

EXCITING MYSTERIES

DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY

FOR



Bluebeard's Seventh Wife

Detective Dokes Vowed
His Sister Should Not
Be the Next to Die—

A Tense Novelette by

Cornell Woolrich

Max Brand

Richard B. Sale

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DETECTIVE

FICTION WEEKLY



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August 22, 1936

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

THE RED STAR NEWS COMPANY

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE

3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

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Flashes ^{from} the Police Front

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

INSURANCE

Post Office Dept. Makes Investigation

THE Franklin Life Benefit Association of Delaware, The Prudential Assurance Association of America of Delaware, (not the Prudential Life Insurance Company of Newark, N. J.) and the Missouri Farmers and Merchants Benefit Association of Missouri, are under investigation by the Post Office Department.

None of the above associations is licensed to sell insurance in any state in the Union. Their so-called insurance is offered to prospects by mail and seemingly provides \$1,000 death benefits and \$1,000 disability benefits for one dollar per month.

Mailings, with envelopes in which they were received, should be forwarded to Post Office Inspector A. F. Burt, St. Louis, Mo.

MEDICAL SUPPLIES

First-Aid Kits Not Delivered

D. A. THOMPSON, who formerly used the name of Emergency Supply Co., now claims to represent American Diathermy Rubber Co., 329 Walnut St., Philadelphia. This company does not exist.

Thompson collects deposits on

first-aid kits from doctors and industrial plants and then disappears.

LOTTERY

American Legion Name Used By Swindler

GEORGE SWAN, alias George Shaw, alias Richard La Verne, may appear and tell you that a member of your family has won a cash prize of eighty-six dollars in a lottery conducted by the Houston Post of the American Legion. He says the "winner" must purchase a set of dishes before the prize will be delivered and Swan tries to collect the money for the dishes in advance.

He has no connection whatsoever with the Houston Post of the American Legion, which has never conducted an affair of this kind, but which has received numerous complaints against this man's activities.

CEMETERY LOTS

"Cease and Desist" Order Issued in St. Louis, Mo.

RUSSELL MALONEY, Commissioner of Securities of the State of Missouri has issued a "cease and desist" order against the following companies and individuals:

National City Sales Company,
Louis Farr.

First American Corporation,
Herman Berk.



Flashes ^{from} _{the} Police Front



Arlington Memorial Park,
Harry Nedelman.
Fidelity Guarantee Corp.,
Morton Gilbert.
Leo Shayer, American Bldg.,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

All of the above companies and individuals are directly connected and function in the "exchange" of defaulted bonds for cemetery lots located in the Arlington Memorial Park in Ohio.

The National City Sales Company was ostensibly the selling organization and the Fidelity Guarantee Corp. part of the selling scenery.

Wisconsin, Illinois and Ohio authorities have likewise taken action against representatives of these companies.

JEWELRY

Conviction Puts Club On The Move

A JEWELRY club operated by the Alan King Co. of Newark, N. J., was forced to discontinue its operations in Providence, R. I., because of the conviction of August Rieger and Fred Lighte on a charge of promoting a lottery. This merely means that the "club" will move to some other city where the authorities are more complacent.

Here's the scheme. Salesmen sell jewelry contracts for \$45, collecting \$1 at the time of the sale. When the full amount has been paid, the purchaser is entitled to select a watch, stickpin, ring, or some other article of jewelry which may, or may not, be worth \$45. As an add-

ed inducement, the purchaser is also entitled to participate in a lottery based on stock exchange figures published in the newspapers.

You're lucky when you collect.

FORGERY

Travelers' Checks Not So Good

J. K. BURKE is traveling the Western states and paying his expenses with travelers' checks drawn on the Commercial Bank and Trust Company of New York City, signed by O. M. Baird. This is a very poorly printed and amateurish forgery and may be readily identified by the word "countersign" which, on the check, is spelled "coutersign."

"TAGGED"

Critchlow Organization Individuals Indicted

WALTER G. CRITCHLOW, Myron J. Doran, Henry D. Englesman and C. A. Bush are under indictment in Chicago charged with mail fraud by means of the territorial rights scheme.

The indictment sets forth that the defendants obtained money and property from numerous persons who were desirous of obtaining salaried jobs as distributors of the Critchlow automobile "gas saver." The victims invested sums ranging from \$250 to \$1,250 for exclusive rights to the sale of the article.

Critchlow, in 1908, was involved in another mail fraud in Cincinnati and drew a penitentiary sentence.

(Continued on Page 139).



Bluebeard's Seventh Wife

By
Cornell Woolrich



"I haven't done anything to you—"

CHAPTER I

Preliminaries to a Wedding

I WAS detailed to the Blaney case at the time; that's how I happened to stick my nose in the modus operandi file so much. Don't get me wrong; I don't mean I'm that good that they just dropped the Blaney case in my lap and said: "Here, Dokes,



*Detective Dokes Worshipped
His Younger Sister and Be-
lieved That the Man She
Adored Would Lead Her,
Like a Lamb, to Slaughter*

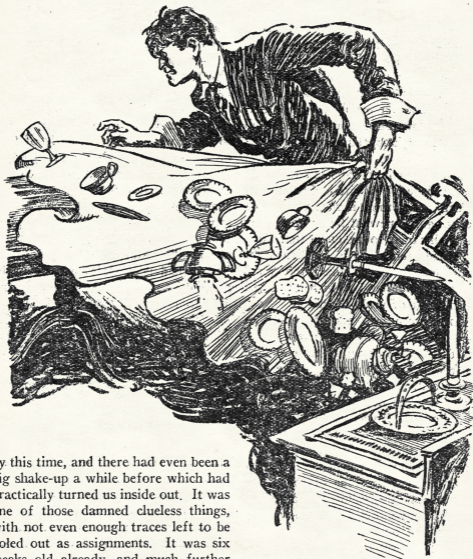
this is all yours; just take your time, and when you get around to it, tell us who creased Mrs. Blaney with an axe six weeks ago out on the front porch of her house." If I should try to give that impression in print, I'd be lynched by every man-jack in the

squad-room the minute they read it!

No, it was just that this Blaney case had us all by the short hairs, and we were all of us on it at once, you might say—and getting nowhere rapidly. Everybody on the squad, to the best of my knowledge, had had a crack at it

probably not even premeditated, certainly not even intended for a "perfect crime," which just happens to jell that way without any help from the participant. In other words, a natural.

I had been at the file so much by now, hoping all the time I'd come



by this time, and there had even been a big shake-up a while before which had practically turned us inside out. It was one of those damned clueless things, with not even enough traces left to be doled out as assignments. It was six weeks old already, and much further from solution than it had been the day after it happened. It was, we were all agreed, that most dangerous type of "perfect crime": a haphazard one,

"I'm going to kill you!"

across someone who had once hacked some other woman with an axe on the front porch of her house, or the back porch, or anywhere at all, that I was getting to know whole sections of it backward and forward, by way of automatic reading as I flipped the cards up and down—whole slews of stuff that had nothing to do with what I was looking for. For instance, "Morrison, Harold," would flash by up in the upper left-hand corner, and I'd be able to say, without reading anything further, "Yeah, that was that prowler that went around shooting people through their open windows all one summer, kept all suburban Indianapolis in an uproar until he climbed up in a tree to get at a second-story window and fell down and busted his leg." A wire had come back to Leftwich, I think it was, a couple of weeks ago, somewhat tartly answering one of his own, to the effect that Morrison had been safely in jail there ever since and to query them ten years hence. So neither Leftwich nor I had much use for Harold Morrison.

Then there was another one that used to keep getting in my way too, I called it "the one with the ink-spot" because somebody years before had gotten a drop of ink right in the middle of it from holding a fountain-pen poised over it. It was as old as the hills, must have been one of the first ones in when the file was first started—and that had been before my time. Its color stood out against some of the newer ones, it had faded yellow instead of being white any more. I was always tripping over it on my way backward or forward to some hot lead (which promptly fizzled when I got there) and many a time I'd felt like ripping it out and pitching it away.

"Garvey, James," was the tag, and a lot of other pleasant information fol-

lowed, to wit: "Recurrent homicidal mania, directed solely against women—" That, of course, had brought me up short almost the first time I hit the file—me and about six of the other fellows. Not for long; it was as much of a dud as Leftwich's Morrison. You only had to read a couple more lines on the card to know that it was no good for the Blaney case, or any other case any more either.

"—whom he has married; inoffensive toward all others." Mrs. Blaney had had a perfectly good husband of her own for ten years past. "Method is to strangle with bare hands; unable to touch weapons, particularly of steel or objects with sharp cutting-edges during crises, as though subconsciously aware of what will result. Unable to shave himself, at such times, for the same reason. Growth of beard a good indication of approaching danger-period—" And so on. But Mrs. Blaney had been cleft barbarously by a razor-keen axe. "Congenitally unable to bear the sight of blood." I needn't dwell on the condition Mrs. Blaney had been found in from that axe. . . .

THERE was a lot of other dope on this loveable character, but you didn't have to be drawing my wages to see, if you'd gotten that far down the card, why he was out of the running as far as the Blaney case was concerned. "Impulse only recurs at lengthy intervals of six months to a year, and comes on slowly; normal in between times, likable, pleasing personality. Well-educated, neat dresser, able to earn good money at various white-collar jobs as long as his condition permits him to retain them—" And then it went on into a physical description of him.

The whole thing dated way back to the Twenties, and wound up with this brief summary, which just about clinched the matter anyway, as far as our present purposes were concerned:

Married Barbara Newton, Buffalo, N. Y., April 15, 1923. Newton woman met death May 12th, same year, during his absence. Verdict of coroner's inquest: death by strangulation, assailant unknown.

Married Rose Lawton, New York City, December 10, 1923. Arrested charged with causing her death by strangulation, June 5, 1924. Brought to trial September 24th; acquitted.

Married Sylvia King, Toronto, Canada, February, 1925. under name of "Spencer White." Bride found dead by strangulation July same year, Cleveland, Ohio. Brought to trial and admitted identity as Garvey. Adjudged insane and committed to State Institute May 31st.

Escaped October, 1928. Body recovered from Lake Erie, December 14, 1928.

The first, and only, time I had gotten down that far, all the way to the bottom, I wondered what the card was still doing in the file under the circumstances; it should have been chucked out, or at least transferred. But at the very end there was this notation, penciled-in, probably by some long-forgotten predecessor of mine on the squad:

"Retain. N.B.—Identification never fully verified."

And then something further after that, so blurred as to be all but illegible. Which explained why it was still in there, if nothing else. As for being of any use in the Blaney case, that was another matter. It was just that it kept getting in my way constantly, until I'd taken almost a hatred to it. There were dozens in there along with it, still on the active list, that had better possibilities; I would have liked to have them all out, separate, where I could put my

fingers on them in a hurry when I wanted to, I suppose.

I was at it again, going after some poor punk named Montaigne, just because he had carved quite a bad name for himself with an axe up in a number of lumber-camps in the Northwest, when the Blaney case suddenly blew up by itself without any help from any of us. I slammed the damn file-case shut the minute the rumor first percolated out from the Chief's office, and barged in without being sent for to find out if it was true, and so did everyone else around me. The Chief looked plenty relieved, if not particularly pleased, for which you couldn't blame him. It had had us up a tree, and no mistake!

"Yeah," he sighed without being asked, "it's over—and no credit due to us, either! I'm not blaming you lads, but the damn breaks we got! It wound up as screwy as it began, it was a jinx all the way through. Just listen to this, will ye? I got a long-distance a few minutes ago from a little one-horse town down in Virginia—never heard of it before. Some farmer down there yesterday afternoon set his dog on a tramp he caught mooching his fruit. The tramp picked up a rock and knocked the dog's brains out. So the farmer grabs him, hauls him along with him, and presses charges. The constable sets a fine, the tramp can't pay it, and he's thrown into the coop. The tramp is full of interesting stories. His crime isn't a particularly heinous one, and the first thing you know this hick constable and his prisoner have cracked a bottle of corn together and are chewing the rag until all hours of the night, both of them higher than blimps. Murray and Leftwich, you go down there and bring him back with you. He killed Mrs. Blaney six weeks ago up here. Hardcastle's the name of the place,

they're holding him for us. Take an Atlanta train and change at Richmond—"

"How was the constable able to remember, if he got tanked along with him?" somebody asked.

"He didn't, from what I gathered, although he hated to admit it. But the tramp did, and tried to commit suicide this morning when he realized what he'd done, they just stopped him in the nick of time. Then when the constable asked him what he'd tried it for, he told him, thinking the constable knew all along."

"Nuts!" somebody said. "It's enough to make a guy want to resign!"

"Don't worry, I'm keeping it from the press if I possibly can," he agreed. He gave out a couple of petty-larceny assignments, then turned and asked me: "Well, Dokes, you got any eyesight left after the way you've been going after that *modus operandi* file?"

I grinned shamefacedly and asked him if he had anything in line for me.

"Not right this minute," he said.

"Okay if I chase over to St. Thomas' Church, then, Chief?" I asked. "It's my kid sister's wedding-day, she's getting married at five, and I'm supposed to stand up for the guy."

"By all means," he said heartily. "Give her my best, and see that you bring us back a piece of the cake."

They all laughed and Leftwich, putting on his hat to start out after the Blaney murderer, said: "I'll take mine inside of a bottle!"

CHAPTER II

Terror in the Files

I BEAT it home to put on a stiff collar and my best blue serge, and found the place turned upside-down with all kinds of female goings-

on, just like before any wedding. The kid was standing there in the middle of our parlor with about six miles of cheesecloth around her, looking pretty as an angel, and the old lady was down on her knees with a mouthful of pins—but able to talk just the same!—and the old man was pie-eyed in the kitchen, having a lone-wolf celebration. They shooed me out ahead to go over and wait at the church with the groom, and I shoved a flat bottle of rye into my back pocket and took it with me to see us both through.

I found this guy Hilton pacing back and forth in his room and just about as nervous as any guy would be before his marriage. "Gee!" he groaned, "I thought you were going to stand me up!" His collar had melted, and I helped him on with a new one, and we each had two-fingers of his own liquor, so I didn't have to open the bottle I'd brought over. I didn't tell him about the Blaney case cracking, and that otherwise I probably wouldn't have been able to show up, because it didn't seem right to talk about a thing like that on his wedding-day.

I didn't know him very well at all; he'd only started coming to the house the past month or so, although the kid had first met him six months before. She was dippy about him, naturally, and the old man and woman seemed to think pretty highly of him too, so that was good enough for me. He seemed to be a decent enough sort—"a perfect gentleman" was the way the old lady put it—and he was apparently drawing good wages at some kind of white-collar job or other. I'd been meaning to ask him what line he was in, and hadn't gotten around to it somehow. I hadn't had much time off, hadn't been home much, since that damn Blaney thing had started up—but I took it for

granted the old folks knew all there was to know about him. Leave it to the old lady when it came to getting information out of anybody! So I slapped him on the back, said "Buck up, Hilton, it can only happen to you once!" and we started out for the church. He kind of laughed as we got in the cab and said, "I guess you may a well start calling me Frank from today on."

It was a very touching sight, to see that pretty little kid and him kneeling there side by side in front of the altar, with soft light falling on them through a strained-glass window from above, and tapers gleaming, and the scent of flowers in the air, and the holy father murmuring "—until death do ye part," and a gold ring twinkling and a soft kiss being exchanged. My own lousy racket seemed to belong in another world; crime seemed very far away from here.

After it was over I went up and pecked at her, and her eyes were wet and she said, "You'll come and see me real soon, won't you, Ritchie?" Then they all crowded around her, like they do, and Hilton was left out of it for a minute. So I grabbed him by the arm and said, "Come on, let's duck into one of the side-rooms here and have a quick bracer before you leave—I've got a bottle with me." A few of the other fellows came with us, old beaux of the kid's, but none of his own friends; matter of fact, none of them seemed to be at the church at all, but that didn't occur to me at the time.

We all ducked into a little place banked with flowers, and I took out the bottle and tried to dig the foil off the neck with my nails. "Who's got a knife?" I asked, and one of the guys opened a penknife and passed it to me. I sliced the foil off all right, but went

too heavy on it and opened the ball of my thumb. It wasn't anything to speak of, but it flooded red right away—

Somebody said "Hey!" and I looked up, and they were holding Hilton up by the shoulders, and his face was all green. He closed his eyes and shook his head, and then he seemed to get over it. "Cover your finger up, will you?" he said sort of shakily. "I can't stand the sight of blood; never could—"

Somebody passed me a handkerchief and I tied it around it. "You're just shaky from the strain," I tried to buck him up, "I know how it is. Here, wrap yourself around this, you'll feel better!" And I passed the bottle to him, but I was still holding the open penknife with that same hand, and the gesture pointed the blade at him. He backed away so sudden that the precious bottle nearly landed on the floor between us. He reared away, you might say. "Gee, close that knife!" he whimpered, "before somebody else gets hurt with it!"

This time I stopped and gave him a look, still holding the bottle at him, and all at once I could feel myself getting absent-minded, right standing there like I was. I seemed to be trying to remember something awfully hard, and couldn't. But neither could I quit trying to. It was as though somebody had once made that same remark to me before, that he had just now. But no, that wasn't it. Or as though I had once *heard* of somebody who—

THEN just as I was going to connect with it, whatever it was, the old lady stuck her pan in at us and bawled me out, and that knocked it clean out of me. "Here, you Ritchie, what're you doing? Don't you know he has to make a train? You're as bad as your father!"

I folded the knife, popped the cork, he took a quick swig from the neck, we all banged him on the back, and he scrambled out. And then didn't she tiptoe in, give a look over her shoulder, and say: "Lemme just smell the cork, I need a whiff myself. And if I catch a grin on any of your faces—!"

They had a big blowout at our place afterwards, but I didn't stay for it. I wolfed a couple hunks of cake and went back to Headquarters, feeling like a lost sheep with that much time on my hands. The Chief asked me how it had gone off. "Fine," I told him. Then I laughed and went on to tell him how nervous the groom had been. Then I stopped right in the middle of it and got awfully white, and the room went sailing around me.

"Dokes!" he hollered. "What's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost!"

I hadn't. What I'd seen just then, in my mind's eye, was a yellowed card in our *modus operandi* file, and the writing that was on it. I knew then what it was had been trying to come through to me in that anteroom at the church. Crime had seemed very far away there, the file hadn't been able to work through the flowers and the organ music. But here in these more familiar surroundings it had clicked right away.

"—better take the rest of the night off and get some sleep," he was saying.

"I'm all right," I said. "I'll be inside there, if you want me for anything."

I went in and snapped on the light and opened the file. I was scared sick, trying to talk myself out of it. "No," I said, "No! I've been working too hard, that's what's the matter with me! I've been soaking that damned filthy card in day by day without knowing it, until it's gotten the better of me. I'm

seeing things, looking for trouble! There are plenty of guys that can't stand the sight of blood, everybody knows that—there's one right on this squad with us—" Then I almost laughed out loud with relief when I remembered what was at the bottom of the card. "Why, his body was fished out of Lake Erie in December, 1928, he's been dead eight years—" And I couldn't help adding, "Thank God." But there were three little words added to that that I remembered just as well, it was no use kidding myself: "Identification never verified."

I detached the card and took it out by itself. "Unable to touch . . . objects with sharp cutting-edges." The open penknife! The way he'd reared back, nearly letting the bottle drop between us. I went and got a magnifying-glass and went to work on the blurred pencil-notation I've already mentioned way down at the bottom. The friction of the flapping cards through the years had rubbed it well beyond the point of illegibility to the naked eye. I finally got it, not so much by the help of the glass itself as by retracing it on a piece of scratch-paper with a pencil of my own—the way kids have to do when they're learning penmanship. After I had each curve and loop down pat, I bore down heavy on it and it came out "See Lansing." There wasn't any Lansing in the file when I looked, but there was a Lanning, Joseph, so I decided that was it. I only had to glance down his card to be convinced I was right.

They were birds of a feather. Lanning seemed to have taken up where Garvey had left off.

Married Bertha Heilman, Chicago, August, 1931. Latter found strangled to death in North Side flat, October, 1931, during his absence. Lanning was released

by the Chicago police after questioning. Married Esther Miller, St. Louis, March, 1933. Latter disappeared two weeks later, never seen alive again. No record of any charges against Lanning.

Married Linda Regan, Baltimore, December 22, 1935. Latter found strangled to death in berth of Pullman car on which she had been traveling alone, December 25, 1935. This man is still at large.

If I'd been scared sick before I began, I don't know how to describe myself by the time I was through digesting the Lanning data. I was like a kid that thinks he's seeing goblins in the dark.

I kept muttering to myself, "Garvey didn't die! No, Garvey didn't die! This is him right here," and mopping off my forehead, which was all damp and cold. But whether he had or hadn't, that wasn't what was making me sweat. He could be Lanning, and welcome; he could be alive, and welcome. The thought that had me frightened to death was: were there two of them, or were there not, still, a third person?

CHAPTER III

Evidence

I TRIED to steady myself, I clutched at straws in every direction. And to tell the truth, there were plenty of them and they weren't just straws. I soon saw what I would have seen much sooner, hadn't the image of a pretty little kid swathed in cheesecloth blurred my vision: that the evidence against far outweighed the evidence for. That for that matter there was none of the latter to speak of. It lined up like this: A bridegroom is nervous on his wedding-day. Well, who wouldn't be? Cancel. He nearly folds when he sees some blood accidentally shed. There are hundreds of people with that same quirk, even if not

carried to quite such a pitch. That fact, plus the one just before—cancel. He shies from the open blade of a penknife pointed his way. This last, alone of the three, won't cancel out. But on the other hand neither will it stand up against the tremendous amount of evidence *against* that even the cards themselves offer. Take Garvey's physical description, for instance. Sandy hair. Hilton's was a flaming red (one of the kid's pet raves). Blue eyes. Well, Hilton's were too, but so were my own, and I wasn't Garvey. Large, outthrust ears. Hilton's may have been large, I was hazy on that point, but they were close to his head, that much I recalled because I'd been present one night when the kid playfully pinched one of them and he'd jumped back and we'd all laughed. Of Lanning there was unfortunately no description available.

I said to myself impatiently, "Well, the hell with all this! Why do I sit here going at it this way? It's a rotten accusation to bring against anyone, even in my own mind, but as long as I have, why not go about it right and get it out of my system once and for all? He was brought to trial in Cleveland and found guilty, this Garvey, and Hilton hasn't given up his flat yet here. It's simple enough to find out what I want to know."

So I picked up the phone and sent a wire to Cleveland Police Headquarters, asking them to send on a copy of James Garvey's fingerprints, and then I went around to Hilton's flat and had the superintendent let me in — and felt pretty ashamed of myself in the act, too. It was rented furnished, and he'd already given it up effective that afternoon, they were holding the greater part of his personal belongings for him in the basement, but the rooms themselves hadn't been cleaned yet. "I just

want to get a glass," I mumbled. He knew I was now his brother-in-law and raised no objection, stood waiting just inside the door for me.

The two we'd used just before we'd left for the church were still there, sticky, where we'd put them down. I remembered standing my own on the window-sill, so I picked up the other one that was below it on the table and wrapped it in a clean handkerchief, and also that wilted collar he'd jerked off at the last moment, which was still lying where he'd dropped it on the floor. I didn't want to go any further. I was fighting myself even by doing what I had already. But while I was there I stepped into the bathroom for a minute.

And in there on the floor I noticed a toothbrush he'd discarded. It was the peculiar color the bristles were stained that made me pick it up. I thought, "Looks as though he had pyorrhea." But it wasn't blood that gave its bristles that peculiar rusty discoloration. There was too much orange in it for that. It wasn't big enough to have been used for a shoebrush. I held it up to the light and the single hair caught in its bristles showed me how and why it had been used. The empty bottle was there in the medicine-chest when I opened it. "Egyptian Henna Hair Tint. Directions: rinse the hair thoroughly in warm water, apply Tint with a small nail, or tooth-brush—"

Garvey had sandy hair. Hilton's was a flaming red.

I bumped my head rather painfully on the open door of the medicine-chest as I reared back from peering at that bottle.

There was something else in there too, a mere scrap of something else. A strip of flesh-colored adhesive-tape. I put it on the back of my hand and

looked at it, first at close range, then further away. At arm's length it was all but invisible, it blended so with the color of my skin. Then I put it up against my face, hygiene to the contrary, and studied it there. It hadn't apparently been used, was a remnant; the gum was still strong enough to make it adhere of its own accord. To cover up a pimple or boil, perhaps? He was a fastidious dresser, but he hadn't struck me as that conceited that he'd care whether it showed or not. Why not just the ordinary white kind? My eyes, in the cabinet-mirror, traveled up my jaw-line to my ear—and stopped there. I didn't need to ask any more questions after that.

I REMEMBERED how Betty had playfully reached out to pinch his ear one night at the house, and how he'd swerved his head back. I wouldn't dodge if a pretty girl tried to do that to me. I'd let her get at both my ears and only wish I had two more. But then mine weren't pinned back close to my head by flesh-colored adhesive-tape in such a way that it wouldn't show. I closed my eyes briefly; God, how fast this thing was building up!

Notwithstanding all that, the tape was something you might expect to find in a bathroom-cabinet, anyone's. But there was something else that should have been there, and wasn't. That my own at home, and any other man's invariably has at least two or three of. Used razor-blades. There wasn't one in sight. The mirror in front of me was streaked and filmed by splashes of soapy water leaping up from the wash-basin under it. It was all right to see by, but not to shave by. It hadn't been cleaned in at least two weeks. He didn't shave himself.

I'd only been in the place about five

minutes, all told. The superintendent hadn't even gotten impatient yet waiting for me. I didn't stay any longer after that. What was there to stay for? Did I have to have blueprints, to feel satisfied? Wasn't what I had just seen enough? I came out of there so suddenly the super forgot to lock up after me for a minute, just stood there staring down the stair-well after me. I kept thinking, "I've got to find out where they went—! I've got to get hold of her—!" All the way back to Headquarters.

The fingerprint-man thought it could wait, when I paged him at his house from there over the phone. I told him it couldn't, that I'd go over there and get him if he wouldn't come of his own accord. He quit beefing after he'd shown up and found me pacing back and forth there like a caged bear. "For Pete's sake," I pleaded, "do this thing for me, will you, and don't ask why or what it's about! Can't you see by looking at me—?"

"Yeah," he admitted, "I can!"

"This glass, then, and this collar—will you see what you can do with 'em right away? Especially the collar, it came out of a cellophane wrapper, and there oughtn't to be more than one set of prints on it. There's a set coming in from Cleveland, telephoto, ought to be here any minute, for purposes of comparison—but get started on these while we're waiting—"

I was at the cards again when he came out, as though I didn't know them both by heart already! But I was checking them on the time-element this time. "Impulse only recurs at lengthy intervals of six months to a year," Garvey's card said. There was eight months between the first and second marriages, and a little more than a year between the second and third. On

the Lanning card, the timing was slower. A year-and-a-half and then a year and nine months; he'd had to be more careful. But that wasn't what interested me chiefly; it was the length of time between each marriage and the ensuing death. I was trying to figure out whether she had any margin of safety at all. It stood like this: The first victim had lived one calendar month. The second, six. The third, five. The fourth, two. The fifth, disappeared within *two weeks' time*. The sixth, found murdered on the *third day after she'd married him!* There was an increase of tempo there that couldn't be ignored. Lanning's horrid record ended December 25th, 1935, with the finding of the last of them in a Pullman berth (obviously something had forewarned her and she'd tried to escape from him). Ten months had now gone by since that date; it was about due again, no margin of safety could be counted on—even if I'd been foolhardy enough to rely on such an uncertain thing. It might be a matter of weeks, it might be a matter of days, or—it might be a matter of only hours.

I pressed my head with my hands and groaned aloud. "Why didn't I find this all out yesterday at this time!"

The fingerprint-man had come outside again, was standing there looking at me. "I asked you whether that other set you spoke of came in from Cleveland yet? I can't get anything off either of those two things you gave me, to match up with them. They've both been handled by someone who's had the skin taken off the ends of his fingers by acid or something. All I can get is blurs, deposits left by the body-oil. Are the others going to be like that too—?"

So he'd done that too! "Never mind," I said, "I don't need fingerprints, I need a lucky star!"

I beat it back to the house. The celebration was over and they'd all gone. The old lady was cleaning up the mess; the old man had been put to bed. I came in on her like a cannonball. "Where'd they go?" I panted, snaking the dishcloth out of her hand.

"Why, they went home where they belong—"

"No! I mean Betty and—and him!"

"Why, that's not our business," she tried to stall playfully. "They're on their honeymoon, no one's supposed to know, a thing like that's always kept a secret—"

I took her by the shoulders and tried to shake some commonsense into her, without being too rough about it. "You've got to tell me! I've got to know!"

CHAPTER IV

Safeguards

SHE got sort of frightened just by looking at my face, so I tried to put the soft-pedal on. After all, what was the good of telling her? Why put her through hell? The shock alone might be enough to kill her, at her age. "Nothing's the matter, Mom," I quieted her in answer to her frightened questions. "Only, if you got any idea where they went, I want you to tell me—"

"Atlantic, that's all I know," she protested. "They didn't tell me where they were going to stop down there—"

"Atlantic City?"

She laid a finger alongside her nose. "But if you want to find out that bad, I'll ask her. She promised to call me up from there after they got in. She won't forget her old mother. What're you thinking of doing, playing some trick on them, Ritchie? Is that why you want to know?"

"No," I said almost inaudibly, "the joke's on me." I flung myself down limply in a chair. They'd taken the six o'clock train; they were down there already by now. I said to myself: "I'll wait half-an-hour. If she hasn't called up by then, I'm going to start down there myself, if I have to hunt for them in every hotel in Atlantic City!"

What's the use painting that half-hour for you? The tension, the knowledge that I ought to be doing something, and yet the inability to do anything but just sit there and wait. The thought: "Maybe it's too late already, maybe right while I'm sitting here—" I couldn't bear to have the old lady see what I was going through, I stayed off in another room by myself.

Then when the *brring* finally came from out in the hall, it lifted me a good two inches above the seat of my chair, as if a spring had been released under me. The old lady had stayed up waiting for it, and she came out of the kitchen drying her hands. "See, wha'd I tell you?" she said happily.

"Don't let her get off," I warned, "I've gotta talk to her!" Then I let her go to it first. When she was all through cooing and billing, she said, "Wait a minute, Ritchie wants to say a word to you—"

I took the receiver and muffled it against my chest. "You go upstairs and go to bed, now," I said to the old lady. I waited until she was out of ear-shot, then I said: "Betty." Just that one word, quietly.

Her voice was a song. "Oh, Ritch, I'm so happy! You'll never know—"

I was shaking all over, like a man with the ague. I thought, "Am I sure enough, even now? Can I take the risk of smashing her life for her? Suppose, suppose I find out afterward that I was

wrong? Isn't what I am about to do to her only a degree less terrible than what I am trying to save her from? 'Sure enough' isn't enough, all the *modus operandi* files in the world aren't enough, nor all the toothbrushes, nor all the effaced fingerprints; I've got to be positive—and yet how can I be that until it is already too late, the thing has already happened?" An unheard cry that should never have come from a detective, welled up inside me. "God, tell me what to do!"

You understand, don't you? It wasn't the detective in me that was holding me back; the detective had enough to go by, more than enough. But I wasn't a detective in this, I was this girl's brother. For twenty years now she'd been my weakness, my one soft spot, since they'd first let me hold her in my arms, a kid of seven. Was I ready to pour filth and insanity all over her, tear her heart out with my own hands, blot out the sun from her for years to come, maybe forever? I was, if it meant saving from sudden death in the depths of night. But that *if*, that biggest, longest, strongest word in the language! *If* Hilton wasn't the man, *if* I had my wires crossed—!

Something—Someone— must have answered that cry of mine for guidance after all, without my knowing it. The course of action that was the only safe one for me to follow unraveled itself of its own accord from the tangled skein of the predicament I was in, right while I stood there, and pointed the way. I saw that there was no choice; *whether he was Garvey or not* I could not afford to tell her, for her own sake, while I was still at this distance away from her. If he wasn't, then all the above reasons entered into it. If he was, then I was simply bringing her eventual doom down on her twice as

quickly—before I could get there. She would give herself away, in her terror and revulsion, and meet her end almost instantly at his hands. Or she would attempt to escape, and the same fate would overtake her that had undoubtedly overtaken the last woman "Lanning" had married. By warning her over a telephone-wire from a hundred miles away I was simply condemning her to death.

There was only one thing for me to do, until I could get down there. Keep her in ignorance of the horrible trap she was in. Safeguard her as far as I was able to, without letting her know I was doing it. And, outweighing the grim realization that such safeguards would be worse than useless if the crisis should come on suddenly, there was the indisputable fact that her present ignorance and trustfulness, while they were allowed to continue undisturbed, formed her chief margin of safety. Would lull him to procrastination instead of whipping him to instant frenzy.

ALL this in a matter of seconds, though it seemed years, while she was babbling blithely at the other end. Then, "Well, I must say you're not very talkative, Ritchie. This is costing my Frank money, so I guess I'd better say ta-ta." And, a modern-girl streak which she sometimes affected—but which really wasn't like her at all—cropping out in her just then, she giggled and said: "Zero-hour approaches; I think I just heard the elevator come up out in the corridor.

There wasn't very much time. "Where're you registered?" I said tensely.

"The St. Charles."

That was good. That or any other well-staffed hotel—the surroundings,

set-up, would be in her favor as long as they stayed there; it was when he got her off in some house or flat by themselves . . . Even so, I couldn't just pin everything on that, there was no certainty in this case, in any shape, form, or manner. "You've got a nail-file with you?"

"Of course—!" she said in surprise.

"I've just heard of an old superstition, it's supposed to bring you luck. Slip it under your pillow, without letting him see you do it." The way he'd reared away from that penknife, such a thing might just save her, give her a moment's time, if anything happened in the middle of the night. Arguing that she'd have presence of mind enough to reach for it, which was unlikely unless she knew what it was for. And to most people a nail-file isn't a weapon of defense. "It's like a charm. If you have a bad dream, or anything happens—take it out and hold it with the point away from you. Don't tell him about it, or it won't work." Something like a sob caught in my throat. "Be sure you do this for me, Betty. I'll tell you why someday—soon."

So she didn't laugh the way she would have otherwise.

Further than that, I couldn't go, and there was nothing else I could do at the moment. There was obviously a telephone right in the room with her, the one she was using right now. "Tell me something," I couldn't resist asking, "you've unpacked already, I suppose?"

"Yes, I unpacked for both of us, like a good wife."

"Set out all his shaving things for him—?"

"No, I meant to ask him about that!" she said. "He must have left them all behind in his hurry, he came away without a razor or blades or shaving-cream or anything—"

"Don't!" I said, "Please don't mention that subject to him at all—" And then lamely, "That's supposed to bring bad luck too."

But she wasn't listening any more. "Here he is now," she said. "Well, goodbye, old-timer," and hung up. What's a mere brother, even when he is trying to save your life without your knowledge, compared to a brand-new, adored husband?

I got the hotel right back again, and got the hotel-detective and identified myself. It was easier going with him, the ice wasn't quite so thin. "Now this is a personal matter and I'm not in a position to give you the low-down. You can check up on me by getting in touch with Headquarters up here—"

"That's perfectly all right, Dokes," he assured me. "Anything we can do to cooperate with you, we're at your service."

"You have a Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hilton in tonight, room—?"

"Just a sec. Yes, Suite 22-G, that's right."

"I want you, or somebody working with you, stationed within earshot of the door of that suite tonight—all night long—with orders to break in there at the first unnatural or alarming sounds they hear. This is important, there must be no delay; whoever you give the post to must be provided with a passkey ahead of time and authorized to act at a moment's notice, whether summoned by the occupants or not. Is that clear?"

"It's unusual, to say the least, but I'll see that it's done. You wouldn't care to enlighten us any further—?"

"I would, but it's out of the question just at present. This is a preventive measure, not a coercive one, you understand? And it's essential that it be done without attracting the attention of the people in question; they must not

know they are under surveillance. That's vital!"

"You can count on us," he said.

I wasn't so sure that I could at that, it was a half-measure at best, but at least it was better than none; she wasn't quite alone and at his mercy now, with just a fingernail-file and a room-phone to fall back on in case of a sudden attack in the dark. But I wasn't being lulled into any false security, just the same. The room-door might be solid enough to muffle anything short of a full-bodied shriek. The man posted outside it might doze off. And if he was a person without much judgment, how would he know what constituted a danger-signal and what didn't? By deliberately withholding the key to the situation from them I'd rendered them enormously liable to error. A death-rattle might seem no more to them than the sound of a restless sleeper clearing her throat. The whole thing was porous with pitfalls.

CHAPTER V

Disbelief

SHE wasn't glad to see me. That was as obvious as the nose on your face. She'd already passed back and forth in front of me an even half-dozen times in the wheel-chair—with him—without spotting me watching her. I'd taken good care of that. It was when I finally saw the Negro wheeling her back alone in the chair, that I stepped out from the cool, shady pergola where I'd stationed myself into the glare of the Boardwalk and strolled up to meet her. The colored man had turned her chair aside and parked it against the railing, looking toward the sea. I didn't know how soon he'd be back, he might have stopped off just for cigarettes, but the opportunity mightn't

recur again for the rest of the day, so I had to grab it while I could.

Her mouth just opened when she saw me, then closed again, rather firmly too. "What are you doing down here?"

I said to the darky, "We'll call you back when we want you." Then I perched on the rail, facing her, so I could keep my eye on the Boardwalk. "I'm down here to get a guy," I said tersely.

She didn't try to conceal her repugnance. "That rotten business of yours! Hounding people—"

I said morosely, "Did it ever occur to you what kind of a world this would be, if it weren't for that rotten business of mine?" But her reaction even to a casual remark like that, that seemingly had nothing to do with her, only showed me how she would have taken it had I told her the real McCoy over the phone. It would have killed her, or unbalanced her. "Even now," I said to myself, "I've got to watch my step how I go about it, I can see that. She's hipped on the guy. I've got to break it to her little by little. If I just drag him away from her, there's no telling what it'll do to her!"

"Look at that sea, look at that sun and that blue sky over us," she was saying. "Oh, Ritchie, is that the only purpose you can find in life, to spread fright and darkness around you, to send people to their deaths or to living deaths shut up in clammy cells? Today—for the first time in my life—I'm not so proud of you!"

Which was a swell example of feminine logic for you, if there ever was one. Even so, I couldn't rig up much of an answer to it. "There has to be a garbage-man," I said, "there has to be a street-cleaner, there has to be a detective. They spoil the pretty

picture for you I know, little sister. But it wouldn't be so very pretty without them, either!"

We were working on each other, irritating each other, like only two people who think a hell of a lot of each other can do.

"I'm glad, now, that I haven't told Frank what you are. I suppose he'll find out anyway sooner or later—"

"Sooner—or later," I agreed.

Why, the kid was actually ashamed of me! Because I was no Romeo, because I didn't blend well with the golden daydreams of her honeymoon. My head went down a little lower between my shoulders, perched there on the topmost rail, and I closed my eyes thoughtfully for a minute. A Boardwalk cop came along just then and motioned me off, so I palmed my badge at him and snarled "Scram!" with unnecessary roughness.

"Where is His Nibs?" I said to her.

"He dropped in at the hotel barber-shop to get a shave."

"Doesn't shave himself, does he?" I commented.

She didn't answer. Instead she flared, "I have a very peculiar hunch that it's more than a coincidence, your being down here at the same time we are! What was all that rigamarole about a file last night on the phone? What have you got in the back of your head, what are you trying to do to us anyway? There was whispering going on outside our door all night last night, as though—as though we were being watched! Frank's already informed them we're leaving before tonight, and you can't blame him. We're going out of there right today!"

I tensed a little without, I hope, showing it. "Where's he taking you, got any idea?"

"He's rented the cutest little two-

family house out in Ventnor—furnished." She began to thaw out again. "He took me over to look at it this morning. Solidly built, such thick doors and windows, no one can get in—"

I thought, "And no one can get out either—in a hurry—maybe that's the idea."

"We're staying down here, you know. Frank's had an offer of a better job, and he's sent for his things—"

"This house." That was all that interested me. "Two-family, you say?"

"The other half isn't occupied. Most of the summer-people have left already. It's off by itself, absolute privacy. We got it dirt-cheap, too—"

"It has a telephone, of course?"

"No, what would we need one for? We don't know anyone down here."

I TOOK a deep breath and said to myself, "Well, here goes! I've wasted enough time." I looked her square in the eyes and said, slowly, "I haven't told you, have I, about this guy I'm down here after?"

"Must you?" she said coldly.

"He's a woman-strangler. Normal part of the time, a dangerous homicidal maniac at certain other times. He always marries them before he— He's married six already. The name of the last one was Linda Regan."

"Ritchie, shut up!" she said horrified. I went right on.

"He can't stand the sight of sharp implements, with cutting edges. He can't stand the sight of blood. Are you listening? He doesn't shave himself." I gave her a mild sort of third-degree, went back and started the whole thing over, like a phonograph-record. Beating it in, pounding it in. "The name of the last one was Linda Regan. Linda Regan. He can't stand the sight of

sharp implements. Sharp implements. He doesn't shave himself. Doesn't shave himself." I stopped a minute, then I said: "We don't know what he looks like. He's at large down here. Mom's not well, Betty, not at all well. I think you better come back to town with me—" I could tell her the rest on the train, or after we got home. "She wants to see you." And I reached out my hand to help her out.

I expected anything—but not what I got. She reared up in the chair all right—but not with the help of my hand. She stood up in it full-length, and her face was white—but not with fear or shock—with rage, almost with loathing. She swung her own hand back and slapped me with all her might across the face. It stung like a whip. Then again, and then once more. Three times, with every ounce of energy in her. The crowd around stopped to look, and then to listen.

"You lying, filthy-minded—flat-foot! There's not a spark of manhood in you! Coming to me when his back is turned like this, with your slimy hints and insinuations! You meant him just now, didn't you, only you didn't have the courage to come right out and say so! And you call yourself a brother! The rotten profession you're in has gone to your head, you're sick in your own mind, you can't see good in anyone any more! You're not worth the little finger of the man I'm married to! And you expect me to listen to you, yet; doing this to me the very day of my wed—" She was having her hands full keeping the tears back, but she was managing to.

She sat down again in the chair and motioned the attendant. Everyone was standing around in a big half-circle taking it all in. "Take me to my husband—" she said, and lifted up her

head proudly for me to see what she thought of him.

I could have stopped her by using force; that was the only way. Dragged her back with me to the city against her will, turned it into a sort of legal kidnapping. What was the use? She would have only beat it right back to him again, probably, the first chance she got. I couldn't arrest him, while she was right with him, without dragging her name into it, spreading her all over the papers, making a hash out of her future.

So I just stayed there hunched on the railing, with my face tingling, while the darky pivoted her chair around to start back with her. "I'll be at the St. Charles, Betty," I muttered hoarsely, "and you'll find a telephone installed in that house of yours when you move in tonight, whether you like it or not."

