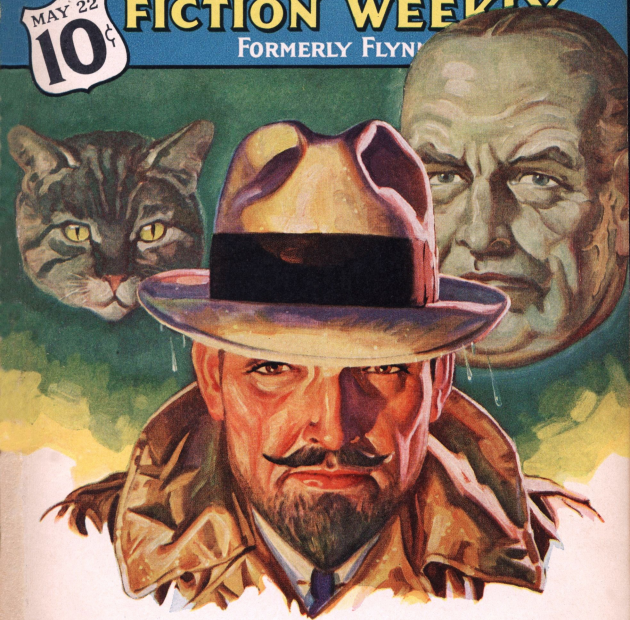


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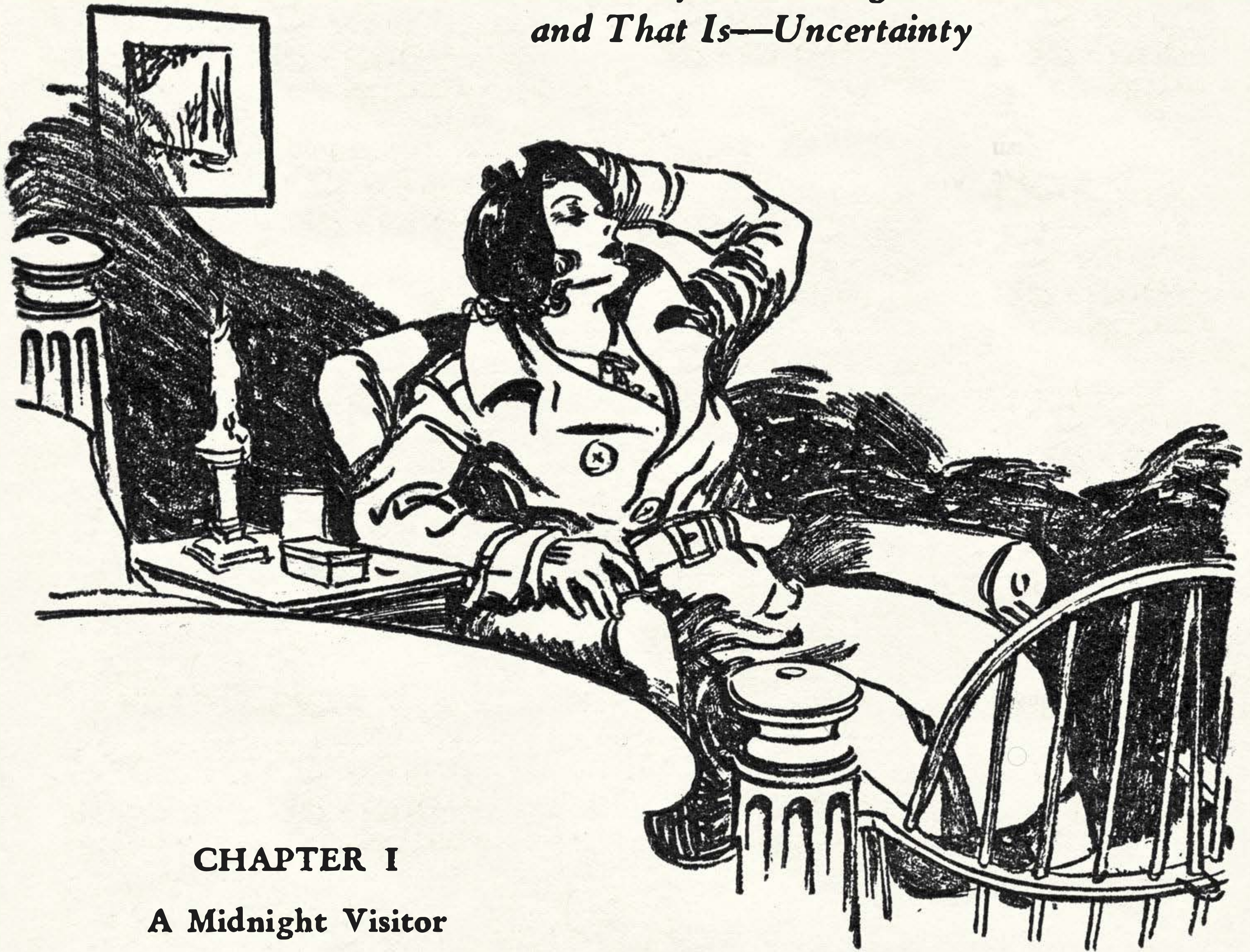
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CHAPTER I

A Midnight Visitor

WHEN Muir came up to the bar, a Third Avenue elevated train was going by like thunder in a tin heaven and he had to pitch his voice as though he were talking into a high wind in order to ask for a Scotch-and-soda, but by the time he could wrap his long fingers around the glass there was sufficient quiet for him to ask: "Has Everett Franklin been here?"

"Dunno the name," said the bartender.

"Middle-sized, a good pair of shoulders, and as handsome as Hollywood," said Muir. "Looks five years younger than I."

The bartender scanned again the

huge, scholarly forehead of Muir and the face half-ugly with pain that was not of the body. He looked forty, though in the morning of the day no doubt he seemed five years younger.

"It's the reporter that you're askin' about," said the bartender. "He's been and gone."

"When?" asked Muir.

"Fifteen, twenty minutes, maybe."

Muir glanced at the clock on the wall and it was, in fact, a quarter past eleven. Other questions rose in his eyes, but he kept them silent and drew the letter from his pocket again. He read it very slowly, deliberately.

DOCTOR

By Max Brand

Author of "Seven Faces,"
"The Granduca," etc.



At last Muir was looking at
the man he was hunting

Dear Pete,

You remember when we were riding up-town in the taxi the other day, and I pointed to a house and said I was going to raise a scandal out of that place that would put a bad smell all through New York? Well, tonight is the night for me to do a little looking into the business, and it may be a job that will need your pick-lock, your flashlight, and even that big automatic you like to harness under your left arm.

The fact is that you haven't had much fun since you were the boy aviator in '18, playing tag with the enemy over the Western Front, but tonight

I may be able to show you enough action to quiet your nerves, for a week or so, and you'll be able to sleep every night through instead of going the rounds like a silly ass and lapping up all the liquor in New York.

I know you're only four days back from Central America and you may have meant it when you said that you wanted to rest a bit, but if I know the old Peter Angus Muir, he'll be on the job with me tonight.

When I say scandal, I don't mean any dirty man-woman business because I know that's not up your street. I mean another kind of dynamite that may blow



*New York wide apart. Till eleven,
I'll be at O'Doyle's Saloon, on
Third Avenue, near Fifty-ninth.*

*Adieu to the greatest detective
outside of books from the greatest
reporter that ever covered crime.
And I mean it!*

E. F.

Muir, refolding the letter, drank half the Scotch-and-soda slowly, without taking the glass from his lips. More than ever he could curse, now, that restless habit which kept him roaming the city and which on this night had caused him to miss the telephone call of Franklin at his apartment, for he felt that some great venture lay ahead, and that he might be left hopelessly in the rearward of the event.

He lighted a cigarette and looked into the smoke with the eyes of a crystal-gazer, trying to step back to the hour when he had ridden up-town with Franklin four days before. He could remember first, and most clearly, the grinning face of that malevolent reporter as he had hooked his thumb over his shoulder and said: "One of those houses right there on the corner—I'm going to raise a worse smoke than murder, I think, out of it. The police are going to hate my heart all over again."

It had been on the East Side, somewhere. Not Fifth, because there had been houses on each side of the street; not Park because the avenue had not been so wide. Not Third because there was no double file of ugly pillars for the elevated. It was Madison or Lexington, then.

MUIR paid for his drink and took a taxi across to Lexington and then up-town, driving slowly. Instead of peering earnestly at every corner, he

relaxed in the left side of the seat as he had done when he was with Franklin and kept his eyes forward as in consideration, letting the street-corners drift casually through the widest angle of his vision. They were north of Seventy-second Street when a ghostly finger tapped at his forehead.

He got out at the next corner, paid the taxi, and went back. On the northern side of the block below, three houses of identical aspect, long and narrow as the faces of three fools, rose cheek to cheek. Now that he confronted them, all recollection of having seen them before departed from him, but he would not deny the authority of that electric touch which he had felt as the taxi passed this corner.

He went to the south west street corner and viewed the houses aslant, as he must have done when Franklin called his attention to them. Still nothing returned from his memory, so he came closer to examine them at first hand. The one nearest Lexington was alight from the first floor to the sixth and highest story; music. Young voices crowding together in laughter, told him of the party which was going forward.

It did not have the look of a place where Franklin might have need of a pick-lock, a flashlight, and a gun. The adjoining house carried a "For Rent" sign, so he went past it to the third place where the front windows were equally filled by empty blackness. His confidence in the trail he was following had diminished almost to nothing, but he wandered up onto the porch of the house and took from his inner coat an electric torch hardly larger than a fountain pen. It cast a thin, sharp ray with which he ran rapid pencil strokes of light about the porch.

He saw the doorplate of "Dr. David

J. Russo;" he saw the folds of the thick satin drape which hung inside the door-glass; and on the cement floor of the porch lay a cigarette butt that had been stepped on by a foot which afterward twisted over it and left paper and tobacco as an ugly spot, well-ground into the cement. Few men put out their cigarette butts with such care, but Everett Franklin had that ugly habit.

Muir turned from the house and walked straight across the street, where he lounged in the thick shadow between two houses. Franklin had been at the third house before him, and not more than twenty-five minutes ago.

He had come, according to his letter, prepared to go to great lengths to enter the building, and therefore the chances were large that he was in the house at the present moment; for every successful reporter has to have a good deal of the bulldog about him and Franklin had the patience of a hunting beast.

A paved footway ran down the left side of the house but not a glimmer of light came from the windows on that side. If Franklin was inside, he was at work with one of those flashlights of which he had spoken.

If that were the case, it would probably be foolish or even a little dangerous to try to enter the place while the investigation was going on. There came to the eye of Muir a picture of shadowy hands running through the papers of a desk, while an electric torch set them flashing.

A GIRL walked down the farther side of the street and the eye of Muir commenced to follow her because her steps were not checked and stilted by high heels; she moved with the rhythmic lightness of an athletic boy, with a good, free swing. When she reached the house Muir was watching,

she turned and ran up the steps, and for some reason he looked up at the bright December stars and laughed, silently.

He could even hear the click of the key in the lock, he thought, as he strained his ears; then the door opened and she went inside. The door glass was illumined only a moment later; then the shades of the double window to the side glowed faintly.

Muir forced himself to wait two minutes; then he crossed the street and rang the house-bell.

He heard a step come into the hall. The door was pulled open by the brisk hand of someone in a hurry, and he saw the girl before him with the fox-fur loosened about her throat. The cold of the winter night was rosy in her face and twinkling in her eyes. She had the glow and the air, if not the exact features, of beauty.

Muir took off his hat. "Dr. Russo in, by any chance?" he asked.

The late hour made her look carefully at him.

"He isn't in," she said, "and I'm afraid that he won't be in tomorrow, either. I'm sorry."

Muir smiled on her a little.

"After all, this is not an office hour, is it?" he said.

"Hardly," she answered, and then, looking farther into him: "Are you in pain? Is it something acute?"

"Rather," nodded Muir.

She glanced instinctively down at a wrist-watch. Then: "Will you come in? I can make a note and perhaps the doctor can get in touch with you later?"

"Thank you," said Muir, and stepped inside.

Crossing the hall, he photographed on the sensitive plate of his memory the details of the hat-rack at the side, the two straight-backed chairs which

flanked the mirror farther down the hall, and the stairs climbing into shadow. The girl showed him into an office with a small mahogany desk set at an angle in a corner, three framed diplomas on the wall, two shelves of books, a coal fireplace, a rather good Persian rug with a pine-tree pattern on the floor, and above the mantel-piece the large photograph of a narrow-bearded, professorial face, a sensitive face with a great slope of forehead and penetrating eyes; the moustaches and beard left the expression of the mouth somewhat indecipherable. But what Muir used his eyes on chiefly were the ranges of books. He picked the word "diet" out of half a dozen titles.

The girl was sitting behind the desk, now, pulling the glove from her right hand, then pulling a note-book in front of her.

"Your name, please?" she asked.

He did not hesitate. The name Peter Angus Muir was not known in many quarters. In 1918, when he came back from the front, the newspapers had made a good deal of the seventeen year old boy who perjured his way into the air force and shot down eight planes, but that was nearly two decades ago and people had forgotten the Great War.

He had another reputation which was almost entirely confined to a small scope in the New York police department for certain bits of voluntary detective work which he had done and it was this reputation which he was trying to keep in shadow as he gave the name: "Oliver Croft."

"Your address, Mr. Croft?"

"The Centenary Club," he answered, for the club knew what to do with communications addressed to "Oliver Croft."

"And the symptoms?" she asked.

He considered his physical condition and began to speak the truth.

"FOR the last day or two," he said, "I've had a subnormal temperature, a heaviness in the knees, disinclination to stir about, and something rather misty about the old brain. Living in something of a fog—that sounds a bit on the liverish side, doesn't it?"

"A bit," she answered, gravely.

He saw that he would have to add something more to justify this midnight call at a doctor's office.

"And in addition, griping occasional pains in the stomach," said Muir.

She made the notations swiftly. A huge tiger cat came into the room on silent feet, turned its yellow eyes on Muir, and then leaped onto the desk. It sat down facing the girl, with its long tail wrapped around its forepaws. As she finished writing, she put out her hand and scratched the cat across the forehead. The sound of its purring began like a distant buzz-saw.

"Much drinking?" she asked.

"Much," said he.

"Very late hours?"

"Very," said Muir.

She read his face from right to left and then from left to right. She did not smile.

"May I ask who recommended the doctor to you?" she asked.

"A fellow down in Nicaragua, just before I flew back. Craig, or Krank, or some such name, I think."

"May I ask a rude question?"

She had green eyes, full of penetrating thought.

"Fire away," said Muir.

"You don't look well," she remarked, "but did you come here partly because you're in pain and partly because you wanted something to do?"

"Partly," he admitted. "Twelve

o'clock hasn't come, and that's not so very late for a doctor to be awake in his home."

"But he doesn't live here," she answered.

"Doesn't he? The fact is that I was up in this part of the city and suddenly remembered his name and that my insides seemed to need some tinkering. Did you ever want to kill some time in the middle of the night?"

"Of course," she said, rising.

"From the moment the sun goes down, in fact?" asked Muir. "Will you have a cigarette?"

She hesitated over the offer, and then smiled as she took the cigarette. Muir lighted their smokes.

"Will you sit down a moment?" she asked.

"I'm only going to take a bit of your time, and I'd as soon take it standing," he answered. "I know you're about to leave."

"How do you know that?" she asked, her brows lifting slightly.

"You have a forward look in your eyes," said Muir, "that tells me you have some place to go. You people with places to go—you have all the luck."

"Do you always know what people are going to do?"

"They don't have to look at their watches for me to know that they're going to leave me."

"No, people don't leave you," she decided.

"Ah, but they do. Can't put a value on a thing you can have any time you want it. Oliver Croft is a glut on the market."

She surveyed him again with a faintly whimsical smile.

"No, not a glut on the market," she said. "I don't think he puts himself on the market at all."

"Don't you?" asked Muir.

"NO," she decided more firmly. "He keeps away from his friends because humanity disgusts him a little; and then all at once the corners of the room fill up with shadows and he has to go somewhere, anywhere, quickly. Isn't that it?"

"Who the devil are you?" asked Muir, abruptly. "If you don't mind me asking?"

"I'm Katherine Edwards," she said. "Trained nurse?"

"Yes. How do you guess that? Because I'm here in a doctor's office?"

"Not at all. I guess by the professional way you have of picking up a man and sifting him through your fingers. Do you ever have trouble wasting time? But of course not."

"Why not?" she asked.

"If you ever do, ring the Centenary Club and ask for poor Oliver Croft. But I know how they're standing in line. A pretty girl in the upper brackets. Whenever I see one of you, there's a procession of ghosts filing away behind your shoulders; all the poor devils who have looked at you and wished that your smiling were not such a confounded generalization. Do you mind me saying that?"

"You know I don't mind it," she answered. "It's the manly way of doing the thing, I suppose."

"What thing?" asked Muir.

"Paying a compliment, and wrapping it up in a little bitterness."

"I'd better go," said Muir.

"No, I have about two minutes more," she answered.

"I don't want the minutes," said Muir. "You've seen too much already. Will you tell the doctor about me?" he added when he was at the door.

"Of course," said she.

"But you won't tell him everything, will you?" he asked.

She laughed, and he went out, buttoning his overcoat against the cold.

He walked with a brisk step down the pavement past the three houses, turned, and came back with a silent footfall into the side-path that ran past the doctor's place. Inside he could hear the voice of the girl, for one of the office windows was slightly ajar. She was saying: "Is this Greenwood 510? . . . Mr. Baldwin told me to telephone and that you'd let me know how to get out to your place . . . yes, Mr. Philip Baldwin . . . how shall I know the car? . . . I'm five feet seven, have blonde hair, and will be wearing a fox-fur and a gray overcoat. I'll carry a small pigskin suitcase . . . I'll repeat it. A blue convertible. I simply ask if the driver can take me to Mr. Baldwin? Thank you. Good-by."

The receiver clicked. A moment later the lights snapped off, then the front door closed heavily and quick footfalls went down the street toward Lexington Avenue. When the sound of them died out, Muir went back to the front porch of the house with a little steel pick-lock in his fingers.

WHEN at last the door was open and he made the first quick step into the dark of the hall, he tripped over something soft and movable and had to bring his left foot down with a stamp to keep from falling. The ray from his torchlight caught the tiger cat which was racing towards the stairs with its body twisting to the side because the hindlegs went too fast for the front feet.

Muir switched off the light and swung the door softly and slowly shut, with his head bowed to listen. For tripping over the cat might have warned any other people in the house that a stranger had entered.

As he paused, he could hear the soft, rushing noises of the city. The groan of iron on iron no longer troubles the ear of New York, now that street cars are being banished from the town and the predominant night-sounds are the swishings of well-treaded tires and the whine of accelerating motors. Muir pushed from his mind these outer noises and tried to leave his ears purged of them to listen to smaller and more intimate sounds inside the house, like the fall and small echo of a footstep, or a creaking of floorboards, no matter how soft, or the dim murmur of a voice, or the dull thump of a shutting door.

In fact, he heard nothing at all, but from that moment forward he felt like a man besieged by danger and muffled every move that he made. As he moved from room to room, searching, he kept the thin sword-point of the torchlight pointing again and again at the doors which might open noiselessly upon him. He wished more than once for a light sufficiently strong to flood each chamber, no matter how dimly, but he knew that such a light would be strong enough to illumine windows and perhaps flash telltale warnings to eyes outside the building.

He began his work in the office, running rapidly through the drawers of the desk, where he found two items that caused him pause. One was a case of shimmering surgical instruments; another was a newspaper item which described the return to practice and New York of Dr. David J. Russo, the eminent young dietitian who for the last three years had been at work in the Orient.

Dr. Russo was quoted as saying: "Just as in medicine there are few specifics, so in diet there are few foods which are either banned or indicated,

except in the case of definite disease. The dietitian walks in a general darkness; we lack a definite science."

The room behind the office was a small laboratory, fitted with the utmost compactness and neat arrangement, with Bunsen burners and other standard equipment, and long ranges of labeled bottles in glass cupboards.

He gave hardly a flash of the light to the multiple, glimmering face of science, but went on into a little room behind the laboratory. It might have been used for a bedroom because of the small cot in it.

The flashlight picked up on the point of its bright pencil the ashes of a pack of miniature cards which lay in a corner of a smoking-tray. In a corner of the room was the top part of a tiny pagoda, made of a bright red composition; the sort of toy that one can pick up in a five-and-ten-cent store.

In the bathroom adjoining there was nothing of note except a mirror which had been struck a heavy blow in the center, so that the glass was broken away around a circular aperture in the middle, while a thousand fracture-lines ran out to the square frame.

A door on the right opened on what seemed to be a waiting-room, to judge by the comfortable chairs and the file of magazines which covered a center table. On the wall were three or four big photographs of the upper Himalayas. He recognized the tremendous outlines of the more famous peaks.

The tiger cat was there before him. He expected it to scamper away when he appeared, but instead, it did not even wince from the passing ray of the torch. He put the bright spot on it again, curiously, and saw that the cat was stalking, its belly almost touching the floor as it stole forward and its tail crooking at odd angles from side to

side. But the direction of that hunting trail led only toward the blank face of the wall!

MUIR sat on his heels to watch. Even the continued brightness of the spot light on it did not disturb the striped cat, for it seemed to be drawn on by a horrible fascination, like a bird towards a snake's eyes. The repugnance it felt caused the hair to stand on its back, and it put down each foot gingerly, with its body sloping back, ready to whirl and flee at any instant, and yet it continued to stalk until it had come to the very edge of the wall. There it extended a forepaw, and ran its unshathed, upturned claws along the bottom of the wall; then it whirled and raced from the room.

Even the blood of Muir was chilled by that strange pantomime. A moment later, running the meager knife-edge of the light across the wall, he discovered something that gave a little more earthly sense to the actions of the cat, for he found the almost imperceptible outline of a door, set flush in the wall to keep from disturbing the pattern of the landscape paper. Now that his attention was drawn to it, he had no difficulty in finding the little drop-handle with which a latch turned, and he opened the door upon a small closet. On the floor inside was huddled the body of Everett Franklin with his dead eyes looking into the face of his friend and his upturned face cross-hatched with lines of blood.

The faintest noise of sighing air behind him made Muir whip around. His spotlight found a door closing at the side of the room. Natural fear stopped him for an instant like a fist in the face; then he raced for the door with a long automatic in his right hand and the flashlight in the other.

As he turned the latch and flung the door open, he slipped to the side, offering only his head and shoulders as he flashed the light into the interior. It was a mere vestibule for a flight of servants' stairs that ran at a sharp angle up the back of the house and above him he heard not the pounding, but the whisper and faintly creaking pressure of footfalls fleeing up the steps.

He followed eagerly, with the hunting animal alive and alert in him, and pictures of dead Everett Franklin flicking through his mind; bright, swift glimpses of Franklin rousing the dangerous streets of Singapore; Franklin with heels and ice-pick dug in on the edge of a Thibetan crevasse; Franklin on a rollicking Western mustang. Grief had no chance to overtake Muir as he swung around the corners of the stairway to the floor above, and the floor above that behind the stealthy sounds of flight. There he ran down a narrow hallway toward an open door and plunged through it to the room beyond.

The flashlight showed him a white-painted iron bed, a cheap bit of matting on the floor, a holiday poster on the wall.

The opposite door was locked, and as he came to a pause, listening intently for the noise of the running feet, he heard the door behind him shut, and the turn of the key in the lock. Downstairs ran the fugitive footfall, swiftly fading out of his ken.

Rage and disappointment locked his jaws together. He was groaning softly as he set to work with the pick-lock, but a state of confused passion was not the way to try to read the mind of even the simplest lock. It left him in a cold sweat, but he brushed the storm out of his mind and with half-closed eyes set to his work. There could not have been

a more ordinary houselock, but it was complicated by rust. It might have been only five wretched minutes that he spent on his knees, laboring, but it seemed to Muir a half-hour before he had the door open.

He went down the stairs without haste, and as one who knew that the vital moment was irretrievably gone from him. The closet door, as he had expected, was now closed, but the body of Everett Franklin was no longer inside. There was not even a bloodstain on the floor, which had been carefully washed and was rapidly drying, now, in the warmth of steam heat.

He found light-switches and turned them on through the lower part of the house. Then he telephoned the police.

CHAPTER II

A List of Clues

THE next morning, John Tory, Inspector of Detectives, arrived at eight o'clock at the apartment of Peter Angus Muir and had the door opened for him by a big man with a pair of beautifully groomed moustaches and a great bald dome of a head.

"I want to see Mr. Muir," said the inspector.

"Mr. Muir is not called until eleven o'clock, sir," said the big man.

"I'm an inspector from the police," said Tory, sharply.

"Mr. Muir will be very sorry," said the guardian of the door. "He is not called until eleven in the morning."

The door began to close, slowly, in the face of the man of the law. Suddenly he pointed a finger.

"Why, you're Hawley; you're the valet, aren't you?" he asked.

The edge of the door cut the face and large figure of Hawley in two as he answered: "Yes, sir."

"You've heard Muir speak of me, then. You've probably heard him speak of me? I'm John Tory."

The door instantly swung wide.

"Mr. Muir speaks of you constantly. Come in, sir. I beg your pardon," said Hawley.

The sense of crowded New York left the inspector, the moment the door closed behind him, and he found himself in the spaciousness of a large reception hall with a hunting scene running across a great green tapestry on the opposite wall. The air had not been parched to lifelessness by steam heat and the room seemed to be warmed entirely by a fire of big logs that burned in a corner fireplace beneath a hood of carved Italian marble.

"Have you had breakfast, sir?" asked Hawley. "And is there anything I can do personally to make you comfortable? The fact is that Mr. Muir is in the country."

"In the country? When did he go to the country?" asked Tory.

"Yesterday evening, sir."

"He was in New York at midnight Hawley. Did you know that?"

"Exactly, sir," said the unblushing Hawley, "but I presume he may be in the country now. He is not at home."

"Is he going the rounds?" asked Tory.

"Sir?" said Hawley.

"I've been around them with him," said Tory, "and I know you've been around after him. In one night I've been from Mulberry Street to Harlem, and across the Triborough and George Washington Bridge, and from a cellar dive to a penthouse in the middle of the sky. I've followed him till my knees sagged; and I've had my brain whirling although I've drunk only one whiskey to his two all evening long. Is he out on a bender like that?"

Hawley took a breath and regarded the inspector with a whimsical eye that seemed to struggle with a desire to speak from the soul.

At last he exclaimed: "Sir, he's *always* out—except for brief spells in the library and the laboratory. More in the laboratory by far."

"Laboratory?" said Tory.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me this, Hawley. How can he stow away so much alcohol in that long, scrawny body of his?"

"I can give you an explanation which he once offered to me, sir," said Hawley. "We were in Egypt at the time, in the company of some English residents and the English who live in tropical countries, as you no doubt know, sir, are really very wonderful with their whiskey."

"Champions!" said the inspector, without hesitation.

"However," said Hawley, "on this evening they failed to stay with Mr. Muir. They failed signally, I may say, sir, at about three-thirty in the morning, and Mr. Muir came home at about six in the morning with an Arab horse thief."

"Horse thief?" said the inspector.

"You must be aware, sir, that after midnight Mr. Muir is in the habit of finding very *interesting* companions."

"True," said Tory.

"The Arab, sir," said Hawley, "showed his international culture by drinking whiskey with Mr. Muir, but at about eight o'clock he fell asleep in his chair. I had not been able to follow the conversation, because it was entirely in Arabic, and now Mr. Muir turned to me and said: 'The rest of the world resists alcohol, Hawley, and because they resist, the alcohol breaks them,' were the words Mr. Muir used, 'but I go to it with my arms open, like

a friend, and the infernal stuff passes me by with a mere pat on the head."

"NOBODY knows him as well as you do," said Tory, "now tell me if nothing but another World War would fill up his time and set him at peace with life again?"

"Nothing else, sir," said Hawley, solemnly. He turned a bit to the side, as though anxious to escape from the subject of the conversation. "As for the laboratory, sir, it would be sure to interest you—and at about nine o'clock Mr. Muir is fairly sure to return."

Tory went willingly into the laboratory. It was a room as big and as lofty as the entrance hall. There was a large sink, drain-board and table for experiments at one end of the apartment with a blacksmith's forge adjoining.

The walls were lined with cupboards which Hawley prepared to open with a bunch of keys but the attention of the inspector fastened upon a large table which was covered and piled deep at the corners with locks of every size, from great padlocks to little devices no larger than a woman's wrist-watch. All the locks on the right half of the table rested upon individual sheets of paper covered with penciled notations.

"What are these for?" asked the inspector.

"A long time ago," said Hawley, "Mr. Muir heard about Houdini in Sing Sing and decided to look into the question of safety devices."

"Houdini in Sing Sing?" queried the inspector.

"I believe it is true," said Hawley, "that Houdini offered himself to be locked with the utmost security in the strongest cell in Sing Sing, with his clothes in another cell, and wagered that he would walk out free and fully dressed within fifteen minutes. As a

matter of fact, they loaded him, naked, with complicated chains and irons secured by the most difficult locks they could find. His clothes were placed in another strong cell.

"In five minutes and a half, Houdini walked out of the first cell with the irons gone from him; in eight and a fraction minutes he was fully clothed and ready to leave the prison. This story intrigued Mr. Muir and he has been studying locks, off and on, ever since. Those on the left of the table he has not come to yet. Those on the right he has solved and made notations in short hand and with diagrams on the papers beneath them. Ah, Mr. Muir has returned—with a friend!"

For here a powerful tenor voice, thickened a bit by fatigue and vocal cords loosened by wine, broke into a hearty Neapolitan ballad.

THEY found the two in the entrance hall, Muir already equipped with a highball and curled into a deep chair while a fat Italian in a ruff-neck sweater and tattered clothes, teetered back and forth and sang to the flames in the fireplace, waving a fiasco of red wine to keep time with his music. His knees began to bend before he had finished the lyric. Muir watched him curiously, his own face dead-white, but his eyes as clear as ever.

"Put him to bed in the Quattrocento room, Hawley," said he.

"I beg your pardon, sir? To *bed?*" said Hawley.

"To bed," said Muir, rising as he saw the inspector.

"In the Quattrocento room?" echoed Hawley, sadly.

"In the Quattrocento room," answered Muir, with patience. "How are you, John?"

"Much better than you," said the

inspector, bending back his bulldog neck and peering up into the face of his friend. "You look like the devil, Peter."

The door of the room slammed. The Italian tenor rose dimly from a distant part of the apartment.

"I need a few minutes of sleep," said Muir, "and I'll be as right as rain. Will you have a drink?"

"No. You should have called me last night. You shouldn't have let those foolish fellows of mine walk over you roughshod, that way. They're good men, all of them, but they simply didn't know you. When I told the sergeant that you were *the* Peter Angus Muir, he turned inside out."

"That must have been an ugly sight," said Muir. "However, there was no great purpose in waking you up in the middle of the night and as for the way they slanged me, why, talk doesn't break the skin. I gave them the clues I had."

"Thank heavens Willett had enough sense to write them down," said Tory, pulling a notebook out of his pocket. "The ashes of a pack of miniature cards; the top tip of a toy pagoda, red in color; a smashed mirror in a bathroom; marks of scrubbing on the floor of a downstairs closet; the picture of the doctor; a clipping that tells he has been in the Orient; and a case of surgical instruments. It doesn't make a great deal of sense to me, just reading the list off. Are you going to do some high-power deduction with this list as a basis, Peter?"

"My dear old fellow, deduction is almost entirely rot," said Muir. "It's in books, not in the facts of detective work, as a rule."

The inspector listened with a shrewd glint of amusement in his eye.

"Do you believe a single word you've

just spoken?" he asked.

"Yes, two or three of them," said Muir.

"Did you give the police everything that you can testify?"

"Almost."

"Will you give me the rest of it?"

"No, John," said Muir.

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector.

"Ah . . . what?" asked Muir.

"Does it mean that you're going on this case yourself?"

"I think it does," said Muir, "if there's room for me."

"Peter, you know what you can always have from me. Every card in the pack that I can deal to you."

"Tell me what you've found out about the doctor," said Muir, "and I'll let it go at that."

