

THE YUKON TRIPLE MURDER  
*True Story by C. V. Tench*

# DETECTIVE FICTION

JUNE 22  
**10**¢

FORMERLY FLYNN'S **WEEKLY**



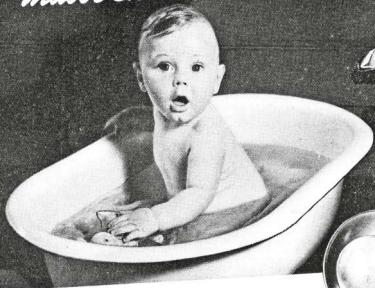
## FINGER of DOOM

A Startling Novelet  
by  
**CORNELL  
WOOLRICH**



Small  
Signature

*Now you can take beautiful indoor shots like this!*



## Sensational New Synchro-Flash Candid Takes Prize Winning Shots... Anytime... Anywhere!

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### CHECK THESE STARTLING NEW FEATURES!



**1. AUTOMATIC BULB EJECTOR**

No burned fingers. Push button; bulb pops out!



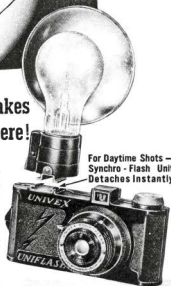
**2. MAGNI-FIELD VIEW FINDER**

Magnifies the view. Gives more brilliant outlook.



**3. POSITIVE SYNCHRO-FLASH**

Guaranteed—Shutter must open to flash bulb.



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*If you earn under \$3,000,  
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be the answer for you*

"THE size of my pay-check? What business is it of yours?" Perhaps that's the first reply that comes to your mind.

But—stop a moment. It really *is* our business—to help men just like you. In fact, it's been our business here at LaSalle for 30 years.

If your pay-check isn't all that you'd like it to be, why not consider accountancy? Why not become a member of this well-paid and respected field? Why not, in short, prepare yourself to earn real money—insure a good home for your family—a new car—an education for the growing youngsters—a bank account for a rainy day . . . these and many more of the precious things in life?

Maybe you're one of those ever hoping for "breaks" that will give you a higher standard of living. Yet that's precisely what most of 30,000,000 other employees in this country are doing.

Not all of them, of course. Here and there you find ambitious men who aren't depending on luck to carry them ahead. They're following a tested path to increased earnings—leaving nothing to mere chance. They're *training* themselves for better jobs—every week spending a few hours in serious but interesting study at home.

Some day, as expert bookkeepers and later as accountants, these determined men will have standing and a considerably larger income—in a profession that pays and pays well.

Why don't *you* do as they are doing—take advantage of LaSalle training? Even though you do not know the fundamentals of bookkeeping now—you nevertheless may have an excellent opportunity to master accountancy. Many others have done it.

Perhaps you're asking yourself, "But don't these others possess natural ability that I lack? Don't I need a special talent for all this?"

Ask rather, "If I do my part, won't I get results, too?"

You will! For all it takes is intelligence, serious study and work—not genius. Under the LaSalle system you solve problems by simple steps . . . from day to day, as an expert accountant does. You use the same basic principles. And when these problems become difficult and puzzle you, you get counsel that could be matched only through personal coaching by a battery of experts in a big accounting house.

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# DETECTIVE



## FICTION WEEKLY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly **FLYNN'S**

Volume 137

JUNE 22, 1940

Number 6

### Serial

**MAN OF VENGEANCE**—5 parts—2.....Lawrence Treat 37  
*Grange laibes back at his would-be destroyer with the aid of murderous gangsters*

### Novelets

**FINGER OF DOOM**.....Cornell Woolrich 6  
*The case of the little woman who wasn't there—only one man knew that she was*

**SUICIDE ROUGHLY**.....William Gray Beyer 59  
*Burns scored twice on the dart board—once for himself and once for the Homicide Squad*

### Short Stories

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*Casey Mason knows how to pull a gun—or a bluff*

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*He was a detective—only he didn't know it*

**MURDER IN THE BIG TOP**.....Dudley Marshall 97  
*Jungle Law has its own swift punishment for a "jinx" threatening a circus*

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*How the Mounties pull a murder solution out of thin air*

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**HANDWRITING SECRETS**.....Helen King 108

**PRIZE LETTER CONTEST**..... 111

**FLASHES FROM READERS**..... 112

### A RED STAR Magazine

**THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.**  
WILLIAM T. DEWART, *President & Treasurer* WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., *Secretary*

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28x4-10.5	2.25	28x4-10.5	2.25
28x4-11	2.35	28x4-11	2.35
28x4-11.5	2.45	28x4-11.5	2.45
28x4-12	2.55	28x4-12	2.55
28x4-12.5	2.65	28x4-12.5	2.65
28x4-13	2.75	28x4-13	2.75
28x4-13.5	2.85	28x4-13.5	2.85
28x4-14	2.95	28x4-14	2.95
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28x4-88.5	17.85	28x4-88.5	17.85
28x4-89	17.95	28x4-89	17.95
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28x4-93	18.75	28x4-93	18.75
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28x4-94	18.95	28x4-94	18.95
28x4-94.5	19.05	28x4-94.5	19.05
28x4-95	19.15	28x4-95	19.15
28x4-95.5	19.25	28x4-95.5	19.25
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28x4-96.5	19.45	28x4-96.5	19.45
28x4-97	19.55	28x4-97	19.55
28x4-97.5	19.65	28x4-97.5	19.65
28x4-98	19.75	28x4-98	19.75
28x4-98.5	19.85	28x4-98.5	19.85
28x4-99	19.95	28x4-99	19.95
28x4-99.5	20.05	28x4-99.5	20.05
28x4-100	20.15	28x4-100	20.15

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W.E.P.Y. (c) 35

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I was so sure I was seeing things I even pointed



## Finger of Doom

I

SHE was always the last one out, even on the nights I came around to pick her up—that was another thing burned me up. Not with her of course, but with her job there. Well, she was on the last leg of it now, it would be over with pretty soon. We weren't going to be one of those couples where the wife kept on working after the marriage. She'd already told them she was leaving anyway, so it was all settled. I didn't blame her for hanging on up to the very end. The couple of

extra weeks pay would come in handy for a lot of little this-ems and that-ems that a girl about to settle down always likes to buy herself (knowing she's going to have a tough time getting them afterwards). But what got me was, why did she always have to be the last one out?

I picketed the doorway, while the cave-dwellers streamed out all around me. Everyone but her. Back and forth and back and forth; all I needed was a "Don't Patronize" sign and a spiel. Finally I even saw the slave-driver she worked for come out, but still no her. He passed by without knowing me,



*Everybody acted as though he was crazy  
—until he began to believe it himself*



**By Cornell  
Woolrich**

but even if he had he wouldn't have given me any sunny smiles.

And then finally she came—and the whole world faded out around us and we were just alone on the crowded sidewalk. I've heard it called love.

She was very good to look at, which was why I'd waited until I was twenty-five and met her. Here's how she went: first a lot of gold all beaten up into a froth and poured over her head and allowed to set there in crinkly little curls. Then a pair of eyes that—I don't know how to say it. You were in danger of drowning if you looked into them too deep, but, boy, was drowning a pleasure. Yes, blue. And then a mouth with

real lines. Not one of those things all smeared over with red jam.

She had about everything just right, and believe me I was going to throw away the sales-slip and not return the merchandise once it got up to my house.

For trimmings, a dark-blue skirt and a short little jacket that flared out from her shoulders, and a kind of cockeyed tam o'shanter. And a package. I didn't like the looks of that package.

I told her so the minute I stepped up and took off my hat, while she was still looking down the other way for me. "What's that?"

She said: "Oh, Kenny, been waiting long? I hurried up all I could. This?

Oh, just a package. I promised His Nibs I'd leave it at a flat on Martine Street on my way home."

"But you're not going home. I've got two ducats for 'Heavens-abustin' and I was gonna take you to Rafft's for dinner first; I even brought a clean collar to work with me this morning. Now this is going to cut down our time for eating to a shadow—"

She tucked her free hand under my arm to pacify me. "It won't take any time at all, it's right on our way. And we can cut out the fruit-cup or something."

"Aw, but you always look so classy eating fruit-cup," I mourned.

But she went right ahead; evidently the matter had already been all settled between us without my knowing about it. "Wait a minute, let me see if I've got the address straight. Apartment 4F, 415 Martine Street. That's it."

I was still grouching about it, but she already had me under control. "What are you supposed to do, double as an errand-girl, too?" But by that time we were halfway there, so what was the use of kicking any more about it.

"Let's talk about us," she said. "Have you been counting the days?"

"All day. Thirteen left."

"And a half. Don't forget the half, if it's to be a noon-wedding." She tipped her shoulders together. "I don't like that thirteen by itself. I'll be glad when it's tomorrow, and only twelve left."

"Gee you're cute," I beamed admiringly. "The more I know you, the cuter you get."

"I bet you won't say that a year from now. I bet you'll be calling me your old lady then."

"This is it," I said.

"That's right, 415." She backed up, and me with her. "I was sailing right on

past it. See what an effect you have on me?"

It was the kind of building that still was a notch above a tenement, but it had stopped being up-to-date about 1918. We went in the outer vestibule together, which had three steps going up and then a pair of inner glass doors, to hold you up until you said who you were.

"All right, turn it over to the hall-man or whoever it is and let's be on our way."

She got on that conscientious look that anything connected with her job always seemed to bring on. "Oh no, I'm supposed to take it right up personally and get a receipt. Besides, there doesn't seem to be any hallman . . ."

She was going to do it her way anyway, I could see that, so there was no use arguing. She was bent over scanning the name-plates in the brass letter-boxes set into the marble trim. "What'd I say that name was again?"

"I dunno, Muller or something" I said sulkily.

"That's it. What would I do without you?" She flashed me a smile for a bribe to stay in good humor, then went ahead scanning. "Here it is. 4F. The name-card's fallen out of the slit and gotten lost, no wonder I couldn't find it." She poked the button next to it. "You wait downstairs here for me," she said. "I won't take a minute."

"Make it as fast as you can, will you? We're losing all this good time out of being together."

She took a quick step back toward me. "Here," she said, "let this hold you until I come down again." And that mouth I told you about, went right up smack against mine—where it belonged. "And if you're very good, you may get a chaser to that when I come down again."

Meanwhile the inner vestibule-door catch was being sprung for her with a sound like crickets with sore throats. She pushed it open, went inside. It swung shut again, cutting us off from one another. But I could still see her through it for a moment longer, standing in there by the elevator-bank waiting to go up. She looked good even from the back. When the car came down for her, she didn't forget to turn around and flash me another heartbreaker across her shoulder, before she stepped in and set the control-button for the floor she wanted. It was self-service, nobody else in it.

The door closed after her, and I couldn't see her any more. I could see the little red light that told the car was in use, gleaming for a few minutes after that, and then that went out too. And there wasn't anything left of her.

**I** LIT a cigarette and leaned against the right-hand wall waiting. Then my shoulder got tired and I leaned against the left-hand wall. Then my both shoulders got tired and I just stood up by myself in the middle.

I've never timed a cigarette. I suppose they take around five minutes. This one seemed to take longer, but then look who I was waiting for. I punched it out with my foot without bothering to throw it out through the door; I didn't live there after all.

I thought: "Nice and fast. I mighta known it." I thought: "What's she doing, staying to tea up there?"

I counted my change, just to give myself something to do. I took off my hat and looked it over, like I'd never seen it before.

Things happened. Nothing much, little things that were to last so long. The postman came into the vestibule, shoved letters in here and there. 4F didn't get

any. He shifted his girth straps and went out again. A stout lady in a not-very-genuine fur coat came in, one arm full of bundles and hauling a yowling little kid by the other. She looked to see if there was any mail first. Then she looked for her key, and it took a lot of juggling. Then she looked at me, kind of supercilious. If a look can be translated into a single word, hers said: "Loafer!" Meanwhile the kid was beefing away. He had adenoids or something, and you couldn't tell if he was talking English or choking to death. She seemed to be able to tell the difference though. She said: "Now Dwight, I don't want to hear another word! If pot cheese is good enough for your father, pot cheese is good enough for you! If you don't hush up, I'll give you to this man here!"

I thought: "Oh no you won't, not with a set of dishes thrown in!"

After they'd gone in, more waiting started in. I started to trace patterns with my feet, circles, diagonals, Maltese crosses. After I'd covered about a block-and-a-half that way, I stopped to rest again. I started to talk to myself, under my breath. "Must be out of pencils up there, to sign the receipt with, and she's waiting while they whittle out a new one! We'll be in time for the intermission at the show—"

I lit another cigarette. That act, slight as it was, put the finishing-touch to my self-control. I no sooner finished doing it than I hit the opposite wall with it. "What the hell is this anyway?" It wasn't under my breath any more, it was a full-toned yap. I stepped over, picked out 4F, and nearly sent the button through to the other side of the wall.

I didn't want to go in, of course. I just wanted to tip her off I was still alive down here. Aging fast, but still

in fairly usable shape. She'd know who it was when she heard that blast. So when they released the catch on the door, I intended staying right outside where I was.

But they didn't. They were either ignoring the ring or they hadn't heard it. I gave it a second flattening. Again the catch on the door remained undisturbed. I knew the bell wasn't out of order, because I'd seen her give just a peck at it and the door-catch had been released for her. This time I gave it a triple-header. Two short ones and a long one, that went on for weeks. So long that my thumb joint got all white down to my wrist before I let go.

No acknowledgment. Dead to the world up there.

I did the instinctive thing, even though it was quite useless in the present case. Backed out into the street, as far as the outer rim of the sidewalk, and scanned the face of the building. There was just a checkerboard pattern of lighted squares and black ones. I couldn't tell which windows belonged to 4F, and even if I could have it wouldn't have done me any good unless I intended yelling her name up from the open sidewalk—and I didn't yet.

But being all the way out there cost me a chance to get in free, and lost me some more valuable time in the bargain. A man came out, the first person who had emerged from inside since I'd been waiting around, but before I could get in there and push through in his wake, the door had clicked shut again.

He was a scrawny-looking little runt, reminded you of an old-clothes-man on his night off. He went on out without even looking at me, and I tackled the 4F bell some more, gave it practically the whole Morse Code.

I WASN'T frightened yet, just sizzling and completely baffled. The only thing I could figure, far-fetched as it was, was that the bell-apparatus had been on its last gasp when she rang it, and had given up the ghost immediately afterwards. Otherwise why didn't they hear it, the kind of punishment I was giving it?

Then the first little trickle of fright did creep in, like a dribble of cold water down your back when you're perspiring. I thought: "Maybe there's some guy up there trying to get funny with her, that's why the bell isn't answered. After all, things like that do happen in a big city all the time. I better get up there fast and find out what this is!"

I punched a neighboring bell at random, just to get past the door, and when the catch had been released for me, I streaked into the elevator, which the last guy had left down, and gave it the 4-button.

It seemed to me to set a new record for slowness in getting up there, but maybe that was just the state of mind I was in. When it finally did and I barged out, I made a false turn down the hall first, then when I came up against 4B and C and so on, turned and went back the other way.

It was at the far end of the hall, at the back. The bell I'd rung was evidently on some other floor, for none of the doors on this one opened to see who it was. I went close against it and listened. There were no sounds of a scuffle and I couldn't hear her saying "Unhand me, you brute!" so I calmed down by that much. But not all the way.

I couldn't hear anything at all. It was stone-silent in there. And yet these flat-doors weren't soundproof, because I could hear somebody's radio filtering through one at the other end of the hall clear as day.

I rang the bell and waited. I could hear it ring inside, from where I was. I'd say: "Will you ask that young lady that brought a package up here whether she's coming down tonight or tomorrow?" No, that sounded too dictatorial. I'd say: "Is the young lady ready to leave now?" I knew I'd feel slightly foolish, like you always do when you make a mountain out of a molehill.

Meanwhile, it hadn't opened. I pushed the bell again, and again I could hear the battery sing out on the inside. I rapped with my knuckles. Then I rang a third time. Then I rattled the knob (as though that would attract their attention, if ringing the bell hadn't!) Then I pounded with the heel of my hand. Then I alternated all three, the whole thing became a maelstrom of frenzied action. I think I even kicked. Without getting the results I was after—admittance.

Other doors began to open cautiously down the line, attracted by the noise I was making. But by that time I had turned and bolted down the stairs, without waiting for the paralytic elevator, to find the janitor. Fright wasn't just a cold trickle any more, it was an icy torrent gushing through me full-force.

I got down into the basement and found him without too much trouble. He was eating his meal or something on a red-checked tablecloth, but I had no time to assimilate details. A glimpse of a napkin tucked in collarwise was about all that registered. "Come up with me quick, will you?" I panted, pulling him by the arm. "Bring your passkey, I want you to open one of those flats!"

"What's matter, something wrong?"

"I don't like the looks of it. My girl took a package up—I've been waiting for her over twenty minutes and she never came down again. They won't answer the bell—"

He seemed to take forever. First he stood up, then he finished swallowing, then he wiped his mouth, then he got a big ring of keys, then finally he followed me. As an afterthought he peeled off the napkin and threw it behind him at the table, but missed it. He even wanted to wait for the elevator. "No, no, no," I groaned, steering him to the stairs.

"Which one is it?"

"It's on the fourth floor, I'll show you!" Then when we got up there. "Here—right here."

When he saw which door I was pushing him to, he suddenly stopped. "That one? No, now wait a minute, young fellow, it couldn't be. Not that one."

"Don't try to tell me!" I heaved exasperatedly. "I say it is!"

"And don't you try to tell me! I say it couldn't be!"

"Why?"

"I'll show you why," he said heatedly. He went ahead up to it, put his passkey in, threw the door open, and flattened himself to let me get a good look past him.

I needed more than just one. It was one of those things that register on the eye but don't make sense to the brain. The light from the hall filtered in to make a threadbare half-moon, but to make sure I wasn't missing any of it, he snapped a switch inside the door and a dim, left-over bulb somewhere further back went on flickeringly. You could see why it had been left in—it wasn't worth taking out. It threw a watery light around, not much better than a candle. But enough to see by.

"Now! You see why?"

The place was empty as a barn. Unfurnished, uninhabited, whatever you want to call it. Just bare walls, ceiling, and floor-boards. You could see where the carpet used to go: they were lighter



in a big square patch in the middle than around the outside. You could see where a picture used to go, many moons ago; there was a patch of gray wool-dust adhering like fiber to the wall. You could even see where the telephone used to go; the wiring still led in along the baseboard, then reared up to waist-level like a pothook and ended in nothing.

The air alibied for its emptiness. It was stale, as though the windows hadn't been opened for months. Stale and dusty and sluggish.

"So you see? Mister, this place ain't been rented for six months." He was getting ready to close the door, as though that ended it; pulling it around behind his back, I could see it coming toward me, and the "4F" stencilled on it in tarnished gold-paint seemed to swell up, got bigger and bigger until it loomed before me a yard high.

"No!" I croaked, and planted the flat of my hand against it and swept it back, out of his backhand grasp. "She came in here, I tell you!"

I went in a step or two, called her name into the emptiness. "Steffie! Steffie!"

## II

**H**E STAYED pat on the rational, everyday plane of things as they ought to be, while I rapidly sank down below him onto a plane of shadows and terror. Like two loading platforms going in opposite directions, we were already miles apart, cut off from each other. "Now, what're you doing that for? Use your head. How can she be in here, when the place is empty?"

"I saw her ring the bell and I saw the door open for her."

"You saw *this* door?" He was obdurately incredulous.

"The downstairs door. I saw the catch released for her, after she rang this bell."

"Oh, that's different. You must have seen her ring some other bell, and you thought it was this one; then somebody else opened the building-door for her. How could anyone answer from here? Six months the people've been out of here."

I didn't hear a word. "Lemme look! Bring more lights!"

He shrugged, sighed, decided to humor me. "Wait, I get a bulb from the hall." He brought one in, screwed it into an empty socket in the room beyond the first. That did for practically the whole place. It was just two rooms, with the usual appendages: bath and kitchenette.

"How is it the current's still on, if it's vacant?"

"It's on the house-meter, included in the rent. It stays on when they leave."

There was a fire-escape outside one paid of windows, but they were latched on the inside and you couldn't see the seams of the two halves any more through the coating of dust that had formed over them. I looked for and located the battery that gave juice to the downstairs doorbell. It had a big pouch of a cobweb hanging from it, like a thin-skinned hornet's nest. I opened a closet and peered into it. A wire coat-hanger that had been teetering off-balance for heaven knows how long swung off the rod and fell down with a clash.

He kept saying: "Now listen, be sensible. What are you a child?"

I didn't care how it looked, I only knew how it felt. "Steffie," I said. I didn't call it any more, just said it. I went up close to him. He was something human, at least. I said, "What'll I do?" I speared my fingers through my

hair, and lost my new hat, and let it lie.

He wasn't much help. He was still on that other, logical plane, and I had left it long ago. He tried to suggest we'd had a quarrel and she'd given me the slip; he tried to suggest I go to her home, I might find her there waiting for me.

"She didn't come *out* again, damn you!" I flared tormentedly. "If I'd been down at the corner—But I was right at the front door! What about the back way—is there a back way out?"

"Not a back way, a delivery-entrance, but that goes through the basement, right past my quarters. No one came down there, I was sitting there eating my supper the whole time."

And another good reason was, the stairs from the upper floors came down on one side of the elevator, in the front hall. Then they continued on down to the basement on the *other* side of it. To get down there anyone would have to pass in front of the elevator, for its entire width. I'd been right out there on the other side of the glass vestibule-door, and no one had. So I didn't have to take his word for it. I had my own senses.

"Is there a Muller in the house anywhere at all?"

"No, no one by that name. We never had anyone by that name in the whole twelve years I been working here."

"Someone may have gotten in here and been lurking in the place when she came up—"

"It was locked, how could anyone? You saw me open it with the passkey."

"Come on, we're going to ask the rest of the tenants on this floor if they heard anything, saw her at all."

We made the rounds of the entire five flats. 4E came to the door in the person of a hatchet-faced elderly

woman, who looked like she had a good nose—or ear—for the neighbors' activities. It was the adjoining flat to 4F, and it was our best bet. I knew if this one failed us, there wasn't much to hope for from the others.

"Did you hear anything next-door to you within the past half hour?" I asked her.

"How could I, it's empty," she said tartly.

"I know, but *did you hear anything*—like anyone walking around in there, the door opening or closing, voices, or—" I couldn't finish it. I was afraid to say "a scream." Afraid she'd say yes.

"Didn't hear a pin drop," she said, and slammed the door. Then she opened it again. "Yes I did, too. Heard the doorbell, the downstairs one, ringing away in there like fifty. With the place empty like it is, it sounded worse than a fire-alarm."

"That was me," I said, turning away disheartenedly.

As I'd expected after that, none of the others were any good either. No one had seen her, no one had heard anything out of the way.

I felt like someone up to his neck in a quicksand, and going down deeper every minute. "The one underneath," I said, yanking him toward the stairs. "3F! If there was anything to be heard, they'd get it quicker through their ceiling than these others would through their walls. Ceilings are thinner than walls."

He went down to the floor below with me and we rang. They didn't open. "Must be out, I guess," he muttered. He took his passkey, opened the door, called their name. They were out all right, no one answered. We'd drawn another blank.

He decided he'd strung along with me just about far enough—on what

after all must have seemed to him to be a wild goose chase. "Well," he said, slapping his sides and turning up his palms expressively. Meaning, "Now why don't you go home like a good guy and leave me alone?"

I wasn't having any. It was like asking you to leave your right arm behind you, chopped off at the shoulder. "You go up and stick there by that empty flat. I'm going out and get a cop." It sounds firm enough on paper, it came out plenty shaky and sick. I bounded down the stairs. In the vestibule I stopped short, punched that same 4F bell. His voice sounded hollowly through the interviewer after a minute. "Yuss?"

"It's me. The bell works all right up there, does it?"

"Sure."

"Okay, stay there. I'll be right back." I didn't know what good that had done. I went on out, bareheaded.

**T**HE one I brought back with me wasn't anything to rave about on the score of native intelligence. It was no time to be choosy. All he kept saying all the way back to the house was "All right, take it easy." He was on the janitor's plane, and immediately I had two of them against me instead of one.

"You saw her go in, did ye?"

I controlled myself with an effort. "Yes."

"But you don't know for sure which floor she got off at?"

"She rang 4F, so I know she got off at the fourth—"

"Wait a minute, you didn't see her, did ye?"

"No, I didn't see her."

"That's all I wanted to know. You can't say for sure she went into this flat, and the man here says it's been locked up for months."

He rang every bell in every flat of the building and questioned the occupants. No one had seen such a girl. The pot-cheese lady with the little boy remembered having seen me, that was the closest he got to anything. And one other flat, on the fifth, reported a ring at their bell with no follow-up.

I quickly explained I'd done that, to gain admittance to the building.

Three out of the twenty-four occupancies in the building were out; 1B, 3C and 3F. He didn't pass them by either. Had the janitor passkey their doors and examined the premises. Not a trace of her anywhere.

That about ended his contribution. According to his lights he'd done a thorough job, I suppose. "All right," he said, "I'll phone it in for you, that's the most I can do."

God knows how he expressed it over the wire. A single plainclothesman was dropped off at the door a few minutes later, came in to where the three of us were grouped waiting in the inner lobby. He looked me over like he was measuring me for a new suit of clothes. He didn't say anything.

"Hello, Gilman," the cop said. "This young fellow says he brought a girl here, and she disappeared in there." Putting the burden of the proof on me, I noticed. "I ain't been able to find anyone that saw her with him," he added helpfully.

"Let's see the place," the dick said.

We all went up there again. He looked around. Better than I had, maybe, but just as unproductively. He paid particular attention to the windows. Every one of the six, two regular-size apiece for the two main rooms, one small one each for the bath and kitchenette, was latched on the inside. There was a thick veneer of dust all around the frames and in the finger-grips. You

couldn't have grabbed them any place to hoist them without it showing. And it didn't. He studied the keyhole.

He finally turned to me and gave me the axe. "There's nothing to show that she—or anyone else—ever came in here, bud."

"She rang the bell of this flat, and someone released the doorcatch for her from up here." I was about as steady as jello in a high wind about it. I was even beginning to think I could see a ghost in the corner.

"We're going to check on that right now," he said crisply. "There's already one false ring accounted for, attributable to you. What we want is to find out if there was a second one registered, anywhere in the building."

We made the rounds again, all twenty-four flats. Again the fifth-floor flat reported my spiked ring—and that was all. No one else had experienced any, for the past twenty-four hours or more. And the fifth-floor party had only gotten the one, not two.

That should have been a point in my favor: she hadn't rung any of the other flats and been admitted from them, therefore she must have rung 4F and been admitted from there—as I claimed. Instead he seemed to twist it around to my discredit: she hadn't rung any of the other flats and been admitted from them, and since there could have been no one in 4F to hear her ring and admit her from there, she hadn't rung any bell at all, she hadn't been admitted at all, she hadn't been with me at all. I was a wack. Which gave me a good push in the direction of being one, in itself.

I was in bad shape by now. I started to speak staccato. "Say listen, don't do this to me, will you? You all make it sound like she didn't come here with me at all."

He gave me more of the axe. "That's what it does sound like to us."

I turned northeast, east, east-by-south, like a compass on a binge. Then I turned back to him again. "Look." I took the show-tickets out of my pocket, held them toward him with a shaky wrist. "I was going to take her to a show tonight—"

He waved them aside. "We're going to build this thing from the ground up first and see what we've got. You say her name is Stephanie Riska." I didn't like that "you say." "Address?"

"120 Farragut."

"What'd she look like?"

I should have known better than to start in on that. It brought her before me too plainly. I got as far as "She comes up to here next to me—" Then I stopped again.

The cop and janitor looked at me curiously, like they'd never seen a guy cry before. I tried to turn my head the other way, but they'd already seen the leak.

The dick seemed to be jotting down notes, but he squeezed out a grudging "Don't let it get you," between his eyetooth and second molar while he went ahead doing it.

I said: "I'm not scared because she's gone. I'm scared because she's gone in such a fairy-tale way. I can't get a grip on it. Like when they sprinkle a pinch of magic powder and make them disappear in thin air. It's got me all loose in the joints, and my guts are rattling against my backbone, and I believe in ghosts all over again."

My spiritual symptoms didn't cut any ice with him. He went right ahead with the business at hand. "And you met her at 6:15 outside the Bailey-Goodwin Building, you say, with a package to be delivered here. Who'd she work for?"

"A press-clipping service called the Green Star; it's a one-man organization, operated by a guy named Hessen. He just rented one dinky little rear room, on the ground floor of the Bailey-Goodwin Building."

"What's that?"

"I don't know myself. She tried to explain it to me once. They keep a list of clients' names, and then they sift through the papers, follow them up. Any time one of the names appears, in connection with any social activity or any kind of mention at all, they clip the item out, and when they've got enough of them to make a little batch, they send them to the client, ready for mounting in a scrap-book. The price for the service is about five bucks a hundred, or something like that."

"How is there any coin in that?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know myself, but she was getting twenty-two a week."

"All right. Now let's do a little checking." He took me back with him to where she worked, first of all. The building was dead, of course, except one or two offices, doing night-work on the upper floors. He got the night-watchman, showed his credentials, and had him open up the little one-room office and let us in.

I'D NEVER been in the place myself until now. I'd always waited for her outside at the street-entrance at closing-time. I don't think it was even intended for an office in the first place; it was more like a chunk of left-over storage-space. It didn't even have a window at all, just an elongated vent up near the ceiling, with a blank shaft-wall about two feet away from it.

There was a flat-topped desk taking up one side, his I guess, with a phone on it and a wire paper-basket and noth-

ing else. And a smaller-size "desk," this time a real table and not a desk at all, with nothing on it at all. The rest was just filing cabinets. Oh yeah, and a coat-rack. He must have been getting it for a song.

"What a telephone-booth," remarked the dick.

He looked in the filing-cabinets; they were just alphabetized names, with a scattering of newspaper-clippings distributed among them. Some of the names they didn't have any clippings for, and some of the letters they didn't even have any clients for—and I don't mean only X.

"There's about a hundred bucks' worth of clippings in the whole kitty," Gilman said, "at your own estimate of what the charge was." He didn't follow up with what he meant by that, and I was too worried about her to pay any attention to his off-side remarks. The only thing that meant anything to me was, there was nothing around the place to show him that she had ever worked here or even been here in her life. Nothing personalized, I mean. The single drawer of the little table just had a pair of shears for clipping and a pot of paste for mounting, and a stack of little salmon-colored paper mounts.

The night-watchman couldn't corroborate me, because the place was always locked up by the time he came on-shift. And the elevator-runners that worked the building in the daytime wouldn't have been able to either, I knew, even if they'd been on hand, because this hole-in-the-wall was on a branch-off of the main entrance-corridor, she didn't have to pass the cars on her way in from or out to the street, so they'd probably never seen her the whole time she'd worked here.

The last thing he did, after he'd



gotten Hessen's name and address, which was readily available in the place itself, was to open a penknife and cut a notch from the under-side of the small table. At least, it looked like he was doing that from what I could see, and he kept his back to me and didn't offer any explanation. He thumbed me at the door and said, "Now we'll go out there and hear what he has to say." His tone held more of an eventual threat in it toward me than toward her employer though, I couldn't help noticing.

It was a bungalow-type place on the outskirts, and without being exactly a mansion, it wasn't low-cost housing. You walked up flat stones to get to the door, and it had dwarf Japanese fir-trees dotted all around it.

"Know him?" he said while we were waiting.

"By sight," I swallowed. I had a feeling of that quicksand I'd been bogging into ever since she'd left me in the lobby at Martine Street, being up to my eyes now and getting ready to close over the top of my head. This dick mayn't have taken sides yet, but that was the most you could say; he certainly wasn't on my side.

A guy with a thin fuzz on his head, who looked like he belonged to some unhealthy nationality nobody ever heard of before, opened the door, stepped in to announce us, came back and showed us in, all in fast time.

A typewriter was clicking away busily somewhere near at hand, and I thought it was him first, her boss, but it wasn't. He was smoking a porcelain-bowled pipe and reading a book under a lamp. Instead of closing the book, he just put his finger down on the last word he'd read to keep his place, so he could go right ahead as soon as this was over with. He was

tall and lean, with good features, and dark hair cut so short it just about came out of his scalp and then stopped.

Gilman said: "Did you ever see this young fellow before?"

He eyed me. He had a crease under one eye; it wasn't a scar so much as an indentation from digging in some kind of a rimless glass. "No-o," he said with slow benevolence. A ghost of a smile pulled at his mouth. "What's he done?"

"Know anyone named Muller, at 415 Martine Street?" There hadn't been any Muller in the filing-cabinets at the office.

"No-o, I don't know anyone by that name there or anywhere else. I think we have a Miller, a Mrs. Elsie Miller on our list, who all the time divorces and marries. Will that do?" He sighed tolerantly. "She owes us twenty-nine dollars."

"Then you didn't send a package over to Muller, Apartment 4F, 415 Martine Street, at 6:15 this evening?"

"No," he said again, as evenly as the other two times. I started forward spasmodically. Gilman braked me with a cut of his hand. "I'm sure I didn't. But wait, it is easy enough to confirm that." He raised his voice slightly, without being boorish about it. And right there in front of me, right there in the room with me, he called—"Stephanie. Stephanie Riska, would your mind coming in here a moment?"

The clicking of the typewriter broke off short and a chair scraped in the next room. "Steffie," I said huskily, and swallowed past agony, and the sun came up around me and it wasn't night any more, and the bad dream was over.

"My assistant happens to be right here at the house tonight; I had some dictation to give her and she is transcribing it. We usually mail out clip-

pings however, only when there is an urgent request do I send them around by personal messen—"

"Yes sir?" a velvety contralto said from the doorway.

I missed some of the rest of it. The lights took a half-turn to the right, streaking tracks across the ceiling after them like comet-tails, before they came to a stop and stood still again. Gilman reached over and pulled me up short by the coatsleeve, as though I'd been flopping around loose in my shoes or something.