The last thing she said was, "I don't want to see you or hear from you again, you're going to apologize to me on your bended knees first, before I have anything more to do with you—!"

"I'll be at the St. Charles, Betty," I said again, more loudly than before, "remember that, when you feel his hands closing around your throat. It'll be too late, then!"

And as the darky guiding her chair lost himself in the throng moving along the Boardwalk, I didn't give a damn about the people standing there watching me, I hid my face in my two hands.

CHAPTER VI

Trapped

Related by Betty

HE was as good as his word; I was alone in the house, unpacking Frank's things, which had been sent on from the city, when a man came to install the phone. Frank, who had

come over with me when we checked out of the hotel, had gone out again only a short while before, to the station to get a refund on our round-trip tickets, he'd said. Now that we were staying down here, there was no reason the railroad company shouldn't return our fares, he'd remarked. Personally I thought it could have waited; it was only a matter of fourteen-odd dollars, the tickets had been good for sixty days, and one or both of us might have found occasion to use them within that time. But I didn't argue the point with him. It never occurred to me that, since brides usually don't carry their own money with them on their honeymoon, I hadn't fourteen cents with me to get back on, much less fourteen dollars; I was stranded away from home down here. But why should such a thing have occurred to me? One isn't stranded with one's own husband; wherever he is, is home. He'd said he'd be back in about an hour.

If he'd been there with me when this phone-man came, I'd undoubtedly have laid my way; there wouldn't have been any phone put in. The idea of Ritchie butting into our personal affairs this way! I was still humiliated and furious at the beastly way he'd behaved on the Boardwalk, but a good deal of the edge had already been taken off my resentment. However, I was there alone, and this phone-man was one of these roughnecks who just barged in without so much as a "by your leave" and paid no more attention to me than if I were a stick of furniture!

I went chasing after him. "Here!" I said, "Where are you going with all those tools? We've made no application for a phone!"

"Oh, yes, you have, lady!" he grunted. "Paid your deposit and everything! I've got my orders, and

it's a rush-job!" And he went right ahead. This was Ritchie's work, of course; he and that badge of his!

The wiring was still there from the phone the last people had had in the house; the whole thing only took him about ten minutes. He simply detached the sound-box from the baseboard where it was clamped and screwed it on again inside the clothes-closet opening of the hall. "Here!" I gasped, "Who ever heard of a telephone inside a clothes-closet!"

"I've got my orders," he repeated stubbornly, and took out a pencil-diagram of the lay-out to show me. I recognized Ritchie's handwriting on the margin; he'd evidently copied a floor-plan of our house from the real-estate office. I was nearly speechless for a minute, but in Frank's absence there didn't seem to be anything I could do, short of running out and getting a policeman. And our house was situated in such an isolated spot. . . .

"You can install it," I said, "but we're not paying a cent—"

"That's all right," he said. "All charges have been paid up thirty days in advance." And he ran the wiring very cleverly under the closet-door, hooked-up the instrument to it that he'd brought with him, put it down on the floor in the dark, tested it by calling the central office, brushed his hands, and departed. I followed him to the door. "Just wait'll my husband hears about this!" I called after him helplessly.

"That reminds me," he grinned, and handed me a sealed note. I gave him a dirty look, tore it open and read it.

Regardless of what your feelings are toward me at the moment, if you have half the sense I give you credit for, you will keep the presence of this phone to yourself. If you must tell him, at least wait

till tomorrow, let it stay in overnight. You have a silver dress, metallic cloth. Well, put it on tonight, even if you don't go out. I'm your brother, I'm only trying to help, not hurt you. R.

This only kindled my anger all over again, even if only temporarily. I crumpled it up and threw it away. This persecution had to stop! If it didn't, I really would tell Frank the whole story, and then the breach would never be healed. I hadn't, so far, breathed a word to him, not even that Ritchie was down here and that I'd run into him. My better judgment warned me not to. It was no augury for a happy marriage, to create bad blood between my husband and brother right at the very beginning. This spat between Ritchie and myself would be forgotten eventually, but Frank would never forgive him for holding such a barbarous, mistaken opinion about him. In the end, I'd be the chief sufferer. Women usually are.

I cooled down again gradually, and then it dawned on me that phone could serve a very useful purpose after all, apart from that hallucination of Ritchie's. I picked it up—you could hardly see it there at the bottom of that dark closet—and gave it its baptism by calling the grocer and butcher and ordering some things sent over. I'd surprise Frank by cooking my first meal for him, and see how he liked it! The house was furnished, even down to silverware and dishes. I set the table, slipped a nice juicy tenderloin in the oven, and then beat it in the bedroom to doll up for him. He'd be back any minute now.

THAT silver dress idea of Ritchie's wasn't so bad at that, I had to admit. I got it out and tried it on. It looked swell, burnished all over just as though it was really

made of metal instead of only silver-cloth. I kept it on. Then I turned around and I noticed that I hadn't finished hanging up his suits in the bedroom-closet. I'd been at it when that phone-man came. Several of them were still lying spread out on the bed. I picked each one up, smoothed it out, and put it on a hanger.

The little notebook dropped out of the last one. He must have forgotten he'd left it in the breast-pocket. It was just a tiny little address-book, two by four, the kind you can pick up at any five-and-ten. As a matter of fact, it didn't even have anything written in it, except just on one page, near the back. He must have forgotten to use it after buying it. But it was because he had pressed that one page down in writing on it, opened it more widely than the others, that it fell open right there in dropping tent-shaped to the floor. And when my eye, in picking it up, came to rest upon a woman's name, I stopped and looked more closely. I'm only human after all; some former sweetheart, possibly?

There were seven, not just one.

Barbara Newton
Rose Lawton
Sylvia King
Bertha Heilman
Esther Miller
Linda Regan
Betty Dokes

And every one but the last one, my own, was crossed off by a red line! Horrible mists from nowhere suddenly seemed to swirl around me, blotting out the room. I couldn't see a thing. But I could hear—I could hear Ritchie's voice coming through them! Vibrant, remorseless, inexorable: "The name of the last one was Linda Regan. Linda Regan. Linda Regan." Booming like a fog-horn.

It was only when I was struggling to my feet again, picking myself up from the floor, that I realized I must have fallen to it without knowing it. But the mists were gone now, there was a diamond-like clarity to the air, that had invaded my faculties too. The faint, if it was a faint, had refreshed me; nature is kind that way. Not a shadow of a doubt remained. I knew the one, the only thing there was for me to do—and I knew how quickly it had to be done! I was whimpering aloud, "I've got to get out of here! Oh, let me out of here!" but that was only the nervous reaction to the shock, not helplessness. I knew enough not to waste a moment, a precious fraction of a second. Even though it meant tramping the sand-dunes in a silver evening-dress and high heels, even though the steak was already filling the kitchen with black smoke. No time, no time, no time! I had to get out of this house of death, back to where life was.

I fled from that room like one possessed, turned the corner into the hall, scampered down its dark length to the solid, oak-paneled front door, and as my face came flush with the diamond-shaped inset of thick glass set in the upper half of that—there he was out there, coming up toward the house in a straight line from the beach! Too late.

I screamed shrilly, unheard behind that thick door, and doubled back, like some silver-smooth little wild animal caught in a trap. There was no back door—I knew now that was one of his many reasons for selecting this house—but there were windows there I might climb out of, we were on the ground floor. Even as the thought occurred to me, I knew how futile it would be. There was nothing around the house to hide me, only sand. I could never reach the next house to

ours in time, it was too far away. Even if I did, I might find it vacant. Or if it wasn't, the people might refuse to interfere; he was my husband, how could I get them to take any stock in my story? No, he'd see me from where he was, in that flashing silver dress of mine, and only come after me, overtake me, drag me back inside again.

The clothes-closet door, standing ajar as I streaked past it, showed me where my only hope lay! I doubled back a second time, skidded and all but fell on the waxed floor, tore it open, snatched at the phone, and on my knees there, like someone saying their prayers, pleaded: "The St. Charles Hotel! The St. Charles Hotel! Life-and-death, no time for Information—you *must* know the number!"

CHAPTER VII

End of the Chase

THE crack of the closet-door, which now stood out at right-angles to the wall, gave me a thread-like view of the front door. The diamond-shaped pane in that was already darkened by his looming head and shoulders, blotting out the twilight from outside. He was standing there on the other side of it, getting out his key.

She did know the number; I heard her say it to herself, and a second voice cut in: "Good evening, St. Cha—"

"Richard Dokes, quick, Richard Dokes!" I yammered. I was almost incoherent with terror by now. I had no presence of mind just when I needed it most. I should have relayed the message to the exchange operator while I still had time, instead of waiting on the line as though this was an ordinary call. Four words would have done it, "His sister wants him!" But his very

nearness had robbed me of all reasoning power; in my panic, it didn't seem enough to give a message to some anonymous girl, I wanted the sound of my brother's voice.

The other's key was scraping into the keyhole; I could hear the intermittent humming over the wire that showed they were ringing his room—unsuccessfully. It kept breaking off, but it went right on again each time. I shook the phone in despair, as though that would bring him on any quicker!

The key turned, clashed, the ponderous door heaved inward. He was a black silhouette against the dying day, and a long ominous shadow fell before him down the hall, almost to where I crouched half-concealed.

The door closed behind him. He was in, now. He could have heard me, now, even if Ritchie had answered; could make an end to me, now, long before Ritchie could get here. Too late for this too, now! I was doomed—

I breathed his name twice over, "Ritchie! Ritchie!" and then I put it down softly on the floor, just the way it was, and bit the back of my own hand, to keep back the scream that was pleading to burst from me.

"Betty," he called in a honeyed voice, which only made my skin crawl and struck fresh terror to my heart, and then he whistled playfully for me. "*Phweet, hoo*. Where are you?"

I was doomed, yes. I was cut off, both from escape and from any means of summoning help. The old Victorian phrase they used to say came to me, I was in his power, but I didn't laugh. Would you have, in my place?

But there was just one dim ray of hope left for me. It pointed, not toward immunity but toward delay, postponement. If I didn't let him see how frightened I was, it mightn't happen

right away, I might be able to gain a little time. But I saw clearly what this depended upon: *he must not know that I already knew*. If he found me cowering there in the closet, eyes dilated, he'd probably finish me off then and there. If I seemed to be still the same happy-go-lucky little sap he'd left in the house an hour ago, he might just possibly wait awhile, take his time. Might even let me live the night through, and in that case, in the morning maybe—

He put his key in the door a second time, on the inside, and locked it. Then I heard it hit a coin as it fell into the depths of his pocket. But hands clenched, steeling myself, fighting myself at every nerve, I was already rising shakily to my feet, like a ghost reborn from the shriveling terror that had consumed my former self. I was panting like something that has run for miles, nature trying to get enough air to my ticking heart. I knew just what sort of an ordeal I faced; this was going to be worse by far than any sudden physical onslaught from him could possibly have been. Just one slip, one momentary lowering of my guard, and—goodbye. But life is sweet. It seemed cheap even at the price I was willing to pay for just one hour more of it.

He took a step away from the door. I tottered around to the outside of the open closet-door, showed myself to him, swayed there briefly—then all at once was moving toward him erect, firm-footed, a gash on my face for a smile, arms out to meet his embrace. The closet-door folded shut behind him, with the slight backward push I'd given it, lest he look in and discover the telephone.

"Oh, there you are!" he beamed. "Didn't you hear me come in?"

He meant—had I heard him lock the door on the inside?

"No," I said, "I was hanging up some things in there—"

I stepped in between his arms; I felt them fold around my back like boa constrictors. My heart stopped, then went on again. "I must, I must," I told myself, "I did this same thing when he left, didn't I?" Our lips met; then he lifted me from the floor, held me there helpless in the air. I saw a funny light kindle in his eyes, not love or passion, something that distended the irises, like a tiger's eyes in the dark. I never knew until then how much it could hurt to keep a steady smile on your face, looking down into twin pools of death from above. I could feel his breath hot on my throat, like invisible steam. The vise he was holding me in began to tighten—

"Frank," I said, "the steak's burning! *Imph, imph!* Smell it? I meant to surprise you—"

NOTHING happened for a minute that seemed a year. Then the floor came up slowly and hit the soles of my feet again, and his arms dropped away. I was afraid to move away too quickly, even with the excuse I'd just given him. I reached out and lightly patted the side of his face, as though to hold him there where he was, then turned and started for the kitchen, expecting any minute to feel his hands close around my throat from behind.

I made it all right, he didn't come after me, but as I collapsed to a squatting position in front of the reeking stove, I said to myself: "I must never do that again, after this. I must never turn my back to him like that any more, I've got to keep facing him at all costs!"

The steak was just smouldering charcoal; when I turned to look he was

standing in the doorway, looking in at me. I thought: This may give me an out—

"Look, isn't that a shame?" I mourned. "Looks like we'll have to eat out." If I could only get as far as some restaurant with him, I could scream my peril in the middle of everyone—

He turned nasty all at once, almost as though he had guessed what was in my mind. Not dangerous, but just nasty.

"No," he barked, "we're going to eat in! We're going to stay here where we belong! Whaddya suppose I married you for? Take off that damned silver dress, it hurts my eyes! Put on something soft, that don't look like a suit of armor!"

I didn't dare disobey; I edged past him sideways, with that same moronic grin still on my face, and got into the bedroom. If I locked myself in in there, I wondered, could I hold him off until help came? But who'd hear my screams? It might be hours, days, before anyone happened to come out this way. And then when I looked, there was no key in the door, and a second later he had followed me in there. I pulled the shimmering dress down off my shoulders, keeping my eyes dead-center in the mirror, afraid even a look might provoke him.

I had dropped the notebook a second time when I fainted and it was still lying there. He saw it before I did. I only saw it when it was already in his hand, and saw him glance craftily from it to me, and back to it again. Ice went down my spine like quicksilver in a thermometer, and I quickly beat him to the ominous, unasked question—the wrong answer to which was death.

"Oh, what's that?" I said naïvely. "Where'd you get it?" Meaning, I

haven't seen it before, I haven't seen it before. The looped dress was down at my feet now, safely below the danger-point of my elbows. I'd been afraid an attack would come while it held my arms pinned to my sides.

"It was lying right here in front of you," he said. There was more of a question in that than a statement.

"It *was*?" I gasped. "Why, where'd it come from, I didn't see it!"

I pulled open a drawer in front of me and got out my shroud: a frilly little frock with flowers all over it, the dress I was going to my death in.

There was another danger-point while it dropped over my head and blinded me; I held my breath, but I was still alive when it settled further down around my figure.

He was still holding the book in his hand, open at the page where those names were. Then, in the mirror, I saw him take a pencil out of his inner pocket. It was red-barreled, so something told me the lead must be red too. He poised it, drew a swift line across something on that open page, and then he looked at me heavy-lidded, and put it away.

That had been my death-sentence, just then. Mine had been the only name of the seven without a line through it. This meant, tonight! Tonight, not another day to live! My knees dipped a little, but I caught the edge of the bureau with the heel of my hand and stayed upright against it—a white face, all eyes, staring into a mirror.

He purred, "Gee, Betty, you've got the loveliest little neck—so soft and white!" and his eyes hardly seemed to be open any more as he took a step toward me.

I was afraid to turn and afraid not to. I got the upper drawer open in front of me, dipped into it and out

again, and as I swiftly pivoted to get his hot breath in my face, I was fumbling at my nails, prodding them with a long steel file. Using it the wrong way, point turned toward him. My bent hand came up until it was at face-level.

He blinked and grimaced and went back a little, while the file slowly swept its arc at him, like the needle of a compass. I said: "I'm starved, Frank, aren't you? Let me go in and see what I can get for you, outside of that steak." And I backed out into the dining room, smiling, doing my nails—

I PUT something on the table, I don't know what, and we sat down opposite each other. We neither of us knew what we were eating, he wanted to kill, and I wanted to go on living. I could already feel myself beginning to crack up here and there, especially around the face, where I was having to smile so much.

I wondered, "Does it hurt much when you're strangled to death?" Ritchie must have been the means of causing that to be done to many men—no, they used a chair in our state. I kept grinding pineapple-cubes with my teeth, and they wouldn't go down at all.

I had put the file down in front of me. He snatched at it suddenly, when I least expected it, with a napkin covering his hand, and threw it over into a corner. "A thing like that doesn't belong at the table!" he shouted at me. "It's disgusting!" Then he did the same with my knife and fork, and his own. "We only need spoons!" he growled.

I thought, "Here it comes. This is it now!" There was a radio in the room, in back of where I was sitting. I groped for it with one hand, without getting out of my chair, and heard the dial snap.

A voice from the outside world broke the lethal silence.

I held up my finger commandingly. "Shh!" I said, "I want to get this!" It worked once, I knew it wouldn't work a second time. The peremptoriness of my voice, the unexpectedness of it, buffaloed him for a minute. Thumping jazz swirled around us; I had it too loud, that must have irritated him, cut its efficacy short.

"Turn it off!" he barked suddenly.

"What for?" I asked innocently.

Then it came. The last link with self-control, the last inhibition, snapped. "Because I'm going to kill you!"

"I haven't done anything to you—!" I moaned. But he was already on his feet, coming around the table toward me. *He shot his cuffs back!*

There was only this left now: the table had to stay between us as long as it could. My chair went over and I slipped around to his side. It was he, when he got around there, who kicked his own chair out of the way. Then he dragged the cloth off the table, sent everything crashing to the floor, and tried to turn it over and sweep it aside, but God was good to me, it was fastened immovably to the floor. I daren't leave the table, to get over in the corner to where he'd thrown the file and knives; he would have overtaken me instantly. My life was hanging on the four corners of that table, I was defter getting around them than he.

Suddenly he himself left the table. He went over to the door, switched the key from outside in, locked it, and put it in his pocket. Then he did that to the other door, leading in to a bathroom. The kitchen door was a swinging-door, but there was no outlet from there. "I'll get you now!" he promised grimly.

He didn't say anything more after that. I was nearly at the exhaustion-point already, ready to drop, stood there panting, waiting to see which side of the table he'd come around this time. He didn't come around either side. He gave a sudden jump up on top of it with both feet, and before I had half started away, leaped down on the other side, right on top of me. He had me. My legs tried to scamper abortively, my body stayed there in his grasp.

I didn't struggle. I said, "All right, kill me, Frank. But I'm so thirsty from all this chasing. Just let me have a drink of water first, and then you can kill me."

It was a crazy thing to say, but maybe not a crazy thing to say to a crazy man. "All right," he nodded coolly. But he wouldn't let go of the back of my neck, where one of his hands had the skin gathered tight, the way you pick up a kitten. Only a kitten doesn't feel pain.

With his free hand he filled a glass from the pitcher standing on the sideboard, thrust it into my hand. I put my lips to it. The water wouldn't go down. It flushed the back of my mouth, came spilling out again.

He dashed the glass from my hand; it hit the tabletop and smashed into curved pieces, that rocked there without falling off. The radio was still going; a girl was singing "My Heart Goes Pitter Patter." That was the last thing I was aware of. His other hand came up in a curve and met the first one, thumb to thumb—my neck was in between. Then at last the first scream came, the scream that couldn't help me; my whole life seemed to go into it. The second one, that came right after it, couldn't get past any more, his fingers held it in. Nothing could get past after that, not even air. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

Trail's End

Related by Dokes

IT was late when I got back, after checking up on him at the hotel barbershop, and also checking with the phone company to make sure the phone had been put in and my note to her had been delivered. At the former place I'd found out just about what I'd expected to. The barber recognized him from my description. He'd only been able to shave one side of his face. He'd closed his eyes and kept shrinking from the razor. Then the next thing the barber knew, he'd jumped up, torn the apron off, slapped down some change, and lit out like a crazy man.

I asked at the desk if there'd been any messages for me. There'd been a call, the operator told me, but no name was left. I tensed right away; Betty was the only person down here that knew me. "Man's voice or woman's?" A woman's. "How long ago?" Not very long ago, twenty minutes or half-an-hour." She didn't say anything, anything at all?" I pleaded.

Yes, she had, but not to the operator. The operator had heard her whisper "Ritchie, Ritchie," to herself. She remembered that.

I gave her Betty's new number. "Call this quick!" I stood, trembling.

She stopped trying finally. "I keep getting a busy signal—"

"Have the central operator cut in, can't you?"

Next time she turned around she looked frightened herself. "The line's not in use, the receiver's been left off the hook, that's what it is—they're going to notify the police."

"I'm the police," I told her, and I ran out of there for all I was worth.

The taxi had picked up a motorcycle

cop within five minutes, the way it was going. I flashed my badge through the window, motioned him on with a sweep of my arm. A minute later a second one had cut in behind him. The machine couldn't take me through the sand, when it finally bogged down I had to stumble the rest of the way on foot, the two cops behind me. The house showed up black against the white sand, but one of the windows showed a light. One of the cops went around to the back. Myself and the other one took the front door, went up to it and listened. A blurred radio was audible somewhere toward the back. And then suddenly a scream topped the radio. That wasn't blurred, it came through clear as a knife.

I fired six times into the lock. It busted to smithereens and a hot piece jumped up and opened my cheek. I kicked the door in. What was left of the lock stayed fastened to the frame. "Stick out here," I grunted to the cop, "I'll go it alone."

I went stumbling down the black hall and came up against another door. Along with the music, somebody was having a coughing-fit in there and floor-boards were creaking. I pitched at the door and it held. I funneled my hands and roared: "Betty! Draw blood! Cut yourself, make yourself bleed!"

Then I went at it again, like something trying to kill itself. I nearly did, at that. It didn't open, it ripped out and went down flat, with me on top of it like a surf-board-rider. I was stunned for a minute, couldn't see anything.

Then when I did, I saw all that mattered, all I'll ever want to see till the day I die. She was standing upright. She was alone. She was alive. My chin dropped down again, gratefully.

Another door, at the upper end of the room, was standing open and there were frenzied, receding footsteps coming from beyond it. Footsteps that scuffed into the wall and toppled chairs over. I went after them. They were easy to follow, I didn't have time for light-switches. Through a bathroom, then into the blackness of the room behind. Window-glass suddenly exploded in a shattering crash, and a square of gray light showed up. And in it the silhouette of a head and shoulders, rising and dipping over the ledge.

"Stay where you are!" I bellowed, and I heard the hammer of my gun click twice, uselessly, and then the window-opening was blank.

When I got to it and looked he was a black shape growing smaller every instant along the tricky sand. There was a bang from the front door, over to my left, and the black shape spun around, turned toward the house once more as if in ghastly surprise. Then it collapsed into just a smudge on the sand.

SHE was still standing there in the room when I came back again a couple minutes later. Not moving, not seeing anything. The damn radio was still going. Someone was singing "Something Came and Got Me in the

Spring." I went over, snapped it off.

She was holding her arm out, bent at the elbow, the forearm up perpendicular to her face, stiff as a ramrod. There was a short gash across the top of it, with a jagged piece of glass caught between the lips of the shallow wound. Even as I looked it dropped out of its own weight.

She spoke, so then I knew she'd seen me. "Is he gone?" she asked.

I didn't answer. I tied my handkerchief around her bleeding arm. "Thank God you heard me through the door! I didn't save you—this did Gee, you were plucky to do it!"

"I didn't hear you," she said dully, "This must have happened when he bent me backwards over the table and my arm hit the broken glass—"

I led her out of the house with my arm around her. I saw the two cops standing in the middle distance looking down at something, hidden from us by a rise of ground. "Don't look over that way," I said to her.

"What's he done to me?" she asked piteously. "I'll see shadows, be afraid now, all my life."

"No, you won't," I promised "There's still that bright sun and blue sky, and someday soon a guy'll come along that'll be able to tell you all about it better than your old brother can!"



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"Play ball or take one
between the eyes!"

The Balinese Dagger

By
Richard B. Sale

ON a dark and gloomy Monday morning when I was feeling like a frog who'd been mud-packed during a drought, I arrived at the city room of the New York *Chronicle* to engage

in a little more or less honest work which pays me fifty-five smackers a week

I was passing wearily through the outer reception office, when who

should give me the highsign but Dinah Mason, the platinum-haired Westport gal who is the blight of my life and who handles the switchboard of the *Chronicle's* frantic telephone system.

They Were After Daffy Dill's Double-Edged Dagger, Something He Had Never Stopped to Think Could Swing Either Way into a Quick Payoff

"Well, well," she said, cocking her head for a good look at me. "If it isn't Custer's last stand. What poisoned you?"

"Garbo," I said fervently, "never

mix old-fashions and daiquiris. I have learned—to my sad regret—that these concoctions are too, too inimical.”

“Inimical?” she said. “Ha-ha. That reminds me—the Old Man was speaking of you only Saturday and he used the same word. Only he said that Daffy Dill and a news beat were inimical. I don’t know what he could have meant.”

“The Old Man,” I said stiffly, “was just talking through his hair—which he has not in large quantities. I’d like to tell him a thing or two—”

“Why, that’s fine, Rasputin,” Dinah said. “Only ten minutes ago he told me to tell you that he wanted to see you when you came in. Run right along, Daffy darling, and just in case you’re thinking of proposing again, the answer is—as ever—nay, nay.”

I wasn’t doing any good there, so I dragged myself wearily through the city room to the Old Man’s private doghouse and went in without knocking, just to bolster my bravado.

The Old Man was sitting at his desk with his green eyeshade down over his face and his bald head glistening like a snake’s spine. He looked like a little goblin and the moment I came in, he said, “Hello, Daffy,” without glancing up, and then: “Sit down.”

I sat down and lighted a cigarette.

“Daffy,” he murmured, looking grieved, “a very sad thing has happened.”

“Chief!” I said, alarmed. “I’m not fired?”

“Worse than that,” he said. “Solly Sampson is home, fighting with a pair of lavender elephants. He was out on a binge last night and therefore he cannot handle his beat today.”

“Hmm,” I said. “Something tells me I’m the guy behind the eight ball.”

“Being as how you are such an elegant sailor,” the Old Man replied

ghoulishly, “I figured that today you could take over Solly’s department and cover the waterfront. Specifically, the job is this: the S. S. *Aranthic* arrives at ten today from a round-the-world cruise. Aboard her is ye well-known and now retired insurance detective, Kirk Rainsford.”

“Listen, chief,” I said sadly, “I like the sea like a fish loves a solid cement swimming pool. Nix on it. I’ll be sick all the way down the bay. That tug is a gem when it comes to rolling.”

“I was saying that Rainsford is aboard the *Aranthic*.”

“As for him,” I remarked, “I always thought he was a first-class crook. I always figured he cleaned up these insurance things too fast—and always collected the reward. It was my theory that he employed the heisters to lift gems so that they could all split the bonus dough. You’ll remember, he never seemed to catch the crooks, he always returned the gems.”

“Regardless of that,” the Old Man snorted, “here is your story. When Rainsford sailed last January, Mrs. Oliver Lane, widow of the late oil tycoon, commissioned Rainsford to bring her back a two hundred and fifty grand star ruby from India. Today he arrives. A photo of said ruby will be news. Also—how it was bought will be news. You cover—or else.”

I groaned and started to protest, but he held up his hand and looked sternly at me.

HE said, “Daffy—the Oracle has spoken. Now take it on the lam. Jimmy Harris will carry the camera for you. And listen, you imitation pencil-pusher, I want a story this time, understand? Lately, all your yarns turned out to be unborn babes. I want news, not hopes. And so, if

you will now kindly get the hell out of here, I will go back to work."

"Yea, verily," I said, and left.

So there I was at nine-thirty A.M. standing on the stern of the *Aloha* which is the hula-hula handle of the tug that takes the ship news reporters down the bay. Jimmy Harris was with me, his Graflex under his arm. And I was watching the water and beginning to feel peculiar.

But I made the *Aranthic* without mishap. And after a climb up the Jacob's ladder and with the steady deck-boards under my tootsies, I felt a lot better.

We were met at the top of the ladder by a swell-looking blonde, who told us she was Julie Hilton and that she was social director of the ship and could point out all the celebrities aboard.

"We have many famous people aboard, gentlemen," she said, "and I'm sure you'll want to interview them all."

"Madam," I said, stepping forward, "we are not interested in famous people. We write only of the notorious. So if you will kindly lead us to the *ménage* of a former shamus by the name of Kirk Rainsford, I am sure all the boys will not neglect to say that we were greeted on the *Aranthic* by an angel whose only difference from Greta Garbo was that Garbo had an MGM contract. Lead on, Ariel, lead on."

Miss Hilton led on. She was a good sport and she took the kid with a nice smile. She led us to "A" square amidships and there handed us over to the purser and said, "These gentlemen wish to interview Mr. Rainsford."

"Fine," the purser said. "Follow me, please."

We followed him down the port corridor to A-61 and I noticed that an-

other officer brought up the rear. The purser knocked on the door, it opened, and there stood Kirk Rainsford, tall, gray, his eyes as furtive as ever, his thin mouth twisting down in a crooked smile.

"Well!" Rainsford exclaimed heartily. "I've been expecting you boys!"

"Hello, Kirk," I said drily. "The hell you have."

"Daffy Dill," he murmured, staring at me. "My word—what are you doing on the waterfront trek? Given up covering crime?"

"Who, me?" I said. "I'm covering you today, aren't I, friend?"

RAINSFORD laughed. "Still the same suspicious Daffy," he said to everyone at large. "Thought I was a phony, boys, and I think it's broken his heart that he's been wrong."

"No man could be as clever as you've been—honestly," I said, smiling.

He laughed again. "Well, you're frank at least. I like you for that, Daffy. But you're dead wrong."

"How about the ruby?" Jimmy Harris asked. "We want to see that ruby and get our pictures."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," Rainsford said, holding up his hands. "The ruby is in the purser's safe at the moment. He will have to get it—or better still—we had all better adjourn to his office. He has told me that it will be necessary for him to stand armed while the stone is examined. You can understand that, I'm sure."

"Sure!"

"Let's see it!"

"Come on!"

"Just a moment," Rainsford said, grinning. "Gentlemen, this is something in the nature of an event. I have performed my last mission for any client. Rainsford, super-sleuth, is abso-

lutely retiring from this day on. And as a memento of this day, I want you all to have a drink. One of you pour the drinks. The makings are right there."

"I'll handle it," some one said.

"Now let's see," said Rainsford, "there are twelve of you. I've brought back several souvenirs for you. Daggers—symbolic things."

"Yeah?" I asked. "What do you mean—symbolic?"

He stared at me. "Why, Daffy, don't you know. Because a newspaperman will never hesitate to stab you in the back. Here they are, boys, daggers from the island of Bali. One for each of you—and now one drink—"

He sat down and the drinks were passed out, rye and honey and ginger ale. "I give you a toast," he said. "The Lane ruby, with the most perfect star in it ever to be seen here."

We all drank.

It couldn't have taken thirty seconds for even the slowest man to finish. Yet in that time, Kirk Rainsford drank his last drink anywhere.

I took my glass down from my lips and I glanced at Rainsford and started to say something when I saw how waxy white he suddenly was. "Holy—" I started to say, then I stopped and grabbed Jimmy Harris and snapped: "Get a shot of that quick!"

"Shot of what?" Jimmy said, dazed.

"Rainsford!"

"But why—"

"Get the shot, get the shot," I said, biting off the words. "You damned fool—can't you see? *He's dead!*"

II

EVERYTHING blew up. The boys went wild. The flash bulbs began to flare and the cameras went to work and a couple of guys from the

Planet started for the door, but the purser yelled, "Come out of that, you two! Nobody leaves this room!" And when they turned around, they saw he meant it. He had a .32 caliber Colt pistol in his hand.

As for me, I was in no hurry to get home to the Old Man. There was a yarn here, but not just the fact that Kirk Rainsford had kicked in. I went for his glass and I got it first and had a nice long whiff.

Cyanide of potassium. . . .

Right on top of that Brown, of the *Herald*, found the white envelope on Rainsford's dressing table and snatched it up.

"Wahoo!" he said, looking frantic "Here's a letter—for us!"

I snapped: "Let's see it!"

He handed it to me like a hot potato. Printed in ink on the face of the envelope were the words: FOR THE PRESS.

I ripped it open and pulled out the letter inside, unfolded it and read it.

"Aloud," some one demanded.

"Okay," I said. "Here it is: 'Gentlemen of the Press: I have discharged my last obligation and have retired permanently from further detective work. Must a man have a motive for killing himself, other than the fact that he is generally fed up with things? What better stage would I need than this one, surrounded by reporters from all New York's papers. What an event—that I should die by my own hand in your very midst. That is all there is, sirs. I trust I have not dimmed the story of the ruby too much and I bid you all farewell. Kirkland Rainsford.'"

The message had been printed in ink, but the signature was written out in his familiar flourishing hand.

"Let me see that," the purser said. I gave it to him.

While he read it, the reporters kept protesting. "For Pete's sake, mister, we've got a story here! This is hot, man, Rainsford commits suicide—are you gonna keep us here all day?"

"Well," the purser said reluctantly, "this seems rather clear. But just the same, you will each report to my cabin in turn so that I may go over your credentials."

We were herded down to "A" square amidships where the purser's office was and we stood in line. "Take your time," I told Jimmy Harris, so we took the end.

When we finally reached our turn, we both went in and handed over our press cards.

"New York *Chronicle*?" the purser said. "You certainly had enough men covering this boat."

"How come?" I said. "Just the two of us. I'm reporting. He's taking pictures."

"I know that," the purser said. "But how about the other chap?"

"What other chap?"

"Sampson. Solomon Sampson. His card said he was a *Chronicle*—"

"Boy!" I cried.

The purser stared. "What's wrong with you?"

"Solly Sampson is home sick in bed!" I said. "That's why I'm here! This isn't my regular beat! This is Solly's—and if some one else had his card—"

The purser got me. "Come on. They're all still aboard."

WE left the office and ran through the square to the port side of the ship. We were moving slowly up the bay now past the Statue of Liberty toward the Hudson River. We went to the railing where the other officer was standing. "Where did they

go?" the purser asked. "They couldn't get off the ship. Where did those other reporters go?"

"They scattered, sir," the officer said. "They've probably gone up to the radio shack with the news to put it on the air."

"Let's go!"

The four of us went up to the hurricane deck beneath the bridge to the radio shack. It was jammed. All the boys were in there, all crying to the frenzied operators to take the copy they were hastily scribbling.

"Hold it!" the purser snapped. "No messages, Sparks! All you men line up!"

The room became densely quiet with unnatural abruptness.

"How many of you came aboard originally?" he asked them.

"Twelve, friend," I said. "When Rainsford handed out the Balinese daggers, he counted us for twelve."

"There are only eleven now, including yourself."

It was true. But nobody could remember who the twelfth man had been. You know how it is.

"Which one of you poured those drinks?" I asked.

Everybody looked at everybody else and no one answered.

"Sparks," the purser said, "get me New York police headquarters on the ship-to-shore telephone and make it snappy."

He made his call and told the sad tale and then went down to his office and I followed him and asked him if he were sure Mrs. Oliver Lane's ruby was still safe and sound.

He took a look and it was.

Which made the case even screwier.

"Don't worry," he said. "The police will be at every custom gate on the pier. The instant this chap shows that

Solomon Sampson news pass to get out—they'll nab him."

I wasn't so sure. The whole thing was lopsided and it seemed to me that if a guy had been smart enough to murder a man in full company, a mere mob of flatfoots wouldn't bother him much. And still I couldn't get it. The ruby was safe. Rainsford was dead. The suicide note—probably a phony.

But the signature looked genuine. And that meant that Rainsford had been killed by some one who either knew him or knew his fist.

III

WELL, it turned out that my hunch had been pretty good. At one o'clock every passenger had cleaned up his luggage and there wasn't a soul left on the pier except the custom men and the police.

And no one had presented a newsman's pass with the name Solomon Sampson on it.

When the ship had first docked, I went right downtown and wrote the story. Only I had an inside track. I called it murder right from the start because that was the beat. The other poor scribblers didn't know that Solly's pass had been heisted.

After I wrote the yarn, I went back uptown to the dock where I found Lieutenant Bill Hanley who is why the homicide squad of our fair city enjoys such repute.

"Hello, Poppa," I said.

Hanley looked glum. "Lo, Daffy," he said, chewing stolidly upon the unlighted cigar in his mouth, his face as homely as ever. "I suppose you heard."

"Your man got away."

Hanley nodded. "I don't figure it at all. Don't see how else he could 'a' got through."

I said, "Sometimes I wonder, Poppa, how you get along. I'll tell you how I would have worked it."

"How?"

"I'd have done two things. First, I'd have stolen a newsman's pass. Then I'd have procured a custom pass, issued to those who wish to see friends aboard ship before they finish with the customs. All you do is write to the line, ask for a pass, mention the passenger you are going to see, and the pass is sent to you."

"Well?"

"Then—like the killer did—I'd have posed as Solly and gone aboard with the reporters. After killing Rainsford, I'd have used the custom pass to get through the customs after the ship docked. Mighty smooth guy, eh?"

"As simple as that!" Hanley grunted, stomping on his cigar and grinding it to pieces. "There may be a slip there at that. I'll check with the line and see if any passes were issued to friends of Rainsford."

"Did Doc Kyne see Rainsford?" I asked. Dr. Kerr Kyne, the buzzard, was chief medical examiner of New York County.

"Yeah."

"Cyanide."

"Yeah. And no prints on that suicide note, Daffy. Oh, Rainsford was bumped all right. But for God's sake, will you tell me why?"

"I can't tell you," I bluffed, "because it's an exclusive story in the *Chronicle*. The homicide squad should really subscribe. It would help you out no end."

"To no end is more like it, quack," Hanley grunted, grinning at me. "There's no green in my eye, Daffy. You're as dumb as I am on this one."

I said, "That's a fact, Poppa. But

I have got a lead, at least. I'll give you a buzz later."

"Right."

I caught a cab and rode east to Solly Sampson's quarters, an apartment house on East 92nd Street and when I reached there I paid off and went upstairs.

Solly was in bed.

"Oh, Daffy," he groaned, balancing an ice bag on his head, "if you could feel like I feel—it was a red truck—it hit me when I, a sober citizen, stuck my foot off the curb and merely began to—"

I said, "All right, Solly. Skip the act."

"The act?" he said. "I feel terrible."

"Yeah?" I said. "And you'll feel worse when you know what you missed. You were supposed to cover Rainsford's return with the Lane ruby today, weren't you?"

"Yeah, the Old Man said he'd send you."

"He did. And Rainsford was murdered."

SOLLY put down the ice-bag and sat up. "Murder on the high seas!

Twelve years I've been on the waterfront beat and it happens the day I'm blotto!"

"The guy who bumped Rainsford got aboard posing as you—using your pass"

Solly just gaped.

I said, "Now drag your brains together and do a lot of recalling, you cluck. You were taken last night and taken sweetly. And you so young. Where were you?"

Solly said soberly, "Surf Bar, 52nd Street."

"Alone?"

"I was. But another guy bought

me a couple of drinks and then we binged."

"Who was he?"

"I never saw him before. He said his name was George Baker. He was a nice little guy and he sure handed out the drinks."

"He knew who you were, I'll bet?"

"Yeah. He said he recognized me."

I shook my head. "And have you figured out why you were sick today? You were Mickey Finn-ed, you sap, and you aren't out of it yet! He lifted your wallet and got your pass and probably gave you back your wallet. Were you out when you got home?"

"I don't remember a thing. I woke up in bed," Solly said.

I nodded. "I'll see you later," and I left.

I took another cab down to 52nd Street to the Surf Bar which used to be one of the better speakeasies and which hankers to the Broadway crowd now as a respectable bar. It was moderately filled when I got there, mostly women chattering at their afternoon cocktails.

The bartender was an Irishman named Mike McFee. He knew me. I went over to him.

"And how are ye, Daffy Dill?" he asked cheerfully. "I ain't seen ye hereabouts since Hector was a pup! What'll it be?"

"Info from you," I said quietly. "You know Solly Sampson."

"Shure I do. He's in here all th' time."

"He was here last night. Were you on?"

"Shure."

"There was another guy with him. Who was it?"

McFee looked at me and then moved his eyes away. "Shure and I don't know, Daffy. That's the truth." He

coughed behind his hand. "Somethin' happen to Solly?"

"Solly's all right. He got a Mickey Finn in one jigger last night. Did you slip it to him?"

"Glory be to God, 'twasn't me, sir!"

"All right," I said. "Then quit the kidding. This other bird came in last night. You know who he is. He asked you to point out Solly Sampson when Solly came in. You did. Then he proceeded to binge with Solly and he took Solly home. Now, who in hell was it?"

"I—I can't be a snitch, Daffy."

I said soberly, "Listen, Mike, there's murder in this. Did you ever hear of an accessory before the fact being just as guilty as—"

"Holy Peter!" McFee whispered. "I had nothin' to do with it, Daffy! He jest came in and says for me to point out who Solly Sampson is. Faith, I didn't know—"

"Never mind what you didn't know," I said. "What do you know? That's the catch . . . come on, Mike, who was the bird? Loosen up . . ."

"All right," he said finally, taking a deep breath. "It was Leo Stivers."

"Fine," I said blankly. "And who the hell is Leo Stivers?"

"That I wouldn't know," McFee replied in a low voice. "But him it was with Solly last night."

"Don't you know anything about him?"

"He runs a sortapawnshop and jewelry store on Broadway between 38th and 39th Streets."

I said, "That's got it, Mike."

IV

I WAS walking out of the Surf Bar vestibule when a man came up to me and said, "Have you got a light, pal?" He was short and skinny

and he had pop-eyes. He wore a salt and pepper suit and a lemon-colored straw hat and there was an unlighted cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth. I'd never seen him before in my life.

"Sure," I said. I took out a clip of matches and handed him it. He struck a match and lighted his cigarette and as he handed the clip back he said, "Daffy Dill, ain't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Crime reporter on the *Chronicle*."

"Are you telling or asking?"

"Telling. You were on the *Aranthic* this morning when Rainsford bumped off. He gave all the reporters each a dagger. Balinese belly-rippers. You got one. Have you still got it? It's worth money."

"I've got it," I said. "How'd you know all this?"

"It's in the papers. Every damn reporter wrote about it. You want to sell your dagger?"

"What's it worth?"

"That depends. Have you got it on you?"

"Sure I have it," I said. "Right here."

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "Now get this straight and don't pull a phony. There's a brown coupé at the curb behind me. There's a guy in it with a .38 pistol silenced, un'er-stand? Play ball or take one between the eyes!"

I stood still for a moment and I let my eyes wander to the car at the curb. The man who sat in it grinned at me in a nice palsy-walsy way and just over the edge of the car window I saw the blunt cylindrical muzzle of a silencer. I said: "What's my move?"

"Get in."

I walked over to the curb and climbed into the car, edging under the

steering wheel close against the man with the gun.

"Well, if it ain't Mac," he grinned, smelling of garlic. "We had quite a time this morning, didn't we?"

I stared at him. "I get it. You're the guy who poured the drinks."

"Now ain't you the detective!"

"You're the guy who slipped Rainsford the cyanide and—"

"Quiet, Mac," the gunman said, leering. "Suppose a flatfoot heard you! Why, he might arrest me!"