CHAPTER III

Strange Imprisonment

WHEN the inspector left, he had given Muir an extended picture of Doctor Russo. The dietitian had been a brilliant student and could have taken his choice of almost any field of medicine when he finished his internship. He could have been surgeon or diagnostician under the best auspices. He had practiced for some time with the greatest success, but finally went to the Orient to pursue the study of certain obscure diseases of the skin. His return to New York was recent and rather unheralded, because he had been away long enough to be forgotten. He was thirty-seven years old, and he still was missing from his office.

Muir pulled off his shoes and coat and lay flat on his back on a bedroom floor for twenty minutes; he roused and lay a somewhat similar time face down. After that, he bathed, and coming back into his dressing room found

Hawley there placing on a table a choice of guns in arm-pit holsters and a selection of small flashlights. For wearing, he had put out a heavy gray tweed and a pair of thick-soled shoes.

"Am I bound in that direction, Hawley?" he asked.

"Nicaragua turned out to be a dull place for you, sir," said the valet, "and I daresay you must find recreation and rest, now."

"Is it rest and recreation to go out with this stuff?" asked the master.

"It is rest for a hunting dog to follow a trail, sir. I beg your pardon," said Hawley.

"Is that it?" sighed Muir. "But isn't a man a fool who baits a trap with his own danger?"

"You're not intending to do that, sir, I trust?" asked Hawley.

"I hope not," said Muir, and dressed gloomily for the street.

He slept on the train for Greenwood, Westchester County, and got out at the station before noon. In the middle of the big street, between parallel white lines ruled aslant, were parked a score of automobiles besides the machines which nosed the concrete station platform. What Muir picked out was a blue convertible with a weather-stained top.

Before he went to it, he looked over the brown winter hills of Greenwood, and the gray trees which rolled like stormclouds across them. The brightness of the sky could not bring cheer to that landscape, and he had a strange, cold feeling in his heart that the hills were drawing closer to see the last of him. He had to rally himself by the use of his powers of logic, for after all he was not on the actual trail of murder but on what was probably a most innocent by-path.

When he recalled the well-tubbed, outdoor, free-swinging look of Kath-

erine Edwards, his spirits rose again. But he could not banish entirely a slight numbness and mist in the brain that had been growing in him during the last few days, since the airplane brought him back from Central America.

As for the girl, he told himself that he had for her a more intellectual than emotional interest, for he had made romance a stranger in his life. And if he followed her by the most slender clue, he made sure that it was not her beauty that led him, but merely his abiding passion for crime-solution. And she was the only approach to the trail, an almost intangible approach, to be sure.

It was his certainty of her innocence that had kept him from speaking about her to Tory or to the homicide squad the night before, and even now she brought to him a sense of refreshment as profound as long sleep.

He went over to the convertible and found behind the wheel a man in a canvas coat with a turned down collar lined with lamb's wool; his head hung down in sleep and he roused from it gradually, coming back to full consciousness with a rhythmical jerking that got his head erect at last.

He had a pale, thin face and when he spoke he looked straight ahead as though he was accustomed to keeping his eye on the road at all costs.

"You can get me to Mr. Philip Baldwin, can't you?" asked Muir.

"A dollar and a quarter," said the driver.

"That's all right," said Muir, and got into the rear seat.

THE car was a four-year-old model, but the motor was tuned up to a hair-trigger fineness. It started at a touch, and softened its whine as the

driver ran through the cars to high. He drove like one to whom an inch is as good as a mile, sliding through a tangle of cars to gain the open road. The village dropped behind; and with the gathered speed of the automobile the brown-faced hills began to flow across the sky.

"You know Mr. Baldwin a long time?" asked the driver.

"Not a great time," said Muir.

"No?" said the driver, and found the remark enough for his digestion during at least a mile of the road.

"Not so many friends as there used to be," said the chauffeur at last.

"Three are enough," ventured Muir, studying the back of the driver's head.

"Yeah. You mean *real* ones."

"That's it."

"There ain't that many," said the driver. "There ain't three."

"I don't know about that," said Muir.

"I do," said the driver, and pulled in at a gas station with a sudden soft, strong pressure of hydraulic brakes.

"Five gallons," he said to the attendant, and then to Muir, as he got out of the car: "Be a minute."

He disappeared into the station and Muir, turning sidewise on the seat, half-closed his eyes in order to focus all his nerve-power on concentrated listening. In this manner, though dimly, he heard the stream of gasoline from the hose plump into the tank, not with a sharp tinny resonance as into an almost empty receptacle but with a full, dull sound as into a tank already nearly brimming.

When he had satisfied himself about this, he faced front again, only watching from the corner of his eyes as the pale driver came out of the station; but it was not the sort of a face that could be read easily, needing close

study and some familiarity before thoughts would be apparent on that cold surface.

It was reasonably certain that the fellow had telephoned ahead about his passenger who had not known Mr. Baldwin a long time and who said that three real friends were enough.

That trust which Muir had been investing in the clean beauty of Katherine Edwards vanished at once. A thunderhead which was growing out of the west, trailing its obscure shadow over the hills and melting them into the sky, seemed to Muir to represent the darkening of his mind as he approached the end of his journey. Even as his eye watched the coming of the storm, so his spirit felt the approach of the danger. Perhaps he should have brought Hawley, that steady, brainless hand.

The car swerved up a slope of gravel and stopped in front of an old shingle building. Muir filled his eye with it as he climbed out of the car. Time had taken the building by the roof-tree and shaken it. There were no straight lines remaining. The roof humped in one direction, the porch-roof sagged in another, and the sidewalls leaned inward for greater security. For a generation at least no care had been given the old tavern; even the yellow paint on the porch pillars and balustrades was rain-rusted to a dingy brown.

Muir paid his driver.

"You go in there, through the bar," said the man, and let his colorless eyes rest once on Muir's face.

THE barroom contained, as the law requires of liquor vendors, a number of tables covered with cloths checkered red and white—and a scattering of salt and pepper shakers helped the legal illusion. But some-

thing stiff in the wrinkles of the tablecloths showed how seldom they were disturbed, and the worn floorboards in front of the bar told where the chief trade lingered in Stowett's Tavern. Muir paused there and asked for a beer. A pair of country fellows in complete suits of brown overalls studied him with a dim interest in the mirror.

"I want to see Mr. Baldwin. Is he in?" asked Muir.

It seemed to him that the bartender's ivory ruler made a sudden jerk as it carved the foam from the top of the glass.

"If he's in, I'll tell him your name," said the bartender.

"Croft," said Muir, "Oliver Croft."

And as he spoke, he remembered the green, clear eyes of Katherine Edwards and her direct manner of speech, like the conversational way of a man. If she had in fact come to a place like this, it was a stain upon the memory of her. The two ideas no more went together than a princess goes in rags and squalor. It was then for the first time that a doubt of her grew up strongly in his mind, for he remembered that crime draws a dirty hand over high and low.

In the meantime he studied the bartender, who was serving another pair of beers to the farm laborers before he left with Muir's message. His knowledge of bars and barmen was long an intimate and somewhere in his past he thought he could recall Jeff's face when the features had not been so engrossed in red flesh. For a long moment he looked inward until the picture of the other place grew clear.

It had been a somewhat shady resort owned by Shannon, the politician, who was still one of the powers behind the thrones of New York. Lightly the mind of Muir linked bartender, Shan-

non, and this unknown Philip Baldwin together, in a tentative chain.

Jeff being gone, Muir drifted his eyes about the room. A picture of the old thoroughbred, Bendigo, hung on one wall, and a large head of McChesney faced it from the opposite side. Above the big, round-bellied stove was a colored sketch of a coach and four "on the road to Nyack. Mr. Vincent St. John, whip."

The bartender returned. He had a red face solidly supported by great jowls. The hairs on his head were white and few but they made up somewhat by their vigor, standing up almost on end. He had found Mr. Baldwin, he said, and the gentleman would come down to the bar.

The two farmhands left, but came bolting back into the barroom again a moment later, driven by a downpour of rain that made the old taven shudder from head to foot; and through the broken light of a window a fine rain-dust entered the air of the room. With the natives entered a third fellow, low and squat and heavy-shouldered as a mastiff. In a few years he would have only the soggy weight of a draft horse, but now youth and hard exercise lightened him. He stood silently by the stove, sunning his back in the warmth, and from the peak of his corduroy cap water dripped unheeded down his cheek.

"How are you, Steve?" asked the bartender.

In the mirror, as he sipped his beer, Muir saw the bulldog nod without unlocking his jaws to answer.

The rain had darkened the place thoroughly before a big fellow inches above six feet entered the bar from the interior of the tavern. He had a dished nose and a scar in front of his left ear pulled his features slightly

awry, particularly when he talked. He had the bulk of a wrestler above the hips and the taper look of a runner below them. He seemed to appreciate the magnificence of his body and set it off with a double-breasted brown suit that fitted him a shade too snugly.

He wore a small red flower in his buttonhole and his blond hair was given luster by some ointment. He carried a certain delectable fragrance into the room and coming straight up to Muir gave him his hand and a slightly twisting smile. His voice was so soft and the pitch of it so low that only a fine resonance kept his words from obscurity.

He said: "You want to see me, Mr. Croft?"

"I do," said Muir. "Will you have a drink with me?"

"With pleasure," said Philip Baldwin. "A beer, Jeff, if you please . . . dark day, Mr. Croft, isn't it? . . . December ought to be white; there's no drama in black mud and brown grass."

HE picked up his glass from the bar, but in the act of raising it and nodding acknowledgment to Muir, he turned suddenly and set his back to the edge of the bar almost as though a twinge of physical pain had disturbed him. Whether it were a thought or actually a touch of suffering, his face darkened in spite of the air of courtesy with which he masked it. It seemed to Muir that the scar must be somewhat new and perhaps that accounted for a slight stiffness of the face muscles which gave a hint of the look of a paralytic.

"The driver of the car didn't approve of me," said Muir, with an air of cheerful frankness. "He stopped on the road and telephoned."

"Did he?" asked Philip Baldwin.

"Poor Jim has to think out everything in his own way."

"Only held us up a moment," said Muir, "and after all why have a man unless he's careful, eh?"

"Perhaps," agreed Baldwin, and though he lifted his eyes no higher than the long, thin hands of Muir, the latter had a distinct impression that he was being searched to the soul.

"We might sit over at one of those tables, do you think?" asked Muir.

"Certainly," said Baldwin. "Will you have another beer?"

"No, I'll keep this going for a while," answered Muir.

He led the way toward a corner and heard the voice of Baldwin exclaim behind him, not loudly but with a sharper ring: "What's the matter with that dog, Jeff?"

Muir turned and saw a big German shepherd with one side of its face swollen and the black, ragged mark of a cut across the puff of one jowl.

"That Schneider dog, that Airedale of theirs," said Jeff. "He got a tooth into Max yesterday. That's all. Max made him run, though, and howl while he was running."

"Get him out of my sight, will you?" demanded Baldwin.

"Sure, sure," said the bartender, and called the dog away.

"I hate it," said Baldwin, gloomily, as he waited for Muir to take a chair and then sat down opposite, "I hate to see a poor beast suffer. They can't talk. That's the devil of it. They can't talk. They can't tell you where it hurts, and it makes me sick to see them done in."

He pursed his mouth with distaste and took a quick swallow of the beer. He was so moved that the highlight on his flat-faced emerald ring trembled a little.

"You're wondering why I'm here, I suppose?" asked Muir.

"I try not to guess at things," said the soft voice of Baldwin. "Will you have a cigarette? The guessing is what does the harm, because no matter how wrong it may be, the guess stays in one's mind."

"But what about the times when a guess is all one can have?" asked Muir.

"Those are the unlucky times," said Baldwin. "They cost money."

"Or blood," suggested Muir.

"Well, yes. Even blood—I'm afraid that I'll have to give you only a few moments, Mr. Croft."

"You know why I'm here, don't you?" asked Muir. "I mean, you wouldn't have to guess more than twice?"

"Well, I suppose so," replied the big fellow.

"IN other words," said Muir, feeling his way delicately forward, "a man either can come because he wants to, or because he's sent."

"Oh, of course," said Philip Baldwin. "I know you're not out here for your own pleasure."

"But it *is* a pleasure, too," answered Muir.

"Is it?" asked Baldwin.

"I mean to say, one likes to see for oneself."

"Ah, does one?" remarked Baldwin, with that slight ring of the voice which Muir had noted before. "But suppose you tell me the whole thing, straight out."

"Right from the beginning?"

"And to the end," nodded Baldwin.

Muir considered, parted his lips as though to speak, and then shook his head.

"I don't think I can do that," he decided aloud.

"Very well," murmured Baldwin, and submitted with a barely audible sigh. "But I wonder what's gained, finally, by dodging through so many fences?"

"Well, suppose that Shannon—" began Muir.

"Did Shannon send you?" snapped Baldwin suddenly.

"You know how Shannon is," said Muir. "He wouldn't want too much talk."

"I know. He doesn't change," agreed Baldwin. "I sometimes want to damn him and leave him damned."

"Ah, but we couldn't do that, could we?" asked Muir.

"No, perhaps not. Definitely, it *is* Shannon who sent you out?"

"I don't think that I can answer that," declared Muir, gravely.

"You can't?"

"No. I'm afraid not—I'm going to get another beer. Will you have one now?"

"I'll do with this, thanks."

Muir felt the eyes of Baldwin following him as he left the table carrying his empty glass. He had made very slight progress indeed, except that he had found weight in the name of Shannon. He had gathered that there was something a trifle strange in the background of Baldwin, but he had gone a single full step on the trail, no matter where it was leading. Dr. David J. Russo, now wanted for murder, seemed certainly as far from Greenwood as he was from his house in New York. And an unusual sense of self doubt was beginning to trouble Muir: He could not tell whether he had come into the country on the trail of the suspected murderer, or whether he was merely hoping, rather blindly, that he might find Katherine Edwards again.

He needed also to escape for a mo-

ment from the pressure which the examining eyes and the mere physical bigness of Baldwin exerted upon him.

That was why he had started for the bar to get a fresh beer. And on the way toward it something else occurred to his mind and made him swerve toward the outer door.

The big young fellow at the stove instantly left his place and found something of interest to stare at through the glass door-panes.

"Brightening a bit over there in the west, isn't it?" asked Muir.

"That ain't where brightness would do any good," snapped Steve, and continued to stare out the door. "The big rains come from the east."

Muir went on to the bar, slowly, for he needed more time than ever to think out his problem. It was considerably more complicated now, since he was sure that Steve was posted to keep him from bolting suddenly away. Perhaps Baldwin himself had not placed him under strict guard, but a very sensitive and accurate instinct told him that they were making him a prisoner in the house.

CHAPTER IV

A Long Sleep

THE bartender, filling the glass of beer, kept his eyes down, with one wrinkle of a frown in the middle of his forehead; Muir carried the drink back to his corner table and sat down again. And as he approached, he noted that the whole upper face of Baldwin possessed a still and perfect beauty as far down as the eyes; below that point the torment began.

"You can't tell me whether or not Shannon sent you out," said the soft, gentle voice of Baldwin. "What *can* you tell me, Mr. Croft?"

"Are you doubting me?" asked Muir, smiling.

He felt again the reach and thrust of the eyes of Baldwin, probing him.

"I have to doubt most things, don't I?" asked Baldwin.

"Why not get hold of Shannon on the phone?" asked Muir, taking another step in the dark.

"You surely know that I can't do that," answered Baldwin, with the first real touch of impatience. "But just what *are* you doing out here, Mr. Croft? Couldn't Shannon give you a letter of introduction?"

"A letter?" echoed Muir.

"No, that's true," nodded Baldwin.

"Nothing written, I suppose," said Muir.

"No, nothing written," sighed Baldwin.

"The fact is," said Muir, "that I'm to establish contact and simply hold on until another man arrives."

Baldwin looked at him in amazement.

"Do they think that I'm about to slip and run?" he asked.

"You know how it is when there is more than one set of brains at work on a thing?" suggested Muir.

"I know; I know," nodded Baldwin. He looked at Muir as though he were comparing him with a picture in his mind. "Weren't you with the Lott and Cornish Sand and Gravel people, five or six years ago?" he asked.

"Not quite," smiled Muir.

"Not directly, eh?" asked Baldwin.

"No, not apparently," said Muir, still smiling.

The lips of Baldwin pinched hard together.

"Frankly," he said, "I don't like this very well. It's no pleasure for me to be treated like a child who mustn't be allowed to hear the real truth."

Muir made an appealing gesture with both hands.

"Can't you understand that?" he asked. "Can't you understand the positions?"

"Yes," admitted Baldwin, grudgingly. "Yes, I can understand it in a way. The fact is that you're not going to tell me anything. You're simply here to—feast your eyes on me. Is that it?"

"Well, more or less."

Baldwin passed a hand of impatient anger over his face.

"I hope you're satisfied, then," he said. "I hope that the rest of them will be satisfied, too. And may they be damned," he added in the softest of whispers. "May they all be damned!"

He pushed back his chair, breathing hard with emotion.

"What do you want to do now?" he asked briefly.

"I want to turn in and have a sleep," answered Muir. "I'm done in."

"I'll tell them to give you a room upstairs," said Baldwin. He added, bitterly: "There may be a rat or two. . . . But the four-legged kind don't matter. The two-legged rats are the ones that eat the soul out of a man, Mr. Croft. . . . Jerry, fix up Mr. Croft with a room"

Baldwin rose.

"You can understand my being busy," he said, dryly. "Not as busy as I once was, but pretty well employed. You'll excuse me for the time being, Mr. Croft."

"Certainly," said Muir, and remained at the table to finish his beer. He needed to add up his gains from Baldwin's conversation and he found that the results were quite nebulous. Some sort of a criminal or extra-legal background was suggested, certainly, but at the end what remained most vividly in the mind

of Muir was the remark about "two-legged rats."

THE bartender appeared, grunting: "Follow me up!" and turned to lead the way; and as Muir rose from the table he was aware of the eyes of Steve, turning their brunt sidelong upon him. He had again the impression that this was jail, and that yonder was the jailer.

Jeff led him on through a pair of frowzy parlors. From door to door cigarette ashes had been trodden into the worn carpets and outlined a path clearly. There was a dank, heavy atmosphere of cookery and un-aired humanity, and a clutter of chairs and old sofas upholstered in frayed velvet.

In the second parlor, a door at the left was closing slowly, softly as he passed through to a winding stairway that rose out of the corner of the room. As he climbed the stairs, Muir felt a slight draft of air and, glancing back, saw that the same door was open again. He could feel rather than see what stood beyond the threshold.

The worn heels of Jeff guided him up that dim stairway to the floor above and then down the hall to the second door on the left, where he paused and produced a jingling of big keys. He unlocked the door and pushed it open with a moan and shudder of rusted hinges. Muir looked in on a dingy room with an old four-poster bed covered with a spread which seemed to have been laundered gray instead of white. He walked in, saying: "This will do."

"Will it?" growled Jeff. "That's good, then."

He stood a moment on the threshold with his small eyes worrying at the face of Muir. Then he shrugged his shoulders, closed the door, and disappeared. His footfall creaked away

down the hall, down the stairs. And a moment later Muir heard deep laughter from the floor below.

He went to the window. A big tree just outside bent down its branches glistering with rain and overlaid the rain-misted landscape with the black pattern of its trunk and boughs. Through the window the dull light that entered the room came as a stain more than an illumination. It was not middle-afternoon, and yet lamplight would have brightened the place.

On the wall, pictures of horses were the motif of the decoration.

Muir threw himself down on the bed, turned on his side, and closed his eyes. The fatigue of the night before, the poison of weariness which had been accumulating strangely in his brain during the past few days, now was pressing down on all his nerves with a steady weight.

He reviewed certain alternatives. It might be that the highly irritated Philip Baldwin would actually get in touch with Shannon, whoever that might be; and it might be that Shannon in a word could reveal "Mr. Croft" as an impostor. What would follow then, Muir could use a fine spread of imagination to foresee.

He had a feeling that Jim, the chauffeur, and Jerry, the bartender, and Steve, the fighting mastiff, were linked together under the absolute authority of big Philip Baldwin. They might be no more than family servants whom Baldwin had taken with him into a temporary exile, but Muir felt in them something more sinister.

HE determined to sleep for a half hour, and tried to set his subconscious mind like an alarm clock for that space of time. Then, quickly, in a sick numbness of fatigue, slumber

rolled over him and submerged him, and he carried down with him into darkness the sharp-bearded face of Doctor David J. Russo, wanted for murder, and Katherine Edwards with her green, clear, steady eyes.

That subconscious brain of his for once was not honest. When he awakened, the light that came through the window was as pale as early dawn and his brain whirled for a moment in the effort to place himself in time and space. The musty smell of the tavern was what brought him to the proper identity, at last.

He sat up. Voices rumbled from the barroom, dimly, like machinery at work in the bowels of a ship. The day's end had come, and perhaps he had wasted a vital share of his time. He realized this with a sinking heart and above all with a sense of weakness, as though his own nature had betrayed him. Something was undoubtedly wrong; a brittle weakness in his knees told him that; as he stood up; and he had to make a sort of physical effort to clear his mind.

He had exploring to do and he required silence for it; therefore he did not cross the center of the floor where his weight would act with a greater leverage upon the boards, but he moved close to the wall, putting down his feet gingerly and keeping his weight as much as possible distributed on both legs.

So he managed to come without a single creak of the floor to the door. He turned the knob of it with the same gingerly care—and found it locked!

He could remember, distinctly, that when he first entered the room a key had been left on the inside of the door. It was gone, now, and therefore that door had been opened while he slept. It might be that deft hands had run

through his clothes at the same time; but when he touched his pockets with rapid fingers he found everything in place.

The locking of the door changed everything. It was equivalent to a declaration of war, silently delivered, and all sense of weariness left Muir at once.

He would have confessed to fear out of the honesty of his mind, but for many years all real happiness had had in it the sharp ecstasy of danger intermingled. He was happy now as he leaned over the lock and began to read its mind with the sliver of steel which he drew from his coat. It was a simple matter for him to turn the heavy bolt. It required merely the brain of a child and strength in the fingertips before he was opening the door softly.

The key was on the farther side, half engaged, and he removed it to the inside as a matter of course. He found the hallway drowned in shadow as thick as sea-water. Only the doorknobs up and down its length glistened dimly.

HE tried the one opposite him. It was unlocked and gave on a damp odor of decay. The finger of the electric torchlight touched a high-stacked mass of furniture, old chairs turned upside down on tables and couches, with red rust stains on the bottom linings. Up the hall, the next room was locked, but he needed only a moment's work to open it. He stepped inside and found the last of the day looking into the room only as far as the center table; the rest of the furniture was as obscurely in shadow as the background of a Rembrandt.

His flashlight spotted a large book on the stand beside the bed. He stepped to that and found a Blackstone's Commentaries, with marginal notes scribbled thickly into the margins by one

handwriting, but of different ages. For a dozen years the reader must have been writing his observations at the sides of the pages.

Muir turned from that to a closet door which stood somewhat ajar and as he pulled it farther open he saw a serried mass of neckties showering down like a rainbow from an inside bracket of the door.

A dozen suits hung within, all newly tailored, most of them with double-breasted coats, and by the width of the shoulders and the natty lines, he could be sure that he was in the room of Philip Baldwin.

While he scanned the rest of the room with the light, his fingers were automatically dipping into coat pockets, but he found them all empty, and in the entire chamber nothing of the slightest importance.

He returned to the door, listened to make sure that the hall was empty, and continued his investigations. He tried the next door on left, across the hall, and finding it unlocked he pushed cautiously into the dim, twilight atmosphere, where the darkness was hastened by the crowding branches of a tree near the window.

As he closed the door, he half-shut his eyes and took a deep breath, for mingling with the musty odor of the old house he detected a thin scent of fragrance that called him back to some memory, near or far. A moment later he had placed it, for Katherine Edwards had used a touch of just such a perfume.

Curiosity made him cut the dimness with the edge of his torchlight, left and right. It gleamed on the false marble front of the fireplace, it flashed with brilliance from a mirror on the wall, and in between it cut across the bed, the table, the open suitcase on a

chair. He made a step toward the latter before another instinct halted and turned him back to the door. He had his hand on the knob when footfalls entered the hall, one light and quick, one soft but weighty. A light in the hall snapped on and etched in the door with a broken line of radiance from which Muir backed away across the room. He was in the middle of it when the voices of Katherine Edwards and Philip Baldwin paused at the door.

CHAPTER V

Old Friends Meet Again

THE corner wall stopped the retreat of Muir. He could not help a glance towards the window, but since he knew there was no time to clamber through this, he resigned himself suddenly and sat down in a chair near the head of the bed.

There he remained, relaxing with folded arms and crossed legs as the door pushed open and showed the girl entering, with the huge shadow of Philip Baldwin flooding over her. He came a step after her, half shutting the door behind him. The sharp tang and purity of the outdoors passed through the room. On the shoulders of Baldwin's overcoat the raindrops, entangled in the upper fuzz of the tweed, shone brilliantly, but since the hall light was at some distance, the angle at which it entered the doorway embraced Baldwin alone and left the rest of the room in an accentuated darkness.

"I ought to wait, but I can't wait," said Baldwin. "I've got to know it now! Kate, do you still care about me?"

"Ah, of course I do," she said.

He kept a nervously doubled fist against his breast and she put up a caressing hand against it as she spoke.

"No—it's not any good," said Bald-

win. "When you look at me, you're changed, Kate. I remember everything too well, you see."

"I haven't changed. I won't change," said the girl.

"There you're fighting yourself," said the soft, gentle voice of Baldwin. "You're whipping yourself forward, dear, but the soul doesn't respond. Tell me. Isn't that the truth?"

She shook her head. "I won't let it be the truth," she told him, "Do you think where I've given my word—I mean, when I've ever loved—"

"Hush!" said Baldwin. "The truth is that you can't look at me. Isn't that the actual truth?"

"It *isn't* the truth! I do look at you—"

"And pity me, Kate. Isn't that it?"

"And love you, and want to weep about you."

"Do you think that we can build it into a great, beautiful life together?" asked Baldwin. "Do you still want time before you tell me, definitely?"

"A little time, my dear," said the girl. "Does that wound you? Does it hurt you? I'll want to kill myself if it has!"

"A man has to take the blows, if he's worth a rap," said Baldwin.

"I *have* hurt you," breathed the girl.

He lifted his big head, and by the light from the hall, all that Muir could see clearly was the noble, polished forehead.

"It's no more than I can stand," said Baldwin. "But I must leave you, Kate."

"Not now," she pleaded. "Stay just a moment longer and let me try—"

"God bless you, my dear," said Baldwin. "But I think I shall have to be alone."

He closed the door. The thick blackness swept over the room for from the sky came only a sooty grayness that

entered through the window no more than a step. Then a switch by the door snapped on and threw a dazzle into the eyes of Muir from the naked unshaded globe that hung from the center of the ceiling.

"That was a little thin, wasn't it?" asked Muir, without rising from the chair.

He saw the outcry swell in her throat, but she set her teeth over it with a swift, fine self-control.

"Pathos, I mean," he repeated, standing up. "There was just a dash of Pathos in Baldwin's farewell. Or what would you say?"

"Do you know that I'm only half a breath from a scream?" she panted, staring at him.

"You'd better get off those wet clothes or you'll be only half a breath from a bad cold," suggested Muir.

Her hands began to unbutton her coat. They stopped that rapid work as she exclaimed: "It hypnotizes me to see you so perfectly calm; as though we'd been talking here ever since tea. What on earth are you doing here?"

LET'S talk about big Mr. Baldwin," said Muir. "I'll lend you an idea that ought to be useful. That clever fellow wanted you to think that he was resigning himself to a deep agony of the spirit. But as a matter of fact he was simply playing a clever hand of cards and taking a trick; and now he's planning the next shuffle and the next deal, which may have all sorts of surprises for you. One way or another he intends to have you, don't you think?"

"It wasn't sickness at all that brought you to the doctor's office last night," she told him. "You have something in your mind; and I don't want to be a silly little fool and make trouble for

you, but hadn't you better explain?"

"If you called Mr. Baldwin with those great big hands of his, there would be trouble, I suppose," nodded Muir.

"I don't want to call him," she answered. "I don't want to do anything melodramatic. But you know I can't take this for granted, after all."

"Can't you," asked Muir, smiling a little.

"Certainly I cannot," she answered.

"Tell me, honestly," said he. "After the first surprise—are you in the least degree shocked or alarmed or in fear on account of me?"

"No," she said. "I mean—well, it's true that I'm not afraid."

"You don't think that I went to the doctor's office to burgle it, do you?"

"No, I suppose not."

"And you don't believe that I'm out here to rob the tavern?"

"Perhaps not."

"But you're guessing at another logical reason that would bring me here?" asked Muir.

She said: "You'd better go, hadn't you?"

"You want me to tell you why I'm here, don't you?" he insisted.

"Yes," she admitted.

"Well, I don't look like a romantic fellow, do I?"

He felt her eyes on his forehead and on the hard-drawn lines of his face.

"No," she said. "Not exactly romantic."

"However," said Muir, "I'm here for a tremendously romantic reason. I want to perform a rescue."

"Ah, good," she answered. "Rescue what?"

"You," said Muir.

"And from what?" she asked rather patiently.

"From danger, of course," said Muir.

"What danger, please?"

"All the danger that's under the roof of the tavern; and there's plenty of it, I have an idea."

"You *are* a bit romantic, I'm afraid," she said without interest.

"Why are you here, for instance?" he asked.

"Doctor . . ." she began, and stopped suddenly. "I simply came out for a bit of country air," she concluded. "The doctor told me I should."

"Because you'd had too much of the city?" asked Muir.

"Yes."

"I'm not surprised," he went on, with ironical sympathy. "Last night I noticed how worn you were, and how bad your color was. But the doctor . . . did you expect to find him here?"

"I don't see . . ." she began.

"You did *not* find him, did you?" asked Muir.

SHE started, and then lifting her head, slowly, she looked at him with new eyes, enthralled by some totally unexpected danger, as it seemed.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean an entirely simple question," he said. "You came here because it was said the doctor wanted you. When you arrived, you asked about him. He was not in. He continues to be out. Isn't that the truth?"

She took a quick breath, but let no words escape from her lips.

Muir went on: "The doctor was out, I suppose? When you asked for him, he would be back presently? Perhaps he was out on a call. Didn't the story go something like that?"

She said nothing.

"Well, I'll trot on back to my room," said Muir, going toward the door.

"Please stay for another moment," said the girl.

"Just as you wish," he answered, and turned back to the window.

A shaft of light from another window beneath it showed the slant of the hillside in the rear of the tavern, the loom and lift of a great tree trunk in the distance and a few shrubs with ragged leaves on the tips of the branches nearer to hand. From the downpour of rain, which was slackening now to nothing, little runlets of brown water trickled down the bank. Muir eyed it automatically for an instant before he turned toward the girl again.

"At your service," he said, smiling.

"Now please tell me what you think," she asked.

"I think I see a nurse," said Muir, "but where is the sick person she is taking care of?"

"There is . . ." she began, but stopped again and even glanced rather apprehensively toward the door.

"There is to be a case presently. Isn't that it?" demanded Muir.

She slipped down into a chair and, with her head raised high and her eyes studying the opposite wall and her hands folded in her lap, she remained impassive for a moment.

"I have to think just a bit," she said.

Muir stepped up behind her and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Doesn't that help?" he asked. "Help the thinking, I mean?"

She turned her head, slowly, until she could look up into his face.

"Yes," she answered gravely. "It helps—it helps to take the horrible, sick fear out of me."

She was looking straightforward again.

"And in the meantime," said Muir, "that noble friend of yours, Philip

Baldwin, has a chance to show his nobility and give you a glimpse of his suffering soul. That's one convenience in having you out here, isn't it?"

"Will you not talk about him, please?" asked the girl.

"Not a word, if you wish," said Muir.

HE drew up another chair beside hers and facing her. As he sat down, he saw that she was swallowing with a hard effort, fighting back a panic that kept growing the more she looked into her mind. Muir took her hand and said nothing.

"Will you tell me this?" she asked at last. "Will you tell me what brought you here?"

"Chiefly you," said Muir.

Half-frowning, she looked at him steadily. He ran a hand quickly over his face.