She was saying, "No, I don't believe I do," in answer to something he had asked her, and looking straight over at me. She was a brunette of an exotic foreign type, and she came up as high as me, and the sun had gone out again and it was night all over again.

"That isn't Steffi!" I bayed. "He's calling somebody else by her name!"

The pupils of Hessen's eyes never even deflected toward me. He arched his brows at Gilman. "That is the only young lady I have working for me."

### III

GILMAN was holding me back with sort of a half-nelson. Or half a half-nelson. The brunette appeared slightly agitated by my outburst, no more. She hovered there uncertainly in the doorway, as though not knowing whether to come in or go out.

"How long have you been working for Mr. Hessen?" Gilman asked her.

"Since October of last year. About eight months now."

"And your name is Stephanie Riska?"

She smiled rebukingly, as if at the gratuitousness of such a question. "Yes, of course." She decided to come a little further forward into the room. But she evidently felt she needed some

moral support to do so. She'd brought a small black handbag with her, tucked under her arm, when she left the typewriter. She opened it, so that the flap stood up toward Gilman and me, and plumbed in it for something. The two big gold-metal initials were so easy to read, even upside-down; they were thick, bold Roman capitals. *S. R.* The bag looked worn, as though she'd had it a long time. I could sense, rather than see, Gilman's mind's eye turned accusingly toward me: "What about it now?" though his physical ones were fastened on the bag.

She got what she was looking for out of it, and she got more than she was looking for. She brought up a common ordinary stick of chewing-gum in tin-foil, but she also accidentally brought up an envelope with it, which slipped through her fingers to the floor. She was very adroitly awkward, to coin a phrase.

Gilman didn't exactly dive for it, but he managed to get his fingers on it a half-inch ahead of hers. "Mind?" he said. I read the address on it with glazed eyes, over his shoulder. It had been postmarked and sent through the mail. "Miss Stephanie Riska, 120 Farragut Street." He stripped the contents out of it and read the single sheet of notepaper. Then he gravely handed it back. Again I could feel his mind's eye on me.

She had broken the stick of chewing-gum in half, put part between her lips, and the rest she was preparing to wrap up in tinfoil again for some other time. She evidently didn't like to chew too much at a time.

Gilman absently thumbed a vest-pocket as though he would have liked some too. She noticed that. "May I offer you some?" she said gravely.

"I wish you would, my mouth's kind

of dry." He put the second half-piece in his own trap. "And you didn't deliver a package for Mr. Hessen to 415 Martine Street this evening?" he said around it.

"No, sir, I did not. I'm afraid I don't even know where Martine Street is."

That about concluded the formalities. And we were suddenly outside again, him and me, alone. In the dark. It was dark for me, anyway. All he said when we got back in the car was: "This 'girl' of yours, what kind of gum did she habitually chew, wintergreen or licorice or what have you?"

What could I tell him but the truth? "She didn't use gum, she detested the habit."

He just looked at me. Then he took the nugget he'd mooched from the brunette out of his mouth, and he took a little piece of paper out of his pocket that held another dab in it, and he compared them—by scent. "I scraped this off that desk in the office, and it's the same as what she gave me just now. Tutti-frutti. Not a very common flavor in chewing-gum. She belongs in that office, she parked her gum there. She had a letter addressed to herself in her handbag, and the initials on the outside checked. What's your racket, kid? Are you a pushover for mental observation? Or are you working off

a grudge against this guy? Or did *you* do something to some little blonde blue-eyed number and are you trying to pass the buck in this way before we even found out about it?"

It was like a ton of bricks had landed all over my dome. I held my head with both hands to keep it in one piece and leaned way over toward the floor and said, "My God!"

He got me by the slack of the collar and snapped me back so viciously it's a wonder my neck didn't break.

"Things like this don't happen," I groaned. "They can't. One minute all mine, the next she isn't anywhere. And no one'll believe me."

"You haven't produced a single person all evening long that actually laid eyes on this 'blonde girl' of yours," he said hard as flint. "Nowhere, d'you understand?"

"Where'd I get the name from then, the address?"

He looked at me when I said that. "I'll give you one more spin for your money. You stand or fall by the place she lived." He leaned forward and he said "120 Farragut" to the driver. Then he kept eyeing me like he was waiting for me to break down and admit it was a hoax or I'd done something to her myself, whoever she was.

Once he said, "Remember, this girl

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(ADV.)

at his place had a letter, three days old, addressed to *her*, giving this same address we're heading for now. If you still want to go through with it . . ."

"I took her home there," I said.

"Parents?"

"No, it's a rooming-house. She was from Harrisburg. But the landlady—He—" Then I went, "O-oh," and let my head loll limply back against the back of the seat. I'd just remembered he'd recommended the place to her.

He was merciless, noticed everything. "D'ye still want to make it there—or d'ye want to make it Headquarters? And the tougher you are with me, the tougher I'm going to be with you, buddy." And his fist knotted up and his eyes iced over.

It was a case of self-preservation now. We were only minutes away. "Listen. Y'gotta listen to me. She took me up one night, just for a minute, to lend me a magazine she had in the room. Y'gotta listen to this, for heaven's sake. Sticking in the mirror of the dresser she's got a litho of the Holy Mother. On the radiator she's got a rag doll that I won for her at Coney Island." I split open my collar in front trying to bring it all back. "On a little shelf against the wall she's got a gas-ring, with a tube running up to the jet. From the light-fixture to that jet there runs a string, and she'll have stockings hanging from it to dry. Are you listening? Will you remember these things? Don't you see I *couldn't* make all these things up? Don't you see she's *real*?"

"You almost persuade me," he said half under his breath. Which was a funny thing coming from a detective. And then we got there.

he said to me, teeth interlocked, "and say one word the whole time we're in here, I'll split your lip so wide open you'll be able to spit without opening your mouth." He sent for the landlady. I'd never seen her before. "Y'got a girl named Stephanie Riska living in your house?"

"Yep. Fourth-floor front." That was right.

"How long?"

"Riska?" She took a tuck in her cheek. "She's been rooming with me now six months." That was right too.

"I want to know what she looks like." He took a wicked half-turn in my arm that dammed up the blood.

"Dark hair, sort of dark skin. About as tall as this young fellow you got with you. She talks kind of husky."

"I want to see her room. I'm the police." He had to practically support me all the way up the four flights of stairs.

She threw open a door, gave it the switch. I came back to life enough to open my eyes. On the mirror, no picture. On the radiator, no rag doll. On the shelf no gas-ring, but a row of books. The jet had no tube plugged-in, was soldered-over with lead. No string led from it to the light. No nothing.

"Has she always had it fixed this way?" Gilman asked.

"Always since the first day she's here. She's a real clean roomer, only one thing I got to complain about—There it is again." She went over to the washstand and removed a little nugget of grayish substance that had been plastered to the underside of it. But she smiled indulgently, as though one such peccadillo were permissible.

Gilman took it from her on a scrap of paper, shifted it from left to right across his face. "Tutti-frutti," he said.

"Look out, you better hold your

**WE** STEPPED down and went in.  
"Now if you open your mouth,"

friend!" she exclaimed in sharp alarm.

He swung me so that instead of going down flat, I landed against him and stayed up. "Let him fold," he said to her. "That isn't anything to the falls he's going to be taking five or ten minutes from now." And we started down the stairs again, with two pairs of workable feet between the three of us.

"What'd he do, *murder* her?" she breathed avidly on the way down.

"Not her, but I got a good hunch he murdered someone—and picked the wrong name out of a hat."

She went: "Tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk. He don't *look* like—"

I saw some rheumatic lodger's knotty walking-stick up-ended out of a brass umbrella-stand at the foot of the stairs. As he marched me by, I was on that side, luckily. I let my right arm fall behind us instead of in front of us where it had been—he didn't have me handcuffed yet, remember—and the curved handle of the stick caught in my hand, and it came up out of the holder after me.

Then I swung it and I beaned him like no dick was ever beaned before. He didn't go down, he just staggered sidewise against the wall and went, "Uff!"

She was bringing up in the rear. She went, "Oh!" and jumped back. I cleared the front steps at a bound. I went "Steffi! Steffi!" and I beat it away in the dark. I didn't know where I was going and I didn't care, I only knew I had to find her. I came out so fast the driver of the headquarters-car we'd left at the door wasn't expecting me. I'd already flashed around the corner below before his belated "Hey, you!" came winging after me.

I made for the Martine Street flat. That was instinctive: the place I'd last seen her, calling me back. Either the

car didn't start right up after me or I shook it off in my erratic zigzag course through the streets. Anyway I got there still unhindered.

I ganged up on the janitor's bell, my windpipe making noises like a stuffed drainpipe. I choked, "Steffi!" a couple of times to the mute well-remembered vestibule around me. I was more demented than sane by now. Gilman was slowly driving me into the condition he'd already picked for me ahead of time.

The janitor came up with a sweater over his nightshirt. He said, "You again? What is it—didn't you find her yet? What happened to the other fellow that was with you?"

"He sent me back to take another look," I said craftily. "You don't have to come up, just gimme the passkey."

He fell for it, but killed a couple of valuable minutes going down to get it again. But I figured I was safe for the night; that it was my own place, across town, Gilman would make a beeline for.

I LET myself in and lit it up and started looking blindly all around—for what I didn't know, where a professional detective had been over this ground once already and gotten nothing. The story-book ending, I kept looking for the story-book ending, some magic clue that would pop up and give her back to me. I went around on my hands and knees, casing the cracks between the floorboards; I tested the walls for secret panels (in a \$50-a-month flat!); I dug out plaster with my bare nails where there was a hole, thinking I'd find a bullet, but it was only a mouse-hole.

I'd been in there about ten minutes when I heard a subtle noise coming up the hall-stairs outside. I straightened to



my feet, darted through the door, ran down the hall to the stairs. Gilman was coming up, like thunder 'cross the China Bay, with a cop and the janitor at his heels. It was the fool janitor's carpet-slippers, which had no heel-grip, that were making more noise than the other two's shoes put together. Gilman had tape on the back of his skull and a gun in his hand. "He's up there now," the janitor was whispering. "I let him in about ten minutes ago; he said you sent him."

I sped up the stairs for the roof, the only way that was open to me now. That gave me away to them, and Gilman spurted forward with a roar. "Come down here you, I'll break every bone in your body! You won't live to get to Headquarters!" The roof-stairs ended in a skylight-door that I just pushed through, although it should have been latched on the inside. There was about a yard-high partition-wall dividing the roof from the next one over. I tried to clear it too fast, miscalculated, and went down in a mess, tearing a hole in my trouser-knee and skinning my own knee beneath. That leg wouldn't work right for a minute or two after that, numb, and before I could get upright again on it and stumble away, they were out on me. A big splatter of white shot ahead of me on the gravelled roof from one of their torches, and Gilman gave what can only be described as an Iroquois war-whoop and launched himself through space in a flying tackle. He landed crushingly across my back, flattening me a second time.

And then suddenly the rain of blows that I'd expected was held in check, and he just lay inert on top of me, doing nothing. We both saw it at the same time, lying on the roof there a few yards ahead of us, momentarily played

up by the cop's switching torch, then lost again. I could recognize it because I'd seen it before. *The package that she'd brought over here tonight*

"Hold that light steady!" Gilman bellowed, and got off of me. We both got over to it at the same time, enmity forgotten. He picked it up, tore open the brown paper around it, and a sheaf of old newspapers slowly flattened themselves out. With squares and oblongs scissored out of them here and there. She hadn't been sent over with clippings, but with the valueless remnants of papers after the clippings had already been taken out. It was a dummy package, a decoy, used to send her to her—disappearance.

The rest of it went double-quick—or seemed to. It had built up slow; it unraveled fast.

"Someone did bring a package here tonight, kid," was the way he put it. "And if I give you that much, I'll give you the whole thing on credit alone, no matter what the odds still outstanding against it are. Blonde, really named Stephanie Riska, works for Hessen, lives at 120 Farragut, *never* chews gum, and all the rest of it. Come on. My theory in a pinch would be she was jumped from behind outside the door of that vacant flat before she had a chance to cry out, spirited up over this roof, down through the next house and into a waiting car—while you hugged the vestibule below. Calhoun, call in and have someone get out there fast to Hessen's house, Myrtle Drive, and keep it spotted until we can get out there. I want to take another crack at that office first."

On the way over I gasped, "D'you think they—?"

"Naw, not yet," he reassured me. "Or they would have done it right in the empty flat and let you take the rap."

Whether he meant it or not I couldn't tell, so it didn't relieve me much.

The second knot came out in the office. I went over the little table she'd used, while he turned the filing-cabinets inside-out. Again our two discoveries came almost simultaneously. "Look!" I breathed. It was stuck in a crack in the floor, hidden by the shadow of the table. A gilt hairpin she must have dropped one time at her work. Such as no brunette like the one Hessen had showed us at his house would have ever used in her life. "Blonde, all right," he grunted, and tipped me to his own find. "I muffed this before, in my hurry: about every third name in this card-index of 'clients' has a foreign mailing-address. Neutral countries, like Switzerland and Holland. Why should they be interested in social items appearing in papers over here? The mere fact that they're not living here shows the items couldn't possibly refer to them personally. If you ask me, the guy's an espionage-agent of some kind, and these 'clippings' are some kind of a code. With a scattering of on-the-level ones interspersed, to cover up. But that's a job for the FBI. I'm only interested in this girl of yours. My lieutenant can notify their local office about the rest of it, if he sees fit.

"The second leg of my theory," he went on, as we beat it out of there fast, "is she found out something, and they figured she was too dangerous to them. Did she say anything to you like that?"

"Not a word. But she had told him she was quitting end of next week to get married."

"Well, then she *didn't* find out anything, but he thought she did, so it amounted to the same thing. He could not afford to let her quit. And did he

cover up beautifully, erase her existence! They only slipped up on that package. Maybe some tenant came up on the roof to take down her wash, before they could come back and pick it up, so they had to leave it there, rather than risk being identified later. Come on, we'll stop off at that rooming-house on the way, I want that landlady picked up. She's obviously one of them, since he recommended the girl there as a lodger in the beginning. Changed the whole room around, even to sticking a wad of tutti-frutti gum on the washstand."

"Let's go," I cried.

A SECOND knot came out at the rooming-house, but it was simply a duplicate of the one at her office: confirmation of the color of her hair. "A girl shampoos her hair once in a while," he said to me, and stuck a matchstick down the drain of the washbasin. He spread something on a piece of paper, showed it to me: two unmistakably blond hairs. "Now why didn't I think of that the first time?" He turned the steel-plated landlady over to a cop to be sent in, and we were on our way again—this time out to the Myrtle Drive house, fast.

There was no sign of the guy he'd sent out ahead of us to keep it cased, and he swore under his breath, while my heart deflated. The place was dark and lifeless, but neither of us was foolish enough to believe they'd gone to bed yet. He took the front door and I took the back, with a gun he furnished me—he was on my side now, don't forget. We blew the locks simultaneously and met in the middle of the hall that ran through the place. In three minutes we were downstairs again. Nothing was disturbed, but the birds had flown; suave Hessen, and the butler, and the

pinch-hitting brunette. No incriminating papers, but a very incriminating short-wave set. Incriminating because of the place it was located. It was built into the overhead water-tank of a dummy toilet, not meant to hold water or be used. Gilman made the discovery in the most natural way possible.

"Spy-ring, all right," he grunted, and phoned in then and there from the place itself.

That wasn't getting me back Steffi. I was in such a blue funk that I didn't notice it as soon as I should have; I mean, something had seemed to tickle my nostrils unpleasantly the whole time we were in there. It only registered *after* I came out into the open again with him, and we stood there crestfallen in front of it. Before I could call his attention to it, headlights slashed through the dark and a car drew up in front.

We crouched back, but it was only the spotter that was supposed to have been hung up there before. Gilman rushed him with a roar. "What the hell's the idea? You were supposed to—"

"I tailed 'em!" the guy insisted. "They piled into a car, locked up the house, and lit. I tailed 'em the whole way, those were the only orders I got!"

"Where'd they go?"

"Pier 07, North river. They boarded some kind of a fuzzy tramp-steamer, and it shoved off in less than a quarter of an hour later. I tried to reach you at Head—"

"Was there a blond girl with them?" Gilman rapped out.

"No, just the three that were in the house here when I first made contact; the two men and a dark-haired girl. There was no one else smuggled aboard ahead of them either; I pumped one of the crew—"

Meanwhile, my heart's eight lives had died, and its ninth was wearing thin. "They're out of our reach now," I groaned, "we'll never—"

"Oh no they're not," Gilman promised viciously. "They may have cleared the pier; a police-launch can pull them off again at Quarantine." He spilled in the house again, to phone in the alarm.

I went after him; that was when I again noticed that unpleasant tickling. I called his attention to it when he got through on the wire. "Don't it smell as though they've had this place fumigated or some—"

He twitched the end of his nose. Then his face got drab. "That's gasoline!" he snapped. "And when you smell it that heavy—indoors like this—it's not a good sign!" I could tell he was plenty scared all at once—which made me twice as scared as he was. "Bill!" he hollered to the other guy. "Come in here fast and give us a hand! That girl they *didn't* take with them must be still around these premises someplace, and I only hope she isn't—"

He didn't finish it; he didn't have to. He only hoped she wasn't dead yet. I wasn't much good to them, in the sudden mad surge of ferreting they blew into. I saw them dimly, rustling around, through a sick haze.

He and I had been over the house once already—the upper part of it—so they found the right place almost at once. The basement. A hoarse cry from Gilman brought myself and the other guy down there after him. I couldn't go all the way, went into a paralysis halfway down the stairs. She was wedge down out of sight between two trunks, she'd been loosely covered over with sacking. I saw them lifting her up between them, and she carried awfully inert.

"Tell me now," I said, "don't wait until you get her—" I waited for the axe to fall.

"She's alive, kid," Gilman said. "Her chest's straining against the ropes they've got around—" Then he broke off, said to the other guy, "Don't stop to look at her now, hurry up out of here with her! Don't you hear that ticking down around here someplace, don't you know what that gasoline-reek means—?"

I was alive again; I jumped in to help them, and we got her up and out of the cursed place fast. So fast we were almost running with her.

We untied her out by the car. She was half-dead with fright, but they hadn't done anything to her, just muffled her up. The other guy wanted to go back in again and see if they could locate the bomb, but Gilman stopped him. "You'll never make it, it'll blow before you—"

He was right. In the middle of what he was saying, the whole house seemed to lift a half-foot above its foundations, it lit up all lurid inside, there was a roar, and in a matter of minutes flame was mushrooming out of all the lower-story windows.

"An incendiary-bomb," Gilman said. "Turn in a fire-alarm, Bill, that's about all we can do now." He went off some-

place to use a phone, and when he came back some time later, he had a mean face. A face I wouldn't have wanted to run up against on a dark night. I thought he'd heard bad news. He had—but not for us. "They got 'em," he said. "Yanked 'em off it just as the tub was clearing the Narrows. They're earmarked for the FBI, but before we turn them over, I wouldn't be surprised if they show wear and tear— She is pretty at that, kid."

She was sitting there in the car by now, talking to me and crying a little. I was standing on the outside of it. I was standing up, that was my mistake.

"Well, I gotta go," I heard him say. And then something hit me. It felt like a cement-mixer.

Our roles changed. When my head cleared, she was the one bending over me, crooning sympathetically. "—and he said to tell you, No hard feelings, but when anyone socks Dick Gilman on the head with a walking-stick, they get socked back even if they're the best of friends. And he said he'd see us both down at Headquarters later in the night, to be sure and get there on time if we don't want to miss the fun."

I was still seeing stars, but I didn't care, I was seeing her too. And now it was only twelve days off, we'd licked the thirteenth.

**USE SPEEDWAY BLADES** DE LUXE  
**FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES**



# A Guy Does What He Can

CASEY MASON sat down. It felt pretty good to sit down. His right leg hurt like the devil; the chair was soft and comfortable. Across the room, at his desk, Bill Latham offered Casey a cigar which Casey refused. "Never handled the things," Casey said. "I'll stick to my pipe, Bill."

They were in Latham's office, in the second storey of the building which housed the Hideaway Club, that bright and gay club between 42nd and 43rd Streets where you have, in your time, spent some money. It was a stunning office, the walls of startling zebra-wood, the furnishings in black and white leather.

"Casey," Latham said genially, "just how good a flatfoot are you?"

Casey grunted. "This good. It'll rain before ten P.M."

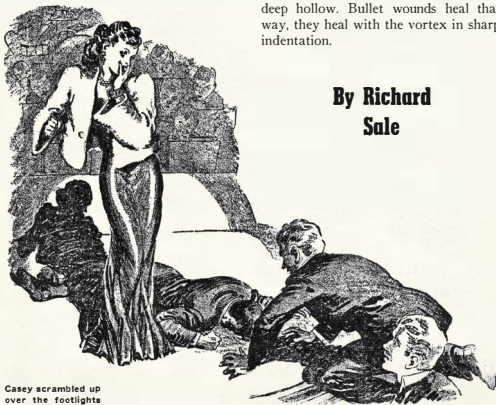
Latham grinned and glanced at the clock on his desk. It was then nine o'clock. "That makes you a meteorologist, not a detective."

"It's my leg," Casey said. "It hurts. The old wound always gives me trouble when there's rain on the wind. I can tell. It's better than a barometer. I'm not kidding."

"Let's see it," Latham said. "I've heard tell of your wound, but I've never had a gander at it."

"Sure." Casey pulled up his trouser leg. In his right leg, below the knee, there was a reddish scar. It fell into a deep hollow. Bullet wounds heal that way, they heal with the vortex in sharp indentation.

**By Richard  
Sale**



Casey scrambled up over the footlights



Latham whistled. "Quite a thing. So that's why they kicked you off the force, eh, Casey?"

"I wasn't kicked off the force," Casey said. "I was retired, a first-grade detective. I get a small pension. This wound was received in line of duty. It makes me limp. The medicos said it wouldn't do to have a limping cop. Out of action, Casey. So I'm out of action."

"Baloney," Latham murmured.

Casey smiled, puffing on his pipe. "I'm only," he said, "quoting the medicos' report, Bill. What was on your mind when you asked me to drop in to-night. I gave up a trip to see Pinocchio just because you called."

"Casey," Latham said slowly, "I've got a job for you. It will pay five hundred dollars."

"That's a lot of money for one job," Casey Mason said. "People don't pay like that unless it's a dangerous case. Or important."

"It is plenty dangerous," Latham said. "But I don't know whether or not that means for you, or for the girl who wants to hire you."

"I see."

"You don't," said Latham. "But you will in a minute." He picked up his telephone and said, "Send Miss Gaye up here, Joe." He hung up and opened his drawer and took out a white envelope which he opened. He spilled the contents on the desk with care. "Don't touch them," he warned. "Just look for a minute, Casey."

Casey Mason looked. On the glistening surface of the polished desk were two small objects, identical in appearance. They were small pellets of lead, each tipped with a sharp needle, each backed with a clutter of tiny white feathers, to lend them stability in flight.

"Why can't I touch them?" Casey said.

"Because they're poisoned," said Latham. "You know what they are?"

"Certainly. They're darts. They're intended for these air pistols and air rifles that have become so popular in the twenty-two and one seventy-seven calibers."

"That's right," Latham said. "Pellet guns. Those needles have been dipped in curare I think."

"You think!"

"Listen," said Latham, "I jabbed one of these things into a stray cat and he curled up in a flash and died on his feet. It didn't take him very long, and he didn't act as if he were in pain either."

"Curare is a South American poison," said Casey Mason. "You don't run into it in New York except in mystery novels. It's distilled from the curare plant in the jungles, and the Runiaru Indians tip their darts in the stuff for game-hunting with their long blowguns."

"All right," said Latham. "Then you tell me what brownish colored poison will kill a cat instantly and painlessly."

There was a knock on the door and Latham said to come in. The door opened, and a girl walked in. Casey started to whistle, then stopped himself. "Well!" he said, and that was all. He looked at her, frankly awed. He wasn't the type to look awed. The girl was tall, statuesque, dark, with a beautiful face and figure. Casey was a movie-goer, and he recognized her instantly. He had never been that close to a cinema star before. Myra Masefield, seductive, lush, and lovely.

"Casey," Latham said grandly, "meet your employer, Miss Masefield."

"How are you?" Casey grunted.

She shook hands, gently, smiled warily, said, "I'm happy to meet you, Mr. Mason," and sat down.

Casey said, "I didn't have any idea—"

"Has Bill told you?" Miss Masefield asked. "Will you take the case?" Her voice was soft and low and scared.

"Don't know," said Casey. "Don't know what it is yet."

"Well," Latham murmured, "it's would-be murder, Casey. Myra has been a two-time target for these things."

Casey stretched himself a little and took a deep breath. "Where?"

"She's making personal appearances this week at the Alden Theatre," said Latham. "You know how those things are. She comes out, the manager introduces her, a thousand males sigh and wish they were single men, and then she sings two songs, and calls it a day. She's been packing them in at the Alden. And she drew two darts."

"I see," said Casey.

**M**YRA MASEFIELD stirred as if she thought he should have been more impressed. "You don't understand!" she said. "Some one is trying to kill me!"

"I understand," said Casey. "But you're alive and kicking. That's a good thing, isn't it? Tell me how you found these darts and how you knew they had been fired at you."

"The first one was Monday," she said slowly. "At the end of the act, when I bowed, some one shot it at me. I was wearing an evening gown and a wrap, and when I took the applause, I bowed, and spread out my wrap, and I felt something hit the wrap. I didn't do anything until I got offstage, and then I saw one of those darts stuck in the lining of my coat. I pulled it out carefully and showed it to my manager, Mr. Alessi, and he didn't know what to do. We'd have thought it was a prank, to hit me and make me yell ouch at the

close of a torch song. Except for this brown stuff on the pinpoint."

"What about the other one?"

"I was standing inside the wings when the other one hit," she said. "There was a different act on the stage. Richard Romero and his band were playing. They accompanied me later when I sang my songs, but they were doing a solo just before my entrance. The dart hit the scenery at the side, right by my head. I recognized it as the same sort of thing which had struck my wrap and I pulled it out and kept it. That's the one with the brown stain scratched off the tip a little where it went into the scenery."

Casey Mason looked at Bill Latham. "And how do you get in this, Bill? Why did Myra come to you with these darts, instead of going to the cops. We have very good police in this city, you know."

Bill Latham smiled. "Looking for subversive elements, Casey? Ah, no. I happen to be the girl's best friend. At least, that's what she tells me."

"Bill gave me my start, singing in the Hideaway," Myra said quietly. "I owe him everything, literally. If it hadn't been for Bill, I'd never have been picked by the talent scout and sent to Hollywood. I always thought that he even arranged to have the scout see me and hear me. I'm a big star now, making money, signing autographs. But Bill did it. I'd still be in the third line of a chorus if he hadn't given me a break."

"Dutch Uncle stuff," said Casey. "Well, why not? Are you married, Myra? You're telling me the truth, you know. I'm a flatfoot, not a fan. I don't care what you tell your publicity men and your studio. Tell me. Are you hitched?"

"I was hitched," she said. She hesitated. "I'm still married to Johnny Car-

rell. But we're not living together. We're separated."

"Why?"

"Oh, we split before I ever got famous or even went to Hollywood. It wasn't the sort of marriage that had a chance. Johnny was an orchestra boy, and I was a career girl, and we never seemed to get together. So we let it go on the basis that if he ever wanted to remarry, or I did, we'd let the other know, and then divorce."

"Where is he now?"

Myra Masefield looked nervously at Casey Mason and wet her lips. "Johnny didn't do this, Mr. Mason. He's a sweet boy. There's no point in his having done it."

"Where is he?"

"He's in Dick Romero's band, at the Alden."

"What instrument does he play?"

"Clarinet," she said.

Casey whistled and rose to his feet. He put the two darts in an envelope and then sealed the envelope. "It would have been a cinch, nonetheless," he murmured, "for sweet Johnny to blow these darts at you out of some tricky arrangement in his clarinet, sighting the clarinet like a gun while he was playing. I think I will look into it, Myra. I think the case has possibilities."

Myra looked confused. "But—"

"As for you," said Casey, "I'd suggest that you're sick as a dog and that it is necessary to retire to your hotel room for the next few days, canceling your appearances at the Alden."

"I can't do that," she said. "I'm under contract. I have to appear at the theatre! The advertisements—"

"If you don't do as I say," Casey remarked, "then I'll have to ask payment in advance."

"I'll guarantee your payment, Casey," said Latham. "You don't un-

derstand show business. We troupe. This girl has a job and she isn't calling it off because she'd let down too many people."

Casey shrugged. "That's up to her. Some one isn't fooling. If she wants to stick out her pretty neck, all right. But you're a long time dead, trouper or not. And somebody isn't fooling around." He coughed meaningly. "Suppose I make my reports to Latham then?"

"All right," Myra said. "I may take your advice. But Alessi will be terribly angry—"

"Hell with Alessi," said Casey evenly. "Managers are always sore. If he feels so brave, have him sing your number, and pepper him with buckshot and see how he takes it. I've got things to do. You'll hear from me."

**D**R. GOBBLER, who was assistant medical examiner of New York County, and an enthusiastic dabbler in poisons on the side, as a hobby, had finished his tests. "Casey," he said, "this stuff isn't curare at all. You'll seldom find a poison like curare out of the South American jungles."

"I didn't figure it was curare," said Casey. "That was Latham's idea. He's the kind of guy who reads too much. What is it then?"

"Nicotine," said Dr. Gobbler. "Pure nicotine, distilled from tobacco."

Casey Mason looked surprised. "That's a new one on me. Is it supposed to be poisonous?"

"Casey," Dr. Gobbler smiled, "you're an ingenious soul, considering your years on the force."

"Naive as Pinocchio," said Casey dryly. "But you haven't answered the question."

"It's deadly stuff," said Dr. Gobbler. "I'm not comparing it with curare, mind

you, because I really don't know so much about curare, and few people do. But pure nicotine is very deadly, painless, and quick. I don't know an antidote. I'd rather be bitten by a venomous snake."

"Fancy that," Casey muttered. "I can't see why nicotine is so deadly. Guys smoke cigarettes every day. I know a bird who is a chain smoker, and tucks away at least three packs. I admit, it isn't doing him any good, but if nicotine is so deadly, why doesn't it knock him off?"

"Casey, don't be a sap," said Dr. Gobbler. "When a man smokes, he gets a very mild dose of nicotine, yes, but nothing much, and it doesn't enter his system the same way. Pure nicotine like this, going into the blood stream and cells stops nerve impulses which in turn stop your muscles, your vasomotor, your breathing, your heart. And the whole process is very rapid. The stuff doesn't waste time."

"All right," said Casey "And anybody can make it?"

"Sure, if you know how. It doesn't take any special equipment."

"That'll do," Casey said. "Thanks a lot, doc. And this is under your hat, you know."

"Under my hat," Dr. Gobbler smiled. "I won't say a word. If you run across any further interesting toxins in your travels, Casey, please bring them in for scrutiny."

Casey grinned and took back his darts and went uptown. It was raining slightly, and when he felt the drops, he glanced up at the Paramount clock on Broadway and grunted. It was five minutes of ten. The leg wound hadn't been such a bad fortune teller at that. Casey continued up the main stem until he reached the Alden Theatre. He bought a ticket and went in.

The picture was drawing to a close as he sat there and he closed his eyes to shut it out, listening vaguely to the mechanical voices of the actors. Presently, with a fanfare, the *finis* title trailed on the screen, and then the screen ascended, the lights burst on, and Dick Romero's orchestra was brassily giving out with *Oh, Johnny, Oh!*

Casey moved down front a little more and sat erect, his eyes sharp. He took a seat far on the right side of the first few rows so that he could peer slightly into the wings. Casey Mason soon saw enough to make him uneasy. Myra Masefield was in the wings in her ice-blue satin gown with her white ermine coat. She looked stunning.

Presently, the song ended, the audience applauded, and Dick Romero took his bows. Then Myra walked onto the stage. The applause was deafening. A spotlight picked her up and the house lights faded. Casey was trying to watch two people at once: the clarinetist in the band, and Mr. Alessi in the wings. He assumed the guy with the mustache was Alessi, a swarthy man with sleek hair who puffed on a cigarette in a holder in the detached manner of an English duke.

Dick Romero's band played, and Myra sang, and nothing happened. Casey was sweating, and he knew why. He couldn't see well in the dark. There was only Myra to be seen in all that darkened theatre. Myra in the white glow of the big spot. She sang softly, seductively, and when she finished, Casey groaned in relief for the house lights sprang alive, and Dick Romero, the band leader, stepped to her side, and the audience applauded again.

And then, for no reason at all, Dick Romero suddenly keeled over to the floor with a horrible thud, and Myra screamed.

Casey Mason had never, in his life, climbed over the footlights, but he did now. He vaulted over them and just got under the curtain as it came down. Back stage, there was confusion, everyone running around wildly, screaming.

Allessi ran out on the stage and reached Romero's body as Casey did. "Don't touch," said Casey, "and stick around, friend. Myra, stay here and keep your tonsils under control. No fainting and no yelling and no hysterics. He might have had a weak spell, nothing more."

"He's dead," Allessi growled bluntly. "Hell, even I can see that. Look at his color."

"Quiet," Casey snapped.

**B**UT Allessi had guessed right, even that briefly. For the dead man's face was waxy, there wasn't a breath in his body. Casey felt the arms and legs and they were stiffened as if in shock. But Casey couldn't find where the guy had been hit. It was easy to see what had happened. Romero had stepped out to take the bow with Myra Masefield, and he'd stepped out just in time to get hit with something that was meant for Myra.

Casey snapped, "I want you, Allessi, and since you're here, maybe you'll lay hands on the clarinetist in that band. I want that guy. Bring Johnny Carrell over here."

Allessi looked flabbergasted. "Bring Johnny Carrell over here?" he said, amazed. "Listen, copper, who the hell do you think the stiff is?"

"Richard Romero," Casey said.

"You're screwy. Romero is sick. He couldn't show up tonight. Johnny Carrell took over the podium, and Slats Walton doubled on sax and clarinet. The guy at your feet is Johnny Carrell, copper! No one else!"