"Skip that stuff," said the man in the straw hat, getting in under the wheel. "Get the dagger and see that Dill doesn't pull a sandy."

"Well," I said, "I'm learning. I don't know who you are, but this apeman with the gun is Leo Stivers."

The driver laughed. "Way off, Dill, way off. I'm Leo Stivers. Now doesn't that cover it all nicely? Oh, you're a smart egg, even if you haven't figured it out. Got that dagger, Porky?"

PORKY reached over into my inside coat pocket and pulled the dagger out. As a matter of fact, it was the first time I had seen it since Rainsford handed them out. It had a sheath like a derringer. Sounds funny, but that's the way it was.

Black wood, shaped like a pistol. That was to take up the curvature of the blade itself which was a nasty thing about eight inches long and shaped like the fang of a saber-toothed tiger with a four-inch grip of polished teakwood. There were three thin white lines painted around the grip. Stivers and Porky saw the lines and sighed. "Well," said Stivers, "that's a load off my mind. That's the one, Porky. No mistake. Sit tight."

In a few minutes we pulled up in front of a combination pawn and jew-

elry shop with the name L. STIVERS on the ripped awning.

I said, "If this isn't a fence, I'll pass up my two weeks in August."

"You ain't takin' no vacation in August, Mac," Porky remarked grimly. "You ain't goin' no place from now on. Inside and watch your P's and Q's."

We went in. Stivers had to unlock the store which made it plain he and the Porky specimen were the only two in on the thing. We went through the dusty imitation of a shop into the rear room where I was jammed into a creaky chair.

"Dill," Stivers said coolly, watching me, "know what's going to happen to you?"

I looked at the pistol in Porky's hand. "I'm beginning to get the idea."

"The bump," Stivers smiled. "Pal, it's kind of queer in a way. We let Rainsford put the finger on you himself before he died."

"Don't get you."

"Then maybe I'll get big-hearted and tell you. I guess you've figured it all the way now anyhow. You see, pal, when Rainsford took that cruise to bring back a two hundred and fifty grand ruby for Mrs. Lane, him and me got together and did some figuring. We figured that if the customs knew he was going after a ruby like that one, all on the level and for a rich dame like Mrs. Lane—they'd think he was all on the level, see? So we got the idea of him smuggling in some rubies on the side for a nice profit."

Porky grunted. "Listen hard, Mac. It's your last bedtime story."

Stivers went on: "So I put up fifty grand and Rainsford put up fifty grand and he bought them rubies for us to cut here and sell—without any duty."

"Sure," I said. "I get the rest . . .

you'd had letters from him. You wrote a suicide note and forged his fist to it. Then you went out and slipped Solly Sampson a Mickey Finn last night and lifted his pass. Plug-ugly here used the pass to get on the *Aranthic* this morning. You'd fixed it with Rainsford to hide the rubies in the handle of a dagger, with three white lines on the grip. So Rainsford handed out a lot of nice presents and gave me the ruby dagger for me to smuggle — unknowingly — through the customs."

"Keep talking," Stivers said. "It's a shame to have to bump a guy like you."

"PORKY," I said, "was to spot a reporter who got the ruby dagger. Me. But you double-crossed Rainsford. As soon as Porky knew who had the ruby dagger, he slipped Rainsford the poison and there was only you and your hundred grand worth of rubies, with Porky getting a small cut. Porky got through the customs himself with a regular custom pass, procured before the ship arrived. You tailed me and first chance you had you herded me."

"Right," said Stivers sadly. "So you see, it ain't really our fault at all. Rainsford put the finger on you when he gave you the Balinese dagger with the white lines."

I grinned. "He never did like me."

"Stand up."

"Wait a minute." I stood up, feeling the muzzle of Porky's pistol against my back. "Before you two gents commit a little murder, maybe we'd better settle one thing."

"Yeah?" Stivers stared at me.

"Yeah," I said. "Did you ever consider the fact that Rainsford might double-cross you?"

They looked at each other. "Go on, Dill."

"I wouldn't know myself," I said, "but I have a funny feeling that your rubies aren't in the grip of that knife."

I was stalling. There wasn't any reason why they wouldn't be. But I was trying to get Porky close up against me while Stivers broke the grip.

It worked.

Stivers grabbed up the black sheath and pulled the dagger out of it, his eyes half-closed as he glared at it. Behind



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me, Porky shifted nervously. I could feel the muzzle of the rod in my back. It wasn't nice. It made me shiver. I'm not the kind of nitwit who can laugh off a clip of slugs all ready to go places.

"What about it, Leo?" Porky asked hoarsely.

"I'll see."

Stivers stuck the hooked blade of the dagger under his heel and bore down. The blade held, but the teakwood—it was hollowed out—split loudly and the grip, surprisingly, came away in Stivers' hand.

He gaped at it, his pop-eyes working grotesquely. "Empty! It's empty!"

"What?" Porky cried.

THAT was the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party. Poppa Hanley had taught me the trick and I used it. The muzzle of that pistol was close against my back on the left side. I stiffened my arm, holding my elbow straight down and I whirled like a top.

My elbow hit the barrel of the gun and jerked it away from me toward the right, while my own right hand came around in order and grabbed

Porky's gun wrist. Poppa Hanley's next instruction had been to bite.

I bit.

I dug the old canines into Porky with all the ferocity of a rattlesnake with St. Vitus dance and he yelled like a tortured banshee and slipped the .38 to the floor. Then I crossed a feeble left to his chin, because I was off balance, but as it pushed him back from me I took a nose-dive for the floor and grabbed that gun like the farmers grabbed their AAA checks.

Stivers was a quick boy. Quicker than I gave him credit for. I'd expected him to have been slowed down by the fact that Rainsford had double-crossed him—which was as much a surprise to me as anyone—but not Leo.

He had a revolver off his hip in seconds and he took one shot at me just about the time I descended for the pistol.

He missed me and he fired again, twice. I don't know how it happened. Maybe a ricochet. But Porky took one of those bullets below the stomach and fell over right on top of me.

He was the heaviest and safest shield a man could have had. I saw Stivers'

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legs below the table and I started peppering them myself, surprised at first at the quiet action of the silenced .38 gun.

"Get up, get up off him, you fool!" Stivers yelled. "Give me a chance at him!"

But Porky wasn't getting up for no one no how on account he had a stomachache.

Stivers started to run around the table and I let one go at his face. It missed by a hair. He must have heard the crack of the bullet passing. He turned stark white and backed off crying, "Porky! Porky!"

Then he started to lam.

By this time, I rolled out from under Porky, covered with the triggerman's own blood and I went to my knees with my head just over the top of the table and the .38 ready for business when Stivers—on his way out into the front part of the store—stopped dead, staring.

"Drop it, rat," some one outside said.

Stivers was too panicky to drop it. He fired his gun once, wildly.

HE was answered by a single crack from a Police Positive and he caught the slug in the most painful place, the kneecap, and crumbled like the 1929 stock market.

I didn't need a map then. I knew it was Poppa Hanley. Kneecaps are his favorite targets.

He came in, roaring, "Daffy! Daffy, are you all right?"

"Yea, verily," I said, sighing at the sight of the shambles. "Would you mind, Mr. Houdini, telling an ignorant reporter how you got to this garden of Eden?"

Hanley stuck an unlighted cigar in his mouth and put up his gun: "Hell," he grunted stolidly. "I been following you ever since you said you had a lead, and it's been a nice merry-go-round. When these two Pollyannas picked you up, I figured your lead was too hot. And as for the front door—why do you figure I carry this ring of keys?"

"Well," I said, "congratulations. The big one slipped Rainsford the cyanide. The little one engineered the whole thing."

"What's this broken dagger?" asked Hanley gruffly. "They were looking for the rubies, hah?"

"Hey, Fido Vance," I lied, "how come you know that, too?"

"Know it?" he said, his eyes twinkling. "Wasn't I the guy who found a stack of smuggled stones in the heels of Rainsford's shoes? Him and these scrambled yeggs were in cahoots on a little side-smuggling. They double-crossed Rainsford *after* he had double-crossed them!"

I sighed.

"Poppa, you get too smart. You are very bad for my ego. And now if you will kindly pass the smelling salts I will get to a telephone and inform the Old Man that he has something in the nature of a small scoop."

Things like that make the Old Man almost human. . . .



Backfire

By

Robert E. Larkin

CRIME
F
D W
SHORT



"Do the job right and there's another three hundred that goes with that"

THREE times John Cramer read the letter that lay on the desk before him. Three times he cursed the sender of the letter, Peter Rush, the founder of the Land Owner's Loan Company, and Cramer's senior partner.

Why, he wondered, did Rush have to pick now, of all times, to retire? Cramer fidgeted. One good break was all he needed in the stock market. He could then replace the shortage and no one would be the wiser. But now—he cursed Rush again, and for the fourth time reread the letter.

It was short and to the point. The auditors would arrive on the morrow

at the request of Peter Rush to go over the company's books.

Six years had passed since that day Rush had taken him into the firm. Six years. It had been a long, hard climb, but he had made it. He looked at the lettering on the glass panel of his office door: "J. Cramer, Vice President and Treasurer." Again he cursed Rush, as his mind went back over the years.

Unknown to Rush, Cramer had once been one of the slickest confidence men

John Cramer Was One of the Slickest Confidence Men in the Game Until He Tried a Fast Play in a New Racket

in the game. At the time Rush offered to take him into the firm, things were going bad. People no longer had ready cash to be taken in by a n y cock-and-

bull story that was put up to them. Hence, he had snatched at Rush's offer like a drowning man, sensing an easy mark in the trusting loan company's president.

And now Rush had decided to retire and take things easy. It had been a sudden decision. With his retirement in mind, he had made arrangements to turn the firm over to Cramer, taking a large amount of the working capital and the rest in payments, which could be decided on at a future date.

Rush's decision, however, came at a time which threatened to play havoc with Cramer's plans. For three years, now, Cramer had been "borrowing" from the firm's ready cash, faking entries in the books, always chasing that elusive "strike" in the market. Time after time, he had taken company funds to play a hunch, with the result that he became more deeply imbedded in the clutching mire of debt.

Thoughts drummed at Cramer's mind as he sat there in his office. Where was he going to get twenty-one thousand dollars before tomorrow? Of course, there was the joint insurance policy he and Rush had taken out. But a loan on the insurance would still fall short of the necessary amount. He needed all of it.

He thought of the trusting Rush who had insisted that the policy be taken out at once, and in favor of either, should anything befall the other. The policy was for twenty-five thousand dollars. He must have that money.

If anything should happen to Rush before the auditors came in the morning, the examination would be put off long enough to give him time to collect the insurance and replace the money.

Cramer had not flinched at the thought of murder. Since first reading the letter he had given it much thought, but was at a loss to find a means of carrying out the plan. His glance strayed to the office window. He stiffened suddenly. A car standing on the opposite side of the street caught and held his attention.

He remembered the auto show he and Rush had visited several months before, and how they had taken a liking for the same car. Both had ordered one of exactly the same model in every detail.

Rising quickly, his eyes were cold and expressionless as fish eyes as he went over his suddenly formulated plan. Satisfied, he strode to the hat rack, donned his hat and left hurriedly.

CRAMER brought his car to a stop before one of a long row of brownstone houses in the poorer part of the city. The house, a very familiar one to Cramer, was the headquarters of one of the city's most daring auto theft rings, and known to very few persons.

Cramer mounted the half dozen steps and knocked on the heavy door. A slot opened and a pair of eyes surveyed him. The slot closed and the door opened and he was ushered into the presence of the big shot of the "Hot Car" ring.

Marty Reeher, seated behind a battered desk in an equally battered chair, was a slim, nattily dressed man of forty with a small, brown mustache waxed at the ends. Nothing in his appearance betrayed him for what he was, as he deliberately studied Cramer's heavy form for several seconds.

"You look like you're in the money,

Evans," he finally drawled. "Things must be looking up these days."

"The name is not Evans, now," Cramer told him shortly. "And I didn't come here to pass the time of day."

"But I thought you were out of the racket," Reecher returned questioningly. "What business can you have with me?"

"Whether I'm in or out of the racket is nobody's business but mine," Cramer snapped. "But let it pass I'm here on business. Of course, you remember a little case some seven or eight years ago in which my testimony saved you from a little stretch up the river?"

"So what?" Reecher demanded. "You don't have to remind me of it. What do you want?"

Cramer drew a sheaf of bills from his breast pocket and tossed them on the desk in front of Reecher.

"There's two hundred there," he remarked as Reecher picked up the bills and started to count them. "I want a little job done on my car. Do the job right and there's another three hundred that goes with that."

"For five hundred dollars I'd build you a new car," Reecher assured him. "Whatever it is, you can consider it already done."

EIGHT thirty the next morning found Cramer bringing his car to a stop in front of his partner's home. Rush's car, an exact duplicate of his own, was already parked there. He thought the setting perfect as he switched off the ignition and started to climb out.

He was too intently thoughtful, however, to notice that his partner's car, as usual, partly obstructed the driveway, a habit formed by the aging

Rush who much preferred walking up and down the less tiring, gentle slope of the drive to that of the several short flights of stone steps.

Cramer reached under the dash before stepping from his car and threw a small, cleverly hidden switch; the switch which set into motion the primary machinery in his plot to do away with his partner.

Anyone pressing down on the starter after that switch was closed would be blown to bits by the bomb which had been planted under the driver's seat. Reecher had done his work. How well it had been done would be known shortly.

He purposely left his key in the ignition switch. One glance into Rush's car showed him that, as usual, Rush had also left his key in the ignition lock.

Cramer did not knock as he entered his partner's home. And he found his partner seated comfortably at his breakfast.

"Well, John," the senior partner looked up as Cramer came over to the table and stood there, "this will be about the last time we will be going to the office together; and in a way I'm rather glad. Had breakfast?"

"Yes, thanks, Pete. And as for the office," he turned and started toward the door, "I'm afraid I can't wait for you this morning. I just thought I'd drop in to see if I could make you change your mind about retiring. If your mind is made up, though, my stopping here has been of no consequence."

"That's right, John," Rush assured him somewhat wistfully. "I'm through for good. I'm not getting any younger, you know. I'm going to have a little fun while I can."

Cramer nodded. "In that case, I'll

be going. The auditors will be at the office by the time I get there, and I want to give them all the help I can." He started to leave, but turned suddenly. "By the way, you left your key in your car again. I saw it as I came in. That's a good way to have your car stolen."

Rush grinned sheepishly. "I guess you're right, John. I'll try to remember it after this."

"The damned, complacent-faced old fossil," Cramer murmured as he closed the door and started back to the street.

"Just wait till he steps on that starter."

"Dad," Mr. Rush's eldest boy came into the room and stopped beside his father, "Sis wanted to get out with the roadster, but your car was blocking the drive. So I ran your car around in back of Mr. Cramer's. If he takes your car by mistake, you can tell him about it when you get down to the office."

"You shouldn't have done that without first telling—"

A deafening explosion obliterated the rest of the sentence.

Super-Sucker Lists

MANY swindlers conceal the nature of their operations by masquerading as legitimate business men, and their methods are often characterized by a high degree of efficiency. In order to avoid loss of time and effort in trying to swindle persons who do not respond well to their schemes, these efficient swindlers frequently make use of information which sells for a high price and is obtained in the form of super-sucker lists. The information contained therein lists the follies, and vices, as well as much of the history of the prospective victims so that schemes may be laid to trap them with a finesse which would otherwise be impossible. This information is gathered from many sources of which the best is that which is given by disreputable psychologists who are in a position to reveal secrets wholesale. Persons who have been swindled before, and still have some money left, are regarded as being the cream of the crop. Thousands of names are frequently purchased by the swindler. One Wall Street gang listed as among their assets one of these super-sucker lists which they had bought for \$100,000. It was a gold mine of information concerning 70,000 persons.

—John Berry.



The Green Fingers of Death

By
Tom Curry



*Detective Devrite Had
Seen Their Marks on His
Friend's Throat, and Knew
They Were Reaching for
His Own, Hungrily, Avidly*

GEORGE DEVRITE stared at the water-washed corpse on the morgue sliding slab. The head was rigidly back so he could see the long green-tinted fingermarks on the throat.

"There," he thought, "am I, save for luck and the grace of heaven." For Devrite was a secret agent of the New York police and the dead man, picked up in the lower harbor as the tide swept him to sea, had also been one of Inspector Hallihan's operatives. And Devrite knew that if Waite had

"What is it? Is Herman
with you?"

then been standing looking at a brutally murdered Devrite, Waite would have felt the same burning rage he did, a desire to avenge a comrade's death.

Hallihan, large and favoring a fireman's haircut, put his curly head to one side as though viewing a choice painting. He clinched a burnt-out cigar stub in his lined Irish mouth. He felt as did Devrite about this murder. He was furious and wished to get his hands on the killer, but he was a cool man of long police experience and knew as did Devrite they must keep their heads. He was giving Devrite a private showing of Waite's remains. Devrite worked under cover, was unknown to detectives as well as criminals.

"I should hate," remarked the inspector, "to have whoever did that get his hands on *my* throat when I was down. There's not another substantial injury on the body, the life was choked out of him. See how deep the tips drove in—takes strength to do that."

Devrite held his nerves in iron control; there was a grim set to his lips and he knew he would go the limit to capture the killer of Waite. "And the green tint where the nails drove in?" he asked.

"Part of the discoloration."

Devrite shook his head as though he did not believe that. His lean form was bent, hands clasped at his back. "I'm not so sure. If we could find the spot where the murder occurred—"

They left the body and retired to a police room.

"Here's all I've got," said Hallihan rapidly. "About a week ago a Mrs. Evans came to us and asked for a confidential interview. She was worried about her son Robert, a teller

in the United Bank. It sometimes happens a mother comes to us in a last desperate attempt to save a child. She couldn't say what she feared, but he was staying out late and she thought he was gambling; though it was his general manner which frightened her so she came to us. She believed bad companions were corrupting him and was willing to place him in small trouble to save him from worse."

"You must give her credit for that."

"Yes. Most let it slide or are blind until too late. I gave the report to Waite. He didn't call in for several days but I thought nothing of it since you fellows sometimes go weeks without reporting. Yesterday his corpse was picked up in the harbor—the medical examiner says it's been in the water three or four days anyway. Probably it sank, snagged and then washed out. That's all I know; the only link is Evans, the bank teller."

"Let's hope," murmured Devrite, "for his mother's sake that she didn't come to the police too late. If Robert Evans had any part in Waite's murder—"

Hallihan shrugged. "He burns," he said tersely.

Devrite left with Evans's business and home addresses in his trained memory. He never carried papers that might embarrass him.

It was a bright morning; the pavement was warm under his soft shoes. In the Wall Street bank he picked out Robert Evans in a cage marked with his name. Evans was 24, slight of body. Devrite kept away, but could see dark circles of dissipation under Evans's eyes.

Later he glimpsed the mother, a pretty woman of fifty—he was down the hall on the second floor of the

Washington Heights apartment when Robert came home that evening. "Hello, son," the mother cried, throwing her arms about him.

IT would, thought Devrite, be a terrible thing if she had fingered her only son as a murderer—perhaps Evans was too darkly entangled for saving. Devrite hoped to help her. It was imperative that swift action be taken, however; once hooked a young man might slide with breath-taking speed to the bottom. His wish to aid Mrs. Evans was a further reason for solving the killing of Waite.

Through the door he heard a few thin words: "I've got to dress in a hurry," said Robert. And shortly after he appeared clad in a tuxedo, and his mother said wistfully, "I'll wait up for you."

Devrite followed Evans. It was 7:45 and evening was falling on Broadway as he "put" Robert into a cabaret on the Great White Way. Devrite took a small side table set a step above the dance floor surrounded by tables and on which a buxom girl in scant clothing was singing a song. The agent had a full view of Robert Evans at a table for four with another man and two pretty women. The swing music of the band sent the couples dancing on the polished floor.

So far it was harmless enough. A young man sowed his oats or they cropped out later at inconvenient points. The girls were chorus variety, not inherently depraved; the pleasure in such a hot spot consisted of spending money and believing oneself a jaded youth-about-town.

Devrite, cigarette trailing smoke between his long fingers, observed the second man. He was tall and broad at the shoulders; high cheekbones and

depth of eye-socket gave him a distinguished foreign look. And when Devrite caught some of his words the tall man spoke with a German accent. Through a burst of other sounds he heard one of the girls cry: "Oh, Count von Hult, you're so funny!"

"Count" von Hult—he wondered if the rangy man was really a noble. Von Hult was elegant in full dress with white tie and boiled shirt, patent leather slippers gleaming with the sheen of his carefully plastered black hair.

It was a tiresome wait. Devrite's ears buzzed with talk and vibrations of swing music; he ordered drink after drink to justify holding his table. It was 11 P.M. when the party left but instead of breaking up they repaired to a smaller nightclub.

Close to 1 A.M. they dropped the girls at a cheap hotel. In a following taxi Devrite trailed them up Fifth Avenue to the 80's. There were many private homes left here and von Hult and Evans stopped at one. Devrite shrank back in the seat as the count stared at the passing cab. He let his driver go on around the corner, dismissed the taxi and strolled back—the cab von Hult and Evans had come in was gone and so were the two men.

Devrite walked slowly toward Madison. There was a high grille gate at the far side of the house into which his quarry had gone. Cars hummed on the avenues and a passing man's feet clacked in the side street. Devrite paused just an instant to try the gate but it was locked so he kept on, turned left on Madison and found a delivery entry. He could work through the rear courts—some of the houses retained vestiges of yards.

Coming to the graystone by this back route he could look along a nar-

row alley with the house to the right and the high blank stone wall of an apartment on the left and see the front gate.

Devrite was now suspicious. He thought it strange that a man of von Hult's evident wealth should associate with a poorly paid young bank teller.

He wondered if Waite had discovered von Hult—or did Robert Evans have other companions. This might be a blind trail but his interest in "Count" von Hult justified fuller investigation. The house windows were barred—usual here. He passed along the narrow cement walk; there was the dark recess of a side door and he paused to crane up at a dim-lit window—

The pain was excruciating, the pain of that sharp pistol barrel raking down his temple and cheek, mashing his upper lip against his teeth; the shock to his nervous system was so sudden his cry choked off in his throat and warm blood spurted inside his macerated mouth.

For a moment he fought by instinct, the instinct an animal has to defend itself. Then he saw the dark blur of his attacker and just managed to get up his forearm between his head and the again descending pistol barrel. He realized he had to do with a criminal; an honest man on guard would not have attacked without warning in that virulent fashion—had Devrite not paused to stare up at the window the steel would have hit him square in the temple and he would now be through, finished, like Waite—

Trained in jujutsu and the fine tricks of disarming an opponent Devrite could act as well as think with lightning speed. The man evidently wished to knock him out and not disturb the neighborhood. A guttural German

curse—Devrite spoke it as well as French and Spanish—told him he was dealing with a friend of von Hult's.

"You sneag!" growled his enemy. "I seen you try de gate—"

II

IN the light shaft from the window which hit the stone wall of the apartment next door he saw the frowning face of his adversary. For the moment, Devrite was underdog but he had stopped that second crushing blow and his wits had come back. He was a much faster man than the thickset German; his right hand caught the automatic pistol, thumb ramming between the flat hammer all the way back and the firing-pin of the cartridge.

He fell away, pulling the German with him and, landing on his spine, shot his bent legs into the other's belly, carrying him on over. Since Devrite held to the gun, the German was violently slewed around and his head struck the house wall; he grunted and jerked at Devrite and the secret agent had his thumb torn as it ripped out from the hammer.

Devrite was down; he realized the German would fire as soon as he could raise the gun muzzle. His hands clawed at his enemy's right arm—the German was coming to a sitting posture from which he could shoot. Devrite heard his teeth grit together and he threw his body weight in as the German pulled the trigger.

The big automatic roared in Devrite's eyes and he felt the impact of ravished air. It stunned him. He found he still held to the German's right wrist, pressing it in, but the arm was limp and the man's head dropped on his breast—he had pulled the trigger to kill Devrite, but the secret

agent's swift move had caused the slug to enter the gunman's vitals.

Devrite came up on his knees, shaking his head from side to side, ears roaring. To him the explosion had seemed shattering; he believed it must wake the dead to say nothing of sleepers in surrounding houses. But as the seconds ticked off he heard no cries for police—he realized that in a motor-ridden city cracking explosions passed as backfires. The public was used to detonating reports through the streets. The gun muzzle had been pressed against the German and the clothing would act partially as a silencer.

He was piqued. More than anything he had wished to avenge Waite, and to do all he could to aid Mrs. Evans. This untoward incident might well ruin his plans, warn the killers—

He swung as the window slid up overhead. Von Hult, a pearl-handled pistol in hand, looked out and demanded harshly in German: "What is it? Is Herman with you?"

"Excellency," replied Devrite humbly—he knew von Hult must have been aware of that guard or he would not have used the German, and Devrite answered in that tongue—"Herman is not here."

"So, he's at the place then. He sent you to guard me. Very well. Did you fire a shot?"

"No, sir," replied Devrite gutturally. "A car passing backfired." He looked up at the dark shadowed face—the window light touched Devrite but the dead man was well out of von Hult's angle of vision.

"Stay close," ordered von Hult in his Junker tone of command—he spoke as a highborn one to a serf. "I will need you." He drew back and shut the window.

Devrite inhaled a deep breath of the cooling night air. For the moment he had staved off exposure. But the guard's disappearance would alarm von Hult sooner or later. It was evident the count had an aide named Herman who supplied henchmen all of whom von Hult did not know.

He meant to solve Waite's murder; and he could not get out of his mind the figure of Mrs. Evans who might suffer the worst of human agonies over her son. He was urged on by a burning, vital necessity; speed was now essential because of the dead guard.

Why had not Waite's capture warned von Hult—provided von Hult's bunch was responsible for the agent's death? The German he had collided with might have been set because of Waite but they evidently were persistent with Robert Evans. He concluded that they could not have known Waite was a police agent, if they killed him.

He bent over the dead German, hoisted the heavy body on his back and staggered to the rear. He went through a gate and down steps, bent double under the load. Hidden from view by two converging walls he switched on his fountain-pen flashlight. The German was coarse of feature, of peasant stock. Devrite's beam stopped at the thick hands: he had a distinct mental shock as he saw the fingernails were stained green.

IN the pockets he found a ring with several keys attached. His own pants were dirty from his hand-to-hand scrap in the alley; he threw off his coat and put on the German's worn one that did not match his trousers, dropping the Luger pistol in a pocket. He hurried back to the side door.

"I may need you," von Hult had said. Devrite looked at the door—his fingers touched the keys and he drew out the ring. The third one he tried fitted the spring lock and he slipped inside.

He was in a small hall, looking about. Ahead was a short flight of steps and he could hear von Hult's voice raised in anger. To right and left were closed doors—there would be house servants but they would sleep on the top floor.

He started on tiptoe up the stairs; as his eyes came level with the story on which was the living room, he saw von Hult's long legs flash past an open double door. He crouched and listened.

"You haff gone so far you vill now do as I order," declared von Hult. Devrite glimpsed the powerful figure; Robert Evans huddled in a corner of the davenport. "Fife thousand you owe me from cards. This iss the way you can repay. A gentleman pays his debts, Evans."

"I've thought it over—and I won't do it!"

A bank holdup? wondered Devrite. Abetted by the teller? But von Hult's next words made that seem improbable.

"Dumbhead," snarled von Hult, red with fury—he stood before Evans shaking a fist in his face. "Now, hear: tomorrow you stard or else—" Von Hult broke off, the implied threat more ominous than any he might have uttered. "I am not the sord of man who can be cheated."

Devrite was already convinced of that. Evans, facing von Hult's towering rage, muttered, "All right—I'll do it."

The spy shrank, pressing against the rounded step edges as von Hult swept

through the double doors and went up front. He heard the sliding metallic sound of a dial telephone. Von Hult spoke to the party he obtained in German: "*Ja*, bring it yourself, Herman," and hung up.

Devrite backed down the stairs; it was time to call Hallihan. Evans must be trailed and checked at whatever he was about to attempt for von Hult. That was obvious.

It was fortunate he left when he did, for he was hardly outside when von Hult came down and opened the side door. "You are ready?" he said in German. "Your boss Herman is coming. After he arrives the young man inside will leave for his home uptown. Get out in the street and follow him. If he goes anywhere but to his apartment you will instantly put a bullet through his heart and make your escape. You understand?"

"*Ja*, Excellency—"

VON HULT closed the door. Devrite rapidly crossed down through the back court and hurried up Madison to an all night drugstore where there was a phone booth. He was glad to be out of the side alley before Herman came; von Hult might not know all the men but Herman certainly would. And he was also glad for Mrs. Evans's sake that he had been there in place of the German guard when von Hult gave that order to kill Robert in case of a false step.

Hallihan was usually on tap, often slept in his obscure office down the street from Headquarters, outwardly an importer of beaded goods but actually the main receiver of reports made by such agents as Devrite.

"I haven't much time," said Devrite quickly. "Please radio Berlin on a

Count von Hult." He gave an accurate description of the man, told Hallihan of the dead German in the court, the address of the graystone house. "And," he added, "send a man up to arrest Evans at his apartment."

"Ugh!" grunted Hallihan in distaste. "So he's in for it? I hate to think of his mother, after she came to us—"

"This is preventive. I'm sure of nothing yet except that von Hult's up to some game involving Evans. I'm going to find out what it is. Von Hult must be watched continually from now on."

"I'll send a shadow up there at once," Hallihan promised.

Devrite hung up and hurried back to the side street. He took up his post across from the graystone—von Hult had so ordered. Soon a closed car drew up and a huge man in a dark suit and cap got out of the driver's seat. He went to the door, carrying a brown bag some twelve inches square.

The secret agent had the Luger in his pocket. He thought he might need it when he saw Herman's bulk—for he was practically sure this was the man von Hult had called. And it was vital for Devrite to finish the job; he must obtain evidence enough so Hallihan could send in the regular police. As yet he was not certain of anything, save that von Hult was a criminal.

Von Hult came to the door answering Herman's ring. They exchanged a few words Devrite could not overhear. The door closed. The giant German puffed down the steps and entered his coupé. The starter buzzed. Devrite ran down the side street as fast as he could go. Herman's car went east and the secret agent was

gasping for wind as he came to the avenue corner and jumped into a taxi waiting for a fare.

Herman drove to Avenue A. Devrite paid off his cab at the corner and watched the hulking German unlock the front door of a dirty brick front. Devrite approached. The neighborhood was dark and deserted at this hour, the street lights seemed too feeble to dispel the gloom cast by the derelict buildings. The one into which Herman had gone had evidently in bygone years been a small factory but the downstairs windows now were boarded over and it appeared deserted.

III

IT was George Devrite's business to investigate such places. It might be simply Herman's living place; or it might be his business quarters. It was imperative that Devrite obtain complete evidence to turn over to Hallihan. The police could not crash into every building that looked slightly suspicious. Devrite must get in and see what went on inside.

He made a quick survey of the surrounding buildings, all of three-story height. There was a convenient alley two houses down which led him to the old-fashioned fire escapes in the rear. He started up, able to see thin edges of golden light around dark drawn shades of Herman's second floor.

It had been a hard and rapid run for him; his mind was weary from the long strain. Aware, too, that if he wished to hook these fish he must complete the angling so Hallihan would know what he was after, he pushed swiftly on. It was tantalizing to feel that he might almost have the murderer of Waite in sight; he *must* solve that. And if he could land von Hult on a

criminal charge the scare might be enough to save Robert Evans. Deep inside he hoped to accomplish these two objectives. Everything he had he was throwing into this case.

Catlike in his movements, a lone hunter used to running terrific risks to abet the Law, he went up three ladderlike flights to the roof, two buildings down from Herman's.

He paused to listen before he stepped on the cracked tarpaper topping, paused to listen and peer into the gloom. Low parapets separated the different houses; beyond glowed the bright lights of Broadway, with twenty thousand policemen on tap but Devrite dared not call one to assist him directly, since he was an undercover man and could not expose himself to friend or foe.

He was on the roof next Herman's, keeping close to the wall so there would be no creaking under his soft feet. He slowed and a hand gripped the Luger butt. Now he was over on Herman's roof. He listened again and the low hum of a motor with stamping sounds caused his eyes to widen—must be Herman's place of business.

Then he saw that open trapdoor. No light came from it. The opening led into Herman's attic. It was a warm night and such vents were often left for air. He crept toward it, foot by foot, and cautiously peered over, saw the ladder leading down. It was too good to miss; he descended, found himself standing in total darkness. The motor and stampings were plainer—a crack of light showed under a door ahead and he started on tiptoe toward it—

The electric light blinded him as the switch clicked on, flooding up the tiny room where he was trapped.

"Throw up yer hands!"

Devrite obeyed for he had heard the pistol cock; his eyes turned slowly to look into the hard face of a small man of obvious Teutonic blood, holding an automatic in hand, covering Devrite. He was fully dressed and had been sitting there in the dark.

The secret agent was desperate; he would have made a dive for that gun had the small man come close enough to allow the slightest chance of success.

"Oben the door und walk out," ordered his captor.

Devrite had to obey. In the hall burned a small bulb in a wall socket lighting descending stairs. "Down," snapped the man with the gun.

Devrite preceded him, acutely aware of the death at his spine; a finger pull and he would be through. He was angry at himself for having stepped into the trap; the whole business might now go up in smoke. And then there was the desire for self-preservation; he did not wish to die horribly, like Waite—

He watched his chance but none came. An open door led into a large rear room. The paraphernalia he saw at once told him what von Hult and Herman were up to: there was a printing press Herman and another man were running, an electric motor hooked up in careless home-made fashion, lead-in wires bare where a knife had scraped them off to make the connections. Devrite did not miss the possibility of a short-circuit of such wires.

There were bundles of fine paper. Under glowing 100-watt globes Herman was turning out bills, 50's, 20's, 10's, 5's. There were plates for each bill and inks to touch them up for final passing.

It was a counterfeiters' den and obviously Herman's place of business;

von Hult must be the chief of the bunch. And Evans—the bank teller—Devrite thought he understood now. A bank teller would be perfect to pass a large number of queer bills.

Herman swung ponderously and glared at Devrite. "Who's this?" he demanded in German.

The small man reported, "Another thief. It's lucky we kept guard. He came through the trapdoor and I caught him."

"Good," grunted the giant.

He scowled as he approached Devrite and slapped the agent's pockets; he felt the gun and took it away. Devrite looked at the big man's pudgy hands; they were stained green, green with indelible ink used in making the false money.

He understood now: Waite had gone from Evans to von Hult to Herman's. He had, just as Devrite, found that obvious way into the counterfeiters' den. Not having learned as much as Devrite at the graystone house, he had failed to phone Hallihan and had been caught and killed. The green ink had been scratched into the skin of his throat as they throttled him—

HE knew, too, now, why the intrusion of Waite had not caused them to take alarm. "Another thief," the small man had said. They had thought Waite a sneak thief.

"So," Herman went on in thick English, "you come maybe to steal, you t'ief!" He struck Devrite in the face and knocked him sprawling against the wall.

"What'll we do with him?" asked the small man.

"Wait," counseled Herman. "The boss'll be here soon. He must put the

finishing touches on the new batch—" He spoke in German.

Devrite whined, "Aw, I was on'y lookin' fer the price of a meal, mister. Lemme go."

Herman stared at him grimly. "You haff seen too much," he replied.

A buzzer sounded in the hall. "Gus, you go down and let him in," ordered Herman. He folded his arms and watched Devrite as his aide hurried to the ground floor.

Von Hult climbed the stairs, walking stick in hand. He came hurriedly into the big room. His face was dark with rage as he stood beside Herman looking at Devrite. The secret agent stared back at the master counterfeiter.

"Another thief, sir," Herman reported. "We caught him like the first—this time we were watching carefully."

Suspicion flared in von Hult's deep-set dark eyes. "A second? You," he growled, prodding Devrite in the ribs with his long fingers, "who are you?"—Von Hult's fingers were quite clean.

Devrite spoke in as high a voice as he could make sound natural, for von Hult had heard him speak back in the alley. "I just t'ought it'd be a good place to knock off a few bucks—"

Von Hult cursed. He lunged at Devrite and seized the secret agent's throat. Devrite felt the crunching of his windpipe in those powerful hands. His own flew to grasp the tautened wrists but he could not tear them away and his eyes popped out, blinded with water—all his wits, all his training came to him at that instant and he called forth all his reserve power. He seemed to surrender and as von Hult drove in, he drew back his fists and rammed them violently into von Hult's stomach.

It broke the throat grip. Devrite

fell and came up between von Hult's crotch, lifting him off his feet and flinging him against the great, slow Herman, who was coming in to help.

Von Hult's appearance gave the swift-thinking agent new hope. Hallihan would have had time to get shadows around to the graystone, and they should be outside now, having trailed von Hult. And, unless Devrite underestimated Hallihan's ability, the fact that von Hult must have a criminal record back in Germany, that he was a master counterfeiter—such men are not made in a short time—meant the inspector would take no chances but would have von Hult heavily covered.

Yet somehow Devrite must signal those outside else they might be too late.

The wires near the motor were bare of insulation. He reached up and shoved them together. His hand was scorched and for an instant he felt the pricking needles of the current, biting in agony at his smashed lip. Blue sparks hissed but the lights suddenly went out and the current was off.

"Stop the door," bawled von Hult.

DEVRITE in the blackness ducked under the long worktable and reached the fire-escape window. He smashed the pane with his fist and a stab of blue flame and the thud of a bullet in the still told him they had placed him and were shooting his way. He gave a penetrating, drawn-out screech as he dove out the window. The racket should be enough to bring Hallihan's men in at once.

He was outside. And he heard von Hult shout, "They're breaking in downstairs—hurry, over the roofs—"

Devrite started up the ladder instead

of down. A man below in the court shouted at him, "Hey—up there! Surrender—" And when Devrite rushed on he fired a shot but the agent dove over the parapet and reached the trapdoor, slamming the thick panel shut on top of von Hult's head. It knocked the German back inside, delayed the counterfeiter still further.

He had been correct: Hallihan had put enough men on the German to clean up.

Devrite knew it was time for him to leave and rapidly crossed toward the end of the block. At the river margin he looked out on the murky waters into which Agent Waite had been thrown. Von Hult had killed Waite, Devrite was sure from the length and narrowness of the marks on Waite's throat. Though von Hult's hands were clean they had been stained green when he choked Waite; probably von Hult had been working on the money when the other agent was trapped. He could use chemical solvent to wash off that indelible ink.

Hallihan would break a lesser member of the mob and pin von Hult; the evidence was all there.

Later he called Hallihan: "Did you get Evans?"

Hallihan replied, "Just a short while ago. We grabbed the mob, von Hult killed Waite. Evans took the counterfeit money von Hult gave him to pass at his bank and started home. But he went to the precinct police station and gave himself up instead; he had nothing to do with Waite's death."

Relief surged through Devrite; he was glad he had disposed of von Hult's guard in the graystone alley else Evans might have died. "Evans stepped close to the edge," he said, "but I don't think his mother will need come to you again."

DFW
SHORT
NOVELETTE



The guard never knew
what struck him

The Spanish Prisoner

By

Eugene Thomas

SUDDEN consternation flooded the Lady from Hell as she surveyed the interior of her cabin on the steamer *San Stefano*.

The cabin had been searched, searched thoroughly and carefully. The few dresses that had been given her had been ripped from their hangers in the

That Impregnable Spanish Prison Could Not Stop The Lady from Hell from Attempting the Jail Delivery of Cruz Delgado, Europe's Most Notorious Bandit. Chieftain

little clothes closet and tossed on the floor. Swiftly she stepped inside the cabin, locked the door, ran to the bathroom . . . and halted.

The long oblong mirror lay on the floor, and the space behind it was empty of the article she had hidden there . . . a money belt containing eight thousand dollars.

The Lady from Hell and her companion in crime, Adrian Wylie, had been passengers on the steamer *Esteban*, fleeing from the Republic of Monteverde. The steamer had gone up in flames, and the enormous treasure of jewels and bonds that the two had gathered in their criminal association had burned with the ship. The only thing that had been saved from the catastrophe was a money belt containing eight thousand dollars . . . a belt that had belonged to Miguel, the renegade captain of the *Esteban*. The Lady from Hell had taken it from the captain herself before he died.

And now that was gone. The two were penniless. The only clothes they had were articles that had been contributed by kind hearted passengers of the *San Stefano*, after the two had been picked up from the open boat in which they had drifted for days after the holocaust on the *Esteban*.

The screening lashes of The Lady from Hell lifted like a momentarily raised curtain, disclosing in the green orbs a leaping flame of fire, hot and wild as the flames in the heart of a driftwood fire, as she took in the significance of the situation.

Then her eyes lit on the door leading from the bathroom to the other cabin. The bath was so constructed that it could be utilized as a communicating

bath between the two cabins . . . the one occupied by Vivian, and the other on the other side. Ordinarily the door to the other cabin was fastened with a bolt. She saw now that the bolt had been sawn through by a slim instrument inserted through the crack between the door and the jamb.

Fire blazed again under her brows, a flame of greenish scorching anger, sudden as the outburst of a smouldering volcano.

She knew then what had happened. The cabin into which that door led had been occupied by a tall, slim man who claimed to be Portuguese. And Vivian knew that both the man and her money were no longer on the ship. The man had disembarked at Las Palmas—and the ship had sailed from there half an hour before. Already the mountains of the

island were becoming purple shadows on the horizon.

She had been on deck with Wylie watching the ship draw away from the land, or she would have discovered her loss sooner. Undoubtedly the man had waited until the last moment! Come to think of it, she remembered now that he had hurried down the gangplank an instant before it was drawn in, and the ship pulled away.

And to think that she, the criminal scourge of three continents, had been robbed by a cheap sneak thief and

A TRIO OF "LADY FROM HELL" STORIES

"The Spanish Prisoner" is the first of a group of three LADY FROM HELL short novelettes—each complete in itself—but forming a trio of continued and related episodes. These are presented in this and the two following issues of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Readers will be interested to know that, although the LADY FROM HELL stories are fiction, they are based on fact. The glamorous adventures of the series was the notorious blackmailer, "Babe" Carrington, who called herself "Vivian Legend" in one or two instances, but never habitually. The famous Spanish bandit, Cruz Delgado, whom she meets early in this first episode, operated for a while in South America. His extradition from that continent to Spain is true, and it is at that time in his career that "The Spanish Prisoner" begins the amazing tale of his encounters with the red-headed LADY FROM HELL.

robbed of the funds that Wylie and herself were counting on to give them a new start on their criminal career, was particularly galling and humiliating.

There was nothing that she could do. She could not return to Las Palmas. A radio message might bring the arrest of the man. But he would undoubtedly have prepared for that, and unless the money were found on him, there would be no proof that he was the thief.

With an eloquent lift of her shoulders she turned and went back on deck.

Adrian Wylie, recovered somewhat from the strain of exposure in the open boat in which they had drifted, and his broken ribs expertly bandaged, was lying in the cushioned deck chair where she had left him. The moment that Vivian Legrand appeared in sight he sensed that something was amiss and closed the book he was reading.