"I know," he said. "It's bad. Full of long nights and short days, and all that. But the truth is still what I say. It's chiefly you that brought me here. On a rather blind trail. After I left you last night, I listened under the office windows and heard you telephoning into the country. So I came out here pretending to want to see Mr. Baldwin and I've seen him. He's a bit suspicious but he's not quite sure that I'm a fakir. If he were sure, I think he'd wring my neck. What do you think?"

She put up a hand to her throat and looked at him with eyes made blank because of what they saw inwardly.

"You can't talk about him," nodded Muir. "There was a time when he meant most of the world to you. Isn't that true?"

She agreed with a gesture.

"Why did you come to the doctor's office last night?" she asked.

He said, faintly smiling: "Because

I had a premonition that I'd find you there, of course. Is it bothering you to have me talk like a silly ass at the very moment when you're beginning to be afraid?"

"You know it doesn't," she said.

"Whatever I had to say, you'd listen?"

"Yes."

"As though we had a thousand safe hours ahead of us?"

"Yes," she said.

"And I'm something more than a bit of middle-aged grotesquerie?" he asked.

She smiled at him, with the fear gone from her eyes and only a slightly amused human consideration left in them.

"Something more. A great deal more," she admitted.

"Now you want to know why I was at the doctor's office? Because I was following a friend who was there before me. Everett Franklin."

"The newspaper man?"

"That's right."

"Did you have an idea that he could be there?"

"I was fairly certain that he was there."

"But of course—"

"And he was. I found him."

She opened her eyes, at this.

"Are you steady?" he asked.

"Like a rock," she said.

HE was an old friend," said Muir.

"I'd run across him in a dozen different parts of the world when he was hunting news and I was hunting—other things. He had one of those beautiful faces that you never find outside of Hollywood. He couldn't grow older. He was one of those bright little boys who always have the answer. There was no more fear in him than

there is in a ferret, and he was always going into dark holes and bringing out the truth, sometimes with the blood still fresh on it. One part of me loved him. Do you understand?"

"You've put him in the past. He's dead!" murmured the girl.

"He was dead," said Muir, keeping firm hold on her with his eyes. "I found him in the closet of that room with the landscape wallpaper."

She took the news of the death with a wonderful calmness.

"He had been stabbed to death," said Muir, still holding her eyes strongly. "And the murderer wasn't satisfied with that. He'd leaned and slashed him across the face—crisscross slashes—a lot of them, over and over again. With something as sharp as a scalpel."

The strength went out of her, suddenly. Her head dropped to the back of the chair. Her eyes closed. By the blue gray of her lips she seemed to have fainted, but Muir saw the faint pulsation of the artery at the base of her throat.

He stood up and went to the window, to lift the sash of it so that fresh air could blow in; and as he did this he saw the figure of a man pass up the bank at the rear of the tavern, a tall, alert, sure-footed fellow in a raincoat and a slouch hat with a heavy pack strapped behind his shoulders.

Through the thin mist of the rain, the light from the lower window played upon him clearly enough, striking upward to follow him as he reached the brush.

Then, as one does after climbing over an obstacle, he turned and looked back down the bank which he had just passed. Muir saw the face of his quarry, that same face which Inspector Tory so eagerly desired to trace, with the pointed beard giving it an old-fashioned professional neatness. As Muir watched, Doctor David J. Russo turned again and stepped out of the misty light into darkness, leaving the brush trembling behind him and a few of the dead leaves slowly adrift down the bank.

Peter Muir, undercover agent, has at last caught up with his quarry. But he is a virtual prisoner in that country tavern, and is thwarted from stalking the murderer of his closest friend. Yet Muir is a man of great resourcefulness, and you will thoroughly enjoy watching him try to extricate himself from the strange predicament in which he finds himself. The concluding installment of THE FACE AND THE DOCTOR by Max Brand comes to you in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

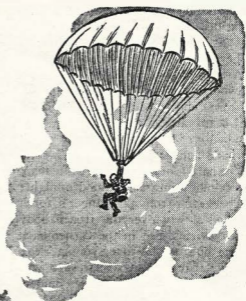


Mesa Mystery

By Edward Parrish Ware

Author of "Once a Miser—," "Twixt Cup
and Lip," etc.

*Avis Lane, Glamorous Movie
Star, Was Slated for Death,
But the Forest Ranger Wiped
the Slate Clean!*



Something slim and dark had balled out
above dangerous Cutrock Mesa!

CHARLIE REDHORSE and his squaw had removed themselves and their flock of sheep from Cutrock Mesa when Forest Ranger Clay Parker got there. For once, the Pima buck had trekked ahead of a blizzard, instead of remaining to make snow trouble for the rangers in that part of Arizona.

Parker removed his snowshoes, cleared the snow away from the low doorway of Charlie's deserted hogan, crawled inside and cast about for wood to build a fire. It was midmorning, and the ranger was hungry.

The Pima had been provident in that he had made his squaw pile a great deal of dry fuel in one corner of the hogan. Dead cedar, mixed with seasoned oak. Stuff that wouldn't smoulder and fill the hut with smoke. Parker bent down and piled up an armload.

As he fumbled in the gloom for a final stick, his hand touched something that was distinctly not wood—and he froze as he was.

After a moment he lowered the load of wood to the ground, then took out his torch and set the catch. He played the beam about over the pile, and steadied it at length on the thing which his hand had grasped.

The bare foot of a man, a white man, lay ice-blue beneath the flood of light!

The beam from the ranger's torch traveled slowly over the frozen body which lay huddled in the corner back of the pile. A tall man, young, clean shaved, trim and muscular. He was clad only in a suit of woolen underwear.

"Poor Wicker!" Parker exclaimed softly, resting the beam on the dead youth's face. "You hadn't been with us long. Six months, I think. A nice kid, and you didn't deserve a thing like this!"

Snow trouble. Always, snow in the mountains brought plenty trouble. It seemed to release pent-up savagery in man and beast, as well as in the elements. Nothing, however, quite like this had happened before within the range of Parker's memory.

For the dead man was a forest ranger. A ranger—murdered!

Yes, it was murder. A knife wound under the left shoulderblade established that. Why? Who would have done it?

Surely not Charlie Redhorse. The Pima buck would have no reason for harming a ranger.

Wicker, Parker recalled, should have been patrolling over in the Pima Butte country, miles to the southwest. Yet his dead body lay there back of Charlie Redhorse's woodpile, unclothed, hat, boots, uniform and all equipment missing.

Worried and greatly puzzled, Parker prowled the hut, then built a fire on the hard earth in the center, sombre eyes watching the thick smoke pillaring up through the vent. Then he cooked breakfast, ate it, and went outside.

THERE was smoke on the mesa. Just a hazy column off toward the west. Up there the mesa was fairly choked with scrub oak, ash, mountain mahogany. Some green juniper, too, dark against the virgin snow. And beyond the choke of growth, the smoke.

Parker put on his snowshoes and started toward the spile of smoke. He had not gone far, however, when he cocked his head and listened.

The drone of an airplane engine could be clearly heard. Parker stood where he was. Presently he spied the plane. It was flying fairly low and came circling in toward the mesa from the southwest. Its speed was not great.

Parker wondered. Surely no pilot in his right senses would attempt a landing there. The face of the mesa lay strewn with big boulders which even the blanket of snow could not hide. A plane simply could not land in safety—

A bundle tumbled from the side of the plane next to the ranger. Not a very large bundle, but then the distance was deceiving. The bundle almost immediately increased its first proportions and became a parachute—and on the ropes below the chute dangled something slim and dark.

Somebody had bailed out above Cut-rock Mesa!

That was a most astonishing piece of business. Parker started walking westward.

The figure attached to the chute was visibly kicking its legs, swinging in the wind. The chute and its cargo dropped

beyond the range of Parker's eyes, somewhere in the mesa growth.

The plane circled above the place once more, then came about and lost itself rapidly in the cloud-haze to the south.

Once more there was silence over the mesa. A silence rendered more sinister still by the swift intrusion of another mystery.

Parker was making all possible speed toward the clump of growth into which he judged the parachute had dropped, when a blue clad figure broke cover and came struggling toward him through snow almost hip-deep. Even at that distance, the ranger was certain the person in the heavy blue flying-suit was a woman.

"Stay where you are!" he called. She'd trip on the treacherous mesa floor, fall and bash her brains out against a boulder. "I'm coming after you!"

She was closer now, and Parker could see her face clearly. There was fear, rage, exhaustion in it. In spite of his warning, she kept struggling toward him through the snow.

When she got nearer, Parker stopped suddenly and almost shouted her name. Almost—but not quite. Surely he knew that face, and the name that went with it. Complete recognition had been very near, only to elude him!

Then the ranger saw somebody else. A booted mackinawed figure limned darkly against the green of a cedar beyond the struggling woman. A man with a rifle in hand. Almost at sight of him, the man swung the rifle up and let drive.

A bullet slapped against Parker's right leg with force enough to hurl him almost about-face in his tracks. He swung back toward the rifleman, conscious that he had taken a slug

where it would do him a lot of harm.

The woman raised a cry of alarm—and again the rifle snarled. The bullet sang harmlessly by Parker's head. By then he had shucked the mitten from his right hand and clawed his service revolver out of its holster. The range was a trifle far for a belt-gun—

Disaster, more snow trouble, came at that instant. Parker's left leg, supporting most of his weight, turned under him. His boot had trod on a rock, and he went down on his face, his gun going end for end into the brush.

Whack!

Parker's forehead encountered a buried boulder with a sound which surely must have carried clear to the rapidly nearing figure in blue. Parker, though, didn't hear it. He was past hearing anything, his long, green-clad figure half buried in the blanket of snow.

THE ranger's next conscious moment informed him that he had been removed from his bed in the snow and placed under shelter. The ground beneath him, rocky and uneven though it was, was dry. Near him a fire blazed and crackled, and by its light he was able to make out his surroundings.

He lay inside a rudely constructed shack of brush and bark. Beyond the fire and nearer the low doorway he made out two fresh-cut heaps of spruce boughs, both heaps topped with blankets. There was nothing else within the hut, except a pile of newly cut pine beside the fire.

Parker, white and drawn, sat up. His right leg stabbed him with pains which shot from hip to ankle. He then remembered the bullet. Evidently, he thought, the slug had not struck a bone. For that, at least, he was thankful.

And the woman in blue, with the

strangely familiar face—surely she had not bailed out of that plane of her own accord. In the brief glimpse he had got of her, he had seen clearly that she was frenzied with fear. No, she had not bailed out of her own will.

Then he made a discovery. The snowshoes had been removed from his feet, and that rendered him helpless indeed. A man wouldn't get anywhere at all in such a snow, unless there was a pair of good webs under him.

"And on top of it all," the ranger groaned, "I haven't got my gun!"

As though Parker's groan had cued him in, a stooped figure slid through the doorway and stood erect in the light of the fire. A tall, lean man in boots, woolen britches, plaid mackinaw and a cap of fur. A man with black eyes under highly arched brows, a long, beakline nose and a thin-lipped slit of a mouth. A man who was clearly in a rage about something.

"Too damned many of you rangers snooping about in the Prescott National!" he snapped, fixing hot eyes on the cold ones of the ranger. "Thicker'n blackbirds, by God!"

Parker eyed him in silence for a moment, then said:

"Well, you seem to have succeeded in eliminating one entirely, and you damned near eliminated me. But, of course, you had a perfectly sound reason for it?"

"From my angle—yes!" the other snarled. "And I don't care for face-tiousness, from you or anybody else. Remember that!"

"Glad you mentioned it," Parker told him. "I'll bear it in mind. Hope a bit of first aid, self-administered, doesn't also ram up against one of your taboos? I had a pack, first-aid stuff and all that. If you don't mind, I'll do what I can to avoid bleeding to death."

The black-eyed man, without yea or nay, turned and ducked out of the hut. He returned ten minutes later, and another booted and mackinawed man came with him. A short, heavy-set, blondish man, this second one. A man very much disgruntled, Parker thought, if not actually in fear. He carried a small kettle of warm water in one hand, Parker's first-aid kit in the other.

"Damn it all, Sid," the blondish man complained, as he placed kettle and kit on the ground within reach of the ranger, "this guy showing up, along with what's already happened to the other one; don't suit me. You picked this spot yourself last summer. Didn't you get hep that the forest was lousy with rangers?"

"Don't bother about the rangers, Con," counseled the man called Sid. Remember the old whiz about a dead Indian being a good Indian? Well, same thing applies to rangers."

"That may be all true enough!" Con exclaimed. "But, damn it, if I'd known there was going to be a killing, and especially if I'd known government rangers was going to be killed, I'd not have put in with you none a-tall! We're in for it, sure as hell, unless we make a good clean getaway—and how we going to do that, considering we're snowbound up here good and plenty?"

"Let me remind you, Con," Sid said coldly, "that this snowstorm was hardly of my contriving. It was, you might say, an act of God. I didn't foresee it, and couldn't stop it when it came. Also, when that other ranger stepped out and told us to back-track for the lowlands, what the hell could I do? He'd seen us, hadn't he? Sure. So I had to take him in as I did. Safety, yours and mine, demanded it."

"Reckon so," Con grunted, still unappeased. "But there's something yet

I don't understand. Before you stuck the ranger with your knife, you made him strip to his underwear—and you kept his clothes and things. Why the hell did you do that?"

Sid laughed. "Mighty suspicious, aren't you, Con?" he jibed. "Well, I'll explain. The clothes and equipment would have enabled a finder to identify the stiff as a ranger at a glance. That's why I took his outfit. Chances are, of course, that nobody will visit that hogan until well along next summer—and then it'll be hard to identify what is found. Now, for the love of Mike, stop growling!"

PARKER had bandaged his wound and reclothed himself. He had heard a lot, as is usually the case when two crooks start an argument. But there was no personal satisfaction in that. He well knew that Sid and Con would make an end of him, just as had been done in the case of Wicker, else they'd have been more guarded in their conversation.

Where, he wondered, was the woman? What had they done with her? Who was she? Damn it all, if he could only place her! And what was the meaning of that dangerous descent from the plane?

There were a number of things yet which Parker didn't know—and probably never would know.

Sid was speaking again.

"Get some cord out of the car," he instructed. "Not much sense in tying this bird up, seeing he can't get away anyhow, but we'll be thorough. Get the rope."

"Seeing you're so certain I can't get away," Parker suggested, "you might give me the lowdown on this funny business. What'n hell's going on, anyhow?"

"If you never know," Sid grinned evilly, "that'll be time enough!"

Con returned with a coil of rope, and the ranger was bound, wrist and ankle, then left alone in the shack. He was to have plenty of time in which to think, for it was after dark when Sid and his pal came back. Parker did the thinking, right enough, but it got him nowhere. All he knew was this:

Two murderous crooks were encamped on Cutrock Mesa, for what purpose he hadn't the least idea. A woman whom he knew and yet didn't know was there with them. The hot-eyed Sid had killed Ranger Lee Wicker—and he, Clay Parker, would probably get a dose of the same medicine.

Strangely enough, Parker was concerned mostly about the young woman. Who was she, why was she there? At times he could almost call her name, only to have her slip back again into the shroud of mystery which had so abruptly enveloped the mesa.

At about nine o'clock, Sid came back into the shack, cut the ropes which bound the ranger, and ordered him outside.

The ranger, limping badly but able to use the wounded leg much better than he had any right to expect, passed through the doorway and found Con, wearing snowshoes, awaiting him. Pointing to another pair of snowshoes which lay on the ground, Parker's own, the blonde ordered him to strap them on.

Parker did so.

Sid, wearing snowshoes now, slid a revolver out of its holster, and spoke. "Follow your nose, Ranger, straight across the mesa toward the south," he ordered briefly. "Try to escape—and I'll fill you full of lead. Get going!"

The going was slow, every step an

agony to the ranger, but the mesa was negotiated; and they began a climb along a hogback up toward the top of Poverty Peak.

Parker knew that section well, and it was apparent that Sid knew something of it also. Presently, as they toiled up the hogback, Parker spoke.

"Me for the bottom of Black Lava Canyon, eh?" he queried. "We're headed in that direction."

"You've guessed it, Ranger!" Sid exclaimed. "They'll probably find you, or what the wolves and coyotes leave of you, after the thaw next summer. Well, you can't squawk. You knew you were inviting trouble when you signed up with the rangers. You'll go over the edge of Black Lava—and there'll be another snooper missing in the Prescott National!"

WHY, Parker wondered, was Sid taking the trouble to trek up to Black Lava, when a bullet or a knife could just as easily have done the work down there on the mesa? Surely there was something back of it. However, Parker wasn't greatly interested in that problem at the moment. There was something else in his mind.

Choosing a time when Con had his mind on the difficulties of the trail ahead, and Sid also was having his troubles, Parker stopped abruptly, whirled—and launched himself upon the black-eyed killer. It was a fool thing to do—but at least he would die fighting.

Sid, taken by surprise, went over backwards under the assault. He fired his revolver once, the bullet going wide, and then Parker was on him, knees gripping his body, hands clutching his throat.

"Here—quick—Con!" Sid cried chokingly. "Crown him—damn you!"

Con struck with the barrel of his gun. Once, twice—and Parker's body went limp. He rolled over in the snow.

Sid and Con yanked him to his feet, and between them they dragged him a hundred yards farther—to the rim of Black Lava.

The ranger, stunned, bleeding about the head, was only dimly aware of the progress of events. He'd tried—and failed. Well—that was that!

"Goodbye Ranger!"

It was the voice, the hoarse, jeering voice of the black-eyed killer, and it sounded far away. Parker was suddenly hurled off the edge of the canyon—to go tumbling downward three hundred feet toward death on the rocks at the bottom!

But fate in the form of a mountain ash, which clung to the edge of a cutback not more than twenty feet from the lip of the canyon, interfered. Parker rolled against the bole of the tree, and almost without conscious volition encircled it with an arm. Desperately, every bone in his body aching under the strain, he brought his free arm into play and clung there.

Then, from above, the silence was shattered by a high, shrill scream of mortal terror. Something dark and bulky landed with a terrific thud on the cutback almost brushing against the ranger, slid off—and went bouncing and tumbling toward the bottom.

Who had it been? Sid or Con? One of them had been thrown from the lip of the canyon. Which one?

Parker, his senses gradually clearing, managed to drag himself to comparative safety on the cutback. He lay there exhausted. After a rest of fifteen minutes he crawled a bit farther back toward the body of the mountain, searching for a way to climb to the top.

Two hours later, almost frozen, the ranger crawled beneath the umbrella-like foliage of a snow-weighted ash. He searched for matches, found some, then broke off dead limbs from the canopy above him and built a fire.

Thawing out, he considered his position. There was still a good fight in him—if only he had a gun!

Then he thought of the weapon he had lost on the mesa. With luck, he could get back there before daybreak, dig the gun out, and then meet the survivor of the criminals on equal terms.

"And it'll be the black-eyed devil," he assured himself gravely. "It was Con who went to his death in the canyon. And that explains why Sid took me up there. He meant to catch his pal in an unguarded moment and make a quick end of him—and he did. That, Con, is what you got for getting cold feet—and letting Sid know it!"

He waited an hour longer, then struck out along the hogback toward the mesa. The wounded leg was stiff and sore, impeding his progress greatly. Then—more snow trouble.

Parker's webs, broken and rock-worn, gave out. Convinced that he couldn't repair them, he kicked the useless things off and resumed his journey. Daylight found him yet two long miles from the mesa—and the going getting rougher all the time. He plowed on through the snow.

Driving Parker, transforming him into a dynamo of energy, was the thought of the lovely young woman on Cutrock Mesa. Who was she? Was she, too, slated for death by the murderous Sid?

AS Parker finally came out on the crest above Cutrock, he again heard the droning of an airplane engine. Crouching beside a boulder, the

floor of the mesa under his eyes, he waited, watching the sky.

Again a plane hovered above Cutrock, and another bundle was released from it. Not a parachute this time, but something smaller. It dropped into the snow near the site of the deserted Hogan—and then the plane circled away toward the south.

Parker waited where he was. Then, fifteen minutes later, Sid appeared below him. He retrieved the bundle, digging it out of the snow, and swung back into the brush.

What had been dropped from the sky in that bundle?

Parker couldn't answer that. The bundle, for the moment at least, must remain a part of the mystery which had already blackened the mesa.

There was one chance in a hundred that the ranger could get down onto the exposed mesa and find his lost revolver. He was about to take the one chance, desperate though it was, when something else happened.

Sid, muffled to the eyes, a blanket-pack strapped to his back, snowshoed into view. He struck off at a distance-eating swing toward the west end of the mesa.

Sid had retrieved a bundle dropped by a plane—and was making tracks out of that section of the country. And he had lost no time in the going!

And the woman—what of her?

Parker went slipping and sliding down onto the mesa and into the brush. Half an hour later he stopped and gazed in astonishment at what stood before him.

A long, high-powered coupe stood wheel-top deep in the snow, and attached to the rear was a new, streamlined house-trailer. From a tiny stack in the trailer's roof thin smoke spiraled upward.

There was a closed door in the side of the trailer, and the ranger, his teeth set grimly, slapped it open and entered.

The girl was there. Lying on a bunk, slim ankles bound with cord, wrists secured at her back, she cried out in joyous relief at sight of the ranger.

Parker quickly released her and stood her on her feet. Clothed no longer in the shapeless blue flying-suit, she stood revealed a slender, graceful girl in boots, trousers, fleece-lined jacket and a red beret. And, at last, Parker recognized her.

"Avis Lane!" he cried, eyes wide with sudden comprehension.

The mystery of the mesa was a mystery no longer!

And yet—surely, he thought, there must be some mistake. The mystery girl standing there was certainly a double for Avis Lane, Supertone Pictures' girl of golden glamour. The petite blonde artiste who in one short year had lifted Supertone out of the deep red and catapulted the company high up into the heavy money.

Avis Lane, ranking with Garbo, Gaynor, Crawford. . . .!

It was Miss Lane. It could be none other than she. Parker snapped out of his frozen surprise.

"You've had me scared stiff," he said, dropping onto a bunk. "You—you're all right, aren't you?"

She nodded, sat down—and burst into tears.

Parker waited until the tears had run their course, then said gently:

"Tell me all about it, Miss Lane. You've been so damned game—don't give up now."

Avis Lane sat down on the bunk, rested her small, firm chin upon a graceful hand, and began talking.

"Sidney Galt was once a well known movie director. You probably will recall

him under the name of Sydney St. John. Booze and gambling, along with too much prosperity, got him. Con Daly is a rat who was, until three or four months ago, a property-man on Supertone's payroll. Phil Burge is a crook who owns a small cabin-plane and can fly it like nobody's business. Art Cummins is just another crook. There, Mr. Ranger, is the cast of characters.

"Under the leadership of Sid Galt, those four men plotted a snatch, with me as the snatchee. They chose a time when Supertone was making a picture with me as the star. 'It's Never Too Late.' That's the title of the story. It is now about two-thirds done. If it isn't finished, then Supertone stands to lose a couple of million at the least. That's the set up.

"I was kidnaped night before last from my garden in the rear of my home in Beverly Hills, taken by car to a deserted ranch north of Los Angeles, transferred to Phil Burge's plane, and Phil and his pal flew with me here. When Phil located a long black cross, made of two strips of cloth laid on the mesa, I was forced out of the plane. When I landed, I saw you and recognized the ranger uniform. I tried to get to you—and failed.

"My price to Supertone is one-fourth million dollars, and they'll pay. In the end, of course, it will come out of my pocket. That, Mr. Ranger, is the thing in a nutshell."

ONLY part of it. Parker knew that—and his whole body felt chilled. Supertone would pay. Hardly any doubt of that. But not a dime of the ransom money would ever come out of the pocket of the little blonde star—for the simple reason that the girl would be dead.

Plain enough, as Parker saw it. The fact that they had forced Avis Lane to bail out above the dangerous mesa was proof enough that the kidnapers cared not a hoot what happened to her. Also, if it had been intended that she be returned upon payment of the ransom, would her kidnapers have permitted her to know their identity?

Not in a blue moon!

Avis Lane had surely been slated for death. Death there on the mesa!

"Why did Galt leave you here alive?" he asked abruptly.

"Personal reasons for consigning me to a slow death," she answered, a flush stealing softly over her face. "I—I think he really went insane. After the plane dropped the satchel containing the ransom, he slammed me on the bunk and bound me as you saw. Then, just before he left for good, he stood in the doorway and laughed like a maniac. He gloated over the plight he was leaving me in. He took all the food and weapons with him. Nobody would come this way now until spring—and I'd be past helping within twenty-four hours. He went away—still laughing!"

Parker's brows drew together in thought. Presently he got up, and there was ice in his gray eyes.

"There's one chance to stop him," he told her, his voice sounding like a file on metal. "We'll take it!"

"How?" she begged, clutching him by the lapels of his jacket. "What can we do? We're without snowshoes, without food. We haven't a gun between us—"

"Sit down and listen!" Parker cut her off. Then, when she was seated: "When Galt left here he was wearing Lee Wicker's ranger uniform, hat, boots and all. That was why he kept the outfit, after killing Wicker. He figured it might come in handy. It will—but it

also tipped me off to what he's up to.

"It's like this," he went on explaining. "Puma Gulch, a small village, lies some thirty-odd miles westward, and it's the only place Galt can make for. He headed out of here toward Puma—but there's a long, hard trip ahead of him. He'll have to break his journey tonight and resume it tomorrow. Once in Puma Gulch, that uniform and the credentials with it will get him a car—and safe conduct clear out of the country. See it now?"

"Yes!" the girl breathed, her face flushed, eyes shining. "And you have a scheme for stopping him! What is it?"

Instead of answering, Parker strode to one of the leather-covered seat-beds with which the trailer was provided. To the girl's astonishment he began slashing the leather cover away. Then, a big segment of it in hand, he turned to her.

"Good, heavy leather!" he exclaimed "See if you can cut it in strips with a knife. Make the strips about one inch wide. Hurry. I'll be back shortly."

Snatching up a small hand-axe from beside the stove, he went out onto the mesa. When he returned he was laden with several strips of tough mountain-ash. Then the girl got the idea.

"Snowshoes!" she cried delightedly.

Deftly, Parker fashioned two pairs of snowshoes. They would not have done at all, from an ornamental point of view, but they were good, serviceable webs for all that. With blanket-strips he fastened one pair to Avis Lane's small boots, then he bound a pair to his own.

"We're going to head for the ranger cabin at the top of Soapstone Mountain," he explained briefly as they started out. "Harry Morgan is sure to be there, because in this snow he won't have occasion to venture far from his

base. In any case, I'll find what I want there. A gun and a pair of skis. Now—let's mush!"

DAY was just breaking when Ranger Harry Morgan, in his cabin tucked snugly under the peak of Soapstone Mountain, opened his door to two all but exhausted wayfarers. A man and a girl on homemade snowshoes, the man supporting the girl who had reached the end of her endurance at last.

"Parker!" Morgan cried, snatching the woman up in his arms and laying her on a bunk. "What the devil has happened?"

"Coffee first!" Parker croaked, dropping onto a chair. "Hot as hell, Harry, and strong enough to float a wedge. Then I'll make talk!"

Over the steaming cups, Avis Lane and the ranger told their story. Morgan swore softly, while rage turned his weathered face into so much granite.

"But what can you do now?" he demanded at last. "No phone wire up this far yet, so that's out. Galt is probably coming around the base of Soapstone at this moment—and all hell can't stop him!"

Parker got up, took Morgan's field glasses from the table and dragged himself to a window at the front. Levelling the glasses, he pointed down the snow-clad slope of Soapstone.

"Yonder's Puma Gulch," he said. "Eight miles down. You can see the smoke from the chimneys with the glasses. Unless Galt broke camp a lot earlier than I believe he'd care to, then I've still got time to cut him off in Puma—"

"Hell you have!" Morgan snapped in. "You're not in Puma, Clay—and no way of getting there. Say—have you gone crazy?"

"No!" Parker cut at him. "I'm plenty sane. All I want is a six-gun and a pair of skis—and I'll prove I'm sane!"

Morgan stared, his jaw dropping. Parker just couldn't be sane!

"You—you don't mean you'll try to go down Soapstone on skis!" he exclaimed. "Parker—you must have lost your marbles!"

Parker, who had suffered long and much, was not exactly sane. He was drunk, in fact. Drunk with rage. He whirled on Morgan, his red, strained eyes flashing fire.

"A pair of skis and a gun!" he insisted. "Never mind me and my marbles. It's a straight shot down the side of the mountain into Puma Gulch—"

"Yes—and there's the gulch, Puma Gulch, one mile this side of the village!" Morgan rasped in. "Not so wide—but two hundred feet deep! Even if you didn't crack up against a boulder, what about the gulch?"

"At the speed I'll be going, I can clear the gulch," Parker told him, eyes calmer now. "It's the only chance, Harry—to even the score for Wicker. The gun and the skis—get 'em!"

"Please, Mr. Parker!" Avis Lane implored, her eyes misted. "You've done enough. Don't take the chance!"

Morgan, seeing the set, resolute look on Parker's grim face, threw up his hands in surrender. From a wall closet he took a holstered gun and cartridge-studded belt, which he placed on the table. Then he drew out a pair of light ash skis, together with a pair of his own skiing boots.

Parker buckled the gunbelt about his middle, shouldered the skis and set out for a suitable spot for his take off. Avis Lane trotted as best she could beside him. Morgan, his face set and grim, followed on Parker's heels.

"So long, Miss Lane!" Parker cried. "I'll be seeing you in the pictures!" He took off.

SEVEN miles straight down the slope of Whetstone, each foot of it a threat because of possible exposed boulders, and then Puma Gulch. With luck, Parker believed he could clear the gulch. He knew the lay of the land, knew there was a fine chance to make it—provided he didn't crack up against a boulder before he reached it.

The wind screamed in his ears, tore like human hands at his clothing, his breath whistled through set teeth—and then, almost before he was aware of it, there was Puma Gulch ahead of him. Now it was beneath him! Parker, in a long, high jump, cleared the gulch, and there was good solid snow again under his skis!

One more mile, up over a slight hummock, down the other side—and into Puma Gulch's single, snow-glutted street flashed the ranger. A series of ruts in the street where a caterpillar tractor had been along—and Parker, his skis striking even so slight an obstruction, went headlong, ploughing through the snow to bring up with a thud against a hitching post.

Men ran out of the postoffice, one of them the town marshal. They recog-

nized the ranger, yelled at him. But Parker, after kicking off his skis, was running along the street, heading back toward the trail which wound into the town from around the mountain.

Already, in one flash of an eye, he had glimpsed a lone man on snowshoes, trekking for the village.

And that man was Sidney Galt!

Galt saw the ranger coming. He halted in his tracks, amazement twisting his long features. Then, in a flash, he went for his gun.

Parker fired, and the bullet turned the oncoming Galt almost completely around. Galt fired, and his lead spatted through the ranger's coat-sleeve. He dropped on his knees—fired again—

Galt went down on his face, hands clawing the fluff, toes beating out a soft, muffled tattoo of death. Then he lay still.

"Parker!" Marshall Simms bleated, rushing up. "What th' hell! That man's a ranger. Yuh done killed a ranger—"

"Take it easy, Pat!" Parker counseled, sitting in the snow and glancing up with a satisfied grin on his homely face. "No ranger. Just a wolf in ranger clothing. A dead wolf. Take care of his pack, for there's a quarter of a million smackers in it. Now, if you'll kindly help me to a bed, I think I'll turn in for a good, long sleep!"

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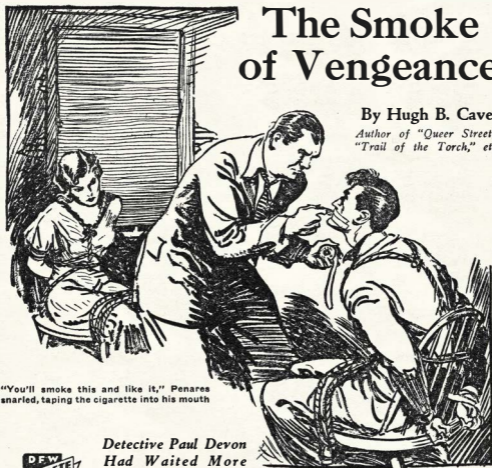
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YELLO-BOLE

The Smoke of Vengeance

By Hugh B. Cave

Author of "Queer Street,"
"Trail of the Torch," etc.