Casey took a deep breath. "That right, Myra?"

"Yes—yes—" she whispered. The blood was leaving her face. "Johnny—oh my heaven, Johnny—"

"Grab her!" Casey yelled.

She fainted instantly. Allessi said wearily, "I got her, copper. You said not to leave. What do I do now? She don't weigh light, you know. Ain't it hell how a dame will always faint?"

Casey rose instantly and frisked Allessi and presently found the cigarette holder. "Okay," he said, "maybe you get this back. Take her to her dressing room."

He bent over Carrell's body, searching for the dart. Maybe it wasn't murder, he thought frantically, for there was no sign of the dart.

Then he found it. Of all the places for it to be: in the closed palm of Carrell's right hand. Casey unwound the tight fingers, and there it was, a lead pellet, needle tipped, with a tuft of white feathers to lend the pellet balance. The needle was thrust into Carrell's palm as far as it could go.

Casey Mason didn't dare touch it. He didn't dare pull it out. That was a job for the coroner, and already the police were arriving, blue-coated patrolmen, the advance guard. It meant the homicide squad was on the way.

Casey waded through the orchestra boys to the seat of Slats Walton and he took the clarinet from Walton and examined it thoroughly. When he finished, he was vaguely disappointed, for it was a cinch the pellet had not been fired from the instrument.

Then Casey faded into the shadow of the wings and broke apart Allessi's cigarette holder. It was long, long enough to house a spring, but all it actually housed was two other cigarettes to take up the tobacco tar so that

Allessi's smokes would be super mild. There was no mechanism in the gadget.

Casey Mason chewed his mouth sadly. He looked frustrated. He went down the hall to Myra Masefield's dressing room and went in without knocking. Mr. Allessi was there, working on her, and her maid, Angie, had a glass of port ready for her mistress.

Presently she opened her eyes. Angie, distraught, gave her the port, and it brought a flush back to her cheeks.

"How do you feel?" Casey said.

"Better," she said. "But Johnny—is he—"

"Oh, he's dead," said Casey as if it had happened a million years before. "He's dead, and we've got a sweet problem. The clarinet didn't do it, and Allessi didn't do it."

"Me?" Allessi said.

"Yes, you."

"Why would I knock off the kid?"

"The kid wasn't meant to be knocked off," Casey said. "Some one was trying for Myra and missed. It isn't inconceivable that a guy like you managing a gold mine like her, would insure her against loss. And if she hit the chute, you'd be in quick money."

Allessi laughed harshly. "You been reading too many detective stories," he said. "I don't hold a cent of insurance on her or anyone else. Not even me. And why would some one want a bump off Myra? It's a laugh."

"Some one's tried three times now," said Casey.

"What?" Allessi snapped, his eyes narrowing. He wheeled on her. "Myra, you little fool—why didn't you tell me—"

Casey frowned. "Never mind that. Some one is at the door."

The door opened, and a tanned good-looking boy came in. Casey recognized him as the up and coming star of Mogul

Studios, the young and handsome Ames Whitlock who had plenty of what it takes and was beginning to show it at the box office.

"Myra!" he gasped, rushing across to her. He kissed her passionately and said, "Are you all right? I was out front—"

"I'm all right," she said faintly. She was breathing hard. "You shouldn't have come here Ames—"

"Who's this?" Casey said, looking dumb.

"Ames Whitlock," grunted Allessi. "Him and Myra are going to get hitched, and it'll be the biggest Hollywood spectacle since Desmond Taylor was murdered. The studios will handle it, soon as Myra gets her divorce."

"From Carrell?" said Casey. "She's a free woman now. She doesn't have to divorce him."

"I hadn't thought of that," Allessi said. "Well, you never know. Some good comes out of the bad, eh?"

**C**ASEY MASON grunted. There was nothing else to do at the theatre. He limped out and crossed Broadway and went over to the Hideaway Club. He had no more than entered the club when Bill Latham fastened on his arm and took him to the bar. "Have a drink," Latham said. "On the house. Have an evening on the house. I owe it to you."

"Why?"

"Because I pulled you into a phoney, Casey. The Masefield thing. I'm pulling my feet out now. I'd have sworn she never would have done it, but she even hoodwinked me."

"I don't get you, Bill."

"It was phoney, that's all. It was a publicity stunt, the whole works. Haven't you seen the early editions for tomorrow? Take a gander at the *News*.

She gave it to all the papers. Makes a good story. Some one tries to murder beautiful screen star. It gives her sympathy publicity from coast to coast. I'm sorry I got you in it, Casey. Forgive me."

"Forgiven," Casey Mason said. "That's all right."

"Myra isn't the girl she used to be," said Latham. "I was talking to Milt Swanson a little while ago. You know him, don't you? He's the Broadway Tattler. He told me she was poison and why."

"Why?" said Casey. "She does all right in pictures."

"I'm talking about the human angle," said Latham. "You remember that arrangement she and Johnny Carrell had about marriage?"

"Yes. They both failed to make it go. Divorce when the other one asked for it."

"Nuts. Milt told me that Johnny fell in love with a dame two years ago and tried to get a divorce from Myra, and she wouldn't give it to him. Said she was still in love with him and such hooey, and that a divorce at this time would spoil her career. Johnny was a softy. He kept mum. All she was thinking about was the bad publicity."

"Well, well," said Casey. "You never know, do you?"

"That's not the whole story," said Latham. "Milt tells me that Johnny is going to sue her for divorce now. The gal is still waiting for him. Two years. That's love and patience, brother. Johnny is going to sue her—Myra—for divorce because he suddenly wised up. He got the dope from a pal on the coast. Myra is nuts about this newcomer Ames Whitlock and she filed suit in Reno charging Johnny with desertion. Johnny wouldn't have minded that, but after that lovesick gag she pulled on

him two years before—it was too much to take. Particularly when he has evidence of adultery."

"Oh-oh," said Casey. "He was going to sue her in New York state?"

"That's right. Let her try that kind of publicity on her pan. It'll be worse than somebody's diary a couple of years ago. That's the story, Casey, and that's what I got you in for, a publicity stunt to get her sympathy for what was coming. I let you out now, and God bless you."

"Thanks," said Casey. "And here's a little thing you can dream on, Bill. She murdered Johnny Carrell tonight on the stage of the Alden in front of six thousand people, and the cops won't be able to prove a thing."

Latham went white. "She—she'll get away with it?"

"I didn't say that," said Casey. "All I said was, the cops won't be able to prove a thing."

"You're not a cop anymore," Latham said.

"I know," said Casey. "That's what I mean."

CASEY was annoyed. He was annoyed because he had had his leg pulled. It was easy for some one to get you to believe that some one else was gunning for them. She had been a very clever woman at that, bringing the darts in, telling her story. No wonder no cops. She was setting a stage.

Casey Mason telephoned Richard Romero at his apartment and then identified himself. "I guess you heard about the trouble at the theatre," said Casey. "I was wondering why you didn't show up for tonight's performance."

"That's easy," Romero said miserably. "Somebody slipped me a Mickey. After the last show."



"You don't know who?"

"No. There was a bunch of us—the boys of the band, Alessi, Myra, Johnny—all over at Dave's Gold Room while the picture was on, and I got handed one right."

"It was a nice way of getting you out of the late show, wasn't it?"

"What do you mean, Mason?"

"Skip it," said Casey, and hung up.

What to do, what to do. Casey chewed on a fingernail and considered the dilemma. Women were unpredictable, that was the hitch. But then that very unpredictability might work to his favor. Actually, he had some evidence. He didn't know how it would stand in a court of law; that worried him. But it was good evidence. It was so good, it might scare Myra Masefield. It was worth a try.

"A man only does what he can," Casey Mason murmured. "And if I don't make a try, some one else is gonna get hurt."

He didn't have to leave the Hideaway Club, for when he went to Bill Latham to say goodbye, Latham said, "Where are you bound?" and Casey replied, "Tempest in a frock." "Hell," said Latham, "you're there now."

Casey stared. "You mean that dame is coming over here?"

"Yes. Alessi just telephoned for a reservation."

"That's fine," said Casey. "I'll hang around."

"Have a drink on me."

"Never touch it."

Casey returned to the telephone and called Myra Masefield's hotel. "How long," he asked, "do you expect Miss Masefield to be with you?"

"As a matter of fact," replied the desk clerk, "not very long. Miss Masefield has cancelled her New York performance and already has reservations

on the morning Sky Chief for Los Angeles. She checks out at seven."

"Well, well," said Casey. "She sure is in a hurry, isn't she?" He hung up and then took a stool at the bar and brooded.

It was an hour before Myra Masefield and her party showed. She had Alessi with her, and the young actor, Ames Whitlock, and a couple of other guys. No other women. Myra didn't believe in character support.

They all looked glum enough and it wasn't really a party. The head waiter, Pierre, took them to the table which had been held. Casey wandered in after them. He saw her grab Latham's hand and cry, "Oh, Bill, dear, did you hear the awful news?"

"Yes," said Latham warily.

"I couldn't stand the idea of sitting home alone," she said. "Please don't think I'm a horrible person, coming out like this, but I had to get away from myself. When I thought of Johnny—dying—murdered in my place—I wanted to get away from thinking, get away from myself—"

"I don't wonder," Casey Mason said aloud.

The party had reached the table which was on the edge of the dance floor. Some one had put the spotlight on Myra. She wheeled and stared coldly at Casey. Ames Whitlock thrust out his jaw and snapped, "Who is that chap?"

"He's a detective," Myra said. "I hired him—"

"What did you say?" Ames Whitlock demanded of Casey.

Casey stood on the dance floor with his arms hanging loose. He smiled faintly. He said, "I just remarked that I didn't wonder."

"You didn't wonder what?"

"That Myra wanted to get away from herself."

"I don't like the way you say that," Whitlock growled.

"I don't give a damn," said Casey Mason.

"You infer something unpleasant."

"Not at all," said Casey. "I'm not inferring anything at all. I'm just saying that I don't wonder a woman wants to get away from herself after she's bumped off an honest man."

Whitlock swung, missed, found himself on the dance floor. There were lights in his eyes and his jaw hurt. He never even heard the crack of the right hook when Casey creased him. He sat there, and he did not look very golden-boyish or glamorous.

In the spotlight, Myra Masefield's eyes were wide with horror. Not at Whitlock's position on the floor, or the punch that put him there. She was white as death, staring at Casey Mason, not daring to take a real breath.

Casey just stood opposite her, mocking.

Allessi grunted, "You must be goofy, Mason. She couldn't—"

"She's a good actress," said Casey. "She ought to get the academy award for this hunk of extra curricular acting. It sold me for a while. It was really good. But facts are facts. Can't be beaten. Myra, I'm taking you in for murder."

"He's mad!" Myra cried sharply, throwing her hand to her throat.

"Look," said Casey Mason. "Did you ever see a slug before it was fired?"

"Sure," said Latham.

"How does it look, Bill?"

"Dull and sort of dirty."

"How does it look after it's been fired?"

"All shiny and scratched from the rifling of the gun barrel."

"Go to the head of the class," Casey said. "That's the point. And even with

lead pellets out of air guns, the thing is the same. The lead pellet, unfired, is dirty and grimy and dull, like lead is, but after a gun barrel has scraped it clean, it glistens like silver from the rifling marks. . . . Myra—the pellet with that venomous dart was dull as your protestations of innocence. The pellet was never fired. You held that dart in your hand and when Johnny Carrell took your hand to acknowledge the applause, it stuck his palm. He was trouper enough to keep a straight face, but the nicotine got him, knocked him down fast. And the 'attempts' on your life were pure plants. That, folks, is how it is. That is the way the jury gets it. And there's only one answer."

NO ONE moved. Then Myra did. She flung her hand at her throat again, and Latham saw the quickest, neatest bit of gunfire he ever would see again. He saw Casey grab out a revolver and fire all in the same motion. It was a snap shot, and it looked dangerous.

Actually, it was on the line, and Casey himself thought he would never get the gun out, sight it, and fire it. To him, it took forever. And to him, he was precise and slow about it.

Myra Masefield's arm felt the shock of the bullet, was thrown cruelly aside. Her evening gown was quickly crimson where the blood flowed. Before she could move again, before the women in the club even began to scream hysterically, Casey Mason jumped across to her and grabbed that wounded arm and snapped to Latham, "Get her out, and hold her down! Are you guys all blind? She tried to kill herself!"

Latham and Casey gave her the bum's rush into Latham's office, and out on the floor, the band leader got smart and started the music, grinning from ear to ear as if it were all

a practical joke. In the office, Bill Latham said, "I'll call a doctor."

"Sure," Casey said. "Call Dr. Kyne. A police doctor. It'll be better that way."

"How was she going to kill herself?" Latham said. "I thought she was making a try for you!"

"Oh hell," Casey murmured, "not at me. Take a gander at the ring on her third finger right hand."

Latham took a look. Myra had passed out on the couch, still terribly white. "It's got a sharp prong on the seal of it," Latham said.

"That's right."

"You mean, the thing is doped with the same stuff she gave Johnny Carrell? With pure nicotine?"

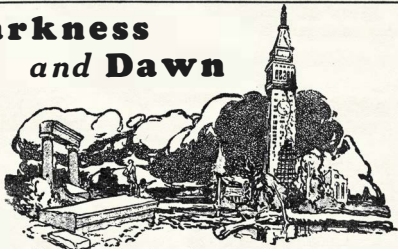
"Uh-huh," said Casey.

Latham sat down and took a breath. "How did you figure that? How could you figure the woman that well, to know she'd bump herself if she got caught?"

"Oh well," said Casey. "She was an actress wasn't she? And ain't it more dramatic to go out with boots on, in a spotlight, than in an electric chair, with your slip showing? A guy only does what he can, Bill."

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## By Lawrence Treat

Thor was too fast  
for the gangster—  
much too fast



# Man of Vengeance

FROM his deathbed WARREN MACKINER, old and embittered eccentric, gasped an order and thereby launched as ingenious a scheme of vengeance as ever man devised to destroy an enemy. The instrument of vindication was his son, THOR MACKINER, product of a most remarkable system of training. The intended victim was DAWSON GRANGE, a man of tremendous wealth and power.

What lay behind Warren Mackiner's hatred for Grange perhaps even Thor himself did not know. But the young Mackiner did understand his life's mission—to crush irrevocably his father's enemy. It was an undertaking for which he had been trained since the day he first walked, and now at young manhood his senses, muscles and abilities had been sharpened to a point where he was more than a match for any man.

At his father's command Thor headed

straight for the city and the great mansion of Dawson Grange. Gaining entrance, he struck terror into the heart of his avowed enemy by announcing his destructive purpose. Then, with the aid of LINDA GRANGE who did not know Thor was her father's enemy, Thor escaped from the house.

But as a result of his brief meeting with the beautiful Linda, strange feelings arose in Thor. His emotional nature had been neglected in his training and he was incapable of understanding why a word, a smile from Linda affected him so. He only knew that he must see her again—that same evening.

And so, despite the fact that the police had been called and a search for him was in progress in the house and grounds, Thor returned. Perhaps Linda felt something of the same attraction; at any rate she did not

tell her father or the detectives that it was she who, unwittingly, had aided the fugitive's escape a few hours before.

But now, as he appeared before her for the second time that evening, even while squads of police roamed about the house, she demanded an explanation of his action and his hatred for her father. Thor found himself powerless to speak. And then Linda Grange raised her voice dramatically.

"Help," she called, "he's here in my room!"

Thor looked at her breathlessly for one fleeting second and then dove for the window as racing feet pounded up the corridor in answer to Linda's alarm.

## VI

**T**HOR, in full sight of the crowd below, was running nimbly along the wide molding that banded the second floor. Someone saw him, yelled. A revolver cracked out and slapped a bullet a bare two feet in front of him. Then he was around the corner of the house and climbing upward along a heavy drain pipe.

As his hand gripped the gutter of the green-tiled roof, he heard someone clattering up behind him. A second shot barked, went wild. Thor seized a loose tile and flung it at his pursuer. There was a rattling sound, a shriek, the thud of a body.

Crouching low, his bare feet pounding on the slippery tiles, Thor scurried up the steep incline of the gables. Near the top he found another loose tile, ripped it free and hurled it at the glass skylight a dozen yards away. That would make them think he'd leaped down, inside the house. Then he doubled back towards a broad chimney, ripped off the mesh screen that capped it and disappeared inside.

A yard or so down, his feet rapped against a sheeting of tin. With his knees spread and pressing against either side of the sooty bricks, he was in no danger of falling. But he realized it

was simply a matter of time before flashlights would be trained down the shaft to discover him, wedged in a trap of his own making.

Leaning down, he worked feverishly to bend back the sheets of metal far enough to permit the passage of his body. Then he wriggled through, keeping himself from falling by alternately bracing his feet and his hands against the brick. Once below the tin barrier, he forced it back to its former position. He lowered himself another few feet and thanked the soul of Warren Mackiner for a foresight that had included even the detail of the great chimney.

He could hear the dull echo of many feet tramping and skidding on the roof. Twice the beam of a flashlight was turned down the chimney, but the light showed nothing but two strips of sheet metal firmly in place. Obviously no one could have squirmed through the narrow slit.

An ordinary man might, for a time, have kept his perch in the brick-lined flue, but in the end he would have dropped from sheer exhaustion. Thor, however, had been trained to immobility for hours on end in the most awkward and trying of postures. Not that it was easy. His muscles began to ache and throb, his head to sing. But he kept himself awake, kept his arms tense and his body firmly wedged.

Occasionally he heard the sounds of the search, gruff voices, a barked order and the muffled reply. Sometimes they came from the roof, sometimes from the room below. Once, somebody looked up the chimney. A sliver of dull light splashed on the sooty deposit of many fires, a heel clacked sharply on the stone hearth, and then the light withdrew. Thor was too high up to be seen.

Hours later he lowered himself, cramped and stiff, to the big stone fire-

place. He found himself in a guest room. He opened the door a crack and listened intently, but there was no noise. The household had gone to sleep.

As he passed a mirror he saw himself, grimy and sooty, with his clothes badly mussed and a broad rip at the shoulder. That wouldn't do. His first requirement was clean clothes and a bath.

He sat down and thought it over. Thus far, Warren Mackiner had foreseen every difficulty. But the simple need of a clean shirt and a well-pressed suit—Thor had never practiced that one.

For an instant he saw the defects of his training. Too accurate a rehearsal of the probable, too solid a confidence in the expected. So far it had worked. But a situation as ludicrous and yet as precarious as the lack of clean clothes left him momentarily lost.

The bare realization, however, had taught him an important lesson. A thousand small difficulties were bound to present themselves and from now on he must expect the unlikely, rely on himself as well as the teachings of his father. Then Thor's clear logical mind grew practical and tackled his problem.

Whose clothes would fit him? Thor went over the names of the servants and made his selection. For years Warren Mackiner had paid ten dollars a week to Dawson Grange's housekeeper. In return she gave a full report of the household, listing every new piece of furniture, every detail of gossip. When Warren Mackiner wanted information, money always flowed outward until he had what he wanted.

So Thor merely had to go over the list of servants and to recall their height and weight, and his problem was solved. Cummings. Second door to the left in the servants' wing. Closet on the far wall. Racks of clothes across the back.

THOR flitted through deserted hallways, slid into Cummings' room and selected a suit. Ten minutes later Thor was soaking in a tub. His own clothes he stuffed into laundry hamper. Then he shaved in the darkness, dressed, stretched out on the bed in the guest room and went to sleep.

It was dawn when he awoke. He crept to a window. A patrolman was twirling his nightstick and marching jauntily up and down, some twenty feet from the corner. Thoughtfully, Thor crossed the house and parted the curtains of another window. The building was surrounded by cops.

The sky was already light gray, and an attempt at escape would have been disastrous. It looked like a bad day ahead, a day he'd have to spend cramped in some corner and in constant danger of discovery. But there was no alternative and so, characteristically, he stopped worrying about it.

One thing, however, bothered him. Linda Grange. What was she that last night she had made life seem so complicated and uncertain? Why didn't she realize he was acting as he should and must, and that he meant her no harm? She affected him strangely, drawing him to her and then repelling him. Why? To what end? Were women a different type of creature? Warren Mackiner had forgotten to say.

Had Thor had a wider experience, he could have gone beyond the facts of her inconsistency. But as it was, he kept repeating them and reaching no conclusion. She had been willing to help him when she thought he was just a crook, but as soon as she had learned he was something else, she had cried out and set the police on his trail. And despite that deliberate betrayal, he wanted to see her again.

Thor smoothed his borrowed suit

and examined the room. It was a spacious chamber with a large, green-covered bed, thick Persian rugs and roomy chairs. The shades were drawn and concealed all but a thin strip of window pane. Through it he watched a pair of large black shoes, sturdy, thick-soled, polished. They paced past him, turned and reappeared. Thor didn't have to see the rest of the man. The shoes told the whole story. Cop.

Nevertheless he felt comparatively safe as long as he stayed where he was. Last night's search had been thorough, and Grange and Inspector Mercer must have assumed Thor had escaped. As for the police guard, it was meant to keep him out of the house rather than to trap him inside. Accordingly, he decided to crawl under the bed and catch up on sleep.

He had hardly closed his eyes, however, when the sound of an opening door woke him up. A pair of dark trousers and narrow, shiny black shoes entered the room and stepped past him. A snap and the flood of light told him the shade had been raised.

Thor bit his lips. Luck seemed to be against him today. The room was going to be occupied and he'd have to move out. Well, it was a minor inconvenience, and in view of the circumstances he couldn't complain to the management. Later on, he'd sneak out and select one of the other guest rooms. And then, as he was dismissing danger, it arrived. And in a form that Warren Mackiner could never have foretold.

It arrived on four legs. It arrived with the fluffy, white face and the pink nose of a poodle. It trotted in, sniffed and sighted the man under the bed.

**I**N THE next few seconds Thor learned what fear and despair and misfortune can be. The dog barked, it

dived, it snapped, but always it kept beyond the reach of Thor's arms.

Had he been able to talk, he might have calmed the dog. He had been trained to handle every savage stray that Warren Mackiner could get hold of. But no self-respecting animal—not even a poodle—will sight a stranger under a bed without making a fuss.

The servant spoke lightly. "What's the matter, Fran? You'll wake up the master, barking like that. You'll—"

He broke off at the astonishing sight of a growling, snapping poodle suddenly disappearing and becoming absolutely silent. He walked to the side of the bed where Fran had vanished and stooped to see what was wrong.

He was still stooping when a squeak sounded from the opposite end of the bed. He grunted, scratched his head and turned.

Thor had finally caught the poodle with a lucky sweep of his hand. His fingers closed around the small windpipe and throttled the noise while he rolled to the other side of the bed, stumbled to his knees and sprang.

As he sprang, he released the poodle which squeaked. Thor's body launched through the air like a diver in a racing take-off. The servant, turning, saw a man with lidded eyes flying at him. He saw for a fraction of a second. Then a fist crashed against his parietal lobe, a body struck him and he went out. Cold.

Thor gagged and blindfolded him with a piece of sheet, tied a few knots and secured the man's hands and feet. It was Cummings, whose clothes he was wearing and whom he had surprised in the pantry last night and later impersonated.

Meantime the poodle was returning to a noisy life. Thor scooped, caught a woolly tail and clapped his hand over the windpipe again. Still holding the dog,

he crossed swiftly and closed the door.

How much disturbance had he made? How long did he have in which to get away? And how could he escape in a household that was already stirring, and that was surrounded outside by a cordon of police?

Thor's original plan of staying for the day was out of the question. He couldn't hold Cummings here indefinitely. His absence would be noticed, the attack discovered and the search resumed. His dirty clothes and the soot marks in the bathroom would tell last night's story. And where else could he hide?

Thor stood in the center of the room, holding the half-choked poodle while his mind clicked off possibilities and discarded them almost on the instant. And then his eyes, traveling across the room, saw his answer.

He stepped to the far wall, picked up the house phone and pushed the button marked *Servants*. When he spoke, it was with the voice of Dawson Grange.

"Hello," he rumbled in heavy tones that were thick with sleep. "Roberts there? Put him on." He waited a moment or two. "Roberts? Forgot to tell you I made an appointment last night with the inspector. Due here for breakfast. Mercer's the name. Take the roadster over there with my compliments. Right away or you'll miss him." Thor hung up.

He tossed the limp poodle on the bed. Cummings moaned slightly with returning consciousness, but he was securely bound. Thor left the room.

The corridor was empty and he ran, full speed and yet silently, to the back stairs. Down a flight to the pantry. Someone was mounting.

Thor flattened himself against the wall, tense, poised. Benson advanced unsuspecting, reached the first step. A man towered up, a fist crashed and

Benson saw fireworks. They were less splendidous, though in one sense far more effective, than the display he'd seen at the club last Fourth of July.

Thor caught the tottering figure, laid it to rest on the stairs and dashed across the pantry, down to the basement and into the garage.

Roberts was prompt. The motor of the yellow roadster, standing between the big limousine and the low slung phaeton, was purring gently. He was in the act of pushing open the garage doors when Thor entered.

Scuttling behind the cars, he reached the roadster, pushed open the rumble and curled inside. He won by a split second. When Roberts turned, the rumble seat had already shut. And naturally he didn't notice a piece of wire caught between the cover and the body of the car, so that the compartment could be opened from the inside. Roberts simply slipped into the seat behind the wheel, pushed the lever into gear and drove out.

As he was passing through the gates, he heard someone shout. Glancing behind him he saw a maid calling frantically from a window.

"Roberts—come back!"

At the same time a cop saw him and yelled.

## VII

**D**AWSON GRANGE'S big black limousine poked its way past the trucks and trolleys of Tenth Avenue. Grange hadn't been here in years. Dust and noise and dirt, he reflected. Too bad his car wasn't air-conditioned. His throat would be dry and scratchy all evening.

He glanced at the street signs and saw he had reached the forties. "Roberts!" he called out. "Stop here, at the next corner."



"Yes, sir." The big steel car slid over to the curb and halted. Roberts, neat and capable and obsequious in his uniform and puttees, hopped out smartly and opened the door. The car tilted as the running board took Grange's bulk.

"Wait here, Roberts. And this time, don't obey any messages."

"Yes, sir."

Grange rapped his cane on the sidewalk. A couple of urchins were staring in spellbound wonder. They sucked dirty thumbs and couldn't take their eyes from him. He felt in his pocket but couldn't find any pennies. Wouldn't do to give them anything more. He'd have a crowd of kids around him in no time and he was conspicuous enough, what with the white carnation in his buttonhole.

He plucked it out and presented it to his chauffeur. "Wear this for me. For luck, Roberts." His laugh was robust, hearty, arrogant. Roberts snickered and accepted the flower.

Grange chuckled at his man's embarrassment, then turned and strode confidently down the street. He wheeled sharply at the corner and headed east. Those damned police had certainly bawled things up. He'd never have called them himself. But Benson, old fuss-budget that he was, had found Grange unconscious and the room in a mess, and so he'd called in practically the whole homicide squad.

Mercer! Too keen and too intelligent for Grange's purposes. He'd done his best to have Mercer called off the case in favor of some cop who'd listen to reason. But no. The commissioner had refused. Said if Mercer couldn't handle it, nobody could.

Well, luckily he'd failed. There was no telling what Mackiner would say if he were caught, and accusations wouldn't do Grange any good. Partic-

ularly now, with those deals pending. They required delicacy and finesse, and Grange couldn't afford to have his reputation attacked. Stockholders were funny that way, inclined to believe anything you told them. But give Grange time to consolidated his position and he could laugh in young Mackiner's face. Say in a couple of months or so.

Grange bit his lips and thought of how Mackiner had spent the night in the house and then escaped in the morning. Pure accident that Roberts was such an obedient ass that once he had his orders, he wouldn't even stop when the cop yelled, so Mackiner had been in the rumble all the time and had merely popped out at the first traffic stop. Some taxi driver had seen him, too. And dorie nothing.

Grange strode on, his jaw hard, his stride firm, his color high. Things could have been a lot worse. To begin with, he was through guessing what Warren Mackiner's canny old brain might be planning. He'd been a sort of perversely brilliant gnome and he'd worried Grange for years. More than Grange cared to admit. But in his place now was nothing but a super-athlete. Well, let the super-athlete fight against a few million dollars. Wipe him out! Squash him like a grasshopper underneath a steam roller!

Grange snorted and felt blood distending the cells of his brain. Getting all worked up over a super-athlete, was he? Well, why not? Thor menaced all that Grange possessed. Fortune, position, reputation, daughter. No mercy for Thor now. Grange would cut him down if he had to shoot him himself, in plain sight of a dozen witnesses.

But he didn't have to. He made inquiries, in a civilized manner. He knew a couple of men mixed up in Crime with a capital C. A question or two, and

they'd fix it. Healy. Turk Healy, gunman for dough.

GRANGE doubled back and found the saloon. It was cheap and tough. Well, that was what he wanted. Somebody tough, who didn't have to be told things directly. Grange walked in.

The bartender looked up as if the Queen of Sheba had just arrived. Grange stared with authority and rumbled, "A man by the name of Healy . . . I was told I'd find him here."

The bartender jerked his head. A little man, with a high forehead and cheeks sunken in as if he were sucking at his gums, sidled over. But despite the thin face, his shoulders were solid and he looked as if he could take care of himself.

"You want to see me, huh?" he said. His voice twanged through his nose.

"Where can we talk?" asked Grange.

Healy steered him to a door in back. The passageway beyond it was lined with curtained booths. Healy entered one of them and said, "Here."

"Are you sure nobody's listening?"

"Sure not. I been in the joint an hour and nobody ain't gone back here. Keep your shirt on, Mister. They only listen behind doors in the movies. What the hell you think this is—a peep show?" His laugh was as disagreeable as his voice. It had a cold, whinnying note.

Grange said, "My name is Dawson. John Dawson."

"Pleased to meetcha," cackled Healy. "Pleased to meet a stuffed shirt any time. My name's Hoover, but you can call me Hoibie."

Grange slapped his fist on the table. "I'm not in the habit of making a burlesque out of a business deal. I came here to talk straight. I was told you'd

take charge of a certain matter, on a cash basis."

Healy shrugged. "Let's hear your proposition, Jack." Grange opened his mouth in protest, but Healy went right on. "What I want is to get out of the racket I'm in. Healy Equipment, see? We put in cigarette machines and then we collect to keep everything running smooth. Just one of the rackets, but rackets ain't no good any more. Not safe, with them investigations going on. Look at all the guys they got, and right at the top too. If they can get them, where do I stand, huh? I ain't got no big shot behind me." He lit a cigarette.

Grange said, "I'm not interested in what you want to do or why. I'm here to make a proposition."

Healy raised his eyebrows. "Like I said, no stuffed shirt ain't gonna shut me up. If you don't like it, scram. I got responsibilities, see? Six guys working for me, and if I give up the rackets, then where the hell are they? They got wives and kids, some of 'em. It's a screwy world. Five years ago I give up knocking off guys just for a few bucks and I went into the rackets, respectable-like. Now it's the other way round. The rackets is poison and I got to start knocking 'em off again so's I can pick up a piece of change without worrying about the heat being on. I tell you. there's nothing left for a guy like me except murder. Screwy, huh?"

Grange tapped his fingers on the table "When you finish shooting off your mouth, let me know."

"Keep your pants on, Jack, or you'll get your face pushed in. I don't do business with nobody till I know who he is."

"I was told you were reliable and open to a proposition. Are you or aren't you?"

Turk Healy lit a cigarette. "So what?" he said. He puffed into Grange's

face. Grange frowned and Healy said nothing further. It looked like his way of announcing he was ready to listen.

"There's a certain person," began Grange, "who's annoying me. He broke into my house the other night and handed me a threatening letter. The police were completely incompetent in dealing with the situation."

Healy murmured, "Yeah, them cops."

"I'm willing to pay you five thousand now, and another five thousand after the annoyance has been stopped."

**H**EALY went to the heart of the matter. "Who's the guy I'm supposed to bump, and where do I find him?"

"I said nothing about killing," snapped Grange. "Understand that clearly. I'm not paying for murder and I'll have nothing to do with it. The methods you use, of course, are entirely up to you. And are employed completely on your responsibility."

"That's what I said, Jack. Who's the guy?" Healy let the cigarette dangle from his lips. "You don't pay ten grand unless you want to be damn sure nobody'll ever connect you with it."

Grange said, "Mackiner, Thor Mackiner. He's about five eleven in height and weighs around a hundred and sixty. Light-colored hair, blue eyes, small features."

"What do I do? Wait on Times Square and bump the first pair of blue eyes I see? Listen, Jack—you want to be sure you get the right guy. Where's he live?"

"I don't know. Suppose I make an appointment with him, say at the Hotel Farragut, Thursday evening. Be there in the lobby at seven. I'll send a message that I can't meet him and he'll be paged. When the bellhop finds him, you can make your identification."

Healy didn't answer. Grange snapped

at him irritably. "Well? Do you accept?"

"Listen, Jack. Want me to sign something or smack you on the kisser or what? I told you I want to get out of the rackets. Let's see your money . . . and by tomorrow night this case of annoyance, like you say, he'll be one dead chicken. So fork up, Jack, fork up."

Grange reached into his pocket and took out the five one-thousand-dollar bills. He said, "I already told you there is no question of killing, as far as I'm concerned."

Healy sighed, "Yeah. So what?"

"There's one thing I want to warn you about. This Mackiner is no ordinary man. He can practically smell guns and read minds. He can see behind his back and move faster than anyone you ever saw. I'm paying high because the job is a difficult one and I don't want you to underrate it. You got into the killing game when you reached your teens; this man started it the day he was born, and he's good."

"Carried a rod in his cradle?" said Healy. But he was unimpressed. "Nuts to you, Jack."

"I'm trying to make you realize what you're facing. I have a five thousand dollar investment in you and I don't want to lose it. Whatever means you choose, you'd better be armed. And have help."

"Sure," said Turk Healy. "If you say he's that smart—hell! I'll get a few of the boys and drag out the tommy gun. That ought to do it."

"When I have proof that he'll no longer bother me, I'll meet you here with the additional five thousand. Is that satisfactory?"

"Sure, Jack, sure. The Farragut tomorrow. That guy's as good as bumped."