With a lithe catlike movement she dropped in the chair next to him and in a few swift sentences told him of their loss and her belief of the identity of the thief.

WYLIE was silent a moment after the crushing news.

Giving the impression of a scholarly and dignified gentleman of independent means, there was nothing about him to hint that for years he had been a consummate crook, any more than there was about the Lady from Hell to suggest that she was the world's most glamorous criminal.

Tall, lean and impressive, Wylie gave far more the impression of a man of affairs, a banker perhaps, than the whimsical, yet prudent and incalculably gifted criminal that he was when the Lady from Hell had first met

him in the house of the Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu in Manila. He had been an opium addict then. Now, under the urging of that gifted brain of his, he had completely thrust the drug from his life. And he was never to touch it again during his association with the Lady from Hell.

He, no less than Vivian realized the seriousness of the position in which they found themselves.

"Napoleon said," he murmured thoughtfully, "that an army moves on its stomach, and most certainly, two people in the business in which we are engaged move on the money they pay out—money in bribes, in paying helpers, in securing the information that they must have."

He made a little gesture of helplessness.

"Of course," Vivian said thoughtfully, "there are a few hundred scattered here and there in banks—in Paris—in London, but . . ."

"But," Wylie cut in, "in order to get hold of those few hundred dollars we must first get to Paris and to London."

"And," Vivian went on thoughtfully, "front is one of the most important weapons we have. Without money for clothes . . . Adrian, do you realize that we haven't even enough money for a hotel when we reach Cadiz, or for . . ."

She halted, stiffened and broke off in the midst of the sentence. Her glance, with startled intensity struck on the face of a tall, swarthy man who swung past in the company of another man a smaller one. There was calculation mixed with speculation in the glance she turned back to Wylie.

"Who is that man?" she queried. "Last night I passed his cabin. The door was partly open and the light on.

It was closed by someone almost immediately, but not before I had seen that this chap . . . the tall one . . . was handcuffed to the berth railing."

Wylie nodded. "A rather silly precaution in the middle of the Atlantic, it seems to me," he said, "but then I suppose the two detectives with him aren't taking any chances. That is Cruz Delgado."

"Oh, so *that* is Delgado," Vivian said, and there was decided interest in the gaze she sent after the vanishing figures, her mind mulling over the amazing possibility that had leaped into her mind. The name of Delgado had been familiar to both of them during their criminal operations in Europe. It was a familiar name in the underworld, where the exploits of the Basque brigand were discussed. A year or so before he had fled to the Argentine after a crime that included the killing of a high government official. "So he's being taken back to Spain."

Wylie nodded. "Yes, to Cadiz . . . I don't think his life will be worth much after he gets back."

"Probably not," the Lady from Hell mused, "and I suspect that he knows it."

THERE was a curious quality in her voice that Wylie did not miss . . . a quality that had not been there before. Though she spoke musingly, her voice seemed to be pulled from the depths of something that was apt to be dynamite when it rose to the surface.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Wylie drily. His eyes were very bright. He had worked hand in hand with the Lady from Hell far too long not to realize when she was hatching a particularly audacious scheme. "Being somewhat

familiar with Spanish detectives, I have no doubt that they've explained to him in detail just what his fate will be."

"And," Vivian went on in that musing tone of voice, as her facile imagination poured like water into crevices to cement detail to detail in a slowly unfolding scheme, "if he found himself in a position to thumb his nose at the law again, I suspect that he might be inclined to be exceedingly grateful to the person . . . or persons . . . who made that possible."

Wylie sat up suddenly. Through all her criminal career the Lady from Hell had been guided by what Wylie, in later years, described as a rare sense of intuition that had enabled her to carry through her numerous schemes. And he knew, without doubt, that she had recognized in the situation before her an opportunity to turn it to their advantage.

"What harebrained plot are you concocting now?" he demanded.

"Not a harebrained plot at all," the Lady from Hell said coolly. "I simply intend to release Cruz Delgado from his detectives and make it possible for him to escape . . . for a price, of course."

"Don't be an idiot," Wylie said. "We're in the middle of the Atlantic, we're practically penniless, and when this ship arrives in Cadiz, Delgado will be met by a squad of the marine police who will take him in charge. What chance have you of getting him free?"

"I have an idea," Vivian said slowly.

"Well?" Wylie demanded.

She shook her head. "It's too vague to put into words. I've got to puzzle it out. But I think, Adrian, that we'll land in Cadiz with enough money to give us a start, anyhow."

Wylie looked genuinely worried.

"I wish, Vivian, that you would wait until I am well enough to be of some help to you. Seeing you run headlong into danger when I am still so banged up isn't improving my peace of mind."

Vivian rose and patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't you worry about me, Adrian. I can take care of myself."

"All the same," he insisted, "I wish you'd wait before you start anything."

Vivian flared up in one of the rare bursts of anger ever displayed by her toward her companion in crime.

"Wait . . . wait . . . wait. That's all I've been hearing from you lately. How soon do you suppose another opportunity like this will drop into our laps? How long shall I wait? Until we both starve?"

Wylie laid back with a little sigh and closed his eyes. He knew that the issue was closed.

II

VIVIAN'S first concern, in her campaign, was her clothes. The several kindly women on the ship had managed to get together a small but becoming wardrobe for the unfortunate survivor of the burned ship.

Then, perfectly garbed and groomed, she proceeded to ingratiate herself with one of the two Spanish detectives who were escorting Delgado back from the Argentine. This was an easy matter. The Latin is notoriously responsive to the flicker of a pretty woman's eyes, whether he be a detective on duty, or a *caballero* at a sidewalk café table.

An inquiry of one of the detectives about a passing ship was the entering wedge to an acquaintanceship which

within a few days had ripened into friendship. That in turn was followed by an introduction to the second detective and one night after dinner, under the very noses of his guards, Vivian's opportunity came.

She slipped a note into the hands of Cruz Delgado. He read it when Vivian had attracted the attention of his two guards, and five minutes later he began to complain of a headache, requesting that he be permitted to go to his cabin.

Nothing loath to be free of him in order to continue their joint pursuit of this red haired woman with the eyes that promised sublime enchantment, the two detectives handcuffed Delgado to his berth, locked the door and rejoined Vivian. In turn the Lady from Hell requested them to wait for her on the upper deck for a few minutes while she saw to the comfort of her friend with the broken ribs.

The deck was deserted as she made her way down to the porthole that belonged to the fugitive's cabin. It was in darkness, but a ray of light from the deck lamp fell across the face of the man in the berth.

Vivian leaned carelessly against the deck wall, the light from the overhead light catching her red hair and turning it into a flaming aureole above her exquisitely exotic face. To an observer she would have seemed a woman leaning casually against the wall with no thought of the open porthole beside her. Her call, low, guarded, had nevertheless sufficient carrying power to reach the man.

"I did as you said," Delgado whispered, "but I do not understand why you wished it."

"I thought that perhaps you might wish to escape," Vivian answered swiftly.

The man strained upward against his handcuffs, his face working eagerly. He registered an impression of slightness, but in reality he was a big brute, with a face from which varied dissipations had wiped every trace of color and the strange eyes did nothing to lighten it. They were lusterless, burned out with a coldness in them that suggested the filmed eyes of a crocodile.

Those cold eyes of his now were fixed intently on Vivian's face, seen through the window.

"Escape? But of course. Can you arrange it?"

"I can," Vivian shot back at him. "For a price."

"Yes, yes, of course," the man said eagerly. "How much of a price?"

"That depends," Vivian told him coolly, "on how much money you have."

"I have five hundred pesetas," he said thoughtfully, but there was a curious note in his voice.

"Is that all your life is worth?"

"It is all I have." He insisted.

"So," Vivian said harshly. She did not miss the cunning which lifted a corner of the man's lips. At the bottom of her eyes a light flashed and went out. "You would attempt to bargain, with your life as the stake. I know that Detective Sanchez has three thousand pesetas he is keeping for you. I want that three thousand . . . and more . . . as the price of your liberty."

"I tell you I have no more," the man snarled.

"A man is dead a long time," Vivian said, and her voice crackled like the snap of a whip. The light from above touched her face . . . glinted on the cold iciness of her eyes. She turned away.

"Wait," the man's voice came to her shrilly. "I have more."

His long fingers, that were like ivory claws, started to crawl back and forth on the edge of the bunk like one of the great white hunting spiders that natives of the tropics keep in the thatch of their huts to prey on the lizards and cockroaches. The resemblance was uncanny.

"How much?" Vivian queried harshly.

"Two thousand pesetas," the man said. "It is sewn in the lining of my coat and the detectives did not find it. But that is all. I swear it by the Madonna and all the saints."

Vivian leaned against the porthole again.

"That is better," she said. "Did you think me a child to believe that Cruz Delgado would not have money hidden where he could put his hands upon it in an emergency? Now listen. We reach Cadiz the day after tomorrow, and I will arrange your escape there. But there is something that you must do also."

For five minutes she talked swiftly, outlining to the bandit what he must do, and then, lest her two Spaniards on the deck above become restless, returned to them.

THERE was not a cloud in the sky as the ship moved slowly toward Cadiz, a city of white stone and marble, joined to the mainland by the slenderest strip of yellowed earth. Already the nearest of the *miradores*, towers originally built as lookouts from which the garrison could discern the approach of returning treasure-laden galleons, was looming abreast of the ship.

The driving energy that was behind Vivian never caused her to hurry or

to stumble. She knew how to attack swiftly, but her plan of attack was always thorough to the last detail. Now, with the moment of action upon her, her restless mind went around and around her plans, shoring up guards against contingencies that had not arisen, might never arise.

For the plan that she had concocted for the escape of Cruz Delgado was a daring one . . . so daring and so simple that its very simplicity made for success. It was a scheme that not one woman in a million would have attempted . . . that not one man in a million would have dreamed a woman would attempt . . . and that also made for its success.

With a last glance out of her window the Lady from Hell slipped out of her stateroom and made her way down the corridor to Cabin 12, occupied by Delgado and his two guards. Delgado, she knew, would be in the cabin, handcuffed to his berth, and the two detectives would be smoking aft.

Keeping them there had been the duty assigned to Wylie, and detectives are detectives the world over. As long as a new found friend stood ready to pay for the bottle of liquor on the table before them, they would remain in the smoking room until it was finished.

The door of the cabin was not locked. The detectives had seen no need to lock it, since their prisoner was handcuffed to the rail of his berth. What they did not know was the fact that not ten minutes before the Lady from Hell had skillfully picked the pocket of one of the detectives of a ring of keys . . . among them the key to the handcuffs.

Delgado raised his head eagerly as the door swung open. He started to speak but Vivian raised a warning hand.

"Don't talk," she said. "Somebody passing might hear."

Bending over she tried key after key until the right one clicked in the lock and the handcuffs opened.

Cautiously she peered out into the corridor. It was empty.

In a moment Vivian and the man she had released made their way along the corridor to Vivian's cabin.

After a minute Wylie arrived. A look of profound astonishment flashed over his face as he saw who her companion was.

"Good God, Vivian," he said in a tense voice, "I didn't know, when you asked me to keep those detectives busy, that this was what you intended. Bringing this man to your cabin is madness. You'll spend the balance of your life in a Spanish jail for this. Don't you know they'll search the ship . . . every inch of it . . . when they find him gone."

Cruz Delgado took a step toward Wylie, his long slender fingers working as if they longed to get at Wylie's throat.

"This is no business of yours," he began ominously, when Vivian cut him short with an abrupt gesture.

"Keep quiet," she snapped. Then she turned to Wylie. "I know what I'm doing, Adrian. Go to your cabin. Please. It would be fatal if the searchers found you here when they arrived. Stay in your cabin until I tap on the door."

"But . . ." Wylie began.

She cut him short as a glance through the porthole showed her the scarlet sails of the pilot boat rounding alongside the steamer.

"Adrian, time is precious."

Without another word he turned and left. She locked the door behind him.

"Now you," Vivian snapped to Delgado. "Get in there . . ." She flung open the bathroom door . . . "And stay there. And if you want to live, don't make a sound."

She closed the door behind him and began swiftly throwing off her clothes.

Ten minutes later a ship's officer, accompanied by a sailor and one of the detectives tapped on the door of Vivian's cabin. There was no response. The ship's officer tried the knob and, finding the door locked, opened it with his pass key.

THE cabin was deserted. A gaily colored sports dress was laid neatly across the berth. A pair of filmy silk stockings hung from the back of a chair. Intimate, lacy underthings lay in a little heap in front of the door, so close, in fact, that the men were compelled to step over them to enter. From the bathroom came the sound of splashing water and above it the sound of Vivian's voice humming a gay little Spanish air.

The two men exchanged glances and then the detective tapped on the bathroom door. The singing and the splashing stopped abruptly.

"Who is there?" Vivian demanded.

"It is an officer of the ship, *señorita*," came back the answer. "We are searching the ship for an escaped criminal. Will you open the door, please?"

"Certainly not," she replied indignantly. "I am bathing."

"I am sorry, *señorita*, but it is of the utmost importance that we search the ship. You must open the door."

"This is most outrageous," they heard her sputter, and then the door was opened a trifle, just far enough for the officer to see Vivian clothed in a thin silken dressing gown that failed

utterly to conceal her lovely form. She was wet. Water dripped from her face, her shoulders, her arms. The silken dressing gown, rapidly becoming soaked, clung closely about her, revealing the sensuous contours of her figure. It was obvious that she had just stepped from the brimming tub.

There was a strange little flicker, like fever, playing behind those slanting green eyes. Present in her was the knowledge, like the tension of muscles in the presence of fear, that she must play these men with all the subtlety that the years of her criminal life had given her.

"This is outrageous," she repeated angrily, and the most skilled actress alive could not have thrown more sincerity behind those three words. It told of the outraged modesty of a woman . . . of many things. Then, as if aware for the first time of the revealing qualities of the thin silken covering, she closed the door except for the merest crack. "I shall complain to the captain."

"I am truly sorry, *señorita*," the ship's officer said, "but we are searching the ship for an escaped criminal."

"Am I then supposed to have him concealed in my bath," she asked in withering scorn. She had long ago learned that anger mixed with scorn is . . . next to tears . . . a woman's chief advantage against men . . . a citadel against the aggressive. "Can you think of no better place to look than a bathroom while a lady takes a bath?"

She closed the door with a bang, leaned against it listening. In that instant it was almost as if she were a tautened wire which vibrated to the least sound from the cabin outside. The pounding of her pulses which had crept up imperceptibly to a roaring

crescendo during those dragging seconds of nerve splitting suspense suddenly died down. Her blood ran cold and smooth as a river of ice.

Outside that door that had been slammed in their faces the ship's officer looked at the detective with a grin.

"I think," he said, "that we had better search elsewhere for our escaped prisoner."

The outer door closed behind them. A dozen tense seconds passed before either the Lady from Hell or the man with her moved or spoke. Then she turned to Cruz Delgado crouching under a pile of rumpled bath towels in the angle formed by the wall and the bathroom door.

"You're safe . . . so far," she said with a grim smile. "Now to get you ashore under the noses of the police."

III

HARDLY had she finished when the clang of the engine room bell and the shuddering of the ship's fabric from the propellers as the engines reversed and went astern told her that they were nearing the dock. A swift glance out of the bathroom window showed her that they were almost alongside. Five minutes, ten at the most and the Civil Guard would be aboard. And there would be no tricking them with the bathroom ruse. Every inch of the ship would be searched until the escaped bandit was found.

Racing against time and the inevitable search she dressed and then opened the bathroom door.

"The money," she said tersely.

The man laughed. "You take me for a fool? When I am ashore, free, then you get your money. Until then, not one peseta."

"And unless I get my money now," the Lady from Hell told him dangerously, "you will never be free. I'll call the detectives . . . tell them that I found you hiding in my cabin when I came from my bath."

Her face was impassive. Only her eyes were alive . . . they were hard, deadly bits of emerald. There were men in Havana, in Haiti, in Monteverde who could have told Delgado that the shadow of death hung in the air when that cold light glowed in the eyes of the Lady from Hell.

"But suppose your plan fails?" the man queried. "Suppose I am captured. What then?"

"That is a chance you must take," she told him flatly. "Give me the money—or I call the detectives."

Delgado laughed, a sneer in his voice. "You wouldn't dare," he said. "I would say you helped me to escape and you would spend the rest of your life in a Spanish jail."

"Oh, no," Vivian said smoothly, and before Delgado had grasped the significance of her movement her hand had moved with the speed of a striking snake . . . the tiny but deadly revolver that she was never without covered him. "Dead men tell no tales . . . or betray women who aid them. I heard a noise . . . I turned . . . a man was in my cabin . . . he attacked me . . . and I killed him . . ."

She raised her gun slowly. The face of the man opposite her had turned the color of putty. Ruthless himself, he knew the quality of deadly ruthlessness in others when he met it, and he realized that this woman was as much of a killer as any one he had ever met.

He clawed at the seams of his coat frantically, his eyes fixed on the muzzle of that gun that covered him without a tremor. Pulling out the

bank notes hidden there, he handed them to the Lady from Hell. She tucked them away. The gangplank was out now, and she saw a detail of uniformed Civil Guards swarming aboard.

"You know what you have to do," she said. "If you slip . . ." she did not finish. There was no need. Delgado could visualize, without aid, what was in store for him if he failed.

There was no one in sight in the corridor as she opened the door and peered out. Then, moving with that tigerish gait, she made her way down the corridor and turned toward the staircase that led to the deck. At its foot a uniformed Civil Guard stood barring the way.

Vivian was panting for breath, as though she had been running and her eyes were wide with fright.

The guard halted her. "You cannot pass this way, *señorita*," he said. "The passengers are to assemble in the dining saloon while the ship is being searched for a dangerous criminal."

"But I must see the captain," she said in evident distress. "The criminal . . . the man for whom they search . . . is in my cabin."

"Your cabin!" the man cried, and raised his whistle to summon a comrade. Vivian halted him. "Do not call aid," she whispered tensely, with a swift look of fear over her shoulder. "If you do, he will flee. He doesn't know that I know he is in my cabin. He is in the open space beneath the berth. If you hurry, you can capture him without trouble." Then she suggested cunningly, "It would please your officers if you captured him without aid, would it not?"

That was the clinching argument. Cruz Delgado was a dangerous

criminal. To capture him single handed, with ease, and turn him over to the officer in command would mean official commendation . . . promotion.

Without another word the guard followed her down the corridor.

"It is Cabin 12," she whispered. "I left the door slightly open. Go in, and call to him to come out."

Drawn gun in hand, the man opened the cabin door, looked about, then stepped inside . . . and dropped to the floor without a sound as Delgado hit him viciously over the head with the short iron bar that Wylie had stolen for Vivian and Delgado.

Even as he struck the floor Vivian was inside the cabin, the door closed and locked and was twisting a strip of cloth about the man's mouth as a gag. He was unconscious now, but no use taking chances.

"Get into his clothes," she whispered. "Hurry," and aided the bandit to strip off the guard's uniform.

THERE was, luckily, not a great deal of difference between the guard and the escaped criminal. The uniform fitted sufficiently well to pass muster. Together they dressed the unconscious man on the floor in the garments Delgado had worn.

"From now on," she whispered to Delgado, "you must act alone. I can do nothing. You know the habits of the Civil Guard better than I do. Remain here until the man recovers consciousness. Then, keeping him gagged, with his hands bound, make him march ashore as the escaped prisoner you have captured. The officer will be in the dining saloon with the passengers. There is a guard at the head of the gangplank. If he halts you, tell him that you are taking Delgado ashore by your officer's orders. Good luck."

She stepped out and closed the door . . . heard the key click in the lock behind her. A tap on Wylie's door and her companion in crime joined her in the corridor.

"All set," she whispered. "We've got to get up into the saloon, so that we're in the clear if anything breaks."

The Lady from Hell carefully chose a seat beside a window that looked down on the gangplank, and waited as the officer in charge questioned each passenger in turn.

The heat of the Spanish midday was on the gangplank like the white hot blade of a sword. Vivian kept her eyes fixed upon it, scarcely conscious of the conversation of the two men behind her, unrelating fragments lodging in her brain but making no impression . . . until . . . "Anxious to capture . . . not so much because he's a brigand . . . what he knows . . . tremendous treasure . . . hid all his loot in mountains . . . left there when he fled to the Argentine . . . Cruz Delgado . . ."

The Lady from Hell sat up alertly, listening intently. The conversation went on.

"The officials estimate that he must have several hundred thousand pesetas hidden away. If it weren't for that, they'd shoot him as soon as they got him ashore. But the government would like to get their hands on that money, and no one but Delgado himself knows where it is hidden."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw a Civil Guard descending the gangplank holding tightly to the bound and gagged figure of a man in civilian clothes.

Delgado, posing as a member of the Civil Guard, was audaciously making his escape. Another moment he would be free, lost in the Cadiz underworld.

"Oh, look!" Vivian exclaimed in a loud voice. "They've captured the man who escaped. There's a guard taking him ashore."

The officer looked up alertly.

"What is that, señorita?"

Vivian repeated what she had said and pointed through the porthole. With an exclamation the officer ran out onto the deck and toward the gangplank shouting at the two figures on their way down the plank.

Delgado realized at once that success or failure hung in the balance with seconds tipping the scales between freedom and capture. With an oath he flung the bound figure of the guard aside and made a break for the end of the wharf. But he was too late. The shouts of the officer had reached the guards at the gate and, with only ten feet separating him from the sunlit street and freedom, Delgado saw the gates close in his face. He whirled, gun in hand, to make a last stand, and a guard sprang out at him from a pile of freight. A short struggle—and he was a prisoner again.

With a little contented sigh Vivian turned back from the scene she had been watching. She wasted no thoughts upon the man she had double crossed. That was like the Lady from Hell. If a thing . . . a man . . . had no further usefulness for her, it was tossed into the discard at once, without sentiment, without regret. Likewise, if a thing . . . or a person . . . could still be useful to her, she would cling to it with every bit of savagery she possessed. In all her long and glamorous career of crime she had fought viciously for any member of her gang in trouble. And once something was in the past, she wasted no thoughts over it.

She met Wylie's puzzled eyes with a smile.

"Why did you do that, Vivian?" he whispered, under cover of the general excitement. "Why didn't you let the poor devil escape? After all, he deserved getting away. He'd paid you what you asked."

"Yes," Vivian said thoughtfully. "He paid . . . but not all he is going to pay."

THE fact that Cadiz was a strange city and that she had no extensive underworld connections was no obstacle to the Lady from Hell. There was scarcely a city of major importance in Europe where she did not know the name and address of at least one of those shadowy figures of the underworld who kept his fingers on the pulse of crime for his own benefit. In one city it might be a fence who, unsuspected by the police, handled stolen works of art; in another, a man who made it his business to finance robberies, putting up a specific sum for a specific job.

Cadiz was no exception. There was an Arab rug merchant there, Es Sayed, and it was to him that Vivian sent word, on the third day after her arrival in the city. He came, bearing a huge bundle of rugs and primed with the knowledge, obtained for a price from the Hotel Portero, that the woman who had sent for him was a wealthy Englishwoman.

He knocked on the door of her room and at her command to enter, came slowly in and dropped his bundle of rugs on the floor. He was a tall Arab, thin almost to the point of emaciation, with bony fingers and deep sunken eyes that seemed like two bits of agate set in a coffee-brown mask.

"You wish to purchase rugs," he inquired in French.

The Lady from Hell looked at him

quietly, sizing him up. Her eyes, rather heavy lidded, and green as the precious tiles set in the roof of the Mosque in Mecca, were baffling.

"Not rugs," she said quietly, "information—"

Their eyes met, and they exchanged one long, calculating glance. The Arab seemed to be appraising the woman who lounged in the comfortable Madeira chair. The face that the Lady from Hell turned to his gaze was an expressive one . . . only, something that few men discovered until it was too late . . . it expressed exactly what its owner wished it to express, never anything more.

Es Sayed shook his head, stooped over to pick up his rugs.

"I sell only rugs," he returned courteously.

Vivian smiled. "To those who do now know you, perhaps. But to those who come well recommended there may be other things to be had . . . such things for instance, as a knife and the hand to wield it from behind on a dark street; poisons . . . the slower the poison the higher the price. And perhaps . . . and the Spaniards might be interested in this . . . deserters from the Spanish Foreign Legion aided in their escape to French or Italian soil."

The Arab's face darkened. He shot a swift, hooded glance from Vivian's impassive face to that of Wylie. "Who are you to dare to suggest that an honest rug merchant would meddle in such things as these?"

Vivian smiled again. "I have been called," she said gently, "the Lady from Hell."

A swift smile broke the brown mask. "Allah," the man ejaculated. The name was familiar to him, as it was to every criminal of importance in every European country. He looked

at her closely and nodded. "Forgive me for not recognizing you. I have been stupid. Who is there that does not know the reputation of the Lady from Hell? What is it that you wish?"

"I wish to check certain information that I have obtained from a guard at the prison," Vivian said thoughtfully. "One Manuel Viviani. I have made his acquaintance . . . no matter how . . . and for some strange reason he believes that I am attracted by him. Among the bits of information that he has given me is the statement that he is the guard in the execution courtyard of the prison. I want that statement checked, and also to find if he is the only guard on duty."

THE Arab nodded. "That will be difficult. I do not know this particular guard, but such information is easily checked." He paused a moment. "It would not be difficult to bribe a prison guard to perform a little service for you . . . such as smuggling in a message . . . but you have no guarantees that he would not turn it over to the Comandante. As for anything greater . . . it cannot be done. Not that they are incorruptible, but they are kept honest by fear. A guard who betrayed his trust would find himself facing a firing squad."

"I have no intention of bribing a guard," Vivian told him, with a grim smile. She, better than most women knew that there were lures greater than money that might be dangled before the eyes of susceptible men, and she had already considered and dismissed the possibility of smuggling in a message. "Then," she went on evenly, "I wish this purchased and brought to my room in a bundle of

rugs." She handed him a slip of paper. "There must be nothing to connect me with the purchase."

The Arab glanced at the slip of paper and raised protesting hands.

"It cannot be done," he expostulated. "It is impossible. Sale of it is forbidden. Possession of it, regardless of whom, means imprisonment and possible death. What do you wish it for?"

The Lady from Hell looked at him with the unreadable, faintly slant-eyed gaze that, had he known her better, would have told him that trouble was brewing. Her voice was suddenly harsh.

"That is my business. It is your business to give me what I want . . . unless, of course, you would like the Spanish authorities to know of the deserters who come to you in the night and are fitted out with new clothes and false passports . . ."

There was behind her words a suggestion of a blade that would slice and cut if its owner loosed it. The Arab quailed before the suggestion contained in her words.

"It is a difficult thing," he said. "But I think that I can do it. I have connections . . ."

"I know," Vivian cut him short. "Now, one other thing. I wish a large scale map of the prison and the surrounding streets, particularly with reference to the execution courtyard."

"That will not be difficult," the Arab said thoughtfully. "But . . ."

He was cut short by a knock on the door. Vivian opened it. It was the hotel porter.

"Don José Obarrio is below, *señorita*," he said.

Vivian nodded and closed the door. The Arab's eyes were wide. He had recognized the name.

"The Comandante of the prison," he breathed.

"The Comandante," Vivian agreed, drawing on her smart gloves. "I am making a tour of inspection of the prison with him." She pulled on the chic little hat and then, picking up a little cluster of flowers on the table, pinned them on her shoulder.

Wylie smiled grimly at the flowers. There was more to those flowers than met the eye. Vivian directed a long hard look at the Arab. "In the event," she said, "that you should surmise my reasons for asking these things and be tempted to betray me for a reward . . . there is a letter in the hotel office concerning you that the police would undoubtedly find if I should be arrested."

She turned and swept out of the door, leaving Wylie to complete arrangements with the Arab.

COMANDANTE Don José Obarrio might not have twirled the thin waxed spikes of his mustache as he waited in the hotel lobby if he had realized that he was being skillfully played by the Lady from Hell, as an expert angler plays a fish. Neither would it have been soothing to his vanity if he had known that the interest the woman with the flaming red hair and slanting green eyes was bestowing upon him was simply the interest bestowed upon an important pawn in a game.

It hadn't been difficult for the Lady from Hell to make the acquaintance of Don José. The gentleman had a roving eye for the ladies, and she had employed the same means on the Comandante as she had on the prison guard. She had made discreet inquiries as to the Comandante's favorite café. A tip to the waiter had

secured her a table next to him. It had not been difficult to persuade him to speak to her . . . and her interest at subsequent meetings, at what went on behind the scenes in a prison had brought forth today's invitation to make a tour of the prison over which Don José ruled.

The Comandante rose and tossed away his cigarette as Vivian came down the hotel stairs.

"I am sorry to be so late," she said, "but a business matter detained me."

It would not have added to the Comandante's peace of mind, as they walked toward his official car parked outside the hotel, to have known that the "business" was a scheme to release his most prized prisoner.

There is only one building in Cadiz with thicker, more massive walls than the prison. That is the Capuchin convent which guards the Virgin of Cadiz, and the reason for those thick walls is the fact that the prison was once a church prison, used by the inquisition for heretics awaiting trial.

With a great deal of pride Don José showed the Lady from Hell his domain, and it was while passing the entrance to the quarters of the guards that catastrophe almost struck.

A guard, his uniform coat off, was lounging at the entrance. He looked up and a look of astonishment flashed over his sallow face as he saw Vivian. He started to speak, would have spoken, if the look of warning on her own face, the gesture with which she halted him, had not been unmistakable.

It was only for a moment that danger threatened. The realization came to the guard that it would not help him with the Comandante if that official knew that the woman he

escorted through the prison with such ceremony was the woman of whom this guard had such high hopes.

VIVIAN breathed a sigh of relief and the tension was unlocked from her muscles as they moved on and Manuel, the guard, did not speak. A moment or two later the Lady from Hell and her companion halted at the end of a gloomy corridor.

"And now, Señorita Legrand," the Comandante said, "that you have seen my prison, what do you think of it?"

"But I am disappointed," Vivian cried. "You have shown me nothing but iron bars and stone walls. Where are the dark dungeons, the mysterious passages, the prisoners in chains?" She threw a world of scorn into her voice. "Is your prison then merely a jail for petty thieves and such people?"

"There are dungeons," the Comandante admitted, "but you would not want to descend to them. They are dark and dirty."

"Oh, but I do," she insisted, catching his arm. "You must show them to me. Have you important prisoners there?"

"One very important one," the Comandante said. "Cruz Delgado, the bandit."

"A bandit! Oh, how romantic," Vivian gushed, but in her eyes glinted that spearhead of fire, a danger signal that even the most formidable of her associates had come to know and respect. "I must see him."

The Comandante stopped before the iron bars of a cell.

"He is there," he said.

Vivian peered into the dark little room. He did not see the swift gesture with which she put her finger to her lips and if he noticed that an

exclamation died in utterance on the lips of the bandit chief, he paid no attention.

"Poor fellow," Vivian said pityingly. "How long must he remain in prison?"

"He dies tomorrow morning at dawn," the Comandante said grimly.

Vivian gave a start of dismay. The green pools of her eyes seemed to stir as if a wind had passed over them, became veiled, as if their owner wished to shut out something that might betray her. She had not expected this. She would have to work fast. Then she looked at Don José with a little pathetic smile edging her lips.

"Poor fellow," she breathed.

Before the Comandante could stop her she had ripped a cluster of flowers from where it was pinned to her shoulder and thrust them through the bars.

"Take them," she breathed to Delgado, with a little catch in her voice. "Perhaps they will comfort you before you die."

She turned away toward the staircase, followed by Don José.

"You are too soft," he said. "Delgado is a dangerous rogue."

The Lady from Hell smiled charmingly. "Alas, I cannot help it," she said with a little sigh. "It is my nature."

Behind them, Cruz Delgado's fingers were swiftly tearing at the little cluster of flowers. In his eyes and upon his face was a light like that of a condemned man who has been granted a reprieve. The Lady from Hell shot a glance over her shoulder, just in time to see him snatching from the heart of one of the flowers a thin slip of paper covered with writing.

Wylie had worked for a long time that morning to secrete that slip of

rice paper in the flower, and Delgado read the instructions it contained with glowing eyes. Then he rolled the paper into a tiny ball and swallowed it.

Dawn was hours away when the Lady from Hell and her companion left their Cadiz hotel and walked swiftly in the direction of the prison.

IV

THE afternoon and evening had been a busy one . . . one of the busiest ones in the long career of the Lady from Hell. There had been so many loose ends to tie into their scheme, and so little time in which to accomplish it. Both were dressed in dark clothes and Wylie carried a large leather bag.

They did not take a taxi. Better, Vivian reasoned, to leave no trail that might point toward her. If the scheme she planned was successful, they would have a start on a new fortune to replace the one that had been lost to them. If anything went wrong . . . there was a vivid recollection in her mind of the gloomy cells of the prison she had visited that afternoon.

There was little conversation between them. They had gone over their plans in minute detail and little remained to be said. Vivian was keenly aware of the difficulty of the thing she had set out to do. Her brain was working coolly, methodically, judicially, and in her eyes as she walked along, was a light more hard and calculating than is usually found even in the eyes of a beast of prey.

The dark little side street with an uneven narrow sidewalk and cobbled street that was their destination had been four hundred years old when Rome was founded; it had echoed to the arrogant tread of Phoenician traders eleven hundred years before

the Christian era, for Cadiz is the oldest city in Spain. In the shadowy alcove of a huddle of buildings she found the spot that she sought . . . a narrow, iron barred door in the towering brick wall.

"Keep out of sight, whatever you do," she told Wylie. "Whatever happens don't show yourself until I call you. With your shattered ribs, you haven't strength enough to be of much help. Your gun is to be used only as a last resort."

Wylie, resenting the minor rôle his injuries forced him to play, melted into the shadow of one of the houses and Vivian glanced at her watch. Five minutes to three. Five minutes to the time when the Arab had told her that Manuel, the guard she had been playing, would pass the gate on his rounds.

A footstep was audible on the flagstones inside and as it came opposite the gateway the Lady from Hell rapped sharply on the doorway. The sound was clear and distinct in the stillness of the night . . . too loud, Vivian feared for a moment. The footsteps halted, then resumed, and a tiny iron wicket in the thick gateway was shot back.

"Manuel," she whispered.

The man stared out through the grating incredulously.

"You," he whispered in Spanish. "But what are you doing here?"

"I must see you," she whispered back. "That was why I persuaded the Comandante to show me through the prison today. I thought that I might see you then, but I could not talk while he was with me." She was lying expertly, but the man did not know that. "Open the gate, and let me in."

"No, no," he said, "I cannot open the gate. It is forbidden."

The keynote of her plan lay in her,

persuading him to open the gate. Without that, she was doomed to failure. "But I am going away. Would you have me leave without my farewell?"

THERE was an exclamation from the man and the sound of a key grating in a lock. The door swung open and Vivian slipped through it into the courtyard of the prison.

"But you did not tell me you were going away today," Manuel told her as she slipped into his arms and nestled there.

"I did not know it until an hour ago, when I received a message," she said. "I could not go without seeing you."

"I will not let you go," he man said. "You must stay."

"I must go," Vivian told him. She disengaged herself gently from his arms and lit a cigarette, shielding the tiny glow from chance observation of some other guard about the great stone building towering above them in the darkness. "I can stay only so long as this cigarette lasts. That is all the time we have." She extended the case to him. "Smoke one with me."

There was only one cigarette left in the case. The guard took it, lit it and then launched volubly into a torrent of reasons why she should not leave. Never a shadow quivered on the face of the Lady from Hell as she watched the cigarette smoke trickle from the guard's nostrils, but in her eyes a flash came and went like unsuspected summer lighting, leaving no sign but only a memory of its passing.

She listened, interjecting a word now and then. The cigarette was half consumed when her keen ears caught

the first faint hint of a hesitancy in the guard's speech; a hesitancy that grew until it seemed that the man was fighting against an overpowering sleep . . . as indeed he was. The single cigarette left in the Lady from Hell's case had been drugged and now, the man's eyes closed and he leaned against the wall, crumpled toward the flagging. Vivian caught him, lowered him gently, so that his equipment would make no noise as he struck.

Satisfying herself that he was out and not likely to recover for some time, Vivian opened the gate. Wylie, watching from his shadowy corner saw her, saw the gesture with which she beckoned, and crossed stealthily to her side.

Together they searched along the brick wall until they found the spot they sought . . . a space where scarred and pitted bricks told their own story. This was the execution courtyard, and the spot they had found was the place where prisoners invariably stood to face a firing squad. The wall there was marked with the grooves of countless bullets.

Working in the purple darkness where each little distance isolated itself absolutely, like a man in a black cloak turning his back, Vivian carefully measured off the distance from the execution spot in the corner of the courtyard to the gateway in the wall, and then, in the narrow street outside, measured the distance again. With a piece of chalk she made a mark on the wall.

"Here," she told Wylie, "I think one row of bricks will be sufficient. Take them out, and then the bricks behind them, and I think you will have sufficient space. When you are through replace the outer bricks. No need to be careful about the replace-

ment. It will be too dark in this street for anyone passing to notice anything out of the way."

NODDING understanding, Wylie placed the large leather bag he carried on the pavement and began at the old bricks of the wall with a chisel, as Vivian turned back toward the courtyard again.

And then fate, which had been dogging their heels ever since they left Monteverde, threatened to wreck the whole elaborate structure she had created.

She stepped into the courtyard just in time to see a figure bending over the form of the guard on the flagstones. The newcomer raised his head, sprang to his feet as the sound of the opening gateway came to his ears.

"Who is it?" he demanded sharply. "Stand where you are, or I shall shoot."

Vivian halted, under her quiet all her muscles and nerves gathered together like a cat, bunched for a spring. Her own gun was in readiness. She could have shot the man down, but that would have been fatal to her plans. A shot would bring the other prison guards swarming into the courtyard. Powerful lights would be turned on . . . and their plans would be shattered, ruined irrevocably.

She saw the man, an officer by the shining bits of metal on his uniform, raising a hand toward his mouth. In another moment, she knew, he would blow his whistle, giving the alarm.

She had scarcely a split second in which to act to prevent their whole scheme from being ruined. And in that split second she acted. Her right hand, which had crept stealthily toward the neckline of her dress, was

flung up and forward. The starshine touched a streak of silver in the darkness, and the knife that the Lady from Hell had flung struck its target. Even in the darkness her aim had been true. The knife plunged into the base of the man's throat, the keen blade slicing into the flesh like soft butter. The officer gurgled chokingly, his hand groped toward the deadly weapon in his throat, and he sank to the pavement.

Silence followed, silence so complete and abrupt as to give the uncanny sensation that the clatter of the man's gun as he fell had been only a queer trick of the mind.

A sibilant whisper from the gateway brought Wylie to her side. Together they moved the body of the dead officer to a little tool shed in a remote corner of the courtyard. Then, after binding and gagging the drugged warder lest he awake before the hour set for the execution, they placed him beside his officer in the shed. The bloodstains on the flagstones would not be noticed, she knew, when Cruz Delgado was marched into the yard. Attention would be concentrated on the prisoner walking to his death.

Then, locking the gate behind them, they slipped out into the silver-blue darkness of the ancient Roman street. Twenty minutes later the two straightened up. Three bricks lay at the foot of the wall, but the outer row had been replaced, and to the casual eye the wall had not been disturbed.

"Now," Vivian said softly. "Everything is in readiness. In an hour Cruz Delgado will be in our hands again . . . if there is no hitch. And once we have him I think that he will be glad to show us the hiding place of all his loot."

Wylie nodded grimly. He had seen

the Lady from Hell wring secrets from unwilling men before this, and her methods, unpleasant though they might be to her victims, were uncommonly effective.

THE dawn was killing the stars, clear and cold in tint, beneath a sky shifting in color from smoke gray to aquamarine and icy blue, when the sound of a trumpet somewhere in the prison told them that the hour for execution was at hand. The Lady from Hell, crouching with Wylie behind the ruined façade of a house across the narrow street from the execution courtyard, stirred and peered out through a crack in the board nailed across one of the windows.

They waited tensely. The zero hour was approaching. Another few moments would either see the consummation of one of the most brazen and dangerous schemes that the Lady from Hell ever attempted—or find them inside a Spanish prison, locked in—

The clang of the iron door and the sound of marching feet!

The Lady from Hell stiffened, and for a moment Wylie's eyes were caught by a glittering stare.

The showdown had come. Cruz Delgado, she knew, was being marched to his death. The sound of tramping feet, the officer's crisp commands, came clearly to her ears through the still morning air.

There was a little silence . . . eerie . . . pregnant with meaning. The world seemed to be waiting for a vast event, imminently lurking. The Lady from Hell knew that the bandage was being adjusted over Delgado's eyes, and on the moment that followed that tiny fragment of silence she knew hung the success or failure of her plot; the decision on whether they might have

a chance to dip their fingers in Delgado's hoarded treasures.

The silence was shattered, and she heard the sharp command of the officer in command of the firing squad.

"Ready . . . aim . . ."

It was the instant. A swift movement of her hand pressed the button on a small black box at her feet. The sound of a thunderous explosion filled the air.

Even as the sound of the explosion came, she could see a section of the wall toppling forward into the courtyard. And, the Lady from Hell knew, beneath that section of falling wall would be standing the firing squad. She had calculated it nicely — with ruthless certainty, dooming every man of that firing squad to either death or hideous injury.

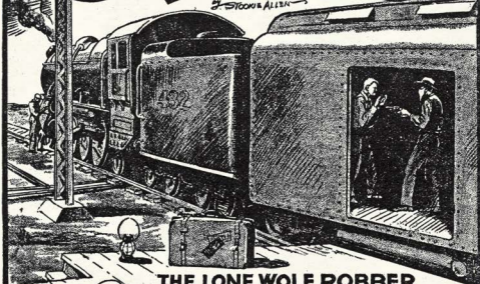
Before the dust had settled, the two criminals saw a figure scrambling over the heaped-up bricks . . . the figure of Cruz Delgado, bandit leader. He had followed the instructions she had passed on to him, hidden in the cluster of flowers, and the moment the wall had fallen, had darted for the breach in the wall before the remaining occupants of the courtyard had recovered from their astonishment.

The Lady from Hell opened the door of their hiding place and ran across the narrow street to meet him. There was a smile of grim triumph on her face as Delgado, Wylie and herself ran down the street to where a car was parked in readiness for their flight.

Cruz Delgado was the only man who knew the hiding place of the loot he had gathered during his desperate years of anditry. She had no doubt but there were methods she could utilize to persuade him to divulge that hiding place.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

By STOOK & ALLEN



THE LONE WOLF ROBBER

HERMAN INTERLIED, CLERK IN CHARGE OF A MAIL CAR SCHEDULED TO PULL OUT OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA, ON THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 16, 1921, PLACED A PISTOL ON A TABLE AND STEPPED OUT TO COLLECT THE MAIL FROM THE STATION BOX. WHEN HE RETURNED A MOMENT LATER, HE WAS CONFRONTED BY A MASKED MAN WITH A GUN WHO ORDERED HIM BACK INTO A CORNER. INTERLIED OBEYED, BUT WAITING HIS CHANCE, LEAPED AT THE BANDIT AND GRASPED HIS GUN HAND.