"You'll smoke this and like it," Penares snarled, taping the cigarette into his mouth



*Detective Paul Devon
Had Waited More
Than Three Years to
See a Certain Girl
and Face a Certain
Death...!*

CHAPTER I

Clueless

THE past hour had been one of almost interminable torment.

That phone call, that voice which he hadn't heard in three and a half years, had spread a pallor across Paul Devon's angular face and brightened his eyes with a strange kind of fever.

Three and a half years of waiting, then the voice, and now . . .

It was cold on Grove Street, Devon paused after leaving the Gregor Arms Apartments, shrugged his coat collar up. The clock in front of Newgold's Delicatessen said 10:20.

On the flat roof of the Gregor Arms, four stories above street level, a pair of feet moved with soft, crunchy steps over tarred gravel. Slitted eyes peered down, as cold, as brittle as the night air that bit at Devon's lungs.

A stiff wind swept across the roof. Breath steamed from twisted lips and was fanned into space as the roof-top prowler crept along, matching steps with the man below.

Devon turned left along Temple Street. The man on the roof straightened, for a few seconds leaned back against the sweeping wind, then ran lightly, swiftly to a nearby bulkhead.

Counterbalanced with iron weights, the bulkhead squealed open, exposing steep stairs.

The prowler descended, pulling the heavy lid down over him. Open, it would let a wailing wind rush along the top-floor corridor and tenants might be aroused. The corridor was quiet. A dim light revealed tarnished brass numbers on four doors.

After three minutes with a ring of skeleton rings, the prowler succeeded in unlocking the door of the bachelor quarters of Detective Paul Devon.

Quietly, he closed the door behind him. It stayed shut for several minutes. When the intruder reappeared, his small, bright eyes gleamed like a cat's, and with a cat's noiseless speed he slid along the wall, climbed the stairs to the bulkhead.

The wind tugged at him as he ran into it, face first, across the roof. It whipped tears to his eyes, jarred his hair back and gave him a wild, insane appearance. Nervous now, as if the wind's low wail were human and accusing he clawed open a bulkhead in the south corner, slammed it behind him and scurried down four flights of stairs to the street.

The street was deserted. He hurried along it, head down, leather heels click-clacking on the sidewalk. The night swallowed him when he wheeled left into the first black alley. . . .

PAUL DEVON reached his destination ten minutes too soon, walked on past the brownstone house and walked back again. She had said, "Not before eleven!" and said it em-

phatically. At eleven he climbed the steps, peered at the names under the row of bells, and jammed his thumb against the bell marked: MRS. WILLIAM A. HARRIS.

Three and a half years he had waited.

Down at Police Headquarters, they classified Paul Devon as a "queer one." Thirty-one years old, with seven years of police work behind him, he had a record at which the rookies raised their eyebrows; but their admiration and that of his superiors apparently left Devon cold.

The rookies whispered: "Nothing ever gets under that guy's hide! Nothing!" The wiser ones knew better. They could name the week, even the day, when Paul Devon had changed. Since then, some deathless parasite had been gnawing from the inside out, never giving him peace.

It hadn't affected his work. But as Captain Timothy Burke had said: "You get the feeling he doesn't care what happens to him any more. He shakes hell out of every job, wrings it dry, then drops it without even raising a sweat. His duty—he does it. He'd dig ditches exactly the same way."

He had wrung hell out of the city-wide mob controlled by Vincent Penares, had smashed it almost single-handed, and handed the District Attorney sufficient evidence to put Penares behind bars. Others had tried for years to do that.

Others would be scared blue right now, with Penares out again on parole. But not Devon. "The sob sisters," Timothy Burke had announced with an outburst of vitriol, "have turned that killer loose. You better lie low. It's you he'll be looking for."

Devon had replied, indifferently: "Penares will make another mistake

sometime. We'll get him again. That's what they pay us for."

Now, after three and a half years . . .

"You haven't changed much, Nicky." It came as evenly, as gently, as that. "You haven't changed much, Nicky." But Devon didn't know he was saying it, or that his chest was swelled with a mighty, painful breath. White as wax, stiff as the icicles above the door, he stood wide-legged, staring.

The girl stared back, her gaze restless, anxious, but never leaving his face. She was about twenty-five, pale but attractive. She didn't smile, but her lips trembled before words came, whispered: "Come in, Paul."

There were no lights inside, but Devon didn't fear a trap. The girl's hand reached for his and she steered him through a dark corridor, into a lamplit living room.

"Vincent left only ten minutes ago," she announced. "I was afraid you'd get here too soon."

She turned slowly, as if half expecting Devon to take her in his arms. He didn't, just thirstily drank in the sight of her—her dark eyes, soft brown hair, trim figure. Never at ease with women, he hung back now, waiting for her to lead.

"It's been a long time, Paul. I had to come back when they gave him his freedom. I had to know his plans."

Awkwardly Devon looked around. "He lives here—with you?"

"No. I'm here alone."

"Why do you call yourself Mrs. Harris?"

"I'm still wanted, Paul. You know that. As Nicky Evans, I'd be picked up in an hour."

Devon said slowly, with a dead look in his eyes "And you came back to be near him again?"

She shook her head vigorously. "You know him; you know how he deals with his enemies. I came back because you're his worst enemy now. You shamed him, sent him to prison. No one else was ever able to do that. I knew he would be planning his revenge, and I had to warn you."

Devon sighed. After all this time, she merely wanted to warn him of a danger of which he was already vividly aware. He had hoped for something else, had even dared to hope that she had finally severed all the old connections.

"Suppose Vincent came back and found me here now?" he asked calmly.

"You know what he'd do."

"Gun me, maybe?"

"No. He'd smile, shake hands and call you his friend. He's not an ordinary man, Paul—not a common killer. He's done many horrible things, but the most horrible is what he is planning to do to you. He won't tell me the details. He just smiles and says, 'Wait, you'll see.' But there's something awful brewing in his mind. I can tell by his actions, by the way he looks at me."

Devon's face darkened with anxiety. "He knows about you and me?"

"Yes, he knows."

"Then he must know why you've come back?"

She stared at the carpet, shook her head slowly. "He thinks I've come back to be with him."

"And so you want me to go into hiding, before he kills me?"

She stood up, came close to him. At that moment she was very like the girl he had known three and a half years ago, the girl who slowly and permanently had taken possession of his heart while he was grimly destroying the Penares' gang.

He had never known much about

her, except that she and Penares had always been apparently inseparable. She had not hated him for sending Penares to prison. Nor had she at any time professed to love him.

With Penares' gang shattered, she had fled to Canada. Paul Devon had even helped her to get there.

Now she was back, warning him. Now she was gripping his arms, her breath hot on his face as she said anxiously: "You'll go away and give him time to forget you? Promise!"

A storm of turmoil raged in Devon's brain. He couldn't think and he didn't want to. His big arms went out and pulled Nicky Evans closer. "I love you, Nicky. You've known it, right along. You've avoided me because you're his girl. Well, I'm not running away. This time I'm seeing things through to a finish."

When he released her and strode to the door, she did not call him back. Swaying on her feet, she put her hands to her mouth and her lips formed the words, "You're wrong, Paul—wrong!" but Devon closed the door without turning, and was gone.

THE one good eye of Dr. Philip Jeremiah Hasper was round and large with fear. The other looked off into space as if seeking the hidden menace of which its mate stood in terror. Paul Devon, in pajamas, surveyed the man through a scowl and said: "This is a queer time for a social call. What the devil is wrong?"

"Everything, Mr. Devon!"

Philip Jeremiah Hasper was a physician and, reputedly, a good one. Built like a weighted salt-cellar, he stood five feet three, weighed well over one-eighty, and had a round, red face that was twitching now with emotion. To Devon he was not a stranger.

Hasper had political connections. He used them, not to increase his income or prestige, but—of all things—to get himself named for jury duty more frequently than was legal. He liked to be on juries. He wrote frequent letters to the newspapers on the subject of the suppression of crime. As a juror, he had never been known to vote for acquittal.

He had served on the jury which had hung a verdict of guilty around the neck of Vincent Penares.

"I've received a horrible threat, Mr. Devon!" he said, gesticulating in the center of Devon's living-room. "I'm to be destroyed!"

Paul Devon was tired and irritable. After leaving the brownstone house last night he had walked the streets until after three in the morning, then returned, smoked innumerable cigarettes, and finally climbed wearily into bed. It was now seven-thirty.

He motioned Hasper into a chair and said dully: "Tell me about it."

"There was a phone call," Hasper wailed, "last night. Late last night. It was he! Penares! He threatened me!"

"What did he say?"

"He said—oh, I don't remember his exact words! He threatened me, that's all. Among other things, he told me to say my prayers, if I knew any, because he intended to—to get even!"

Devon nodded. It was like Penares to do things that way—to warn a victim before striking. A queer sense of satisfaction possessed him when he realized that he was not alone on Penares' death list. But he pushed a box of cigarettes over the table, stared while Hasper lit one, and said with grim lack of sympathy:

"It's your own fault, of course. You gulped every shred of publicity you could get. You wrote articles for the

newspapers and blabbed to reporters. You wanted the whole world to know that you and Rand and Robertshaw argued the rest of the Penares jury into bringing a verdict of guilty. Now the publicity has backfired."

"But what am I to do? I don't want to be murdered, Devon?"

"Go to the police."

"You *are* the police!"

"Not at seven-thirty in the morning, Hasper. Go to Headquarters. Tell them you want protection."

"But I'm begging you—"

"My orders," Devon replied coldly, "come from Headquarters. Go on down there. It's broad daylight, and you've nothing to fear. Penares doesn't shoot men down on the street."

Philip Jeremiah Hasper departed, white of face and trembling violently. When he had gone, much of Devon's indifference vanished, and Devon hurriedly stepped into a shower, shaved, and got dressed.

If Hasper had received a threat of death from Penares, there was no time to lose. It meant that Penares was determined to settle certain scores as quickly as possible. The parole board, swayed by the demands of criminally ignorant sob-sisters, had turned loose a killer!

"He'll have to be re-arrested," Devon muttered. "We'll have to find him and lock him up again—somehow."

But it might not be an easy task to locate Vincent Penares. The man was cunning. He had connections.

Devon drove downtown to Police Headquarters and sat in session with Captain Burke. Burke, when told what had happened, raised heavy eyebrows and said softly: "Ah! I knew it. I knew there'd be trouble!"

"May I suggest," Devon said, "that we get in touch with Robertshaw and

Rand? Perhaps they've been threatened, too. Penares will waste no time, Captain. He'll want to square his accounts quickly and get out of town."

"We'll find him! I'll put every available man on a city-wide search!"

Paul Devon thought of a brownstone house and a slim, brown-eyed girl name Nicky—but kept his peace. He would handle that part of it himself. What troubled him now was the fact that Dr. Philip Hasper had not yet shown up at Headquarters.

Rising, he said to Burke: "Well, I'll get on the job."

Burke peered at him quizzically.

"I haven't seen that glint in your eyes for a long time, Devon. Not since you were hunting down Penares the last time."

"It's the cold weather, sir." Briskly, Devon walked out.

THE offices of Dr. Philip Hasper were on Bentley Avenue, near Governor Square, in a former private residence, huge and ornate, where half a dozen medical men carried on their practise. A bell tingled when Devon opened the door of Hasper's suite, and a nurse came from an inner room to ask his name.

"You have an appointment?"

He shook his head. "The doctor," he explained, "visited me this morning. It's important."

"I'll see," she replied dubiously, and added: "The doctor is not well this morning. He instructed me to cancel all appointments and went straight to his room, to lie down."

The door to the inner room was closed, and when she opened it Devon was at her heels. Her starched uniform crackled against his upthrust arm as she backed into him. He couldn't see her face but knew it had suddenly

blanched. A team of horses could not have dragged her closer to the man at the desk.

The cold, icy stare of the man's good eye was like a lance, and to step forward was to be impaled upon it.

Hasper's arms were on the polished desk, one atop the other, and his chin hung over a lumpy, clenched fist. His mouth gaped, and he seemed to be crouching, ready for a savage leap.

Devon pushed the nurse aside and strode forward. The glare of the eye chilled him; moisture gathered on his forehead. Without touching the desk or the body he bent low to peer into Hasper's face.

There was no blood, no sign of a weapon, but Philip Jeremiah Hasper was dead. "Get Police Headquarters on the phone," Devon ordered. "I'll talk to them."

The nurse whispered, "Yes, yes, of course," and moved slowly toward him. She would have used the phone on Hasper's desk, but Devon's outthrust arm blocked her.

"Some other phone," he said.

She stared queerly at him and hurried from the room. . . .

CHAPTER II

Threat of Doom

"THE coroner's physician," Captain Burke declared grimly, "has finished his autopsy. That's why I sent for you, Devon. Are you *sure* there was nothing queer about the room where you found Hasper's body?"

Paul Devon shook his head wearily and sank into a chair. All day he'd been slogging along, searching for something into which he could sink his teeth. A two-hour search of Hasper's offices, interrupted by conversations with detectives, physicians, tenants,

and with Miss Marshal, the nurse, had worn him ragged without producing a single workable clue.

A visit to a certain brownstone house in the afternoon had produced only the bewildering fact that Nicky Evans no longer lived there, but had fled, severing the only possible link with Vincent Penares.

"There wasn't a thing wrong with Hasper's place," Devon said firmly.

"No trace of—poison gas?"

"Of *what*?"

"The autopsy proves," Burke declared, "that Hasper died from inhaling a kind of mustard gas, something like ybrite. Used in wartime, ybrite is sprayed down from planes and burns horribly when it comes in contact with human flesh. Hasper's lungs were just about eaten away by some similar substance."

Devon stared, said nothing.

"Penares did it, of course," Burke declared, exhaling heavily. "He warned Hasper, then struck. As yet, he hasn't warned Rand or Robertshaw. He may not, may strike without warning—may not even bother with them. Or with you."

Devon thought glumly of his visit last night to the brownstone house and of his talk with Nicky Evans. "Chances are," he agreed, "Penares won't trouble his head about getting me." But he knew better.

"We've offered Rand and Robertshaw police protection. Rand grabbed at the offer, wants us to put him in jail until the thing blows over, but, of course, we can't do that. Robertshaw calls us crazy, refuses to give the matter a second thought. He's being watched by two of our men but doesn't know it. It's the best we can do, considering his attitude."

"And Penares?"

"It's a queer case, Devon." Burke's voice was suspiciously heavy with resignation. "We know the killer and we know the names of his intended victims. But we don't know where he is or when he'll strike next. He's clever. He may succeed in hiding out indefinitely. If we don't get him before he strikes . . ."

Apparently that ended the interview.

AT nine o'clock that same evening, Paul Devon called at the home of Mr. Richard Rand. Devon's brain, usually alert, was chugging along at half speed through heavy fog. The only solid thing brewing within it was the realization that he had worked all day, and might work many more days, without getting anywhere.

What was there to work on? Penares had threatened Hasper and Hasper had died. But Penares was in hiding. What to do, except to wait for the killer to make the next move—which would probably result in the death of another victim?

A detective on guard at Richard Rand's home opened the door to Devon and let him in. Rand was in the living room, where all shades were drawn and a blanket of cigarette smoke hung thick and sour in the dim light.

The little merchant was obviously on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Devon said gently: "I'm from Headquarters, Mr. Rand. Come to help."

Rand shuddered. "That fiend will get me as he got Dr. Hasper!"

"It's about Hasper that I want to talk to you." Devon admitted. "I've done a bit of checking on his affairs. I find that you and he were close friends."

"Yes."

"In fact—partners."

Rand hesitated. Small muscles

twitched at the corners of his mouth and his bright little eyes studied Devon closely. Devon waited, sure of himself, sure that he was not groping in the dark.

It was true. Rand and Hasper had been partners. At the trial of Vincent Penares, three and a half years ago, they had met and become friends. Thirty days of virtual imprisonment while on jury duty at that sordid affair had welded their friendship, and later Dr. Philip Hasper had invested large sums of money in the Rand Leather Corporation, which was now on the verge of bankruptcy.

"It's true," Rand said, slowly moving his head up and down. "It's true, what you say. Hasper and I were partners."

Devon mentally examined his cards and studied his nervous opponent. There was nothing imposing about Rand. He had a bright, shiny face crowned with graying hair, and weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of one-forty. A widower, he lived here alone in a rather ordinary neighborhood, and was reputed to have a married daughter living in some distant city.

It was on the tip of Devon's tongue to ask about a certain phone call which had been made last night to Dr. Philip Hasper. He changed his mind, however, and said instead:

"What are your plans, Mr. Rand?"

"Plans?" the little man wailed. "I haven't any! I intend to remain here in seclusion until that fiend is apprehended! I don't wish to be murdered!"

"What about your meals? You usually dine out, don't you?"

"I'll get my own meals. I don't feel very hungry, thank you."

"Then I can depend on it—you'll be here if needed?"

"I certainly will!" Rand said.

"That," Devon said dryly, "is a load off my mind. Now if I can get the same sort of coöperation from Robertshaw, I'll rest more easily. Thank you, Mr. Rand."

ANDREW ROBERTSHAW was not at home. His residence, an elaborate street-floor apartment in Greenwood Court, in the city's swankiest residential sector, was in darkness, but Devon found a man from Headquarters casing the place.

"He left," the officer shrugged, "about half an hour ago, with a woman. Both were dressed for an evening at the Ritz. Williams tailed them; I stayed here to keep an eye on the joint."

That was bad. It built a stone wall in front of Devon and hung out a stop sign. He had hoped to have a long talk with Robertshaw. Had hoped to win the man's assistance and make him realize his danger. That would have made it hard for Penares to get results; would perhaps have kept Penares at bay until another plan, already half formed in Devon's mind, could be put into motion.

"Any idea where Robertshaw went?"

"Not until Williams phones in. We were instructed to report every hour on the hour."

It was ten of ten by Devon's watch. He drove downtown, and at five past ten called Headquarters from a drug store phone booth and learned that Williams had tailed Robertshaw to the Alcazar Club. He went there.

He spotted Williams almost as soon as he entered the place. The Headquarter's dick was idly toying with sandwich and beer in a booth which provided an excellent view of the dance floor.

Andrew Robertshaw, elephantine and elegant, was gracefully dancing with a gorgeous companion.

Aware that his street clothes were conspicuous in such spangled surroundings, Devon slid into a convenient booth and signaled a waiter. The waiter gazed at a five-dollar bill and bent closer.

"The name of that gentleman over there," Devon said quietly, pointing, "is Robertshaw. That's right—the big lad dancing with the lady from the nudist colony. Robertshaw. Got it? Mine is unimportant; he doesn't know it anyway. I'd like to confer with him alone."

"I'll do my best," the waiter said, and glided away.

Robertshaw, although well over forty, carried himself with the poise of an athlete and stood out like a light-house on the crowded floor. He was ruggedly handsome. He was known farther downtown as a financial wizard, a man to be consulted, regardless of price, before any important plunge into the big-money pools.

Robertshaw had a reputation for being fearless, merciless, uncompromising. A bad man in whom to arouse enmity. A good man to have as a friend.

His lovely companion was a seductive combination of bare back, bare arms, and glittering ornaments.

When the music faded, they were the last to leave the dance rectangle. Robertshaw stumbled on the step-up.

Paul Devon watched from the gloom of his niche as the two walked by him. Robertshaw had evidently been drinking. It hadn't been noticeable on the dance floor, with so many weaving bodies jammed into so small a space, but Robertshaw now was unsteady on his feet, and his handsome face was off color.

They entered a booth not far from that in which Devon sat watching. In a moment, before Devon's waiter had had time to deliver the five-dollar message, the girl straightened out of the booth alone and frantically beckoned to a waiter standing nearby.

Paul Devon rose, walked unobtrusively down the aisle, and reached the booth just as the waiter did.

The girl did not notice him, or if she did, paid him no attention. In the booth's red glow, her face was a startling mask of apprehension and she was trembling. Clutching the waiter's arm, she dragged him closer and gasped out:

"He's ill! I don't know what's the matter. I think he ought to have a doctor!"

Robertshaw was huddled over the table, his arms fanned out, his gasping mouth wetting the table-cloth. Something was violently wrong. The man's big body heaved as if depth-bombs were exploding within it. His nails tore the cloth. He struggled to vomit, couldn't.

The waiter stood gaping, not knowing what to do. It was obviously not a case of drunkenness, and beyond the handling of drunks he was incompetent. Devon thrust him aside, pushed past the terrified girl and grabbed hold of the sick man's shoulders.

When he lifted, Robertshaw's head rolled back, then sideways, and the light made a hideous red gargoyle of the man's twisted face.

"Get a doctor!" Devon snapped. The waiter stopped stuttering and ran.

Paul Devon slapped Robertshaw's back, hooked an arm across the man's stomach and bent him double. It seemed the only thing to do. The man was fighting for breath, getting none. His eyes were out of their sockets; his tongue was far back in his mouth,

gagging him. It looked like a case of strangulation.

"What's wrong with you?" Devon shouted. "What caused it?"

Robertshaw rolled glassy eyes at him and went limp, stopped writhing. A doctor could do no good. There wasn't strength enough left even for the answering of Devon's crisp questions. The man worked his lips wearily, made moaning sounds. He slumped back, feebly tried to push Devon away.

The girl, breathing hard and fast, sank into a chair and sat stiff as wood, staring.

When the waiter returned with the manager of the club, Andrew Robertshaw was dead, and Williams, the man from Headquarters, was at Devon's side. People in other booths were staring, and a slightly intoxicated young man was trying to jam into the booth to see what had happened.

Devon said grimly to the manager: "I'm a detective. Phone Headquarters what happened and ask for an ambulance." To Williams he snapped: "No one leaves this place. Understand? No one!"

Resignedly he went to work.

There were two glasses on the table, both empty. He covered them with clean napkins and tore one napkin to identify the glass used by Robertshaw. There was an ashtray half filled with cigarette butts. He wrapped it without spilling the contents. To the girl he said crisply: "Sorry. You'll have to stick around."

When the ambulance arrived, Devon supervised the removal of the body and himself took care of the stuff which would go to the property clerk at Headquarters. Williams and the others took charge of the routine.

It was done quietly and swiftly, and most of the club's customers probably

thought that nothing more serious had occurred than the passing out of another drunk.

Later, the customers would be requested their names and addresses upon departure.

The orchestra was in full swing when Devon walked wearily back to his own booth. His hat was there on the table. A white envelope leaned against it.

Frowning, he stepped out of the booth and stared around. He knew none of the dancers, none of the occupants of other booths. Yet that letter had been propped against his hat during his absence.

He tore the envelope. The penciled message, neatly printed, read:

I am in no hurry, Devon. The destruction of a hated enemy should never be performed hastily. Enjoy yourself. Make the most of what is left to you. But do not for a moment console yourself with any delusion of escaping me. Hastily—Vincent Penares.

CHAPTER III

Long Shot!

BEHIND the wheel of a police cruiser car, Paul Devon drove at a moderate clip along Murray Boulevard and looked at his watch. The windshield wiper clicked monotonously; rain slicked the crowded sidewalks and produced a haze that rendered visibility almost nil.

It had been midnight last night before the last of the customers had been allowed to leave the Alcazar Club. With two assistants, Devon had checked and double-checked the identity of each one. Vincent Penares was not among them.

Yet Penares had written that note. An expert had gone over it, compared it with recorded samples of Penares'

handwriting. A fingerprint man had lifted from it the prints of a thumb and forefinger which matched those on Penares' card in the files.

This morning, the coroner's physician had handed Captain Burke a written report stating that Andrew Robertshaw had died of collapsed lungs—lungs burned by the same kind of gas which had destroyed Dr. Philip Hasper.

Poison? There had been no trace of it on the glasses used by Robertshaw and his charming companion at the club. No trace of it in the butts of half-smoked cigarettes. And certainly the Alcazar had been the scene of no murderous gas-attack!

But Robertshaw was dead.

Would Rand be next, or would Penares now turn his attention to the settlement of his major score—that with Paul Devon?

Devon braked the police car as a red signal light blinked warningly at the intersection of Third Street. A bad corner, that, especially when the streets were crowded with lunch-hour pedestrians.

A large green sedan, curtains drawn in back and driver's face blurred by an unwiped windshield, rounded the corner on squealing tires, skidded, cut the light.

A police whistle shrilled, but the green sedan did not stop. Pedestrians leaped out of the way, yelling.

Devon stared.

The car skidded again, and again righted itself. Its heavy prow bore down on Devon at twenty, thirty miles an hour. Devon's face paled. Instinctively he spun the wheel, jammed his accelerator to the floor.

The police car shot forward.

The big sedan slewed like a drunken, staggering giant, splashed mud into the

faces of lurching street-crossers who were caught between curbs. The blurred shape behind that wheel might be intoxicated, but if so, his intoxication was of a murderous brand and he had singled out Paul Devon for a victim!

As if rammed by a derailed locomotive, the police car careened into the gutter, left fender and left front wheel crumpled. The impact slammed Devon sideways on the seat, flung him like a motion-picture dummy against the door.

Miraculously, the car remained upright when it shuddered against the curb.

Before the grisly din of the crash had died away, the big sedan swerved clear, cut diagonally across the gleaming street and roared with wide-open throttle into a protecting blanket of rain.

The crowd gaped. The off-side door of the police car had swung open, and Paul Devon lay in a sprawled, queer-shaped heap, half in the gutter, half on the crumpled running-board, groaning.

A few men rushed forward; others followed and a crowd formed. Uniformed policemen had trouble getting through.

Devon's face was not pretty when they turned him over. A red, sticky smear filled the agony-creases in it. His raincoat, ripped open, revealed torn, stained clothes.

A smear colored the cement when they dragged him across the sidewalk. Scarlet drops splashed when they picked him up to carry him.

He lay in a store doorway for about five minutes before the wail of a siren announced the arrival of an ambulance. They took him to the accident-room at City Hospital, where a young doctor,

working over him, whispered gravely to nurses and to Officer James O'Donnell, Shield No. 718, 11th Precinct, who had ridden along in the ambulance.

O'Donnell's report of the accident was submitted as follows:

March 18, 1936. Post No. 14

Tour 8 A.M. to 4 P.M.

At 1:20 this P.M., Detective Paul Devon, 31 years, white, unmarried, U.S.A., of No. 8 Gregor Arms Apartments, Grove Street, while driving Police Car No. 7, was in collision with large green sedan at intersection of Third St. and Murray Blvd. Devon was driving West on Murray Blvd. Other car, speeding South on Third, rounded corner against traffic light, frightened pedestrians, and after skidding, crashed into the police car, hurling latter to the curb and partially demolishing it. The sedan, registration number not known, but believed to be of six digits beginning with 5744—, sped East on Murray Blvd. without stopping. Driver apparently intoxicated.

Attended by Ambulance Surgeon Wm. Morrill, City Hospital, and removed thereto suffering from contusions, abrasions, and possible skull fracture. Condition serious. Street wet and slippery. Accident report made out. Witnesses:

The newspapers, already doggedly waging a grim war against drunken drivers, pounced on the case with avidity and gave it headlines.

**Drunk Collides with Police Car!
Detective Injured, May Die!**

It had plenty of news value. The papers squeezed every last sensational drop of blood from it to provide ink for front-page copy. Meanwhile, Paul Devon lay like a bandaged mummy on a clean, soft bed at City Hospital, private room number nine.

Then: "I—I wish to see Mr. Devon, please. I'm a friend of his."

The gray-haired woman at the information desk looked up, frowning. She immediately catalogued the speaker as a slim, attractive girl of about twenty-five, chestnut hair, maroon eyes,

small, vertical chin, height about five-foot, weight about one-twenty. She noted other things as well, and they all checked with the typewritten description which lay face up in the top drawer of her desk.

"Your name, please?"

"Dorothy Cummings," the girl said.

"He is in room 9. You may go right in, Miss Cummings. Turn left at the end of the hall here, and it is the first door on your left."

They had given Paul Devon a room on the first floor, to make things very, very easy and not frighten anyone away.

Miss Cummings gently closed the door of room nine behind her and found herself alone with Paul Devon. She drew a quick, sharp breath and ran toward him. "Paul!" she whispered. "Oh, my dear!"

Of Devon's face, only the eyes and mouth were not hidden by bandages. The eyes stared into the girl's face and the lips said softly: "Nicky! I knew you'd come."

She would have pulled a chair to the bedside, but he thrust a bandaged hand down beneath the covers and drew her down on the bed itself. He wanted her close to him. His lips fashioned a kind of smile and he said weakly: "Nothing to cry about, Nicky. I'll be all right again after a while."

"You've got to be! Oh, you've got to be!"

"Sure. . . ."

"Who did it, Paul? It wasn't Vincent; I know it wasn't. I've been watching him and I know every move he's made. Someone else must be out to get you."

"Just some crazy drunk, Nicky," Devon said. "That's all."

"Well, then I'm glad. I'm glad! Vincent won't have a chance at you now.

The police are after him and he knows it, and he won't dare wait for you to get out of here."

Devon hung onto her and pulled her closer. She kissed him gently without leaning on him.

"You're a good girl, Nicky," Devon sighed. "I knew you'd come and hoped you wouldn't, in a way. They might pick you up. You'd better beat it now."

Nicky kissed him again before she left. When the door had closed behind her, Devon raised himself on one elbow and stared at it, and listened to the click of her heels in the corridor.

He swung his feet to the floor and stood up. In his eyes was that odd, vital gleam which long ago had attracted Captain Burke's attention. No longer sick or a cripple, he ripped the bandages from his face and arms, ran to a closet where his clothes hung, and dressed himself.

His only souvenirs of the accident were a few pale scratches across one cheek and a lump on the back of his head. The yards and yards of bandages had covered no wounds at all.

Grimly smiling, he yanked open the door and stepped into the corridor.

WHEN Nicky Evans left the City Hospital, she walked two blocks and ducked into a subway entrance. There she mingled with the crowd until the arrival of a car marked Crandall Heights. She rode for forty-five minutes, unaware that she had been followed from the hospital and was under scrutiny the whole way to her destination.

Crandall Heights was a middle-class suburb on the south side of the city.

When Nicky got off the car, two men descended behind her and only a handful of passengers remained. The two men trailed Nicky without arous-

ing her suspicion. They were old hands at the business.

Nicky walked eight blocks and let herself into a small, suburban apartment house. She climbed two flights and unlocked the door of apartment number seven. Without removing her hat or coat she sank wearily into a chair and whispered aloud:

"Thank goodness he won't die!"

Outside, the two detectives separated. One strolled back down the street, bought cigarettes and used a phone in a drug store. The other settled down to wait.

When the phone call reached Headquarters, Detective Paul Devon was there waiting for it. Devon took the message, scribbled notes on a pad, and said to Captain Burke:

"Well, it worked. We know where she is, and we'll soon know where *he* is."

Burke said: "You took a terrible chance. That smashup mighty near became the real thing. That red dye you spilled all over everything might easily have been real blood."

"It worked," Devon muttered. "That's all that matters. I knew she'd come if she thought I was dying."

CHAPTER IV

Alone

ALONE in her apartment, Nicky Evans talked to herself.

"He's safe now," she reasoned. "Vincent can't get at him and won't dare to stay in these parts until he can. Paul will be safe until he's well again, and by that time, Vincent will be tied up with the old gang, working some new racket in a distant part of the country. I mustn't stay here. My job's done. . . ."

Rain whispered at the windows, and

outside a premature dusk had fallen. In the half-dark, Nicky Evans tossed a suitcase on the divan and began to throw her few belongings into it.

The phone rang before she was finished.

She hesitated before answering it, and almost decided not to. Only one person could be calling; only one knew her whereabouts. It might be better if she did not answer.

But no. If Vincent Penares received no answer, he might come here. Finding her gone, he might be worried, might abandon whatever plans he had for leaving the city and hang on, waiting to hear from her.

She took the phone off its cradle and said anxiously: "Yes?"

The voice was Penares': "Nicky?"

"Yes."

"I want to see you. Want you to come over here."

Her face paled. The hand holding the instrument wobbled a little. It took courage to say what she wanted to say, but she had to say it, had to let him know.

"I'm going away," she faltered. "I'm going away—now—for good."

"Where?"

"Away."

The hesitation was on his end then. She heard him speak in a low voice to someone else, heard also the tap-tap of his fingertips on the telephone shaft. Then: "All right, kid. It's maybe for the best. How you leaving?"

"I don't know," Nicky told him. "By train, I suppose."