Grange grimaced and then rose. Ap-

parently there was nothing he could do with a man like Healy. Grange would have to make sure he wasn't followed on his way out. If Healy ever found out his real name, Grange would be blackmailed for life.

He was careful to wind through several streets and take three taxis before he returned to Roberts and the car.

**B**UT Grange's caution was unnecessary, for Healy made no attempt to follow. After Grange had left, Healy tapped on the partition of the booth.

"Hey, Doc," he called. "Come on over."

Doc was a man with a slight build and a serious, lined face. Its square contours and level gray eyes gave him a look of ultra-respectability, which was useful in Healy's line.

Healy said, "You hear what he said?"

Doc nodded. "A guy like that, he's got dough."

Healy smiled. "A guy like that, he's Santa Claus. He's gonna pay for us to eat turkey. Tell the boys to forget the machines. We're through with piker stuff, through risking our necks for a lousy few bucks a week. Doc, we got us a sugar daddy."

"Who is he?"

"Who the hell do you think? Dawson Grange. They told me that before he come in. I wouldn't do no business with a guy I didn't know."

Doc gasped. "Turk," he said, "I got a weak heart. And after a shock like that, I need a drink."

Turk nodded and pressed the buzzer. Yeah. Grange was going to cough dough. Bump this Mackiner guy, and then put the screws on Grange. It was going to be a cinch.

"What we'll do," twanged Healy, "is have Joey bring the boys down to the Farragut and wait outside. Then when

this guy walks out of the joint I'll give the high sign, and Pete and Hack and Pancho and me, we'll all let him have it at once. Blow him clean across the street. What I always say is, why should a guy take chances when he don't have to? Listen, Doc—did I ever shoot a guy in the front when I could get him from the back? I ain't no sap!"

He lifted up his glass of whisky. At the same time he felt the weight of the five grand roll in his pocket. He smashed the glass suddenly against the partition.

"Hell!" he wheezed. "This lousy rot gut! Come on, Doc—we're goin' out and get champagne!"

## VIII

**T**HOR lounged on the bed in Wilkes's room and munched contentedly on an apple. He had been roaming the city for a day and a half, scraping up chance acquaintances, familiarizing himself with landmarks that had only been photographs and penciled crosses on a map. Long ago Warren Mackiner had advised him to spend every minute of his spare time in learning the city, and Thor lived only as a projection of his dead father's character.

"I helped a blind man cross a street that he could see as well as I could. I met a panhandler who owns his own house and goes South every winter and I saw a man steal two cars on the same block within a half hour. He had trouble un-parking the second one and a cop helped him out."

Wilkes, thin and gray, his hair sparse on his forehead and his eyebrows hunched in the lines of one who suffers from nervous headaches, nodded.

"That's good. Study people, their gestures and habits and language. Be an actor, an acrobat, an encyclopedia. See through people and know them more

deeply than they know themselves. Your father told you all that, many times. He's gone now, but the project has barely begun."

"I've started," said Thor. "I'll finish."

"It will be harder than you think. Grange is a powerful man. You have to strip him of every cent of wealth he has, you have to humble him lower than the beggar you took across that street. You have to break his pride and his confidence, turn his every friend against him. You have to teach him fear, and crush him to a point where he lives in a perpetual dread of what the next minute will bring."

Thor chewed contentedly on his apple. He was used to this. He had been surrounded with this consuming hate of Dawson Grange for so many years that now it seemed natural to him, one of the facts of life. For some reason he was dedicated to the extermination of Grange. His father had known why and hadn't seen fit to tell; Wilkes knew why, and when the time came he'd explain.

Thor picked the last bit of meat from his apple and tossed the core across the room. It landed in the waste basket. He leaned back and crossed his elbows behind his head. "What would I do," he asked, "if something happened to you? If Grange retaliated by going after you? He could, you know."

Wilkes leaned forward in his chair. His brown eyes gleamed as if they were equipped with miniature electric filaments. "If anything ever happens to me," he said solemnly, "Grange is to be killed. At once, without delay and without compunction. Those are your father's orders. Grange knows that. It was in the letter you delivered." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Nevertheless it would be a good idea not to give my address to anyone. Or even to admit my existence."

Thor picked up another apple and polished the skin. "Grange would be easy to kill," he observed. "His car goes through the same street every day. When it stops at the corner, I could simply walk over and shoot."

"And escape?"

Thor nodded. "Sure. The corner house has a brick store front overlapping the next building. I run in there and it looks as if I disappear into the wall. There's a narrow alleyway behind, then a fence and then the roof of a garage. From there, it's easy." He bit into the apple. It was tart, juicy. He was proud of discovering that brick wall. It was something he'd found by himself.

Wilkes studied him, knowing the power and capacity of that body as nobody else save the dead Warren Mackiner had ever known it. Saint Warren, Wilkes called him privately. Wilkes missed him keenly. The solitary burden of knowledge was almost too much to bear and sometimes he wondered whether he'd go insane. At such times his head throbbed and he seemed to hear the ringing of ships' bells, the hiss of escaping steam and the washing of waves. Then he would clench his teeth and think of the instrument of vengeance that had been turned loose upon the world. Thor the Hammer, god of war and destruction. He was well named.

**W**ILKES rubbed his forehead. His headache was returning. He leaned from his chair and took a letter from a pigeonhole of the desk.

"I received a note from Grange," he said. "He wants to see you. He asks you to meet him in the lobby of the Hotel Farragut, this evening at seven."

Thor stared at his apple and bit into it from the other side. "What's his idea?"

"Probably a trap. Get there well ahead

of time and watch. If you see Grange, make sure he's alone before you speak to him. And if he isn't there, use your own judgment about finding out the reason for the appointment. Meantime . . ."

He held out a batch of papers. Thor threw away the second apple and advanced to take them. Wilkes had already explained, and Thor stuffed the documents in his pocket. They had been selected from the ones he had taken from Grange's private safe.

The offices of Randolph & Veblen, Accountants, were on the twenty-eighth floor of one of the big downtown buildings. Thor, a pleasant light-haired man, neat in appearance, stood at the receptionist's desk and gave his name. If the girl noticed anything it was merely that his eyes were narrow, lidded, so that she wasn't quite sure what color they were.

She said, "He's expecting you. If you'll follow the boy . . ."

Thor nodded. The office boy took him past a large room filled with clerks, down a corridor and to a lavishly furnished corner room. As he entered, he recognized in Dennis Veblen the tall man who had visited Grange the other night.

Thor came to the point immediately. "I understand," he said, "that you're opposing Dawson Grange's attempt to control Symonds Trust. You're not strong enough to fight him alone, but I have a plan that will bounce him clean out of his directorship."

"Can't be done," snapped Veblen. Then he realized his impulsiveness had given him away. He leaned forward. "Mr. Mackiner, what makes you suppose I have any antipathy towards Grange?"

Thor smiled. Veblen was afraid this was some trick. People were always frightened to talk, scared you intended

to harm them. How much happier they'd be if they assumed the opposite!

"I know you dislike him and are afraid of his power, so let's deal with facts."

"Who are you?"

"You know my name and you know who sent me. The best proof of my sincerity is this." He took the papers Wilkes had selected and tossed them on the desk.

Veblen picked them up. They were photostats of stock transactions. Veblen studied them closely. "What bearing," he began, and then broke off and seized one of the papers. "This is the block of securities I pledged him for a loan two years ago!"

"Correct," said Thor. "A thousand and seventeen shares. Check the numbers."

Veblen kept staring. "If he manipulated these, he's converted them to his own purposes. And that's grand larceny!" He pressed a button and spoke into the inter-office phone. "Ask Mr. Massey to come in here, please." Then he glanced up. "If you're out to get Grange, why come to me? Why not take these to the police?"

"Because with his influence and the legal talent he can hire, Grange might go free. But if you use the same evidence to force his resignation from Symonds Trust, his only recourse is a libel suit. And he'd never dare bring that."

**T**HE door opened and a thick-set man with a sharp jaw and curly, blond hair entered. Veblen said, "Mr. Mackiner—Mr. Massey, head of our legal staff. Massey, look at these."

Massey examined the papers and murmured to himself. After a while he glanced up. "I always suspected Grange of stepping over the line," he declared, "and this looks like proof."

"Then we've got him?" demanded Veblen.

Massey shrugged. "It depends on what you want. To convict him? That would mean months of arduous work and the gathering of collateral evidence and then—who knows? And meantime, he could do a lot to us. And undoubtedly would." He studied the other documents. "How about these?"

Thor answered. "Braydon, Neems, Anlonberg, Dunne. You're all in the same boat. All you have to do is bring the matter up before your stockholders and accuse Grange. He can't refute the evidence. Then you force him to sell, and buy him out on the open market."

"Easier said than done. It takes money to buy out a man like Grange. Much more than this firm has available."

"You might discuss the matter with the other interested parties," suggested Thor.

Massey lit a cigar. "Just where do you come in, Mackiner?"

"I don't. My business ends where yours begins. I offer you these photo-stats and then I'm through. Unless you need some more evidence, of course, in which case I'll try to get it."

"For a price?"

"For nothing."

Veblen murmured, "Very peculiar, Mackiner. You must have risked a lot obtaining these, and now you offer them gratis. I don't see what you gain."

Thor ran his fingers through his hair. He didn't understand their attitude. Here he was giving them a present of incalculable value, and they worried about the motives behind it.

"The documents," he said slowly, "prove themselves. They're genuine and can be shown to be genuine, on their face. Why do I enter into the picture?"

"Frankly," said Massey, and he

smiled wryly, "because of the possibility that you stole them yourself."

"And if I did?"

"Then we'd be dealing with a thief."

"Would that be a new experience?" asked Thor. "Grange himself, for instance. Is he any better than other thieves?"

Veblen burst out laughing. "You're right, Mackiner, but when millions are involved we rarely speak of theft. We haul out the more cumbersome words, such as misappropriation or misfeasance. Did you ever hear of anybody misappropriating a dollar or two? Dollar bills are stolen, but millions are wrongfully converted."

Thor smiled. "I still think Grange is capable of stealing. Pennies and nickels included."

Massey puffed slowly on his cigar. "Nobody knows anything about him. The stories of how he first made his money are fantastic. It was around the time of the first World War. One version has it that he was the prince of profiteers, another that he raided the treasury of the czars, a third that he came out of the heart of India with twelve gigantic elephants laden with stolen gold. I believe all of them are sheer rumor, and yet there is nothing about Grange which I would completely doubt. If he's a crook, he steals on a scale so vast that he almost makes it respectable. These documents are interesting, Mr. Mackiner. If we can have them for a while . . ."

"They're yours," said Thor. Wilkes had told him to have nothing to do with the financiers' plot to get Grange. Thor was merely to instigate it, to plant the idea and supply the evidence. Financiers, Wilkes had said, simmer like witches' brew, but no ordinary man dares stir the pot. "They're yours," repeated Thor. "If you need me again, just tell Mr.

Wilkes. He can always get in touch with me."

Massey and Veblen watched him close the door. "Fantastic," remarked Veblen.

"Bizarre," said the lawyer.

"There's something incredible about that man. Did you notice his eyes? I've never seen eyes like that before in my life. They're completely yellow!"

"Nonsense. They're the clearest blue I ever saw."

Veblen picked up the phone and spoke to the receptionist. "Miss White, the gentleman who was just in here to see me—what color were his eyes?"

"Brown," she replied decisively. "I noticed them on his way out. Deep and warm and brown."

## IX

THOR sat in the lobby of the Farragut. He was wearing a dark suit, a hat and glasses, but he needed no more complicated a disguise. The trick was in the tilt of his head, the set of his shoulders, the muscles of his mouth, the gestures and mannerisms of movement. Thor the actor was playing an out-of-town business man reading a newspaper from home and chuckling over the local items. And he was enjoying his role.

There were no detectives in the vicinity and he wondered what Grange had in mind. Perhaps Grange was weakening and intended to buy off Thor. If so, Thor had orders to accept. And then to disregard the bargain. "Grange," Warren Mackiner had often said, "won't keep his word to you; never make the mistake of keeping yours to him."

Warren Mackiner had outlined three phases of the campaign against Grange. Sabotage, petty thievery and terror. The first had started the night Thor had entered the Grange residence. The sec-

ond had begun this afternoon with the organization of a business cabal. The third phase, the most dangerous and difficult of all, still lay ahead.

Thor glanced up as a bellhop marched sprucely across the lobby and sang out, "Calling Mr. Mackiner, calling Mr. Mackiner!"

Thor remained motionless. He'd let the boy make the rounds once. If nothing happened, Thor could get the message on the return trip. He watched the page head towards the door and turn down the east corridor. Behind him, walking leisurely but with his eyes darting to either side, came a small man with a high forehead, and with cheeks sunken in as if he were sucking at his gums.

A crook can spot a cop two blocks off, a confidence man can recognize a sucker without even looking at him. It becomes almost a matter of instinct, that perception of all-revealing trifles which mean nothing to the ordinary observer and everything to the expert. And by the same token, Thor could recognize a gangster when he saw one.

But Thor's perception was scientific and based on study. For hours on end, Warren Mackiner had shown him motion pictures of gangsters and racketeers and pointed out their characteristics. The arrogance of a man who depends on bluff, on the possession of a gun, who has to hide his fear both from cops and from his own kind. The type of dress, the details of tailoring. The gestures, walk, carriage. Thor knew at once what Turk Healy was, and consequently Thor let the bellhop pass by and return to the desk.

A couple of minutes later Thor took off his glasses, changed the crease of his hat and replaced it at a different angle. When he rose, he was no longer the out-of-town business man lounging in a hotel lobby. He was butler from his



shoes to his hair. His mouth had narrowed, his steps were short and mincing, his shoulders were bunched to conceal their breadth. Only his eyes, lidded to hide their color, were the same.

He walked quietly towards Healy who was standing near a potted palm. A cigarette dangled from his lips and a thin wisp of smoke curled upwards. Thor approached, coughed discreetly and said, "Beg pardon." His voice was not the voice of Thor Mackiner; it was a voice he used for this occasion only. "Beg pardon," he said.

The gangster swung around in surprise. "Who, me? What are you yap-pin' about?"

"Yapping?" Thor seemed to draw himself up to his full height, but his knees were still bent, his shoulders still hunched and sunken. "A dog yaps, sir; a man speaks."

Healy thought it was funny. "So you're a man, are you?"

"Mr. Grange's a man," said Thor with dignity. "I have a message from him."

"Well, spill it."

"I must be certain you're the party to whom I was instructed to deliver it."

"Listen," said Healy. "Any time you want a character reference on me, go down to Spitull's joint, see? But if you just want to identify, they got it all down at headquarters. Identification bureau, under the H's. Turk Healy. So you run along down there, and when you get back, just look around for me."

"It's hardly worth all that trouble, Mr. Healy. I was merely to tell you that something unforeseen had occurred and Mr. Grange wishes to see you. About eight-thirty, at his residence."

"Whyn't you say so right off, huh?"

"I had to be certain you were Mr. Healy."

"So now you know it, huh? Well, get

a load of me, Toots. Turk Healy himself. So the stuffed shirt wants me up at his joint, huh? You always call it a residence?"

"It's where he resides," said Thor.

Healy slapped him on the shoulder. "High-hatting me, huh? Well, better scram, Toots. The stuffed shirt might get lonesome for you."

**TURK HEALY** watched Thor trot meekly towards the front door. Probably the old boy hadn't been able to locate this Mackiner, decided Healy. Well, that was too bad. Here he had Pete and Hack and Pancho waiting outside in a cab, ready to mow this guy down so's Turk could collect his cash right on the line, and the mug never showed up. He headed slowly for the door.

It was a revolving door. A half minute ahead of him, Thor the butler entered it and just plain Thor came out the other side. A matter of adjusting his hat, throwing back his shoulders and letting the cramp out of his muscles. And so he walked a half dozen feet from a parked taxi in which three men, three revolvers and a machine gun were waiting to kill him. But as Thor expressed it later on, when he learned exactly what had happened—"not tonight, Josephine."

He headed for the somber, spacious pile of architecture in which Dawson Grange lived. The police guard had been removed and Thor felt the confidence of familiarity as he approached. He had entered and left twice, and under difficulties. Tonight there was only a watchman to worry about.

As soon as the street was deserted, Thor leapt the high iron fence, scurried across the lawn and started his ascent. He had picked out the place to climb. At an angle of the house where even

the ivy was in deep shadows and where he had a drain pipe to balance him, he scrambled up the rough ashlar blocks.

At the second story he hesitated and looked around. For a couple of seconds as he vaulted over the balcony he would be in plain view. Thereafter, comparative safety again.

He waited until he was sure the watchman was out of sight. Then Thor grabbed the stone balustrade, hoisted himself up and leaped. A moment later he was lying on the balcony outside Grange's study, above and a little to the side of the front door. He couldn't want a better place.

Around eight, he heard the door of the study open. Thor rolled deeper into the shadows and crouched, gazing through the tall French window. He saw Grange stride to his desk, turn on the lamp and start working on some papers. Thor made himself comfortable. He had a front row seat this evening.

Once, he thought he heard Linda Grange's voice, and his whole body seemed to flood with vitality. He wanted with a strange intensity to see her, but he knew that he couldn't tonight. Or any other night that he had to climb a fence and scramble up the side of the house. For the first time, he felt an emotion akin to shame. But he felt it vaguely, and had no word to call it.

Around eight-thirty a taxi pulled to the gate. Turk Healy's twanging voice, addressing himself as much as his companions, carried clearly from the street. "Now how the hell are you supposed to bust into this joint? The screws musta locked up and went off to breakfast." His nasal laugh was half sarcasm, half cough. Then he found the bell and rang it.

Thor heard the sounds of an argument as the gateman tried to keep

Healy out. It was followed by the noise of someone skidding on gravel, and then Healy strode confidently up the driveway. Thor, leaning over the edge of the balcony, could see him on the stoop below.

The front door opened part way and Benson's voice said, "Yes? You wished to see someone?"

"Who, me?" rasped Healy. "Naah—it's the other way round. The boss called me in. Tell him I'm here. Healy."

"The master left no word. If you'll wait outside a moment . . ."

But Turk Healy wasn't accustomed to wait outside. Except outside police offices, and with a guard to watch him. There was the usual sound of a scuffle, a raised voice and then retreating footsteps. Thor edged back to the window. He opened it a crack and kept his eyes at the slit.

Benson knocked discreetly before opening the study door. "Mr. Grange? A Mr. Healy claims he has an appointment with you. He's not exactly—ah . . ."

"Healy!" Grange knocked a pile of papers off the desk and banged his fist. "Tell the fellow I'm not here! Tell him he can't come here tonight or any other night! Tell him he's got the wrong house, that I don't live here, that I'll call the police if he tries to pester me! Tell him—"

Healy's voice, still nasal but a trifle weary with arguing, interrupted. "Save it, Jack. That ain't the way to talk about a pal."

Grange thundered, "Get out! Benson, throw him out!"

**T**HOR couldn't see the door, but he could imagine Benson's attempt. He heard the smack of a fist, the slipping of feet and then a thud. Healy marched into Thor's line of vision. "Jack," said

Healy, "you ain't even polite. Me, if I had a bungalow like this, I'd keep the door wide open, and drinks on the house."

Grange snapped, "Benson, you ninny, get out and close that door!" The door closed dutifully.

Grange yelled, "What's the meaning of this? And how did you find me?"

Healy grinned, took a cigarette out of his pocket and then saw the cigars. "I'll take one of these, Jack. Trouble with you is, you ain't got no manners. Making me come all the way up here and then trying to kick me out. What's on your mind, anyhow?" He bit off the end of Grange's cigar.

Grange said, "You won't get a damned cent out of me! I told you I'd meet you at the same place. And now, explain why you forced your way in."

"Just told you, Jack. The bellhop at the Farragut, he yells for this Mackiner and I tail him, not too close and not too far. But this Mackiner guy ain't there, and then one of them flunkys of yours tags me and says the boss wants to see me. So here I am."

"I sent nobody there, you brainless nitwit! You've been fooled!"

"I've been fooled?" sneered Healy.

"That's a good one. If there's any jackasses around, it's my old friend Jack Dawson of the horse marines. In person." He cackled sarcastically.

Grange rubbed his lips. "You say a servant of mine told you to come here? What did he look like? Blond, blue eyes, well-built?"

"Naah. He was dark and his eyes was dark too, and he had shoulders on him like he died of TB years ago."

Grange shook his head. "That's not him. He must have someone else working with him."

"Another guy to knock off?" asked Healy eagerly.

"I told you the other night you're killing nobody."

"For five grand," added Healy. "You welsh on that too—" He sat down and stuck his feet on the desk. Grange rose and slapped them off.

"You guttersnipe!" he roared. "Get back into the street where you belong! Why, you little water-brained, dyspeptic degenerate! You dumb, moronic bundle of hot air! You damned little hoodlum! You—"

Grange broke off as Healy pulled a gun and snapped, "Cut it, Jack! Think you're damn good, just 'cause you got a few sawbucks in the bank, huh? Listen, heel—I'd just as soon cut you down as this Mackiner guy. No stuffed shirt ain't gonna tell me where to get off and then shell out a few lousy bucks. As far as I'm concerned, you stink. Get it, Jack? You stink!"

Grange sat down slowly. "Suppose we call it all off, Healy. I seem to have made a mistake. I didn't want to kill anybody, and you seem to think I did. This isn't a matter that's going to court. You have five thousand dollars that you didn't work for. Keep it, and we'll both forget this ever happened."

"That's what you say, Jack. But it ain't so easy. You remember the booths we was in, huh? Well, it seems one of 'em wasn't empty. Seems a pal of mine was in there all the time and heard what we said. He wanted to have a little talk with you and see if you'd come across. But I says no. I says it's between you and me, and you're all right. But you're not. So I'm goin' back to this guy and I'm gonna say, 'Doc,' I'll say, 'you was right about this Grange guy. You want to hop around and see him, and you don't wanna take a cent less than ten grand.' Get it, Jack?"

Grange's mouth was thin, angry.

Thor pushed the window slightly, and as it opened a draft blew in and the curtains flapped. Neither of the two men noticed.

Grange stood up. "I called you a degenerate and a guttersnipe," he snapped, "but the words I ought to call you haven't been made up yet. I'll tell you this, Healy. You can't scare me. You seem to think I'm as soft and stupid as the servants you pushed around. Why, you cheap little four-flusher! You haven't even the nerve to shoot because you know damn well you'd get the chair! So put that damn thing away before I throw it out of the window. And you after it!"

**M**AYBE it was courage and maybe it was just stupidity. But Grange didn't see what Thor saw. The whitening of the knuckles on Healy's trigger guard, the distending of a little vein on Healy's temple, the skin vibrations as his pulses beat, beat him into killing fury.

Thor yelled suddenly and leaped. He did it deliberately, with no particular feeling or emotion. But Grange belonged to him, to despoil and ruin, and nobody else had the right to kill him off. Least of all a snarling little gunman, ready to shoot because his vanity was hurt. Ready to shoot Thor or shoot Grange or shoot both of them.

So Thor the machine went into action. At his yell, the gun swerved and swung towards him. The chair he picked up went skidding and scraping in front of him, while he dived low and to the side. Healy's revolver barked three times, thunder and acrid smoke boxed up within the confines of the study. But Healy's eyes were on the last place Thor had been and Healy's bullets went ploughing into the leather seat of the chair.

Thor and the chair crashed into Healy at the same moment. He smashed against the desk, tried to point his revolver downward and felt it ripped out of his hand. Three of his fingers snapped back and dangled helplessly. A man and a fist rose up from the floor. The fist shot out, a strange twisting blow that seemed to unfold too slowly, hesitate and then curl and crash on the parietal lobe of Healy's brain. The blackness of sudden night sheeted him. When he came to later on, he had a nasty bruise and a throbbing headache. Thor had put almost too much power into that blow. Almost enough to kill a man.

He stood up. As swiftly as he had exploded into action, just as swiftly he was calm, self-possessed, his mouth faintly smiling and his eyes lidded.

"Grange," he said. "You shouldn't lose your temper like that."

Then he heard voices yelling and feet running towards the study. After those shots, the watchman would be on the lookout and Thor couldn't risk scrambling in full view down the outside wall of the house. Even the shadows wouldn't help. The watchman would have a flashlight as well as gun.

Thor lowered his head and charged at the doorway. He kept his face hidden behind his raised elbow. Benson, running in the opposite direction, spread his arms to grab Thor. Thor merely put on speed, lowered his head and butted. Benson was knocked off his feet and slammed into the wall. He tried to get up, but the pain in his shoulder made him groan and he sat there stupidly, unable to move.

At the head of the stairs Thor wheeled, slapped one hand on the banister and vaulted into space. He landed lightly as a cat on his bare feet. Landed lightly and kept running.

Pull the bolt and push that bar down. He remembered Linda's explanation of the other night. The front door swung and slammed behind him. He went sprinting down the driveway.

A shot rang out. He saw the watchman tearing across the lawn. Must have been on the other side of the house and then dashed across the grounds to see what was happening in front.

Thor crouched low, zigzagging and keeping his body a bare yard above the ground. He'd practised it often, dashing at full speed, hunched, weaving, darting at unexpected angles so that the target he presented was small and elusive.

The shots kept coming. He was through the gate, but the street beyond was brightly lit and the watchman could stand on the curb and pick him off. In the darkness of the driveway it was easy to escape, but under the street lamps it would be different. And how near would a cop be?

Very near. Thor saw one running towards him.

The cab was still waiting in front of the gate. Thor yelled, "Get going!" tore the door open and flung himself inside. Gears ground and the taxi jerked into movement. Thor looked up. Three big men, grim-faced and with automatics nudging at his head and shoulders, stared down.

After a while one of them spoke. "Well," he said coldly. "What in hell did you do to Healy?"

Thor straightened slightly. The muzzles of the three revolvers were cold and murderous against his temples.

## X

**T**HE nervous bird-like little man at the wheel rolled the cab into a small West-side garage. "Okay," he said

cheerfully. "Nobody around. Gonna need me any more?"

The big broad man, spare and wide in the shoulders, with a thin slit for a mouth and a scar across his lips, answered. "Stick around," he snapped "Wait'll we find out what happened to Turk."

The little bird-like man sighed. "So I got to stay here while you have all the fun, huh?"

"Pipe down, Joey," ordered Slit-lips. "Pipe down before I roll you up inside a spare tire."

"Sure," chirped Joey. "But are the cops after us or aren't they? Do I keep this cab license or do I junk it for one of the spares?"

"Ask him," said Slit-lips gruffly. He nudged Thor and barked, "All right, you. Up them stairs."

Thor obeyed. He realized by now what had happened. Five men, including the taxi driver, had been hired for the job of killing him. And when he had dashed out of Grange's house, he had thrown himself straight into their arms.

Well, at least they didn't know who he was. He wondered how much time he had. If Grange turned Healy over to the police, Thor had plenty of time and no worries. But if Grange secured Healy's release for fear that he'd talk, then Thor stood a hair's breadth from death.

He climbed the stairs thoughtfully, up to a big office-like room with a high ceiling and old furniture, peeling walls and dirt-coated windows. Always he remembered that room and that ordeal by the smell. Old decayed wood and dry paint, mustiness and thick dust and bacteria, and, filtering up from below, the odor of engine oil and leaded gas.

A square-faced man, serious and respectable in appearance, was seated at

a desk. He jumped up at sight of Thor and the three men with drawn guns. "What happened, Pancho?" he demanded. "Who's this guy and where's Turk?"

Slit-lips replied. "That's what we're gonna find out, Doc. Turk goes into the hotel and gets told somethin' happened and to go on up to Grange's at eighty-three. We're waitin' outside, and all of a sudden we hear shots and then this bozo comes lammin' out with a watchman after him, jumps in the cab and tells Joey to get goin'. Well, there's a cop at the other end of the block and no sign of Turk, so Joey goes. We bring the bozo back here. He ain't talked—yet."

Thor sat down. Besides Doc and Pancho, there was a big, beefy man with heavy features, and a short, stocky man with a bald head.

Doc said coldly, "Well, you—what happened to Healy? And who the hell are you?"

Thor shrugged. "I got your friend Healy out of a jam, that's all."

"Yeah? And who fired those shots?"

"Healy. That's the jam I got him out of."

Pancho grabbed Thor's shoulder. "Spill it, wise guy."

Thor said, "Why not wait for Healy to show up, and then get the story from him?"

"And suppose he don't show up, huh? Suppose you're just trying to stall along."

The big, beefy man got excited. "Th—that's it, Pancho!" he exclaimed. "This guy—he's stallin'. Bang it out of him, Pancho—bang it out!"

Pancho's hand streaked out and Thor's head rolled, taking the merest edge of the blow. At the same time Thor's hand whipped out. It was like a bouncing ball, it happened so fast.

Pancho slapped out and the slap came back and almost knocked his head off his shoulders. He staggered away, holding his head and moving it cautiously. "Geez!" he said. "Geez!"

The big, beefy man raised his gun. His eyes were red at the rims and his mouth curled angrily. Pancho said, "Geez, what a wallop! Take it easy, Pete."

Pete glanced at Pancho and lowered the gun slightly. Thor sat down on the edge of the table. Doc said, "Listen, you guys—use your brains, if you got any. Give this mug a chance to talk. If he won't, it's time enough to turn you loose on him. Alright then. What's your name?"

"Sam," replied Thor.

"Sam what?"

"Sam Durgin."

"Now tell us what happened."

**T**HOR shrugged. "Nothing much. Grange keeps a lot of loose money around his place and that's cash appeal. I can't resist it. So I sneaked into his place and climbed up a balcony. I was waiting for my chance when your friend Healy came in. He got into an argument with Grange and pulled a gun. I went in and stopped him. That's all. Murder a guy like Grange and you write your own ticket to the chair. So I figure I helped Healy out."

"Pal of yours?" demanded Doc sarcastically.

"No. But if Grange gets shot I have a tough time getting out of the place. And if I don't get out, I have an even tougher time explaining. So I stopped it."

Doc stared for a long while. Thor had spoken simply, and to the point. He realized now that he hadn't made much of an impression. He should have piled it on thicker, worked on his audi-

ence and made some sort of appeal. But Thor had had little experience with people, his training had been so isolated that he lacked the power of persuasion. Lacked it and decided it was something he had to acquire.

Presently Doc said, "You believe him, Pancho?"

"No."

"You, Hack?"

The stocky man with the bald top shook his head. "No."

"Pete?"

"Me? Hell no!"

"Makes it unanimous," declared Doc. "Now let's have the real story."

"Bang it out of him!" yelled Pete again. He moved slowly across the room. His gun was in his left hand, but his right hand was clenched.

His punch shot up and out, booming towards Thor's mouth. Thor's head turned and slid back so that the blow caught him in the cheek while it was traveling in the same direction. Simultaneously he grabbed for the gun barrel and swung it away from him. The gun thundered once and then wrenched loose. Thor's knee thrust upwards and he grabbed Pete's elbow and applied pressure.

Pete's whole body twisted. Thor grabbed his wrist and pulled on it. Pete yelled, but he was powerless. All Thor had to do was press down on the wrist, and Pete moved with it or risked a broken arm.

"Stay back, the bunch of you!" ordered Thor. He was screened by Pete's body and he had the trio covered with the automatic that he poked from under Pete's armpit.

He edged back slowly, in the direction of the door. Edged backwards and bumped into something two yards from the door.

"Drop it!" chirped the little taxi

driver. "Drop it and let him go!"

Thor felt something sharp prod his back. Was the little fellow bluffing or did he have a gun? He wouldn't risk carrying one around while he drove a taxi, and yet he might have picked it up downstairs.

Thor tried to read the answer in the three faces staring at him from the other end of the room. Then he dropped the automatic and released his hold on Pete.

Joey's laughter was high and merry as he held out his empty hands. So he'd been bluffing after all!

"Sap!" he jeered. "You shoulda known I didn't have no heater!" And the rest of the gang laughed and called out, "Good work, Joey! You sure saved it that time!"

Thor's face was expressionless as he stepped across the room and sat down where Doc told him.

They made no further attempts to force him to speak. They realized that he was at his most dangerous when they had their hands on him, and they preferred to wait in the hope of Healy's return.

As far as Thor was concerned, escape was out of the question. So he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Within a minute he was asleep.

Footsteps woke him up, and he came to with complete alertness. The little bird-like Joey had gone. Four men were playing cards in the center of the room, four guns were resting on the corners of the table. The door had opened and Healy was walking in.

He looked tired. His hand was bandaged and his shoulders sagged and he rubbed his forehead and his eyes were cloudy. He muttered, "Hello, boys." Then he sighted Thor. "Hey!" he cried. "You got him!"

DOC said, "Him? He got in the cab with the boys and they brought him along. Who is he?"

Healy took a deep breath. Three fingers were sprained and his head ached and he felt weary to death, but the sight of Thor was like a tonic. "Mackiner!" he said in his nasal voice. "The guy we got paid to bump. Come on, you—let's get it over with."

Thor didn't move a muscle. He said, "You're a fool, Healy. Grange is playing you for fish and you don't even know it. I got you out of one jam tonight—do I have to do it all over again?"

Healy rubbed his forehead. "You got a mean left, but you ain't gonna use it again, see? Nobody socks Healy and gets away with it."

Thor said, "What happened after I left?"

Healy laughed through his nose. "All the flunkies run around in figure eights and then the cops come and the stuffed shirt, he hands out a story of how I come up to get something out of him and pull a gun, and so he got sore and socked me. Then he says how it wasn't my fault and he don't want to see no poor guy get put in the hoose-gow and so he won't bring no charges. He hands me ten bucks and tells me to go on out and get a room and a meal. Geez, what an act!"

Doc said, "It don't make sense."

"Sure it does. Listen, Mackiner here gets a friend of his to tell me to go up to Grange's, see? When I get there, Grange is sore 'cause he figured I didn't know who he was. Jack Dawson, he calls himself. So he's sore I had 'too much brains for him and found out, and when he gets sore I get sore too and tell him he's going to shell out. I tell him about you, Doc, how you heard what he told me, and he gets scared of

that. He don't want me to talk to no cops, and that's why he puts on the act and lets me go. Now all we got to do is bump Mackiner and then we collect the other five grand."

