sad circumstance that a man who is playing hookey from an insane asylum can take money away from “sane” people with such a brainless scheme.

It is quite probable that the generation now attending school will be better equipped to recognize gyp schemes, especially in California, for the Los Angeles City school system has recently adopted two new textbooks, “What About Jobs” and “What About Dollars,” which were prepared under the supervision of a committee of Southern California business men with the co-operation of various Better Business Bureaus, particularly the Los Angeles Bureau. The new course is compulsory in the upper high school grades and will acquaint the students with many practical facts about the management of their money and other consumer problems. Many of the employment rackets which have been described in this series are mentioned in “What About Jobs.”

This is additional evidence of the wisdom of the editors of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY in providing fact articles which must, sooner or later, be made part of our children's education. I am very proud that nineteen articles in which I collaborated (describing various rackets) are named in the bibliography of “What About Dollars.” Just as soon as the citizens of this country learn as much about rackets as the racketeers know, there won't be any more rackets. No crook can racketize a man who knows as much about the racket as the crook does.

Next Week—They Didn't Swindle Me!

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

CRYPTOFANS who have not joined our *Cipher Correspondence Club* are missing half of the fun! For instance, take this case: "Ajax recently had a request in your column for letters and crypts," writes Etcog. "So my whole family concocted a crypt and sent him a letter. His answer was very interesting. And now we are writing regularly, every two weeks or so!" The moral is—send us your name and address for publication in our C. C. C. directory. Membership is free. The subjoined list of ten new correspondents raises our total C. C. C. enrollment to 130 members. Clip this list for reference, and write these new members a welcoming letter! And if you are not already a member yourself, join now!

CIPHER CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

(Continued from May 15, 1937)

Frank A. Brennan, 197 Kent St., Charlotte-ton, Prince Edward Island, Canada.

CAGY DEE, Kenneth Davidson, 5177 Cas-grain St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

GRACIAS, Charles R. Chambers, 1207 E. 63rd St., Chicago, Ill.

GREGORY, D. G. Secrest, Taos, N. Mex
Joseph G. Brown, 2934 Lincoln Ave., Chi-cago, Ill.

REMDIN, T. Dawson-Finucane II, 807 Florida St., San Antonio, Tex.

SHALMANESER, D. J. Dolphin, 109 Iowa St., Manchester, Iowa.

Irving Freedman, 1525 Walton Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

DUKE D'EKUD, Frank A. Pistone, 1739 Pilgrim Ave., Bronx, N. Y.

John J. Gannon, Jr., 1320 W. Central Ave., Phoenix, Ariz.

(To Be Continued)

H. N. Hehr contributes this week's opening puzzle, a cryptic division using a 10-letter key word, numbered 0 to 9. Find zero by inspection; then note P - K = P for the value of K; etc. The phrase UZ UFC will unlock the pattern YCZYKC in Ian's cryptogram, also supplying all but two letters in *CGEFUF. ZD FGV and DCKKZR will follow. Effe You's quotation may be approached through BE PEN and PE. These words will lead to NLTLEYCT and AEY, with IDIL and LICLINNUPT next in line.

Mono Verde's message relates a true happen-ing, only the HKO FGEDS was in the hands of another NLTROKG, on the job! Mono Verde is in the NLTRO business in Minne-apolis. For entry, note HSKR and HTOS, using HKO as a check. Thus to NLTRO, NLTROKG, and RLN. †Qpkwins provides several patterns for consideration, including YAENVTKKT, GKKT, and GKKTUZSBE. Spot your own clue in †T. F. B.'s inner circle cipher! Answers to this week's puzzles will appear next week. Asterisks indicate capitaliza-tion.

No. 145—Cryptic Division. By H. N. Hehr.

O P E) E S P L A S (N C O
P C K P

T P K A
S O C N

S A T S
S A T L

N

No. 146—Titular Equivalents. By Ian.

*CBRIWB *SGG WCDCWWCB UZ UFC *AWGUGVF YCZYKC
IV FGV "VTAHCNUV." *JGME *ECZVEC *S VYZJC ZD FGV
"YCZYKC." *CBRIWB *CGEFUF IBBWCVVCB FGV "DCKKZR
LCM."

No. 147—Keep Smiling. By Eff e You.