"Nix. Too dangerous. Tell me where you're going and I'll start you off the safe way. It would be tough if the cops nailed you at the last minute."

Nicky thought it over and said slowly: "I'm going to Canada."

"Good! Then grab a bus to Albany

and take the train from there. I'll check the bus schedules and send a car over for you. You ready now?"

"Yes—almost."

"I'll send a car, Nicky. I suppose you're right; things are pretty hot in this burg. I'll say goodbye in the car. . . ."

Nicky Evans lowered the phone and stared at it. Her lips were tight-pressed, twitching. She didn't want to say goodbye to Vincent Penares, or even to see him again. But he was right. The town was hot, and the police were undoubtedly on the lookout for any of Penares' former associates.

The trip to the hospital this afternoon had used up about all her courage. The thought of riding a street-car downtown to the railroad terminal and risking recognition again, terrified her.

Vincent could drive her to some small town on the bus route, and the rest would be easy.

She finished packing, dropped her suitcase by the door and waited at a window that overlooked the street.

After what seemed an eternity, a car rolled up and stopped. No one got out of it. There was no blast of the horn.

Nicky Evans hurried downstairs. The car's rear door swung open to meet her as she ran down the steps and across the wet sidewalk. An out-thrust hand relieved her of the suitcase. The door thudded shut and the car growled into motion.

The driver was a stranger. The man in the rear seat with Nicky was not Vincent Penares but one of Penares' former henchmen, a killer named Degman.

Nicky said: "Where's Vin? He said on the phone—"

She was silenced by the sinister as-

pect of Degman's oily smile. "So you're goin' to Canada?" Degman laughed.

The tone of his voice was enough. Nicky cringed, frightened. Her voice, husky and tremulous, she asked: "Where are you taking me?"

"To the chief. To say goodbye."

"But he told me—"

"Aw, pipe down. D'ya think he'd be nuts enough to come after you himself, with every harness bull in town carryin' his picture?"

Nicky Evans slumped back in the seat, as far from Degman as the width of the car would allow, and maintained silence. She was uneasy. Knowing Vincent Penares as well as she did, she knew how hideous his anger could be when aroused. Perhaps she had aroused that anger by telling him of her intended desertion.

She stared out the window as the machine droned at an even forty along a four-lane highway leading away from the city. They were taking her to Penares' hideout, of course. She wondered where it was.

Even in the old days, Penares had never allowed a woman inside his headquarters. He didn't trust women, not even her. He had told her that a score of times.

Degman, beside her, peered through the rear window and said quietly to the driver: "We're bein' followed, Matt."

"Yeah?"

"Take it easy. We don't want 'em to lose us."

Nicky looked behind, glanced at Degman in turning around again, and scowled. Degman's laconic comment didn't make sense. Something about the whole set-up was queer.

"Where was Vin when he phoned me?" she asked.

"At home," Degman grunted. "At home."

"But you were at the apartment in less than ten minutes. We've been riding longer than that already!"

DEGMAN threw back his head and laughed again. Something apparently was very funny. But when the outburst of mirth had died to a low rasp in his throat, he said ominously: "I'll tip you off to somethin', sister, so you'll have an idea what to expect. First place, we know all about the nice little gab-fest you had with Paul Devon the other night, after the boss left your old hangout. Yeah. The boss told Matt, here, to keep an eye on the joint. And we know all about your trip to the hospital, kid. You're not foolin' anyone. Not even a little bit."

Nicky Evans shut her eyes and felt dizzy. Her heart had suddenly stopped beating and now was hammering wildly, as if about to burst. She was cold, cold as ice. She didn't move.

"So the chief," Degman informed her, "ordered me and Matt to stick around your new apartment, kid, just in case you developed some more funny notions. And we kept in touch with him all the time, see? Show her, Matt."

Indifferently Matt reached to the dash and flipped the switch of a two-way police radio. A blast of static ripped through the car, and he turned the set off again.

"There ain't nothin' the cops have that we ain't got," Degman declared proudly. "So we're in touch with the boss, see, and after he phones you, he grabs the mike and tells us to pick you up."

Matt interrupted. "Is that cop-wagon still tailing us?"

Nicky turned to look. About a hundred yards behind, dim headlights of a pursuing car were visible through the rain.

"Yeah," Degman said.

The machine slowed, swung left off the four-lane highway onto a narrow ribbon of black macadam. Degman kept looking behind, turned at last and grunted: "Okay. They saw us." Then, glaring at Nicky:

"Let me give you some good advice, sister. Don't make no trouble. I don't figure to get in wrong with the boss by messin' you up, but if you ask for it, I got my instructions on how to handle you. See?"

"I've got four hundred dollars in my bag," Nicky said levelly. "It's yours if you stop and let me out."

Degman's guttural laugh made four hundred dollars seem like four cents. She didn't speak again until the car swung into a gravel driveway and slurred to a stop in front of an abandoned gas-pump and roadside stand.

An old, rambling farmhouse loomed gray in the drizzling darkness. It seemed deserted. There were no lights.

When Matt switched off the car's headlights, the night rushed in from all sides, and Nicky's whispering voice, laden now with terror, was like a child's wail in a wilderness.

"What—what does he want me for?"

"I wouldn't know," Degman sneered. "Get out!"

He opened the door on his side and stooped out first, dragging her after him. Matt fell in step on the other side of her, and though a dozen quick strides into the crowding darkness would have given her a chance for escape, Nicky could walk only where they took her.

Strong hands gripped her arms. Her high heels bit deep into loose gravel. She saw lights, then, in a rear section of the house.

Rain drummed on a salt-box roof, and from a gutter overhead a small torrent of water slobbered down on the twisted stalk of a dead rose vine. There were three wooden steps rising to a door, and when Matt rapped a signal, the door opened.

Nicky Evans stared into the cold gray eyes of Vincent Penares. She shuddered. She knew those eyes. When they were frozen like that, with white areas showing above and below the iris, Penares' large, pale hands were usually itching to reach for someone's throat.

"This isn't Canada," he rasped, "but it will do for a while, I guess."

Degman pushed the door shut, locked it. "We were followed, chief, by them cops that were keepin' tabs on Nicky's place."

Penares stepped back to a table. The room was a typical farmhouse kitchen; table and sink were littered with dirty dishes, more dishes than one man could have soiled in a week.

Penares tipped a bottle of expensive whisky, poured himself a short drink and motioned Matt and Degman to help themselves. When he turned to face Nicky, his laugh was like discordant music, throaty and unpleasant.

"So you were followed," he said. "Fine! That just goes to prove that when a man uses his brains, the police are a pushover."

It had to be his brains. Vincent Penares had ruled the destinies of some of the country's most savage killers. His brain never slept. His associates might die or be thrown into prison to rot, but new ones were ever eager to fill the gaps.

Only once had Penares been trapped; and for that, the brain behind those frozen eyes was now planning a pay-off.

"When you're through guzzling," he

said softly to Degman and Matt, "get out. Your slimy companions are in the dining-room. I have a few things to say to this charming girl . . . alone."

CHAPTER V

"It Won't Hurt"

IT looked somewhat like a parade, or an escort for the Governor, when, in answer to the message radioed from the machine which had trailed Micky Evans on her pilgrimage, three police cars left Headquarters and tore out into the country.

Two-way radios, installed recently in all official cars of the department, had simplified matters tremendously and cut the time element to almost nothing.

The three cars droned through Crandall Heights while Vincent Penares was pouring himself a drink of expensive whisky in the kitchen of the farmhouse. They turned off the four-lane main highway twenty-five minutes later, and were flagged to a stop by a winking searchlight.

The car which had trailed Nicky Evans was parked there without lights, and a dusky shape advanced from the shadows of it.

"She's still in there, Captain."

"Good!" Captain Burke rapped out. "Lead us to her!"

"Better go slow," the detective advised. "We've looked the place over, and the guess is that it's an arsenal. We couldn't see in—the shades are all drawn—but we heard voices, and I'd say there's at least half a dozen men in there. One of them might be Penares himself."

"They suspect nothing?"

"They don't seem to."

Captain Burke signaled the driver of his car to pull over, off the road. Strid-

ing back to the second car, he peered into a stern, pale face and said grimly: "It looks like she's led us to him, Paul. Donovan says the place appears to be an arsenal and is occupied by at least half a dozen men. We'll look it over, form a plan of attack, and then—"

Paul Devon got out, and the car pulled over. The third car moved off the road in a similar manoeuvre, and all three machines disgorged human shapes armed to the teeth. If the occupants of Penares' hideout offered resistance, the battle would be savage and bloody.

Burke issued orders. He and Paul Devon strode down the road to look things over. Glancing at Devon's gaunt face, Burke said softly: "What's eating you?"

A lot was eating Paul Devon. He alone had planned the series of events, beginning with the faked automobile crash, which had brought a small army of men to this hideout of Vincent Penares.

It was something of which to be proud. But the girl he loved and wanted—the girl who unwittingly had led him to Penares—was in the hideout and would be captured along with the others.

It meant the end of Nicky Evans. And he, Paul Devon, would match her years in prison with double that number of years in a mental hell of his own making.

He didn't answer Burke's question. His head and heart were heavy and his feet trudged along of their own accord. His mind was glued to an image of Nicky Evans sitting on a hospital bed, tears glistening in her eyes.

She loved him or she wouldn't have risked her freedom to come and see him. Whatever she was to Penares—wife or sweetheart or—or anything—

she still loved the dick who was going to build prison walls around her.

It was hell, being a detective.

"This looks like a tough job," Burke was saying. "Get a load of that place. We'd need an army to surround it."

Devon stared at the house. A deep breath swelled his chest, and his lips came together hard.

"We'll take it," he said grimly.

THERE were no lights in the front of the big farmhouse, but behind unshaded windows just under the slope of the roof, a killer's eyes peered out into the rain and darkness.

A wicked smile curled the salmon-hued lips of Vincent Penares. "Suckers!" he said softly. "Stupid fools! Look at them, Eades—begging tickets to hell!"

The room in which Penares stood was black as a vault at the end overlooking the front yard. On a table near the rear wall a lantern glowed dimly, casting a light too dim to be seen by the creeping shapes that were closing in on the house.

Machine-guns and guns equipped for hurling tear-gas bombs lay in a grim array on the floor. Four men stood ready to use them. A fifth man silently entered the room, and Penares turned expectantly.

"Well?"

"Everything's okay downstairs," the man said. "Doors and windows are locked. Wertin and Blake have enough guns in the kitchen to hold off the National Guard. Bleuge and Davey have the room under this one. Let 'em come. They'll never know what hit 'em!"

Penares smiled his thin-lipped smile again and surrendered his post at the window to one of his companions. He went alone into an adjoining room and closed the door after him.

In that room, which had no windows and almost no furniture, coils of rope held Nicky Evans supine on a dirty, moth-eaten couch. Penares bent over her and with a mocking show of tenderness pressed his lips lightly to her forehead.

"In a little while," he said, "it will be all over. We won't kill him, Nicky. I've instructed my slimy assistants to let him get into the house. He'll have a chance to say farewell to you before. . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders, stepped back. "You think I'm a rat, I suppose. Perhaps I am. But I can't take chances. You've double-crossed me too often."

Nicky Evans' dark eyes were wide with horror, and grew wider. "Vin!" she moaned. "Vin, I want to talk to you!" But the door had clicked shut, and Penares was already rejoining his companions in the other room.

The man named Eades said in a low voice: "They're gettin' closer, chief. Almost close enough, I'd say."

Penares stood at the window. Outside, the ground was in motion; crawling shapes were almost near enough to be good targets.

Penares said softly: "You see the fat one, over there on the far side of the drive? That's Burke. I don't spot Devon, but he's one of them, all right. When you're ready, gentlemen, let 'em have it. But remember—I want Paul Devon alive!"

THE withering gunfire from those darkened second-floor windows came as a hideous surprise to the police. It was as if the house itself had suddenly become an enraged monster, lurching at them. Prepared to meet resistance, but not that kind of resistance, they were too close to their objective to beat a retreat.

Bullets sought them out as they crawled, mowed them down when they staggered erect and plunged for shelter. The world around them, hitherto so eerily still, was all at once a place of screaming horror.

Captain Burke, an easy target for Penares' killers, died without being able to rise. His warning shout was utterly instinctive, and became a stuttering death-groan.

Of the nine attackers, four died in the first merciless barrage. The others staggered erect and zig-zagged for shelter, and one collapsed after taking two aimless steps.

Paul Devon, clutching a sub-machine gun to his chest, raced not away from the house but toward it, seeking protection against the frowning front wall.

Unharméd, he reached his objective and sprawled face down in a flower bed.

For a moment he was unable to move because of the storm surf of horror that roared in his brain.

A man could face death. Death was the penalty one paid for blundering. But cold-blooded slaughter. . . .

He raised his head and peered into the dark. Evidently the killers at the windows above had not spotted him; he was safe until they did. And there was no gunfire now, only a heavy, frightening silence. Nothing was moving.

No—something was moving. Midway between the house and the road, a wounded police officer was crawling slowly, ever so slowly, toward the small, square blur of the roadside stand.

He'd never make it. They would spot him and—

A gun belched above Devon's head. The single report was like the bark of a dog. The crawling officer stiffened, swayed back on his knees and collapsed.

Paul Devon measured the distance to

the corner of the house and began wriggling toward it on his stomach. When he reached his objective, the side door was only a little more than thirty feet distant, and he kept going.

Behind him, the surviving officers, under cover of darkness, began sniping at those upstairs windows. Not again would they attack en masse merely to be mowed down. One of them was already hurrying to the parked cars, to contact Headquarters and summon reinforcements.

Paul Devon rose to his feet, clutching the machine-gun. For a moment he leaned against the door, listening. The room inside was probably a kitchen. It was dark, apparently unoccupied.

He tried the door. It opened and he jerked back, flattened against the wall, expecting a rain of bullets. When he was not challenged, his lips curled and a pale glint crawled in his eyes.

Entering, he drew the door shut behind him. The room, a kitchen right enough, was dark as a vault, and a door on the far side led apparently to a corridor. From upstairs, muffled sounds of gunfire reached his ears.

Devon paced forward. Suicide? Perhaps. Perhaps he'd pay with his life for his audacity. But the weapon in his hands would take other lives first, and would at least hold the undivided attention of Penares' killers long enough for the men from Headquarters to close in.

He reached the corridor, started along it toward a flight of stairs that curled up into darkness. Behind him, a man stepped silently over a threshold, calmly raised an automatic pistol, and took aim.

The gun's roar was a staccato voice from hell. The bullet shattered Paul Devon's elbow, and the machine-gun fell to the floor.

In agony, Devon staggered against the wall. Blind with pain, he thrust up his uninjured arm as the gunman lurched toward him.

The automatic pistol rose, crashed down on Paul Devon's head. Devon groaned, collapsing. From the top of the stairs, Vincent Penares said softly, "Well done, Degman, well done indeed!" and uttered a throaty, discordant rumble of mirth.

PAUL DEVON gazed at Nicky Evans, and the torment of returning consciousness expanded to a numbing sensation of helplessness when his focusing eyes made out the ropes that held Nicky prisoner.

"You, too?" he mumbled. "What for?"

She and he were alone in the room, and her staring eyes were big with terror. He tried desperately to organize his thoughts, to remember what had happened.

He had not been out long, that was certain. He had walked into a trap, and they had slugged him, dragged him into this room. He vaguely remembered Vincent Penares' triumphant laughter.

Somewhere nearby, close enough to be in an adjoining room, guns were still coughing out a guttural clamor. The men from Headquarters had not given up, then. They were still out there, holding their own and awaiting reinforcements.

"They're going to kill you," Nicky Evans whispered, "Paul, they mustn't! Don't let them!"

There wasn't much he could do about it. His right arm was numb to the shoulder, as if packed in dry ice, and an itchy, tingling sensation was all that remained of the agony in his shattered elbow. They had propped him in a chair

and bound him. His hands were taped to the chair-back.

Nicky was bound, too. Did that mean they were going to kill her?

He tried to sway forward onto his feet, to go to her, but the back of the chair bit savagely into his neck and he rocked down again, groaning.

"How long have I been here?" he mumbled.

"A few minutes," she whispered. "That's all."

Behind Devon, the door opened and thudded shut, amplifying for an instant the sounds of gunfire in the adjoining room. A voice said quietly, "I guess you're awake now, Devon," and Vincent Penares paced into the detective's line of vision.

"I've waited a long time, Devon. A long, long time. Three—"

"And a half years," Devon finished for him. "I know."

He should know. He too had waited that long, not to kill someone but to hear again from Nicky Evans. Now he had found her. Now he was going to lose her—for good.

It made him feel numb all over. His tongue seemed big as a balloon in his mouth, and there was a vise with serrated jaws crushing his heart. He didn't want to die.

Penares pulled up a chair, sat with his back to Nicky and stared into Devon's waxen face. He was enjoying himself. "A long, long time," he mused, nodding.

He took an envelope from the inside pocket of his coat, removed two cigarettes and a folded piece of paper from it, and hummed a few bars of a funeral march, using the two cigarettes as drumsticks and tapping out the rhythm on the edge of the chair-seat. Penares had a sense of humor.

"I've got a few things to say to you

before we begin, Devon. In the first place, I'm not the man who murdered Hasper and Robertshaw. I intended to, and paid a visit to Hasper's office the morning he died—but he was dead when I got there. See these?"

He flipped the two cigarettes in his palm.

"They're quite the gadgets, Devon. I made these myself, but I didn't think up the idea. Someone else did that. They look just like ordinary cigarettes, don't they? Well, they're not. In each of them there's a little gelatin capsule filled with some kind of mustard gas.

"I guess you know what the gas did to Hasper's lungs, and Robertshaw's? Well, they inhaled only half as much as you're going to. The cigarettes they smoked contained only one capsule, see?—and I guess the stuff worked slowly. I guess the man who invented these things figured on that.

"You smoke a cigarette. The heat melts the capsule and you inhale the gas. The smoke kills the taste of the gas and you don't suspect anything is wrong. In a couple of hours, you begin to feel queer down in your chest, but still you don't guess what's happening. Then the gas really goes to work, Devon, and you're finished. Simple, isn't it? And clever. I give that guy credit!"

PENARES' large, pale hands toyed unceasingly with the two cigarettes. His eyes never blinked; above and below the glitter of their irises, the white areas swelled and deflated, snaring the light, reflecting it.

"Funny thing, Devon. All the time I was in that filthy prison I thought up ways to make you suffer. It was my only recreation. And now I'm using a method invented by someone else—only there'll be two capsules in the ciga-

rettes you smoke, because I can't wait too long for you to die."

Paul Devon heard himself saying dully, "Nice of you, Penares," but the voice was like that of a stranger. Wondering why Nicky Evans was so silent, he swayed sideways and peered past Penares, and saw the answer.

Horror had robbed Nicky of her powers of speech. Her face was ghastly. She could only stare.

"Just so the police won't write me down for the murder of Hasper and Robertshaw," Penares said, "I'll leave this letter in your pocket, Devon, and they can find it when they strip you for the morgue. No, I didn't write it myself. I did write the note I left for you in the Alcazar, before slipping out through the basement, but I didn't write this one. It tells the whole story, however, and I wouldn't want any wrong ideas of me to get around."

He stuffed the sheet of paper back in the envelope and returned the envelope to his pocket. Rising, he stood very still and stared at Nicky.

"You're going too, kid. You're in love with this guy. I've known it for a long time, and I hate like hell to have to do this, but you've made it necessary."

He had a roll of adhesive tape in his hand. Nicky closed her eyes, shuddered, but said nothing.

"I guessed you want to take the trip with the guy you're so fond of, Nicky," Penares said gently. "That's why I postponed it until Devon got here. That's why I made two of these cigarettes. You're a queer kid in lots of ways, and I figured—"

It seemed to hurt him to talk that way. He jerked around, snarling, and took it out on Devon. The whites of his eyes were crawling.

With chunks of a torn handkerchief

he stuffed Devon's nostrils, then taped them. Long strips of tape sealed Devon's mouth, leaving only a gap large enough to hold a cigarette.

By winding tape around the cigarette before thrusting it into the gap, he made sure that Devon would be unable to eject the deadly tube with his tongue.

In order to breathe, Paul Devon had to inhale and exhale through the tube of tobacco.

Penares worked fast then, apparently anxious to get the job done. He dragged the detective, chair and all, over to the couch, and without meeting the imploring gaze of Nicky Evans' eyes, thrust the second cigarette into Nicky's mouth.

A match flared. The end of Devon's cigarette glowed red.

"You can go with him if you want to, kid," Penares said, still keeping his head turned. "It won't hurt an awful lot. I'll leave you alone with him for a while—twenty minutes, say. You can light your butt from his if you want it that way. If not, I'll have to order one of the boys to—well, you know. Maybe a bullet won't hurt so much. It's up to you."

Beads of sweat were oozing from Penares' face. His hands shook violently. He forced himself to look at the girl, and whispered: "I hate to do it, Nicky. I hate to—but—"

He almost ran from the room, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI

Men From Headquarters

THE cigarette in Paul Devon's mouth sent a spiral of smoke ceilingward. His tongue fought to eject it; his lungs clamored for air and his face purpled.

Nicky Evans looked at him and

voiced a quavering moan of pity.

Devon slewed his chair sideways, tipped it on two legs and fell across the couch. Nicky knew what to do then. She could reach the cigarette with her bound hands. She snatched it from his lips, and Devon gulped air.

When he could speak, he muttered: "Loosen the tape so I can breathe. No, no, don't rip it off. Just loosen it."

She did. Her staring eyes, no longer glazed, were afire with wild hope. They blazed like the eyes of a fanatic praying for divine aid.

"Don't drop the butt," Devon whispered. "Slit the paper with your fingernails and take out the capsules. Keep the butt burning."

It took time to do that. Her bound hands worked awkwardly. But the cigarette continued to glow, and presently a pair of long, thin, gelatin tubes fell onto the couch. Devon put his tongue to the torn paper and resealed it.

"Now yours," he said.

Her breath was hot on his face as he squirmed up and, with his lips, pulled the cigarette from her mouth. Looking into her eyes at such close quarters was like peering into crystal globes bathed in tears. The tears flowed unchecked. She couldn't help it.

"We're going to make it," she whispered. "We've got to!"

With his help, she extracted the capsules from the second cigarette, then lit it from the red end of his. Then, despite the clumsy burden of the chair to which he was bound, Devon worked himself into a position where she could reach his bound wrists with her hands.

"Got to keep smoking these butts," he told her. "If he comes back he'll think we're just hanging onto each other. You know . . ."

She knew more than that. Knew, presently, that her slender fingers were

not strong enough to free him from the chair. Her nails were broken, bleeding, and the blood made the ropes slippery. Sobbing, she frenziedly doubled her efforts. There wasn't much time!

"I can't loosen them, Paul!"

"Sure?"

"I can't! I can't!"

The cigarette fell from her lips and smouldered on the floor. She stared at it, knowing that for some reason he wanted her to keep on smoking it.

"Never mind that," he muttered. "Here!"

It was an effort, but by rolling back on the couch he was able to swing his legs across her body. They were less securely tied than his hands. She should be able to free them.

She loosened the ropes and he kicked his ankles free. He could move then, could walk. Squirming off the couch, he let the chair thud back to the floor and sat in it.

His splintered elbow was hurting again. The pain was like a long, hot needle reaching to his shoulder.

The sweat trickling from his forehead had half-blinded him.

The cigarette, half-consumed, was a twisted, red-tipped stub held by lips made raw by strips of tape.

It must be almost time for Penares to return. Almost time. Sounds of gunfire still boomed intermittently in the adjoining room.

"Sprawl back," Devon whispered to Nicky Evans. "He may come back any minute. You're sick, dying. He'll be sure to look at you."

It was the only way. Given time and strength enough, he might be able to jam the chair against the couch and smash it by bearing down, the way you'd rip a wrestler off your back by grinding him against the ropes. That

way, he could work his arms free from their bonds. But Penares was due.

He slumped, used his feet for hands and worked a few loose coils of rope back around his ankles, so Penares would not notice. The cigarette burned his lips, and the lips clung to it despite their agony. It expired with a sizzle.

Devon's head slumped down on his chest. He heard footsteps.

The door opened. . . .

VINCENT PENARES stood on the threshold and stared for a moment before entering. The room was deathly still. Nicky Evans lay with her face to the wall, her body slightly contorted, unmoving. Paul Devon was a limp, grotesque figure in the chair, a charred cigarette-end still protruding from his taped lips.

Penares dragged a deep breath through his nostrils and paced forward. His eyes were wide. His lips quivered, formed a whispered word. "Nicky!"

He walked toward the couch first but stopped before reaching it, stopped and clenched his hands and screwed his mouth out of shape and groaned. Sweat was like oil on his face.

Pulling himself together, he jerked around and snarled gutturally at Devon: "Well, I guess we're square, copper. I guess we're even." A forward step carried him to Devon's chair.

His hand clawed at Devon's chin. He stooped to peer into the detective's face.

For that, Devon had waited prayerfully, with bated breath and every muscle tensed.

Devon whipped his feet back for leverage and rose like a rocket. His head crashed with sledge-hammer force against Penares' hovering face, then dropped and drove viciously into the pit of the killer's stomach.

Breath exploded from Penares'

mouth. He bent double, staggered off balance and was slammed against the couch by the force of Devon's charge.

The couch upset him. He fell on his back, arms and legs flailing in space. An expression of utter amazement jelled on his face, and the blows had dazed him.

Under him, Nicky Evans sobbed out a prayer for Devon's success.

Devon gave the man no chance to recover. He swarmed over him, butted him back against the wall, sank teeth into a groping hand that stabbed to his throat. He battled with feet, head and shoulders, and kept Penares under him and kept the killer's hands from snatching a gun.

With the right moment arrived—when Penares, sobbing and cursing, squirmed into the proper position—Devon drove a bent knee with pile-driver force into the man's mouth.

Penares groaned and went limp.

Devon worked fast. Time was precious because the door was open and one of Penares' henchmen might appear on the threshold at any moment. Rolling the limp body with his shoulder, Devon struggled to bring the man's pockets within reach of Nicky Evans' hands.

"Get his gun," he rasped. "See if you can find something to cut these ropes!"

She found something — a small, razor-keen dirk, the blade of which slid free from a leather sheath sewn to the lining of Penares' inner pocket. With it she freed herself and Devon. Devon flung the chair aside and swayed erect.

"He won't bother you." With Penares' gun gripped in his good hand, he was already limping to the door. "Tie him up and when he comes to, watch him. Don't give him a break!"

He had to concentrate on the job

ahead of him. An ominous silence had settled down on the house; not even a murmur of voices greeted him as he crept toward the room where only a short while ago guns had been blazing.

Rain muttered on the roof. A weary wind came from an open window somewhere and swept the corridor and cooled his fevered face. The silence troubled him. It might mean that the last of the men from Headquarters had been beaten back.

Without a sound, Devon glided into the dim yellow glow cast by a lantern and stopped.

His eyes glittered. His hand, holding Penares' gun, moved up and out and became steady as stone.

There were two windows. Penares' rats were crouching near them, at the far end of the room. Arms and ammunition enough to supply a small army cluttered the floor around them.

"I tell you, get the boss!" one man was whining. "Them cops have got reinforcements! We can't hold off the whole damned force. Look at 'em — creepin' up on us! Look!"

Another—his name was Degman—had more nerve. Armed with a machine-gun, he thrust the whiner aside and stepped closer to the window.

"They're as close as they're comin', right now. I'll show—"

Paul Devon took two abrupt steps forward and snarled: "Drop that gun!"

Degman stiffened as if stabbed in the back.

"Drop it!"

Degman's hands twitched open. The gun thudded to the window-sill, teetered there, and slid down his legs to the floor.

"Get your hands up, all of you," Devon rapped out. "And don't turn around. *You*—reach! I'll kill the first man who—"

He wished suddenly that he were a patrolman, that he had a patrolman's whistle with which he could shrill a triumphant blast to the men outside. Without it he had no way of summoning them. It was dangerous to go too close to the windows.

Now he faced a long wait and the possibility that one of Penares' men, in desperation, might start something. It was one against seven. They were killers, vicious and dangerous. The room was so still, so pregnant with tension, that the sledging of his own heart was deafening.

He stood his ground. It was hard to watch seven pairs of hands, seven tense bodies. Not a job for a man whose nerves were ragged.

Time crawled. One of the men inched toward the ledge of the farther window, where lay a revolver.

"I said I'd shoot the first rat who . . ." Devon warned, and the man froze again.

Then in that ear-splitting silence the door creaked behind him, and a hurtling weight crashed against his legs.

A shrill, whistling voice, the voice of Vincent Penares, screamed: "Get him!"

PAUL DEVON sprawled down on hands and knees, twisted his lean body at the hips the moment he reached the floor, and met Penares' second rush with an upthrust knee. That much was instinctive. The impact slammed his head against the floor and dazed him. But he swung his legs up and over in a wide arc that carried him to his feet. That was training.

Lunging clear of Penares' clawing hands, he turned and made murder with the killer's own gun. Only it wasn't murder.

It wasn't murder in a room full of

kidnapers, counterfeitters, white-slavers and common rats, all of whom were striving to send him to hell first.

The place was bedlam. Penares' gorillas scrambled to reach the pile of weapons, and some got there. Penares himself staggered erect and bellowed orders. He had courage. Unarmed, he he stood like an enraged Napoleon directing an army, and then he went for Paul Devon with his bare hands out-thrust.

A machine-gun spewed livid streamers of flame as Devon swung a clenched fist to the jaw of Vincent Penares. Penares, reeling back, upset the table. The lantern slid to the floor and was smashed.

The room was suddenly black as pitch, and the screaming slugs from the machine-gun streaked the pitch with yellow flame.

Devon dropped to his knees and fired. The shape behind the machine-gun slewed over backward, and bullets tore a zigzag pattern in the ceiling. Powdered plaster misted down. Devon crawled, reached the open doorway and slowly straightened to his feet.

Downstairs, pounding footsteps were audible, and men were shouting. Men from Headquarters. A grim smile twisted Devon's mouth. He hadn't moved in four seconds. The gunfire had ceased. Penares' men, unable to locate him, were keeping very still, waiting.

Degman's voice came hoarsely: "We must've got him. Chief, where are you? We got to get out of here?"

Devon stepped back into the corridor and abruptly dragged the door shut. He had them! A rush of footsteps inside halted when he put two bullets through the barrier. Someone yelped, cursed.

Men from Headquarters were storming up the stairs! . . .

CHAPTER VII

Beginning

PAUL DEVON did not take part in the cleanup. Aware that he was not needed, he groped his way back to the room in which he had left Nicky Evans. He was horribly afraid of what he might find there.

He found Nicky Evans lying in a heap on the floor, an angry red welt on the side of her face. While the men from Headquarters fought things out with the bottled-up remnant of Penares' mob, Devon carried the unconscious girl downstairs to the kitchen.

Cold water from the pump brought her to. She stared dazedly into Devon's hovering face and whispered: "I—I gave him a chance to escape. I had to. But he punched me and—"

About that time, the upstairs part of the house became quiet again. Devon's face was frozen in a frown of bewilderment, but the questions he might have asked remained unvoiced. Men from Headquarters came trooping downstairs with a few manacled prisoners.

Vincent Penares was not one of the prisoners. He came later, limp and bloody on the shoulder of a uniformed policeman.

"His own rats must have got him by mistake," the policeman said to Devon. "He got in the way of a machine-gun."

Devon looked once and momentarily shut his eyes. Up there in that inferno, after Penares had upset the table and plunged the room into darkness, the machine-gun had gone wild when the man behind it had stopped a bullet from Devon's own gun.

"He's got a paper I want," Devon muttered.

It was a peculiar thing, that paper. It read:

I know I am dying, and wish to make my peace. Also to save two men from death. Here, with this paper, I leave four cigarettes which contain capsules filled with a gas that will destroy. I made seven such cigarettes and placed the other three within reach of Paul Devon, Andrew Robertshaw, and Richard Rand, one to each of them. They must be warned before it is too late. I have tried to reach them by phone, but failed.

Rand was the man I hated. He deceived me, prevailed upon me to put my entire fortune, my all, at his disposal. Only by getting rid of him could I regain my losses. I planned it carefully. I would destroy him, but would destroy Devon and Robertshaw also, and pretend that I myself had been threatened. That arch-fiend, Vincent Penares, who recently regained his freedom, would then be held responsible.