Thor said, "You're a damn fool, Healy. He's scared of me—not you. Why else does he want me killed?"

"Nuts," said Healy.

"You'd have shot him tonight and gotten the chair sure. And thrown away enough money to retire on."

"Nuts," said Healy. He sat down and held his head. It was throbbing like mad and he wanted to kill Thor and get to bed. But Doc wasn't so sure.

"What's that about dough?" he demanded.

"Grange has plenty," said Thor, "so why sell out for a measly five grand? I got a racket that says fifty grand a clip. Maybe you guys would like a cut."

Pancho began to get the idea. "Yeah," he said. "Maybe this mug's got something. Grange don't want him killed just for the exercise. What's your racket, Mackiner?"

"Stick around and watch."

Healy's nasal voice interrupted. "He's trying to crawl out of it."

Doc shook his head. "It don't make sense to me, the way Grange let you go, Turk. A guy like him, all he has to do is say you're a liar and everybody'll believe him. It ain't as if there was justice in the world. So why'd he let you go if it wasn't on account of Mackiner?"

"He's stringing you, Doc, and I got a new angle," said Healy. He felt punk and didn't want to argue. "Grange is tough, see? But he's got a daughter and she'll shell out without a squawk."

"How?"

"Snatch her and find out what she knows. That's the start, see?"



Thor strode across the room and faced the gangster. "Healy, lay off her or you'll get trouble."

"Nuts," said Healy. He held his head in his hands. The throbbing was growing worse and he could hardly think any more. "Nuts," he said. "I got a headache. Now get the hell out, all of you!"

The next morning Thor bought a paper. Grange's picture was on the front page, and next to it the headlines:

MILLIONAIRE DISARMS  
GUNMAN  
Insists On Release Of Would-be  
Assailant

Pity, Not Revenge, Rules His  
Life, States Dawson  
Grange

Thor read the account. Grange had side-stepped a bad situation, and Thor had to admire his presence of mind and the bluff that had carried it through.

But Healy complicated the situation. Sooner or later Thor would have to make good his promise to give the Healy gang a cut. And a large one. It was that, or face a machine gun. And though Warren Mackiner's genius had taught Thor many things, it had never taught him how to dodge the spray of bullets from a machine gun.

Which was unfortunate.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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THIEVES and  
BLACKGUARDS,  
—BUT**

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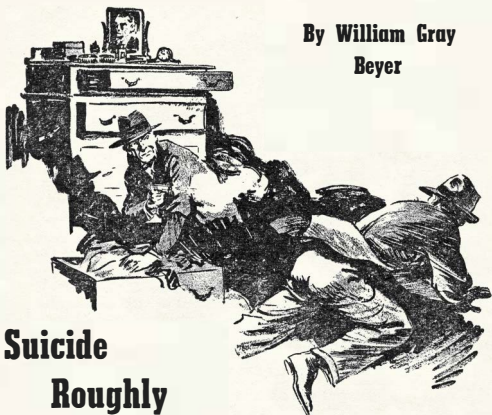
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By William Gray  
Beyer



## Suicide Roughly

*A taproom shooting runs the gamut from suicide to accident to murder—all on the strength of hunches*

I

IT AIN'T often that the Homicide Department goes out to drum up trade. As a general rule business comes in pretty regular without us advertising for it. People commit murders for all sorts of reasons, in all kinds of weather. There's no seasonal slumps and we usually manage to keep fairly busy. When you come to think of it, we got a pretty good racket.

But in spite of the regularity of the business, every so often we get a breathing spell when every case on the books is closed and no new ones have

come up. This don't happen often, mind you, but when it does, everybody gets the jitters waiting for something to bust loose. It was during one of these temporary lapses that me and Tim Casey was sitting in the station house wishing for a race riot or something. Tim had just turned off the radio because some guy was telling him about the marvelous qualities of his brand of face powder. I think Tim got insulted when the guy suggested that he shove a handful of it in his mouth and chew it, to prove how free from grit it was. As he snapped the switch and spit on the floor to get the imaginary face powder out of his

mouth, Tim fixed a baleful eye on me.

"How about you going out and conking somebody," he suggested. "Then I'll solve the murder."

I glanced at the clock. "In five minutes I'm through for the day," I reminded. "And I never kill anybody on my own time. Besides, you couldn't solve anything without me. And if I done the dirty deed, I wouldn't help you."

Tim grunts, disdainful like, as if to imply that my valuable assistance wasn't indispensable. But he decides not to put that into words. "Let's hit a beer," he says instead.

We took my car, being off duty and not entitled to use a squad buggy. And Tim didn't own one. He claimed that even though he was drawing a sergeant's salary, he couldn't afford a car of his own on account of having a flock of kids to feed. Myself, I figure he either fed them hummingbird's wings or else he had a sock tucked away. On a first-class detective's salary, I always managed to have a jalopy, and I had as many mouths to feed as him. And most of them were blondes, who can eat more than any kid. So accordingly I worked him for a tankful of gas.

After we left the gas station I headed for a tavern where you meet the right sort of people. The place wasn't exactly to Tim's liking, but I was driving the car. Tim's taste runs to nickel beers and dime shots. He feels more comfortable in that kind of a joint, probably because there's never a crease in his pants and his coat usually looks as if he'd hung it up on the floor. But me, being the Beau Brummel of the Homicide Squad, I prefer a filling station with more class. As I said, you're more apt to meet the right sort of people where the beers cost twenty cents and the liquor slides down real smooth

and then sneaks up and kicks you in the pants.

"I can't see the sense of it," says Tim. "They got the same brand of beer down at Brady's for a nickel, and what's more the glasses are bigger. Why, they ain't even got a dart board here!"

"Yeah," I remarks, "but in a place like this they got atmosphere. And I don't mean the kind that smells like stale beer and disinfectant."

"Sure. Fifteen cents worth of atmosphere with every beer," he growls. "I'd rather pay a nickel for the beer and then go over to the art gallery for the atmosphere."

**T**HIS sort of light-hearted banter goes on for the space of three beers with Scotch chasers, when I realize that Tim's right. I'm certainly not enjoying the expensive surroundings when I have to argue with him. So I finally gave up and piloted my jalopy around to Brady's, which ain't really such a bad place if you're merely intent on oiling your tonsils and would just as soon get your swing band off of a record.

"This is more like it," sighs Tim, as we sidle up to the bar at the end where the dart board is located. "Two beers, with no more than four inches of collar," he orders, plunking down a dime. "Wanta shoot a game? Loser pays for the next round."

This was a very subtle dodge of Tim's calculated to appeal to my sporting blood. He always beat me, mainly because I don't usually bend the elbow at dives where they cater to the dart-shooting element, and therefore don't get much practice. Tim, on the other hand, is an expert, and foxy in the bargain. He never beats me by much of a margin, though I suspect that he could if he wanted to. Evidence to support this is the fact that no matter how

good a game I might be having, Tim's game always improves just enough to nose me out. As a result he never pays for any but the first drink, which is always a beer. After that he orders Scotch on me.

He hands me a dart and I flip it at the cork. But I must've had some outside English on it because it missed by a couple inches. Tim's dart sticks plumb in the center, which entitles him to shoot last. This little detail is very important the way Tim plays, because no matter what score I make on a number he has a chance to equal it or barely beat it. But if he shot first, he'd have to shoot his best to be sure of keeping ahead. And then he might lick me by such a big margin that I'd get discouraged and quit on him. So Tim always makes a special effort to beat me to the cork so that his supply of free Scotch won't be cut off. It's easy to see why I work him for a few gallons of gas when I get a chance.

Me being first Tim handed me the third dart and I went to pull the other two out of the board. That gave me a chance to notice a peculiar thing that I might have missed if it hadn't been for his cork shot. For his dart had not only smacked into the board dead center, but it was buried clear up to the wood. Pulling it out required no effort at all. It wasn't even necessary to wiggle it to get it loose. It *was* loose. The steel point was resting in a hole, slightly less than a quarter-inch in diameter, which went clear through the board! The cork was painted a dark blue, the same as the outer area of the board, and the blackness of the hole wasn't noticeable except at close inspection.

"What happened to the board?" I asked the barman. "Somebody trying out a new drill?"

He leaned over the bar and looked at the hole, but just shook his head.

The game progressed in the usual manner. I clipped off a thirty-five in the nine innings, which was a good game for me, but Tim, with a great show of very careful shooting, made a forty. I grinned to myself as I considered the fact that he could have made it forty-five without even trying.

But Tim's too good a guy to begrudge a few drinks, even if he does win them that way. And being single I don't have to feel that I'm robbing a wife and kids every time I buy a drink. I imagine that's the way Tim would feel if he was setting them up instead of winning them. And as I said, Tim's a pretty good guy. He don't take all the credit when we solve a case, as he could easily do, him being a sergeant and me only first-class. Far from it. It's always "we" when Tim's telling about one of our cases. He leans over backward in that respect. Which is one of the reasons why the team of Casey and Burns is generally known to be unbeatable. We work together, though you'd never know it to listen to us wrangle.

I was just aiming for a very careful cork shot, in the vain hope of getting the dart so close to the center that Tim couldn't get closer, when a minor commotion in a booth at my back spoiled my shot. Like a temperamental golf ball it flew way out in the rough over by the double six.

"I'm getting tired of it all!" shouted the disturbance in the booth. "Same old grind every day. And what do I get out of it? The only fun I have is drinking, and that gives me a headache."

I watched the guy next to him calm him down, while Tim nonchalantly placed his dart about an inch nearer the cork than mine.

"Take it easy," said this lad, while the two girls across the table from them looked bug-eyed. "What you need is another drink. Life's not so bad. If you don't believe me, take a look at the gorgeous creatures helping us with this bottle."

The "gorgeous creatures" seemed to perk up a little when he said that, and tried a couple of sickly smiles. I was thinking at the time that neither of them was gorgeous enough to accompany me to a murder, but every man to his taste. Which was a funny thing to be thinking, the way things turned out.

I didn't pay any more attention to what went on in the booth, because I happened to glance at the board and saw where Tim's dart landed. As a matter of fact I was chuckling inside at the way Tim stuck to his teasing method of barely beating me with every shot. And I forgot all about the guy who was "tired of it all."

## II

**B**UT I remembered all of a sudden in another minute or two. Tim was taking elaborate aim at the four when the commotion broke out again.

"Don't try to stop me!" says the screwball. "I'm going to put an end to a useless existence!"

The goof was pretty wild-eyed when he said that, but I didn't take him very serious. I've known guys that got that way every time they smelled a cork. Those kind are the same as a lot of other drunks that suddenly decide they want to attract attention. They're usually quiet inoffensive guys when they're sober, but feel that they've got to be the life of the party when they're tanked. You know, the kind that sing on trolley cars and argue with cops.

But this particular stew fooled me. Before I could do more than take a step he had whipped out an automatic, put it up to his ear, and squeezed the trigger!

He got a very funny look on his pan just before he toppled off the seat. He looked kind of amazed, like a guy that's shot when he don't expect it. The other peculiar thing that I noticed in that split second—though neither thing sunk in very far at the time—was that the lug along side of him didn't seem very surprised or perturbed about the whole thing. He hadn't made a move to stop the suicide, even though he was on the guy's right and could have reached the gun, or at least tried to. Nor did he shout or show any sign of being upset when his pal dropped a slug into his brain. The girls, on the other hand, let out a couple of screams that they could have rented out to a locomotive engineer.

Right at that moment Tim grabbed me by the arm and pulled me back toward the bar.

"We're off duty, you dope," he reminded. "And besides it's out of our department. Let some of the other monkeys handle it."

He was right, of course. If there was a crime to be solved, neither of us would have considered whether the city was shelling out for our time. But this was open and shut. It was bad enough that we would have to show up at the coroner's inquest as witnesses, without spending a couple hours of our own time doing a routine job of taking names and addresses and getting the statements of the other witnesses.

The bartender called the cops and a radio car arrived in two minutes flat. Tim and me leaned against the bar, getting a kick out of watching somebody else work. Tim forgot himself

and shoved out a bill and ordered Scotch. We had just put that one down when a couple of plainclothes men showed up. They spotted us right away. First they looked surprised, then mad. It turned out that they had been partners in a cut-throat pinochle game a few minutes ago. And at the moment when their desk sergeant had sent them out to cover this business, they had been about to set their opponents up on an over-bid. They were plenty mad about it on account of they were playing a dollar a game.

"You're gettin' paid, ain't you?" Tim pointed out. "Go into your act and forget we're around. We're homicide men, anyway."

"Stick around," one of them growls. "If I get any madder there's liable to be a homicide."

IT DIDN'T take long to straighten things out. Tim and I told what we saw, and the plainclothes boys got all the dope on who the guy was from the lad who sat beside him. The dead man was George Cummings, a buyer for a gyp jewelry house.

The other guy, James Medway by name, describes himself as a "gem speculator." This, he explains, is a man who buys up stones at auctions and forced sales, and hangs on to them until he can find a buyer at a decent price. Personally I didn't like this gent's looks. He was a little too smooth to suit me. He answered all the questions without getting flustered or showing that he was nervous or ill at ease in any way. He gave me the impression of expecting each question and having the answer all ready on the tip of his tongue. And what's more he didn't seem to give a damn whether it was a friend of his that lay on the floor or some unknown Scowegian which had just fallen off a

glacier and happened to land there. Which is probably why I didn't like him. I know if somebody I had been hoisting them with had bumped himself off, I would have felt kind of bad about it.

One of the harness cops picked up the automatic and was looking it over when I happened to glance at him and saw something unusual about the rod. He handed it over when I asked him. The thing was a target automatic, twenty-two caliber, with five inches of rifling in its barrel, and a magazine designed to hold nine bullets. Ten shots . . . counting the one in the chamber. It was a special job, and fully as heavy as my thirty-eight. I'd heard about guns like it, but I'd never run across one before. They were supposed to be a marvel for accuracy and with plenty of muzzle velocity with high-speed shells.

Idly I counted the cartridges in the clip. There were seven, and one in the chamber. And considering that there was one in the guy's head, I deduced that he hadn't replaced the ninth one in the clip when he had pumped one into the chamber. That was odd, because a man usually carries his gun fully loaded. But it didn't impress me very much, him being a jewelry buyer and not a cop or a gunman. I passed the rod over to Tim, but he just grunted and handed it back. That was because he don't like automatics and still has the idea that revolvers are the more dependable gun.

And that, like a lot of popular ideas, is only half right. As a matter of fact an automatic is only undependable when it's not treated right. A dirty shell or a few grains of sand will jam them. Pocket lint will raise hell with their mechanism. But if the user keeps his automatic clean and properly oiled, it will shoot as straight as any revolver

of similar size, and a whole lot faster. And that last item can very well mean the difference between a whole skin and one with a hole in it.

The powers that run police forces, however, are wise enough to know that some of the dopes that get by the civil service examinations haven't enough brains to see that fact, and therefore they require them to carry revolvers, which are closer to being foolproof. I hesitated slightly when I handed the twenty-two back to the cop, wondering if there was any chance of me lifting it when nobody was looking. I had a hankering to experiment with the thing, to see if it was as accurate as I'd heard

In about fifteen minutes the taproom was almost back to normal. The detectives had bundled off the two girls and the smooth Mr. Medway to have them sign typewritten statements. The girls had wept brine all over the place, insisting that they had never seen either of the two gents before they met them in the taproom, and that the cops were spoiling their whole evening, taking them away like that. Medway just smiled and went along without saying a word. And, of course, neither did the corpse when they heaved it in the morgue wagon. His top-coat, a light tan one with big patch pockets, they tossed on the floor beside him, not caring whether it got dirty or not.

**T**IM and me went back to the dart game. We started in the fourth inning where we had left off. When the stew had put on his act, I had been two runs ahead but by the time I finished the eighth I was eleven behind. Tim very foxily threw off with the first two darts and then made a single with the third, making me twelve behind.

"Shoot for the cork," he suggested.

"Counts ten on the first dart. Then make all you can with the other two. You can't say I ain't a sport."

"No, no, of course not," I agreed. "You'd risk a buck on a horse anytime—if you knew the race was fixed."

But I took him up on it anyhow. There's always a chance of a miracle. And the miracle happened! With a dead sounding plunk the first dart landed smack in the center of the cork! That counted ten points, according to Tim's offer, but all of a sudden I lost interest in making more points with the other two darts. The reason for that was that I noticed a thin dribble of white powder trickle out from behind the board.

I didn't even throw the other two darts. It was silly anyway. Even if I had made two triples, Tim would have come through with a miraculous seven. But I wasn't thinking of that. I had to find out why there was so much plaster dropping on the floor. The few darts that would go through that hole couldn't account for it. Checking up wasn't such a big job. I loosened a screw with the blade of my pocket knife and pulled the board away from the wall.

"What the hell goes on?" queried Tim.

I didn't answer right away. I was busy digging with the small blade of my knife in the hole that was directly back of the spot where the cork had been. In a minute I had it . . . a small slug of lead less than a quarter of an inch in diameter. I held it up so Tim could see it

"A twenty-two," he said. "So what?" "So it was a twenty-two that the jewelry guy used," I reminded.

"Oh, I see," Tim says, very judicious. "You mean that the bullet passed through his head and landed in the

dart board fifteen minutes before he shot it?"

Ignoring Tim's silly remark I colored the barkeep. "That hole in the dart board was caused by a bullet," I informed him. "Did anybody shoot off a gun before we came in?"

"Not since I came on duty. But then that was only an hour ago."

"That guy that shot himself," I pursued, "was he here when you went to work?"

"No. The four of them came in right after . . . two at a time. First the girls, who ordered beer . . . then the two gents, who stood at the bar and had straight rye. The girls gave them the eye and they sat down and bought a bottle."

"Uh-huh," I mused, trying to make something out of it, but failing. "Pour a couple Scotch. Have one yourself."

"Thanks. I'll take a cigar." He pours the Scotch, takes a three-cent cigar out of a box and removes seventy-five cents from the bill I shoved across the bar.

"Did you ever see those two guys before tonight?" I inquire.

"Yeah, once. They were in here last night when I came on. Had a couple of girls in the same booth they were in tonight. Different girls, though. They took them out right after I came on."

"I see. Pour a couple of short beers for chasers. Have one yourself."

"Thanks. I'll take a cigar." He pours the beers and takes another cigar, deducting fifteen cents from the remaining quarter You can't win.

"I know I'm dumb," sighs Tim. "But what's it all about? Let me in on your brain wave."

"I'm not so sure," I confessed, screwing the dart board back against the wall. "I just got a hunch."

"You and your hunches!" snorts Tim. "What about?"

"Murder. I got a hunch that suicide was caused."

### III

TIM almost choked on his drink. He spluttered a little, set down the glass, and then got kind of red in the face. It was almost a minute before he decided he could talk.

"You feelin' all right?" he inquires, real calm.

"Sure, sure."

"Then maybe it's your eyes," he concludes. "Me, I saw the guy shoot hisself."

"Yeah, I know. But did you notice how surprised he looked? Almost as if he didn't think the gun was loaded."

"Phooey! That often happens. It's like a guy sees something just when he's dying, and it registers on his face in that last second. Maybe he was expecting to see Saint Peter and instead it's the guy with the horns."

I shook my head, unconvinced, and took a sip of my Scotch.

"And besides," Tim clinches, "he said he was tired of it all. And then he said he was going to put an end to a useless existence. That shows he intended to give himself the works and he done it."

"Now you're arguing on my side," I said. "Nobody talks like that unless they're putting on an act. 'Tired of it all.' 'Put an end to a useless existence.' Sounds like a melodrama."

"Phooey again! Why don't you wait for the murders to come to us instead of trying to make them where they ain't?"

"This one landed right in our lap," I claimed. "Look. Suppose we take this slug down to ballistics, and ask them to see if it matches up with the one in the guy's head. If it does, that



ought to prove something, oughtn't it?"

"Sure. It'll prove that they came out of the same gun. That's all. The barkeep said the guy was in here yesterday. He just tried a little target practice. Where's that get you?"

That had me stumped. "Well let's try it anyhow. I might think of something."

"With what?" Tim remarks, looking at his watch. "Me, I'm a married man. I got a lovin' wife who is probably glarin' at a cold steak and an empty chair. I'll see you tomorrow."

Tim left, taking the subway. But the look on that jewelry guy's face was haunting me, so I hopped in the jalopy and headed back to the station. The ballistics man told me he'd have the dope in the morning.

**T**IM beat me to work the next day. He was listening to the radio when I arrived, after stopping first at ballistics. I didn't waste any time breaking the news.

"They matched!" I chortled, showing him a report.

Tim just shook his head, and handed it back.

"But look, Tim," I pleaded. "There's some reason why he took a shot at the dart board. Let's find out. I got a hunch, I tell you."

"Sure there's a reason. Didn't you ever notice how the cork on a dart board looks about the same as the bulls eye on a target?"

"All right, maybe that's it," I admitted. "But let's make sure. I got a hunch."

Tim grumbled about wasting time, but seeing that we weren't doing anything anyway, and the captain was getting tired of looking at us, we wound up at Brady's bar. The day man was on duty, and he exploded when I in-

formed him that the guy who rubbed himself out had also shot a hole in the dart board.

"So that's who it was!" he chirps. "That dope! Well what do you know about that?"

"Look, Toots," I says, real patient. "We came in here to find out what *you* know about it."

"Me? I didn't know nothin'. I was tendin' bar."

"Of course. But what did you see? How did he come to perforate the dart board?"

"Oh. Well he just let fly with an automatic and hit it smack in the middle of the cork. I soaked him a half buck for the damage."

Tim was grinning and looking very superior.

"Look, Toots," I says, feeling kind of desperate. "Tell me everything you noticed about him from the time he came in. Who he was with and everything he did."

"Oh," says the barkeep, trying to think. "Best I can remember, they came in about four o'clock. The guy with the gun—though of course I couldn't see the gun then—and another guy and two girls. They sits at that booth over there and orders a bottle of rye. For about a half-hour they're quiet and I don't pay no attention to them, havin' other things to do. Then all of a sudden this guy yells that he's tired of it all and yanks out his rod. He aims it at his head and pulls the trigger. But it don't go off. It just clicks."

Tim's grin has faded by this time, and I got one. "Keep going, brother," I prompts. "What next?"

"Why, the guy takes the gun down from his head and does something to it. Then, like I said, he aims it at the dart board and it goes off! Then he laughs at the look on the girls' faces,

and puts the gun away. The other guy laughs too. About that time I wake up and go over and raise hell about the hole in the dart board. The guy musta been some kind of a screwball."

About this time I notice the visible part of Tim's neck beginning to get red. To look at his face now you'd never think that it could be made to register a smile.

"All right," he growls. "So the guy was in the habit of pullin' an act to thrill the girls. And the last time he made a mistake and left a bullet in the chamber. So what? Is that murder?"

"No, and it ain't suicide either," I chortles.

"Okay then, Sherlock," says Tim. "We'll tell them all about it at the coroner's inquest and they'll call it accidental death. Let's have a beer."

"Nothing doing," I returns. "Let's have Scotch. I think better on Scotch."

"I hadn't noticed," says Tim, putting his dime back in his pocket when I flashed a bill.

**I** DIDN'T taste that drink. I was still thinking about the screwball, Cummings, and his "gem speculator" friend, Medway. And there still seemed to be something fishy about the set-up. Suddenly I got it.

"Say! Why didn't that guy Medway mention something about that suicide act being a gag? Answer me that!"

Tim set down his glass and got a very resigned look on his pan. "Still got hunchophobia, hey? You're not satisfied with suicide, so you make it accidental death. Now you're back to murder again, I guess. Just because you're on the Homicide Squad don't mean you can make a murder out of nothing at all."

"As I remember it," I says, ignoring him, "Medway said practically nothing,

except to point out to the plainclothes dicks that he had calmed Cummings down when he started to talk wild a few minutes before he actually shot himself. He even got the girls to back him up on that, which they did. Now why did Medway go to the trouble to stop Cummings from going through with his act, if he didn't want to be able to tell about it afterwards? Which indicates that he knew what was going to happen when Cummings finally did pull his little routine. That's it!"

Tim shook his head mournfully. "S'wonderful," he said. "The man turns a harmless little accidental death into a murder, and then puts his finger right on the killer. Deductive reasoning, I calls it. Do you mind if I shake your hand?"

"Nerts! I got something, and you know it."

"You got something, all right. I only hope it's not contagious. The chances are that they figured out that part of the act beforehand, to make it look more realistic."

"I can't see it. A man don't make a mistake with his gun when he's figuring on doing a trick like that. According to this barkeep, the gun clicked when Cummings pulled the trigger. That means that it was cocked, with no bullet in the chamber. So Cummings prepared the twenty-two before hand, by removing the magazine and cocking it. That would eject any cartridge that was in the chamber without putting in a new one. Then he put in the clip and later pulled his little act. The gun just clicked. Then he cocked it, which threw a shell into the chamber, and fired at the dart board. It went off and the girls probably thought he had escaped death by a miracle. Only the last time he did the trick somebody monkeyed with the gun after he had

fixed it. I figure that Medway called on him, or maybe they room together, and cocked the gun when he wasn't looking. That threw a shell into the empty chamber and crabbed his act. Which accounts for Cummings' surprised look and also Medway's lack of surprise or concern. What d'you think?"

"I think you're nuts," said Tim, reaching in his pocket and cornering a quarter. "Let's have a beer. Pour one for yourself."

"Thanks. I'll have a cigar," says the barkeep. He probably went to the same school as the night man.

"Make mine Scotch," I says, pretending not to notice as Tim scowled and reached down in his jeans for another ten cents. "There's no two ways about it, Medway's gotta be checked up on. He knew about the suicide gag and therefore he could have fixed the gun. That makes it murder, and right up our alley."

"Up *your* alley, maybe," growls Tim, still burning about the thirty-five cents for one round of drinks and probably figuring that it would have bought three and a half rounds of beer. "Me, I still think it's accidental death. If you can tell me why Medway would want to kill him, I'll be interested. Otherwise I'm going back to headquarters and report what we found."

I slammed the Scotch down in one gulp, a thing I never do. But Tim's unreasonableness hurt me more than you'd think. "All right," I snapped. "You go back and listen to the radio. I'll go out and dig up a murder, if I have to commit one myself."

"When'll you get in?" he asked, kind of sulky.

"Depends. Couple hours, maybe."

Tim poured the last of the beer down his gullet and headed for the street. He slowed down at the door, as if he was

going to change his mind, but kept on going. As soon as he disappeared I made for the phone. In about two minutes I had the addresses of Cummings and Medway. Two addresses! They hadn't roomed together. But the addresses were pretty close to one another. Within a few blocks. I decided to try Medway's first. It was Saturday and he might be home.

#### IV

THAT turned out to be a bum guess.

The place was an ordinary rooming house with a flock of push-buttons in the entry. I found his button and gave it hell. No result. So I went over to take a look at Cummings' former place. This time I rang for the janitor. He turned out to be a dopey-looking gent in a pair of overalls. I flashed the tin.

"Want to take a look in Cummings' room," I said.

"Second floor," he mumbles. "Third door left."

"How about the key?"

"Door's open."

Before I had a chance to ask him how come, he ducks through a door and I hear his brogans thumping down a flight of stairs. So I started up toward the second floor. There wasn't any light on the landing and I had to feel my way, it being slightly darker than the inside of your chapeau, in spite of the sun shining outside. I felt around for a light switch when I reached the top, but I couldn't find it and continued down the corridor by sense of touch.

The janitor was right about the third door. It swung open when I turned the knob. But that's as far as I got. I took one step into the room, blinking at the light streaming past a lifted shade, when I almost had the pants scared off me by a guy who jumped out from

behind the door. He wasn't as tall as me, but the way the light was blinding me he looked as wide as King Kong. And he didn't wait for me to get my eyes focused on him. He came out from behind that door slugging. I went down like a ton of bricks.

There was more than sunlight blinding me as I made a half-conscious grab for his legs. That light was brighter than the sun, and came and went in waves, pitch-black in between. I don't know whether I got his legs or not, because one of the black spells stayed for awhile.

I got a notion he slugged me twice, but I never felt the second one. But that second wallop might have been caused by hitting the floor. Whatever it was I had two sore spots when I woke up.

It took both hands to explore the extent of the damage. One for my chin, which came away with blood on it. The other for my forehead, which was sporting a knob you could have hung your hat on. After a minute I remembered what I came for and looked around the room. It was a mess. Every drawer had been emptied on the floor, the bed torn apart, the carpet folded back and the knobs had even been pried off the brass bed posts.

A sudden inspiration struck me and I went for the stairs and took them two at a time. Each thump of my heels started a vibration which coursed up my legs and through my torso to finally explode with fireworks in the front of my head. I was kind of unsteady when I flung open the door at the foot of the stairs and yelled for the janitor. That didn't help the head any, either. He came up after a minute, during which I alternately dabbed at my chin and clutched the door to keep on my feet.

"Did you know there was somebody up there when you sent me up?" I snapped.

"Yeah, sure," he answered, puzzled. "Another cop. I thought you knew."

"What did he look like? Quick, you dope!"

That was bad tactics. The chump just looked scared and started to mumble: "An ordinary looking guy . . . Yeah, ordinary looking. Taller than me and younger . . . shorter than you and older."

"What kind of clothes?"

But that drew a blank. He couldn't even remember if he wore a cap or a felt. I left the place in a hurry and chased the squad car over to Medway's dump. There was a hazy idea thumping around in my conk that it might have been him. What description I had would fit him—or a million other guys. And he hadn't been home when I called before. If I was right about this, I'd at least have something on the guy . . . illegal entry, impersonating a cop and assault and battery. Enough to sew him up good and tight while I checked my murder hunch.

**T**HERE was a woman in charge of the place. I explained that I had cut my chin by slipping and banging it on the door of the gas buggy as I got out. That quieted her before she had a chance to get alarmed at my appearance.

" . . . I thought that my friend Jimmy Medway would give me something to put on it. But he don't answer, and he ought to be home. Maybe we'd better go up and see if he's sick or something?"

She hesitated, fumbling with a ring full of keys. "Well, I guess it's all right," she finally said. "But if he's not home, you can't go in. I'll give

you some collodion for your chin."

"Oh, I don't want to go in," I said. "I'm just worried about him. He didn't look so good last night."

As a matter of fact I wanted that door opened without warning Medway that I was coming. If it was him that socked me, I'd know soon enough. And I reasoned that if it was him, he'd have ducked in here right after he scrambled from the other place. It was the quickest way to get out of sight.

The woman was wearing bedroom slippers that didn't make a sound. I walked as quietly as I could without showing her that I was pussyfooting. Medway wouldn't have the slightest warning until I was on top of him. I loosened my thirty-eight in its holster, and hoped I could draw faster than he could. But there wasn't any need of that. The room was empty. We went back down the stairs and the woman plastered some stickum over my cuts. I thanked her and shoved off, ripping it loose when I turned the corner. The bleeding had stopped anyway.

I didn't wait for the janitor when I got back to Cummings' diggings. I just jabbed the first button I came to and opened the door when it buzzed. This time I found the light switch and turned it on. A frowzy-looking dame stuck her head out of a door on the second floor and glared at me.

"Sorry, lady," I chirped. "Got the wrong button."

She glared again and pulled in her head. I headed for the third door to the left, determined to find out what I could from the scattered remains of Cummings' belongings. I flung it open and stepped in—and stopped dead! In about a fortieth of a second I got a glimpse of a guy's back bending over some of the trash from one of the bureau drawers. Just about a fortieth

of a second. For at the sound of the door he straightened and turned. I saw his roscoe just in time to dive sideways for the floor, trying to draw my own while I did it. I felt the wind from his bullet fan my neck as I hit on my shoulder and rolled over. A second shot roared but I didn't feel anything though.

I was too busy getting my somersault over and my rod out to be sure of anything.

When I faced him again, with the thirty-eight in my hand, *he* was on the floor, and twitching! I passed a hand slowly across my throbbing forehead and looked through the fingers toward the door. Tim, of course—grinning, and twirling his revolver by the trigger guard.

"You need a nurse-maid, boy," he gloated. "Leave you by yourself and you'd be punctured in no time at all."

I got up and looked at the gunman. "You're a great help," I growled. "I could have asked this guy some questions."

"Well go ahead and ask 'em."

I turned him over with my foot. There was a neat hole over one eyebrow and the back of his head was a mess. "I don't think he's in the mood to be giving the answers," I said.

"You'd be in the same mood if I hadn't been right on your tail when you came in here. He was taking aim for his second shot and you were still turning over when I dropped him. There wasn't time for any fancy shooting."

"Pretty fancy at that," I judged, looking at the defunct. "Say . . . Don't he look familiar to you?"

"Sure," said Tim, very pleased with himself. "I pinched him once. Name of Anthony Staub. Right now he's wanted in connection with the murder and robbery out at the Mason House."

I NODDED. With this little prod to my memory I placed where I'd seen the lug's map before. I guess the little beauty mark over his eyebrow had fooled me at first, but now that Tim mentioned it I remembered seeing that phiz on a poster with two others. The poster had said that they were wanted for murder. The killing had happened while the three of them had stuck up a shindig at the Mason House, a suburban hostelry patronized by economic royalists. I also remembered that they had managed to get away with quite a wad of cash and some assorted necklaces and bracelets. I hadn't taken any great interest in the job, happening out of town as it did and therefore not our responsibility.

"This sort of ties up," I remarked.

"Ties up with what?" Tim wanted to know.

"Jewelry," I answered, trying to connect something in my mind. "Cummings was in the jewelry business."

"But Staub wasn't," Tim pointed out. "He was in the breaking and entering and stick-up business."

"Oh. I had a notion he specialized in jewelry."

"He specialized in anything that wasn't bolted to the floor," Tim informed me. "He probably heard about Cummings kicking the bucket, and didn't know but what the stuff Cummings handled was valuable. So he just dropped in to see if there wasn't something he could lift. No tie-up at all."

"I ain't so sure about that," I said. "Staub was in hiding, wanted for murder. It don't seem natural that he'd risk poking his nose around any place where a cop was likely to show up."