GARDNER



IN A SCUFFLE FOR THE PISTOL BOTH MEN FELL DOWN. THE CLERK LANDED ON TOP AND GOT POSSESSION OF THE GUN. THEN HELP CAME. POLICE, REACHING THE SCENE SOON AFTER IDENTIFIED THE BANDIT AS ROY GARDNER, LONG SOUGHT LONE WOLF ROBBER OF THE MAILS, WHO BOASTED A RECORD OF NUMEROUS STICK-UPS AND FOUR SENSATIONAL PRISON ESCAPES, INCLUDING ONE FROM THE FAMOUS FEDERAL FORTRESS ON McNEILL ISLAND, WASH.

GARDNER, WHO HAD BEEN TERRORIZING THE PACIFIC COAST FOR OVER A YEAR, SAID HE EXPECTED THE MEEK NEGRO CLERK TO BE IN CHARGE, AND THAT HE HAD BEEN AFTER \$15,000 WHICH HE BELIEVED WAS READY FOR SHIPMENT.

COMING SOON—



REWARD

\$7,000.00
 FOR INFORMATION
 SEE THE POLICE

TWO OF THE BULLETS IN HIS REVOLVER HAD WOODEN NOSES AND WERE ARRANGED SO THAT THEY WOULD FIRE FIRST. "I NEVER SHOOT AN ARMED MAN," GARDNER SAID, AND HE EXPLAINED THAT HIS ODD WOODEN BULLETS CONTAINED SMALL SHOT THAT WOULD STOP A MAN WITHOUT KILLING HIM. INTERLIED RECEIVED \$7,000 REWARD FOR HIS COURAGEOUS CAPTURE.

GARDNER WAS TAKEN TO THE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY AT LEAVENWORTH TO SERVE OUT HIS PREVIOUS SENTENCES. BECAUSE OF HIS LONE-HANDED POSTAL ROBBERIES AND HIS SPECTACULAR ESCAPES HIS NAME HAD BEEN IN SCREAMING HEADLINES FOR MONTHS. HE LOVED THIS PUBLICITY AND WROTE LETTERS TO THE NEWS PAPERS WHILE HE WAS THE OBJECT OF FAR-FLUNG MANHUNTS. HE TOOK, OVER A NUMBER OF YEARS, BOOTY AMOUNTING TO \$250,000. (MOST OF IT WAS RECOVERED)

WHILE IN LEAVENWORTH, GARDNER'S WIFE PLAYED IN VAUDEVILLE AND RAISED MONEY TO PAY FOR AN OPERATION ON HIS BRAIN. IT SEEMED TO CURE HIS URGE TO ESCAPE FOR SIX YEARS. THEN, HE AND A PAL TRIED AN UNSUCCESSFUL BREAK FOR LIBERTY FROM THE ATLANTA PENITENTIARY WITH PISTOLS THAT HAD BEEN SMUGGLED TO THEM. SINCE THAT TIME GARDNER HAS BEEN IN ALCATRAZ. RECENTLY HE MADE A NOVEL PLEA TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT FOR HIS RELEASE. HOLDING HIMSELF REFORMED HE CLAIMED HE WOULD EVENTUALLY RUN LOOSE WITH HATRED FOR SOCIETY, IF REFUSED.



THE "MILLION DOLLAR" SNATCH MOB

Waterfront Stick-up

By
Robert H. Leitfred

DETECTIVE
D G W
SHORT



CHRS LARSEN'S eyes were moody as he stared at the type-written order transferring him from duty in the port city of San Pedro to the homicide squad in Los Angeles. His eyes turned to those of his superior, Captain of Detectives Judson, in unconscious appeal.

"Being a detective," said Captain Judson, "is like service in the army. You take your discipline and like it. Hell, Chris, don't you suppose I fought against your transfer? Damn it, you're the best man I've got on the force. I pointed out your splendid record. And that made it worse. Your record is what's causing the transfer. You're too good for this hick, seaport town."

"I never mixed with politics," observed Chris. "Now, I wish I had."

Chris was ready
for anything

*Detective Chris Larsen
Knew There Was No Use
Bucking Discipline, but He
Determined to Try Out His
Own Methods When the
Huge Navy Payroll Was
Being Snatched*

"Forget it," snapped Judson. "There's a future for you in . . ."

"I'm just a plain, hard-boiled dick," said Chris. "And I ain't kidding myself that I'm anything else. I like it here in Pedro. I belong here among the stevedores and longshoremen. And I'm not going to let any bunch of politicians kick me around . . ."

"You've got your orders," broke in Judson. "Start packing."

"You mean it, Captain?"

Captain Judson banged his desk with a heavy fist. "Mean it? Of course I mean it. Listen here, Chris. If there was any way under heaven I could break that order, I'd keep you with me. You know that—or you should."

"Okay," nodded the big detective. "I'm going out to breakfast. The order relieves me from duty, I suppose?"

"Sure. Why not?"

Chris shrugged. "I just wanted to keep the record straight in case somebody gets bumped off in this town within the next couple hours."

A little while later the eyes of Detective Chris Larsen were still moody as he drank a second cup of coffee. San Pedro was his town—his life. What could ever take the place of its colorful and ever-changing racial groups, its husky stevedores, longshoremen and sailors from the Navy? How was he going to live without its bawdiness, drunken brawls, percentage girls and laughter? He didn't know. He hated to think about it.

There was an actual ache inside the detective's brawny chest. He never knew how much he liked the place until now. It troubled him. It made him think he was soft when he wasn't. It made him want to squeeze certain police officials by their necks till they squeaked.

Discipline! Sure, he was used to it.

He could take it. But he wasn't going to like it. Of that he was damn well certain. He lunged to his feet, paid his check, and went out to the street.

Free from active duty he felt queer and useless. From his pocket he took a sack of tobacco and rolled a cigarette. As he cupped his hand behind a match he heard sirens screaming.

He roused out of his moodiness. Fire! He looked up Pacific Avenue and saw a dense cloud of smoke on the right side close to Tenth Street. The smoke was so thick that it reminded him of an oil well fire. His eyes swerved in the opposite direction.

He stood there, listening, waiting. He saw a radio car cut in front of the fire trucks. Saw it swerve at the corner to avoid a slow-moving car crossing Ninth. Saw that its swerving was not going to help matters, then shrugged philosophically.

"Smash-up!" he muttered, throwing the cigarette to the gutter.

The radio car caromed sideways from the impact and crashed into a telephone pole. Chris started moving. When he reached the machine, Sergeant Gowry was crawling from the wreckage and mouthing profane epithets as he hauled his partner after him. The partner had an ugly gash in his forehead. His mouth hung open, and he was making a snoring noise.

Sergeant Gowry was excited—too excited to notice the detective. Chris forgot he was no longer on duty. He grabbed Gowry by the arm. "Sergeant," he snapped, "your eyes are bulging like a couple of grapes. What the devil is your big rush?"

Gowry broke into a run down Pacific. Chris kept beside him. Gowry's voice jerked over his shoulder. "Stick-up, fellow! The Navy payroll. Close to half a million . . ."

The eyes of Chris Larsen hardened, and he became once more the man-hunter, hated and feared by water-front gangsters. "What else?" he yelled. "Tell me more."

"Yah!" gasped Gowry. "More? I don't know any more. We were getting the details when that half-wit Calahan crashed into the pole."

By this time they had reached the smoke-filled area. Half-blinded and coughing, Chris floundered through the smoke.

GOWRY was in front of him wrenching at the handle of a Buick touring car. Chris's sudden: "Hold everything!" stopped the sergeant. Chris spoke sharply. "Get out in the road and flag the fire trucks. This car ain't burning. It's the one behind it. Pfui, what a stink!"

A moment later a stream of water hissed into the center of whatever was causing the dense smoke screen. Chris choked in a cloud of nauseous vapor that almost gagged him. The smoke thinned. He was able to see.

Behind the Navy Buick was a battered, model T Ford. In front of it was a vegetable truck, one wheel jacked up, and the Buick was wedged between them, its front wheels against the curb.

The fire chief was pawing around the interior of the Ford. "Phosphorous candles!" he growled. "And broken glass from a stench bomb. Hey! Where's the driver of this wreck?"

No one answered. More sirens. Three motorcycle cops drove up and took control of the traffic situation. An ambulance purred to a stop and out jumped two internes in white jackets.

"Keep away from the Buick," warned Chris. "Here, Sergeant Gow-

ry, hold the mob back. Bust their heads if necessary. . . oh, hell, what a shambles!" Chris had hold of a door handle and was staring into its blood-drenched interior. Three men in Naval uniforms were twisted in grotesque positions on the car seats.

A hand gripped his arm. He whirled, and there was a glint of vexation in his eyes for he thought some snooping reporter had crashed through the police lines.

"Out!" pointed Chris, his eyes snapping with impatience.

The man who was gripping his arm said: "No!" He turned back the lapel of his coat disclosing a metal shield. "Department of Justice," he explained. "I'll take charge. You're—"

"Detective Lieutenant Chris Larsen," said Chris.

"Heard of you. I'm McDonald, Special Agent. Your superior will receive orders from our field office suggesting coöperation. Meanwhile we'll work together. Now. What's happened?"

"Take a look inside."

Special Agent McDonald surveyed the massacre. There was a tautness around his lips when he spoke: "Butchery, Larsen. The work of a machine gun at close range. But why?"

"See those initials on the door? U.S.N. That means Uncle Sam's Navy. This is the paymaster's car. And it's my guess that it just came from the sub-treasury loaded down with brand new currency for the gobs of the fleet now at Panama on maneuvers. Swell, ain't it? Sergeant Gowry says more than half a million. . ."

"It checks," broke in McDonald, "with the first report I received. All right. Sergeant Gowry!" The radio car officer came over to the car. McDonald continued: "Find witness-

es, Sergeant. Hurry before the crowd starts to move away. Ah! This way with the cameras, boys. Get angle shots through door openings from both sides. Also shots of the steering wheel and door handles."

Two officers from the *U.S.S. Vicksburg*, supply ship for the fleet, had hurried over from the Navy landing. They identified the three Navy men in the Buick, and verified the fact that four hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in new currency was missing.

The Special Agent took this all down in a note book. Big, brawny Chris Larsen watched the man. As a waterfront detective he was accustomed to more direct procedure, but he said nothing. Have to hand it to these G-men. They knew what they were doing.

Within three minutes after Special Agent McDonald took charge, wires were humming all over the southern part of the state. Teletypes were tapping out orders. Gowry had found two witnesses that had seen a tan sedan roll out of the smoke screen and turn up Tenth Street.

IT was as simple as that. Radio cars picked up orders, relayed them verbally to state cops on motorcycles. The sheriff's office received their orders. Within ten minutes a net began to tighten around San Pedro. Every road north and south was covered by grim-faced officers searching for a tan sedan.

All the main highways as well as feeder roads leading to Los Angeles were barricaded. No car answering this description could get through without being searched. The whole lower end of the state of California was sewed up tight.

Chris discovered after a time that

he was merely acting as an errand boy. He left McDonald at the first opportunity and strolled back for a closer inspection of the Ford. In the gutter he found a big cork with a circle of glass attached to it. He picked it up casually, but his nose wrinkled as he dropped the foul-smelling clue in his pocket.

Then he went across the street to look things over from a different angle. Two stocky boys in denim overalls were sitting on the curb in front of a candy shop. One of them was saying: "On account of stink getting on the candy he'll have to throw it away. If we can get hold of it, all we gotta do is hold our noses . . ."

"I'm gonna be a cop when I grow up," broke in the other. "Cops carry guns. They ain't afraid if they do get shot. Boy, if I had had a gun I coulda said to that guy at the wheel before he turned the corner, I coulda said: 'Raise 'em, Mister, or out spills your brains!' That's what I coulda . . ."

Chris Larsen abandoned all pretense of acting like a hard-boiled detective and sat down on the curb next to the boys. In his right hand were coins which he jingled.

His square face beamed with a disarming smile. "Kids shouldn't eat candy that's been contaminated from the fumes of a stench bomb."

"Yeah?" drawled the one who wished he was a cop.

"Just give me a chance," promised the other. "I wouldn't care if a elephant walked on it."

"It was on my mind," said Chris, opening the closed fist and staring at the coins, "to pass this change on to you boys. Did either of you see what happened over across the street?"

The one who wanted to be a cop said: "I'll talk for both of us. I'm the

leader. I'm Tommy. He's Don. How much you gonna give us?"

Chris regarded the change speculatively. "All depends. There's six bits here, but I can dig down in my other pocket if . . ."

Tommy looked wiser than his age. "If what, Mister?"

"If I thought you earned it. You see, Tommy, I heard you say you were going to be a cop when you grew up. That's fine. Once I was a cop. Now I'm a detective."

The eyes of both boys glowed. He had risen considerably in their estimation.

"Tell me, Tommy," Chris resumed, "what you thought happened . . ."

"Thought me eye. I saw the whole thing, I tell you. It began back there at Ninth Street. That tan car was crowding the Buick. I heard the fenders scrape. They was lots of room. But the driver kept pushing over. Finally the Buick gets stuck behind that truck."

Chris nodded. "You're doing fine. Looks like I'll have to dig down in my other pocket."

Tommy continued. "When the Buick is jammed against the curb the tan car stops beside it. Then up rattles that Ford. I saw the driver lean back over the front seat and pretty soon the Ford begins to smoke. Gee, what a stink! I couldn't see a thing after that."

"Hear any voices, Tommy?"

"Naw. The engine of that Ford was making too much noise. But I heard the chopper . . ."

"Chopper?" Chris eyed his young informant sharply. "What do you know about a chopper and how it sounds?"

"Easy, Mister. I heard plenty of 'em in the movies."

"Check," nodded Chris. "Then what happened?"

"Nothing for a couple minutes, then horns started to blow and cars began to move through the smoke. The tan car moved, too. It turned up Tenth Street towards the hills."

"How many men were in it, Tommy?"

"I counted three and they was all on the front seat."

"Was it traveling fast?"

"Naw, just crawling along."

Chris looked at his watch. Nearly an hour had passed since he emerged from the restaurant following the stick-up. He put his watch back and dug down in his pants pocket for more change. This he evenly divided among the two boys.

"Thanks, Mister," grinned Tommy.

"Keep me in sight," said Chris. "I may want to talk to you later on."

He went back across the street to see if anything new had developed.

II

CAPTAIN OF DETECTIVES
JUDSON scowled behind a black cigar as Chris Larsen entered headquarters. "Well," he snapped.

Chris's eyes were moody again. "I never saw such efficiency in my life. We're all just a bunch of hicks when it comes to getting things done, when you compare us with those Federal men."

Judson's scowl deepened. "Is that all you've got to say?"

"The roads," continued Chris, as if he hadn't heard, "have been closed down tight for over an hour. And no arrests have been made. The system is good, but it isn't working. Something's screwy!"

"Chris, we've done evcrything.

Every last stretch of state and county highway north, south, and east is cluttered up with searching patrols."

"Sure," said Chris. "Anybody would know that—especially the three killers in the tan sedan. They must have brains or they couldn't have pulled that job so neat and got away without a trace. Give 'em credit, Captain. Hell, they knew they wouldn't have a Chinaman's chance of getting out of a town situated as Pedro is." He rolled a cigarette.

After the second puff he said: "I wasn't in charge of the investigation, Captain, so I kept my mouth shut."

"Meaning?"

"You look off through these windows to the west, Captain, and you'll see a hell of a lot of Pacific Ocean. Is there any reason for you or anybody else to think these smart gents might not use it in their get-away—say, after darkness?"

Captain Judson looked as if he had swallowed his upper plate. He glared at Chris, and his face began to purple. He grabbed the receiver from the telephone. "Harbor Police," he barked at the operator at the switchboard. His voice took on an edge as he rapped out curt orders over the line.

Abruptly he hung up, knowing that in a few minutes the Harbor Police and fast cruisers from the Coast Guard would go into action. But what would going into action mean? What would they look for? Could they be expected to stop every boat in the harbor channel? Judson continued to frown. He was far from happy.

"Well," drawled Chris, "I guess I'll start packing."

Judson's teeth almost cut his black cigar in two as they clamped down. "What do you mean—packing?"

"It's no concern of mine if three

poor Navy guys get bumped off. And what's a half a million dollars? It's Federal money. Let the Federals get it back."

"You mean you're quitting?"

"Quitting. I'm already out. You said so yourself. You said: 'Chris, start packing.' And that's what I'm going to do, pronto."

The eyes of Captain Judson gleamed cunningly. "This murder and stick-up is the biggest thing that's hit Pedro since you smashed that Mannock snatcher mob from Frisco. And you talk about quitting. Make a crack like that again and I'll break your jaw!"

Chris grinned. This was more like it. Judson was acting human again. "Well," he asked, squinting at his superior.

Captain Judson hauled out an ancient timepiece and peered at it. "An hour and a half have passed since the stick-up, and no word's come in regarding any pinch."

"I figured the same thing over an hour ago. I also figured like I told you, that the mobsters who pulled this job were no amateurs. They belong to the new order of professionals. They had their get-away in the bag, and it didn't mean hitting the state highways with their car when they knew the roads would be jammed with police. They know about radio control the same as we do."

Judson rubbed his chin. "Then they must still be in Pedro."

"Swell, Captain. That's just where they are."

"Chris, don't get me sore. You've got something on your mind. You always have when a case like this breaks. I can tell you're holding back on me from the way your jaw slacks away."

"Whatever I know I'm taking to Special Agent McDonald. He'll know

what to do with it. You've got no authority over me, Captain. Right now I'm free as the air, and I'm on my way."

"Listen, Chris, you aren't turning the department down . . ."

"Nerts on the department. It turned me down. Let the Federal men make the capture and get the glory. I'm just a . . ." Something in the old captain's eyes caused him to relent.

"I forgot for a minute, Captain, that you'd have to stay in this town after I'm gone. Now, listen. How long can you hold back on that transfer?"

"Till tonight. Not any longer."

Chris nodded. "I'll see what I can do for the San Pedro police department. But don't expect too much. Stick close to the phone. And if you have to go out, fix it with the operator to locate you. I may need help in a hurry."

He smiled heavily and left the room. All the old instincts were aroused. He went first to the laboratory on a lower floor. Billings, the keen-eyed chemist and ballistic expert in charge, looked up from a comparison microscope.

Chris took the cork from his pocket with the circlet of glass around it. Without a word he handed it to the chemist. Billings placed it under a strong light, held it close to his nose, squinted and said: "Cork and glass probably from a thermos bottle. The glass was filled with a valerian preparation obtainable most anywhere.

"The preparation used, as far as I can guess without a chemical test, is most likely zinc valerate, a pure white powder, or valerianic acid composed of small, water-white crystals. Dissolved in a small quantity of ether with water added, either of these chemicals make a lingering, and altogether repulsive

odor. You found this cork near . . ."

Chris nodded. "Beside the car where the phosphorous candles were ignited. The rotten smell kept people at a safe distance, which was what the stick-up men wanted."

"Leave it here, Chris. I'll have it gone over for prints."

Again Chris nodded. "About the thermos bottle angle. You mean the glass bottle inside the metal shell?"

"Exactly. The glass is crystal thin. It would break easily."

"Which means," said Chris, "that a bomb like this couldn't be carried around. You think they were made here in town?"

"My guess is—yes. Why?"

"Just a hunch. And I'm going to play it for what it's worth."

The chemist shrugged. "If you mean you're going to search for the metal case of a particular thermos bottle, the odds will be against you. The idea is good, but not practical. Better wait till we get prints from the cork. Then we can check back through the fingerprint files."

"Too slow," Chris frowned. "I haven't the time. See you later."

III

CROSSING the street after leaving the police building, he almost ran down the sturdy Tommy, who was waiting for him. As they walked up Sixth Street together, Chris said: "Still want to be a cop?"

"Sure. I will be, too, some day."

"All right. Here's how. But first, how many kids can you get hold of right away for a job of work?"

"My neighborhood is lousy with them. Maybe a dozen. Maybe more."

"Good. Here's what I want you to do for me." Rapidly Chris outlined his plan. "And there's two bits for every

bottle brought to me, and five dollars for the lad that brings in the particular one I'm looking for. Clear?"

"Yes, sir. Where will you be . . ."

"In the restaurant near that candy store where I talked with you right after the stick-up. And listen, Tommy. There's five dollars for you in this case, regardless. So don't spend too much of your own time searching trash cans. Y'understand?"

Tommy saluted his superior gravely. "Check, Mister Detective."

Chris looked at his watch. Two hours and a quarter had passed since he had emerged from the restaurant. He felt the need of a stimulant. Pocketing his watch, he went into the Harbor Café. Here he had two drinks of straight Scotch.

Then he walked rapidly to the restaurant where he always took his meals. "George," he told the proprietor, "for reasons which wouldn't be important to you I want the use of the banquet room upstairs."

"Sure, Chris. It's empty. Help yourself. The place is yours."

"Thanks, George." He rubbed the palms of his hands together. "Arrange it with the cashier. If a young lad comes in inquiring for me, route him up the stairs where I'll be waiting for him."

This preparation attended to, he went to the bank and got a pocketful of quarters, then returned to the restaurant.

IN less than an hour Tommy came into the room. His face was red. Evidently he had been running. He grinned at Chris.

"I got twenty kids at work in the neighborhood. What they won't find in those trash cans, Mister . . ."

"You can call me Chris, Tommy."

"Gee, you're swell, Chris. I like to work for you." He fumbled awkwardly with his cap. "Some of the kids," he began. "Well, I didn't tell them who wants the thermos bottles. See? They think I want them. So it's me who pays them. Maybe I ought to have some quarters in my pocket to show them just in case . . ."

"Tommy," marveled Chris, handing the boy a handful of silver, "you have got what it takes to make a good cop. Never tell all you know or think you know. Now beat it."

"Yes, sir." Tommy waved a grimy hand and vanished down the stairs.

Chris pondered his next move as he rolled and lit a cigarette. "If Judson," he mused, squinting at the glowing end, "knew what I was doing . . . oh, hell! He never did understand how intelligent some kids are."

He jerked erect and crossed the room to a window. He could see the Navy car and the Ford behind it. The big truck was gone. The place was barricaded to keep traffic away, and a couple of camera men were working on tire prints.

Chris grinned wryly. "Those Federal dicks don't overlook much. If anything's there, they'll find it and classify it. But there's one thing they won't find." He was thinking of the cork with the cirlet of glass fashioned around it.

After a time he went downstairs and called Captain Judson. "Any news from the front lines?" he asked.

"No," growled Judson. "Where are you? What are you doing?"

"You'd be surprised," said Chris. "Bye." He hung up.

He went upstairs again and waited. Inaction grated on his nerves. He kept glancing at his watch. Minutes were slipping away. Five, ten, fifteen.

HERE was a clamor of sirens. Chris looked out the window. Half a dozen motorcycle cops were passing through town at top speed. The place was overcrowded with cops from outside districts.

Chris clenched his hands. Was he crazy to place so much faith in a bunch of young boys? He ought to be out himself. Back and forth he paced, smoking continuously.

He went to the window again. A taxi was drawing up to the curb. The driver opened the door, and out popped Tommy, dragging a burlap sack behind him. Gravely he paid the driver.

Chris Larsen's jaw twitched. He had a grin on his face when Tommy staggered into the banquet room with the burlap sack of clanking metal.

"We had swell luck," said Tommy. "Twelve thermos bottles in all. Two gallons, six quarters, and four pints. Eleven of them are in pretty good shape. But I got gypped on one of the pints."

Chris had the bottles out of the sack and on the table. "Which one did you get gypped on?"

"This one," explained Tommy. "I didn't look at it close till after I paid Eddie Weaver two bits for it. Y'see, it's got no insides and no cork. I'm sorry about this, Mister . . . Chris."

"That's okay, kid." But Chris could feel his heart begin to hammer against his ribs. He swallowed heavily. Had the impossible happened? He could hardly believe his luck.

"Tommy," he asked, softly, "where'd this bottle come from?"

IV

GEORGE KELLY was slim, his movements furtive. He had his coat off and was in his shirt sleeves. A leather holster was strapped

around his chest and shoulder. In the holster the handle of an automatic was visible.

He stood near a window, peering through parted curtains at the back of the house. At the front window stood his brother Ernie, similarly dressed and armed. The dining room table was covered with odds and ends of food and an assortment of liquor bottles. A radio was blaring in one of the rooms halfway between the brothers.

George Kelly's mouth thinned to an ugly slit. The alley in back of the house seemed to break out with a rash of kids. They were everywhere at once, snooping, pawing like a scourge of rats.

Kelly took out his automatic, examined it and returned it to its holster. He went back through the house and snapped off the radio.

"Seen anything of Mike?" he called out to Ernie.

"Mike's okay. He'll be back soon. What time is it?"

"One o'clock."

George Kelly began to sweat. "This town is getting hot, Ernie. I don't like it."

Ernie laughed thinly. "Hot me eye. It's the highways that are hot. We're safe here, Georgie, till night. The boat Mike went out to hire will be ready by then. By midnight we'll be safe across the line into Mexico."

George poured himself a drink, gulped it, and returned to the rear window. The kids had left the alley. All was quiet again. A half hour of silence was broken by Ernie's rasping voice.

"C'mere, George!"

George Kelly raced through the rooms. Ernie pushed the drawn shade to one side. "Ever see that guy before?"

Muscles began to twitch in George Kelly's neck. "Yeah," he said slowly. "I think I have. Ain't he one of those harbor dicks Mike pointed out a couple of days ago?"

"Ahh. He's one of those dirty harbor dicks. But he didn't look at the house, George. Maybe he just happens to be passing. What do you think?"

The lips of George Kelly began to whiten. He returned to the rear window. Five minutes elapsed. Then George Kelly saw the waterfront detective in the alley some distance away, and he knew that the moment he dreaded had come. He called to his brother.

"Ernie, that dick is coming down the alley. Slip on your coat. I'll get behind the kitchen door. If he comes up the stairs, get him inside where we can finish him off."

V

CHRIS LARSEN studied the building from behind a pepper tree. It was an ordinary wooden structure with a garage beneath, and living quarters above. There was an outside stairway leading to a screen door. All the shades were drawn. A high fence surrounded it on three sides. Within the fence Chris could see the tops of shrubs and small citrus trees. There was a gate in the fence beside the driveway. The place was quiet and appeared deserted.

The detective looked cautiously down the alley. No one was in sight. He had started to turn around when something brushed against his back. Chris jerked sideways and swung at the thing behind him. The backhanded blow struck the boy in the cheek.

With a whimpering cry Tommy dropped to his knees.

Chris knelt beside him, torn between

anger and pity. "Damn it, Tommy. I didn't know you were behind me. Hurt?"

Tommy rubbed his jaw. Tears were in his eyes. "Naw," he lied. "I didn't mean to get so close to you. Honest. I was just watching."

"I don't want you to watch," reproved Chris. "It's dangerous. I sent you home once. You should have gone. This is no place for a kid. Now beat it, and don't let me catch you around here again."

Tommy scuttled back down the alley, his eyes aglow with excitement. But he didn't go very far. Just far enough to get safely out of Larsen's sight.

Chris felt for the reassuring bulge of the gun in his hip holster, took a long breath and went through the gate into the back yard.

His heavy feet clumped up the stairs. He rapped on the screen door. He heard feet cross the room. A thin-faced man wearing a blue coat came to the door. "What do you want?" he asked.

"State motor vehicle inspector," said Chris. "I see you've got a car in the garage below. Mind if I inspect it? Routine stuff."

"State inspector, eh? This is a new racket, fellow. Come on in. Have a drink, then we'll go down to the garage."

"Sure," agreed Chris. "I hate to bother you with that drink . . ."

"No bother. Got lots of the stuff. Here," picking up a bottle by the neck, "pour it yourself."

The bottle started towards the detective's head. Chris ducked. His fist curved up. Ernie Kelly crashed against the table. His hand streaked to his left armpit.

The door slammed behind Chris. A

voice crackled: "No shooting, Ernie. Might be others outside. Beat him up!"

Chris backed against the wall. They moved on him together, lashing with the barrels of their automatics. Chris flung bunched knuckles into George's face. Ernie came in on the flank. His automatic thudded against the detective's shoulder.

The blow knocked the detective off balance. George tripped him. He fell to his knees. They flung themselves upon him. Metal gashed the detective's cheek. He could feel the blood spurt out.

He lurched erect, carrying both men with him. He hit George Kelly in the face. Kelly shook off the blow and chopped at the detective's head. Chris snapped his head aside and took the blow on his shoulder. Pain gripped in. Sheet lightning flicked in his eyes.

His shoulder bunched. His arm jerked back, then straightened with a piston-like movement. Thock! More pain. This time in the knuckles. George Kelly groaned, flung up both hands, and crashed to his back—knocked cold.

Instinct caused Chris to whirl. Ernie was backing away, half crouched. His gun flamed. Chris felt powder sting his cheeks. The bullet missed his jaw bone by a hair but clipped off a gory hunk of flesh.

He reached for his Colt. But that movement was not going to help him. He realized it in a flash and flung himself down—out of the line of the burning lead chunks from Ernie's chattering gun.

HE hit his head on the corner of the table in going down. It almost knocked him out. He pushed himself to his knees with the palms of his hands. Ernie was still crouched close to the floor, a smoking

gun in his fist. His eyes were wide and staring. He was waiting for Chris Larsen to die.

Sudden paralysis held Chris to the floor. Bullet must have struck a nerve. His throat and mouth were full of cotton. He tried to talk. But his voice was only a hoarse croak.

"Drop that gun!"

Ernie Kelly licked his lips. His eyes became opaque, murderous. He shoved it out ahead of him till it was within a foot of Larsen's head.

Chris cuffed it aside and felt the scorch of powder against his palm. Breath made a rasping sound in his throat. The room began to revolve. Was he sick!

Again the gun drew down on its human target. Chris lunged. His fingers closed over Ernie's wrist. He yanked savagely and struck with his free hand. He could feel bruised knuckles sink into the stringy cords of Kelly's neck. Ernie choked and began to retch violently.

Hauling out his gun, Chris rapped him smartly over the right ear. Ernie collapsed. The detective staggered to his feet, holstered his gun and reached to his belt for steel bracelets. He snapped the wrists of the two brothers together, wiped the blood from his face, and started for the front door. He never reached it.

Mike Kelly, the third brother, came through, his gun belching a staccato fury. Chris flung the dining room table on its side and dropped behind it. A wood sliver stung his face. He raised his Colt. Mike nailed him then—through the forearm.

The Colt dropped to the floor and Chris Larsen knew that he had overplayed his hand. His cards had run out.

Mike Kelly came around the corner

of the overturned table. His eyes were thin slits of hate. He kicked Chris's gun across the room. He kicked the detective's face. Brutality fairly drooled from his lips.

Chris spat. He attempted to get on his legs. Mike kicked him again. Chris moaned, shook his head and stubbornly tried a third time. Mike snarled and struck with the gun butt. Chris sank to the floor, his body quivering.

Mike went out to the back room. He saw his brothers on the floor cuffed together. He went back to Chris, rolled him over and searched for a bunch of keys. Found them and went back to release his brothers.

Hardly was the killer out of the room when Chris roused up again. His eyes opened. Pain spurred him to renewed efforts—pain and the will that made him feared along the waterfront. His fingers closed over a bottle. He had to use his scorched left hand. His right hung useless.

He looked for his gun. It was over against the wall. He looked out into the back room. Mike Kelly was bending over the handcuffed men, trying out keys. Chris started to crawl towards his gun. The floor creaked. Mike lifted his head as if listening. Chris hurled the bottle. Not at Mike Kelly, but into the front room where it crashed through a window. As Kelly straightened, Chris feigned unconsciousness. Mike brushed past him, not noticing the pretense, headed towards the front.

Again Chris roused up. It took every ounce of strength in his tortured body. He heard a noise outside on the back stairs. The screen door hinges made a rasping sound. The the inner door opened and the head of a boy became visible around the edge of the door.

Chris called out huskily: "Tommy!"

TOMMY saw him and started towards him, half-frightened but determined. The detective pointed to his gun. Tommy pounced upon it like a striking hawk. Chris got it fitted into his scorched left hand just as Mike Kelly came back into the room. The gun in Kelly's hand spewed flame. But the Colt in Chris Larsen's big paw erupted a split second faster. And the two shots blended as one.

Mike Kelly, pawing at a crimson chest, glared at the detective on the floor, then his eyes turned malevolently upon the boy crouched against the wall.

Venom dripped from his eyes. He swung his gun for the final act of violence that was part of his twisted mentality, and pointed it at the boy. Tommy did not flinch. His eyes turned pleadingly towards his big friend sprawled on the floor.

There was no other way out. Chris drilled Kelly, then—through the head. Kelly dropped without a sound, face downward, his gun arm extended, the weapon still gripped in his fingers.

From somewhere out of the depths of a tortured body, Chris found his voice. "Get to a phone, Tommy. Call police headquarters . . ."

"I—I already called them, Mister—Chris. They're coming!"

Chris heard the near whine of a siren. He got to his feet, searched for whisky, found it and drank shakily. There was commotion outside and the pound of feet on both front and back stairs. Then the room was filled with cops and Special Agents.

Captain Judson looked at the cuffed men on the floor, then at Mike Kelly's stiffening body. "Got all three of

them, eh? Chris, you're a glutton for punishment. If you weren't so busted up, I'd break your jaw." This was high praise. Chris liked it.

Special Agent McDonald came to where Chris was leaning against the wall. "Larsen," he said, and there was admiration in his voice. "How did you do it?"

"Better check up first," drawled Chris. "I haven't had time."

"We found the car in the garage below. Everything was in it. These men," indicating the prisoners, "are the Kelly brothers. They were down on our list of public enemies. Stick-ups of big payrolls are their specialty. I should have recognized their technique, but I didn't."

"Never heard of them along the waterfront," said Chris, trying vainly to roll a cigarette. "I pulled a fast one on you, McDonald. Didn't realize what I was doing at the time."

McDonald lit a cigarette of his own and gave it to the detective. "What's this fast one you tell about?"

"I found a cork," explained Chris, inhaling deeply. "There was a ring of glass around it. The remains of a stench bomb container. The glass looked as if it came from a thermos bottle. Wasn't positive though. Figured that the bomb was constructed just before the stick-up. Since the metal part of the thermos bottle was no good once the inside was removed, it would be thrown away—in some trash can."

"I still don't . . ."

"Wait," sighed Chris, patiently. "I hired Tommy and his friends. He's the lad who phoned for help and got here in time to hand me my gun when I needed it badly. I don't know how many kids were working for me in the search, but there were plenty.

"I also figured that since the sedan could not be traced, it must still be in the neighborhood of the stick-up—the safest place in the world. So I had these boys search all the trash cans in this part of town.

"I pulled twelve out of the grab-bag. One of them was without a glass bottle inside. Tommy knew where this case was found. He directed me to the spot. Then I sent him home — sent him home twice. But the kid wouldn't go."

"I was scared," defended Tommy, "that something might happen to you."

"That's all," finished Chris. "It was a crazy hunch on my part. And it just happened to work out."

"I see," nodded Special Agent McDonald. "You've been in this town a long time, Larsen. Sort of know your way around. Your superior, Captain Judson, tells me that you're being transferred to . . ."

"Why bring up that chunk of bad news?" complained Chris.

"Because it concerns you personally. Larsen, in spite of everything I might say, the newshawks are going to give the Department of Justice credit for this pinch."

The moodiness returned to the detective's eyes. "That's all right with me. I've done my duty. The hell with who gets the credit."

"But if you won't feel too badly about all this," McDonald continued, "I think I can arrange it with certain high officials to keep you here in this port city where you belong. It isn't much, but I'll start pulling the strings right away."

Chris Larsen started to grin, and he was still grinning when dizziness assailed him and he passed out cold in Captain Judson's arms.

DETECTIVE
FICTION
WEEKLY
SERIAL
NOVEL



"Stand still and stick 'em up!" advised O'Rourke savagely

The Granduca

By
Max Brand

*Henry Tydings Is Dead,
but the Machinery of
Hatred Which He Created
Continues to Turn out Bit-
ter Jealousy, Gnawing Sus-
picion and Stalking Murder*

What has happened—

HENRY TYDINGS, a wealthy art collector, has invited his bitterest enemies to spend a week-end with him prior to his marriage. Gene Chatham, Tydings' arch-foe, is there, only so that he may be near Charlotte Reid, the bride-to-be, whom he loves. Winifred Staunton, Tydings' former mistress, is also present, and at dinner, when Tydings is baiting his guests, including Rupert Walden, another collector rival, and Willard Hamblin, his resident physician, Winifred wounds Tydings with a gun belonging to Lionel Reid, Charlotte's brother.

Sergeant Detective Angus Campbell and his bickering team-mate, Sergeant Detective Patrick O'Rourke, arrive at Tydings' Island to learn that Tydings' body has vanished. Only one clue is found. Hamblin's amateurish copy of Raphael's Granduca is smeared in the corner with Tydings' bloody fingerprint. A bit later, Campbell surprises a sneak thief, William Kearton, in his room, examining the copied Granduca

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canvas. Campbell is convinced that the copy is the key to the mystery.

Lionel Reid is found struggling with his sifter for a cancelled check. Campbell recovers it, forces Lionel to confess that it's a forgery which Tydings honored only so that he would have a hold over Charlotte.

Kearton makes a break, tries to escape with the Granduca copy, and Walden, the butterfly collector, stops him and betrays his own keen interest in the picture.

In the meanwhile, a police launch has recovered Tydings' body, floating in the bay. An autopsy is ordered by the dead man's daughter, Vivian, and it is learned that Winifred Staunton's shot did not kill the collector. He died of accumulative arsenic poisoning. Dr. Hamblin collapses when he hears the news. He had been prescribing an arsenic tonic for Tydings. An analysis proves that it is a much stronger solution than the pharmacist had prepared. In the midst of the questioning, Kearton, with the aid of someone inside the house—probably Chatham—escapes.

Shortly thereafter, Campbell accuses the doctor of Tydings' murder. O'Rourke third-degrees Hamblin, learns that he was the one who moved the dead body around. He had found Tydings dead in his room just after the shooting at the dinner table. Afraid of suspicions, he carried the body to the armory, put it into one of the suits of armor. Then he managed to spirit it from the armory to the dumb-waiter, where the cook saw it, and from there to the cellar, where he cast it into the sea. While O'Rourke goes to lord it over Campbell with this information, Hamblin falls from his window and is killed. On a sudden hunch, O'Rourke goes to the laundry, directly above Hamblin's room, and discovers that a flatiron, tied to a length of laundry cord, was dropped on the doctor's head as he leaned out the window.

O'Rourke goes to the room of Clifford, the butler, and surprises the servant writing a letter, threatening to expose someone in the household. Together, the detectives force Clifford to send the blackmail letter to each of the suspects. Clifford balks at sending one to Chatham, on account of the man's violent temper.

"And you think he might have killed Tydings?" O'Rourke asked.

"Yes, sir," Clifford answered.

"And Hamblin?" the Irishman added.

"Yes."

"You hear that, Campbell? Look here, Clifford. Are you ever wrong in the way you dope out people?"

"No, sir," Clifford answered, at the door. "I am never wrong."

CHAPTER XXI

Sneak!

CAMPBELL sat steadily at his work on the books, his pondering of the picture, an hour later when O'Rourke came back to the room from his meanderings. He carried a small bottle in his hand.

"You remember when the druggist sent back the bottle of the arsenic tonic?" asked O'Rourke.

"I remember," said Campbell.

"Remember how much stuff there was in the bottle?"

"Yeah, and what of it?"

"Take a look now."

O'Rourke set the bottle on the table. Campbell said: "That ain't possible."

"Take a look-see," said O'Rourke. "It's been back there in Tydings' medicine cabinet ever since the druggist sent it back with his report."

"Half the stuff is gone," said Campbell.

"Half?"

"I think so."

"So do I," agreed O'Rourke. "You only got half an eye in your head, but I wanted to get your idea. Who's been stealing the stuff? Who's it being fed to?"

The night was hot, but that was not the reason that Sergeant Angus Campbell broke into a heavy sweat. He pushed back his chair from the table and stood up. He leaned his weight on his arms and stared at the Irishman.

"There's still murder turned loose

in this hell-hole," said Campbell. "Who are they after now? Who's getting sick?"

"Lionel Reid is looking damn' bad."

"We'll keep the stuff in here," said Campbell. "D'you think there's enough been used to kill a man?"

"I dunno," muttered O'Rourke. "It's gonna be a big setup for you and me. It's gonna build us right up to the sky with the Inspector. He sends us out on a job and the dead begin to fall all around us. And Sergeant Campbell, like a damn' fool, spends his time lookin' at a lousy picture that somebody painted a thousand years ago!"

Such an idea came to Campbell that he paid no heed to the latest insult. He merely exclaimed: "Kearton!"

O'Rourke started and looked over his shoulder at the door.

"What about him?" demanded O'Rourke.

"What about him? Why, you seen something shine the other night when he chucked it out the window. . . . It was another bottle of this damned stuff. When I came in behind him, the first thing he did was to chuck the bottle out the window into the sea. Then he turned around and took a shot at me. That must of been it. Kearton! If we could get hold of that rat! Kearton's at the bottom of it. He comes to the house, and Tydings is scared to death. He fades right out of our hands with maybe Chatham helping him. Chatham and Kearton are the men we want, Pat."

"That sounds like sense," said O'Rourke.

Here came a knock at the door.

In response to Campbell's call, Walden entered, with a paper in his hand. "I thought you people might like to hear this," he said.

He stood close to a light and read aloud, calmly, the letter which Clifford had printed with such care in copy after copy, and which had been distributed secretly to every suspected person in the house.

O'Rourke and Campbell listened with the greatest attention.

"Who signed it?" said O'Rourke.

"No one, naturally," said Walden. "I wonder what to make of it. Blackmail barking up the wrong tree, perhaps?"

"Maybe," agreed Campbell. "Want to go down to the lake about eleven and see who turns up?"

"D'you think I should?"

"One of us will be on hand," said O'Rourke.

"I'll do whatever you say," said Walden. "And in the meantime, I have to ask how long we are to be held here, Sergeant Campbell. I've remained past my time. I have no work that absolutely demands me, but at the same time there's a good deal of unpleasantness in the atmosphere of a house of death such as this, Sergeants, as you can understand."

"Understand perfectly," said O'Rourke. "We can't hold people beyond tomorrow morning, anyway, I suppose. You'll be free then. . . . And don't bother about the lake at eleven, if you don't want to."

"I don't think I shall," said Walden. "It's some sort of a practical jester choosing a particularly horrible moment for a joke. Good night."

He went out of the room, followed by the stern regard of Campbell.

"I don't like that one," said Campbell.

"He's got some flesh on his ribs," said O'Rourke, rubbing his own paunch thoughtfully, "and you never could stand a man that looks like he

ate three meals a day. . . . Anyway, Walden's the only one of the lot that was man enough to come up and show us the letter. What do the rest of 'em think? I'll be down there at eleven, at the pool. Damn it, Angus, I've got an idea that I'll catch a whole netful of fish."