But I have smoked one of the poisoned cigarettes myself—the one I placed in Devon's apartment. He offered me one when I went there to strengthen my alibi by begging his protection. The box looked innocent and I took a cigarette without dreaming . . .

I am sorry. I have been losing my grip on life for a long time, and for weeks have not been myself. Rand took everything. I hated him. Now I want only to prevent . . .

That was all. Devon stared at the bullet-riddled body of Vincent Penares and said almost reverently: "So you weren't lying. You found Hasper dead in his office when you went there. You took the cigarettes, this paper—"

Devon put an arm around Nicky Evans and walked with her into the living room, away from the hum of

voices, the sight of blood and death. He had a question to ask her, and guessed that the answer would leave him as empty, as dead inside, as he had been for the past three and a half years.

But she didn't wait for the question. She looked straight at him and said almost inaudibly:

"I had to do it, Paul. I had to give him a chance. I've tried—"

She faltered, waited for him to say something. But Devon's lips were tight-pressed, white. His hands trembled.

"It's goodbye, I suppose," she said dully. "Even if they don't send me to prison, it's the end of—of—"

She stared at him, tried to smile. "They'll tear me to shreds, Paul. My name in the papers. Sob sister stuff. Pictures. You know what they'll do. The sister of—of a killer."

Devon pulled a big, noisy breath into his lungs. "Sister?" he said hoarsely. "Sister? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"You're a detective. You're the law. Now—now it's goodbye. I'm sorry . . ."

Devon put his good hand on her arms, stood up and lifted her up with him. His eyes were alive, glowing. His lips formed the word "sister" and he stared at her.

"The end?" he said. "The hell it is! It's the beginning!"



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Practical Finger Printing

The Story of
Fingerprints

By Lieut.
Charles E. Chapel

*U. S. Marine Corps
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TWO HUNDRED years before the birth of Christ, the Chinese used fingerprints as a means of personal identification. Even today, in the most remote sections of China, farm laborers leave their thumbprint as a signature to important documents. In Babylon, the index finger was affixed to the clay record tablets while they were still soft. Whether the Chinese first discovered fingerprints as an exact, infallible registration, or borrowed the idea from another nation, we cannot say, but we do know that our modern system is derived from one they used during the Tang Dynasty, slightly more than one thousand years ago.

Loops and Whorls, the two big divisions of fingerprint patterns, were the basis for the classification employed under the Tang Emperors. Sir Francis Galton, a distinguished English anthropologist, read about this Chinese system in a magazine article written by an American, and used it in perfecting the ideas already started by Sir Edward Henry.

In 1858, Sir William J.

Herschel, Civil Administrator of the Hooghly district of Bengal, India, compelled two natives to affix their fingerprints to a document. This was done to frighten the people into honesty.

Nineteen years later, Herschel recommended the introduction of fingerprinting for all of India to the Inspector General of Indian Prisons, but his suggestion was disregarded. He continued his studies, but was surprised to find, in 1880, that Dr. Henry Faulds, on the staff of the Tsukiji Hospital, Tokio, Japan, had written an article for a nature magazine describing fingerprints as a means of identifying criminals, and stating that the idea had first occurred to him when he saw finger impressions on ancient Japanese pottery.

Herschel immediately claimed prior discovery of this new science, and offered his many years of investigation as evidence of his authorship. There was no material gain involved, but it was quite natural for him to want credit for his efforts. Impartial critics of fingerprint history agree that Herschel had done the spadework that Fauld's contribu-





In 1858, in India, Sir William J. Herschel had natives affix their thumbprints to documents

tion was more speculative than practical.

The importance of Herschel's studies is that he named several fingerprint patterns, devised ridge tracing, and started a classification system. Both he and Faulds denied getting their ideas from Orientals, but it has always intrigued historians that our modern methods were first thought out in India and Japan.

Sir Francis Galton, as we have seen, had heard of the Chinese use of fingerprints, but he faced the hostility of the European police who had adopted the Bertillon system and did not care to tax their minds with anything new. Bertillon, it must be emphasized, had nothing to do with fingerprints; in fact he so bitterly opposed them that they were not adopted by the Parisians until Bertillon's death in 1914.

DETECTIVE FICTION

Bertillon's system was based on the tenet that the measurements of certain bony structures in adults are invariable and individual. The length and width of the head, the length of the left middle finger, the length of the left foot, and the length of the left forearm were among the principal measurements he recorded.

The index was based on the color of the eyes, the length of the little finger, and the height of the body. The system was complex, required delicate instruments, and depended on the accuracy of the man who took the measurements. Obviously, no two men recorded the same readings.

IN spite of the fact that the Bertillon system was already well established, Galton went ahead with his studies. When the British Home Secretary, Mr. Asquith, appointed a committee to con-

sider various identification methods, Galton offered his system.

The committee laid down three conditions that must be met before they would consider any identification method. These were, first, records must be simple enough to be taken by people of average education and intelligence; second, the classification system must permit a quick comparison between the record of a newly arrested man and the records of old law violators; third, there must be no doubt that identification was absolute.

Galton was pleased when he heard the committee's requirements. He demonstrated mathematically that the chance of two people having the same fingerprints was less than one in sixty-four million, with a time chance of this happening once in ten thousand years. He further explained the never-changing character of fingerprints from the cradle to the grave. The committee was impressed, but to satisfy a public that was afraid of new things, they decided to retain most of the Bertillon system, with Galton's fingerprints as an extra, added attraction. Fingerprints had advanced far with Galton, but large accumulations of fingerprint records were unwieldy and required many hours of searching to find one record card. There was a crying need for a classification system.

Sir Edward R. Henry, who had studied with William J. Herschel in India, had invented a classification based on a simple mathematical formula, which he had shown to the Indian government's committee on identification. This convinced government officials that big files of prints would no longer require hours of searching, that it would now be nothing more than a flip of the wrist to see if a wanted card was in its proper place.

Henry fully explained his classification principles in his "*Classification and Uses of Fingerprints*," first published in London in 1900. It was eagerly welcomed by the police of the British Empire, and of the United States. This text is still the standard text of fingerprint experts, although they have progressed along the lines of simplification of labor, and the classifications of large accumulations by carrying the fingerprint index fraction further than he proposed. Henry, as a result of his work, was called to Scotland Yard as assistant commissioner of the criminal investigation department, and there established his system.

Galton was given full credit by Henry, who never claimed anything more than his practical improvement of the classification formula already started by Galton. Taking over his new duties at Scotland Yard, Henry promised that he would be able to accomplish three times as many identifications in the coming year as had been effected during any preceding year under the Bertillon method. This prophecy was fulfilled. Under his leadership, the identification men made 1,772 identifications, as compared with only 462 made during the peak of the Bertillon regime. No doubt he could have added more had it not been for the conservative Scotland Yard policy of demanding that no two prints be declared identical unless there were at least ten characteristics common to both.

THIS demand for ten common characteristics did not seem unreasonable in the early days of fingerprinting. In fact, many authorities said that twelve was the minimum number of points that must exist in the print found at the crime scene and the corresponding impression found on the

finger of a suspect. Today, we are more concerned with quality than quantity. One rare detail is worth more than a dozen characteristics that might be found in any print. Five or six details in the core of an infrequent pattern has more weight than fifty forks at the edge of the design.

Clearness of the print, the presence of the core or delta, the uniqueness of the pattern, the direction of ridges, the width of ridges, and the angles of forks are highly valued in the modern office. Add to these the examination of the pores, and you have more reliable guides to accuracy than deciding on any arbitrary number as the requisite for absolute identity.

Henry followed Galton, who strongly emphasized what we now call the *first rule of fingerprint science*—that, “No two persons have the same fingerprints.” This sounds absurdly simple today, but in 1900, countless lawyers argued that it might be possible for two men to have the same patterns on their fingers. Galton based his announcement of the rule on what naturalists call “Quetelet’s law,” that “every thing in nature exhibits unlimited and infinite variation of form.” This is seen to be true when we remember that no two blades of grass, no two snowflakes, no two hairs from the human head are exactly the same when seen under magnification.

As an anthropologist, Galton was interested in the possibility that fingerprint patterns might be inherited, or might be the same in brothers or sisters. To test this theory, he took fingerprints of three or more generations in several families, and of brothers and sisters. He found that sometimes relatives will all have Loops, or all have Whorls, but when it came to absolute identity it became another matter. The details of the

prints were never the same, and it was rare when even the general patterns were found similar among relatives any more than among people not related. These studies of Galton’s which backed up Henry’s teachings, have since been verified by countless scientists in several countries among whom we can mention Forgeot, Helweg, Somner, and Harster, if you want to pursue this subject yourself.

The *second rule of fingerprint science*, that “fingerprints never change” was presented by Henry and Galton. They knew of the anthropologist, Welker, of Giessen, Germany, who in 1856, at the age of thirty-four recorded an impression of his palm; at the age of seventy-five, in 1897, three years before Henry published his textbook, Welker again took his palm print and found no difference in the patterns of the fingers. Galton and Henry also knew that their predecessor, Sir William J. Herschel, had taken fingerprints of himself thirty years apart without finding any change. Two instances do not prove a rule in science, but these tests were corroborated by many others. They were important only because they had been performed by careful, trained observers.

Do illness and injury affect the patterns? This was one of the doubts cast on the second great rule. Careful investigation has shown that a few rare diseases cause the distances between the ridges to vary, but not the cores, deltas, forks, islands, rods, and staples that constitute the patterns. This is the same as saying that the fingerprint of a child is small, while it grows with the rest of the body as he approaches manhood, with no change in the designs that were found at birth.

Do burns affect the fingerprints? French identification experts answered

this question by dipping their fingers in boiling water, hot oil, and even in molten lead. This violent experiment naturally took off the outer layer of skin, but as soon as it healed the same patterns returned.

What about scars? If they are from deep wounds, they will remain for life, but they attract attention if they were apparently inflicted deliberately. Whether accidental or not, the presence of a scar in a fingerprint will bring a conviction in a criminal case quicker than all the cores and deltas in the whole set of prints.

Criminals have attempted to change their fingerprints by means of plastic surgery. If anyone has succeeded his case has not yet been brought to the attention of the authorities. In the first place, there are few plastic surgeons competent to perform this operation, and none of them would jeopardize their professional future by this practice. Secondly, it is an extremely painful operation, even with anaesthetic. Criminals are not noted for bravery when they are taking the punishment. Third, we know of no way of transplanting skin without leaving tell tale scars that can not be explained.

THESE rules of the non-repetition, and the non-variation of fingerprints—with all that went with them—were universally accepted by identification men, but an Argentinean, Juan Vucetich, introduced a system similar to Galton's in the year 1898, two years before the appearance of the Henry textbook. Whether he developed his ideas independently of Galton or not is immaterial; he did give Galton credit for subclassification based on ridge training and ridge counting, and made these a part of his own system.

The Vucetich method has been pop-

ular in Latin countries, and has even been accepted in part in France, Switzerland, and Norway, but it is enough like the Galton-Henry method for the various countries to exchange records without confusion or loss of accuracy in identification. We refer to it here because it is part of the knowledge expected of every fingerprint expert. The Vucetich system need not be studied, but its existence must be considered.

No discussion of the history of fingerprints is complete without reference to Professor Purkinje, who taught pathology and physiology at the University of Breslau. In 1823, he published a lecture in Latin in which he advocated the division of fingerprints into nine types, similar to those we use today, and at the same time suggested that a classification system could be developed. At one time, he was credited for giving Henry and Galton their start, but the majority now believe that he was an independent thinker whose ideas never progressed past the theoretical stage. Regardless of his proper place in the story of fingerprints, he is respected as one of those who at least tried to serve humanity.

If history is the lamp by which we can light the path into the future, the story of fingerprints should cause us to wonder what will happen next in the world of Loops and Whorls. We have solved the problem of classification, which was the chief stumbling block in the early days of long hours spent trying to find a record buried behind hundreds of cards; at least we know how to classify a complete set of prints, or even a set with a few of the digits missing, but a criminal does not always oblige the police by leaving all ten fingerprints neatly outlined in blood against a white door.

The usual experience of detectives is to find one or two, rarely three or four clear impressions at the crime scene. With this small number, it is still possible to find duplicate prints if they are in the files, but it is not the task of a moment. To meet this problem, several scientists have devised systems of identification based on a single fingerprint. Files of single impressions will never supplant records of the complete set of ten, but a workable system based on individual impressions is now an integral part of every

large bureau. In a later issue of this magazine we shall explain exactly how you can classify and file individual prints. This branch of fingerprint science is still in its infancy. Who knows whether or not we have reached the limit of our progress? You may be to single prints, what Henry was to the complete set. A beginner, familiar with the story of fingerprints, but unshackled by fixed opinions, brings fresh inspiration into this profession that had its origin back in the centuries before the beginning of the Christian era.

Coming Next Week—How to Take Fingerprint Impressions

Cipher Solvers' Club for February

(Continued from Last Week)

CIPHERS are winning new converts every day! For instance, there are many new names in the following list of readers who submitted answers to ciphers Nos. 31-54, inclusive, published in our cipher department during February. The solving total for February was 7,033 answers, raising our total for the first two months of the year to 15,727 answers. The special signs preceding names indicate *Inner Circle Club and †Honor Roll membership. Watch for our March Solvers' Club, cryptofans, in an early issue! And don't fail to try the ciphers in this week's issue!

Segro, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †D. G. S. Colusa, Calif.; Louis Stephens, Homestead, Pa.; †A. Traveller, Washington, D. C.; *W. R. W., Chicago, Ill.; †Little Willy, Johnstown, Pa.; †I. Workem, Spearfish, S. Dak.; Charing X, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Charles E. Zirbes, Clinton, Iowa.

Twenty-two—†Ajax, Staples, Minn.; †Arthur J. Brooks, Jr., Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario, Canada; †Mabel B. Canon, Philadelphia, Pa.; GKC, Seattle, Wash.; †Uucos, New York, N. Y.; A. Meredith, Jr., Lynchburg, Va.; †Gene Miller, Petersburg, Ind.; †Rejna Patton, Los Angeles, Calif.; *Plantagenet, Paterson, N. J.; †Quay, Springfield, Ill.; Ralavega, Miles City, Mont.; Charles R. Robb, Toledo, Ohio; Wayne E. Wright, Chicago, Ill.

Twenty-one—†Ernest G. Alstadt, Erie, Pa.; †Alpha Bet, Merchantville, N. J.; Chas. F. Bridewell, Houston, Tex.; Cryptox, State College, Pa.; Robert De Mougout, New York, N. Y.; Dictionary, Dillon, S. C.; Duke d'Ekud, Bronx, N. Y.; †H. H., Coventry, Ohio; Jatcy, Greensburg, Pa.; E. Sthar Odilnu, Atchison, Kans.; Paul Presnell, Pilot Mountain, N. C.; *Ike N. Wynne, Great Falls, Mont.; †Zarkov, Aberdeen, S. Dak.

Twenty—†Harry R. Bell, Columbus, Ohio; †H. L. Evans, New York, N. Y.; †L. S. H., Washington, D. C.; †Kadash, Tacoma, Wash.; †J. G. Meerdink, Jersey City, N. J.; †Nertz, Waukegan, Ill.; †Pangram, Lakewood, Ohio; Mae Lisbeth Phelps, Tampa, Fla.; †B. P., Miami, Fla.; Y. M. Reyna, Syracuse, N. Y.; †Flo Rogoway, San Diego, Calif.

Nineteen—Albert H. Alpert, Cleveland, Ohio; †Arulas, Los Angeles, Calif.; Joseph F. Csank, Cleveland, Ohio; W. A. Deen, Corpus Christi, Tex.; †Al. Liston, Newark, N. J.; †Mabs, Baltimore, Md.; †My Pal, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Mrs. J. C. Saunders, Vallejo, Calif.; *A. W. Smith, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Loula Williams, Stockton, Calif.

Eighteen—Case Ace, Chicago, Ill.; †Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr.; Ellean, Orangeburg, N. Y.; King Frank, Maspeth, N. Y.; Alwina Gentsch, Richmond Hill, N. Y.; †G. N. G., Key West, Fla.; Rupert Graves, Douglass, N. Y.; E. Groesch, New York, N. Y.; Bert Hilton, Wilmington, Calif.; †Lucille Little, Chicago, Ill.; †Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; *Romeo, Waynesboro, Pa.; †C. H. Spencer, Washington, D. C.; †Dr. Dirk E. Stegeman,

(Continued on page 103)



The flames had burned with fury, and only charred clues remained

Murder Caravan

From Coast to Coast Murder Marches On—And Right On Its Heels Follows Tony Savage With His Crime Laboratory Trailer

By T. T. Flynn

Part II

WHAT HAS HAPPENED—

NORTHWARD along a main Florida highway, Anthony Savage, ace private investigator for the Pan-America Insurance Company of New York, and his assistant Briggs, were driving in their coupé—attached with a new, radio-equipped trailer. They are suddenly halted by the appearance of a hatless, bearded man—a typical Florida cracker—who stumbles onto the macadam road—and is shot by a hidden gunman.

Savage gets out of the car and rushes to him just as the man expires and whispers, "Bellamy!" To Savage this is a significant coincidence, for he and Briggs were



on their way to "Flamingo Groves," the Florida estate of Roger Bellamy, a heavy policy holder with the Pan-America Company. Savage carries the corpse of the unidentified native to the side of the road, and drives but a short distance, when a small coupé stops in front of the car and trailer, and an indignant girl accuses them of leaving a body behind in a hit-and-run accident.

At the point of a gun, she orders them to drive to "Flamingo Groves," where she tells them that the owner of that estate,

Roger Bellamy, President of the Arcade Steel Company, is dead. The woman is Rita Carstairs, reporter for the *New York Star*.

They drive to "Flamingo Groves," where Tony, after he has identified himself to the sheriff, begins his investigation of Bellamy's death. The wealthy man had been found drowned—caught up under a boat. He had been insured by Pan-America for \$300,000, which in case of accidental death was increased to \$525,000. The New York office phones Tony full authority to go ahead with his investigation.

During his further inquiries, Tony meets Joan Bellamy, daughter of the deceased, Jerry Goddard, her fiancé—a young man of unstable character—Prendergast, the family lawyer, and Clark, a boatman on the estate. The latter grudgingly rows Tony to the watery scene of Bellamy's death. There Clark suddenly assaults Savage and during their fight, Clark is mysteriously sniped by someone hidden in the thicket ashore. Savage makes his way back to the dock, and Briggs informs him that Bellamy had been in a financial jam, and that a man named Larnigan, who is connected with Bellamy's business operations, has skipped out of town. That night, Anne Teasdale comes to his trailer.

CHAPTER VI

Sheriff Proctor

ANTHONY SAVAGE stood in the intimate luxury of the big trailer and looked at the girl, Anne Teasdale, who had something to tell him.

"Sit down," he said. His imper-turbable manner took the edge off the spark of urgency she had brought through the door.

She sank into the upholstery and springs of the divan opposite the door.

"Nice," she commented, and locked slim fingers behind her smooth black hair and looked up at him. "You don't look like a detective."

"And am I?" said Savage.

"That's why I'm here," she said, and crossed one leg carelessly over the other in a movement that matched the slim boyishness of her figure.

"Who said I was a detective?"

"I shan't tell you," she refused promptly.

Tony Savage smiled slightly; the little crinkles at the corners of his eyes formed most of the expression.

He was, if he only knew it, rather formidable as he stood there, tall, stringy, with the hint of wire muscles under the light weave of his coat, the deep tan of the Florida sun on his lean face, a poised intentness in his manner.

"It was," he reminded, "something I wouldn't believe; something that might mean anything. It concerns Roger Bellamy's death, I take it."

"Naturally," she assented, and pouted the merest bit as the black lashes came down over her gray-blue eyes.

The slim boyishness, Tony Savage decided shrewdly, was a calculated feminine bit, more blessed in its use than its naturalness. That visible side of her went well with the sun, the beaches, the sports and sports clothes.

But here in the quiet intimacy of the trailer, with the frogs booming through the insect chorus outside in the night, there was room for the softer side, the more feminine side. And she was displaying it for what it was worth, Savage thought cynically, as his visitor said:

"I had to come to you. I thought you should know—"

"Yes?" said Savage, turning the wine glass slowly in his fingers as he watched her.

"It's about Jack Goddard—" Her eyes were troubled; she seemed nervous, hesitant."

"What about Goddard?" asked Sav-

age with an interest that was very real.

"Has it—" Anne Teasdale paused, drew a breath—"has it occurred to you that Jack may know something about Bellamy's death?"

"Young Goddard? Miss Bellamy's fiancé?"

"You saw him," she said. "He drove up from Palm Beach in the red car as soon as he got the news."

"Bellamy died here—not in Palm Beach," Savage reminded. "How could Goddard be connected?"

She made a helpless gesture with her hand.

"I know. But—"

"And Goddard's engaged to Joan Bellamy," said Savage.

"Does that make him sacred?"

She shouldn't have said that. She shouldn't have smiled with a shade of sarcasm. For the smile was like the brief whisking aside of a phantom curtain. For an instant a cynical hardness was revealed, a worldliness glossed by the veneer of Palm Beach, of Park Avenue, of those brittle and sophisticated spots on both side of the Atlantic ruled by fashion, money and what passed for fashionable society.

"Sacred, my eye," said Savage, catching her mood and matching it. "Is anything sacred? What about Goddard?"

"You don't," she said, "know anything about him, do you?"

"Do you?" said Savage.

"I introduced him to Joan. Since then I've been sorry."

"Why?"

SHE seemed embarrassed. But her reply was ready enough. "Jack's a climber, a money hunter. He's after Joan's money, of course. He wouldn't look at her twice if she were poor."

"Perhaps she is poor—now."

Anne Teasdale's lip curled. "There's the insurance. Quite a bit, I understand."

Savage's quizzical smile brought red into her face under a slight tan. She stood up defiantly.

"I came here to—to help. Not to be laughed at."

"You're helping me," said Savage quietly. "Just who is Goddard?"

"He passes for a wealthy banker's son—he's vague about the family—and speaks of writing in Hollywood for a lark, at a huge salary."

"Perhaps he did."

She tossed her head. "Nonsense." On a sudden thought she glanced at the open window. "I wouldn't believe anything he said—now. Have you seen that dirty old man who—who runs the boathouse?"

"Clark?"

"Yes. Several days ago I heard Jack speaking to him inside the boathouse. Jack called him 'Father.'" Anne Teasdale's lip curled. "I'd like to see the two of them together when confronted with that."

"I've an idea you would," said Savage. "Women go in for that sort of thing, don't they? In savage tribes they're first in at torture of the prisoners, with the fanciest tricks. In the beauty shop belt it's done with a bit more finesse—but even more efficiency."

Stung to anger, she cried: "How dare you insult me when I came to—to help you?"

"Nonsense yourself," Savage said with a thin smile. "You came to slip the knife into Goddard—and probably to turn the screws on Miss Bellamy."

She paled. Her face grew sharper and her eyes clawed him.

"You lie!" she flared out. "I thought you were a gentleman! I thought you'd

appreciate it! And—and—oh! what a filthy swine you really are!"

Savage chuckled.

"Now we're both frank. I'm only a gentleman, Miss Teasdale, when I can afford to be—or when I choose to be. Which isn't now. And I'm afraid you'll never have the pleasure of seeing Clark and Goddard together. Clark was murdered a little while ago. I'm waiting for the sheriff now."

"No! Murdered? You can't mean that!"

"Cheerfully, to you."

Her pallor for a moment had the blue-white quality of lifeless ice. Her eyes were wide, unbelieving, and into them came something that was close to fear.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked in a choked voice.

Savage put down the wine glass he was holding. He was sharp when he turned back. "You don't like young Goddard, do you?"

"I haven't any feeling about him!"

"And none about Miss Bellamy?"

"Joan is one of my closest friends!"

"Save us from our friends, eh?"

"You *are* an utter swine!"

"That's twice you've called me that," said Savage. "Is your vocabulary so limited?"

"I'VE had enough!" she exclaimed violently, and brushed past him to the door. She turned at the door. Her face was still white. "I hope you have enough honor to keep my name out of this. I value Joan's friendship. She wouldn't think it cricket for me to say anything."

"And she'd be right," said Savage, smiling coldly. "Do you try playing cricket with your women friends?"

She slammed the door behind her as she went out.

And Savage shook his head and moodily lighted a cigarette. This was the sort of thing you ran up against too often. The woman had brought something unclean into the trailer, falseness, and—to be blunt about it—treachery and hate against friends she should have been shielding.

And you would look for a reason behind it if you were wise. Love? Perhaps. She'd known young Goddard first. He'd fallen in love with Joan Bellamy later. Hard to tell about such matters.

Briggs returned, his short blond hair all but bristling with anticipation.

"I heard her through the window," said Briggs. "All cat and needle claws. Watch out for a woman like that, Chief."

"Did you report Clark's murder to the sheriff?"

Briggs grinned.

"They told me at the house the sheriff was on his way out here, so I kept mum."

"Good enough. Get out a flashlight and start unhitching the car. I may want to use it."

An automobile came swiftly from the direction of the house and drew up beside the trailer. Savage was outside when it stopped. The tall, loose-jointed figure of Proctor, the sheriff, hurried around through the car lights.

"Quiet spot you picked out here, Savage."

"On the surface," said Savage. "Not so quiet when you hear the news."

Proctor's angular face ran the gamut of emotions as he listened to a terse account of the boat trip into Gator Sink, Clark's actions and death from a shore ambush.

And at the end Proctor swore prayerfully under his breath.

"What next!" Proctor turned to his

deputy, McComb, who had joined them and listened with his mouth agape. "McComb, telephone for another posse! We'll be out most of the night, I guess. Here—take the car! You can get to the house quicker!"

And as the deputy jumped back into the car, Savage asked the sheriff:

"Have any luck with your blood-hounds?"

Proctor was profanely negative.

"THE dead man was Lafe Peckham, all right. Got what was comin' to him, the shiftless no-account. He's one less worry I'll have. The hounds backtracked the trail to the edge of Palm Lake. It's more a swamp than a lake—cypress an' water enough to float a boat if you keep to the channels."

The sheriff stopped, cursed again, and went on: "This latest killing has got me beat, suh! It don't make sense! Well, anyway—Lafe Peckham got out of a boat—an' the fellow that shot him got out of the same boat. There was a handkerchief on the bank that wasn't Peckham's. The hounds nosed the handkerchief and went hellin' back toward the road on another track that followed Peckham's trail pretty close.

"We found where the man must have stood when he shot Peckham. The hounds followed his trail back to the bank where the boat had been—the marks were there in the mud—an' that's the last we had of that. It was coming on dark by then. I went into town to eat an' change my clothes, and then called up to see if you were still here."

"Any chance of the dogs following the shoreline and finding where that boat landed?" asked Savage.

Proctor gave a short, snorting laugh.

"Have to search a hundred miles of shoreline. You can get from Palm Lake into Casper Lake, an' out of two or three channels into John River, and clean out of the district if you want to. The country's low for miles back in there—saw-grass, snakes, cypress an' Crackers, wild as backwoods deer. Peckham ain't the first one to get killed an' leave a question mark behind. But that's only Lafe Peckham. What about this other business—this fellow Clark going crazy on you, and being shot from the bank? It's got me, suh, it's got me! What was it you said about the water being too shallow for Bellamy to drown?"

"Bellamy evidently didn't drown. If he didn't, he was murdered," said Savage. "Clark knew something about it. And Clark's dead. Heaven knows why he was killed. Find the man who killed him and you'll probably have someone who can tell you how Bellamy died—and *why* he died. And, on a guess, why this chap Peckham was killed."

"Wouldn't be a chance of following anyone back in there tonight," said Proctor dubiously. "I wouldn't want to. The lights'd make us too good targets. We'll get Clark's body."

"I'd suggest a quick autopsy on Bellamy to find out how much water is in his lungs."

"He's at Jason Dyer's furniture store in town. Dyer does the undertaking. Doc Summerville, the coroner, will have to take charge of the autopsy." And Proctor said wonderingly: "Why'd anyone want to murder Bellamy—if he *was* murdered?"

"That," said Savage, "is something for you to discover. While you're getting Clark, I'll drive into town and have a look at Bellamy. And a talk with the coroner. You might telephone I'm coming. And you might make sure

no one leaves the estate here."

"Summerville can do the autopsy tonight," said Proctor. "And don't worry, mister, I'll sew this place up tight as soon as I get men here."

CHAPTER VII

Long Distance Check-up

COHATCHIE was the town, the county seat, on the highway four miles north of the Bellamy estate. Lights were burning in Dyer's Furniture Store. A dozen-odd loiterers in front stared curiously as Savage knocked on the locked, curtained door. Steps hurried to the door. A dry, pinched little man admitted him on hearing his name.

"I'm Jason Dyer," said the little man fussily. "The sheriff telephoned you were coming. Doctor Summerville is here. . . . This way," said Jason Dyer, ~~trotting along a linoleum-covered aisle flanked with divans, overstuffed chairs, floor lamps, tables and chairs.~~

A door at the back admitted them to a rear room, brightly lighted and smelling of chemicals. A narrow table held a sheet-covered body, and a tall, florid man talking to Rita Carstairs, of the *New York Star*, peered nearsightedly through rimless nose glasses.

"Mr. Savage? I'm Doctor Summerville, the coroner."

The doctor's grip was hearty. And Savage lifted eyebrows at Rita Carstairs. In her sports jacket, skirt and saucy small hat of the afternoon, Rita Carstairs looked, Savage thought, more stunning than ever. And quite brisk, competent and coolly amused as she read his slight annoyance.

She said: "This goes with my job, you know. You must expect to find me under your feet at the most unexpected moments."

"Every job has its particular delight, Miss Carstairs. But you'd do better for your newspaper, if you were back at the estate right now."

"Has something happened?"

"Only another murder. Clark, the man who had charge of the boathouse, was shot just before dark. Probably another hit-and-run driver," said Savage blandly.

Rita Carstairs colored, "I see you're not going to forget my mistake when I met you. But thanks for the tip anyway. I'll dash back and see about it. Thank you, too, Doctor Summerville."

"My dear young lady, anything, anything at all," Doctor Summerville assured her largely. And as the dry little undertaker followed Rita Carstairs out to unlock the front door, Summerville confided: "Proctor told me over the telephone about it. I'm staggered by all this, Mr. Savage, frankly staggered. Proctor requests an immediate autopsy on Bellamy. And this charming Miss Carstairs begs to be allowed to examine Bellamy, and questions me closely as to my opinion of the real reason for his death. And—er—and now you have more questions, I presume?"

"What I want," said Savage briskly, "is exact knowledge as to how Bellamy died. Frankly, I think he was murdered. If violence was used, there should be some mark. If he did drown, his lungs will show it."

Summerville, for all his florid expansiveness, was a shrewd man. He polished his glasses with a handkerchief and reminded: "His lungs might indicate drowning—and it could still be murder. People have been held under water until they died."

"Yes, I'm remembering that. Have you examined the body?"

"Closely. Not a mark on it, other than a slight skin abrasion or two that

"I'm sure means nothing. Have a look at him."

DEATH had brought Roger Bellamy to the common level. He was merely a man now, and a peaceful man, no matter what stress his last hours had held. Bellamy had been a tall man, and had taken on weight. He was heavy. His mouth was a firm slash, his chin bold, he had been, even if you didn't know his history; a driver, a bold man, who could on a guess, be ruthless. And it was ruthlessness in others which had brought him down.

"Here," said Summerville, indicating a bruise and skin abrasion on one of the bare forearms.

Savage was already bending over the hand, picking it up so that he might closely examine the fingertips.

"The fingernail is broken— See how the skin is abraded on the tips here," said Savage.

He took out a small pocket knife, opened the blade, ran the point under a fingernail. "D'you have a magnifying glass handy, Doctor?"

Summerville produced a small pocket glass.

Savage smiled with satisfaction as he studied the scrapings on the point of the knife blade.

"Wood fibers, Doctor! Plain enough, isn't it? Bellamy clawed so hard against wood he broke the nail and scraped wood in under the nail."

"Why didn't I think of that?" said Summerville, taking the glass, the knife, and looking.

"He struggled in some way," Savage decided briskly. "It might have been a fight—but when you'd ask how the other man got into the boat with him."

"He could have been on shore at the time."