Tim scratched his chin, the upper one, and shook his head. I leaned over and went through Tony's pockets. Outside

of a couple extra clips for his rod, a bunch of keys and some other odds and ends there wasn't anything of importance. His wallet was stuffed with frogskins but there wasn't any addresses or anything to provide a lead. It looked like a blind alley to me.

"How'd you come to tail me over here?" I inquired.

Tim laughed, kind of embarrassed. "Aw, I waited a while and then I began to get worried, knowing you ain't got as many buttons as you might have." He paused and picked up the wallet, absently counting the bills. "Then I decided to look you up. I figured you'd call up and get this address, so I checked up and found I was right. Then I started over and . . . Say, look at this!"

He had taken out the bills to count them, and when he did a flap of leather came up and disclosed a secret compartment. The bills had held the flap down flat, as it should have been, but there was something behind it pushing it up. Tim took the thing out and I could see it was a folded snapshot. When I saw the flap I'd expected to see a couple big bills tucked away, because I'd seen wallets like that before. They make them for henpecked husbands who have to hide a few bucks from their pay in order to have some spending money. The snapshot surprised me and I stepped over to take a closer look. Tim was too busy admiring it to pass it over.

And he had reason to, even if he was an old married man. The dame on the photo was a wow, and I do mean wow! The face was a delicate oval, framing a set of features that would have made a Hollywood glamour girl turn green with envy. The lips were smiling and the eyes sparkled. That picture was the next things to being alive. You almost expected to see the

lips part and hear a melodious chuckle. I wondered what the hell Tony Staub had been doing with a picture like that.

## V

TIM took a deep breath and handed it over. That was when I noticed that there was some hen-scratching on the back. A closer look proved that the penciled marks were a phone number. Tim saw them the same time I did, and made a grab for it. I yanked it back and growled like a dog.

Tim grinned. "All right, Casanova," he chuckled. "You run it down while I clean up the gory details. You always manage to leave me with a mess like this. And no doubt the captain will think you're very industrious, when I tell him all about it. And say . . . Don't slow up any lead! The prettiest of 'em get nasty at times."

It was a routine matter to get the address that went with the phone number, and also the name of the dame who subscribed for the phone. Her name was Fifi Frazier, which didn't cause any clicks in my dome, and the address was a pretty swanky apartment house. I didn't waste any time shoving the squad car in that general direction.

There were a million or so cars parked in front of it and it looked as if I'd have to scout around for a place to put the department jalopy. I was just glancing toward the front entrance of the place, trying to make up my mind whether to park double or not, when I saw a guy dash down the front steps and hail a passing taxi. It was Medway!

For a minute I was so startled that I almost ran into the car in front, which had stopped at the end of a line wait-

ing for a green light at the corner. I slammed on the brakes and saw Medway hop into the hack and ride off in the opposite direction. And when I tried to loop in the street to chase him, I heard a screech of sliding tires, and another buggy just managed to get stopped abreast of me, blocking my turn. In about no time at all traffic was snarled in both directions. It took five minutes to get untangled, during which time the taxi disappeared. I was madder than a boiled owl when I finally parked around the corner.

Just to calm myself I took another look at the photograph of the lady with the sparkling eyes. It was the right medicine. One look at those sparkling glims and I wanted to smile right back at her. I forgot about being mad. Of course she wasn't blonde, but then I never claimed to be a gentleman anyway. All of a sudden I realized that she was a very important link in the mystery I had on my hands. She might know why Tony had apparently taken a flier in trying to ransack Cummings' belongings. The thought that struck me dealt with something I had read of this gentleman. It seemed that he was a careful worker, always making sure that a job was worth while before he pulled it. And that made it appear that he must have known that Cummings had something that was worth stealing, or he wouldn't have tried, especially with the law already looking for him.

It followed then, that if Staub knew, Medway would know too. Which provided a motive for the crime of killing Cummings. Ordinarily the kind of phony trinkets handled by an outfit like the one Cummings worked for wouldn't have been worth killing to get. So he must have had something valuable in his possession. And if I was going to hang his death on Medway, I'd better

get a move on and find what it was.

I put the picture in my pocket and went to see the original, wondering if the rest of her matched her gorgeous kisser. They made me use the house phone system before they'd let me up to see her. A clerk, about whom I harbored some doubts of his masculinity, insisted on calling her and mentioning my name. She asked him to put me on.

Her voice was all I expected. "What did you want to see me about?" she inquired.

"It's about Mr. Staub," I answered. "I'd rather not speak of it over the phone."

"Let me speak to the room clerk," she said, after a minute's hesitation.

I handed him the phone and he listened for a second, then smiled all over his sissified pan. "Room 320," he simpered, and started to fuss with a lot of register cards. I didn't let any moss grow on me getting to the third floor.

**F**IFI lived up to all qualifications.

"Are you a friend of Mr. Staub's?" she inquired sweetly, without stepping away from the door.

My brain started clicking on all three. It seemed that my answer was going to determine what kind of a reception I was going to get. And when I considered what kind of a guy Tony was, and what kind of a girl she seemed to be, I decided to take a chance.

"Well, I wouldn't say that," I replied. "As a matter of fact, he seemed kind of mad at me a little while ago."

"He's no friend of mine either, the cheap chiseler!" she snarled in her pretty way, and moved away from the door.

I walked right in and she languorously plunked herself on a divan. I plunked also. "I think you and me's

going to be friends," I remarks. "What have you got against the lug?"

"Plenty!" she obliges, boiling over with her peeve. "He's been bothering me for weeks. I do a song and dance over at the Chrome Club, you know." I assured her that I had admired her work many times. "So does Tony," she says. "Though it may be something else. Anyway, he pestered me for a date every night for weeks. Finally he showed up one night with a pearl necklace, and wanted me to wear it. I turned it down. But he kept on offering it and finally I gave in and promised to wear it just one night.

"Well he got called out suddenly or something and he wasn't there when my turn was over. Then I didn't see him for a couple of weeks. In the meantime I fell in love with the necklace. It just seemed to go with everything I wore. It got so I felt naked till I put it on. Then, what do you think? He sneaks in here one day with another guy and demands it back!

"I told him I had it in a safe deposit vault, but it didn't work. When I told him that, he turned to the other guy and shrugged. The other guy looked mad. 'I tell you I can get ten grand,' he raved. 'Get it off her!' Then Tony grabbed me and started to choke. All I could think of was the marks that he might make on my neck. And you can't very well sing under a spot-light when you're all bruised up. So when he let loose I handed over the necklace, which was on my vanity all the time. Then . . ."

She stopped suddenly, twisted around and looked into my eyes very questioningly. "By the way, Mr. Burns," she cooed, "you haven't told me who you are and why you came here."

I took another chance and flashed the tin.



"Oh!" she gasped. "Then it *was* a hot necklace. And Tony *is* a thief?"

"Worse than that," I told her. "A murderer. That's why he disappeared right after he gave you the pearls. He got them at the stick-up of the Mason House a while back. A guy died from a bullet wound a few days after the holdup, and the newspapers gave out that the bandits had been recognized. A private dick on guard there knew them in spite of their masks. When Tony and his pals heard about it, they got under cover. We've been looking for them ever since. So anything you can tell me will probably be of great value."

She shook her pretty head. "I doubt it," she said. "I don't know where Tony is." She stopped, struck with an idea. "But I might help you recover the necklace! You see, after they went out with it I quickly threw on a wrap and followed them. I was going to call the first cop I saw and have them arrested. But you know how cops are when you want them . . ."

She stopped again and blushed when she remembered I was a cop in disguise. "I'll try not to be that way," I says, patting her on the knee to relieve her embarrassment.

"Anyway," she continues, "they got in a car and I followed in a taxi. But when they stopped in front of a rooming house and went in I didn't try to follow any further. On the way I happened to remember what the other man had said about getting ten thousand dollars for the necklace. I figured that meant that it was stolen. So I went home, not wanting to get mixed up in anything crooked."

I nodded, approvingly. "But what did you mean when you said you might help recover it?"

"Oh, I forgot. This man came *into*

the club with another man, only a few nights ago. And just when I was finishing my number and walking off, this new guy says, 'Hya Toots?'. Without thinking, I answered, 'Hello, Sugar.' Then I went through the door to the dressing rooms, which was right back of their table. But I stopped behind the door and listened. The first guy says, 'You know her?' The new guy says, 'Sure. Old friend of mine.' That was a lie, of course, but a lot of people pretend to be acquainted with the entertainers. 'Why don't you ask her if she's got a friend?' says the first guy. Right afterwards they went out."

She stopped, real pleased with her story, but personally I didn't get it. "How does that help me . . ."

"Oh, I forgot. The first guy, that's the one who was with Tony, was just in here a few minutes ago, all hot and bothered. He claimed that I had wangled the necklace back from the friend he had with him at the Chrome Club—the guy who was going to sell the necklace. I told him that I didn't even know his friend and that I never saw the necklace again after he and Staub took it. He didn't believe me at first, but I think he did by the time he went out. And here's how I can help you: The man who was to sell the necklace for them was George Cummings, the man who killed himself in that taproom last night! I recognized his picture in the papers. All you have to do is . . ."

## VI

I JUMPED to my feet. The whole set-up was clear now. Tony had tried to win the favor of Fifi by giving her what he thought was a trinket of small value. Medway, who monkeyed with jewelry himself, must have learned about it and knew about the value of

the thing. Probably from a list of the stolen goods which had been published in one of the newspapers. It was also a good bet that Medway had a working arrangement with Cummings whereby the latter disposed, through his legitimate connections in the trade, of certain baubles that Medway might pick up at a bargain. So Medway put through the deal for Tony to get the necklace for Cummings to fence.

Then he probably got the bright idea that he might be able to get rid of it himself, and take all the profits. He had to do this in a way that Tony wouldn't suspect him. So when he stopped to pick up Cummings for a night of carousing, last evening, he slid a fresh cartridge into the chamber of the automatic so that Cummings could put some realism into his favorite act. Medway probably figured he could lay his hands on the necklace this morning in Cummings' room. I was thinking of the brass knobs on the bed posts, which might have been Cummings' favorite hiding place. But he hadn't found what he was looking for.

Then Tony had probably read about the suicide in the papers and came out of hiding once more to try to recover his property. With the result that he wound up in the morgue. And Medway, after conking me and scrambling, had thought of Fifi and remembered that Cummings had said they were old friends. He'd drawn a blank there. But the trick was, where the hell would he look next? I wanted Medway. I wasn't so particular about the necklace, but I'd have to trail the necklace to get him. It was a cinch he wouldn't turn up at his apartment again. He couldn't have helped but recognize me when I'd barged into that room with the light in my face, blinding me. And he'd have to assume I'd be looking for him.

"I know. You're thinking," said Fifi; smiling brightly. "But I was just going to tell you that all you have to do is search Cummings' belongings and you'll find the necklace."

"I think you got something there, Babe," I agreed.

"Promise you'll come and tell me how you made out? I think detective work is so thrilling . . ."

"You got no idea, Beautiful. Suppose I meet you at the club after the show and tell you all about it. Still better, I'll call for you and take you to work tonight."

A little while later I was back in the squad car trying to get my mind back on the problem of where Medway might have been headed when he left in the taxi. I was having a little trouble controlling my thoughts, on account of I was looking at the picture of Fifi and wondering how a photographer could so mangle up a gorgeous Rand and McNally like hers. It didn't do her justice, there was no two ways about it. For one thing it didn't show up the bluish glints in her jet-black hair. I finally finished that line of thought by concluding that the only photo that could do her justice would have to be full length anyway. There was too much missing otherwise.

Having disposed of that matter, I really got my brilliant intellect to work on the problem of Medway and the necklace. Suppose I was Medway, where would I figure that Cummings might have put the thing? And incidently where *was* the danged thing, supposing I was me. The trouble there was that I didn't know enough about the life and habits of Mr. Cummings. It wasn't in his room, that was sure. Medway would have found it. In fact for all I knew he might have already turned it into cash and had figured to double-

cross both Tony and Medway. His character hadn't been of the best, from what I had learned. And if a man'll fence stolen goods, which is the same as stealing off honest people, he certainly wouldn't balk at stealing from his crooked pals if he saw a way of doing it.

STILL running up mental blind alleys, I stopped for a bite of lunch. If there was any possibility of doing it, I wanted to nab Medway and take him back to Tim Casey. Not only prove that murder had been committed, but hand him the murderer as well. But all I did was waste half the afternoon trying. I looked up Medway's landlady and got the names of a few of his friends and then I looked them up. But none of them had any idea where I might find him. If he had any regular haunts that he might be found at, they didn't know of them.

Finally I gave up and went back to headquarters to seek the advice of Mr. Casey, who still thought Cummings' death was accidental. The fun I had watching his face while I handed him my story made up for the wasted afternoon. It was a bitter pill he was swallowing, but I had too many facts, all pointing the same way, for him to see any way out.

"I know when I'm licked," he finally said. "So don't crow so much. It's murder, all right. At least it's got everything a good murder should have, now that you've found the motive. But you got to admit all you had at first was a corpse. And an obvious reason how he got that way. Me, I only work on facts."

"Yeah, I know. You don't like hunches, even when they're right. But how are we going to locate the Medway guy?"

Tim looked at the clock. "We're

through for the day," he says. "So we'll tell the captain all about it and he can turn the night boys loose. Let them do a little work for a change. Bringing the guy in is a minor detail after the crime's solved. Then let's hit a beer."

This seemed to be a sound idea, so I put away the squad car and got my own out, while Tim acquainted the captain with the facts. Brady's was the next stop. I didn't feel up to an argument about a nicer joint. The barkeep greeted us with smiles and filled them up. He was still talking about the suicide he had witnessed. I sipped the amber fluid and paid little attention to Tim telling him that he'd soon see some more in the newspapers about the affair.

My mind had returned to the promising acquaintance I had made this morning. In a couple more hours I'd be stopping to pick her up. I was wondering how she'd take it when I told her that Tony was in the morgue with a ventilated head, for trying to get her little necklace back. And that I was still looking for Medway and the necklace. "All you have to do," she had said, "is search Cummings' belongings . . ."

It must have been the thought of the morgue and Cummings' belongings coming so close together that gave me the idea. In my mind's eye sprang a picture of the tan coat with the big patch pockets that the boys had tossed on the floor of the dead wagon.

I gulped the rest of the beer. "Look, Tim," I says. "I just got another hunch, and I don't want to listen to any of your arguments. You and me's going down to the morgue."

The morgue was only a block and a half away, so we walked. The car was parked facing the wrong way and

the directions of the one-way streets in the vicinity would have made it a four-block ride. We climbed the marble steps into the place and turned to the left toward the office. Just as we did a man came out of the corridor to the right and headed for the door. He had a small package in his hand and was taking the paper off it. I turned my head to get a look at him. He looked at me at the same second and bolted.

**I** LET out a yell and went after him.

It was Medway, and that package must be the necklace! He must have got the same idea as me, that maybe Cummings had carried the thing with him. Somehow he had fooled the morgue attendants into giving it to him, or else had lifted it when they weren't looking. As it turned out I never did learn which. And at the moment I wasn't greatly concerned about it. This boy Medway must have been training for this race, using a gazelle for a pace-maker. He was down the marble steps in three jumps. I almost went on my nose trying it myself.

Without looking back, knowing I must be following, he sped up the street in the direction Tim and me had just come. I was hot after him, but in spite of my long legs he was widening the space between us. But I guess he must have thought I was right on his tail, for he dropped the package. Trying the old trick of the lady with the golden apples. But I didn't bite. I was too far behind already. Tim did the biting, though it didn't matter, he was so far in the rear anyway. I heard the pound of his brogans slow up, stop for a second, and then start again. But Tim was outclassed worse than me in this contest. His squat two hundred and fifty pounds weren't designed for running.

By the time Medway reached the corner, there was about two hundred feet of distance between us. I tried firing at him—not up in the air, at him. He didn't stop, and I missed him clean. There wasn't another chance to fire, for a woman rounded the corner in the line of fire, and I was afraid of hitting her. Medway was gone the next instant, out of sight around the same corner. When I reached it I followed the way he disappeared, but in the meantime he must have turned another corner.

The blocks in this part of town are chopped up with a lot of little side streets. At Brady's corner, half a block from where I lost sight of him, I stopped and looked both ways. No dice. The lead he had on me had given him the chance to reach another side street, and I didn't know in which direction. The newsboy on the corner said he hadn't even seen anybody running. Tim caught up to me, panting like an Airedale in August, and clutching the package with its paper half undid.

"You take that way," I said. "I'll try down this way."

"No . . ." he gasped. "I need a beer."

So saying he half stumbled toward Brady's swinging doors. Disgusted with such lack of co-operation, I started to climb into my buggy, thinking to cruise around the neighborhood on the chance of running across him. I had my foot on the running board, when I heard an explosive grunt and turned around to see what had caused it. I saw Tim backpedaling to keep from going over on his posterior, and I also saw an outstretched arm that had just been sunk to the elbow in Tim's stomach. The arm belonged to Medway, who, I suddenly realized, had ducked into Brady's thinking we would dash on past. At the sight of me coming toward him he ducked back in, reaching for a hip pocket.

I was right after him, and darn near got a slug for my hurry. It hit the door jamb a couple inches away. It came from the direction of the bar and I slung one that way, just for luck. It was too quick to be accurate, and made a mess of the mirror back of the bar instead of hitting him. He was on the floor before I could get another shot. For a second I wondered what to do. I couldn't get to him without absorbing some lead, a thing I had no desire to do. I had an engagement to cover that evening and it wasn't in a hospital. On the other hand he couldn't move without exposing himself to my fire. The barkeep was just standing there with his hands up in the air and his eyes popping out.

I'd just about got breath enough to yell to Medway to surrender, that he couldn't spend the rest of his life where he was, when matters were taken out

of my hands. Two shots rang out. I ducked in spite of myself . . . even though my ears told me that the second of the shots hadn't come from behind the bar. I looked around and there was Tim, twenty feet away and standing where he could see back of the bar. He'd come around to the side entrance and got in position for a shot.

"It's Casey and Burns, kid," said Tim, twirling his thirty-eight by the trigger guard and grinning all over his homely mug. "You can't get along with-  
out me."

"You said it," I admitted, leaning on the bar. "Pour a couple slugs of Scotch. Take one yourself."

The bartender slowly lowered his hands and reached for glasses.

"Thanks," he said automatically. "I'll take a cig— . . . No, by Heaven, I'll have a Scotch, too! So help me!"

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*A True  
Story*



The Mounties raced to the rescue of the man

## Death on the Yukon

By C. V. Tench

THE winter-gripped Yukon River stretched as far as snow-strained eyes could see, a seemingly endless river of giant-flung whiteness, shrouded by air so cold it was hazy with frost. Upon its frozen surface moved three men, trudging all unsuspecting toward where sudden, violent death lurked in hiding; death now watching their approach through the narrowed eyes of a man well-concealed in a cut-bank against where the trail curved in close to the shore.

The three travelers were Oscar Relfe, a man with extensive gold claims in the Yukon; William Clayton, a prominent Seattle business man with more than one finger in the goldfields pie; and "Slim"

Olsen, the local telegraph linesman.

The man lying in ambush was Patrick O'Brien, a bad character who had served time in more than one gaol and who had but recently been released from the Dawson gaol on the completion of a twelve month sentence for petty theft.

All unaware of O'Brien's nearness and his murderous intentions, Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen moved slowly and steadily forward. Eyes burning with a cold flame, O'Brien snuggled his heavy-caliber rifle closer to his shoulder and waited until they were directly abreast his hiding-place, then:

"Halt!" he shouted. "Put up your hands!"

As he gave the command, O'Brien

stepped from his hiding-place on to the ice full in the path of the startled Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen. The leveled rifle, the cold gleam in O'Brien's eyes told the three travelers that this was the real thing and, as they were totally unarmed, they slowly raised their hands.

"Now," O'Brien commanded further, "keep bunched together and climb up to the top of that hill."

Set-faced, no doubt fuming inwardly, Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen obeyed. Herding them into a small clear space at the crest of the hill, out of sight of the river, O'Brien then lined his victims up so that they stood side-by-side facing him. It was then that Relfe found his voice.

"What's your game?" he asked hotly. "You don't think that—"

He got no farther. Even as Relfe's voice rose in protest O'Brien began shooting. The first bullet crashed into Relfe's body and his words ended in a gasp of agony as he crumpled to the snow. Shocked into momentary helplessness by the utter callousness of the shooting of their companion, Clayton and Olsen stood there as if transfixed, staring in numb horror. They stood thus long enough for O'Brien to work the magazine lever of his rifle with lightning-like speed and again press trigger. This time Olsen sprawled coughing and writhing to the ground with a bullet through his body.

Again O'Brien rapidly reloaded. In the same instant Clayton lunged forward in desperate effort to save his own life. He was a split second too late. This time O'Brien fired from the hip and as the heavy bullet tore through his body Clayton went down like a pole-axed steer. Three men ruthlessly shot down in as many seconds!

But none of the three men had been killed outright. They now sprawled

helpless, groaning and writhing in bullet-stricken agony in the snow. Callously O'Brien approached them and, standing over each in turn, drew a revolver and shot each of them through the head, killing them instantly.

So far his fiendish plan had worked perfectly.

He next proceeded to rob the bodies of his victims.

From the dead Clayton's inside pocket he took a leather wallet containing a large sum in currency, a number of the bills being of large denomination. A search of Relfe's clothing revealed a fair sum in cash and a large gold nugget. It was an unusual specimen of unique design; a small, solid chunk of gold enclosed in a cup-like nugget of larger size. An easily recognized article. And that was where O'Brien made his first mistake. His wisest course would have been to have either thrown the nugget away or to at once have hammered it into an unrecognizable shape. Instead, with a use for the nugget in mind, he stowed it away in a pocket.

Then he set about the task of covering up all traces of the crime. First he stripped the bodies of Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen of every stitch of clothing. Leaving the dead men staring sightlessly at the sky he bundled the clothes in his arms and carried them toward the small tent that was his temporary home.

Starting a fire of dry wood, he carefully burned each article of clothing in turn, then, raking over the hot ashes painstakingly collected buttons, rivets and other metal parts that had not been consumed and scattered them widely in all directions. Belts, shoes, leather mittens and other things that took longer to burn, he burned in the sheet-iron camp stove in the tent. He then returned to his victims.

BY NOW dusk was settling all about the white wastes, and there were no signs of other travelers on the river trail. After making certain of that fact, O'Brien picked up an axe and going out on to the ice laboriously cut a large hole. It was slow, hard work, and O'Brien soon found the sweat oozing from every pore in his body, despite the fact that the temperature was at least forty below, with a blustering wind hurling the snow along the frozen reaches of the Yukon in huge, billowing clouds. But the rising blizzard was an ally in his diabolical scheme, for its blanketing folds would cover up all tracks.

Followed three journeys from the hole in the ice to the crest of the small hill and back again heavily burdened. In less than an hour Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen, who but a short time before had been journeying on *top* of the ice, were continuing their journey *under* the ice. And by daybreak an inches-thick white blanket of fresh snow covered the river and the desolate landscape. O'Brien noted that all traces of his ruthless crime were obliterated. In his tent, crouched low over the red hot stove, he went all over it again.

Since several weeks before—whilst still serving his sentence in the Dawson gaol, as a matter-of-fact—when he had first thought of the idea of murdering and robbing river travelers, he had planned until he had arranged every detail of his scheme. Had done all he could to make of this the perfect crime. So far, apparently, he had succeeded. The worst was over.

GIVE the Mounted a corpse to find and a trail to follow, and they usually brought the murderer to justice. But he had left them not one corpse to find. At least, that chance was in his

favor, for rarely did the Yukon reveal its grim secrets. When the spring break-up came, the thawing ice would likely grind and pound Relfe's, Clayton's, and Olsen's remains to fragments; or at least render the bodies unidentifiable. He had laid his plans well. Not a flaw anywhere. Now he had the money to indulge his long-denied urge for liquor, gambling, and dance-hall girls to the full. Tomorrow he'd start visiting the roadhouses strung along the trail. And when the money was gone, well, there were always well-heeled miners and others traveling the river trail.

Confident that he had committed the flawless crime, O'Brien started his tour of the roadhouses the very next day, indulging his lustful appetites to the full, but taking care that he did not show too much money at a time. He listened avidly to the many discussions regarding the sudden and complete vanishing of Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen, but made no attempt to enter into any of the many hot arguments their disappearance occasioned, realizing that, in such hectic gold-rush days, the disappearance of three men was but an incident soon to be forgotten.

He was right in this respect. As he moved from one roadhouse to the next he noted that already the subject was waning until he no longer heard the matter of his three victims' abrupt disappearance even mentioned. And it was then that he decided it would now be safe to use the odd-shaped nugget for the purpose for which he had so carefully saved it. To do so he would have to journey as far as one of the most pretentious roadhouses in the Yukon, a place known as the Carcajou Chalet, for the following reason:

Among the girls at the Carcajou Chalet was one known only as "Goldie," a girl notorious throughout the Yukon



for her exceptional beauty, her aloofness, and her sheer greed. Goldie would have nothing at all to do with the small fry as did the other girls; her attention could be bought only by successful men able and willing to pay a high price, that price being gold nuggets of exceptional shape, weight and size. It was thus that she had earned the nickname of "Goldie," for actually she was a vivacious brunette. From the time he had first met her, O'Brien had wanted to see Goldie. Now, at long last, the opportunity presented itself.

Up to now, since his committing the triple murder, O'Brien had carefully avoided all contact with the various members of the Mounted he had encountered in the roadhouses he had visited to date, but to get to the Carcajou Chalet and Goldie he would have to follow the ice trail to where it led directly past the Mounted Police post at Tagish. In fact the trail curved in right up to the barracks gate and it was the habit of the Mounted to hail all travelers and question them briefly. As a man with a police record, and now the murders on his conscience, O'Brien shrank from being interrogated by a keen-eyed policeman.

Actually, had O'Brien faced up to the situation boldly he would most likely have been able to bluff his way through an awkward ordeal. What actually happened was that he now lost his nerve and thus made his second serious mistake.

Trudging along toward the Carcajou Chalet, when he reached the spot where the trail swung in toward the police post he turned aside and started breaking his own trail on the far side of the river. Even then he might have gone unnoticed but for a factor he had forgotten to take into account; a patch of rotten ice!

As his right foot crashed through inches of snow supported by but a shell of ice, weakened by the up-pourings of an underground spring, he flung himself forward, hands outstretched. A frightened yell broke from his lips, a cry that was smothered a moment later as he was submerged in deep water.

Clawing, shivering, gasping, he rose to the surface. For a moment he clung, too weak and winded to extract himself, then with a strength begotten by fear slowly heaved himself back to solid ice.

And then he heard shouts. Three members of the Mounted who had seen him break through were racing across the ice with ropes. Grasping O'Brien on both sides they rushed him toward the post, forcing him to run, for his wetted clothing was freezing fast. Arrived at the barracks they quickly stripped him of his sodden clothing, wrapped him in warmed blankets and placed a hot rum in his hand. They then told him that he must stay there until his clothes had dried when he could continue his journey. O'Brien could do nothing but accept the kindly invitation, but inwardly he was cursing his luck.

NATURALLY, in the course of a friendly conversation, he was asked his reason for being in the vicinity. The vagueness of his answers and the surliness of his demeanor soon aroused the suspicions of the Mounted—hard-bitten men with a deep understanding of human nature—and in a very short time the casual conversation had become a formal cross-examination by the officer in charge of the post. O'Brien did not stand up well under the strain and finally fell back on silence, refusing to answer direct questions that might incriminate him.

The upshot of the cross-examination

of O'Brien was the laying of a formal charge of ". . . wandering at large unable to give a satisfactory account of himself . . ." against him. This gave the authorities right to search O'Brien's clothing and packsack. One of the first articles they came across was the odd-shaped nugget. It was then that O'Brien learned that the Mounties, who had been working quietly and thoroughly, had a complete list of possessions of Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen, and the gold nugget was at once recognized as having belonged to Relfe. The search was continued and in the pockets of O'Brien's heavy shirt a considerable amount of currency was discovered.

Knowing that O'Brien had but recently completed a twelve months' sentence in the Dawson gaol, that he had not worked since his release, and that he did not own a gold claim, the Mounted were convinced that they had apprehended the man who could explain Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen's disappearance. But it was one thing to believe it and another to prove it. O'Brien's reply to how he came into the possession of the nugget and the money was a surly "Find out!"

The Mounted determined to do so, but as they could not lay a suspected murder charge on such slight evidence brought their prisoner before the presiding magistrate on the minor charge O'Brien received the maximum sentence of six months, giving the Mounted just that length of time to solve the mystery of the three missing men.

Telegrams were exchanged with Superintendent Primrose at Dawson, divisional headquarters, with the result that Constable Pennecuick was especially assigned to the investigation. He came to his new post with a reputation for tenacity and outstanding ability to follow up the slightest clue. Sergeant

Holmes, under whose charge he was, explained that it would be necessary to build up an airtight case against O'Brien within the limited time of six months, as they could not possibly hold O'Brien longer than that. Constable Pennecuick nodded and went to work.

For the next few days, during every hour of daylight, Constable Pennecuick traveled the face of the river in the vicinity of where the three missing men had last been sighted, scrutinizing both banks hard for signs of tracks. One morning, at a point about six miles above Fussell's roadhouse, the last stopping place where Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen had stayed, he thought he distinguished faint footmarks leading up from the ice. Several falls of snow had occurred since the murders but still Constable Pennecuick thought there were footprints under the fresh white blanket and started to follow them.

Once within the shelter of the trees his hunch was rewarded. Here and there where the trail was protected by overhanging branches he saw the distinct footprints of a man, the tracks both coming and going. Eagerly he climbed the small hill, following the blurred tracks.

Reaching the crest of the hill he discovered that he could get an unobstructed view of the Yukon in both directions. And then he saw the reason. Small trees had been deliberately cut down by someone so as to provide that unobstructed view. Why would anyone do that in such an out of the way spot? The logical answer was a hold-up man watching for travelers along the ice. Constable Pennecuick found further proof of this conviction in that, on carefully examining the recently-cut trees he noted that all had been felled with the same axe, the marks in the wood showing in every case that the blade

that did the work had three flaws in it—two nicks at the top and one near the bottom.

Standing there atop the hill, Constable Pennecuick mentally pieced together his version of the case. It was obvious that someone had used this observation post in order to keep track of the traffic along the river trail. Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen could have been sighted a considerable distance away, allowing the murderer plenty of time to hide himself on the river bank.

But it was most unlikely, Pennecuick reasoned, that the killing took place on the ice, where other travelers were likely to come along. The logical surmise was that the three men had been driven into the shelter of the woods and there shot.

Working on this theory, Pennecuick began to search for traces of a track leading from somewhere close by in the direction of the river. It took skilful work to discover this, the track being by now so faint that it would have been indiscernible to other than a highly-trained tracker.

Once he had ascertained its general direction it was not hard to follow, for it led practically straight to the bend of the river. Reaching the bank, it disappeared beneath the storm-piled snow on the ice. Pennecuick, now satisfied that he was on the right track, went back to the Tagish barracks for a broom and shovel.

**T**HE next day found him back on the job. Returning to the spot where he calculated the path through the woods reached the river he commenced to shovel and sweep the snow away from the surface of the ice in the hope that he might find bloodstains or other proof that the three missing men had been murdered. And luck was on his side.

When O'Brien had half-dragged, half-carried his victims' bodies toward the hole in the ice on the night of the crime, the corpses had still been warm, and here and there where O'Brien had stopped to rest they had melted their own molds in the snow.

Before the heavy snowfall that followed, these barely distinct molds had frozen solidly. Constable Pennecuick, after moving a tremendous amount of snow, found these molds and marks where the corpses had been laid down—marks that were just as clean-cut as when they had been made. Following these up, Pennecuick arrived at the again frozen-over hole in the ice, verifying his theory as to the disposal of the bodies.

From the absence of bloodstains or other indications of a struggle on the ice, he was now more certain than ever that the murder had not taken place on the river, but that the killer had chosen some less conspicuous place for his crime. Climbing back to the top of the hill he again started sweeping and shovelling in search of further clues.

For four long, heart-breaking days he swept and shoveled without making any further discovery. Any ordinary man would have given the job up as hopeless after the first day, but Pennecuick did not know the meaning of the word "quit," and was so confident that he was on the right track he kept on in spite of blistered hands and aching muscles. Then came reward. A stroke of his broom uncovered a large clot of frozen blood. Further sweeping revealed a smaller pool.

Dropping to his knees, Pennecuick carefully dug down with his knife into the frozen blood and discovered a broken, gold-filled tooth and some pieces of splintered bone. Deeper yet he recovered a .41 revolver bullet. This sug-

gested to his trained mind that the victim had been knocked down by one bullet and finished off by another bullet while he lay on the ground wounded.

Before he finished his search, Constable Pennecuick had uncovered four other pools of frozen blood nearby, accounting for the two other men. In each case he found revolver bullets beneath the surface, together with bits of smashed skull bones and brain matter.

But still convinced that the revolver bullets had merely been the finishing shots, and that the three men had been shot while standing on their feet, Pennecuick then set about trying to prove his theory. Now, turning his eyes upwards, he started to closely scrutinize the branches of the green spruce trees all about the clearing.

Again his patience and keenness were rewarded. Approximately nine feet from the ground he noticed two small branches that had plainly been nicked by a bullet. The marks must have been made by the bullet that killed Clayton, when O'Brien had shot from the hip at an upward angle. Pennecuick did not know this at the time, but he did guess that it was a spent bullet that had struck the branches after passing through the body of one of the slain men, and a spent bullet is easily deflected. Working on that theory, Pennecuick carefully worked out the likely trajectory and again using broom and shovel recovered a .40.82 rifle bullet from where it had dropped in the snow.

Carefully collecting all the grisly evidence he had so far discovered, including some of the frozen blood, Pennecuick sent them to Dawson to be held for future use. He then went through all of O'Brien's effects still held at the Tagish post and noted that O'Brien's camp axe had three nicks in the cutting edge of the blade that exactly corre-

ponded with the marks on the stumps of the trees that had been felled. Slowly and surely he was building up an airtight case, but important items were still missing; the weapons with which the killings had been committed, and the disposal of the murdered men's clothing and other effects other than gold and money.