"Maybe," said Campbell. "Tell me one thing, Pat. What the devil can the murderers be up to now? Who do they want to bump off? They knock over Tydings—plenty of motives for that. But who wants to keep on killing? What's to be gained?"

"The two gals hate each other because of Chatham," said O'Rourke. "Ever think of that? Then there's Chatham and Kearton. Maybe it's a partnership, and one of them wants to break away from the other. . . .? There is that damned Clifford — golly, I wanted to sock him, just now!"

"Yeah," agreed Campbell. "To bash in the dirty, smooth, sleek face of him with the heel of a gun. That would be something worth while. Pat, it's close to eleven now. Will you take a look down by the lake?"

"While you keep on at the picture?" sneered O'Rourke.

Campbell shrugged his shoulders. "There's the news of the murder and all, right here in this paint," he said. "I feel it as clear as ever a Scotchman ever felt a ghost in the prickling of his skin."

O'Rourke growled an oath and left the room. He went down to the garden entrance, found the old porter once more asleep, stared cynically at that fallen head, and then let himself out into the open night.

The stars were half obscured by the humidity of the air. They burned small and dim. Even the slight exercise of

walking made the sweat stand on his forehead and then run down his temples.

"I gotta reduce," said O'Rourke to his soul. "I gotta start in and take it off. I gotta melt it off. I'll give up potatoes and bread and butter and beer. I'll give up the bread, anyway. I'll give up the butter except for the baked potatoes. A baked potato without butter—well, what the hell, anyway?"

He got down by the pool, keeping to the grass where his footfall sounded small. Something stirred; someone moved at the end of a narrow path. He dropped to his knee and pulled his gun. . . . it was only the dim flash of a statue at the farther end of the path.

"What a mug I turned out to be!" said O'Rourke through the fat of his lips.

He no longer felt too warm when he went on. The moon was coming up. It threw from the pergola a long-slanted pattern of shadows across the sleek face of the pool. O'Rourke got into the shadows.

You take people that have swimming pools, and whole islands for their gardens, and fast motorboats, and big cars, and houses full of fancy junk, it's no wonder that murder pops up among them, every now and then. That's the way things are kept even. Champagne is all right, but beer is safer. You take it from O'Rourke, beer is a hell of a lot safer. You don't be apt to have any flossy females around, when you're drinking beer. . . . It goes with cheese sandwiches and things that don't cost you a million bucks; and afterwards what have you got except a morning after, anyway? And maybe a dame on your hands that what's she's looking for except where she can knife you, and what do Dun and Bradstreet's say about papa?

To be kind of natural is the main thing in life, any way you look at it. Nothing too much, like somebody says. That is, the bigger they are the farther they fall. And look at the big bozos in the ring. I mean, look at Fred Fulton. What a canvas-kisser he turned out to be, and what did Jack Dempsey say with words *and* music to Willard; or there was poor Carnera, and little old Jimmy Braddock made a dummy out of Baer, or didn't he? Of course, the good ones have the Irish in them but don't be funny . . . the big guys tumble.

The same with money. You want to have enough.

All you got more than enough is extra weight and a hell of a long race. You take the bird that's got a eye for horseflesh and twenty, thirty millions of old stuff and he wants to go to the auctions and pick up that good-looking bay and that brown mare that stands over a lot of ground. But can he buy what he wants? Hell, no! "What is the strain of that bay gelding, Mr. Smith." "Strain? I don't know," says he. "You not just going around picking up trash, are you, Mr. Smith?" "I just got careless the other day," says Smith. He goes and gets himself a swell jockey that finds the fancy ones, blood all the way back to Moses, all paprika and damn' little ham. Smith gets a stable full of that stuff. He goes out and says: "Jeffers, have the grey saddled this morning." "Beg pardon, sir," said Jeffers. "You're not forgetting that you rode the grey only yesterday, sir?" "True," says Smith. "I'll take Spaghetti, instead." "Spaghetti is off in the near foreleg, sir," says Jeffers. "I'll give you Head Sail, sir. Shaping up very well just now, sir, and needs the work." "I don't feel like riding much this morn-

ing anyway," says Smith, and goes back inside and looks at his boots and says: "Hell, what's the use, anyway?" That's the way with the fellows with the big capital. All I say is, the bigger you are the more sucker they play you for. You dodge the hooks for a while but finally you get the gaff where the soft is the softest, and there you are in the bag.

O'Rourke stood up from the stone bench where he had been assembling his thoughts. There was no sound in all the island except the windy rushing of the tide through the broken causeway. The moon was higher. His watch, in a patch of the white light, told him that the time was eleven-twenty, so he started back for the house.

When he came to the gate, the porter greeted him with an apologetic smile.

"That's all right, papa," said O'Rourke. "We all gotta have our shut-eye. Only around this dump, look out they don't give you a whiff of poison gas while you're snoozing."

While he went up the stairs he kept thinking it over. The poison was the worst part. Take and slam a fellow over the head with a flat-iron and that's not so bad. It sounds sort of homely and natural, like it might happen any place. But poison is hell.

He got into the upper hall. It was dim, at that end. One of the big lights had burned out and left the place shadowy, so that the bust in the niche stared at him with a lifelike intelligence.

Something stirred just to the left. He turned.

That was the door of the doctor's room, the crystal knob glittering at him like an eye.

There was the stir of life again—a

thin cat's-claw of light that slid under the edge of the door!

O'Rourke stuck out his head like a bulldog and set his jaw. He walked for that door with his automatic pressed close to the fat of his right hip.

CHAPTER XXII

Artistic Discovery

THE knob, turned softly, cleared the latch; the weight of the door came softly into O'Rourke's left hand.

Over his shoulder, as it were, he gave one thought—rather than a glance—towards Angus Campbell, a good man, damn him, in a pinch; a very good man in any sort of a fight. Because the Scotch are that way—mean, but useful on your own side.

Then O'Rourke snatched the door open and dropped to one knee on the threshold.

That way, you let the first shot go over your head, because instinct makes most men shoot breast high. The figure in the center of the room made a leap for a window.

"Stand still and stick 'em up or I'll blow the living hell right out of you," advised O'Rourke savagely.

The man said nothing. He stood still and put his hands up.

"Touching the ceiling, baby," said O'Rourke. "Don't move. I was born at night and I can see in the dark. . . . There you are!"

He found the switch with his left hand and turned it on. It was Kearton who stood in the middle of the room with his arms well stretched above his head. He had the cuffs of his coat sleeves turned up. There was a pungent odor in the room.

Kearton's hands were stained. A bottle of stuff stood on the table.

"Had to come back and see us, brother?" asked O'Rourke.

Kearton, as usual, said nothing. He looked tired. He lifted his weary eyes a little towards the light, blinked, and glanced back at the face of the detective.

A shadow came behind O'Rourke. He jumped back against the wall. The huge shoulders of Gene Chatham loomed in the doorway, where he had appeared with such a noiseless step.

"Same little visitor, sergeant?" he asked.

But he looked not at O'Rourke but straight at Kearton.

"Get the hell out of here!" cried O'Rourke. "Back up and shut that door—don't try to come in here, Chatham!"

"Certainly not," Chatham agreed, and stepped back into the hall.

"That's all right," said O'Rourke, aware of a quiver that was making his gun unsteady.

He went behind Kearton. "Put your hands behind your back, will you?" he commanded. "Dead slow."

Very slowly, Kearton lowered his hands behind his back. O'Rourke tied them up in his own tidy way. He felt that handcuffs are all right, but you can't carry a whole hardware store around with you.

He still was breathing hard when he finished that task. He began to realize what a shock it had been—the appearance of big Gene Chatham and that hard, fighting face on the threshold of the room, coming from behind.

It gave him a double grudge against Chatham—the fear that still shook him, and kept working its cold fingers deeper in his bowels in spite of the fact that the danger was gone. If Campbell had a Scotch instinct about the

picture of the Granduca, O'Rourke had an Irish instinct about Gene Chatham.

"Now what?" asked O'Rourke, backing up in front of Kearton.

Expressionless eyes, as usual, silently faced his question.

"Ah, damn you!" said O'Rourke, and jerked back his arm to striking tension.

Kearton winced only a little. O'Rourke let his arm drop to his side.

"What you been up to in here?" asked O'Rourke. "It's no go, Kearton. We know that you've stolen the poison out of the cabinet of Tydings, and used it. We begin to know a lot about you, fellow. No talking? Just been in here twiddlin' your thumbs?"

Kearton rested one hip against the table and sighed with sheer fatigue. O'Rourke glanced around the room, caught his eye on one of the pictures, stepped suddenly to it—past it—moved rapidly around the room.

The lower right-hand corner of each of the doctor's paintings had been rubbed away on a small spot hardly half an inch in diameter. The dark canvas showed through from beneath.

"Well?" demanded O'Rourke. "None of these what you wanted? . . . Ah, don't be a swine, Kearton. Loosen up. Is that stuff in the bottle what you used to clean them?"

Kearton said nothing. And O'Rourke pursed his fat lips, sucked them in.

At last he said: "All right. We'll go back to the old hangout."

He picked up the bottle. From the floor he took some soft rags he had found there.

"You go first," he said to Kearton. They passed through the door and down the hall.

"Keep walking slow," said

O'Rourke, "because I'm expecting your partner, Chatham, to take a jump at me any minute. If he does, he's gunna have stomach trouble the rest of his life. I never seen a fellow I'd like to drill more than that chum of yours, Kearton. . . . Smooth, ain't he? I mean, handing down the rope to give you a free trip out of that room, that day? And dropping the flatiron on the head of the doctor—that was another smooth one. What you think?"

Kearton said nothing. They got to the door of the right room, and O'Rourke opened it. He pushed Kearton in ahead of him.

"Here's the old playmate again," he said.

CAMPBELL turned at the table where he sat. His sunken red-rimmed eyes blinked at Kearton. He was so tired that he was turning gray around the mouth and his lips pressed together and drew in a little, like an actor registering high emotion. That was merely keying himself against bitter fatigue.

"Nobody asked for you. Why'd you come back?" asked Campbell.

O'Rourke laughed heartily. "You got a kind of a sour damn sort of funniness about you that tickles me, Angus," he said. "Try to get some language out of this loony if you can. . . . The Talking Kid, is what he is. He was in the doctor's room, cleaning the right-hand lower corner of every picture that was there. Wouldn't that damn you?"

"Which part?"

"The right hand, lower corner."

"The right hand, lower corner," said Campbell, thoughtfully. He shook his head in despair.

"He was using these rags and stuff," said O'Rourke, "and—"

"I'll try some of it on this copy," said Campbell.

"Yeah—always talking about pictures—you're gonna go nutty when you get the Colored Supplement, next Sunday."

Campbell said nothing. He shook the contents of the bottle, smelled them, made a wry face, moistened one of the rags and poised it over the right hand lower corner of the painting.

"Don't do it!" shouted Kearton, suddenly.

"Lookat!" said O'Rourke. "You've touched his funny bone at last, and that's damn queer."

"What's the matter with the mug?" asked Campbell, looking over his shoulder, the rag still poised.

"I tell you, don't touch that picture!" exclaimed Kearton. "Those ignorant hands of yours may swab away—"

"Willing to use your own?" asked Campbell.

"Willing? It's all I ask!" said Kearton.

"Let him do it," said Campbell, although a little puzzled.

"What's the matter with you, Angus?" asked O'Rourke. "You want me to set free the hands of this disappearing guy and have him hoist himself through the ceiling or something?"

"Do what I say," said Campbell. "Or I'll do it myself."

"I'll be damned if you do!" said O'Rourke.

"Keep back from him," said Campbell.

"I'll slam you one on the beak, you damned dummy," said O'Rourke.

"Hand that man over to me!" commanded Campbell.

"Yeah. You say so, eh? I hand him over to you, do I?"

"Sergeant O'Rourke," said Campbell, "as your senior officer, I command you to step back from this man."

O'Rourke started to laugh. Suddenly he turned on his heel and walked to the window.

He leaned there, breathing deeply of the night.

Campbell freed the hands of Kearton.

"Stand away from the window or you'll get a flatiron dropped on the thick of your skull," said Campbell.

O'Rourke said nothing. A shudder ran through the fat of his back.

"Stay there and get your head smashed in," said Campbell. "A damned good thing for the force; a damned good thing for me. . . . I never pulled seniority on you before. I wouldn't be that much of a rat, but if I'd known that it would shut you up, I'd of slammed you with it a long time ago. . . . Sergeant O'Rourke, you fool, step back from that window."

O'Rourke said, without turning his head, without violence but with a trembling intensity of voice: "To hell with you. To hell with the Inspector. To hell with the New York police force. To hell with the whole damn thing!"

Campbell stared at the fat back.

He turned suddenly on Kearton.

"Well, if you're going to do something, do it!" he snapped.

Kearton nodded, took the wet rag, and began to scrub at the bottom of the picture. He took another small phial from his pocket and poured a few drops of it on the paint. A sick, sweet odor entered the air. Campbell blew out his breath to get rid of the smell.

O'Rourke said: "A lot of four-flushing, half-witted, fat-headed, two-

timing, calf-faced twicers! To hell with them all. To hell with everything. Seniority!"

He turned around and shouted: "Seniority! Hell!"

"I'll have you broke!" shouted Campbell in return.

"You can't break me. I've broke myself!" yelled O'Rourke. "I've resigned from the force."

"I'll have you fired before you resign. I'll have you on the black list. You'll get no pension. You'll draw nothing but a laugh from the whole department."

"And I'll break your neck before—"

"Here!" cried Kearton.

He threw his arms into the air. "Here. Here! I've got it. I knew it! I've got it here! Look! D'you see? The real Granduca!"

CHAPTER XXIII

Vial of Arsenic

O'Rourke came back with ghostly softness of step from the window. He stood staring at the work which went on under Kearton's eager hands. Campbell, unable to contain himself, walked up and down the room, now and then flourishing a fist above his head, now stopping to stare at Kearton's labors, now asking a question.

"You mean it's real? You mean it's the real Raphael? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Damn it, of course, yes! Don't you see with your own eyes? It's going to come up as clean as a whistle," answered Kearton, relief in his voice.

"There was nothing in the picture all the time, eh?" demanded Campbell of O'Rourke.

A stare of consuming hatred answered him.

"Nothing but damn Scotch foolishness," mused Campbell. "Sure there wasn't anything else. Nothing except one of the most famous pictures in the world. Nothing but a Raphael."

"You never heard of him before you come here," said O'Rourke, tormented into speech.

"Raphael," said Campbell, "is one of the prince of painters. The funny thing about him ain't the color that he puts into a painting, but it's the way he fills up the canvas."

"What d'you mean fills up the canvas?" asked O'Rourke. "What would he do, anyway? Leave some spots of it bare?"

"Sure everybody fills a canvas, but they got different ways. Anyway, that's wood, not canvas. But the way he filled it up was the great trick."

"What was great about it?" asked O'Rourke. "Come on and tell us, if you know so much!"

"It was the way he done it that counted," said Campbell. "A guy like you wouldn't be able to tell, Pat. It takes a man with taste and an eye to understand things like that."

"Lemme tell you something. You make me sick," said O'Rourke. "You wouldn't know how much. It takes a man with taste and an eye to understand things like that. But where you make me sick is in the stomach."

Kearton was saying: "The way it was done was the clever trick. D'you see how it was done?"

He went on talking, in bursts, rapidly, while his clever hands went on with the work, using a loving speed.

O'Rourke forgot Campbell. He stepped up beside Kearton and said, ingratiatingly: "How did it happen, partner?"

"Why, the devil went into the Pitti and started copying the Granduca—no one would think anything of that—the picture's copied enough every year."

"What's a pity?" asked O'Rourke. "What pity?"

"The Pitti Palace," said Campbell, with a raised voice, "is one of the greatest depositories of art treasures in the known world. They gotta lot of stuff there from all over. Don't butt in like this and show your ignorance. Leave the man alone to talk."

"He covers his board with a sheet of fine canvas. Nothing simpler than that," said Kearton. "But the fact was that under the canvas there was an excellent copy of the Granduca. An old one. Painted centuries ago and by a good workman. That was where the idea came into the brain of the doctor—or of Tydings, or whoever was behind it—to find that excellent old copy in the shop of the dealer. And so Dr. Hamblin skins a fine canvas over that old board and takes it into the Pitti Palace to copy the Granduca. The guard grows used to him in that room. Now and then, naturally, he walks up to the picture and examines it carefully. Why not? Any painter may want to see how the paint is put on. Who would suspect that a fellow in the open light of day was loosening the fastenings that join the picture to the gilded frame? Day by day he prepares everything until it will take only a touch to move the picture out of the frame. . . . Then to wait for the right opportunity. The guard in that room of the Pitti liked to pick up a tourist, here and there, and escort him off to another room to show something curious. They have that way of picking up an extra *lira* or so. And when

it happens this time, Hamblin is ready. . . . It must have been a strain on his nerves, but he snakes his canvas from the good copy that it covers. He runs to the Granduca hanging on the wall, jerks out the last fastening, removes it from the frame, puts the copy into the frame, secures it in one or two places, and jumps back with the real Granduca, which he puts on his own easel."

"There's brains!" said O'Rourke. "I wouldn't of picked the doctor, living or dead, for brains like that!"

"But here comes the clever part. He can't leave the Granduca exposed on his easel. There's nowhere near time enough to stretch a new canvas over the top of it. That takes hours, perhaps. And though it's early in the morning of a dark day, when not many tourists or other sightseers will be around, every moment counts, because the guard will be back almost at once. Now I ask you, what does he do to hide the face of the real Granduca? What does he do, Sergeant Campbell? Tell me that!"

"I'm damned if I know. All I could of done would of been to sweat," said the sergeant. "No, I would of popped the picture into a bag that I would of had along with me, and I would of said that I'd finished making my copy, and goodby."

Kearton laughed on a high, breaking note.

"That's what you would have done, maybe," he said. "But when you were to leave the gallery, your painting would have had to be inspected, of course, and the moment the inspector saw that old paint on your board, he would have stopped everything. . . . Besides, you hadn't the time necessary for securing that painting in its frame—the one that was to serve as the real

Granduca. . . No, you could pop the picture into a bag and walk off with it. You simply would have been walking yourself into jail—for a fifteen year sentence. They're thorough about such things in Italy, these days! . . . Can you guess what Hamblin did, O'Rourke?"

"I dunno. I been trying to think," said O'Rourke, fascinated. "I'll tell you—he's got a line hitched to the picture, and he lowers away through a window to where his confederate . . ."

KEARTON laughed again. "In broad daylight . . . with the guard coming back again at any moment?" he asked.

"No, my idea ain't so bright," agreed O'Rourke.

"Why," said Kearton, "he already has prepared a quantity of grayish tempera, a coating that can be washed on fast, and when the guard returns, he simply finds Hamblin covering his board with great strokes. The whole thing has turned to a mass of gray under-paint. The guard thinks that the artist is dissatisfied with his work. Hamblin swears and groans and speaks of the time he has lost. The guard feels sympathy. At the moment of stealing one of the world's most famous pictures, Hamblin, with the article there under his hand, is the earnest, innocent student—least suspected of men!"

"Smart! Damn smart!" said O'Rourke. "Too smart for Hamblin, I'd say."

"Of course it was. But not too smart for a Tydings, who was in the background, planning everything," said Kearton. "The cleverness doesn't end there. Day after day, Hamblin remains there at his work, painting on

his new ground of tempera his new copy of the Granduca—this copy—the one that I'm cleaning away at this moment! It took nerve to do that, too. Because at any time it might be discovered that the picture inside the frame was a copy. Perhaps no suspicion would attach to the poor, honest fellow who was working there so patiently, but in case of inquiry, it might have been very bad. There was the nature of the old board itself to attract attention. At any rate, day by day Hamblin was renewing the fastenings which held the copy in the original frame. When all was firm, he had finished his new copy, took it down, had it duly inspected and passed, and away he went. . . . Ah, ha! Do you see? There's the Madonna's face, clear enough—and ah, faith—I'm tired—I'm going to sleep!"

His hands dropped to his knees.

Through the wet of Kearton's work, O'Rourke stared with great eyes at the dim face which was growing out from under the cleansing and taking more perfect form. It was dim, but it sent a vague thrill up the spinal column of the Irishman.

Kearton stood up, stretched, groaned.

"I've got to sleep. I'm dead!" he said.

"Wait till you finish the job!" pleaded Campbell.

"It's as good as finished. Any tramp could do the work that's left. Sleep—I've never had enough sleep in my life."

He staggered across the room, reached out his arms to the bed, and fell prone on it with another groan.

Campbell went over to him and pulled at his arm.

"Get up and finish that job, Kearton!" he commanded.

The arm fell limp from the hand of Campbell.

An obscure muttering was the only answer.

"Hey," said O'Rourke, shaking the sleeper. "What's your business with Chatham? Why was Tydings afraid of you? Who are you?"

Alcohol never thickened a tongue more than the blurred utterance with which Kearton responded. Campbell shook his head.

"It's no good," he said. "You could shoot off cannons beside him, now, and he wouldn't more'n blink an eye. . . . He's done his bit for us pretty good. Leave him be. There's plenty for us to do till he wakes up. . . . Gosh, I could use some sleep myself, and I guess I've got to take it."

"I don't give a damn what you do," said O'Rourke, leaning over the table. "But sleep is something you won't get."

"Why won't I?" demanded Campbell. "We've got Clifford under guard, all right. He won't move. He don't even know that he's the bait in the trap and that we hope we'll catch some big game with him."

"You won't sleep," said O'Rourke. "Yeah, but maybe you will. You're that kind of an officer. Duty don't mean nothing to you."

Campbell walked over to him and looked him in the eye. O'Rourke, with a swing of the head, resumed his staring at the little bottle of poisonous tonic which stood on the cluttered table.

"Come on," said Campbell. "Even you don't talk like so much of a damn fool as this, unless you got an idea."

"I've got an idea," said O'Rourke. "Now you see if you can get the same thing."

He stood up, turned his back,

lighted a cigarette, then walked to the window. His words drifted back over his shoulder. "You're the senior sergeant, ain't you? Then you oughta have the senior brains, too, shouldn't you? Go ahead and use 'em, will you?"

Campbell looked down at the table, and particularly at the small phial of the tonic. He shook his head, bit his lip, picked up the bottle and stared down at it in vain. There was meaning for him in the tokens that seemed to have meant so much to O'Rourke.

"There's nothing to it," said Campbell. "Cheap Irish bluff, is all there is!"

"Oh, yeah?" said O'Rourke.

"Yeah!" said Campbell.

"Just bluff, eh?"

"I said it before. The same thing you been using to climb up in the force. Bluff—no brains—just bluff. I say it again."

The voice of O'Rourke was exquisitely soothing.

"Why, I think you're right, Campbell," he said. "The way I've climbed up in the force is just this way—just by using the same old pair of eyes. A thick-headed dummy of a Scotch mist wouldn't be apt to understand—but look at the bottle, you fool!"

Campbell heeded not the insult. He stared at the bottle. And suddenly the voice of O'Rourke blasted his ears.

"The stuff has sunk an eighth of an inch since we brought it in here! It ain't been stolen at all. It's evaporated. It's evaporation that's changed its strength. There ain't any murder of Tydings at all. The thing that murdered him is simply the damn junk evaporating thicker and stronger in the bottle—and there's nothing but talk around here and no Tydings case at all—and a dummy has been made

out of Senior Sergeant Angus Campbell!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Campbell Dreams

THERE was the long, steady snoring of Kearton, as he lay stretched on the bed. That and the clicking of O'Rourke's heels as he walked up and down the floor made the accompaniment to which Campbell had to do his thinking.

He uncorked the bottle, stared at the contents, smelled of them, shook his head once more.

"Volatile . . . that's what they call stuff like this," said Campbell. "But how would it evaporate through a glass bottle with a cork in it?"

"It can't evaporate through glass," said O'Rourke.

"Nothing can evaporate through cork, neither," said Campbell. "Put your knee into the ribs of Kearton and stop him snoring, will you?"

O'Rourke went to the bed and turned Kearton on his face. The snore turned into a stifled groaning.

"Nothing can evaporate through cork, neither," insisted the Scotchman, as O'Rourke came back.

"Then the cork ain't there," said O'Rourke.

"What do you mean it ain't there? Can't I see it?"

"What can evaporate through glass or cork? Nothing!" said O'Rourke. "So I say, the cork ain't there."

"I always knew it," said Campbell. "Crazy as a loon—and on full-time pay of the City of New York!"

O'Rourke, without answering, picked up the bottle from the weary hand of Campbell; pulled out the cork, and began to examine it.

There was a knock at the door.

Campbell went to it, and pulled it half open. Lionel Reid was there. The light gleamed on the dark red of his hair and made his eyes bluer.

"I've come to talk about the check, Sergeant," he said in a low voice.

"Later on," said Campbell, and started to close the door.

Reid put his foot against it.

"I've come to talk about the check you promised to me," said young Reid.

"All right, all right," said Campbell. "As soon as I've had a chance to check up the yarn you told me. Rome wasn't built in a day, young man."

"It was taken and smashed in a day, though," said Lionel Reid.

"You're drunk," said Campbell. "Get out and stay out."

He slammed the door in Reid's face and turned back into the room.

"Manners," he heard O'Rourke saying. "That's all they ain't got. Manners. Take them otherwise and the Scotch ain't a bad sort of a second-rate people."

He had the cork in his hand, turning it. He put the bottle back on the table and untwisted the wire cork-pull which was affixed in the cork.

He held up the cork in one hand, the crooked bit of wire in the other.

"I told you so," he said. "There ain't any cork!"

Campbell started to swear. He wound up by taking the cork out of O'Rourke's hands and examining it for a moment. The moment was all he needed. A narrow hole had been drilled into the cork. When he held it to the light, he could look straight through.

What O'Rourke had said was true. There was no cork. A highly volatile liquid, chiefly alcohol, would evaporate swiftly in this hot summer weather.

Campbell screwed the wire pull back into its place and reclosed the bottle.

"Neat," he said.

"Like the swiping of the picture from the palace, over there," said O'Rourke. "Damned neat. Too neat. There's been nothing but brains sloshed all over this case! . . . Look at it now! Murder, all right. Murder by drilling a sneaking little hole through a cork. That's all. I never heard anything like it. Murder is gonna jump at us out of keyhole or something."

"Who did it?" muttered Campbell.

"Likely the doctor. The same sneaking sort of idea that a doctor would have, anyway," suggested O'Rourke.

"But there's Walden — there's Chatham—there's Vivian Tydings—there's the Reids—all been near the house. All had a chance to do this trick. All had some kind of reasons for it—to say nothing of dirty dog-face Clifford."

"Look," said O'Rourke. "You're tired. You go and lie down."

"I'm not tired. . . . You were right, Pat. I won't sleep tonight."

"You gotta sleep. You ain't got much brains anyway, and you need what you got freshened up. Do what I tell you."

"I can't sleep."

O'Rourke took him by the shoulder. "Go on over there and lie down beside Kearton," he commanded.

Campbell moved, shaking his head in a feeble protest.

"I'm going to take a look around for some of the old bottles of this tonic," he said. "There must be some more of them, somewhere. You get a bit of shut-eye, and I'll take a slant around the place. Then I'll come back. Take it easy, Angus. Don't be a mug. Let everything go and take it easy."

"Thanks, Pat," said Campbell. "Maybe you're right." He stretched himself on the bed. . . .

THIS unexpected kindness on the part of O'Rourke amazed him and disarmed him. He would not, of course, go to sleep, but at least he would pretend to, and the moment O'Rourke was out of the room he could be up again. Never refuse a gift or a kindness. Even if you don't want, never refuse.

He heard the feet of O'Rourke stride across the floor. The door opened, a warm slosh of air washed through the room. The door closed again. The footfall of O'Rourke going down the hall was instantly dim, then lost.

Rich people could afford to sound-proof their homes, in this fashion, far different from the sort of semi-tenement lodgings which Sergeant Campbell could afford to give to his wife and children. That hard-faced woman would be sitting up with her sewing, perhaps, even at this late hour. Silently, her lips pressed together a little. She had headaches all the time, but she never talked about them to her family. She had been married for ten years before Campbell even knew about them. Then she had said once to the doctor—Campbell had managed to overhear—"I think I'm going crazy. Hours every day I have it behind the eyes, as though somebody had driven a nail through my temples."

There was something in the Bible about a woman driving a nail through the temples of somebody.

Well, you have to pay for class, and Campbell's children would be the class. They looked scrawny, but they had to be the class. There was iron in them from both sides. Hammer iron enough

and you make fine steel of it. Campbell's children would be the class, all right. They'd take an edge that would cut a way for them through the world. A quick way. They wouldn't have to climb a ladder a million steps long, the way Campbell had had to do. But the way it is in this world, hard work tells in the long run. . . . Take the fancy detectives in the books, the ones that are the masterminds—they ain't true. They're only funny. You don't meet real ones that match up with the book stuff. You wouldn't have one of those funny guys on the force. But reading about them made you laugh, and it sort of gave you ideas. O'Rourke never stopped riding him because he read about the flossy detectives. O'Rourke never would let up.

You take a man that hasn't got much to think about except beer and graft and things like that, he never lets up on any hold he's got. The Irish are like that. Ignorant and fat-headed. Boors. Pigs. If you want a clean man, you take a Scotchman. Maybe kind of hard. But that's what a man should be . . .

He would close his eyes, now.

Strange how the darkness, in soft, obscure waves, slipped over his body, from the feet towards the head. There seemed more darkness. The darkness was like sleep. Sleep was like an ocean, rolling ceaselessly over him.

Dying would be something like that, sinking into numb pain instead of out of pain into sleep. The man that invented sleep . . .

He had made a mistake, somewhere. He could not tell where. Somewhere a mistake. In the accounts. Something that had to do with money. He had lost some money.

The wife would say nothing. She would go on with her sewing, late,

later than ever, to make up the money he had lost. She wouldn't take the kids to the seashore this summer, because he had lost money.

But he never lost money. He wasn't that sort of a fool. This time . . .

Half rousing out of sleep, Campbell put his hand up to the breast of his coat. It was true. It was his own wallet out of his own pocket that he had lost, that had been stolen!

His eyes were wide open, staring, staring into darkness. And that wasn't right because there had been an electric light shining when he went to sleep. . . .

One hand got to the automatic in a jerking, swift movement. The other found his pocket torch. He raised on one elbow.

Over there towards the door a whisper was passing. The weight of footfalls seemed to be pressing not on the floor but on the nerves of Campbell.

So he swung suddenly from the bed to his feet. It seemed to him that in the darkness Kearton, still snoring, was reaching up a hand to drag him back. Except for the snoring of Kearton, certainly no one would have managed to put out the light without waking Sergeant Campbell, no one would have been able to put hand on the wallet inside his coat pocket.

The electric torch clicked in his hand. The light jerked foolishly high, towards the ceiling.

Then it flicked across a figure there near the door, slipping past a couple of chairs. . . . Campbell fired. He let two bullets roar out of the throat of that big automatic.

The figure slipped out of sight behind the chairs.

Kearton was saying in a horrible whisper: "What's happened? Ah, what's happened?"

Campbell charged straight in behind the cone of light, his lips furling back from his teeth.

"You get up out of there. Damn you, get up out of there!" he was shouting.

Then he looked with light and gun over the backs of the chairs and saw, huddled back against the wall, which was thinly sprayed with blood, Charlotte Reid.

CHAPTER XXV

Ready for the Payoff

SHE kept her eyes fixed on Campbell and began to push herself up from the floor, clumsily.

He said: "I didn't know it was you. I didn't know a woman—how was I to know . . . ?"

She stood erect, touching the wall with her hand. Her blood was on the wall. It blurred under the tips of her fingers. The fingers were slender. Her hand was like the hand of a child. In the other, which hung at her side, dangled Campbell's wallet. He snatched it away, threw it on the table.

"Where you hurt?" he asked.

"I'm all right," she said.

She had the meaningless eyes of a sleepwalker. It was as though she still were walking through darkness, feeling her way with her hand against the wall; as though she could not see Campbell's face, for instance. She had on a very thin blue dress that hung about her like a translucent cloud.

Campbell could not think of anything except that the dress was like a cloud and that the beauty of the girl was like a sun trying to shine through. Back in his mind he had another picture. That was of the inspector saying: "Campbell, I hear you've been shooting up the girls, eh?"

You didn't shoot women. Not on the New York police force. Sometimes you ought to shoot them like dogs, but you didn't. Take O'Rourke. Not even in the dark, not even waking out of sleep—he wouldn't have shot a woman. An instinct would have told him.

There were footfalls coming with a rush. People were going to pour in and see what he had done.

He put the gun away.

The girl had a damned sort of childish, stunned look about her that wrung the heart. He had a crazy idea of getting her out of sight, even if he had to throw her out the window.

Hands beat on the door. He shouted something. They were pooling up, outside there in the hall. He realized that he was shouting to them to keep out.

Kearton, off there in the corner, had begun to yell out something about a gun and a crazy man.

Then the door opened.

It was O'Rourke, swollen with haste, red-faced. The others came packing in behind him. Half of them were police. One of them was the policeman who had been guarding Clifford. He had come, bringing the butler with him.

The room was full of people. Campbell could smell the stale sweat of the policemen, condensed in their uniform coats. Lionel Reid screamed out something and came leaping, dodging to get at Campbell. A big form stepped into the path. That was Chatham. All Campbell could see was the jerk of Chatham's shoulder. What he heard was the smack of Chatham's fist against flesh and then the slump of Reid's body against the tiles.

The air was full of hands, asking questions, trying to do something.

Chatham was the one who picked up the girl and carried her over to the bed. Her clothes pulled up above the knee. She had sort of spindle shanks, but pretty and rounded. Campbell caught the edge of the dress and pulled it down a little.

Chatham was laying the girl on the bed.

There was Vivian Tydings' pale, intense face, cutting into the attention of Campbell with a knife.

Campbell was saying: "Where's there a doctor? Somebody go get a doctor."

A hand caught him by the shoulder.

The round, swollen face of O'Rourke loomed close to him.

"Don't be a fool," said O'Rourke whispering. "Pull yourself together. There ain't any doctor here. She's all right. Even if you shot some veal, what of it?"

Campbell looked at him and took his first breath. In some ways, O'Rourke knew a lot. You take a crooked grafter like O'Rourke, he's sure to know a lot.

Chatham dragged up the skirts of the girl on the bed. The blue cloud held tight at a point. Chatham gave it a flick and ripped it away.

You could see where the underclothes were sleeked and plastered to her thigh with red blood. The outside hole was just a dark spot. The exit hole of the bullet had torn through the thick soft of the flesh in a bigger way and that was where the blood was oozing out. Campbell looked at the way the stocking gave to the pull of the garters. She had those funny double garters that women wear. You wouldn't think a woman could walk very easy the way she's harnessed up underneath.

Chatham's hands were red to the

wrists. He turned his head. There was a smear of blood above one eye and down the cheek. It looked like a thin, watery, red paint.

He said: "Clear out the room, will you?"

Campbell stood up on his toes.

"Get the hell out of here, all of you!" he yelled.

They didn't move. They stood like oxen, staring. The police began to turn their backs on the wounded girl. They started pushing the people out.

CHATHAM was asking for things. O'Rourke was getting them. Chatham had ripped a sheet out of the bed the way you would pull a page out of a book. He stood up and ripped the sheet into strips. He had jerked off his coat. One of his sleeves was unbuttoned at the wrist. The cloth furled up. You could see the twist and bulge of the long forearm muscles. He kept ripping the cloth as though it were paper.

The girl on the bed moaned.

Chatham cried out: "Charlotte! Charlotte! . . . Do you hear me? Charlotte!"

He grabbed her up. Campbell wanted to do something, but he couldn't tell what to do. His hands were no good. He kept half moving from side to side and he watched Chatham catch up the girl. One of his big arms was under her neck. Her eyes were closed. Her face looked loose.

Campbell said: "I've killed her. . . . That's all I've done. . . ."

It would go into the report: "In line of duty."

Maybe O'Rourke was right. Maybe he was only a dog, and not a man. Maybe there was something wrong with *all* Scotchmen, the way O'Rourke said.

It was queer and sort of horrible the way Chatham was kissing the girl on the bed, hard, her head pressed back by the force of each kiss.

He kept saying: "Charlotte! . . . Ah God! . . . Charlotte!"

O'Rourke took him by the hair of the head and pulled.

"Listen! Chatham! She ain't dead! She's only fainted! Listen! She'll be all right if you don't let her bleed to death."

Then Chatham dropped her back on the bed, roughly, and snatched up some of the length of linen which he had prepared. The blood was pumping out of the inside mouth of the wound. The heart pressure was fisting the blood out in jets.

Someone came dodging back into the room through the policemen. That was Vivian Tydings. Her eyes were wonderfully small and bright. Campbell caught her by one wrist and said: "What's the matter? What do you aim to do?"

She pointed with her other arm.

"I'm going to send Gene Chatham to the electric chair!" she cried.

"That's the stuff," said Campbell numbly.

"The hypocrite! . . . Gene, do you hear me? Do you hear? I'm going to tell them everything! I'm going to see that you get the chair! I'm going to be there to see that you burn in it!"

He said, without turning his head: "Get the scrawny little fool out of here, will you?"

"Ah!" said Vivian Tydings.

"I want to talk to you," said Campbell. "I want to hear everything."

"Do you?" she said, with a remarkable sweetness. "I wonder if you want to hear it half as much as I want to tell? Good night, Sergeant. Good night, Sergeant O'Rourke."

She went to the door, turned and smiled back at them, and went out.

O'Rourke said: "What a gal!"

Chatham said: "Hold the leg up."

The girl on the bed moaned. Chatham was putting force on the bandaging, perhaps.

O'Rourke assisted him, holding up the leg.

Some of the policemen were still there by the door. One of them had a young face. He seemed to Campbell too young to be in that room, staring. Campbell said: "Go on out, all of you! Get a move on you! Shake it up."

The policemen crowded back through the doorway.

The bed was all blood. Some of the blood was dripping off the edge and down onto the floor.

The bandaging was finished. Chatham took off the bloody silk stocking. His big hands were delicate. He slipped the stocking off and it came away like a delicate extra skin. It slumped to nothing on the floor. Chatham washed the stained leg. The flesh puffed beside the bandage. Chatham put his hand on the puff of flesh. Then he drew a soft, knitted throw over the girl's body.

She said: "Gene!"

"I'm here," said Chatham. He stuck his big head out over her.

"Will they hang us both?" said the girl.

"Be still!" said Chatham, with no breath in his voice.

He half rose. He kept one hand spread out on the breast and shoulder of the girl, and he turned his head and looked with the eyes of a wild beast at the two detectives.

O'Rourke said: "We didn't hear that, Chatham."

"Damn you!" said Chatham.

O'Rourke walked right up to the monster.

He said: "Listen to me, Chatham: We didn't hear that. We didn't hear anything—no more'n a priest would of heard anything."

Chatham said nothing. His eyes digested the words, though, and changed in expression.

HE dropped on his knees beside the bed. One arm he slipped in under the girl's body. The other hand began to go over her face. Campbell had seen a blind man touch a face the way Chatham was doing, drinking it in with his fingers.

"Gene," said the girl.

"Be still," said Chatham.

"Did you kiss me?" she asked.

"No," said Chatham.

"Gene," she said.

"Well?"

"Did you kiss me?"

"Yes," he answered.

She turned her face towards him and smiled. She put out a hand and slipped the fingers into his hair.

"Is there much pain?" said Chatham.

Her forehead clouded a little.

"No. Not much," she said. "Iodine has a horrible smell, hasn't it?"

"Yes," said Chatham.

"I wish you'd wash your face," said the girl.

"I shall—now," said he.

"No, don't do it," said the girl.

"All right," said Chatham.

O'Rourke came to Campbell and said: "Let's get a drink."

O'Rourke looked sick. "All right," said Campbell.

He picked up his wallet from the table. He pinched the soft leather between thumb and forefinger. He had felt the stealing of that wallet just as

though it had been part of his flesh, and that was a funny thing.

He went behind O'Rourke out of the room.

"We oughtn't to leave him on the loose," said Campbell.

"Don't be a damn fool," answered O'Rourke.

Somehow, O'Rourke was able to speak from an elevation. He seemed to be in command.

They went down to the dining room and through to the pantry. There was white wine cooling in the icebox, there. And in the wine pantry there were all sorts of things. Rich people pour funny stuff into themselves. It would be like going to school again to learn the names of all the sorts of things they drink, and the way they mix them.

O'Rourke did not hesitate. He found some Bushmill's, Black Label.

"That's the finest whiskey in the world," said O'Rourke. "Have a shot?"

"After you," said Campbell.

"Go on and drink," said O'Rourke.

Campbell poured some into a glass. He said: "I was just waking up. I felt somebody pulling the wallet out of my coat pocket and I was just waking up. And then I flashed on the light and only saw . . ."

"Quit it, will you?" said O'Rourke.

Campbell swallowed his drink. It burned his throat and cast a smoky mist across his eyes. O'Rourke was not using a glass. He had lifted the bottle to his lips, and Campbell dimly saw bolus after bolus of the liquid gliding down his gullet.

O'Rourke lowered the bottle from his mouth and leaned forward, panting.

The sweat on his forehead looked as big as glass beads. He tilted the

bottle and looked at the amount of the whiskey that was left.

"Whatcha think?" asked O'Rourke.

Campbell stared at him and began to penetrate to the mind.

"You mean about the two of them?"

"Yeah. What else would I mean?"

"I guess it's Salt Creek," said Campbell.

"Yeah, that's what you'd guess," said O'Rourke.

Campbell said: "I gotta hand it to you all the way. You guessed it was Chatham all the time."

O'Rourke raised savage eyes, started to speak, and suddenly sat down. He rested his elbow on the edge of the table and put his hand across his face. Some of the sweat trickled from his forehead and ran over his fingers. It made Campbell think of tears. O'Rourke was thinking.

Campbell said: "I can't help wishing, though—I mean, the way she was looking at him. You take her, she was a kind of a hard, cool girl. The kind that you could of suspected of

doing anything she thought was necessary to do. But there on the bed looking at Chatham, she was like a baby, wasn't she?"

"Shut up, will you?" said O'Rourke.

Campbell stared. There was something in that voice which he never had heard before. The hand of O'Rourke was clasped hard across his face, masking the eyes.

Campbell said: "We've gotta go and talk to the Tydings girl."

O'Rourke said nothing.

"We oughta get her," said Campbell, "while she's still near crazy with jealousy."

"Get the hell out of here, will you?" said O'Rourke. "I gotta think."

Campbell gaped. Then he went out of the room.

You never can tell about an Irishman. When they get stirred up and emotional, they're funny. That's all they are. Funny.

Campbell went up to the room of Vivian Tydings and tapped at the door.

The more minor mysteries O'Rourke and Campbell solve, the more the major mystery grows. Who killed Henry Tydings? Who killed Dr. Hamblin? What part does the purloined Raphael play? What did Charlotte Reid mean when she asked Chatham: "Will they hang us?" What will Vivian Tydings, frantic with jealousy, reveal? The answers to these questions will be found in next week's smashing, thrilling conclusion.