"And then he'd have had bark, dirt, crushed leaves under his nails. No, it was in the boat. I've an idea; I'll check on it later. How soon can you get an autopsy report on the contents of the stomach, Doctor?"

"Tomorrow, with luck."

"Good! And now where can I find the telephone office?"

THE telephone office was up one flight of stairs from the sidewalk. Rita Carstairs was coming down when Anthony Savage started up. She was annoyed.

"Are you following me?" she demanded as they met at the bottom.

"Hardly," chuckled Savage. "Not as long as you carry a gun."

Rita Carstairs was further annoyed.

"Why didn't you," she wanted to know, "tell me you were with Clark when he was killed?"

"No can do, missy. We're scratching at each other across the fence. You want headlines for the *New York Star*. I want no publicity right now."

She tossed her head. "You may want it later."

"Then I'll be gallant, Miss Carstairs."

"And it will probably be too late," warned Rita Carstairs, smiling at the thought as she left.

In the telephone office upstairs, a crisp young blonde girl was busy at the small switchboard. She inserted a plug, said: "Number, please. . . Thank you . . ." inserted another plug, and meanwhile gave Savage a critical, estimating glance.

"Mr. Bellamy's death," she guessed.

"Bull's-eye," admitted Savage, smiling.

"Long-distance call?"

"I'd like to check the long-distance calls from Bellamy's estate today."

Her deft hands and her voice were automatically busy with the plugs and the mouthpiece on her chest, but her attention remained on him.

"Bet you're a newspaper man," she guessed again. "I'm not allowed to give out information. You'll waste your breath trying to get it."

"Rules of the company, I suppose?"

"Strict rules," she assured him, smiling, weighing his appearance with increased admiration. The blonde operator thought: "Why can't the men around here wear clothes like that? Like—like *they* made the clothes, and weren't just covered up."

But her smile was wary as she met Tony Savage's look. He had that manner of poised competence, as if used to having his way.

"I'm not a newspaper man."

"That still doesn't get you anything."

"The perfect operator," Savage applauded. "You never give out information—and never listen in on calls."

"Certainly not!" she informed him virtuously.

"But I'm wondering," said Savage with a grin, "how you were able to tell Miss Carstairs, who just left here, the details of the sheriff's telephone call to Doctor Summerville."

THE blonde operator was instantly indignant. "So she blabbed that already—the deceitful thing! She promised she wouldn't breathe a word to anyone! What a sucker I was to fall for her line!"

"Better luck next time," Savage comforted. "And you may believe *me*, word of honor. What calls have been made from the Bellamy house?"

"That's the same line she handed me," jeered the operator.

"The difference," said Savage amiably, "is that Miss Carstairs rep-

resents a newspaper. I'm working with the sheriff. Proctor might be annoyed if he knew you had tipped off Miss Carstairs. Suppose we forget that—and don't force the sheriff to use his authority to trace those calls from the Bellamy house."

She flushed, annoyed, yet uncertain before her tall visitor's smiling manner.

"How do I know you're working with the sheriff?" she challenged.

"Call the Bellamy estate and check on it."

"I guess you're all right," she conceded reluctantly. "Just a minute."

She picked up a small stack of paper forms and flicked through the top slips.

"Miss Carstairs just telephoned the *New York Star* from the booth there," she said. "A Mr. Goddard telephoned a Hollywood number; a Mr. Prendergast telephoned a New York number; Miss Bellamy called Mr. Goddard at Palm Beach hours ago; a Mr. Robertson called New York; a Mr. Chatham to Chicago; and about an hour ago a Mr. Larnigan talked to someone in New Orleans?"

"Who was it?"

"It was a number."

"What did he say?"

"I didn't listen."

"How did Larnigan look?"

"Upset," said the girl. "He looked tired and—and sorta up in the air."

"What did the others talk about?"

"Listen!" said the operator defiantly. "I didn't hear a thing. I didn't cut in on a single call. Forty sheriffs can't make me say I did! I put through their calls and minded my own business. Don't try to get me in trouble."

"Believe me, I'm not trying," said Savage. "I'm grateful for the help you've given. . . . If you don't mind, I'll copy those names and telephone numbers."

She hesitated, grudgingly said: "I'll read them off to you. And if I get into trouble for it, it serves me right."

CHAPTER VIII

More Cross-Questioning

AUTOMOBILES were parked at the entrance to Bellamy's estate. Their occupants were grouped around the ditch bridge. A guard armed with a flashlight and a shotgun was on duty under the stone arch. He waved Savage to a stop with the flashlight.

"No visitors allowed," he called.

"I'm staying here," said Savage through the open window.

"What's youah name?"

"Savage."

"Go ahead." And the guard confided: "Some of those fellows are reporters from Jacksonville and Palm Beach. Guess there'll be more along. Bellamy's death seems to be news."

"Keep them out," urged Savage cheerfully as he drove on.

The big white house, studded now with lights, was no less striking by night than its white walls and red tile roof had been by day against the blue sky, the gold and green of the orange trees. Savage drove past the house to the trailer, and found the headlights of parked automobiles strewing a blanket of light under the tall, moss-draped trees and out on the black water.

Half the household, it seemed as he looked about, servants and guests included, had come to the boathouse. And men were there—and women and girls too—from Cohatchie. Some of their cars had raced past him as he drove into town.

All the available boats had gone after Clark's body. A hum of talk was coming from the waiting spectators.

Joan Bellamy was there with young Goddard. She looked, it seemed to Savage, even younger in the simple white chiffon dinner gown she was wearing under a lightweight cape. She was without make-up. In the glare of light she looked pale to the point of ghostliness, in a young, hurt, apprehensive way.

She was clinging to Goddard's arm; when she saw Savage she hurried Goddard toward him. She said:

"I've been waiting for you, Mr. Savage. The sheriff didn't tell us much. We're all dazed. What happened?"

"I can't tell you a great deal," said Savage, and his glance went past her to Anne Teasdale, who was watching them with casual indifference.

Jack Goddard wore the rubber-soled shoes and white beach sweater of the afternoon. He seemed sober, and concerned for Joan Bellamy. His devotion was obvious—almost too obvious.

Savage studied him keenly without appearing to do so.

Goddard looked tired. And uneasy. In the morning he would probably be haggard. And with reason, Savage reflected, if what Anne Teasdale had said was true. If Clark was Goddard's father, and Goddard dared not reveal it, the strain must be acute.

But—was it true?

Resemblance was lacking, Savage decided. Clark had been gnarled, worn with work. This young fellow had the easy manner of a moneyed background. Not that a manner indicated much. Would the Teasdale girl dare to lie about such a matter when the truth could so easily be checked?

The motive was there if her story were true. Goddard might have had a hand in Roger Bellamy's death, so that he might, at any cost, marry a girl who would inherit money. Stranger things had happened.

Goddard asked rather sharply:

"What reason was there for Clark to be killed? For that matter, why were you two there when it happened?"

"Any reason why we shouldn't have been there?"

"None that I know of," admitted Goddard promptly.

"Everyone present on the estate?" Savage asked Joan Bellamy.

SHE nodded. "Everyone but James Larnigan. He was shocked when he returned and found that Father was—was gone. But there had been no friendship between them. His business was over and it was necessary for him to hurry back to New Orleans. He conveyed his regrets as decently as possible and left immediately. That was before we knew Clark had been killed."

Jack Goddard's look probed at Savage. "Did you want Larnigan for any reason, Mr. Savage?"

Savage shrugged. "I've never met the man."

"Strange you asked about him then," said Goddard pointedly. "He was gone all day. He had a rifle. I noticed that his shoes were muddy when he returned. And I understand he's a crack marksman," added Goddard with a trace of sulky impatience. "Medals and all that in rifle matches."

"And that suggests?" said Savage.

Goddard shrugged in turn. "I don't know that it suggests anything," he disclaimed.

Inwardly Anthony Savage was berating himself for letting Larnigan get away. He should have sent word to the house immediately by Briggs. There might have been time to stop the fellow.

Joan Bellamy changed the subject in an effort to be cheerful.

"Your man was kind enough to let us see inside the trailer. It has so much

luxury in such a small space. I—I'd like to do the same thing someday."

Goddard reached for her hand. "On your honeymoon, darling."

She flashed him a look of gratitude.

"Who was Clark?" Savage questioned.

"I hardly know," Joan Bellamy confessed. "I should be ashamed, I suppose. He'd worked for Father four or five years. But I've been away to school so much."

Young Goddard's face was expressionless. Savage met his eyes. If guilt were there, it wasn't noticeable.

"I noticed a young chap around the boathouse," said Savage. "Squarish sort of face, soiled white trousers. . . ."

"You must mean Parker—I don't know his first name—the assistant gardener," said Joan Bellamy. "Parker is a comparatively new man. Oscar, the gardener, can probably tell you about him."

"I'll let Parker tell me. When it's convenient, Miss Bellamy, will you tell him to see me?"

Briggs had been hovering expectantly in the background for some minutes. Savage led the way into the trailer.

"Can you get through to W2ZXTO in New York with code, so every home radio set won't listen in?"

"Sure," said Briggs promptly. "Mike Levy is a pain on his code work, but he can take it. I was talking to him a little while ago. Mike wants to know how long he has to hang around his set before we wind up this evening's work. Says he's already broken a date with his girl. Mr. Johnston, from our office, has called a dozen times for more information."

"GIVE Levy my sympathy and assure him his assistance is invaluable. I think he can knock off after this.

Here's a list of telephone numbers in different cities. I want Levy to telephone them to Johnston, with my request that Johnston immediately take steps by wire and long-distance to find out who the numbers belong to. Tell Johnston it looks as if Pan-America Insurance will have to pay double indemnity on the policies. Johnston's replies are to come by wire, notification to be telephoned to the house here. Got it?"

Briggs was jotting shorthand notes. He nodded, and Savage continued briskly:

"Johnston is to arrange with a New Orleans detective agency to have James Larnigan investigated and his movements covered after his arrival in New Orleans. Larnigan is driving through to New Orleans now.

"In addition, I want information about a James Goddard, at present staying in Palm Beach, address unknown; engaged to Miss Joan Bellamy, about five feet ten, black hair, slightly curly, age about twenty-five. Goddard called the Hollywood number. He might be investigated from that end. That's all."

A grin split Briggs' face as he flipped the notebook shut.

"Mike Levy will be in a state of collapse when he's through taking all this." Briggs cocked his head. "Outboard motors. They're bringing Clark's body back."

Knuckles rapped on the trailer door. Savage opened the door on Parker, the young man who had stalked angrily away from the boathouse before dark. Parker was older than Savage had thought, burned almost black by the sun, close to bristling as he said:

"I'm Parker. Miss Bellamy says you want me."

"I've a few questions," said Savage,

stepping out and closing the door. The hammering sound of outboard motors was audible in the distance. The generator of Briggs' short-wave sending set raised its whine as Savage asked: "What do you know about Clark?"

"Nothing."

"You had words with him just before I parked here this afternoon."

"Listen," Parker demanded belligerently, "are you trying to tie me in with what happened while he was out with you?"

"Not at all."

"I had an argument with Clark about one of the boats, see? I wanted to go fishing an' Clark wouldn't give. That's all! And now the place is crawling with cops trying to pin some dirt on someone—and you pick on me."

"I'm not a cop, Parker."

"Sure, I know who you are. Insurance. One of the maids told me."

"Take the chip off your shoulder," Savage suggested calmly. "How long have you worked here?"

"A little over three months."

"Who hired you?"

"The head gardener."

"References?"

"Rats!" Parker retorted rudely. "I was on the road looking for work. I walked in, asked for a job, got it, and did my work right. But I didn't hire out to take a rap for anything like this. I'm quitting as soon as it's over, see? If Miss Bellamy don't like the way I'm takin' it, she can fire me tonight."

"No one's going to discharge you. I'm after information about Clark."

"Ask Oscar, the head gardener. They were thick."

"Tell him to look me up, will you please?"

"Sure," said Parker, more civilly as he left.

The outboards were coming nearer,

behind flashlights that winked and danced on the surface of the black water. And a hush was falling over the spectators on the bank as death approached out of the night.

Savage moved toward the boathouse. A blond, placid man in overalls intercepted him.

"You vant me, sir? Oscar, de gardener?"

"I'm looking for information about Clark."

A BIG calloused hand shoved an under-sized straw hat back on a tumbling mane of yellow hair. Oscar's forehead wrinkled as he struggled for thought.

"Funny man, dat old Clark. He don't say mooch. Yah—vas funny faller."

"Married?"

"Bane widower, he tal me."

"Any children?"

Oscar ponderously battled with a slow memory. His face seamed in a pleased grin as he captured a thought.

"One tam las' year Clark vas feel planty goot one day on account his boy in Hollywood mak mooch money. Yas—uh-hoo—his boy."

"Now we're getting somewhere. What was the boy's name?"

"Clark don' say, sir."

"What kind of work was he doing?"

"Clark don' say, sir."

"And you didn't ask any questions?"

"I yust don' bother," Oscar beamed. "Fools all de tam ask questions."

"And you may be right at that," Savage chuckled. "Thanks for setting me right, Oscar. That's all."

Savage was on the boathouse float when the first boat, bearing the sheriff and a long canvas-wrapped bundle in the bottom, slid alongside the float.

Proctor leaped out and joined Savage.

"Any news?" asked Proctor anxiously.

"Nothing to speak of."

"Blast the luck!" Proctor ripped out with exasperation under his breath. "I'm not getting anywhere! I'll have dogs out there at 'Gator Sink the first thing in the morning. But there's too much water back in there for them to work right. Meanwhile I'm having trouble with the people here on the estate. The guests want to leave. They're influential people. I'm going to have to let them go. Even Miss Bellamy wants to leave late tomorrow, for Cleveland, with her father's body. Her fiancé is going with her."

"Thoughtful of Goddard," Savage remarked. "Well, I suppose you'll have to let them go. The coroner hopes to have an autopsy report complete tomorrow. Have you taken any steps to have the roads watched west of here?"

Proctor nodded glumly. "But I don't look for much from it. I couldn't give anything definite to look for. Suspicious characters is all—and that doesn't cover much, with so many tourists on the roads this time of year."

Proctor spat into the water. "I'll send Clark's body along to town. Then I'm going to call everybody together and find out who was on the estate with an alibi when Bellamy died, and later in the afternoon when you saw Lafe Peckham shot, and still later when Clark was shot."

"One man's already gone. Larnigan, a New Orleans man. He was out all day with a rifle, came back and left at once for New Orleans. He wasn't too friendly toward Bellamy, I hear."

"Running away, huh?" Proctor snapped. "I'll have him stopped before he gets out of the state, and brought back."

"I doubt if he'd have left, if he thought you could bring him back," said Savage. "He's a man of some importance. Killing that poor devil Peckham, or even Clark, doesn't sound like the man."

"Just the same I'll get him back."

"You're running things. I'm only an observer for Pan-America Insurance."

THEY were putting Clark's body in a station wagon when Savage returned to the trailer. Briggs, pulling nervously on a cigarette, was listening to a ripping stream of dots and dashes off his spark set.

Briggs held up a hand for silence.

. . . After some moments Briggs reached for his key and sent out a faster burst of code, and then swung around.

"Everything's on the line, Chief. Anything more?"

"Yes. I'm glad I'm in time. Young Goddard is going to Cleveland with Joan Bellamy and Roger Bellamy's body. I want a day and night check on Goddard in Cleveland—telephone calls, wires, and all communications possible to check."

Briggs turned to his set again.

Tony Savage poured another glass of wine and slumped comfortably on the divan.

Briggs shortly stood up, stretched, yawned, grinned.

"You're running up a terrible bill for detective service on this, Chief."

"Bellamy's half million insurance is more," said Savage. He yawned, also "Pan-America will have to pay, I guess. But if Bellamy was murdered, Pan-America will damn well want to make sure his killer is caught. They do hate to have a murderer cost them so much. They'll spend a hundred thou-

sand to get such a man—and call it cheap."

"For a hundred thousand I'd take my chances on pleading guilty to it," Briggs declared. "What do we do now?"

Tony Savage yawned again.

"I'm going to bed. It's been a hard day. Tomorrow may be harder. If you feel lively, you might sit in with the sheriff while he asks questions. Waste of time, I think. If Bellamy was murdered, it wasn't done on an impulse. This thing is apt to drag along for weeks."

"Mike Levy," said Briggs, grinning as he headed for the door, "would have nightmares, if he knew there were weeks of this ahead."

CHAPTER IX

Rita Carstairs on the Lam

THE morning sun washed the world clean again. The black water was gray-blue once more. Birds sang. A servant brought an invitation from Joan Bellamy for breakfast at the house. Anthony Savage declined with the proper appreciation and breakfasted in the trailer.

Proctor, the sheriff, came to the landing float in a boat Proctor was haggard with sleeplessness, irritable by lack of success with his questions the night before, and with the bloodhounds which had been taken to 'Gator Sink shortly after daybreak.

"I feel like a drunk man the morning after, suh," said Proctor, blinking bloodshot eyes. "I'm going home and get some sleep, and be damned to the whole Bellamy business until I wake up!"

Fresh in white ducks, hatless, whistling through his teeth, Savage strolled to the house and sent in his

card to Prendergast, the Bellamy lawyer. He had his interview with that tall, bony man at one side of the sun-drenched flagstone terrace.

"You understand I'm acting with full authority for Pan-America Insurance, Mr. Prendergast."

"Perfectly, sir. As Miss Bellamy's lawyer, we expect a prompt settlement of the insurance."

"They're waiting on my report."

Prendergast pressed his thin lips together. "You're not suggesting there will be any red tape about the matter?"

"I hope not," Savage said cheerfully.

"By the way, who is Mr. Larnigan, who left for New Orleans last night?"

"A promoter," said Prendergast, and it was almost a snort of distaste.

"A promoter of what?"

"Larnigan," said Prendergast stiffly, "got his start in real estate, raided the cotton market some years ago, and made a fortune. He lost that, came back again with a Texas oil field he promoted on a shoe string, and had his ups and downs plunging in the stock market. At present he is well supplied with money, and backed by half a dozen men who—uh—see eye to eye with him in his way of doing business."

"Which wasn't Bellamy's way of doing business?"

"I'm not here to discuss Roger Bellamy's private affairs, sir."

"You happen to be doing just that," Savage differed, smiling slightly. "As a matter of fact, Larnigan came here with his associates to get Bellamy's scalp, didn't he?"

Prendergast was startled. "How do you know that?"

"It doesn't matter. They got Bellamy's scalp. Outside of the insurance, there's nothing left."

"I see you've been discussing the matter with them, sir. It's quite in keep-

ing with their ethics. Since you know, I will confirm it. Roger Bellamy was one of the coming leaders of the alloy steel industry. His Arcade Steel Corporation controls patented processes and trade names that will undoubtedly earn millions in the next decade. The trend is toward alloy steels. Bellamy controlled Arcade Steel. But he expanded too fast. He put up stock on his own for collateral; he—er—allowed too much of his stock to get out of his hands. He even sold some of Arcade Steel stock short. And while here for a short vacation, Larnigan and his associates arrived and informed him they had quietly bought up control of Arcade Steel—and owned short commitments that they were going to force Bellamy to cover. And Bellamy could not do it. He was through, ruined, overnight almost, before he even suspected the possibility."

"Queer they should have come here to tell him," Savage murmured thoughtfully.

TWO middle-aged and prosperous appearing men stepped out on the terrace. Prendergast's pinched-in nose seemed to quiver as he eyed them. Ostentatiously he turned his back and stared at the nearest orange trees.

"It was," said Prendergast scathingly, "quite typical of Larnigan. A man, sir, without taste, crude, unscrupulous and vindictive. It pleased him to come into Mr. Bellamy's home with his associates, under the guise of friendship, and observe Mr. Bellamy while the news was broken."

"Hmmm. You make it sound rather bad. No other reason?"

"I don't understand you, sir?"

"A woman?"

Prendergast's wintery cheeks took on a flush of anger.

"Confound you, sir! Do I have to put up with this?"

"Why beat about the bush, Mr. Prendergast? There was a woman. You know about her."

"Only a court order will make me discuss the matter!" the lawyer snapped with exasperation. "If there was a woman—and I'm not saying there was—it was a personal matter entirely. Mr. Bellamy—uh—has been a widower for some years. He—uh—was still in the prime of life and—er—most eligible. And not a fool where women were concerned."

"You probably mean hardboiled," corrected Savage. "However, that doesn't matter. Has it occurred to you that Bellamy may have committed suicide?"

"It has not," declared Prendergast with emphasis. "Mr. Bellamy was fiercely determined to regain what he had lost. I thought it hopeless. He did not. He lived, sir, to turn the tables on James Larnigan. And a man does not commit suicide when his mind is in that state."

"*Touché*," granted Savage. "You're undoubtedly right. And thank you for your trouble."

A telephone call from the front hall of the house, to Dr. Summerville, brought a guarded confirmation from the coroner.

"Very little water in the chest, Mr. Savage. I haven't any further information."

Joan Bellamy looked tired this morning.

"We're expecting to leave early this evening," she answered Savage's question. "The men who came with Mr. Larnigan are waiting for the sheriff's permission to leave. I don't see why he requested them to remain."

And with the first bitterness Sav-

age had heard from her, Joan added: "It's a strain on all of us."

He looked at her keenly. "You're aware of why they are here?"

She faced him proudly; and, so young, bearing her grief without ostentation, she answered him dry-eyed and evenly.

"I know there's nothing left, if that's what you mean. Not even this place. Father was always frank with me. He told me what had happened, and why."

"He didn't speak of death?"

"He wasn't that kind," she said quietly. "Death wasn't on his mind."

Savage nodded. "Would you mind—" he asked, "I'd like to meet the gentlemen?"

They were shrewd business men, nothing more nor less, was Savage's estimation after meeting them. Chatham — Robertson — Jackson — and a pudgy man named Borden.

All four were slightly ill at ease in the presence of Joan Bellamy, and obviously impatient to depart.

RITA CARSTAIRS had returned to Palm Beach the night before and was not yet back. Anne Teasdale had remained overnight. Savage caught a glimpse of her through a doorway. Her glance crossed his without recognition. She looked as if she had slept badly. She seemed somber, subdued, uneasy.

On the terrace once more with Joan Bellamy, Savage said: "Miss Teasdale is a close friend of yours, I understand."

"I didn't know you'd met Anne. A close friend? Why—why—does it matter?"

"Not particularly."

"I'd call Anne a casual friend, if I must be accurate," said Joan Bellamy

slowly. "I met her at a tea in Palm Beach last year."

One lie for Anne Teasdale, Savage reflected. And not unexpected.

Joan Bellamy left him. He was skirting the house, on his way back to the trailer, when he looked back at an arriving car. Rita Carstairs jumped out, reached in the seat for a traveling bag, and waved at him.

Savage waved back, and conquered a desire to walk back to her. He was smiling faintly to himself as he went on. Somehow the sun was a bit brighter, the day had a greater snap with the knowledge that Rita Carstairs was once more at hand.

An hour later, word was telephoned from Cohatchie that telegrams were being held for Anthony Savage. He drove in to get them, looked up Doctor Summerville for a few minutes, and drove thoughtfully to the trailer.

For the second time that day he prowled about the boathouse; and then, leaving Briggs in charge of the trailer, he went out on the water in their fast little boat. And for a long time he sat in the motionless boat, out in a small lake, some two miles away, staring thoughtfully into the water.

The sun was again dipping in the west when he returned. Briggs was sitting on the float, arms around his bent knees, smoking a cigarette.

"Another fifteen minutes and I'd have started after you," Briggs said as the boat nudged against the float.

"No trouble at all," Savage said, stepping on the float.

"I was talking to one of the maids," Briggs said casually, and appeared not to notice the quick attention Savage gave him. One never knew what information Briggs was apt to ferret out in his casual conversations here and there. "That newspaper girl is out of

our hair for good," Briggs imparted carelessly.

"How do you know?" asked Savage keenly.

"She got a long-distance telephone call and left pronto."

"Whom was the call from?"

Briggs flipped his cigarette into the water and shrugged.

"The maid—Gladys is her name, swell kid and lonesome out here—took the call and got Miss Carstairs to the telephone. And Miss Carstairs seemed in a hurry all of a sudden. She ordered her bag brought down right away, said good-by to Miss Bellamy, and left."

"Some reason for that," Savage murmured, wrinkling his brow and looking thoughtfully toward the house.

Briggs grinned. "The maid heard her tell Miss Bellamy that if you asked where she was, to tell you her paper had sent her to Havana on important business. She's a sorority sister of Miss Bellamy, by the way. That's where she gets her drag."

"Didn't the maid hear Miss Carstairs say where she was going?"

"She didn't say, Chief. Said she had an assignment, and kissed Miss Bellamy and said she didn't know when she'd be seeing her."

"I'm going to Cohatchie," stated Savage.

THE same blonde telephone girl was on duty at the switchboard. "You want to know who called her," she greeted when Tony Savage swung into the room.

His smile was admiring. "You should be doing something better than this, with that mind."

"All I need is an understanding man, I suppose?"

"All I need—and the sheriff, of course," said Savage across the low

railing that separated them, "is a bit of knowledge about that telephone call."

"Is this official?" she wanted to know.

"Most official."

"I can't repeat a conversation," she informed him primly. "But I owe that woman something for double-crossing me last night. Have you heard that a Mr. James Larnigan was found burned to death in the wreck of his automobile, near Torrington, over near the Alabama line, shortly after daybreak this morning?"

"Great Scott! James Larnigan? Are you sure of the name?"

"They identified the car by the license tags about noon today. It *might* have been the same man who made a call in here last night."

"Has the sheriff been notified?"

"Number please. . . Thank you. . . ." She pushed in a plug, and said: "Miss Carstairs didn't tell him, I'm sure. Her paper was calling from New York. She said she'd kill the story at this end, and was leaving at once."

"And she left," said Savage, starting toward the door. "Thanks. I'll tell the sheriff." He paused in the doorway and grinned back. "By the way, Miss Carstairs didn't give you away last night. She let something slip I knew she didn't know, and I guessed the rest. Don't hold it against her."

The blonde little operator's outraged reply followed him through the doorway. "I'll *never* trust anyone again!"

The coroner had not received his autopsy report as yet. Savage had a five-minute talk with the sheriff, and in another ten minutes was back at the trailer.

"Hitch up. We're leaving," Savage ordered Briggs. "Pick me up at the house."

CHAPTER X

Further Along the Trail

DUSK was falling when the long gray car and the sleek, gleaming trailer rolled through Cohatchie; darkness fell and the powerful headlights bored a way into the north.

They stopped once to file a long telegram to Johnston, at the Pan-America offices in New York. They ate a hurried meal in a Greek restaurant in the same town, and rolled on.

And then the hours of the night began to file by like methodical mile-posts; the road became an unending tunnel of light through which they smashed, rocked, bored with a fury of speed that increased as the night wore on and traffic slackened.

Briggs spent most of the time until midnight back in the trailer working his short-wave set, keeping contact with New York. Several times he telephoned messages up to Savage, at the wheel, and got replies to send back.

They stopped for gasoline and oil near midnight, and Briggs had sandwiches and steaming coffee ready in the trailer. Ten minutes and they were off again toward the west, hour after hour across the long thin finger of Florida that reached out around the Gulf Coast for hundreds of miles toward the setting sun.

The white moon faded into the whiter dawn, and the gold and scarlet of the sunrise swept up over the sky behind them; and the hour-old sun was lancing off the metal sides of the trailer, when Savage slammed on the brakes and brought the long heavy outfit to a careening, skidding stop on the edge of the road.

The spot was on a curve; the bank fell away some twenty feet on the right, the outside of the curve, and

reed-choked swampland stretched for a quarter of a mile to tall, gaunt trees.

A flock of birds swept up from the reeds with a whir of wings and a crackle of sound; the trailer door swung open and Briggs stumbled out, clearing sleep from his eyes with the back of one hand and rubbing the side of his head with the other hand.

"You pitched me out on the floor with that stop," said Briggs—and then Briggs gaped down the bank, into the reeds, where the fire-blackened skeleton of a big sedan lay drunkenly with one running board in the ooze.

"Larnigan's car?" said Briggs, who knew more now about the matter than when they had started.

"I judge so," Savage said. "Torrington's about five miles ahead by the speedometer. I've been watching for the wreck. Almost missed it at that."

Briggs swept a glance along the curve, and looked back some yards where the bank was gouged and torn in two descending spots that formed grim steps down to the final resting place.

"He must have been hitting it up around this curve to go off that way," was Briggs' opinion. "Or maybe he went to sleep at the wheel."

"Possibly," agreed Savage. He stretched stiffly and stared at Briggs from bloodshot eyes. "I almost went to sleep a time or two myself before the sun came up. Shake up some more coffee. We're here now; we can relax a little and give them time to get up in Torrington."

WHILE Briggs was making coffee, Savage climbed down the bank. Someone had stretched a long plank out to the running board of the car. He balanced across it and studied the wreck.

The car itself was not battered much; fire had done most of the damage, and the flames had burned with a fury which had gutted the interior of every combustible thing.

An old truck which he had passed a mile or so back rattled up and stopped in front of the gray sedan. A white-haired negro leaned out.

"Sho' a mess, ain' she, Boss?"

"Bad," agreed Savage, starting up the bank.

"I found hit, suh," the old Negro announced with pride. He clambered stiffly out and surveyed the wreck with an air of possession. "Come dis way ev'y mo'nin', I do, an' she was still hot an' flamin' when I come by heah yes-tiddy mo'nin'."

Breathing faster from the climb up the bank, Savage stopped by the old man.

"You don't say?" said Savage with an interest that was flattering to the narrator. "How long had the car been down there when you found it?"

"Don' ezactly know, suh. Mist' Clydewater, de sheriff deputy-man fum To'ington, say mos' a hour he reckon."

"And the man was inside?"

"Yas, suh—what was lef'! I seen a foot ouden de window an' like ter run offen de road gettin' into To'ington. Sho' nuff, I did. One foots is all I needs in er case like dat."

"Where is the body?"

"Hit er at de buryin' man's at To'ington, suh. What dey found tuh take in. Wasn't much."

"What's the sheriff's name?"

"Clydewater too, suh. De deputy-man air kinda kin-folks to him. Both de same name. Only Mist' Little John Clydewater, de deputy-mans is married, an' Mist' Big John Clydewater, de big she'iff man, ain't. Was you aimin' to talk to him, suh?"

"I might," Savage admitted, smiling.

"Yes, suh! He de talkinest man too. 'Bout fum now on to you gits to town, he be eatin' in Mis' Hightower's eatin' place by de co'thous."

"Coffee!" Briggs called out the trailer door.

They had rolled through towns like Torrington during the night. Houses mostly of wood, a few of brick, weathered, placid under the patina of the years; stores, garages, filling stations, the inevitable hotel or two and moving picture theater along the main street. You came on them suddenly—and as suddenly they were a forgotten cluster of lights along the endless ribbon of highway that threaded the lonely countryside.

THEY found an old brick courthouse in the center of a small sleepy square just stirring for the day. Across the square, white letters on a neat window said: MRS. HIGHTOWER'S RESTAURANT.

The fragrance of coffee, hot cakes, ham and eggs and freshly baked bread met them inside. Three men on stools at the counter were eating. The booming voice of the largest man was scoffing: "Ain't a hawg in the world'll weigh that much in six months. I've had hawgs all my life and oughta know hawgs from grunt to squeal. Every time Bill Jenkins tell it, he adds fifty pounds. Why, suh—"

"I beg your pardon," Savage broke in. "Mr. Clydewater, the sheriff?"

"Yes, suh, the sheriff, suh." Big, broad-shouldered, genial, Clydewater turned on the stool to survey the strangers. He shook Savage's hand when Savage introduced himself, and gestured hospitably to the stools beside him. "Have some coffee, gentle-

men. Mis' Hightower's coffee ain't beat between Jacksonville an' New Awleans, suh. I've been drinkin' it sixteen years an' it's a fact."

Haste could best be served at times by observing local amenities. For some minutes the sheriff's voice dominated the counter with local generalities, and then they strolled outside.

"I stopped to ask you about that wreck east of town yesterday morning," Savage said.

"Wondered if you didn't, suh," Clydewater nodded genially. "I saw you were a stranger. Lots of folks have asked. Newspaper man, suh?"

"Insurance claims," said Savage. "What do you know about the matter?"