For days after that Constable Pennecuick haunted the scene of the crime and the immediate vicinity without making further progress. Then he got another break.

ONE morning, as he was scouting around, a dog approached him, acting as though it was used to being on friendly terms with any man wearing the uniform of the Mounted. Pennecuick recognized the animal at once. It had formerly belonged to O'Brien. Whilst O'Brien had been serving his sentence at Dawson the dog had been well looked after by the officers, among whom had been Pennecuick. On being discharged, O'Brien had not bothered with the animal, but now apparently, obeying some canine instinct, the dog had managed to trail either Pennecuick or O'Brien to this spot. Perhaps O'Brien had camped in the vicinity and the dog had scented his former master's temporary home. Acting on that theory Pennecuick ordered: "Go home, Spot!" Obediently the dog turned and trotted away, with Pennecuick at his heels.

At first the dog headed for the crest of the small hill, then it turned off at right angles into the timber. Deep among the trees Pennecuick discerned a well-worn trail beneath the fresh snow. The dog followed it unhesitatingly, finally leading Pennecuick to a tent erected on a log foundation. Inside Pennecuick found a roll of blankets, a camp stove, and a few cooking utensils. Un-

rolling the blankets he found a 40.82 caliber rifle and a .41 caliber revolver. Undoubtedly this had been the murderer's temporary camping place.

From then on Constable Pennecuick worked with redoubled zeal. Dumping the stove he found among the ashes the metal fittings of belts, suspenders, and boots. He then started to circle the tent, kicking about in the snow and eventually uncovered the remains of a fire which had been built out in the open. Why would a man with a good camp stove in his tent light a fire in the open? The logical answer was to burn something. Acting upon this Pennecuick slowly and painstakingly raked over the ashes and found a number of buttons, some marked with the name of a well-known Seattle tailor, and William Clayton, one of the men who had disappeared, had been a Seattle businessman.

But still, apart from the odd-shaped nugget, Pennecuick had not discovered any articles distinctive enough to be recognized beyond a doubt as having belonged to the missing men. So, going on the assumption that the murderer would probably have scattered such articles far and wide, Pennecuick took a few small coins together with buttons cut from his own tunic and, standing on the exact site of the fire flung them in a wide-armed sweep in all directions, noting very carefully where they fell.

Then he again started using broom and shovel. One by one he recovered all the articles he had scattered and in addition a receipt for bed and board at Fussell's roadhouse, made out in Olsen's name, a comb, a garter, three cigars, a medicine bottle, a safety pin, a pocket piece of copper ore, a one dollar bill, and a short piece of rope. Most of the articles were listed as having at one time belonged to one or other of the three murdered men.

Now satisfied that his case was as complete as possible in the circumstances, Pennecuick then set about drawing up a complete plan showing the scene of his arduous investigations and listing articles recovered. In painstakingly again going over the ground when drawing the plan, he found where a second bullet had cut two small twigs from a clump of willows, and where a third bullet had nicked a branch of a dead tree. He also picked up five 40.82 caliber rifle cartridge cases and two .41 caliber revolver cartridge cases.

And then he got another break. With the coming of spring the Yukon broke up unusually quietly. Instead of the customary grinding, roaring rush downstream, the ice moved gradually out to sea. Shortly after the river was clear three naked bodies were found on sandbars. They were Relfe, Clayton, and Olsen!

The Mounted at once carefully packed the corpses in ice and shipped them to Dawson, where pieces of bone, teeth, and even tufts of hair recovered by Constable Pennecuick were found to fit exactly.

When the trial took place O'Brien's lawyer made a vehement plea for his client, claiming that all the evidence was strictly circumstantial, but it availed him nothing. Constable Pennecuick had made too thorough a job of his investigation, and O'Brien was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

During the interval between the date of the sentence and the actual carrying out of the execution, O'Brien, treated considerably by his guards, became quite friendly with them, expressed openly his admiration for Constable Pennecuick's patient detective work and made a full confession, thus confirming what Pennecuick had discovered and also filling in the gaps such as the rea-

son he had retained the odd-shaped incriminating nugget, which of his victims he had shot first, and other details. He also admitted that had he not been caught and convicted he would have waylaid, murdered and robbed other river travelers as soon as he again ran out of money.

Then arrived the day set for the hanging and the most cold-blooded murderer the Yukon had ever known met a well-deserved fate, and one of the most difficult cases in the annals of the Mounted Police passed into history. Travellers felt easier after that, and many would-be O'Briens exchanged guns for shovels.

Coming Soon

## RING AROUND MURDER

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and the strange case of

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## The HAMMERSMITH GHOST!

FOR WEEKS THE GOOD FOLK OF HAMMERSMITH, ENGLAND HAD BEEN TERRIFIED BY A GHOST — THOUGHT TO BE THAT OF A SUICIDE — WHICH SOMETIMES APPEARED IN FLOWING WHITE, AND SOMETIMES IN THE SKIN OF A CALF.

A WOMAN, PASSING THE CHURCHYARD, WAS SEIZED BY SOMETHING WHITE WHICH ROSE FROM AMONG THE TOMBSTONES — AND DIED 2 DAYS LATER OF SHOCK AND HORROR.

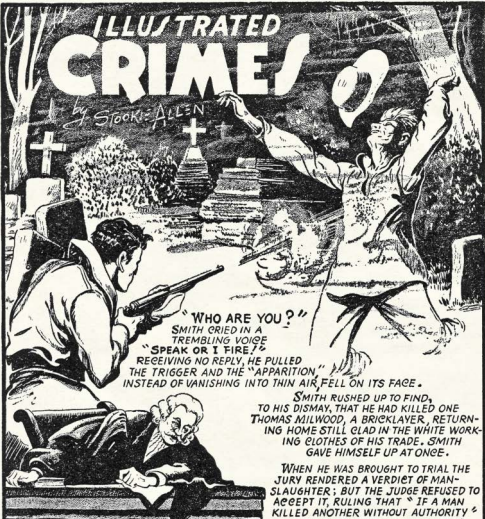
A COACHMAN WAS SO FRIGHTENED BY THE APPARITION THAT HE DESERTED HIS 8-HORSE TEAM AND 16 PASSENGERS AND FLED SCREAMING FOR HIS LIFE.

UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO WAYLAY THE GHOST UNTIL, ON THE NIGHT OF JAN. 3, 1804, FRANCIS SMITH, A LOCAL YOUTH, ARMED HIMSELF WITH A SHOTGUN AND HID BESIDE A LANE. SOON HE SAW A VAGUE, GHOSTLY FIGURE APPROACHING!



# ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOKES ALLEN



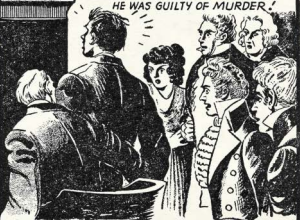
"WHO ARE YOU?"  
SMITH CRIED IN A  
TREMBLING VOICE  
"SPEAK OR I FIRE!"  
RECEIVING NO REPLY, HE PULLED  
THE TRIGGER AND THE "APPARITION,"  
INSTEAD OF VANISHING INTO THIN AIR, FELL ON ITS FACE.

SMITH RUSHED UP TO FIND,  
TO HIS DISMAY, THAT HE HAD KILLED ONE  
THOMAS MILWOOD, A BRICKLAYER, RETURN-  
ING HOME STILL CLAD IN THE WHITE WORK-  
ING CLOTHES OF HIS TRADE. SMITH  
GAVE HIMSELF UP AT ONCE.

WHEN HE WAS BROUGHT TO TRIAL THE  
JURY RENDERED A VERDICT OF MAN-  
SLAUGHTER; BUT THE JUDGE REFUSED TO  
ACCEPT IT, RULING THAT "IF A MAN  
KILLED ANOTHER WITHOUT AUTHORITY"  
HE WAS GUILTY OF MURDER.

THE SHOCKED PRISONER THEN  
HEARD THE JURY RENDER THE  
REQUIRED VERDICT, WITH A RECOM-  
MENDATION OF MERCY; AND THE  
JUDGE SENTENCE HIM TO BE  
EXECUTED THE FOLLOWING DAY  
AND HIS BODY GIVEN TO THE  
SURGEONS TO BE DISSECTED,  
AS WAS THE CUSTOM.

THE JUDGE---HIS LEGAL TECHNI-  
CILITY SATISFIED--- IMMEDIATELY  
REPORTED THE CASE TO THE KING  
WHO GRANTED A PARDON ON CON-  
DITION SMITH BE IMPRISONED FOR  
ONE YEAR, A STIPULATION THE LAD  
WAS HAPPY TO ACCEPT.

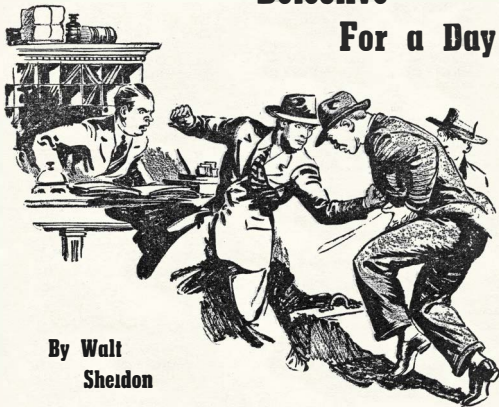


THE HAMMERSMITH GHOST APPEARED NO MORE!



He let Sharkskin have  
one in the breadbasket

# Detective For a Day



By **Walt  
Sheidon**

**J**UST because I had Blowtorch Foley on the phone doesn't mean that I'm not a perfectly respectable citizen. I just happen to be desk clerk in the Billings Hotel, and the Billings Hotel happens to be a place where people like Blowtorch Foley abound. Of course, not everybody who comes to the Billings is ripe for rogue's gallery—we get everybody from science guys like Dr. Anathy Polt, to bright eyed kids like J. Eugene Demwood, III.

This J. Eugene Demwood, III came in to register about the same time I was talking to Blowtorch. He stood in front of the desk and clutched two suitcases in his hands like he was afraid somebody was going to snatch them. I

nodded to him and kept barking into the phone.

"Look, Blowtorch," I said, "these locksmiths always rip things apart as though they were cans of kippered snacks. I want a nice, neat job so we can use the safe again, see? . . . What's that? . . . No, I don't know what's in it. Nobody around here does. We just found the thing in the cellar—nobody even knows where it comes from. . . . You'll be right over, eh? . . . Okay. So long, Blowtorch."

I hung up and pushed the register in front of the youngster. He had a nice fresh skin like you don't often see around the Billings, and the way he smiled was like a big St. Bernard dog

dying to make friends with somebody.

I said, "Single room, buck and a half. Double, two bucks."

"Thank you," said the young fellow. "Mighty reasonable. Yes sir. I'll take a double room."

He was dressed in a herringbone tweed and one of those light sweaters like those Harvard fellows. Only when he spoke his voice had a twang and I could hear the tall breeze blowing in the corn. He put his bags down reluctantly and signed the register, "J. Eugene Demwood, III."

"Bernie!" I yelled.

Our bell boy, a little, mussy-haired guy, trotted into the lobby. He made a dive for J. Eugene's bags and then J. Eugene yelled, "Hey—hold on!"

Bernie looked up from under his brows. "Don't touch that one," J. Eugene said pointing to the larger of the two bags. It was a square, black case and looked pretty strong. Bernie shrugged, took the other one, and left the lobby.

Then J. Eugene Demwood, III, leaned over the desk confidentially and said to me, "That's my crime detecting kit."

It took me a full thirty seconds to squash the laugh that mushroomed up in my throat. I pretended I was blotting the register. Finally I was able to say, "Crime detecting kit? You—er—you don't look like a detective, Mr. Demwood."

"Well, no," he said, blushing with pleasure. "The modern detective doesn't."

"Hm," I said. I eyed him sideways. "What department you work for, Mr. Demwood?"

"Hinkelstown, Pennsylvania," he said without batting an eyelash. "I'm here on a special assignment."

"Special assignment?" This was getting hot. I knew Hinkelstown was a

middle sized burg in Pennsylvania inhabited by a lot of pretty well-to-do families, such as this kid might come from.

"Yes," he said. He lowered his voice. "I'm here to find Justice Grooter."

I ALMOST choked. Justice Grooter!

He'd been missing for years. It was a joke, even. If you dropped a quarter through a grating and got down on your hands and knees looking for it, some wise guy would be sure to come along and say, "What you doin', bud—lookin' for Justice Grooter? Ha ha." I just stared blankly at J. Eugene Demwood, III and bared my chest for the next screwball.

"He was last seen here, you know," he whispered.

"Here?"

"Sure. Don't you remember? He'd taken a room here for a rendezvous with some of the underworld. That was the last ever seen of him."

"It's a little before my time," I said. "How come *you're* lookin' for him?"

"Well, when my father got me a job on the Hinkelstown police force, I guess they sort of recognized my scientific ability. I studied criminology at school. Anyway, nothing really scientific ever happens in Hinkelstown, so they sent me on this case."

"Oh, I see," I said. I could see all right. I could see a bunch of coppers back in Hinkelstown thanking their lucky stars they got rid of J. Eugene, III so easily.

"Look, kid," I said. "Take it easy—don't speak to anybody about anything here. This is a funny place this Billings, and funny things happen here. You don't know who you're gonna run into. You read about that department store robbery yesterday where a watchman was killed? Well, for all you know the guy in the room next to you was the

murderer. And I could say the same for practically any crime that's happened lately."

"Oh, yes—I read about that robbery," Demwood started to bubble. "The watchman had a club in his hand and there was blood and hair on it, and—"

I put out my hand. "Forget it, young fella. Take it easy."

He looked a little hurt. "All right," he said, "Thanks." Then he picked up his crime detecting kit, as he called it, and turned toward the door.

Just then Blowtorch Foley blew in. There was another man next to him, and I frowned. The other one was smaller than Blowtorch, he had a sallow skin, and greenish eyes that kept sliding from one side to the other. He was dressed in a sharply cut suit that tripled the width of his shoulders. This was Sharkskin Storn, and I wished that Blowtorch hadn't brought him along.

And all of a sudden I had something else to wish it wasn't. J. Eugene, lugging that crime detecting kit of his; trying to say so long to me at the same time, and trying to steer himself toward the door, bumped smack into Blowtorch Foley.

"Hey!" yelled Blowtorch.

His voice was big, like the rest of him; when he talked I could feel it in the floor. J. Eugene's nice pink skin got pinker and he stepped back and sort of grinned and sort of said, "huh!" and sort of fumbled at his tie.

Then Sharkskin Storn suddenly stepped in front of J. Eugene and stabbed him in the chest with his forefinger. "Look, punk," he said, "Why the hell don't you put out your hand?"

That was Sharkskin. Sometimes I thought being nasty was his hobby.

"Why," said J. Eugene, looking like a wounded deer, "I'm sorry, but you don't have to get nasty about it."

"Yeah," said Sharkskin. "On your way, mooch." He flipped J. Eugene's tie from his sweater.

There was a small red sunrise on the back of J. Eugene's neck and then there were two sound effects. One was a soft thud, the other a hard *clap!* Before my eyes Sharkin bent double from a blow to the midsection and went to sleep from a sweetly placed crack in the jaw. J. Eugene Demwood, III, rubbed the knuckles of his right hand a little, then pulled at his fingers. About that time Blowtorch Foley started one of his big fists traveling from his side.

J. Eugene rolled his head to the right, stepped inside of Blowtorch's punch and snapped one of those short ones straight into Blowtorch's mouth. Blowtorch's eyes got as shiny as ball bearings and he staggered backward into a corner.

I said, "Well, scratch my ear!" and watched J. Eugene Demwood pick up his bag and leave.

**BLOWTORCH** and **SHARKSKIN** started to get into focus again, and in a moment they were both standing in the middle of the lobby looking dumbly at each other. At that time a stranger came in the door.

First a little pointed Van Dyke beard came, and behind it a little, scrawny man in dark gray clothes. He stopped and looked Blowtorch and Sharkskin up and down.

The little beard quivered. "Had an accident, gentlemen? I'm a doctor."

Blowtorch blinked a little at the beard. "Naw. We're okay."

It suddenly occurred to me that if anything disabled Blowtorch for a while I wouldn't get my safe opened. I used my best foreign minister type tones. "Let the Doc take a look at you," I coaxed Blowtorch.

"Well—" he said grudgingly.

"Somebody sneaked up behind him and socked him on the chin," I told the Doc. I didn't want to embarrass Blowtorch

The beard walked right up to Blowtorch, started to finger his face and peck away in a peppery voice: "Well, well, let's see now, just a bruise or two. Interesting phenomena, propensity of the inferior mentality to deny pain. Probably due to repressions in childhood caused by father forbidding normal urge to cry. Yes, yes. Closely allied to the oedipus complex."

Blowtorch said, "Huh?" and he and Sharkskin stared at the Doc.

All of a sudden the beard stopped jiggling. The Doc's hand was on the back of Blowtorch's head, he frowned and said, "Where did you get this bump?"

"Aw, that?" said Blowtorch, "Aw, a screw in stir batted me wit' a billy onct."

The Doc went, "*Tch, tch, tch.*"

"Why? What's a matter?" asked Blowtorch

"Are you sure you don't get pains in your forehead? Do you ever have hallucinations?"

"Naw! Whaddaye mean! Are you tryin' to tell me I'm nuts?"

"No," said the Doc gravely. He pulled at his beard. "Not yet."

Blowtorch jerked away from the Doc and stood at the door, snarling at him. Sharkskin took his arm and said, "Come on, let's go get some witch hazel. This joint is gettin' a screwier element in it every day." The two of them turned and walked out

The Doc walked up to the desk, and as though nothing had happened, said to me, "How do you do. I'm Doctor Anathy Polt. I'll need accommodations for about two weeks. I came here to

study criminal types. I'm writing a book, you see, on criminal psychology."

"Oh," I said. I handed him the register and looked in the drawer to see if I had any aspirins.

When Doctor Anathy Polt had left for his room I took two aspirins and buried myself in the ledger so I wouldn't start thinking too much about some of the guests at the Billings. Just when I was hot on the trail of a stray dollar and twelve cents, Blowtorch and Sharkskin came back.

Blowtorch asked, "Where's 'at safe you want busted, Wally?"

I pointed to the storeroom door. "In there."

"I'll try the dial first," said Blowtorch. "If I can't open it like that, I'll get some tools."

"All right, sure," I said. I opened the storeroom door for them and they went in. I was just about to follow them when I heard somebody come into the lobby. I turned. There was J. Eugene Demwood, III, with a little tin box in one hand and a pile of old clothes in the other

**I** FIGURED if Blowtorch and Sharkskin heard J. Eugene's voice they'd try to start things again, so I carefully closed the storeroom door on them. J. Eugene came up to the desk, and I faced him.

He had the look of Destiny in his face. "Hello," I said a little apprehensively.

"I'm going," said J. Eugene in a low voice. "to reconstruct the crime."

"Huh?" I asked.

"The scientist," he replied, unloading his junk on the desk top, "to learn an unknown fact, recreates the conditions surrounding that fact. Now, I'm going to be Justice Grooters. And I'm going to come up here and register. Then I'm

going up to the room Grooters occupied. 207, I believe. I see by the key rack that it's empty."

"What's all this?" I waved my hand at the old clothes and the tin box.

"A make-up box, and an exact replica of Grooter's costume at the time of his disappearance," said the kid eagerly. He added: "All the great detectives of history were perfectionists."

"Now, wait a minute—" I said.

J. Eugene interrupted me. "Just think!" he said, "If I can find Grooters, I'll have surpassed every detective in the country! On top of that, there's a ten thousand dollar reward for him. I'll see that you're taken care of."

I didn't believe I'd ever see a pale green flash of that ten thousand, but I figured maybe I could keep the kid and the two gorillas in the storeroom from meeting. I said, "Okay. Go in that little office on the side there to put your costume on."

"I'll be right out!" whooped J. Eugene, III. He dashed into the office. I shook my head sadly, took another aspirin and went back after that dollar and twelve cents.

Just when I almost had it Blowtorch Foley and Sharkskin Storn came stumbling out of the storeroom. Sharkskin looked nastier than ever and Foley seemed to be a slight spearmint color around the gills.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"Nuttin'." replied Blowtorch. His voice was a ragged whisper. "Nuttin'. I can't open your safe." Sharkskin just sort of glared at me. They started to walk across the lobby, and I noticed Blowtorch was placing his feet carefully one in front of the other, like a drunk tries to walk a chalk line. And then, when they were only a few steps from the door, Dr. Polt suddenly popped in.

Dr. Polt's beard vibrated at Blowtorch.

He said, "I'd like to ask you a few questions, Foley."

I wondered where Polt had learned his name, and I had another misty idea that the Doc's voice had lost its Ph.D. peckiness.

"I ain't got time," Blowtorch said, "I got an appointment."

"Just a minute," Polt interrupted. "Where were you Thursday night?"

In a flash, then, Sharkskin had backed away and had a gun in his hand. "I get it," he said quietly. "Blowtorch, get your gat out. This guy ain't a nut doctor. He's a dick."

Polt nodded. "Right. An insurance detective You got some valuable furs from that department store. If I were you I'd tell where they are and come along quietly. Save a lot of trouble in the end."

Sharkskin's eyes squinted under his dark brows. "Mr. Insurance," he said, "I'm gonna let you have a bullet right in the belly."

I could see Polt stiffen where he stood. I could see that he knew Sharkskin wasn't fooling. I could see where I'd better get ready to duck under the desk.

The door of the office rattled open. Sharkskin said from the side of his mouth, "See who that is, Foley."

Blowtorch Foley turned around. I saw him stiffen, then saw a rippling shiver grab him by the toes and travel all the way up his body to the top of his head. I saw every bit of color fade from his face and leave an oyster white mask. Then Blowtorch Foley screamed.

"*Arrrrr!*" He yelled, "*I'm goin' nuts!*"

I swung my head around to what Foley was looking at, and jerked a sharp breath into me. J. Eugene Dem-

wood, III was there. The kid was wearing a dark gray business suit, he had his paunch stuffed to make it fit; there were grease paint lines in his face and his hair was sprinkled with gray. Even his nose was molded with putty. I recalled pictures I'd seen of the missing Justice Grooters . . .

"Get outa here!" wailed Blowtorch, "You ain't real! Scram!"

**S**HARKSKIN turned to see, no doubt, what the hell was making a blubbering idiot out of Blowtorch, and in that minute, Polt jumped him. Polt grabbed the gun and they began to waltz back and forth in the middle of the lobby.

Sharkskin grunted, "Foley! It's a gag! Come on, get this guy!"

"Yeah, yeah," said Blowtorch, staring at J. Eugene, "It's a gag. Sure, it's a gag."

He brought his gun up with a trembling hand, turned, and pointed it at Polt.

In that instant J. Eugene Demwood was bounding across the lobby. He crashed into Blowtorch and knocked his gun arm upward, just as the weapon went off. One of his big hands torpedoed into Blowtorch's face for the second time that day; caught him at perfect right angles on the front of his jaw. Blowtorch's knees forgot what they were for and Blowtorch fell flat on his face.

J. Eugene turned to Sharkskin and Polt. He turned just in time to see Sharkskin jerk his automatic loose and hatchet the butt down on the insurance detective's forehead. J. Eugene took two steps, flung his hand at Sharkskin as though he were throwing a ball and sent the automatic tumbling across the lobby.

Sharkskin crouched low and put every ounce in his body behind a hard

jab into J. Eugene's solar plexus. Sharkskin's fist must have been surprised to find itself sink into a lot of padding.

There wasn't much more to it. J. Eugene lashed out with a rhythmic one, two, three, and then Sharkskin was draped limply over the insurance detective.

J. Eugene turned to me. "Gee!" he said, "What—"

I motioned toward the storeroom. "Don't ask questions," I said, "I've got a sneakin' idea. Come with me."

J. Eugene picked up one of the fallen guns and followed me into the storeroom. The safe that had been found in the cellar was standing in the corner. It was about as high as my waist, as wide as the spread of my arms. I stepped over to it and pulled at the knob of the dial. The door swung open ponderously.

"Good God!" breathed J. Eugene.

"Not very pretty after all these years," I said. "Even with that airtight safe."

"But—but—what's it all about?" asked J. Eugene. He put his hand lightly to the side of his forehead.

"Come on," I said, "We'll call some cops, then I'll tell you."

After I had phoned the law I said to the kid:

"This guy Polt posing as a psychologist, or whatever he was supposed to be, was snooping around to find who robbed the department store and killed the watchman. The watchman's club had a little hair and blood on it, so there must have been a struggle and the thief must have been hit on the back of the head. Polt felt the bump on Foley's head, and went out again to check and make sure. Then Foley came in to open this safe which we found in the basement. He and Shark-

skin saw the corpse of Justice Grooters. Sharkskin decided they'd say they couldn't open the safe, then swipe it later and collect the reward for themselves.

Then when they came out, and Blowtorch saw you made up as Grooters, he thought that bump on the head had

made him nuts. You know what happened after that."

"Gee!" said J. Eugene Demwood, III, "What's gonna happen now?"

"You're going to get a reputation as the greatest detective in the country." I said. "But heaven help you if they ever give you a case!"

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BY PAUL ALLENBY

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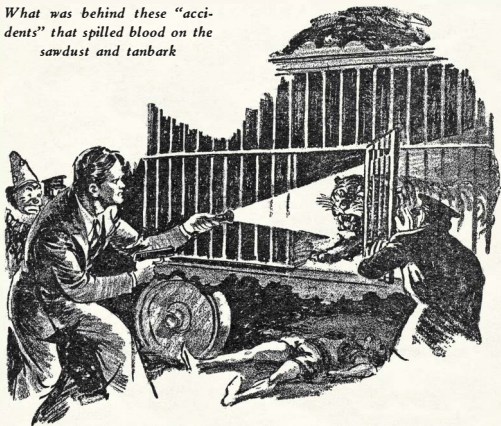


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*What was behind these "accidents" that spilled blood on the sawdust and tanbark*



## Murder in the Big Top

By Dudley Marshall

THE murmur of hundreds of voices filled the huge Mills-Rumling tent.

A gold-braided band leader spun a long, jeweled baton that glittered magnificently in the beams of spotlights. As if blown by that first burst of horns, clowns cartwheeled along the runway in twirls of purple, red and yellow, their appearance bringing cries of delight from the children.

It was then, above the band, that private operative Danny Crogan heard a shout of agony and the rumbling caterwaul of a tiger. Hell broke loose out-

side. Lions roared. Women screamed. The elephant, beyond the silken drapes of the entrance, raised its trunk and trumpeted, ears swinging out like huge batwings.

"Big cat's loose! Run! Run! Cat's loose! Cat's loose!"

Louder screams, shouts, the sudden movement of five thousand people all with the same alarm tearing their hearts, began a slow sway that could stampede into mob hysteria.

Danny Crogan saw all this in split seconds. It was the moment he had felt



drawing closer and closer, since three days ago he had come among the circus folk to investigate the death of Irene Duchet, the little aerial dancer beloved of everybody from manager Cordovan down to the last stake man. She had slipped on a mysteriously paraffined rope and dashed to her death. The circus folk said a jinx had hit the Mills-Rumbling Circus. . . . Now, once more, terror was striking.

Even as his long strides took him towards the point where that scream of agony had burst on the outside night, Danny caught a glimpse of Rosa Montell that roused all his admiration. The former opera star, riding the first elephant, began to sing a troubadour aria which had recently become a feature of the show. At first the glorious richness of her voice circled the big top in vain. She was singing alone, almost in darkness. Then a spotlight found her there on the back of the great beast, a slender, white shape with arms raised beseechingly . . . and the crowd paused and settled back from its terror.

"Good girl," muttered Danny, as he hitched the canvas, ducked under and came up behind rows of trucks backed close to the tent.

"Lights!" someone was yelling. "What's happened to the lights? Git 'em on."

Danny angled towards the center of disturbance. Out of the blackness a flying body struck him head-on and sprawled him backwards. He saw a figure looming above him. He tried to avoid the feet, but one landed like a sledge hammer on his chest, the heel of the other stamped the biceps of his right arm into the mud.

Danny felt the kick coming. He twisted his chin so the shoe just raked the side of his face. At the same time he grasped the leg which still pinioned

his arm and started to throw his weight against it. But even as the man sprang he struck down with his free leg. The blow hit Danny's forearm and loosed his hold on the ankle with such force his fingernails broke in the trouser cuff.

Dazed, Danny stumbled to his feet, at the same time reaching for the gun under his arm. But too late. Both his arms were too numb. The man gained the space near the tent and disappeared past a gilt circus wagon. Danny knew he'd never catch the fellow now; instead of following, he hurried towards the men around a cage whence issued the snarling of the tiger.

"Watch out—door's open!" someone warned as Danny came near.

Crogan used his flash. The ray revealed the animal, teeth bared, eyes ferocious gleams of fire, ears pinned close to its head. The door stood wide open.

"Now," said Danny, "it's blinded. Get in."

A man darted forward, the door clanged shut. Danny shifted his spot to the body of the man sprawled horribly in the mud—it was The Amazing Hubert, a contortionist. Deep gashes ripped his throat, his head was twisted sideways.

A WHITE-FACED lad whirled and started being sick. Another cried, "God! The cat got him. Mills-Rumling is jinxed. This is my last night."

The same scared thought, "Show's jinxed," ran through every man gathered around the dead Hubert.

Crogan slipped close to the cage and threw his spot on the tiger again. Whiskered lips crinkled and drooled over yellow stumps of teeth. It was an old tiger, he saw, that shivered against the wall.

From the direction of the sideshows

a uniformed policeman came running. Behind him, Danny saw the bulky form of manager Cordovan lumbering along with his assistant, Rowley. Before they arrived, Danny stepped close to the head animal keeper.

"Listen," he said to the keeper, "do you think that cat's been out of the cage?"

"Naw," said the keeper. "Too scared. See here . . ." The keeper pulled a thin rod from between the bars. "Him, er somebody's been devilin' the poor beast an' opened the door 'cause they wanted it to get loose. If it was him he only got what was comin'. But that cat's too scared. . . . It's never been outa the cage. He musta stuck his head in to get clawed that way."

"Maybe somebody wanted to let it loose," suggested Danny, "to cover up how Hubert got killed."

"Maybe," agreed the head keeper. "Hubert was a good sort. I can't believe he'd a been devilin' the poor beast."

Cordovan, Rowley and the policeman took a quick look at the dead man.

Cordovan pulled Danny aside. "What an unholy mess," he said, sweat glistening on his forehead. "Two of my best they got now—Irene and Hubert." A fat paw swabbed a silk handkerchief over forehead and neck as the bay-windowed Cordovan struggled to catch his breath.

"Two gone," Cordovan repeated, then added forcefully, "Whoever's doin' this is doin' it so it seems accidental . . . so it'll bust the show. As I've been tellin' you, Crogan, circus people have strange ideas. They'll all pull out tomorrow if we don't get hold of whoever's back of these killin's tonight."

Danny fingered a cigarette from an upper vest pocket, caught a tiny blue flame to its tip, drew the smoke down

deep in his lungs. He was watching the big man through narrowed eyes as the latter began to ramble through the pockets of his rumpled palm beach.

"Here," Cordovan extended a folded sheet of letter paper wrapped in another silk handkerchief. "Since Old Lady Mills sent you here, I'm turnin' this over to you 'stead of to the Jersey Police. I found it on my desk not twenty minutes ago an' I ain't touched it."

Crogan unfolded the sheet, fingertips on handkerchief, and slanted it to catch the glow of the overhead bulb. Its type-written lines read:

More will get it tonight, Cordovan. You better use your influence with Mrs. Mills to sell out, or you'll be next in line. I'm tired of waiting.—The Jinx.

Even in the incomplete light Crogan saw all the *b* letters were out of line. If ever the typewriter was found, its identification would be child's play.

"What do you make of it?" asked Cordovan. "See that *b* is crooked?"

Crogan tried to pierce the intention behind the glistening eyes of the big man. One thing he felt beyond doubt—Cordovan wasn't scared.

"Mind if I keep your nice silk handkerchief?" Crogan's voice was casual. "If there are fingerprints, whose do you think they are?"

"Drucker's," Cordovan snorted, "that guy—Drucker's. He's the only one that's wantin' Old Lady Mills to sell, ain't he? He's the guy that's been hangin' around ever since we hit Jersey City, ain't he? That black-headed ape! He's been runnin' to the Old Lady for the last six months wantin' her to sell."

"Well," said Danny softly, "murderers don't come and lay themselves in your hands. I'm as anxious as you are."

Cordovan let out a curse. "These killin's is getting me," he said, ". . . two of 'em and more threatened . . . some-

thing's gotta be done, Crogan. It's to-night or never."

"Excuse me," said Rowley, stepping forward from where he had been standing in the shadow, "I couldn't help hearing what you were saying, Mr. Cordovan, and I think you're entirely right. All these deaths . . ." Rowley looked nervously off into the darkness and shivered. The assistant manager was thin, long-armed and white-faced. His weak eyes peering through gold-rimmed glasses had the unpleasant look of a man afraid of his superiors.

"Ycs? So what?" Rowley was the type of underling Danny instinctively disliked.

Rowley motioned towards the dead man being lifted onto a stretcher. "Some say there's a jinx on the circus. . . . We don't any of us feel safe. I think maybe we ought to call in the Federal men, Mr. Cordovan. I think murder's the answer all right. If you say so, Mr. Cordovan, I'll—"

The manager interrupted with an impatient jerk of his head. "Beat it, Rowley. I'll be along in a minute."

**R**OWLEY set off at a trot. Cordovan whirled on the detective. "I'll give you till the end of the show," he said. "After that I'm callin' in the Federal men." He whirled again and strode off.

Danny moved towards the circus tent which loomed like some huge dim-lighted Japanese lantern against the electric-splashed silhouette of New York City.