French Weapon Uses Concentrated Light

A NEW method of disarming an opponent without causing permanent injury is always in demand by the police. As a supplement to the use of ju-jutsu and tear gas, a French inventor has perfected a "light gun" which should win instant acceptance. This device, which resembles a revolver, has a reflector which focuses several million candlepower in a concentrated flash lasting as long as twelve seconds. The opponent is blinded, temporarily, and so is rendered helpless. The eyesight is restored after a period of time. The light is produced by a secret material which is said to resemble that used in photographic flashlights.

—John Berry.



Dr. Ruxton looked at the witness of his crime

The 68 Portions Crime

By

Robert W. Sneddon

THE list of doctors who have willfully been false to the Hippocratic oath of the medical profession to heal, and not to kill, is a long one. Scores in every country on the globe have used their professional knowledge for greedy gain or so that they might

taste the sweet savor of revenge. Others have used that knowledge so that

Two Corpses Were Mutilated Beyond Identification — Yet the English Police Could Put Their Finger on the Map and Say with Certainty, "Look Here for the Murderer!"

they might rid themselves of wives with whom they could no longer live. Wives they hated, wives who bored them, wives who drove them to exasperated madness.

Dr. Buck Ruxton

was now about to add himself to this last class. When his wife Belle came home from her jaunt, her death certificate would be ready for her.

Though it was Saturday night, September 14, 1935, and there was fun going on — moving picture houses crowded, music halls jammed, public houses buzzing with football and racing talk to the clatter of glasses and the blare of the radio—in this busy English manufacturing town of Lancaster, there was not a sound at Number 2, Dalton Square.

Behind the façade of the gray three-storied house across from the Town Hall and Courthouse, nothing stirred. The doctor's three children were in bed, so was their nurse, pretty Mary Rogerson.

In his office the doctor sat at his desk, twiddling a pencil in his fingers, looking at the clock, waiting for the sound of that opening door to signal the return of the doomed woman.

He was a strange man to find in this Lancashire mill town to which he had come six years earlier, yet this Hindu doctor had thousands of patients on his books.

He was a Parsee, a member of that large and wealthy community of Persian origin, who live in Bombay. He had graduated in surgery and medicine at Bombay University. His name then had been Gabriel Hakim—Dr. Gabriel. He had married a Parsee bride, whose first name was Motibai. She had borne him a child.

But the wife which Lancashire knew was not this one.

The doctor had left his Parsee wife and child in Bombay, to come to the famous Edinburgh University in Scotland for a postgraduate course. He had not been long there when he met and was fascinated by a Scotswoman

who was manageress of a restaurant. Belle had been married, but had got rid of her husband. She fell for this lithe, sallow-faced, dark-haired, magnetic, voluble and persuasive student, who always had money to spend.

The doctor, under the Scotswoman's Northern charms, forgot the teachings of Zoroaster in whose cult he had been reared, right thought, right speech, right action. Resolutely he determined to cut himself apart from his former life, to forget India, his wife and child whom he had never mentioned to Belle, and to create a new life for himself. As a preliminary and in order to avoid his being traced, he instituted court proceedings and adopted the name of Buck Ruxton.

As he sat in his office this night he reviewed his life of the past seven years. He had prospered. He had paid four thousand pounds for his practice. He owned his house. He had many friends. He had three lovely children; two daughters, aged six, four, and two-year-old Billy, and yet his heart was black with hate and bitterness—such hate, suspicion, distrust as drove the Moor Othello to his destruction of Desdemona.

He remembered a phrase he once wrote in a letter to Belle just before he brought her to Lancaster.

"It's women like you who make men hate women."

She said she loved him, yet he felt she never was truly his, that he was not her lord and master as he would have had her admit.

"You're not in India now, Bommie," she kept saying to him, "and a wife has some freedom here, don't forget that."

Her cold mocking laugh, her neglect of him when he wanted her most, the uncertainty of life with her, one mo-

ment a consuming fire, the next a block of ice, the constant friction of East and West, of ancient ideas and modern, the clash of two strong wills, and ever present domestic turmoil, all had made his life a hell past endurance.

HE could stand it no longer. The time had come to end this conflict. She loved the children. He would tear her away from them. He would rid himself of this torment and heal his burning wounds.

He had good cause for jealousy. Was she not running around with a young local solicitor? He believed they were writing to each other, telephoning. Had she not gone with him on an automobile trip to Edinburgh, a fortnight earlier. Oh, yes, she had said the young man's family were with them, but could he believe her? She lied, as she had lied so often before, to taunt him, to mock him.

And now tonight she was off in the car, alone to Blackpool and its beach pleasures and excitements. To see her sister, Mrs. Nelson, who had come there from Edinburgh for a visit. That was what she said. How was he to know that she was speaking the truth?

If she were not? The pencil snapped in two in his strong, slender fingers.

He would kill her, rid himself of this torture once and for all. Only—there was the law. For those who murdered there was the gallows. For fools who murdered, that was. Not for subtle, cunning brains such as his. There were ways and means to circumvent the punishment of the law. Tricks that only a surgeon knew.

His mind went back to Bombay, to the Towers of Silence overlooking tropical foliage, roof terraces, the sparkling waters. Here the Parsees brought their dead. He saw the bearers

passing through the low door, the dead body exposed to sun and air and to the multitude of screaming vultures. In twenty minutes the bones were picked bare. Twenty minutes to destroy the evidence of death.

But this was England, where men took a strange interest in the causes of sudden death. Where detectives, aided by doctors, sought at the root of murder. He must match his Asiatic wits against their Western—his medical skill against the science of experts.

The perfect crime, this will o' the wisp which tempts so many to their doom, was taking shape in his imagination. They had caught Dr. Crippen, Dr. Cream with his capsules of poison, smiling Dr. Palmer, callous Dr. Lamson, Dr. Cross, the careless, Dr. Bougrat, Dr. Pommerais, the American Dr. Webster, but they would not catch Dr. Ruxton. He would see to that.

Dr. Ruxton stiffened. A car stopping. A key in the front door. He rose to his feet, and with that action, his brain cleared of its miasma of murder. Belle was home safe. In an instant she would be in the room with her careless "Hello, pa," and her kiss. Belle, his Belle whom he adored. Oh, she had her faults, but who had not?

He heard the door closing and impulsively took a step toward the hall, ready to greet her. And then he heard her start to go upstairs. Such are the simple things which determine the fate of mortals. Had she come to greet him naturally, all would have been well, but she did not come.

So. She was afraid to face him. She had been up to something. He ran out into the hall. He followed her up the carpeted stairs.

"Belle!"

She turned and looked down at him, swinging her bag on her wrist.

"Oh, hello, pa. I thought you would be off to bed."

"You thought nothing of the kind," he flashed at her, "you know very well I wait up for you. Where were you?"

"At Blackpool. You know I was at Blackpool."

"How do I know?"

She made a weary gesture. "Oh don't start that all over again. I'm tired."

"You were out with that young fellow again—I can see it—the way you act."

"Oh go to bed," she snapped.

They were her last words in life. One step up and his lithe hands closed about her throat and stayed there. He shook her in his passion. Then suddenly he let his hands go, and the lifeless body folded up in a heap, on the landing of the first floor.

HE had just heard a strange stifled sound. He turned his head.

Standing in the doorway of her bedroom was the nursemaid, twenty year old Mary Rogerson, her eyes distended with terror, her hand to her mouth. For a moment Dr. Ruxton looked at the witness of his crime, then with a cat-like bound, as she took her hand away and opened her mouth to scream, he was upon her. Again and again his hand struck her neck. The blood gushed from her mouth and stained nightdress and carpet.

Suddenly sobered Dr. Ruxton stepped back, the full hideous realization of what he had done, upon him. Oh, to plan death had been easy, but now it was accomplished, how different. He had two bodies, instead of one, calling for explanation, and that explanation he could never give. He must think, think quickly. Now that the deed was done, he must cover it

up, he must set about the battle of wits which lay before him. He must safeguard his life—protect his children who lay sleeping a few feet away.

Turning up his sleeves he dragged the two bodies into the bathroom and laid them there. Then he came softly downstairs to his surgery. When he went upstairs again he carried a keen edged surgeon's knife and its extra blades. He entered the bathroom and locked the door behind him. The light burned long in that room which he was using for his hideous task.

It was about six in the morning when he came out, haggard and unshaven, a cut on his right hand. He had suddenly recollected. Mrs. Oxley, one of three charwomen he employed throughout the week, was due to arrive this Sunday morning at seven. He cleaned himself, locked the bathroom door once more, came down, took the car and drove to Mrs. Oxley, whose husband he saw.

"Tell Mrs. Oxley not to come. Mrs. Ruxton and Mary have gone on a trip and I am taking the children to Morecambe."

He returned home. He was busy about nine o'clock when the bell rang. He wrapped a rag about the right hand he had cut and went down. It was a Miss Partridge with a Sunday paper. He took it and said—"The maid is away with my wife in Scotland."

At ten o'clock he had to open the door to the milkwoman. She looked at his hand. "Why, you've hurt t'hand, doctor."

"Yes, I jammed it."

A boy delivered a copy of the *Sunday Graphic*. After he left, the doctor went out to buy four gallon cans of gasoline. He was just carrying them in when a patient arrived.

"Oh, Mrs. Whiteside," he told her. "I'll have to put off your son's operation till tomorrow. My wife has gone to Scotland. There's just myself and the little maid in the house and we—we're busy taking up the carpets ready for the decorators in the morning."

It was only when she had gone that he realized what he had said on the spur of the moment. He stood for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders. The woman would never think twice about what he said. She was thinking of nothing but her son's operation.

There was a child's laugh upstairs. The youngsters were awake. Their father stood at the bottom of the stairs rigid as a statue then, galvanized into action, ran up. He must get them out of the house. He went into the nursery to meet their questions.

"Mummy's away. Yes, and Mary, too. Daddy will help you dress."

He hurried them into their clothes, downstairs to the car. He drove them to the neighboring town of Morecambe with its beach and sea and left them with friends, the Andersons.

"Belle popped off suddenly on a trip to Edinburgh. She took Mary with her," he explained. "My hand? Oh, I wanted to give the youngsters breakfast. All I could find was a can of peaches, and I cut my fingers on it."

HE drove back to Dalton Square and closed the door upon the dreadful contents of the house. He was busy from eleven-thirty to four, on various tasks. He pulled the stained carpets from the stairs. He kindled a fire in the yard and burned various articles. He must leave nothing to chance. And it was while he was working that it occurred to him that in order to give an innocent aspect to matters which might possibly carry

the taint of his guilt he must go about his life as if nothing had occurred. He must have in the charwomen as usual, must behave in a natural casual way.

He cleared the bathroom, but locked up two of the bedrooms, and at four went out and asked a patient, Mrs. Hampshire, if she would care to come and clean his house a bit. Mrs. Ruxton had gone to Blackpool and Mary Rogerson, the maid, on a trip. Mrs. Hampshire had never worked for him but she agreed to go back with him.

She found the house in a mess, the carpets up, and straws on the stair. Dragged there by his son Billy, said the doctor, in play.

The bathroom was in a mess, the bath tub a dirty yellow up to six inches of the top.

"Give it a good clean and a scrub. What can you do when the woman of the house does not care?" he said.

Mrs. Hampshire set to work, while the doctor went out. She found some of the carpet from the stair in a roll in the surgery waiting room, and there was a blue suit all bundled up. In the yard were several pieces of carpet all stained and where there had been a fire, half-consumed towels and a shirt, all stained with blood.

Dr. Ruxton brought his children back to get some of their clothes and left Mrs. Hampshire and her husband in the house when he drove away with them. He said they could have the roll of carpet and the blue suit. And so they took these when they locked up the house at nine-thirty. They were careful to put out all the lights.

No eye admittedly saw Dr. Ruxton return to his house nor saw him leave it again in the early morning with an uncanny load. No eye spied upon what he did with his burden. No one

noted that the mileage of his car had been increased by two hundred miles. The murderer had won the first battle.

At a few minutes after nine Mrs. Hampshire was amazed to see the doctor arrive dirty and unshaven, in flannel trousers and a raincoat. He who was usually so neat, had come without collar or tie.

"My, how ill you look." She remarked.

"Do I? My hand pained me all night. By the bye, you took away the carpet and the blue suit. Just occurred to me it wouldn't look nice to have such a messy thing as that come from my house."

"Oh that's all right," said Mrs. Hampshire. "I can pay for the cleaning."

Dr. Ruxton hesitated. Early that morning he had realized he had made a blunder but one that could be rectified. But how to get this blood smeared suit away from the woman without exciting her curiosity.

"Well let me cut off the name tag anyway. Let me have the scissors. No, my hand hurts me, you'd better do it."

"Oh, I'll do it after you go."

"No, do it now."

Mrs. Hampshire cut off the tag and he threw it into the fire. Dr. Ruxton was convinced the suit went to the cleaners. Mrs. Hampshire, whom he asked about it several times to make sure, said it had gone.

WHEN he got back to the house there was Mrs. Oxley waiting to get in. She did not mention she had been there at seven-forty and had been unable to get in. The doctor must have been there during the night or early morning for there was a light burning. She asked where the missus

and Mary were and he said they had gone to Edinburgh. They had planned it between them—the two women. She cleaned around all morning, saw the mess in the yard but said nothing, then went home.

Mrs. Hampshire was back in the afternoon. She bothered Dr. Ruxton with her questions about Mrs. Ruxton. Was she in Blackpool or Edinburgh and hadn't he told someone she was in London. Finally he saw he must win her sympathy and shut her up.

"I will tell you the truth," he said, "my wife has gone away with another man—left me with the three children. It's terrible. I can forgive extravagance and she was a wasteful woman, but not infidelity."

Mrs. Hampshire believed him, for the poor man laid his head on his hands and sobbed.

That night he was alone in the house. He still had work to do. Next morning he went off on an expedition. No one would have known of it, but he upset a cyclist in one of the towns of the Lake district who took his number and gave it to the police. Dr. Ruxton had a passenger with him but the young man whom he was using as a shield and a blind to the object of his trip from home could not have testified in a court. He was two year old Billy Ruxton.

He was back, however, by two when two of the usual charwomen Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Curwen arrived. Mrs. Smith noticed blood stains on the stair^{case} woodwork and made a comment, but the doctor had a ready answer. He had cut his hand and the blood dripped. And he said the same thing to Mrs. Curwen who pointed out blood on the stair casement window curtain. He ripped off the bloodied portion and took it away.

"People will be saying I murdered someone," he said with a twisted smile, and the women laughed heartily at the idea.

That night he had a sudden quiver of apprehension. He had slipped up on a detail. If the two women had gone, of course they would have taken clothes with them, in addition to those they had worn. He had already disposed of his wife's dress and things and of Mary Rogerson's stained night-dress, but their traveling things, no.

He made a hasty search, gathered together some clothes, including one of Mary's dresses with glass buttons, and with a can of gasoline made a fire in the yard.

Next morning he felt he had all but closed the door upon his crime. He went to the Andersons and took his children to the carnival at Morecambe.

On Thursday, September 19, Mrs. Oxley got to the house at seven-thirty. Dr. Ruxton told her to hurry breakfast as he had to see a specialist about his hand. She got him his breakfast in a hurry and he ate it in a hurry. She was in the kitchen washing up when she heard him bring his car round to the back door and come in. As he passed the kitchen door he shut it and went upstairs. He came down and up again several times, but she did not see what he was carrying. Which was just as well for both persons. He left the house at eight.

When Mrs. Oxley began to work, there did not appear to be anything wrong with them, though the two bedrooms had a faintly musty odor.

It was close on three o'clock when the doctor got back. Time enough to have gone a good many miles. He said, however, he had been to a nearby town and lost his way.

That night he brought back his

children from Morecambe. There was no longer that beneath his roof which they must not see, must never know of.

On Friday Mrs. Curwen and Mrs. Oxley were again at the house. When they exclaimed about a bad smell, it did not take Dr. Ruxton long to set them right. The odor came from the walls they had been stripping of paper. He sent out for a sprayer and some eau-de-cologne.

He might have been uneasy, had he seen one of Mrs. Curwen's operations. In a corner of the yard almost hidden from sight she came on a blanket in a basin of water. The water was reddish. She wrung the blanket and put fresh water on it, but did not mention the matter to the doctor.

And the doctor went about his usual business, seeing his patients, his ordinary efficient self. He handled all inquiries about his wife and Mary with the utmost composure. They had left his home on a trip Sunday morning. He was just a bit worried, he had not heard from them.

He was untouched by remorse. What was done was done. He had carried out the perfect crime. It would not, it could not be brought home to him. With his surgeon's knife he had destroyed and removed from the two bodies every means of identification.

Yet even as he stalked in his pride through the streets of Lancaster, nemesis was stirring to life a hundred miles to the north where Dr. Ruxton believed he had concealed his secret.

II

MISS SUSAN JOHNSON, when she set out lightly-hearted for a stroll on the morning of September 29, had no idea

of the part she was to play in the most thrilling murder story to flash into the daily press of Great Britain since the discovery of the remains of Belle Crippen in the London cellar of her husband, Dr. Crippen.

With her brother Alfred she had come to spend a few days vacation in the town of Moffat, a well known health resort in the south of her native country, Scotland. Not that she needed to drink its famous mineral waters whose chemical taste attracted so many visitors. Nor was the scenery so different from that of the Glasgow suburb of Lenzie in which she lived, within a trifling journey of Loch Lomond and the mountains.

No, something else, she could not say what, had brought her to the Spa. It was a nice morning and she left the town behind her and began to climb. She could see the river Annan. And had her ears been alive to sounds long dead, she could have heard the tramp of Cæsar's legions on the old Roman road to her left. If she kept on she would come to that dismal forbidding hole known as the Devil's Beef Tub.

But she did not get that far. When she came to the arched stone bridge spanning Gardenholm Linn, she stopped there for a rest and leaned over the parapet. She looked down into the eighty-foot deep ravine, dropping sheer from the roadway, at the bottom of which ran a narrow swift current of the river, and she shuddered. It certainly was a fine place for terrible doings.

All at once she started, then leaned forward. What was that down on a ledge? It couldn't be possible. She couldn't be seeing what she thought she saw. A parcel, something tied, and out of it sticking a foot, a leg, a human leg. She must be seeing things!

She felt she had enough of a walk. Her one thought was to get back to Moffat.

"You're daft," said her brother when she told him.

"I'm not daft. If you don't believe me, you can go back with me."

"But what would anyone be getting rid of a body there for? Why, it's the main road from Carlisle to Edinburgh and cars passing all day. Oh, well, just to please you, Susan. Come on."

Alfred Johnson climbed down into the ravine and with a stick gingerly poked at the parcel. It certainly was a foot and leg with most of the flesh removed. There was another suspicious looking parcel nearby. He prodded it. It was hard and round. Suddenly he knew. A head.

He came scrambling up.

"You weren't so daft after all," he conceded. "That down there is a matter for the police. Here, here, don't faint. I can't carry you home to the hotel."

Police Inspector Strath and others of the Dumfriesshire Constabulary undertook a search of the ravine. Their first finding consisted of four bundles, one wrapped in a white silk waist, one in a pillow slip, and two in pieces of cotton sheeting. Distributed in these bundles were thirty anatomical portions including one trunk, two heads three arms and hands, two legs and feet. Adhering to the trunk was straw. Pages of newspapers had been used as inner wrapping.

Next day a roadman found four more bundles wrapped in newspapers.

THE poor remains were taken to the Moffat morgue or mortuary and deposited there. The county police saw at once that they were con-

fronted with one of the most terrible crimes they had ever dealt with, and one which might prove as insoluble as the still mysterious Brighton trunk crimes which had baffled Scotland Yard.

They called upon the criminal investigation department of the Glasgow police, and a hurry call was sent to two of Scotland's most noted medical crime experts. These were Dr. Gilbert Miller of Edinburgh University and Dr. John Glaister, Professor of Forensic Medicine at Glasgow University, now carrying on the tradition of his father who had for thirty-three years occupied the same chair and written the textbook still used in the class.

The present Professor Glaister has written a number of books on his subject and is rising rapidly into fame as one of the foremost figures in the world of criminal investigation.

The anatomical portions were conveyed to the crown or state laboratory in Edinburgh and there Professor Glaister struck the first blow in the battle.

A strange and gruesome feature was that on the wrappings there was not a single spot of blood. The blood had been carefully drained from the bodies before anything else had been done.

"This is the work of someone with surgical experience," said the expert. "Someone who has worked in a dissecting room, perhaps even one of my own profession."

The two men, assisted by Dr. Brash, Professor of Anatomy began the uncanny business of building up the portions into their respective bodies. It was announced at first that the remains were those of a man and a woman, for one of the trunks was missing.

Streams in the neighborhood were

drained and fished, for there had been heavy rains and it was thought other portions might have been carried away from the ravine to places lower down.

The police were deluged with inquiries as to missing persons. It seemed incredible that so many people could have vanished out of touch with relatives and not been reported. But none of those reported missing seemed to match up with exhibits in the Edinburgh laboratory.

In the first week of October several other portions were found near by the ravine. They enabled Professor Glaister to pronounce both bodies as those of women, and, though there were still missing a torso, two feet and an arm and hand, to give some definite picture of the two victims.

Number One was that of a woman of twenty to twenty-five years of age, plump and well developed. She had been killed by blows from a blunt instrument on the head. Several teeth were missing, some drawn after death. Though there was no trunk, she had both arms, hands and legs.

Number Two, with trunk, was that of an older woman, 35 to 40. A bone in the neck, fractured, pointed to strangulation with the hands. Signs of bleeding in the lungs indicated asphyxia. All teeth missing but one, some removed before death, some shortly after. One of the missing legs was found nine miles from the ravine October 28, and the missing hand and arm, after a storm which laid low the gorse, on November 4.

THE more the experts studied the remains, the more convinced they were that the work was that of a man who knew his anatomy and surgery. Each individual joint had been severed with a sharp instrument.

And what at first glance had appeared to be savage brutality, the work of a sadist killer revelling in his job, now took on another and more revealing significance.

The butcher had gone to incredible pains to destroy every mark of identification. He had made sure no identification could ever be made of the remains.

Both heads had been scalped to destroy hair. So that the eyes might not be identified by size, color, by a possible cast or other defect, they had been taken out. Noses, ears, lips had been cut off and faces skinned. Skin had been removed from the limbs. Toes which by their nails, malformations, corns or bunions could have been identified had been cut off. Fingers had been mangled and severed.

The tongue tip of the elder woman had been cut off. The doctors looked at each other with startled surmise. Had the woman talked too much and so stirred her killer to a madman's fury.

Police and experts bending over the hideous relics, turning over the rags in which they had been wrapped, might well have at this point given up hope of bringing home the killing to any individual. Where were they to look for him in the area of England and Scotland, or even further afield.

Surely it must be some demon of perversity which lures a man to the hideous crime of murder with the promise of safety—with the deluding gift of being able to commit the perfect crime—and then with snickering glee sees him leave on the scene of his crime a damning clue to his identity.

How did the police with almost unerring determination put their finger on the map and say—look here for a murderer.

Wrapped round one of the bundles had been a sheet of paper, the picture section of a newspaper, the *Sunday Graphic*, dated September 15, a paper distributed all over both Scotland and England. How then was it possible to say where this particular copy came from?

Because the picture page was a slip or insert page for local circulation only. It depicted the crowning of a carnival queen for the town of Morecambe in Lancashire, England. The page was circulated only in Morecambe and the four mile distant town of Lancaster, the county seat, both of which lay roughly a hundred miles south of Moffat.

It was reasonable to believe that the person who had wrapped this bundle had received the newspaper on the morning of Sunday, September 15, in one or the other of these two towns.

Who was this person, author of the abominable crime?

Inquiries addressed to the Chief Constable of Lancaster, Henry James Vann, brought the reply that no one had been reported missing there, but the affair took another turn on October 2.

On that day, a Mrs. Rogerson called at the police office and reported that for three weeks she had had no word of her daughter Mary who had been nursemaid to Dr. Ruxton.

"What does Dr. Ruxton say?" asked Vann.

"Lying hound as he is, he says the lass went away with the missus to have a child. Mary was a decent lass. Ah'd have known if she was that way."

"You say Mrs. Ruxton is away, too?"

"Yes, sir. I can't make nothing of it. Mary would have written me, but

Ah've had never a postcard from her."

Vann questioned the poor woman. She had last seen Mary on her half day off, September 12. That was the last time she saw her. Not hearing from or seeing her, they grew anxious, Mary's brother saw Dr. Ruxton who said Mary had gone off with his wife, Sunday morning, the 15th. The doctor came to see them a week later and said Mary was pregnant and his wife had taken her away to be treated. He blamed a laundry boy.

The indignant parents waited till Oct. 1 and then went to see Dr. Ruxton. He told them he could not find out where Mary and his wife had gone. They had taken thirty pounds which he had had in his safe. When that was gone he expected them to come back. He asked the Rogersons to wait and not inform the police, but they could wait no longer.

When the unhappy mother left his office, Vann sat thoughtful and concerned. Two women missing, neither of them reported as such. It was strange, it was suspicious. Both gone from this doctor's house.

Twice before there had been trouble between husband and wife at 2 Dalton Square: Early in 1934, Mrs. Ruxton had asked protection. And in May of this year only, Dr. Ruxton had made some excited statements about his wife and a young solicitor of the town, and asked if the postal authorities could not intercept correspondence or telephone messages.

III

VANN decided to act. He sent for Dr. Ruxton who came at once, and after being questioned, said he had made no report because of possible harm to his practice. His wife and Mary Rogerson had gone

away to Edinburgh. He had written there but received the letter back. He showed the letter.

"Belle can't have any love for the children," he said bitterly. "Not even a postcard for our six year old Elizabeth."

A description of Mary Rogerson was circulated. Next day Dr. Ruxton called on Vann.

"See here," he said indignantly. "All this damn nonsense is ruining my practice. Can anything be done to stop this talk. Why they're linking it up with that Moffat business. You know about that?"

"Oh, yes," said Vann quietly. "I read the papers. Don't worry. Let me have a detailed description of Mrs. Ruxton."

Thereafter there may have been two shadowy ghosts following Dr. Ruxton as he went about the town and on his journeys, but there was also a more substantial shadow in the person of a detective.

On October 12 Vann again sent for Dr. Ruxton and asked him for a statement of his movements between September 14 and 30. It would have to be taken down in writing, which might be used as evidence.

"Certainly, only too pleased to tell you all I can," said Dr. Ruxton easily. His wits against this stolid Englishman's. There was no question of the winner. Had he not prepared for this?

He stated that he was in bed when Mrs. Ruxton came home from Blackpool after midnight Saturday. She wakened him shortly after six on Sunday morning and suggested they should go for a drive after breakfast and would he go and get the car. So he got the car and brought it to the door, and waited around for his coffee and toast. He was in the bath-

room when she came and called through the door that she had changed her mind and was going to Edinburgh on business about setting up a football pool agency and she was taking Mary with her.

So he called out, "Well you can't have the car, and that is that." She made no answer but "Toodle oo, I'm off, pa. There's a cup of tea on the hall table." He heard them go out. A moment later he came out of the bathroom and looked out of the front door. The car was still there. He concluded they took the bus or train.

He got the children up later in the morning and tried to open a can of peaches. He cut his hand severely and bled all over his shirt, clothes, the stairs. He managed to dress the fingers and threw the towel, gauze, etc. into the yard and later the shirt and, as he always did with such things, tried to burn them with petrol.

The suit? Oh yes, it got in such a mess he gave it to Mrs. Hampshire. She had had it cleaned.

Vann shook his head.

"No, Doctor, she did not. That suit is in our possession."

For a moment the questioned man's face grew more sallow, then he smiled.

"I don't see what that has to do with my wife's continued and wilful absence."

He continued to counter Vann's questions as midnight came and the early hours of the morning, all unaware that at his house the experts were at work.

Professor Glaister who had arrived from Glasgow was busy in the bathroom testing the stains there and on the stairs. The stains were those of human blood. Under his direction men were digging by lamplight in the

yard, collecting débris and deposits from the earth, and each minute the professor's face grew more grave. From the drain trap came a mess of animal matter of human origin, traces of internal organs.

Detective Hammond of the Glasgow criminal investigation department was collecting fingerprints in the kitchen.

IT was towards five in the morning when Dr. Ruxton with a wan but triumphant smile affixed his signature to the statement of his absence of any knowledge concerning the missing women. Vann had gone from the room, and now as he returned Dr. Ruxton rose to his feet and greeted him.

"All nonsense this, Vann, but I suppose it had to be gone through with in the line of duty. Well, I'm ready for bed."

He was amazed to see Vann's grim stare.

"Why—anything wrong?"

"I have just gone over the report of the experts." Said Vann slowly. "Dr. Ruxton, I am going to prefer a very serious charge against you. I charge that you feloniously and wilfully and with malice aforethought did kill and murder Mary Jane Rogerson."

For a moment Ruxton was taken aback but only momentarily. "Most emphatically not," he stormed. "Of course not. The furthest thing from my mind. What motive and why?"

"Mrs. Rogerson has identified the white silk waist found at Moffat as one she bought at a jumble sale for a penny and gave to Mary. Mrs. Holmes has identified the child's rompers also found. She gave them to Mary. The sheeting is identical with sheets in your house. A *Sunday*

Graphic was delivered to your house. A page from that paper was used as wrapping."

"But good God, man," Ruxton retorted, "that's no proof either of these bodies was that of Mary Rogerson. How could anyone identify them?"

"By the fingerprints."

"By—by the fingerprints—but—I understood the fingerprints had been removed—all the papers said so—"

"The man who killed Mary Rogerson," said Vann slowly, "made just one slip—he was just a little hurried in his work—and when he was destroying the marks of identification—he missed three fingers of Mary Rogerson's hand—"

"But—"

"And fingerprints from these three fingers are identical with those found all over your house, Dr. Ruxton. There is not the least doubt that the body known as Number One is that of Mary Rogerson and that she was killed and dismembered by you in your house."

They led Dr. Ruxton, stunned and silent, to a cell. For once he had nothing to say. But when on November 5 he appeared before a magistrates' court and heard himself charged with a second murder, that of his wife, he was ready to fight back.

"A positive and damnable lie. It is all prejudice. Is there no justice? Do I look like a murderer?"

On November 26, nine magistrates, two of them women, gathered in the police court to decide whether Dr. Ruxton should be committed for trial.

They heard the hideous story, they listened to the hypocritical letters he had sent to his wife's sister begging her to persuade Belle to come back to him, knowing all the time she was dead. They heard the experts, the

testimony of the prison surgeon that the scars on the prisoner's hand were not from a can opener but a surgical or similar keen edged knife.

The magistrates had no hesitation in sending the case to trial.

When it opened on March 2, of this year, in the city of Manchester a surprise was sprung. Dr. Ruxton was charged only with the murder of his wife, that of the nursemaid being held in reserve.

THE prisoner pleaded not guilty to the charge. Before his eyes in court was a significant array of exhibits. A model of the house, part of the stairway, clothing, the bath, the stained blue suit, Mrs. Ruxton's handbag proving she had returned to, but never left, the fatal house; jars of specimens, plaster casts, photographs of the reconstructed bodies.

The long array of witnesses took the stand, charwomen, a garbage man who had taken away the burned remains of Mary Rogerson's best dress, the Rogersons, then came the experts with their deadly testimony that the blood on the woodwork of the house was human and of recent origin, that the telltale débris all pointed to murder.

In silence the court saw Mary Rogerson's shoe fitted to a plaster cast of her foot from Moffat ravine. Mrs. Ruxton's shoe fitted to a cast of her foot. Both a perfect fit.

Professor Glaister said that of sixty-eight portions of human remains examined by him and his colleagues, forty-three soft parts could not be assigned to any body. He built up a damning case against the prisoner. Even the fact that positive marks of identification had been removed was made to tell. Mary Rogerson's eye with its cast, her freckled face skinned,

her scarred thumb cut off, a birth mark on the arm cut out. Mrs. Ruxton's prominent nose, her teeth, a bunioned toe. The prisoner had taken care of everything but one trifle—three fingers on one hand.

Dr. Ruxton took the stand in his own defense. He dabbed his eyes with his handkerchief. He sobbed and cried. He had fits of angry denial. He declared that the charge of killing his wife was "a deliberate fantastic story. You might as well say the sun rose in the west and set in the east."

"It is suggested that you killed Mary Rogerson," said his counsel the nimble-witted and noted Norman Birkett.

"Bunkum with a capital B. Why should I kill poor Mary?"

He explained his quarrels, his charges of infidelity, proved to be untrue, but at no time had he ever thought of violence. He told his story, of his wife's departure. He explained everything, the stained carpets, the suit stained with blood when he helped his friend, Anderson the dentist, in extractions, the locked doors, his cut hand. He had never been to Moffat. All he carried down on the morning of Thursday, 19, was his camera.

Mr. Birkett, defense counsel, pointed out that the evidence was only circumstantial. No positive identification of the body had been made. Mrs. Ruxton had gone away on a previous occasion without writing. There was not the slightest evidence that Dr. Ruxton was responsible. Would any sane man dismember bodies with his children in the house, throw open his house to a succession of charwomen with sharp eyes. On one of these alleged trips to Moffat, Dr. Ruxton was using a hired car. Not a spot of blood had been noted on the car. The

Crown, Mr. Birkett claimed, had failed to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt.

The summing up of the judge, Mr. Justice Singleton, on the last day of the trial, March 13, was one of the fairest ever delivered.

"It is important," he warned the jury "that no innocent man shall suffer."

The jury filed out. In an hour it came back with a verdict of guilty. Dr. Ruxton listened to his sentence:

"Buck Ruxton, you have been convicted on evidence which can leave no doubt in the minds of anyone. The law knows but one sentence for the terrible crime which you have committed. The sentence of this court upon you is that you be taken from this place to a lawful prison and thence to a place of execution, and shall there be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and that your body be afterwards buried within the precincts of the prison, and may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

Dr. Ruxton looked at the pronouncer of his doom, then raised his hand with the palm outward as though in salute, and stepped down from the dock.

Back in Strangeways Prison, Manchester, he busied himself about his appeal. He was sure that he could argue himself out of the noose on the point of the clean car and other items of defense. But when the Court of Criminal Appeal heard his case on April 27, the appeal was dismissed.

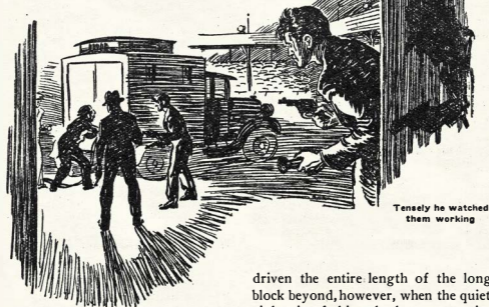
And once more Dr. Ruxton, his name inscribed on the roll of infamous medicos, was taken back to his prison there to await the doom which comes one morning on the stroke of eight to those deluded mortals who plan the perfect crime.

POLICE
D F W
SHORT

Tag Trail

By

Charles Molyneux Brown



Tensely he watched them working

WHEN Detective Walter Hewitt, alone in a department car, wheeled slowly past Konger Food Store No. 47 everything appeared serene there, a quarter hour before the ten o'clock Saturday night closing hour.

There was an armored motor truck double parked before the store and he had glimpsed the uniformed driver inside, signing for the daily cash receipts he was picking up. He knew that another armed and capable guard watched from within the tank, and on the surface of things, there was nothing to worry about here.

Hewitt hadn't

driven the entire length of the long block beyond, however, when the quiet night air of this suburban community was violently shattered by a series of explosions too sharp for backfires.

Jamming on brakes, he snapped his head about for a backward glance.

Flashes of dull orange winked on the sidewalk before the food store. He could see crouching figures about the armored truck, firing at the uniformed driver, lurching in the store doorway and returning the fire.

Swearing savagely, Hewitt jerked the department flivver about in a U-turn and sped back down the block.

Foolishly, perhaps, he switched on the red center headlight and started the siren blaring, and that warned the stickup mob pulling the bold coup of his

Murder and Getaway Were Perfect—All That Was Left for the Cops Was a Mania Merchandising Tag

presence in the vicinity and determination to interfere.

He saw the uniformed driver slump to the sidewalk; saw a man leap to the cab of the armored truck. Two other scampering figures piled into a small sedan parked at the curb at the rear of the truck.

Then, when the scudding police flivver was only thirty yards from the spot, and Hewitt, with plucked service revolver in his hand, was grimly ready to jam on brakes abreast of the truck, they pulled another smart trick.

The heavy truck with its steel armored tank lunged out from the curb directly in his path, practically blocking the street.

Quick work with brake and steering wheel helped a lot, but there was a sickening, crunching bang when the right wheel and fender of the sluing flivver plowed into the side of the steel monster.

The shock threw Hewitt against the steering wheel with rib-bruising force, jarring the breath from his lungs. His head banged a door corner smartly, laying open a cut over his left eye and all but sending his senses reeling.

The truck rocked but didn't overturn. The flivver sagged crazily as the right front wheel collapsed.

The truck wallowed away as Hewitt fought for breath and a grasp on spinning senses. The sedan scooted out in the wake of the truck, and a man leaning from a door window emptied an automatic at the police flivver in a roll of searing shots.

Slugs crashed through a windshield already splintered by the collision, and thudded into the seat back. Luckily for Hewitt, he presented a poor target, wedged between wheel and door as he was.

Men came running from the side-

walk. One of them yanked open the left front door of the flivver and Hewitt spilled out. A man steadied him, burbling anxious questions at the sight of that streaming cut over Hewitt's eye.

Hewitt's lungs were working again, and he wasted some of his first hard drawn breath swearing. He shook off friendly helping hands and loped, lurching a little, for the store and a telephone.

One glance at the pain-contorted, gray face of the uniformed figure sprawled on the sidewalk before the store doors told a plain story. Blood welled from the unfortunate driver's forehead and his chest. Fingers still gripped the butt of his revolver.

A stocky, elderly man blocked Hewitt at the doorway.

"I saw it all, sergeant! I'll phone headquarters and tell them. Here. Take my car and get after them! The gray coupé at the curb. You can get police broadcasts on my radio."

Hewitt recognized a business man of his acquaintance. Eagerly he snatched the ignition key thrust out at him.

"Thanks, Mr. Johnston! How many men in the mob, and what kind of a car were they using, if you noticed by chance?"

"There were four men. One stayed at the wheel of the sedan. It was a Piper Six, dark blue with red trimmings. I couldn't catch the numbers when they pulled out. I happened to be looking when three of them started the business. They tossed something into the truck, through the little side port that was open. A gas bomb, I think. Then they opened up firing on the driver, when he rushed out to the sidewalk. When he fell, one of them jumped into the truck cab, and the others ran back to their car."

HEWITT darted to the curb, piled into the gray coupé and started up the motor. The bandit mob had gotten precious seconds start of him, but this powerful car could outdistance the armored truck, he thought, if he could cut the trail.

Mr. Johnston shouted from the store doorway: "One of the bandits has a tommy-gun, Hewitt! Watch your step!"

Hewitt nodded grimly, sending the coupé leaping, and shouted back:

"When the first car gets here, tell 'em I'm taking the trail, and that the mob turned south on Clayton. Thanks for the car!"

Swabbing blood from his left eye as he roared up to the intersection with Clayton Street, Hewitt made a one-handed turn that rocked the gray coupé sickeningly. Straightening out, he noticed the broad skid marks on the asphalt, where the truck had made the south turn at high speed.

Those skid marks gave him a hint. He watched the pavement for more of them, feeding gas savagely.

Three blocks reeled off dizzily. Then Hewitt slammed on brakes, twisting sharply east on the Airport Boulevard. Those tell-tale skid marks gave him the cue. The armored truck and the sedan consort had turned off there, on a course that would take them out of the city limits within six or seven blocks.

The coupé lurched as he fought the wheel, straightened out and leaped ahead under the spur of the throttle. Hewitt hoped grimly that prowl cars taking up the trail and the emergency squad car headquarters would send roaring out there, would spot those skid marks and read the answers. He was leaving some of his own.

He swabbed at his eye again, peering eagerly ahead for a sight of blink-

ing red tail lights. There were a number ahead but he couldn't know whether or not one of them marked his quarry.

Fumbling, he switched on the radio, set the wave band and tuned in the police broadcasting station. The announcer was repeating a general alarm, and directing prowl cars and special cruisers to Konger Food Store No. 47.

In addition to the regular patrolling cruisers, a harassed chief had put everything on wheels at headquarters rolling tonight, manned by detectives singly and in pairs, anticipating another strike from the bold mob knocking off stores and filling stations for the past week. Hewitt had been engaged on that special duty.

They had struck, all right, Hewitt reflected grimly, and not just as anticipated. He happened to know that that armored truck had been nearing the end of the Saturday night pick-up route at Store No. 47, and that there would be something like five or six thousand dollars in currency and silver aboard, not figuring checks cashed for customers of the food chain stores.

He crouched over the wheel of the scudding coupé. The cut had about stopped bleeding, and trickling blood didn't bother his vision. He was on the route the bandits had taken, he was pretty sure, but guessing their destination was something else again.

He overhauled a car, slowed long enough to make sure it wasn't either the armored truck or the sedan and roared past. Two more cars in quick succession were overhauled and passed up. After that, Hewitt just looked for the bulky armored truck. That would be easier to spot at speed, and the truck was his main quarry, anyhow.

He was well past the city limits now, and houses facing the boulevard were

thinning out. The radio kept up a chatter of orders. They were stirred up, back there at headquarters, and getting nowhere, apparently.

TEN miles reeled off in almost as many minutes. Hewitt had been watching the pavement ahead and on his left closely. On this broad boulevard though, there wasn't much chance of picking up telltale skid marks.

There were dozens of chances for the bandits to have turned off the Airport Boulevard. Hewitt realized abruptly that he was following a rather blind trail now.

The brilliant lights of a filling station ahead caught his eye. He pulled down speed, whirled into the station and made a screeching stop. Attendants about the pumps scrambled to safety, then clustered when he stopped.

An alert chap eagerly answered his snapped questions. They hadn't seen any armored truck pass within the past ten minutes.

"We've been watching, too!" the chap told him. "We caught the alarm on our radio, and we've been checking the cars going past, just in case they came this way."

Hewitt grunted thanks, swung out of the station and headed the coupé back toward the city. Disappointed, he mumbled profanely. The mob had twisted, somewhere, and very probably had gone to cover by now.

He drove at a brisk forty, keeping to the center of the pavement and eagerly scanning both sides as well as he could, for skid marks, especially at intersections.

The pavement swung about a looping turn and the headlights played for a fleeting moment on a stretch of high board fence, built back from the boulevard a hundred yards. Hewitt made

out a word or two in a sprawling sign painted on the fence and remembered the place as an amateur baseball park that hadn't been used this summer.

Then, just when he was passing the place, his eye caught a series of weird, lightning-like flashes of greenish-hued light, lancing high above the fence.