"BE PEN TYLLA, BE PEN KELLA, OR NTUR KELGB AEY
NLODIG NTLEYCT; PE LICLINNUPC, SYFUPC, SLINNUPC,
IDIL MOP OBDOPNOCI AEY."—*KAGUPI.

No. 148—Imaginary Morsel. By Mono Verde.

DAKKNZ NLTRKNG DOVAK RLN HSKR NLTRO DENNAZ
GLR AVH. UGKLBKU VM KLOTRP YKGKLA BTCKU HTOS
OEGNKROTRK. LHVXK YSKHTRP HKO FGEDS!

No. 149—Gladsome Days. By †Qpkwins.

YAENVTKKT SKUA, FYUGR FVNNQNX, PZHVTYU XDZGX,
GKKTUZSBE PYTLZTS JYVEZNX, BNLEZL FYXNFYUU
SYGNX, UKONVX LYTKNZTS HTPNV FVZSBE *MHTN
GKKT,—NIHGGV BYX YVVZONP!

No. 150—A Curious Case. By †T. F. B

WAGING CROSS. ZTNTOWOVKI BSUNG TKYSN TEZUVTU-
SCPOKV.HPOBOC VTOPYPBGUS VUSW ZTKPNKVUZUGOK,
ZPGWVPOFGW SYD AUXOVK, UZOYN. A●WONUPW
AKXUWGW!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

139 -Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 B R I G H T J U N E

140—Advantages of lynch law: it is prompt, energetic, fresh from the people, cheap, final, has no salary to lose, and consequently is not afraid to do its duty.

141—Even mighty war-lords, brass-studded, barrel-chested, who spout fire and dine on scrap iron, caper nimbly to the sprightly strains of milady's lute!

142—Intricate crypts intrigue psychology professor, causing neglect of duties. Dean investigates alleged laxity of subordinate; becomes fan, also.

143—Logarithms extract square roots quickly, calculate cubes, abbreviate mathematical operations, simplify arithmetic, save time!

144—Rabid native brave, with rifle, cavorts over verdant veldt. Rival bushmen, under cover, watch, spy upon crazy humorous antics.

Send us your answers, fans, to one or more of this week's puzzles! You will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



THE EDITORS, one morning recently, were gathered in solemn conclave, propounding methods with which to make this magazine even better.

Since the readers of a magazine determine its policies, by their generous response to it from week to week, why not carry this a step further, and let them actually have a voice in the formation of the magazine? Why not ask them to make concrete suggestions for improvements, for the selection of story types, and by what favorite authors?

We are certain that a great body of our readers have a strong personal interest in what is published in each successive issue. We feel that they, by listing their preferences as to detective-story writers and by offering other suggestions based on their individual reactions, might thus form a great partnership.

All letters received will be assured of courteous consideration. A serious attempt will be made to adjust grievances and to profit from the advice of those for whom the magazine is intended.

Ah, enthusiasm! The editors are

certain, Mr. Snyder, that there are a lot of other people feeling just the same way about "The Face and the Doctor" that you do!

DEAR EDITOR:

Boy, oh boy, oh boy! You've got something there. The new story by Max Brand, I mean, called "The Face and the Doctor." That's my idea of a honey. Not that you don't usually come within hollering distance of that high standard because you do. But this really is high-water mark, from my experience in reading detective stories, and I'm still tingling with excitement as I lay the thing down, and dog-goned sorry that it is coming to a close so soon. There are some stories, now and then, that a fellow would like to have run on forever. This is one of them.

AUGUST SNYDER,
St. Joseph, Mo.

Mr. Tom Curry writes the stories about *Special Agent Devrite*. It is quite possible that there will be more of them in the future.

DEAR EDITOR:

Your list of authors who have been writing for you is interesting to me. I mean the authors who have been writing for you for ten years and more. And you say to drop you word. I don't remember if it is Mr. Flynn or Mr. Curry that writes about a detective named *Devrite* but there haven't been any and I'd like to read some more about him.

SAMUEL LENZER,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Singly and together, *Daffy Dill* and *Candid Jones* will be back to show what a top-notch crime reporter and a fearless photog can do to stir up a little excitement.

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been a staunch supporter of *Daffy Dill* ever since he came into your magazine. And when *Candid Jones* turned up, I was more than delighted. But this man Sale must be a genius to get them both into the same story, and to have a world-beater like "Flash!"