Only a few minutes had passed since Rosa Montell began to sing. Now a whistle shrilled and was followed by a burst of applause and laughter. The crowd had forgotten its scare and was unaware of the threat which hung over it. If humanly possible Danny meant to keep it unaware, to prevent death from

striking again in the midst of that joyous throng. Already several ideas were shaping in his mind.

Some fifteen minutes later, Danny reached the side door of the large trailer which served Cordovan and Rowley as an office. Rowley jumped up from his desk, ink bottle clutched in his hand.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Crogan. I'm—I'm jittery since—since . . ."

"Where Cordovan?"

"I haven't seen him since . . . back there." Rowley's eyes were smoky pits behind the thick lenses of his glasses as he replaced the ink bottle on his desk. "Mr. Drucker was asking for him not five minutes ago."

"Drucker, eh? Asking for Cordovan—which way'd he go?"

"That way," Rowley raised an unsteady finger towards the big tent. "I distinctly remember because I went to the door to see if Mr. Cordovan was anywhere in sight. He was right wrought up about something, Mr. Drucker was. Kept scowlin' like."

"Wrought up, was he?" Crogan made for the door. Suddenly he whirled and confronted Rowley, his hand carelessly under his coat. "Where were you, Rowley, when the Jinx left his note a while ago?"

"I—I—" Rowley cowered back against his desk. "Mr. Cordovan sent me to look over the nets. I've been doing that ever since poor little Irene was killed. The note . . . must have come while I was gone. Say, you don't think—" Rowley's mouth dropped open. "—you don't think I had anything to do with it, Mr. Crogan? Honest, Mr. Crogan," Rowley's voice became a whine that went well with his appearance. "Mr. Crogan, I—"

"All right, all right," Danny slipped sideways out of the door.

Eyes on the crowd, Danny was biting at a broken particle of fingernail. Suddenly he stopped. There was a smell of paraffin under his nails. He slipped the typewritten note from his pocket, squeezed a finger with nail still intact. A thin sliver of paraffin slithered onto the paper. His mind leaped back to that struggle in the dark. He'd torn his nails in the man's trouser cuff. . . . Irene Duchet had slipped to her death on a paraffined rope. . . . Danny whirled toward the big tent.

THE animal act was just going on as the detective entered. At one side attendants were jerking back drapes from a cage in which a dozen lions and tigers footed around with angry roars. Off and on the huge beasts clawed one another, bringing cries of excitement and fear from the audience. The trainer in a braided uniform of red and gold stood talking to a bare-legged girl in a silk blouse.

Cordovan was nowhere in sight, but at the far side of the stands the squat Drucker stood near the cage. There was no mistaking him, for even at that distance Drucker's black hair, beady eyes and beaked nose were easily identified.

Drucker seemed absorbed in the animals. Danny slipped back of the stands with the intention of coming out in the aisle behind Drucker. It was two or three minutes before he gained the aisle. When he did, Drucker had disappeared.

Danny felt himself in a spot. He had a note with a threat of further death, a sliver of paraffin, and, at the back of his brain, a sense of gathering doom.

Danny's eyes were drawn to the trainer. Somehow the guttural menace of lion and tiger had in it an undercurrent of terror and death. The hysterical cries that burst from the audience at

the snarls and roars made Danny tense for action.

The trainer cracked a long, black whip like a pistol shot. With it he drove each animal to a high stool. Using the whip as a threat, he made the two central animals, a lion and a tiger, stand erect facing each other. Again he cracked his whip. The lion and tiger reared apart, tails twitching, and sat down.

The trainer bowed and took his applause; then he flicked a lion which leaped from its stool, reared to its hind legs and began to do an awkward dance across the floor. The audience fell silent. They understood this was to be the big moment of the act. The trainer was going to lie down and put his head in the lion's mouth just like it showed in the posters.

All of a sudden the lion roared and struck out with its paws. The whip cut it across the nose. Danny saw everything in slow motion. The lion's paw didn't reach the trainer, but as the latter's whip cracked his arm dropped, his legs buckled under him and he spun around—a splotch of blood on his face—and crumpled to the floor.

The lion sprang toward the prostrate man. The bare-legged girl and other attendants thrust long bars into the cage, gouging at the lions, desperately. The audience went wild, men shouting, women screaming, people running. . . .

Even as he saw all this Danny was running toward the opening into the next tent, for there he'd seen a spurt of smoke in line with the trainer.

As he ran, a stricken cry broke from the tent where the elephants were tethered and one elephant trumpeted above the pandemonium of the crowd—a high, spine-tingling *shoosh* like the throaty whistle of a great bird.

A crush of men rushed from the side,

half carrying Danny off his feet. Only seconds elapsed before he freed himself, but when he gained the next tent he saw the huge elephant, Hilda, waving her trunk, saw a man stretched on the ground. The killer had escaped.

The man on the ground was the head animal keeper.

Through blood-frothed lips the keeper murmured, "Didn't believe in a jinx. I watched . . . I saw him shoot . . . he caught me. It's . . ."

Crogan strained to hear.

"—wouldn't have thought it," murmured the head keeper. "Hilda tried to get him. . . ."

"Name," Danny shouted, "his name? Who was it?"

" . . . was it? What. . . ." The keeper's lids fluttered. Inarticulate words ended in a strangled cough. He struggled feebly . . . died.

In a flash Danny understood all there was to know. The killer shot the animal trainer with the idea the lion would attack him and mutilate him so the manner of his death would never come out. Or, if it did, not until it had accomplished his purpose of busting the show. He'd caught the keeper spying and shot him to silence him. But shooting the keeper hadn't been in his plan.

As for the elephant, the whole circus spoke well of the head keeper's treatment of his animals. Hilda, a special pet, had merely tried to save her friend.

That was all.

**L**EAVING the keeper to the care of the circus people, Danny hurried into the night. At the nearest street corner he entered a taxi and said, "Sheridan Hotel."

The Sheridan was a small hotel near the Hoboken waterfront where, the day before, Crogan had located Drucker's rooms on the third floor. He paid the

driver off a couple of blocks away and stepped into an alley which led to the rear of the place. As he approached the house he looked up to see if Drucker's windows showed any light and was relieved to find the whole third floor dark except for the window on the hall. That made things simpler.

Crogan found a gate in a rickety board fence. It swung open when he pushed. He entered a yard smelling of fish, garbage and stale beer, the latter from a bar inside the hotel.

A sudden noisy movement made him grab for his gun, but by the dim light of the street lamp he saw two cats upset a basket and spring, fiery-eyed, to a side fence and thence to the roof of a low building in the next yard. The cats hissed, straightened their tails, disappeared. Danny saw that from the roof of the building in the next yard a drain pipe led to a ledge which touched one of Drucker's windows.

He inhaled a deep breath from his cigarette, ground it under his heel and ran to a straight-arm vault that propelled him to the top of the fence. With the same motion he started for the low roof, sprang, kicked and twisted to a crouch on a tar-papered surface.

He tested the drain pipe, then wormed upward to the ledge. He dug his fingers between weathered bricks and side-stepped the six or seven feet to the window. Drucker might be waiting in the dark, but he had to chance it. He slipped fingers under the top of the lower sash and pulled. Another moment and he slid noiselessly into the hot, dark room.

Using only his flash, he saw the first room contained only the usual hotel furnishings—bed, chest of drawers and chairs. But he found what he sought—a standard-sized typewriter on a table littered with papers and correspondence.

A gooseneck light stood at one side. He bent it lower and turned it on. Selecting a clean sheet of paper from the table, he inserted it in the machine.

A minute later Danny whistled under his breath. The message he'd typed compared in every detail with the one Cordovan had given him. Not only were the *b's* out of line, the faint smudges in the *a's* and *e's* were identical.

He crossed to the closet. There, from under a pile of dirty shirts, he brought to light a small coil of rope of the size which Irene Duchet had used for her aerial dance. Where the end of the rope had been cut it showed definite corrugations. Just as did the rope from which the little dancer plunged to her death, Danny remembered. If they were the same—and he believed they were—they'd dovetail together unmistakably.

All in all he had enough circumstantial evidence to put Drucker away . . . but it all seemed too pat.

A key scratched in the lock. Danny had just time to snap off the gooseneck, spring into the other room where he turned, gun in hand. Through a crack in the door he looked into the room he had left.

A man moved carefully from the hall into the darkness of the room. He reached for the same light Danny had just snapped off. The light switched on. The bulky Cordovan crouched in the middle of the room . . . an automatic in his hand.

The big man went through almost the same motions Danny had. He sat down at the typewriter, inserted a piece of paper, and with one finger picked out a message of about the same length as the one he'd given Danny. When he finished he read it over. The circus manager was still a stickler about fingerprints, Danny noted; he wore a pair of white silk gloves.

"Don't move. Drop that paper an' put yer mitts in the air," a low voice grated from the door Cordovan had just closed.

The fat man jerked as if he'd contacted a high tension wire, his eyes wandered to the revolver lying on the table.

"Put 'em up or you get it," repeated the voice. "Move yer little finger fer that gun an' you're a dead man."

Cordovan had no alternative. His hands went above his head, the paper trembling in the right one. Two men stepped into the room and closed the door.

One was thin-faced and wiry, the other of medium build with the square, battered face of an ex-pug. Two gunmen, Danny guessed, hired for the purpose of getting him. If he could get both them and Cordovan, he'd probably be able to pull the whole case together.

SOME slight noise, the feel of a strange presence, was all the warning Crogan had that someone entered the room behind him. He squirmed sideways from the thing that lunged through the darkness. Got his neck clear of murderous claws, but felt their sharp burn in his shoulder.

As Danny fell he heard Cordovan bellow in the next room and saw him sweep the gooseneck from the table, shattering the light. The room rocked with the crash of pistol shots. Both rooms were dark now.

As Danny fell he used an old wrestling trick. Instead of sprawling, he drew up his knees and twirled. The instant his back contacted the floor his feet shot up into the mid-section of his assailant. Once his toes touched he straightened with all his might. His assailant catapulted backward, groaning, but as he went his claws tore savagely at the calf of Danny's leg.

Danny landed on his feet. He was without gun or flashlight, closed in one room with a clawing killer, a death struggle between three men going on in the next. If he only could get his light, only once see the man's face. . . . He felt sure the clawing brute was the real murderer.

He moved along the wall until his fingers curved over the back of a chair. He grabbed it, held it before him.

He couldn't see a thing. All at once the next room quieted. Not three feet away a breath sounded, carefully drawn in. Danny twisted, a dim figure rose.

Danny didn't get to swing the chair. The claw-man grabbed hold of it . . . they both struggled for it. Danny tried to shove clear and jerk the chair back. The other checked him by trying to do the same. They twisted, kicked, jerked, crashed into a wall, went down and came up panting and hanging on.

"Beat it," somebody yelled. "Git out of here." Following the yell, feet thudded along the hall. Cordovan's hoarse bellow sounded, the floor shaking with his running weight.

With a snarl, Danny's assailant yanked the chair to one side, let go of it and lunged. Danny wheeled and swung. The chair connected and the man went down. But Danny sprawled forward himself. Before he could get to his feet, the claw-man leaped into the other room and was gone.

Less than a minute had elapsed since the pistol shots rang in Cordovan's room. Danny jumped up, found his gun, and in a flash was at the stairs where hurrying feet were pounding upward.

"What's goin' on up there?" a voice yelled. Quietly Danny slipped through the hall window to the fire escape.

As he reached the alley he heard a car door slam, a motor whine in low and drone off in high. The cobbled street

in front of the hotel was deserted. Once again the Jinx had vanished.

SOME twenty minutes later, leg and shoulder temporarily bandaged, Danny stepped from a cab near the Mills-Rumling Circus, paid the driver, and watched the cab until it turned the next corner.

Except for a few lights at the office, the big top and all around it lay in darkness. Some distance beyond, the colony of trailers which housed the circus people was brightly lighted. Danny knew the circus people had gathered together there for mutual protection against the Jinx.

He approached the office from the back and peered cautiously through a small window. Rowley was in there alone, a slouch hat low over his eyes. The assistant manager sat facing the door, a length of pipe across his knees. As Danny entered he sprang up, then relaxed.

"Seen Cordovan yet?" Danny asked.

"Not since you asked, Mr. Crogan. But Drucker's been here again." Rowley's voice thinned. "He asked me which trailer Rosa Montell . . ."

Sharp fear gripped Danny's heart. "Did you tell him?" he shouted. "How long ago?" He grabbed Rowley by the arm, shaking him.

"I told him her trailer sets off from the others, because Miss Montell doesn't like—"

"You know hers then?" Danny gritted, thrusting Rowley through the door. "Take me there. Quick! Get going, man!" He shoved Rowley ahead.

Impressed at last by the detective's urgency, Rowley set off at a lope. "This way's nearer," he called, leaping into the big tent. "Hers is a little to one side . . ."

The big top was lit only by a few

lanterns as they sped through the shadowy emptiness. Midway, Rowley veered off the entrance to the smaller tent, Danny close at his heels.

Rowley slowed as though seeking how best to turn. At that instant two men leaped from the folds of canvas, their guns digging into Danny's ribs. "Don't move! Up with yer mitts. Sky-high or you get it." Too late Crogan recognized the gunmen from the Sheridan.

"Got you at last," said Rowley, whirling his gun.

Danny figured he might sweep the gunmen forward and duck behind the canvas.

Rowley's face, unguarded for the first time, twitched with cruel triumph. "You're going for a nice little ride, Crogan. I missed you at the Sheridan, but it all comes out in the wash. Cordovan will get his too. Then Mr. Drucker," he bowed sarcastically, "will be nabbed for the whole thing. After that there'll be the Rowley circus. Neat, isn't it?"

Suddenly Rowley raised his head as if listening. "Hold him there, boys," he said, and catfooted away.

Danny tensed, ready to make a break. One of the gunmen said, "Don't think of it, big boy."

Somewhere behind them, Cordovan bellowed. A moment later Rowley prodded him in, a gun in the fat man's back. "He wants it now, boys," said Rowley with a kind of insane graciousness. "We'll take the two of them together and make it a party."

Although the whole side of the big man's face was smeared with blood, he had plenty of courage. "What's this, Rowley?" he rumbled. He didn't understand the truth even yet and his voice rang with its old authority.

"I'll tell you," hissed Rowley. "I have . . ." but Danny didn't listen to Rowley, for behind him Danny saw a great gray shape almost concealed by the darkness and wing of the canvas. It advanced slowly, with no more sound than a shadow.

Danny set himself, his heart beating wildly. Everything happened at once. Hilda's trunk struck Rowley's arm, his gun fell to the ground. Before he could move Hilda caught him and whirled him aloft. For an awful moment she squeezed him there. He screamed horribly and then Hilda slammed him down with a sickening thud.

Simultaneously, Danny ducked, seized both his captors before they could think, jerking the gun from one as he did so. With it he clubbed the other alongside the head. Cordovan bellowed, lurched forward and fell upon the skinny fellow. That was the end of the fight.

They got up, the two thugs subdued. Hilda touched Rowley with her trunk. After that she backed slowly away.

"Well," said Cordovan. "I don't need to be told any more. My people will be safe from now on. That's him—Hilda told me so."

"Yes," said Danny, "she's a better detective than I am. If she'd only been able to talk, we'd have had him a lot sooner."

This is a Good Week to

**WIN \$10.00**

See Page 111



# Solving Cipher Secrets



M. E. OHAYER  
"Sanyam"

**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 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. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 145—Vacation Spot. By †Gregory.

\*PLDT \*KFTDKG-\*UALNKV AU KVT \*KOAR, \*DTF \*ZTEXSA,  
\*UXTRKO, XR \*ROD \*PLOD \*JOG OK KVT \*XDJXOD BLTQYA,  
FVTNT KVT RBTSKOSYT AU OD ODSXTDK SXHXYXCOKXAD  
XR BNTRTNHTJ OYZARK XDKOSK OZXJRK O ZAJTND FANYJ.

No. 146—Strange Change. By †Nujak.

ELEMENT RKNTZBFKB AKMEMZ K.M \*XDVVSTJLKFZ MEXM-  
FKFEFKVL VP "VK" PVD "ZD," NLR GKBZ GZDMN, NF XZYK-  
LLKLY VD AKRRTZ VP HVDR, NM "\*VKLZMF \*UZDBZ" PVD  
"\*ZDLZMF \*UVJBZ," "FOVKR" PVD "FOKDR," ZFB.

No. 147—Oriental Wisdom. By Mutt.

\*ABCDEFEG GHKLNO PLQHPRG: "SL TSB GBNULG APOVX-  
BKPHQ TSNL GFXXFCK BC FAL AHRL, GBBC SHG 'ABYL' FC  
SLHY" GB ZLTHPL, AFVSLP DHCG!

No. 148—Couldn't Take It. By †M. E. Smith

NSGEYFXU ZFHV-ZSXR ZRXAH-ZRGDDXRVA VUOVAZ AVZO-  
GPAGUO, XAHVAZ DPUNS, LVOZ ZEGDD KFZSTXUV ZOPNB  
FU OSAXGO, ZYVUHZ EXUOS FU SXZYFOGD.

No. 149—Intentional Equivocation. By Nutt.

ZYXVUT FXRSP AXFO YBVLFP RSUOLP. SFUXUL DPYELF-  
FYP GLZUXPLF SAYXU HSDGL FTPXD KSUS. ZNUT CYJLP  
LMZGSNHF: "FYHL FSD!" NPSUL YPSUYP ZSDUXPLF DXV-  
FULP, KXZJF OLSK XVKLP OYPFL UPYXRO DXHD.

A PROPOS of the military ciphers now running, †Volund presents his No. X-91, an appropriate cryptic construction of the key-phrase type. Most of you will remember this variety of cipher from †Watsy Cal's No. X-88, of last May 18. But for the benefit of newcomers, the principles involved will again be briefly described.

abc defghijkl mn opqr stu vwxzyz  
THE BEGINNING IS HALF THE WHOLE

Thus, in the key-phrase cipher, the constructor may select any desired 26-letter phrase or sentence for his alphabet. In the illustrative key herewith, this phrase is "THE BEGINNING IS HALF THE WHOLE," with which the letter *a* is represented by symbol T, *b* by H, etc. In this type of alphabet, a given symbol may signify any one of several different letters, or a letter may act as its own symbol. For instance, in the accompanying key, *useful* becomes ETEGEG in cipher; *two* would be HHH; and so on.

No. X-91. Key-Phrase Cipher. By †Volund.

NIS INN, ESINNNNS NIS  
 PHPN NIHN IS NI ERRSSE  
 HNRE HI NIS ERMSIN NNNS  
 RP HRSEN, THIN OS RP  
 USLN INRI NENSEENRSEPS,  
 HEE HPNHHNSE ON NIS  
 ERPNN SIN RP NHNLNRRNIT.

In solving, the values of these variable symbols must of course be determined by message context. And since the key-phrase is practically equivalent to 26 letters of unspaced text, the message and key may be worked out together, each affording clues that may be applied to the other. In †Volund's cipher, as a suggested beginning, you might try to identify NIS (used 4 times), NIHN, and IS, also noting the 3-letter HEF after the comma; etc. The translation and key to No. X-91 will be published next week.

This week's regular crypts start off with †Gregory's contribution, in which KVT and FVTNT, O and OK, may be guessed by letters in common. In †Nujak's message, leave the "quotes" till last, using NLR, NF, and ZFB, also VP, VD, or PVD, for entry. †M. E. Smith's cryptogram offers FU, and ending -FXU, for consideration. Follow up these with EXUOS, VUOVAZ.

Mutt & Nutt, crypto-team of Johnstown, N. Y., submit their two concoctions with this toast: "May you tear your hair, rack your feverish brains, and chew your pencils to shreds, to ob-

tain the correct solutions!" In Mutt's cipher, observe that GB and BC will combine to form GBBC. But spot your own clues in Nutt's Inner Circle! The key to †Remle Legof's division runs, 01234 56789. And by the way, †Cryptox's No. X-90, four-part multiplication of two weeks ago, used the key-word UPHOLSTERY, numbered from 0 up to 9. Answers to current puzzles will appear next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 150—Cryptic Division. By †Remle Legof.

A M G ) R M N O C C ( N A S  
 R N O I  
 R A G C  
 R O M U  
 G S A C  
 G N U N  
 G S M

### LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

139—In memory of great events, this year we can celebrate the sixcentenary of Chaucer's birth, the centenary of the first postage stamp and (approximately) of the first practical photography.

140—In rocky lair the bass is found,  
 Where the swirling eddy dims;  
 Inch for inch and pound for pound,  
 The gamest fish that swims!

141—Beautiful damsel, gaudily attired, attempts crossing swamp afoot. Slippery moss-covered log surprises gal. Garish finery liquidated.

142—Students explore suspicious escapade, educe evidence, ensnare espionage suspects. Elusive scoundrels expostulate, excoriate scholars, evolve elaborate schemes, effectuate escape.

143—Blowzy poltroon bandies slanderous falsehoods anent sylphine sycophant. Abstemious gladiator ponderously invalidates calumnious figments. Pusillanimous recreant accelerates departure.

144—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 N E W P A D L O C K

All answers to Nos. 145-50 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

# Handwriting Secrets

*Character Clues in Pen and Ink*

by Helen King

**I**N THIS warm summer weather many of us let important matters slide. We feel too lazy to bother more than absolutely necessary. Yet business goes on just as usual. Some of the biggest events are planned during this, the "off" season, so it behooves us to keep up on our toes. The following letter, from an employment counsellor, is typical of the sort which graphologists receive at this time of year:

Dear Miss King:

In another month or so the Fall season will be along, and with it comes Big Business. Our company will need approximately 45 men and women. We will advertise this month for them, and forward the replies to you to pick the future employees. We purposely start work at this time for we want people who are never asleep—even in the summer. Can you tell us one method of detecting *logic* in the writing? We have special reasons for wanting to know this.

D. C., Personnel Mgr.

Logic is disclosed readily by well connected strokes, words and letters as in the illustration given. The man who connects his thoughts, step by step, also connects his writing in the same way. Don't confuse this with the telegrapher's style below.

*but a script  
like this is*

The latter has learned to connect his words for business reasons; once he is away from the requirements of his job he no longer does so. The sweeping joining lines make for speed, rather than slowness as you might think.

In choosing an employe by his writing, don't look for just the best or most legible specimens. Look for certain traits which are necessary in any business. A department store salesgirl, or a salesman must have a pleasant personality. Their success is usually in proportion to their ability to sell themselves first. And some of the best personalities have the worst writings!

An accountant usually makes figures which are almost perfect. A caricaturist and a cartoonist have very definite lines—which almost take on personality. Sometimes a little circle appears over the letter *i* instead of a dot. The

*a well connect  
writing shows*

employer must check hundreds of such things in order to place the employe in a position where he will be of most benefit to the company and to himself.

Dear Miss King:

So! Because I write a letter one way I'm a "flipper," no good at de-

tails and can't take orders. And my *q* makes me careful and meticulous. Ha! You almost make me mad at you. The more I check my writing with your illustrations, the less I like your opinion of me.

Last week I was talented; week before I was a genius; two weeks back I was lazy. Today I am a dreamer. Hey! What am I? Send me your complete and final opinion in *your* handwriting! I dare you!

V. A. G.

That dare has been taken! But here's a tip to all of you: it might be wise to read very *carefully* before condemning yourself. For instance, when I say that sharply pointed writing shows a form of sarcasm, check with your own script. Is it pointed? Is it consistently pointed, or just in one or two instances?

The more points present, the more the trait is present. The fewer the times you can find it, the less the trait. The following week you may read that rounded script tells of good nature. You may see that in your own writing—yet that doesn't check with the sarcasm you know to be present, does it? V.A.G. didn't think so—but he didn't realize that maybe he is a wee bit changeable, and these variations show up regularly.

A writing always rounded shows a nature always pleasant. A writing always pointed shows a nature always sarcastic. The combination tells of a

variable man who changes from time to time. Most of us do change a bit now and then, depending on circumstances and conditions over which we have little control.

### PURELY PERSONAL

*Jean D.*—Contact your nearest Legal Aid Society where you can get the information you need. There may be a small charge, if you can afford to pay it.

*Irene K.*—Dreams don't show up in one's writing. Aspirations do, but they are a definite desire. Dreams may be the result of lobster and ice cream or an upset mind.

*Mrs. Elsie L.*—Graphology is not fortune telling, so your request must be denied you.

*H.J.McA.*—You are the type who usually does get someplace, even without the ancestor thrown in. He is your excuse. Your own ability is your machine, and your pride is your incentive. With such a combination how can you fail to win out?

*Carl F.*—Thanks, thanques and thanx.

*C.A.P.*—You are in the right line of work, and your letter was much appreciated.

*Donald D.*—You certainly have

MISS HELEN KING,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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plenty of rhythm in your writing, and much music appreciation. As for voice, that is a muscular development which does not show up in the writing. Therefore I can only suggest you consult a music teacher (or two) for a candid opinion.

*Edwin B.*—Ventriloquial powers do not appear in writing. That too is a muscular co-ordination. Also you must

have a "line," which means a sense of humor, and an understanding of various types of persons. You must know how to put personality into all your characters.

*Charles K.*—Why must you consider yourself a sissy just because you are a designer? That shows artistic talent, and you need not be ashamed of it. Best of luck to you.

### Chipper Solvers' Club for March, 1940

NEW all-time cipher solving records were established last March. To ciphers Nos. 49-78, inclusive, published during March, our readers responded with no less than 9,599 solutions, smashing all previous records in the history of our cipher department! And this year's January-to-March total of 25,123 solutions, likewise tops all previous yearly records for that period! Readers who submitted answers to one or more of these ciphers will find their names in the accompanying list. Members of our °Inner Circle and †Honor Roll Clubs are distinguished, respectively, by degree and dagger signs. All solutions, excepting to "X-special" puzzles, are duly credited in the monthly lists.

*Thirty Answers*—†K. Aaba, Crowland, Ontario. °Aachen, Los Angeles, Calif. †Abuelo, Okeechobee, Fla. †The Admiral, Munising, Mich. †Agatha, Van Dyke, Mich. °Age, Erie, Pa. †Ambak Agen, Bay Shore, N. Y. †Alackaday, Chicago, Ill. °Amanovlettus, Franklin, N. H. °P. J. B., St. Petersburg, Fla. †Whizz Bang, Montreal, P. Q. °See Bee Bee, Hamilton, Kans. †T. E. Bicknell, Kansas City, Mo. °R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J. †George W. Bowsman, New York, N. Y. †Mrs. Pearl Bradley, Boley, Okla. °Warren G. Brown, Babylon, N. Y. °Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky. †Burbank, Baltimore, Md. †Frank S. Burligame, Winter Haven, Fla. °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, Madison, Wis. M. A. C., Cleveland, Ohio. †Capilus, Peru, N. Y. °H Le Care, Norfolk, Va. °How Carso, Winnipeg, Manitoba. †Chemystic, Ithaca, N. Y. °Blue Hen Chick, Middletown, Del. °Ciphermit, Bangor, Me. †Ciphersmith, Tallahassee, Fla. †A. B. C., Rochester, N. Y. °Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y. †R. C. Clark, Port Stanley, Ontario. °Cliff II, Branch, Mich. †Codela, Allston, Mass. †Codela II, Winchester, Mass. °Comrade, Baltimore, Md. †Floyd E. Coss, Ferndale, Mich. °Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr. †Paul Daeke, Henderson, N. C. °W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind. †A. Dane, Toronto, Ontario. †W. A. Deen, San Antonio, Tex. †Robert De Mougout, New York, N. Y. J. N. D., San Francisco, Calif. °Derfy, Canton, Pa. †Henry F. Dolliver, Belmont, Mass. †Susie Douglas, Mayfield, Ky. †Drokaj, Baker, Oreg. †Drol, Warren, Me. °M.

E., Scranton, Pa. H. W. Ebner, Ewan, N. J. †Eve Eden, Denver, Colo. °Edmaca, Albany, N. Y. †Eeslyn, Easton, Pa. †Eedee, North Sacramento, Calif. †Cap Elliott, Spencer, Iowa. †Sir Elson, Dallas, Tex. †Esoteric, Salt Lake City, Utah. °Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa. †Jay-En-Ess, Denver, Colo. †Jay Essee, Ft. Benning, Ga. Evee, Whitefish, Mont. °Ezymarc, Franklin, N. H. †Rain-in-the-Face, Los Angeles, Calif. E. H. Field, New York, N. Y. †Pee-Five, Alexandria, Va. °Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky. °G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio. †S. E. Furneaux, Methuen, Mass. †W. R. G., Maywood, Ill. †Joseph K. Geibel, Washington, D. C. °Michael G. H. Gelsing, Buffalo, N. Y. †I. Givup, Rifle, Colo. †Gnilpik, Newport, Oreg. °The Griffin, Swansea, Mass. °L-dan-ha, Soda Springs, Idaho. †O. H., Peru, Ill. °Henry J. Haewecker, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Hamcie, East Hartford, Conn. °Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif. °T. Hegarty, Brooklyn, N. Y. °H. N. H., Buffalo, N. Y. †Heliotrope, New York, N. Y. †Hilda II, Carmel, Calif. °G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass. °Opal Hurt, Chicago, Ill. °Herbert J. Huthwaite, Brooklyn, N. Y. °H. Hyman, Philadelphia, Pa. °Alter Idem, Welland, Ontario. °Sam Isen, Saginaw, Mich. †Ixaxar, New York, N. Y. †Jaybee, Oklahoma City, Okla. °U. U. Jeff, Massillon, Ohio. °Kate, Crowley, Okla. °Kismet, Corona, N. Y. †Joe C. Kusmierz, Cleveland, Ohio. °J. C. K., Gary, Ind. †Remle Legof, Pittsburgh, Pa. °Loydeh, Chicago, Ill.

(To Be Continued)

# Prize Letter Contest

Use the coupon below to vote on the stories in this issue, and don't forget that the reader who writes the best letter, of 50 words or more, on the reasons for his (or her) first choice will receive a cash award of \$10.00.

-----  
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

*In my opinion the stories in the June 22nd issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:*

	No. Here
FINGER OF DOOM by Cornell Woolrich.....	.....
A GUY DOES WHAT HE CAN by Richard Sale.....	.....
MAN OF VENGEANCE by Lawrence Treat.....	.....
SUICIDE ROUGHLY by William Gray Beyer.....	.....
DEATH ON THE YUKON by C. V. Tench.....	.....
DETECTIVE FOR A DAY by Walt Sheldon.....	.....
MURDER IN THE BIG TOP by Dudley Marshall.....	.....

Attached is my letter of 50 words or more giving my reasons for selecting .....  
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are to become the property of The Frank A. Munsey Company.

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*(This coupon is not good after June 29, 1940)*

*(Address all letters to the Prize Letter Editor)*

## Coming Next Week

How long before we'll be fighting for our homes and children against the fascists? That question was on everyone's lips but even then none realized how close that danger was—with only *The Park Avenue Hunt Club* between America and

## THE FLAMING COBRA

BY JUDSON P. PHILIPS

**DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**

*(On sale next Wednesday, June 19)*

# FLASHES FROM READERS

WE ARE not quite sure about our next step. There was a time when our life flowed smoothly along with nothing to disturb our feeling of confidence. That time is a thing of the past; probably sleighing on last year's snow. Now we walk down the street, fussing with our tie and even muttering to ourselves. This sad state is caused by a name. In fact, the name of this week's prize letter winner. We've been wondering all week if we should call her (or him) Miss or Mr. Finally we decided to duck the whole thing. That's us to a T—always evading things. We remember one time we kept a job for three months just because we couldn't bring ourselves to telling the boss we were quitting. And then he fired us.

Anyway to get around to the April 27th issue. The stories, and authors, ended up something like this:

STORY	AUTHOR	VOTES
Death Wears Green	Judson P. Philips	13,975
Up From the Dead	Richard Sale	12,225
My Pop the Cop	Peter Paige	11,460

Now comes the prize letter (we couldn't put it off any longer) and that question about Miss or Mr., which we're just going to ignore. The ten bucks goes to Kay Browne of Ithaca, New York. Congratulations, Kay!

## KAY BROWNE

DEAR SIR:

I don't see how you can possibly expect any of your readers to put any story ahead of a *Park Avenue Hunt Club* novelet by Judson P. Philips. My reason for naming

*Death Wears Green* as "tops" in this week's array of unusual tales are:

1. The accumulated equity of interest accruing from the numerous past episodes in the history of this famous club gives this story at least a three-lap start ahead of any rival;

2. The efficient cooperation of Brain, Beef, Brawn and Brilliance as shown in the persons of *Geoffery Saville*, *Arthur Hallam*, *John Jericho* and *Wu* insures action of the thrilling type by a quartet capable of coping with any situation;

3. The timeliness of the plot gives the reader a vivid feeling that the story is an account of actual happenings rather than a masterly piece of fiction

ITHACA, N. Y.

It looks as though we might have a little space left so you'll excuse us if we give you a letter from an earlier contest. It wasn't a winner but we thought it deserved Honorable Mention, so here it is

## SHIRLEY DUNCAN, JR.

DEAR EDITOR:

For a short story filled with suspense and climaxed with a surprise ending, I'd like to give my vote to "George," written by Martin Lehigh, which appeared in the April 13th issue of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*.

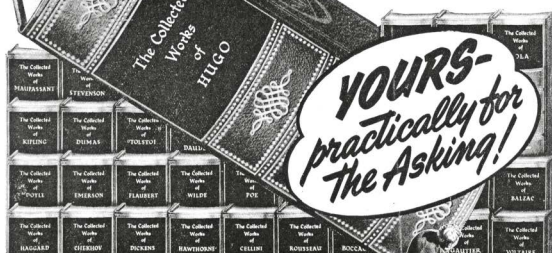
The author has strikingly pictured in this story the pathos that surrounds George the poor half-wit, in his poverty-stricken hovel, his queer acting, then launches quickly into the uprising caused by the murder of the small girl, the quick resentment of the people against George, seemingly the murderer, and then, the surprise ending when the guilt falls on the head of one of the town's outstanding citizens who has killed both the child and later George in an effort to hide his crime.

The story is unique and I believe many DFW's readers would like to see more of this writer's works.

LEXINGTON, KY.

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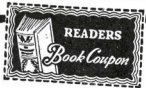
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