The coupé had rolled a good three hundred yards before the significance of those flashes dawned on Hewitt. Then he jammed on brakes and swung the coupé in a feverish, screaming turn about.

That artificial lightning effect had been made by an oxy-acetylene welding or cutting outfit in operation. It wasn't likely that any honest work of that nature would be going on in the ballpark at ten o'clock tonight.

Completing the turn, Hewitt switched off headlights and sneaked back to the ballpark, turning off the pavement onto the broad gravelled driveway leading to the fence. He made a silent stop a dozen yards from a dark break in the fence that marked an entranceway.

He knew the answer to something that had been bothering him. He knew how the mob had planned to get into that armored tank.

His gun was in his right hand, his pocket flashlight in his left, when he reached the dark gap. Tensely he passed through, rather close to one side.

He had only gotten a glimpse of the bulky outlines of the armored truck, picked out by carefully held flashlights in the hands of four men crowded close to it, when there was a sudden movement from the deep shadows beside the fence and the hiss of exertion forced breath.

Something smashed down on the back of his head, crushing his Panama

hat and sending Hewitt stumbling to his knees. The roar of his own gun, blasting harmlessly at the ground, dinned in his ears, then black nothingness descended upon him.

It seemed that the report of the gun still was roaring in his ears when consciousness drifted back to Walter Hewitt. His fingers clawed cinders for a moment and then he managed to get up on bended knees, swaying dizzily. His head ached fearfully, but quickly exploring fingers could feel nothing worse than an egg-sized lump at the back of his head, that wasn't moist.

Savagely he swore his disgust and anger, scrambling to his feet, thrusting out a hand to the fence to steady himself. He strained his eyes in the now pitchy darkness and could make out nothing familiar except the shadowy bulk of the armored truck, outlined against a lighter western sky. The only sounds were the hollow roarings of car motors on the boulevard.

II

FUMBLING fingers found a box of matches. By the feeble light of the three struck in succession, Hewitt confirmed his suspicion that both gun and flashlight were gone. Apparently he had been dragged a few yards from the gap in the fence and dumped there.

He did find his hat, shapelessly crushed where a tire had passed over it.

A faint, wavering beam from a flashlight came threading through the gloom, through the fence gap.

"Hey! Anybody in there?" a quavering voice challenged.

Hewitt stumbled dizzily to the gap and showed himself in the torch beam that centered on him.

"It's all right!" he croaked huskily.

"Come over here, with your torch!"

Feet scabbled in the gravel; a small man in shirtsleeves approached cautiously, and rays of his flashlight glinted on a big revolver that wavered a little uncertainly in his other hand.

"What's coming off over here?" The chap tried to make his tones gruff and confident. "I heard a shot, and I saw two cars light out of the ballpark."

Hewitt fished out his badge, identified himself quickly, with a brief explanation of his presence there. The man was relieved.

"My name's Miller," he explained in return. "I live across the boulevard. I heard about that stickup over my radio. Gosh! Is that the armored truck there?"

His torch had picked out the truck. Hewitt snatched it from his hand.

"That's the truck!" he snapped. "Let's have a look around."

He hustled over to the armored truck, Miller scuttling at his heels. Hewitt saw at once the yawning opening in the side of the tank, just back of the cab, where a small half-door swung open. A brief scrutiny under the close held flashlight disclosed the ragged, blackened edges about the lock, cut through the metal by an acetylene cutting torch.

He poked the flashlight into the cavernous opening, thrusting head and shoulders after it, flashing the beam about.

He saw the huddled body of the uniformed guard on the floor of the tank. Then his eyes began to smart and the membranes of his nose to itch. He jerked his head out and inhaled deeply of cool, clean outside air.

"Gas!" he growled. "That's how they got the inside guard, right at the start of the business. They shoved a

gas bomb through the port and the port devil never had a chance."

Miller made gurgling sounds of wonder and awe, at his elbow.

Hewitt flashed the torch about, held down. Cinders before the yawning door were churned up with small wheel and shoe marks.

"They had a portable oxy-acetylene outfit," he explained to Miller, "and cut the lock-out. They raked out the sacks of cash. It didn't take 'em long at the job. They must have been about ready to lam when I shoved through the gap."

He widened the circle of the torch beam, moving slowly out from the armored truck.

The beam picked up a bit of white on the cinders. Hewitt leaped forward, stooped and picked up a small, oblong cardboard tag, with bits of wire protruding from a metal eyelet.

Curiously he examined his find under the torch beam. There was no printing on either side of the manilla tag, but plenty of greasy thumb and finger marks. And when he bent closer, he could make out a pencilled number, 16,748.

Hewitt grunted, fingering the tag thoughtfully. Just now it didn't mean anything to him. It had been torn from some other object, doubtless, and might have been there on the ground for days. He examined the tag once more carefully.

There had been a light shower just after sundown tonight. Raindrops still sparkled on the cinders, under the torch beam. But there was no moisture on this tag. It had fallen to the ground tonight, then.

"Do you s'pose they dropped that?" Miller asked curiously.

Hewitt grunted, dropping the tag into a coat pocket. "I don't know,"

he said. "You got a phone at your place, Miller?"

"Sure. Want to use it?"

"I'll get you to telephone headquarters, and have 'em send somebody out here." Hewitt was striding for the gap. "That'll save me time. I'm getting back uptown as fast as I can make it. Say, I'd like to borrow your gun, Miller!"

"Take it!" Miller thrust the revolver at him. "It's fully loaded and I just cleaned it up a couple days back."

The revolver fitted nicely into Hewitt's belt holster and he felt a lot better with the weight riding his hip. He gave Miller his torch back, when they were outside the fence.

"Hustle over and do that phoning now," he ordered briskly. "Ask for Captain Dailey, and tell him I'm on the way in."

Miller was scuttling for home, when Hewitt raced to the gray coupé and climbed in.

GRIMLY hunched over the wheel, speeding the gray coupé for the city, Hewitt's thoughts weren't very pleasant. In his eagerness back there at the ballpark, he'd muffed things, and like a rookie sap, had made it easy for the lookout to take him out. He should have known that a smart mob like that wouldn't be careless, at any time.

He'd had his chance to grab a mob that had everybody from the chief down jumpy with daring operations in Bluff City for a week now, and he had handled it with less use of brains than the dumbest cluck of the force would have been guilty of employing.

The mob would go to cover now, and a hangout the cops hadn't been able to get a line on in six days of frenzied sniffing. Dozens of local bad lads had

been dragged in and grilled, and turned out when dicks had been positive none of them were tied up with this new mob in any way. Stoolies couldn't help. The chief and others had decided that a visiting mob working under a brainy leader was pulling these jobs.

After a take like the one they'd gotten away with tonight, they would more than likely lam out of town, ditching the Piper sedan, probably stolen for the job tonight. Hewitt swore aloud, as he was nearing city limits.

That tag now, that he had picked up at the ballpark. Maybe it meant something. Anyhow, it was the nearest thing to a clue yet apparent. He took it from his pocket, slowed his pace and examined it again under the instrument board light.

The number didn't mean anything. Those tracks, when he could get the car to headquarters, might spell something to the fingerprint expert, checked with his records. He thrust the tag back into his pocket.

Miller had said that two cars had pulled away from the ballpark. The Piper sedan would be one of them. The other, doubtless, had hauled the acetylene outfit to the park and waited for the mob to bring the armored truck there. Hewitt tried to remember the little he knew about oxy-acetylene outfits.

There were hundreds of them in the city, he guessed. He'd seen them in operation on streetcar track jobs, cutting down old bridges and the like. Usually a couple of drums strapped to a handtruck, with trailing rubber tubes and a guy with a visored hood operating the torches. He'd never paid a lot of attention.

Then he remembered, quite suddenly, that there had always been tags

hanging to the valve ends of those drums!

With the thought, flashing white hot into his racing mind, the coupé spun around a corner where brilliant signs spotted a drug store. Hewitt shunted the car to the curb, made a squealing stop and hustled into the drug store.

Feverishly he consulted a telephone directory. In the classified ad section he found what he was looking for. Under the sub-heading OXYGEN he found:

WESTERN AIR PRODUCTS CO.
Oxygen, Hydrogen, Welder's Supplies.

Thirty seconds later Hewitt was racing across town for the River Street address of the Western Air Products Company, taking chances with traffic lights and no siren to clear the way for his reckless flight.

Only one light burned in the office of the warehouse when he pulled up there. Hewitt thought there would be a watchman, anyhow. He ran up steps and pummelled a door. Presently a bulky man with a watchman's clock slung from his shoulders and a flash-light in his hand came to the door and peered through the glass at the impatient night visitor.

III

HEWITT held his badge for the watchman to see. "Open up!" he bawled loudly. "Police business, brother!"

The watchman unlocked the door and opened it a grudging crack.

"What the hell?" he growled suspiciously. "There ain't anything wrong here!"

Hewitt further identified himself by name, and added hastily: "I want a look around your shipping room, just the same. Show me!"

The watchman locked the door

again, and rumbling to himself, conducted Hewitt through the office and back to a shipping room, where gas drums of all sizes stood about and were piled in stacks.

Eagerly Hewitt approached a stack, and fingered tags tied about thick drum necks. Most drums had several tags of assorted sizes and colors affixed, but he found one with a small, plain manilla tag matching the one now in his hand.

"Know anything about these tags?" he demanded of the watchman at his elbow.

"Sure I do. I used to work in the warehouse before my back gave out and I took the nightwatch job. That tag's a record of the shipping order number. It'll be in the shipping clerk's order register, showing where the drum went."

"Find that register, brother!" Hewitt grasped the watchman's elbow and hustled him over to a high desk.

The watchman dug the book out of a drawer, leafed through it, after a glance at the pencilled number on Hewitt's tag, and found the corresponding number on a page.

"Your tag come off a drum that went to Dave's Welding Shop, out at 416 West 14th," the watchman traced an entry on the page. "Where'd you get it, sergeant?"

"Never mind!" Hewitt snapped. "What do you know about Dave's Welding shop, if anything?"

"That's a jackleg welding and automobile repair shop, run by a fellow named Dave Risman."

"Thanks! You can let me out now—after I use your office phone!"

Hewitt called headquarters from a phone in the office up front. The H.Q. operator, when asked for Captain Dailey, informed the detective that

Dailey had gone with the squad car rushed out to the ballpark.

"Okay, Red. Hewitt speaking. Tell whoever's the skipper to rush a couple of dicks or uniformed men out to 416 West 14th," Hewitt ordered hastily. "Better send four men, anyhow. I'm on something hot on this bandit mob, and I'll be there when they make it."

"Sorry, Hewitt, but outside of me and the radio op, the desk sergeant and the turnkey, just about everybody's out on this stickup thing. I'll put it on the air for a cruiser to hop over there, and for Captain Dailey to hike, too. He may get the flash."

"Swell!" Hewitt slammed up the phone, skipped from the office and roared off in the gray coupé.

West 14th Street, in the vicinity of No. 416, wasn't five blocks from the Western Air Products warehouse. It was a dark and forbidding neighborhood, the street lined with warehouses and small shops.

Hewitt had no difficulty locating Dave's Welding Shop. A weather-beaten sign hung outside a shabby, two-story frame structure, informing the public that Dave did welding, auto blacksmithing and general repairing.

Hewitt parked a half block from the place, cut lights and motor and hurried back on foot. He studied the place, approaching. The downstairs was dark; solid double doors to the auto drive-in closed. No lights showed in the corner where the business office was.

Glancing up at the front second story windows, Hewitt thought he could detect faint gleams of light about edges of pulled down shades there.

The sensible thing to do was to wait until the radio flash brought a cruiser out here, or perhaps Captain Dailey and men from headquarters, if the

skipper had gotten the flash and had been returning to the city.

On the other hand, Hewitt reflected, grimly staring up at those front windows, they'd come screaming up with a racket that could be heard ten blocks. If that stick-up mob was holed up here, they'd flush, before reinforcements could be of much help.

Odds never bothered Walter Hewitt. He made a decision now, walked up to a small door that bore the scabby "Office" sign and kicked at the bottom noisily, after a twist at the knob proved the door locked.

PRESENTLY his assault brought results. He could hear feet clumping down stairs somewhere within. Then a greasy dim bulb flashed on in the office, and he could see a squat thick-chested swarthy man in greasy coveralls coming to the door.

Hewitt grinned ingratiatingly when a pair of suspicious dark eyes surveyed him through the door glass. "Open up!" he called. Locks clicked and the swarthy man threw the door open.

"What do you want?" he demanded surlily.

"You do welding?" Hewitt asked. "Say, I'm broke down in the next block. It's a welding job, and I want to get fixed up so's I can hit the highway on my trip. You're Dave Risman, aren't you?"

"I'm Risman, but I don't take no jobs after six o'clock," the man growled. "Who sent you to me, mister?"

Both Hewitt's hands made darting, marvelously quick motions. Dave Risman blinked stupidly at the gun muzzle held rock-steady three inches from his thick middle, and at the gleaming gold badge in Hewitt's left hand.

"Back up, Risman!" Hewitt warned

softly. "Don't open your trap in a yell, either. I want to see the inside of your shop!"

The mechanic fell back a few stumbling paces. Panic dawned in his widened eyes. Hewitt pressed him closely, sending darting glances about the small office.

He spotted the side partition door at once, and beyond could see objects dimly in a dark shop. There was a switch beside the door frame. Warily, Hewitt sidestepped to the opening and turned the switch.

Brilliant lights flashed on in the shop. His guess had been good.

A grunt of satisfaction escaped Hewitt's lips, when his darting glance fell on a sedan in the driveway running past the office, its rear bumpers just touching the closed big doors. It was a Piper Six, blue-black, with red stripings.

A few yards ahead of the sedan stood a light truck, with an open body.

The rounded ends of two gas drums strapped to a small handtruck showed in the truck, coils of rubber tubing looped about their necks.

Hewitt's stern eyes flicked to the swarthy man, whose face showed dirty gray under grease smears.

"Stand here in the doorway, Risman!" the order cracked. "Where I can keep an eye on you. Make a funny move and it'll be bad for you!"

THE mechanic shuffled forward. Hewitt stepped out into the shop, and over to the tailgate of the light truck. He drew the little tag from his pocket and looked for bits of wire that might match the broken ends on the drum necks.

He heard the mechanic draw a hissing breath, jerked his head for a square glance at the man. Risman's eyes, wide

and full of a mute appeal for help, were raised and staring upward at a point behind the dick.

Hewitt snapped his head about, following the direction of that strained stare. He saw a shadowy platform at the top of a flight of open wooden stairs, leading to the second floor. There was a blurred movement up there and something metallic gleamed in light rays.

Hewitt let his knees hinge and ducked below the truck tailgate, not a split second too soon.

The crashing blasts of a tommy-gun rocked the shop. Down aimed slugs pinged on the gas drums, ricocheted with eerie whinings and ripped through the wooden flooring of the truck in a hail of death.

Hewitt crouched, his gun gripped, faculties alert. From the corner of his eye, he saw Risman duck behind the door casing, jerking at a rear pocket. He could hear feet thudding on the wooden stairs as men charged down.

Then an automatic popped from the office doorway. The shock of a slug socking into the big muscles of Hewitt's left shoulder almost bowled him over. He caught balance with his right hand, twisted and brought the revolver up to snap a shot at all that he could see of the mechanic, merely an arm and a shoulder exposed beyond the casing.

Dust flew from the coveralls at the upper arm. Risman yelped and the automatic clattered to the floor, falling into the shop.

Then Hewitt was very, very busy with a desperate mob trying to shoot out of a pinch.

Peeping under the truck he saw a pair of thick legs. The gun in his hand roared and a man crashed to the floor. Another stumbled over him, cursing frantically. The prone man

propped on an elbow and shot at Hewitt.

Something bored into Hewitt's thigh with paralyzing pain. His quick shot stiffened the chap on the floor. The stumbling one squatted, poking the nose of the tommy to rake the space beneath the truck.

A slug from Hewitt's weapon glanced along the tommy barrel and found a target in the squatting man's stomach. His eyes popped as he dropped the gun and rocked on his heels, hugging his stomach, face gray-ing.

Hewitt reached up and caught the tailgate with fingers of his left hand, helping his paralyzed leg to pull him up. A flicker of movement at the stair head warned him. He snapped a slug up there and sagged, keeping his clutch on the tailgate.

A sawed-off shotgun roared and pellets rained on the back of the truck and the tailgate, riddling Hewitt's fingers.

Swearing, he huddled on the floor, wondering how many more of them there were up there, and how soon they'd get him now.

A siren shrieked, not two blocks away. Men cursed frantically up at the stair head, and feet sounded hollowly as a pair raced across the floor for the rear of the place.

HEWITT heaved up, tried a step toward the stairs and fell, swearing his anger and disgust. He half-crawled, half-wallowed over to the office doorway, and pulled himself erect by clutching door casings.

Men came hurtling into the office through the outside door, guns in their fists, faces grim and alert. The glint of light on brass buttons was a welcome sight to Walter Hewitt.

"Outside!" he croaked. "Watch the second floor—at the back!"

Two uniformed men rushed outside. Captain Dailey and a bulky dick sprang to catch Hewitt's reeling figure and ease him into a chair.

"Stairs—inside—" Hewitt gobbled a warning, and they left him to plunge into the shop.

There was shooting, inside and outside, and presently things quieted down. Captain Dailey and the dick returned to the office dragging two handcuffed, apprehensive prisoners. The two cops came in from outside and handcuffed the groaning Risman.

There were two men out in the shop who Hewitt thought would need no handcuffs.

Dailey went over the stocky detective hurriedly.

"You all right, Hewitt, outside the slug in your shoulder and the one in your leg?" he inquired anxiously.

Hewitt waggled the numbed fingers of his bloody left hand.

"Count 'em!" he husked. "And see if I've got 'em all!"

Dailey examined the hand and grinned. "It'll make a good fist—as good as ever—in a few weeks," he gave cheerful information.

A dick and a uniformed man came down from an upstairs investigation.

"The loot from the armored truck is all upstairs," the dick reported. "They must have been making the split, when Hewitt jumped them."

"Tell us about it," Dailey demanded respectfully. "How did you find the gang in this hole, Hewitt?"

Hewitt told them, beginning at the food store and running briefly through his experiences.

"Following that tag trail," he wound up, "brought me to this place. That's Dave Risman over there in the coveralls. They used his outfit to cut their way into the armored car tank. I guess they've been making his place headquarters."

"We'll make some of them sing, down at headquarters," Dailey promised, "and we'll find out about things." He cocked his ear to the wail of an ambulance siren, nearing the place. "There's you cab, Hewitt. The chief will be tickled to hear about this. He'll be out to the hospital to see you, fellow!"

"Tell 'em to drive slow," Hewitt cautioned huskily, when they were helping him out. "I'm not in any shape for a wreck!"



Canaries Lose Their Jobs

AN ingenious method of smuggling dope into Stateville Prison, at Joliet, was done away with by Warden Joseph E. Ragen when he ordered the prison population of birds to be transferred from the scene of their captivity within the prison walls. These comprised 3,100 canaries whose singing will no longer be heard by the convicts at Stateville due to the fact that dope had been found in packages of birdseed intended for the canaries. Henceforth, the only warbling done will be that which is performed by stoolpigeons.

—John Berry.



They're Swindling You!

Dope for Your Automobile

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the forty-sixth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial, and commercial associations.—The Editor.

IF you go to your druggist and ask him for a pound of magnesium sulphate, he will reach under the counter and hand you a box labeled "Epsom Salts" and charge you ten or fifteen cents for it.

If you listen to the sales talk of some high-pressure guy with a new "storage battery rejuvenator" and decide to "give it a trial," he will hand you the same thing and charge you at the rate of a couple of dollars a pound for it.

The difference is this. You pay the high-pressure guy about a dollar eighty-five for a sales talk that is one hundred per cent untrue. He will tell you that his dope will "prolong the life of your battery, recharge it if it's run down, will keep it charged and will give life and pep to old batteries."

Don't let him convince you with a "flash" demonstration. Here's what happens. When a storage battery is discharged, the sulphuric acid—which is

the liquid in batteries—makes a deposit on the lead plates, but this deposit is a part of the acid and is necessary for its continued usefulness. When the battery is charged—either by outside current or the generator of the automobile—this deposit is removed from the plates and again becomes a part of the sulphuric acid. This action and reaction is a natural part of all storage batteries and any interference with this action will cause the sulphuric acid to consume the lead plates more rapidly and shorten their lives—and this is exactly what these battery "dopes" do. The addition of epsom salts to your battery solution *will* remove the deposit from the plates, to their damage. The salesman's demonstration *seemingly* rejuvenates the battery, but don't be fooled.

GAS savers. From time to time, there appears on the market some gadget which the maker guarantees will cut your gasoline bill in half. Misleading advertisements headed "60 Miles on a Gallon of Gas!" or something equally exciting and untrue make

"I am glad to endorse the program of *Detective Fiction Weekly* which will bring to its readers the truth about rackets and racketeers. No man can be swindled if he knows in advance what the swindler is going to do—and nobody *wants* to be swindled."—Edward L. Greene, General Manager of the National Better Business Bureau.

claims for the device, which, when tested, fails miserably. The Bureau of Standards in Washington has tested many of these mechanisms and some time later the Post Office Department or the Federal Trade Commission takes action and then there's a short lull before the next hullabaloo starts.

Automobile manufacturers are constantly striving for gas economy through the redesigning and improvement of motors. Gasoline refiners spend millions of dollars installing new distilling or refining processes; adding tetra-ethyl to their product to increase its efficiency and to add one or two more miles to the gallon. Is it reasonable to expect that all this money and effort would be expended if a two-dollar gadget would double the effectiveness of *every* motor?

Now for the gas. Three grades of gasoline are offered to the public and in most instances they are all described as

"high octane." The first grade, or "premium" gas, has an octane rating ranging from 75 to 82; second grade or "ordinary" gas has an octane count from 66 to 71 and the low grade or "cut price" gas runs from 57 to 65. The octane rating is rigidly maintained in each grade of gasoline regardless of what the gas station man tells you. Remember, he doesn't *make* the gas.

It is fairly easy to fool the average automobile driver with gasoline, but you can't fool the motor. As new cars replace old ones, their high-compression motors will inform the driver in a hurry as to the grade of gas he is using by the pings and knocks which commence as soon as low-grade fuel passes the carburetor. When this happens the driver will realize that his new auto engine has shown him how badly he has been fooled with cheap gasoline, although his old car didn't seem to notice the difference.

Next Week—Contracts



Flim Flam Flimsies

ADVERTISEMENT appearing in a Chicago newspaper: "I have had two years' experience in a penal institution of a high national standing. I am minus the underslung jaw, taking ways, and baby-killing ambitions and believe my days in prison have enhanced my value. Ex-Convict." Fourteen offers of legitimate employment were received.

ON a busy road in South Germany motorists recently were puzzled as they saw an automobile tail-light swinging to and fro in the darkness ahead. They found that was the method used by a farmer to protect his cow. The light was tied to the cow's tail and to her head was affixed a headlight in the form of a Chinese lantern.

—John Berry.

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.

EVERYONE is familiar with the "Cost-Mark" cipher, used in this week's No. X-27 by Millexes, as displayed on merchandise in stores and shop windows. This type of numerical cipher is somewhat similar to the cryptic division, in that it uses a numbered key-word or key-phrase—in this instance an 11-letter word numbered from 1 to 0, the last letter being used as a "repeater." To illustrate, with the key-word HYPODERMICS, an article costing 75 cents would be marked RD; etc.

No. X-27. Cost-Mark Cipher. By Millexes.

YG	RD	UD
75¢	\$1.00	\$1.25
NG	P.DS	P.LG
\$1.50	\$1.75	\$2.00
A.OG	U.DS	PD.SS
\$6.00	\$12.50	\$15.00

In the above problem, the cost is given in cipher, and the selling price in plain figures. Mathematically, the solution of the cost-mark cipher may depend on a loose application of the principles of ratio and proportion, as compared to the rigid application of the principles of multiplication, subtraction, etc., in cryptic divisions. Anagrammatically, the letters also may be "shuffled," as in an anagram, to assist in finding the key. Solutions to No. X-27 will not count in your monthly solving scores, but send us your answers anyway! The key will be given next week.

In H. A. J.'s No. 198, last week's Inner Circle

cipher, doubled symbols aided in distinguishing symbols O, R, B, and N as vowels, with R reacting as e through frequency and finality, and B probably o through doubling. Whereupon, trying XRTRE (-e-e-) as never, GEBBARY (-roo-e-) would suggest *crooked*, leading to GVRGAREH (c-ecker-), *checkers*; etc.

Turning to this week's puzzles, Otto Petke opens the bill with a division problem using a two-word key-phrase (01234 56789). Identify symbol F by its use in the first and third subtractions. A Has-Been provides K, KU, and the phrase UN UVX for entry in his contribution. Follow these words with LXKL and KLLBXOO. Note the short words OXB, OXBPB, OHH, and OXHPB in Carroll B. Mayers' cryptogram. Next, identify KXH, KB, KBSB, KXBE, and LSB; etc.

Red Bates provides the affixes VS-, -VSZ, and -YVES for a starter. Follow up with EA, AEH, and EAAFHO; then YTHVGGO and YTVO. Symbol Z occurs 21 times in Del J. McLane's 127-letter alliterative construction. ZUTON may be approached by way of the endings -O, -OO, and -ON. A solution of Bud Kistner's Inner Circle cipher, and the answers to all of this week's puzzles will be published next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 100—Cryptic Division. By Otto Petke.

WTK) YITNSO (KIR
YTFY

TTTS
TRRK

OOOO
OFNI

TW

No. 200—Ambiguous Notation. By A. Has-Been.

BXZXHUPA K PXUUXB SKO BXUDBHXL UN UVX FNOU
NGGRZX KU *DHRNH *YBNTX, *SROZNHORH, EKBQXL:
"LXKL. FBXOXHU KLLBXOO DHQHNSH."

No. 201—When Importunity Knocks. By Carroll B. Mayers.

ABDEF "GHKE LEG HNO" DPE'O RBST UVBLPLEO. ANO
OXPBP GLTP, KXBE OXB ADVV YHVVBVOHS YLVVP,
OHXPB HZ NP KXH LSB "GHKE" HZOBE KDPX KB KBSB
"HNO" OHH.

No. 202—Judicious Variety. By Red Bates.

*BFYFYVNF *AVXYVES *PFFMGR EAAFHO YTHVGGO,
XTVGGO, KSB QROYFHR! KUOEHUVSZ YKGFO EA AKXY
KSB AKSXR! KSB ODGFSBVB AFKYLHFO, VSXGLBVSZ
YTVO OFXYVES AEH XHRDYEZHKTDFHO!

No. 203—Technical Tactics. By Del J. McLane.

ZYXVUTSX ZRTSP ZVZRU Z'UTON ZPULT ZPPKUO. ZKP-
NTRH ZYGTFFVY ZKYNHKREYN ZTUZTEUY ZTSTHYT
—ZVKZPNYDVU ZKTHXRHY. ZTKYSXN ZKPBXPY ZKPAY-
HX. ZKYNXP! ZKGRFO!

No. 204—Back to the Farm. By Bud Kistner.

HOBRNG ABRNGY AXOF! EPXSGOT AKV UKELY ROBU,
HPKOVY GOKBS. OFKENBSR EBGT, AFKMFY VFUPG. UP-
ELFGY UBELFV. ZKALY NPDP VBRYXYGFV!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

103—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 A C U R B S T O N E

104—Once there was a girl who refused dancing with an architect. She said that she was afraid he might leave blue prints on her!

105—Silent movie producers believe that the talkies should be made inaudible, while talkie producers hold that the silent cinemas should also be invisible.

106—Over-confident tyro attempts cryptic solution disregarding preceding hints. Encounters trouble. Finally swallows pride, reads clues. Success follows.

107—Queenie, comely wedded squaw, cat-fights Yvetta, pulchritudinous Esquimaux rival. Yanks Titian pigtail, claws damask cheek, socks rosy nose. Alas, alackaday, ladies!

108—Crabbed, crooked country cousin could never play cribbage, croquet, canfield, charades, crokinole, checkers, without cheating!

Readers submitting answers to one or more of the current puzzles Nos. 100-204, will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for August. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



FLASHES from READERS

THE third "FLASHES FROM THE POLICE FRONT" appears on pages two and three of this issue. The editors of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY intend to publish this up-to-the-minute bulletin every week. We are certain, in a day when harried criminals are made bold by desperation—when all the forces of law and order are working in perfect coordination toward the abolition of rackets and crime—that private citizens will wish to join in the fight, not only because of their personal interests, but also because of their patriotism and love of justice

"FLASHES FROM THE POLICE FRONT" come to you directly from authoritative sources. By keeping them in mind, alert readers will be able to protect themselves from frauds and swindles, and they may possibly be instrumental in laying by the heels some of the smooth gentlemen now living by their wits and on the money they have mulcted from the uninformed.

Three readers comment upon loyalty and the reasons for it.

DEAR SIR:
This is just a brief note from three grateful readers. We think that you are doing a fine service to earnest civil service candidates by publishing "G-2's" helpful quizzes.

That is the vigilant, purposeful sort of publishing which has endeared DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY to such a host of loyal readers over the years. And it is no wonder at all that they are such boosters for the magazine. We know we are.

One of the very nicest features about recommending DFW to a friend is the secure knowledge that he will thank you for the tip when he's begun his reading.

And naturally, it goes without saying that we consider the fiction content to be all wool and a yard wide.

And just in case you think this is a flash in the pan, we sign ourselves,

Very truly yours,
WILLIAM BLACK,
EDWARD KING,
RICHARD BURKES,
Portland, Oregon.

Another gentleman discovers the charm of the cipher.

DEAR EDITOR:
Well, here's another. For a couple of years now, I have been reading through DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY until I came to the cryptofan's section, and then I took a hurdle to the FLASHES page.

But a couple of months ago, I had to spend some time in bed with a sprained ankle, and I discovered that DFW wasn't quite long enough to make the time pass.

So I took a gander at one of the ciphers, and at first it looked pretty silly. Then, as I worked over it without much science or patience, it got my dander up, and I resolved to see it through.

And I did. It was a bit of a struggle, but I felt well repaid. And I've been at it strong ever since. As a matter of fact, that's the first thing I turn to in the book now, and as I begin to get a little better, I grow more and more intrigued.

Here's to more and better cipher puzzles. Maybe there ought to be ten in each issue—although I'd never catch up with the gang that way.

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE YOUNG,
Philadelphia, Pa.

A lady with a preference—and an idea!

DEAR SIR:

I am throwing all my bouquets this time to one of my very many favorites in your care-chaser and wit-teaser magazine.

Mr. Edward Parrish Ware has that sure touch of realism, of naturalness, that makes a story worthy of permanent form. His "*A Bit of Psychology*," in your current number, is a splendid example of what I mean.

I have long been hoping that you might issue a group of his stories in book form. An artist who could really sketch his types from life in a book with the wide margins that Thompson Seton has long since made so very attractive with the charmingly effective little sketches from life, would not that sort of book be both a credit to your house and a fitting vehicle to display the talents of one of your excellent writers?

Sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH KING,
Chicago, Illinois.

Besides the short-story and serial factions, we have a *status quo* army!

DEAR SIR:

I have been a reader of DFW since it was FLYNN's, Vol. III, No. 3, and have read the letters that have been sent in for and against this, that and the other thing. But the only kick I would make would be on the continued stories. I think that one at a time is best; otherwise, as you are!

For in the years I have read DFW there have been but five or six stories that I did not enjoy, so I do not think I should kick very much on that account.

It is more than I can say of other mags, so keep it up as you are!

I am satisfied. E. T. McLAUGHLIN,
Claremont, N. H.

Flashes from the Police Front

(Continued from Page 3)

PRINTING

Fake Salesman Collects Deposits

TRAVELING somewhere in the Far West is a printing salesman using the name of F. J. Lewis. In San Diego, Calif., he sometimes

stated that he represented the Meyerson Press of Chicago and at other times the Kayser Blair Co., another reputable concern.

This boy has plenty of scenery consisting of a fine line of samples, order blanks, and a convincing pattern. The prices he quotes are so low that he has no difficulty in securing orders—and deposits.

Lewis represents no one but himself and deposits paid to him are lost.

LOTTERIES

Sweepstakes Are Illegal—

Look Out for These

SWEEPSTAKES are classified as lotteries and, as such, are prohibited by law, both in the United States and Canada. The following sweepstakes are banned in Canada under Section 236 of the Criminal Code of Canada:

Quebec Division, Canadian Rifle Association.

British Mutual Consolidated Ltd. Sweep. Royal Jockey Club.

Commission de la Palestre National. Canadian Jockey Club.

Metropolitan Hospital Trust & Endowment Fund.

Canadian Cancer Hospital Lottery.

St. Paul Hospital Trust Fund.

Memorial Hospital, St. John's, Nfld.

Sherbrooke Hotel Dieu Hospital Trust Fund.

Montreal Post Graduate Hospital.

Quebec Charity Trust Fund.

Canadian Army Medical Association Sweep.

Montreal Special Derby Sweep.

Montreal Hospital Charities, Ltd.

In certain instances, it has been established that, after a large quantity of tickets are sold, the organizers themselves tip off the police. Later, when purchasers of tickets inquire regarding the draw they are told that no drawing is possible, due to seizure of the records by the police.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as —

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

The Anti-Narcotic Service

OF all the men engaged in crime detection, the operatives or agents of the Bureau of Narcotics, U. S. Treasury Department, rank tops as experts on the practices, systems and organization of the Underworld. Wholly engaged in combatting drug traffic, these secret agents of the Federal government must be in constant contact with denizens of the Underworld. A brief, official description of the duties of an anti-narcotic agent indicates that the work is not without personal risk: "The duties consist of major investigations of interstate distribution and intrastate wholesale distribution of illicit narcotic drugs. These investigations are directed at groups engaged in the unlawful distribution of narcotic drugs, with a view to striking at sources of supply which may have been, or are being unlawfully introduced into the United States. The duties require long hours of arduous work and exposure to all kinds of weather, and involves personal

contact with all classes of people, including criminal types, and for this reason may be attended with personal risk and danger."

The Civil Service Commission might well have added to that description the statement that the work is unusually hazardous because agents frequently must stack up against desperate men and women crazed by narcotics. Yet, in spite of this danger, few anti-narcotic agents have been slain in line of duty. The truth is that they resort to brain power rather than the gun to round up their quarry. "Dope agents," as they are called in the Underworld, work with the utmost secrecy, and sometimes spend years ferreting out the ramifications of vast drug smuggling and peddling rings which have their roots in China, Germany, Belgium and France. The Government never hurries its anti-narcotic agents; if necessary they may spend five years working up a case, and when finally they lay it before judge and jury, rarely ever do they lose a case. They are shrewd, methodical and thorough detectives.

More than once, in his cruising about the Underworld, "G-2" has encountered shadowy figures who looked and acted like they were confirmed drug addicts and seasoned criminals, only to discover, later, that they were dope agents making their usual round of Underworld haunts. And each agent has an army of stools reporting to

him and other informants who are paid by the government to reveal information against drug smugglers and peddlers.

A great deal is exacted of these agents—more, perhaps, than is required of other federal detectives. They must entrap their quarry in the act of smuggling, possessing or selling contraband narcotics. In this entrapment work, agents are permitted to employ former drug addicts and Underworld characters, who lure the smuggler or peddler into a situation where the agents may actually seize the drug and the peddler, red-handed. It is no secret in the anti-narcotic service that agents often lay in the hands of an ex-drug addict several thousand dollars in marked money to be used to lure the peddler into a deal. Singularly enough, these agents are rarely ever double-crossed in their dealings with Underworld stools. The reason for this—they are shrewd, cautious operatives, and noted as students of human nature. In the arrangement of a trap to snare the wily drug dealer they show exquisite skill. A great many of the agents are well-educated men who have gone into the Service because of their intense hatred of the fiends who ruin their fellow men with drugs.

The job pays a fairly good starting salary, \$2,600 a year.

QUALIFICATIONS

Applicants for examination must have reached their 21st but not their 35th birthday on the date of the close of receipt of applications. These age limits do not apply to persons with military preference. Applicants must be in sound physical health; vision 20/40 in each eye, without glasses; hearing, ordinary conversation at 15 feet. Hernia or organic heart disease, or other serious physical disability will disqualify. Applicants must be well-proportioned as to height and weight, and must not have conspicuous physical features or peculiarities in appearance. Persons selected for appointment must pass a physical test given by a federal medical officer. All applicants must be citizens of the United States.

In the matter of education and experience they must show that they meet the requirements specified in one of the following paragraphs:

(a) At least 3 years' full-time, paid experience in positions or occupations the

duties of which required the investigation of major criminal activities.

(b) Graduation from a recognized college of medicine or pharmacy; or from a college or university of recognized standing showing completion of 118 semester hours with at least 10 semester hours' credit in pharmaceutical chemistry; or registration as a pharmacist; and, in addition, for each of the foregoing groups, at least 1 year's experience subsequent to graduation or registration in medical or pharmaceutical work; and at least one year of continuous full-time paid experience in positions or occupations the duties of which required the investigation of major criminal activities. College courses in dentistry or veterinary medicine are not acceptable.

(c) Graduation from a recognized law school with the bachelor's degree, or admission to the bar of a state or territory or the District of Columbia, and subsequent to graduation or to admission to the bar, at least one year of continuous, full-time, paid experience in positions or occupations the duties of which required the investigation of major criminal activities. For some of these positions a speaking knowledge of a foreign language is necessary.

Non-qualifying experience—Policeman, probation or parole officer, guard, watchman, raiding or arresting officer, private detectives assigned principally to roping or shadowing, or whose major duties are the protection of life and property; investigator of financial standing or casualty and insurance claims; persons whose principal duties are the prevention of crime rather than investigation of law violations.

From these qualifications it appears that a college education is not necessary. Section (a), above, opens the test to anyone with 3 years' paid experience in the investigation of major crimes.

Examination subjects—Competitors will be rated on a scale of 100 on a written test which consists of questions of three types:

(1) Questions based on cases of law violation such as a Federal anti-narcotic agent might have to deal with in his regular work, or on problems of judgment like those met by agents. (2) Questions based on short paragraphs and which require applicants to interpret the meaning of the paragraphs.

(3) Questions which test applicants' understanding of words which are used in regulations, orders and correspondence.

A test based upon the type of questions referred to above will appear in these columns next week, together with an unusual test in Underworld matters which recently was given to city detectives seeking assignment to narcotic squads in a metropolitan police department.

THE Q AND A BOX

Inquiries pertaining to civil service tests will be answered without cost, by "G-2." If an individual reply is desired, enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

David Appel, Brooklyn, N. Y.—Q 3 in the customs inspector test published May 30th was, "Consignee is to import as auditor is to (a) accounts; (b) radiocast; (c) defalcation; (d) bank; (e) loss." The key answer was (b). The answer you suggest (a) would not be acceptable. While it is true, as you suggest, that radiocasts require auditors, but they are mostly called artists, consignee and auditor are both on the receiving end, i.e., consignee receives imports, the radio auditor receives the radiocast.

James McCormick, Lansdowne, Md., asks about the practice of keeping alive eligible lists. The practice varies. In some states commissions may arbitrarily "kill" an entire list, in other states and cities vacancies for other positions are filled from eligible lists for a specific position as in the case of eligibles who had taken the last U. S. Secret Service test and were informed that they might be appointed to customs and immigration patrol jobs. The U. S. Civil Service Commission states: "The period of eligibility ordinarily is one year from the date of entering the name upon the register, but the entire register may be extended for a further period, if, in the judgment of the Commission, the needs of the service so require." Other Civil Service lists are differently employed.

Ervine A. Fowle, West Point. Copies of Immigration Laws and Customs Regulations are to be found in some public libraries, in most law libraries, in all U. S.

Customs Houses and U. S. District Attorneys' offices. Or write Superintendent of Public Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

Henry C. Cutton, Chicago.—A military secret agent in the service of the United States is under the jurisdiction of the Military Intelligence Branch, U. S. Army; in the Navy under Naval Intelligence. I have known of commissioned Army officers who have been detailed to plain-clothes work to secretly perform military map-making missions. Right you are. G-2 is the espionage, or negative intelligence branch of Military Intelligence.

Oscar Berding, Milwaukee.—Positions in the U. S. consular and diplomatic service are in the hands of the State Department, Washington, D. C.

Harriet Underwood, Augusta, Me.—An assembled civil service test is usually a written examination taken by assembled applicants. Sorry, but "G-2" does not recommend any civil service school.

John S. Downs, Union City, Pa.—Some banks and insurance companies employ fingerprint experts, but you would have to consult them about openings. It takes an expert to read prints; almost anyone can take them.

Philip Vangood, Sacramento, Calif.—The famous Thomas A. Edison intelligence test was handed to the public in 1921, and, in the not too distant future, we plan to publish it for the benefit of the younger generation.

E. T. Nettleton, Dallas, Tex.—The symbols I. Q. denote intelligence quotient, a system by which psychologists measure the intelligence of human beings. Thus, when it is said that the child screen star, Shirley Temple, has a mental age of 9, that conclusion is arrived at by employing this formula—100 times mental age / chronological age. Little Shirley's I. Q. is fixed at 155.

Elise Hunter, Savannah, Ga.—An applicant who makes a false statement concerning education is silly. All the civil service examiner needs to do is write the school or college and ascertain the truth from the records. Besides, it's an offense to knowingly make a false statement in a sworn civil service application.

Next Week—Anti-Narcotic Agent Test

Coming Next Week

HE ASKED FOR IT

By T. T. Flynn

BEAUTIFUL, lovable *Lisa Barnes* was dead — murdered! Some heartless, fiendish executioner had slaughtered her, left her at the steering wheel of a car parked on a lonely shore road. And it was easy to find the reason for this atrocity, for *Lisa* had valuable, explosive information for the commission which was ruthlessly cleaning up city corruption. Municipal politics were dominated by the powerful barons of graft and vice. Plucky *Bill Warner* of the *Telegraph* asked for a chance to prove conclusively the blasts which his paper was hurling at the crooked politicians. And then, when he was in the midst of it, cornered by unforeseen peril and treachery, *Bill* almost wished he was safely out of it—for he had to discover a mighty quick solution to his problems . . . or sign a shameful death warrant for himself and his loved ones!

THE TREASURE OF THE BANDIT VILLAGE

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By Eugene Thomas

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All in the August 29 Issue!

Detective Fiction Weekly

THE END OF A PUFF-ECT DAY



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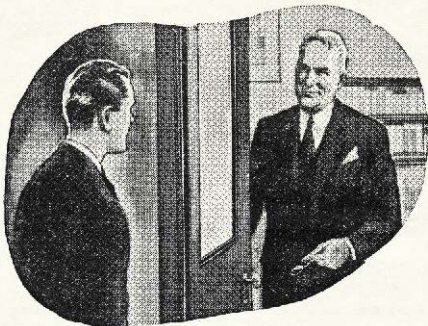
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—An extract from a student's letter.

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