I've read a lot of stories in my time, but this is the first time I've ever seen a story handled quite as deftly as this.

I certainly hope that they are going to be back in the magazine in the very near future. I think they're swell.

LESTER DENNISON,
Wichita, Kans.

This is the first word about covers in a long time, and it was very gratifying to receive it. Has anyone else an idea, pro or con?

DEAR EDITOR:

This is just a short note in appreciation for the new type of covers which you have been publishing on your magazine during the last weeks.

I thought that the one on this last issue, for instance, the May 29th, was splendid. It seems to catch the spirit of the magazine better than anything which has appeared recently, although I must say that the one before, illustrating "The Face and the Doctor," was in the way of a hint that you'd had a new perception about the covers.

In all fairness, I must admit that the covers of the magazine have always been a good leap ahead of the field, and that they have escaped the deluge of blood (and thunder) which has been so prevalent.

So please keep up the good work, and accept hearty congratulations from a devoted, old-time reader.

SAMUEL ASHKIN,
New Orleans, La.

Daring editors to publish a letter usually has a sure-fire reaction. Mr. Gramaton doesn't care for words and yearns for mathematics.

Well, here's a letter you'll never publish, because I'm good and sore about the *Civil Service Q and A* department which you run in your magazine.

What's the idea, anyway?

It used to be that you ran math. problems, which were sort of fun and like puzzles. But these pages where you are supposed to pick out the right word or the wrong word in a sentence and then do something with it drive me nuts.

These recent Q and A's haven't been much fun, and I want you to have G-2 do something about it.

After all, there must be a lot of different kinds of Civil Service examinations being given, and I for one am mighty fed up with juggling words around.

What do you say, Ed?

STEVE GRAMATON,
Atlanta, Ga.

After due deliberation, we have decided against a page on precancellations of United States postage. And tens of thousands of ardent ciferfans will be protesting because we allowed your letter to reach print!

DEAR EDITOR:

I'm sure the cryptogram pages in the back of the magazine are all very fine for ciferfans, but the truth of the matter is that codes and coding leave me cold and uninterested. I would much prefer to see those pages filled with that much more story each week.

I realize, of course, that this is a pretty selfish way for me to look at the matter, and I really don't intend to do anything drastic about it.

But decoding all those jumbled letters is a pretty specialized form of entertainment, and I'm sure that if I asked you to run a page about my specialized interest—precancellations of United States postage—you would refuse.

Well, other than that, I enjoy your magazine very much indeed, but I do eye those particular pages a little wistfully and regretfully. They might have held a true vignette!

PAUL WATSON,
Boston, Mass.

COMING SOON—
THE THUNDERBOLT
A Thrilling Complete Short Novel
By Victor Maxwell

Answers to Detectogram on Page 44

1. No. It is the letter of a man at peace with the world.

2. No, because a fountain pen writes evenly whereas a plain pen is dark after each dip in the ink and lightens until no ink is left on the pen point.

3. Yes, after the word *deal*, because the ink dried on his pen so that he was forced to dip it again two words later.

4. Yes, because he speaks of the *blessed glory of being back again with Alva*.

5. Yes. He must have, because he was shot in the forehead at close range a few seconds after an interruption.

6. Yes, because his pen dropped and blotted in the middle of a word.

7. Yes, because there would have been no time to choke the canary and escape before her arrival.

8. No, because he was fond of it and would have been deeply disturbed. There is no evidence in the letter of any emotional disturbance. He merely states he will be unable to finish the letter.

9. For hate of Williamson or of the canary. The wanton killing of the pet shows the killing to be a hate murder.

10. Alva and Seely were the only ones whose fingers could be small enough to choke the bird through three-quarter inch bars without bending them out of shape. Seely, however, could not have approached Williamson without arousing his suspicion.

11. Alva, because she killed the canary, because she could have interrupted her husband without arousing his suspicion, because he probably saw his murderer and because her story is untrue. It is false because the canary was strangled *after* the murder.

COMING NEXT WEEK—

A Gripping G-Man Mystery

WRECKED

by William Edward Hayes

Richard Sale
Milo Ray Phelps
Norbert Davis

Donald Barr Chidsey
Roger Torrey
Dugal O'Liam

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