"Well, suh, he went over the bank an' burned up. I took the license tag numbers an' found out from Louisiana who he was. His sister's due here this mawnin' to take the body home."

"Has the body been examined closely?"

"There wasn't much left to examine. The gas tank let go. His watch stopped at four fifty-three, near as we can make out from what's left of it. Metal parts was about all that was left in the car. Some pieces of money, his watch an' belt buckle an' the empty shells from some rifle cartridges that exploded. Scattered all over in the back seat, they was; some of the bullets had gone through the sides of the car an' a couple of them had gone into his head."

"The rifle was there?"

The sheriff shook his head. "Funny about that. He was carryin' the cartridges—but no rifle for 'em. We looked all around the spot to make sure it hadn't fallen out. Didn't think much about it myself until a newspaper w-man telephoned me last night from Jack-

sonville an' talked twenty-two minutes askin' questions.

"Must of cost her a week's pay. She asked me if there was a rifle in the car. I told her no, an' she asked me again if I was sure."

"What else did she ask?"

"Well, suh, most everything she could think of. Wanted to know how the road was along here, an' if I was sure it was an accident, an' if any suspicious characters had been seen around here early in the night. I've sorta been looking for her today. She asked me how long it'd take to drive here."

"She hasn't come?"

"Haven't seen her, suh."

"**H**ERE is my card," Savage said. "I suggest you get in touch with Sheriff Proctor, of Cohatchie, Florida. Proctor wanted to question this man Larnigan about another matter. He'll be interested in this. And before you let the body go, I suggest also you have any bullets in it removed and sent to the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, in Washington. They'll classify the bullets and have them in case they're needed."

"Needed for what, suh?"

"When Larnigan left Cohatchie, he was carrying a rifle. There's not much chance he left it anywhere along the road. It evidently was taken out of the car before the fire."

"You mean, suh, by force? In a hold-up? You seem to know a lot about this, Mr. Savage."

"A little," said Savage. "I've just come from Cohatchie. Larnigan's rifle

is gone. Someone has it. Any bullets in Larnigan's body may be needed later to compare with a possible gun that might have fired them into the body."

Clydewater's broad face was a study in amazement.

"I never thought of that!" he muttered. "So that's what that woman was driving at? Yes, suh! I'll do somethin' about it right away, while I've got jurisdiction! You say you know this Cohatchie sheriff?"

"When you talk to Proctor," said Savage, "tell him I'll telephone him this evening. Thank you, Sheriff."

The long trailer and car rolled through Pensacola less than an hour later; and another hour saw the road dropping down out of the turpentine pines to the flat marshlands skirting the salt waters of Mobile Bay.

Ahead of them the spidery steel skeleton of the great Cochrane toll bridge soared across the rippling bay.

Savage cut off his motor as they rolled to a stop at the toll house. He opened the door, spoke to the keeper.

"Are you the man who was on duty here yesterday morning between day-break and about this time?"

The thin-lipped, shrewd looking man he addressed gave him a sharp look.

"Funny," said the toll collector, "what a heap of interest folks is takin' in who was here yesterday mornin'. You're the second car in three hours that wants to know. You're carryin' New York tags, ain't you? The young woman that asked the same thing two-three hours ago had New York tags too, an' seemed in a powerful hurry. You following her?"

The MURDER CARAVAN continues to march on from coast to coast—while Tony Savage, Ace Investigator, follows in the wake of these mystery killings with his crime laboratory trailer. Is Larnigan's sudden death just one of a series planned by a single cunning murderer?—Or is it the handiwork of a shrewd crime syndicate? Tony Savage is determined to find out—so don't miss the next installment of Tony Savage's investigations coming to you in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Death in the News



By Richard
L. Hobart

Author of "Eight-Column Headlines," etc.

*A Good Detective Learns to
Expect the Unexpected. . . !*

"You forgot your
late edition, dearie,"
Old Mag croaked

I WAS out of a job. Not worried, mind, and with a goodly sum in the bank, but I was looking around for something to do. I'd let my special agency business go to pot while serving as the personal investigator for Governor Caleb Young, defeated ten days before when he ran for a second term. The political machine got him, the clique run by Art Bombaugh and his gang of crooks. Bombaugh had the politics of the state tied up. Caleb Young was not a politician, just a rich man who wanted to carry the torch of honesty and, in his first term, was about to get somewhere when the elections came up and he was defeated by a margin that was narrow enough to call for a recount, but he was far too proud to do that.

All I had to do now after the three

years neglect of my business was to rebuild it from the bottom. But I had friends—and enemies.

So when I walked into the Peacock Grill and called for a drink I stood at the far end of the bar, for near the door was Art Bombaugh and some of his cronies. I don't look for trouble, would have beat it across the street to Jake's Place if I'd known Bombaugh was in the Peacock, but right now wild horses couldn't have dragged me out.

Bring to mind the picture of the gangster of the 1920's and you have Art Bombaugh. About fifty, big and loosely built, a powerful man. He looked at me, his black eyes deep in the fleshy swarthinness of his face, and sneered as I went past.

SHORT
THRILLER

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Gren Hannigan," he leered, face twisted.

The four or five men with Bombaugh looked up, laughed the same way their boss did. They would, the lugs.

I didn't say anything, didn't even look around. I went on down to a spot at the end of the bar and ordered Scotch and soda. I shot the water into the glass, raised it to my lips.

The batwing doors that led from the main dining room near the street to the bar slapped back, both of them slamming into the wall. Standing inside the bar was a man, a youngster. He had a gat in his hand and his eyes spelled important business.

He glared at Bombaugh, his gat held stiff at his hip. Bombaugh's fingers all at once had become thumbs; his glass of liquor dropped to the floor and made tinkling noise. The youngster with the gat spat out:

"I got you, Bomby! You yellow cur! Talking like that to a lady—"

"Wait—listen, Mac—" Bombaugh began.

The kid was a fool. He had eyes for nobody else in the room, saw only Bombaugh cringing before him like the yellow dog he is. I was twenty feet away, unnoticed by the kid with the gun. Something had to be done or that kid would have a murder rap to beat and against Bombaugh that was impossible.

Sure, you'd have done the same thing. I hated Bombaugh like double-distilled arsenic, would have shot him in a moment if he even looked like he wanted to snatch a gun against me. But murder is murder—even if the victim is a yellow dog.

I grabbed my gun, pulled the trigger once. My bullet hit where I'd aimed; the calf of the kid's left leg. Not a dangerous hit at all, but painful. The

poor kid screamed, flopped to the floor. His gun fell from his hand and skated across the tile floor to Bombaugh's feet. Bombaugh screamed out a curse, stooped like a flash and gathered in the gun. While he was low against the floor he fired—twice.

I leaped for him, tore the gun from his hand and threw it behind the bar. At the same moment, I pushed Bombaugh headlong and he sprawled to the floor. I was plenty sore.

I turned to the kid but saw at a glance it was no use. In the center of the youngster's forehead was a blue spot now slowly oozing red. He was plenty dead. I turned to Bombaugh who now was slowly getting up from the floor.

"It'll go down as self-defense, Bombaugh," I rapped out at him, "but in my mind it'll always be murder. I shot the boy's legs from under him and he was helpless. Yet you blasted him!" I was fuming. "You damn' yellow dog!"

"Sure, I shot the louse!" Bombaugh blustered hysterically. "He was out to get me. I've got witnesses it was in self-defense. It's Chet McAn; he used to work for me. I caught him—er—stealing—"

"Accusing someone of stealing sounds funny coming from you, Bombaugh," I told him and he flushed.

"What you mean, Hannigan?" he snarled. "I'll get you for—" His face changed and he stepped forward. "I'm forgetting myself, Hannie. Both of us are. I was flustered a while ago." He smirked. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature. I—I shot before I thought, naturally. I'm sorry—now. But I owe you a lot. You saved my life and what I said a while ago—well, just forget it." He grinned and stuck out his hand.

I nodded, made no effort to shake

with him. "Tell the police I'll be in my office in the Dermott Building if they need me." I brushed past him and walked out.

I FINALLY got through the crowd outside and stopped at Old Mag's newsstand fifty feet or so away. Even some of the oldest inhabitants of Central City couldn't remember when Old Mag came to Locust Street as a seller of newspapers and a few weekly and monthly magazines. She tenanted a booth-like lean-to stuck in between the building next to the Peacock Grill and a hardware store. In its shadowy interior Old Mag stayed sixteen or more hours a day, her face barely discernible in the gloom of the little room. She knew everybody in Central City, knew lots of things about its political life. But she knew the crime side best. Old Mag was no criminal, mind, but newspaper sellers get to know secrets—all kinds of secrets.

"Did I hear shooting inside, Hannie?" Old Mag asked with one of her toothless grins. She jerked a thumb in the direction of the milling throng outside the Peacock Grill.

"Yeah," I told her, giving her a dime for a two-cent paper and waving away the change. I sketched briefly what had happened. She shook her white head, and there was something in her face that had me guessing for a moment.

"That Bombaugh! He'll wake up dead some morning, dearie."

I grinned at her. She called those she liked dearie, whether it was the mayor of Central City or a sidewalk bum. I was proud of her liking me. She was the greatest help I'd had in a case a few months before for Governor Young. She was a kind of mother to me, if you see what I mean. I used

to sell papers myself, and many a time she kept a bigger boy from taking my corner.

"And you saved the big boy's life for him, Hannie? *Tch, tch!*" Old Mag shook her head as if she didn't like it.

"It was just one of those things, Mag," I grinned at her. "Funny at that. Bombaugh fighting and defeating my boss, the only man who's been honest in state politics, and me saving his lousy life for him. Oh, well." I shrugged.

"He'll be thinking he's under obligations, dearie," Old Mag worried. "Watch out for guys who come to you with phony gifts." She winked. Old Mag was no fool, and I suspected she was lots smarter than she let on to be.

There was a wailing from up the street and a police car slid to a stop in front of the Peacock. It was followed a moment later by a clanging ambulance. I turned to Old Mag.

"Keep an eye peeled for me, Mag. If you see anything that looks queer remember it. I'll be seeing you." I walked on up the street, turned the corner and went to the second floor of the Dermott Building where I had a small office.

Never having anything of value in my office I always leave the door unlocked. I opened it, suddenly grinned when I saw a girl sitting in my desk chair. She was a brunette, had a pert face, amber eyes and a chin that had "I usually get my way" moulded in it.

It was Reba Young, daughter of ex-governor Young.

"Something for you, mug?" she grinned at me, business-like.

I sniffed, looked around my nearly bare office. "I'm not dealing with a

joint like this. I want class when I have detecting to give out. This is an ump-day." I screwed up my face to look snooty. Then we both laughed.

"Hannie!" she cried.

"Reba!"

I jumped forward, took her hand in mine. Reba Young was plenty close to my own age to give me ideas—which I kept strictly to myself. Imagine a lug like me thinking the daughter of a governor—well—might fall for me! At that, it made good thinking. Every man one time in his life thinks he has a chance to be president some day. I'm just a bit over twenty-seven and if I have thoughts they're my own business.

"How's the governor's only che-ild?"

I asked, then answered the question for myself. "Roses in her cheeks, eyes a bit—er—worried about something, dressed like a girl out of a cigarette ad, mighty neat—er—" I looked her over, then blushed.

"Legs," she supplied, and laughed up into my red face. Then she nodded, her face not showing laughter now. "The old sleuth, eh? Deduces something and puts a big finger on the sore spot. Not exactly troubled, Hannie, but a bit worried." She grinned again. "I've been insulted, old dear."

"Say!" I was frowning now. "Who you want killed?"

"Whoa and back up!" She was frowning now. "Not that bad, Hannie. I mean I'm considering the source and it's not worrying me a bit. I'm just afraid somebody else might get hurt. He's a nice kid even if he has been a crook, and I don't want your boy friend, Mr. Bombaugh, to manhandle him."

"Bombaugh? Nice kid?" I questioned, puzzled. "What's up?"

"A youngster who swears he'll kill

Bombaugh on sight. And it's all over me." Her amber eyes clouded. She looked at me, a curious little tremulous grin on her lips. "As—as if I were worth it, Hannie."

"You're worth—" I started hotly. Then I stopped, a big question mark in my mind. And I believed I knew the answer. "Who's this kid you speak of, Reba?"

"A youngster who got a bad start and tied in with Bombaugh until he found out what a crook he is. Nice kid, too. Name's Chet McAn. Happen to know him?"

FIFTEEN minutes later I had Reba quieted. She didn't blame me a bit for what I'd done. But she took it to heart about what the kid had tried to accomplish. Of course, I told her what Chet McAn said just before he got blasted, and it made her face twist into a hate I'd never seen there before. At that moment, she would have gladly pumped Art Bombaugh full of neat holes. And I couldn't blame her.

Finally she told me the story.

She was sitting alone in her coupé the day before when Bombaugh drove up, young Chet McAn acting as his chauffeur. Reba was parked off to herself in the lot maintained by the Hot Shoppe, a place on the edge of town serving sandwiches of all kinds, cold drinks, and light lunches. It was one of those places where they serve you in your car if you don't want to go inside.

Bombaugh had McAn stop the car next to Reba's. He tried to get fresh, made some insulting remarks when she paid no attention. Reba said she saw the kid, Chet McAn, start to boil. But, of course, he couldn't do anything. So after Bombaugh got through—Reba hardly saying a word but go-

ing on with her sandwich — he drove off. Chet McAn's face was white with anger at what Bombaugh had done.

Later that afternoon, Reba was home by herself. The doorbell rang and Chet McAn asked if he might come in.

"Honest, Hannie," Reba said, "I felt sorry for the kid. He's only about twenty and I know he had a good streak in him. He had a sort of abashed look on his face when he glanced at me as if he were thinking of himself talking to the daughter of the governor, and—oh, I don't know what or how to say it, Hannie, but he seemed to be looking up to me, if you understand what I mean!" She bit at her lips to keep from crying, then went on.

"It seems that Bombaugh kicked the out because he—the kid—was sore at the way I'd been treated. McAn said he didn't care about that, and had a way to get even. As McAn left Bombaugh's office yesterday after getting fired he saw a registered letter on the desk in the outer office. It had been receipted for by Bombaugh's secretary, Abe Kanntor. This all happened at lunch time so it isn't hard to understand how the registered letter was left on the secretary's desk. Kanntor probably thought Bombaugh would see it when he returned to the office.

"Well, what does this crazy kid do but stick the letter in his pocket. Later he opened it. What he found inside was something he knew Dad would be interested in. Then he remembered me. So he came on out, told me what he had and left it with me. I can see now that he started hunting Bombaugh as soon as he got away from me. But he didn't locate him until a while ago when—when he was k-killed. I—I had been crying yesterday, and the kid knew it. I guess it—it got him all stirred up and he wanted to—to do his

good deed for the day, and—and g-g-got shot and—"

She was crying again. I went over to her, patted her shoulder. She looked up at me and tried to smile.

"Let—let me have your handkerchief, you—you big mug," she said.

Well, I helped her get right again, gave her a cigarette and held the match. Then I asked: "And what was in the letter, keed?"

"Evidence that Governor Small, Bombaugh's candidate, was elected by a stuffed ballot!"

"What?"

"Yes," she nodded, "the complete story, Hannie! It—it implicates some pretty big men in the state. From the governor down. They have plans laid for a gigantic steal of state funds through crooked road building contracts. Bombaugh stands to make a million out of it this year and plenty more next."

"Judas Priest!"

I WAS on my feet, face alight with excitement. It was what I'd wanted! Governor Young, as I've already said, was no politician. He was just an honest business man worth a million or so who wanted to do something for his state. He was thinking of running for senator now, but I'd talked him out of that as the Bombaugh machine would have nailed him to the mast.

But with this new information!

I turned to Reba Young. "Does the governor know of this yet?"

"Dad? No, Hannie." Her face was troubled. "You know how he is. He'd refuse to do anything with the information even if he had it, would think it an underhanded method of attack. He says if the dear peepul," she smirked and then laughed, "haven't th—er—nerve to vote for him outright

and override crooked influence, then he doesn't want their vote at all." She shrugged. Then she sat forward on the edge of the chair.

"Listen, Hannie," she said, her voice low and intense. "I believe there's some way to get these facts before the proper authorities so that Dad won't appear in it at all. If we can get some high official to sanction a recount, and Dad knows he wasn't the instigator of the investigation, then he'd be willing to serve another term and clean out this nest of crookedness. *You* can work this, Hannie! I don't know how to go about it, but you could—"

"Nix!" I held up my hand. That was TNT done up in a nice package and labeled TROUBLE. Bombaugh would do anything, go to any and all extremes to protect his hold on the crooked politics of the state. It was dangerous doings, could mean curtains—*black* curtains and what are your choice of flowers? I shook my head.

"Listen, keed," I told her, "that's a good way to depart this earth—*fast!* You don't know this Bombaugh like I do. He's poison and you spell it with a capital *P*. You can just bet your last dollar he knows by now that registered letter is gone, probably knows from whom it came. He also knows what's in it and has a pretty good idea who took it and who has it now—*you!* By the way, who sent it?"

"A man by the name of John Jones, from the state capital."

"That's a laugh!" I shook my head. "If we check up on that we'll find there's no such man as John Jones. The return card probably is being sent to general delivery. But the sender knew the letter would be properly delivered, and it was, and there's no need of going after the return card.

You put the letter in the safe out at your house, I presume?"

"W-W-Well, no, Hannie," Reba said, her face a bit white. "Y-You see, I wanted you to look it over, so I—I brought it along with me. I have it here in my purse, and—"

"You brought it with you!" I shrieked, my voice louder than I intended. I stepped to her side.

"For the love of Mike, Reba, let me have it! I've got a safety deposit box at the Fourth National and I'll put it there for safe-keeping. Gosh, keed, you shouldn't have brought it here with you. It's dangerous, damn' dangerous, and—"

"Yeah, Hannigan, you're right. *It's damned dangerous!*"

I guess my mouth fell open as I looked at the open door. For framed in it was Art Bombaugh and behind him was one of his men. And Bombaugh's hand was in the pocket of his light topcoat and I saw the ominous bulge of an automatic!

"**S**SOMEBODY let out the dogs, keed," I said to Reba. She had fallen back in her chair, face white, eyes wide in terror. I saw her fingers tremble as she tried to knock ash from her cigarette. It fell on the gray fur of her coat, merged and disappeared. I grinned down at her.

"Perk up, keed. These babies have more sense than to start anything in the middle of town." I jerked a contemptuous thumb at Bombaugh and his companion, now inside the office with the door closed.

"Don't bank on that, Hannie," Bombaugh snarled, his voice low and menacing. He said from the corner of his mouth: "Steve, you look through the girl's purse and get me a letter you'll find there."

"Better count your money afterward, keed," I told Reba. "These babies would snatch pennies from Old Mag, the newspaper seller, if they could."

Bombaugh suddenly looked at me, and I knew there was death in those black eyes set in the puffy, swarthy face. Bombaugh meant business; there'd be no fooling now.

The man with Bombaugh, Steve, snatched Reba's purse. She started to scream. Steve slapped her—hard. Reba fell back, utter surprise on her white, drawn face. She whimpered a little—

I guess I went bad at that moment.

My fist slammed out and caught Steve in the mouth. I felt teeth smash, felt hot saliva and blood on my fist. Steve was knocked headlong to the floor. I heard a growl of rage from behind me. It was Bombaugh. He had his automatic out now, but I saw in a snap glance he wasn't taking chances on firing it and bringing curious people. He sliced out at my head.

The barrel of the gun clipped me on the ear and a surge of tingling pain went clear through me. I saw from the corner of my eye that Steve was toiling to his feet, shaking his head and spitting blood. Reba, one cheek marked white and red where Steve's fingers had slapped her, seemed in a daze.

Bombaugh drove at me, his big body pressing against mine. He outweighed me thirty pounds. I could whip him in a fair fight, but I couldn't do much against his big bulk and feeling like I did after that clip on the head. I knew Steve was wobbling toward me. He passed Reba slumped in the chair. All at once I saw her shapely, silken clad legs shoot forward. Steve tripped over them. I remember grinning as I saw him nosedive, then frown at the big runners that appeared almost magically in Reba's sheer hose.

Something thudded against my head. A star rushed at me from about a million miles away, got bigger and bigger. I tried to dodge, but it swerved, hit me right between the eyes.

I wasn't out but three minutes, Reba told me later, and came to thinking I'd been swimming in a lake of icy pitch. But that was only the water Reba was throwing into my face by the glassful. I sat up on the floor, shook fuzzy cobwebs out of my brain.

"The damn' yellow—"

"Curs!"

I blinked, looked straight up and then grinned. Reba Young had my head pillowed in her lap, was looking down at me with quivering lips. She had been crying, but when I grinned she shook her hair out of her face—her hat was all askew on her head—and impatiently dashed her knuckles across her eyes.

"H-H-Here I am crying and—and I'm not hurt at all!" she reproved herself.

I got to my feet, wobbled a few seconds. Then my head cleared. I lit a cigarette, inhaled. "Don't tell me they took the letter!" I said in mock surprise.

Reba nodded, her face white.

"Well," I said, "it looks like no soap. We can't prove a damn thing. Bombaugh has already manufactured an alibi. Technically we are accessories after the fact of robbing Uncle Sam's registered mail. He'll swear if we bring it to court he doesn't know what it's all about—and let's go get a cup of java and a handful of aspirin!"

I steered Reba into the Hotel Mayflower coffee shop and we had a cup of coffee each. Then I ordered another one; I felt like that. We sat in the coffee shop for over an hour, just talking. Reba was worried now and

it tickled me to know that it was over me.

"Listen, Hannie," she said, her face serious. She put her hand on my arm and I could feel her fingers tremble. "It isn't worth it! I mean, if—if you're in danger from that Bombaugh. I knew he was a crook but I—I didn't think he'd attempt murder. Dad will never hear of that letter from me and you mustn't say anything about it. Just as you say, we can't prove anything, and what's the use of getting killed over something that isn't life and death? Dad'd give anything to be governor again just so he could stamp out this crooked regime, but if he knew you were endangering yourself he'd say no."

"No, no, a thousand times no," I hummed to myself. "All right, keed, if you say so. I won't see Bombaugh about it and if you don't want me to stick out of chin I won't. Let it go."

"Hannie, look at me." Reba Young leaned across the table and I found it hard to meet her eyes.

SHE knew, I suspected, that I was lying. She knew I'd hunt out Bombaugh and call for a showdown. But she didn't *want* to believe it. "You're lying, Hannie," she whispered, her face white, her hand clasped tight around mine. "A-a-and I—I love you for it, but, oh, I'm so afraid!"

"Nonsense."

I reached for the check, left a quarter tip on the table. Outside I called a taxi and helped Reba in. She tried to lean out the door for a last word but I very firmly closed it. Her face had a tragic look on it as the cab jerked forward.

It was nearly five o'clock when I got back to my office. I sat around for a while like a dope. I still had a split-

ting headache so I palmed a couple more aspirin tablets, walked over to the washbowl and downed them with a glass of water. I had a pint of Scotch in my desk so tried a highball, letting the liquor mix with the water inside me. Then I felt better.

I took my Police Positive from my desk, looked it over. Then I put a half-dozen extra cartridges in my pocket, slipped the gun into its spring armpit holster, walked out.

I was on the prowl for Mr. Art Bombaugh.

I might as well have stayed in my office. He wasn't in any of his usual haunts, had not been seen. I went in the Peacock Grill and had steak, French fries, more coffee, and apple pie with a double topping of vanilla cream. I felt plenty good now.

It was eleven-thirty when I got the first tip as to where I might find Bombaugh. Jack, barkeep at the Klondike road house, said Bombaugh was in for a while and then left for the Peacock. I jumped a taxi and got off down the street, walked toward the entrance.

"Dearie!" The word came in a hiss from my left.

I stopped. In the dark cubicle that was Old Mag's newspaper stand I saw a dim light, then the shadow of her beckoning hand.

"Hey, keed," I told her, voice low. Then: "Haven't seen Bombaugh around, have you? I want that guy—"

"Sure, dearie," Old Mag said in her cracked voice. "He went in the Peacock a while ago. Seemed to be alone." There was sudden alarm in her cracked voice. "You ain't on the prowl—?"

"Shhhhhh!"

I turned away. I saw Art Bombaugh step to the sidewalk from the Peacock Grill, look around as if he were expecting someone. The street was nearly

dark; there were no pedestrians in sight. It was cold. A clock in the City Hall four blocks away *bonged* midnight. Bombaugh turned toward me. I got back into the shadow and unbuttoned my coat.

Bombaugh came opposite. I stepped out and grinned when I heard his startled squeal.

"It's Hannie, Bombaugh," I said softly, "and I want the stuff that was in that letter!"

"Han—Hannie!" Bombaugh looked at me, his face a pasty blob of white in the darkness. His hand twitched toward his overcoat pocket. I had a gun in his ribs before it had moved an inch.

"I wouldn't," I suggested softly.

"You mean *you* wouldn't!" Something hard and round was jabbing into the small of my back. I felt a hot breath on the nape of my neck, smelled stale beer.

"No," Bombaugh sneered softly, "you wouldn't!" His voice was hard. "Good boy, Steve! I'd better take your gun, Hannie." Bombaugh slid my Police Positive into his pocket, fanned me with practiced hands. He stepped back, satisfied.

Shuffling feet noise came from down the sidewalk. I turned my head. It was Old Mag walking toward us, a folded paper in her hand.

"Quiet, Steve," Bombaugh hissed. "It's that old hag who—who sells newspapers. Step up close but have your gun ready. She'll think it's just a casual conversation— Watch it now!"

"Hello, dearie," Old Mag grinned her toothless welcome at me. "You forgot to get your late edition. Here, I'll put it in your overcoat pocket, you might like to read it. It'll be better company than that slug you're talking to."

She cackled in shrill derision as she

slid the folded paper into my topcoat pocket, walked on up the street.

"Ugly old witch," Bombaugh snarled.

"Yeah, but regular folks and that's more'n I can say about present company," I shot at him.

"What do you care?" he snapped at me. Then to Steve: "Where's the car? We're taking this guy out for a little buggy ride!"

TWENTY minutes later we slid to a stop in the deserted parking lot of the Hot Shoppe. Bombaugh grinned at my puzzled face.

"Didn't know I owned the place, did you, Hannie? It's a swell money-maker, is patronized by the best people." He leered at me.

That explained how Bombaugh had met Reba Young the day before. The Hot Shoppe, set in the center of a huge parking place, was dark except for several night lights. Bombaugh led the way to the side door, opened it. Steve was lock-stepping with me all the way, his gun boring into the small of my back.

We went up to the second floor. It was a big room, was equipped with a pool table and easy chairs. "Just a recreation room where the boys hang out," Bombaugh explained. "Air-conditioned and sound-proof." He was proud of the place.

I walked over and sat in a chair, reached for a cigarette. On the pool table were the racked balls, and staring at me was the black eight-ball. I couldn't help but grin. I'd always heard of being behind the eight-ball, but this was the first time I'd been the one sewed up.

"Hannie," Bombaugh said, his voice calculative, "I've got to do this. You read what was in that letter and

Young's girl did too. If it gets out it might cause some trouble. I've got things tied up too well to allow a slip now. You're going to have to go—the girl later. I ain't never had a girl rubbed but it's not to late to begin." He rubbed pudgy fingers over his puffy face.

I was on my feet, standing in front of him and about three feet away. Bombaugh's gun was still in his overcoat pocket; he was depending on Steve, off to one side, to keep me in my place. There was something inside me now that cut like a knife. Bombaugh would do just as he said. There was no doubt of that. Reba Young was on a spot. After I was taken care of, probably shot down and buried in a shallow grave, they'd go for her. I did the first thing that came to my mind.

I stepped forward, brought my right knee up into Bombaugh's fat tummy. He *whooshed*, bent forward and I straightened him with an uppercut that hit too far on the side of his neck to do much damage. But he went back and down.

At that instant my fist connected, I jumped aside. Steve's gun whammed and I felt the tug of the lead at my overcoat. Steve was rigid about ten feet away from me, his gun settling on my chest for another try. I dived at him, heard the gun pound in the sound-proof room. But it was another miss.

Bombaugh was on his feet, face pasty white, lungs gasping for air. He staggered toward me and he had his automatic out, half leveled. But that blow against his neck made his reflexes slow and he couldn't get his gun hand to function.

I grappled with Steve, heard his gun clatter to the floor across the room as I grasped his wrist in both hands,

twisting and shaking at the same time. I got to my knees, hampered somewhat by my flapping overcoat, slammed downward with my fist and again Steve took it in the mouth as I'd given him it in my office.

I felt my knuckles skin back and the stab of a tooth deep into the flesh. But Steve was snoring. I got to my feet.

And I stood very still. Bombaugh was four feet away, his hand white as it strained against the trigger release of the automatic. My hands were by my side. I felt something, looked down and it was the folded newspaper Old Mag had stuck in my pocket. It was half in and out of my pocket. I drew it out a bit, let it slip to the floor.

"You damn' fool!" Bombaugh grated out. "You may have knocked Steve out but you're not getting off. That letter is hidden in my safe. You'll never see it. You're going, Hannie!"

I was frowning. I knew that in a second or two he would blast me. But something was puzzling me now. It was something that pressed against my right hip, that felt heavy, compact, in my overcoat pocket. I looked deep into Bombaugh's black eyes.

"The end, eh?"

"Yeah, Hannie—the end. I'm blasting you!" The automatic came up.

I dropped like a flash, rolled with the report of Bombaugh's gun. Something stabbed into my shoulder, something that burned like the fires of forty hells. But my hand had streaked to my overcoat pocket. I was under Bombaugh. He stepped back, held the gun trained on my chest. I saw his hand whiten with the trigger pull.

I fired upward through my overcoat pocket.

"That's for Chet McAn!" I spat at him.

There was a look of utter and complete surprise on Bombaugh's oily dark face. He stood swaying, face drenched with white now. I heard the far wail of a siren, a pounding on the door below.

Bombaugh stood another instant. There was a little blue hole under his chin, and the heavy flesh there pulsed rapidly as I'd seen a frog's throat do. It seeped red. He wilted all at once, fell like a bag of wet rags. I got to my feet. I heard Steve stir across the room. Then that shoulder of mine began to pound and quiver.

IT was twelve hours later when Reba Young drove me to the curb in front of Old Mag's newsstand. I started to get out but she yelled to me, came on the run, a folded newspaper under her arm. She grinned at me from the running board, her toothless mouth spread wide.

"How y' feeling, dearie?" she asked softly.

"Fine, darlin'," I told her and there was something in the way of the words, something that kind of pained in my throat. I jerked my head at Reba. "This is Reba Young, the governor's daughter, darlin'. Imagine a nice kid like her taking a chance on a lug like me!"

"I hope *she's* the one," Old Mag said in a low voice.

"Here's something that belongs to you." I put a small, compact package into Old Mag's gnarled hands. "And thanks for tailing me last night and calling the cops." She grinned at me.

"Understand it was useful," she said with a knowing nod at the package I had given her.

"You're telling me!"

I didn't tell her, however, that the gun she had slipped into my pocket the night before along with the newspaper, and all of it done in plain sight of Bombaugh and Steve, was wrapped in five one-hundred-dollar bills! Old Mag might get sore about that.

Cipher Solvers' Club for February

(Continued from page 72)

Los Angeles, Calif.; Elsie A. Turner, Leesburg, Fla.; †Vege e, Globe, Ariz.

Seventeen—†Gladys L. Couch, St. Louis, Mo.; Righty Did, New York, N. Y.; Jay-Ess, Denver, Colo.; Gregory, Taos, N. Mex.; H. M. Hopkins, Baltimore, Md.; Mosark, Portland, Oreg.; †Nonagenarian II, Fancy Prairie, Ill.; O'Phan, White Bear, Saskatchewan, Canada; †Tau Pi, Cincinnati, Ohio; †Posius, Brookline, Mass.; †John T. Straiger, Brooklyn, N. Y.; I. Cipher U., Newport, R. I.; Russell R. Willard, Coopersville, Mich.

Sixteen—Aivlys, Sebring, Fla.; Irving Freedman, Bronx, N. Y.; Iris Goldthorpe, New York, N. Y.; Isabella Grady, Fall River, Mass.; Molinero, Detroit, Mich.; †Sam Spiegel, Butte, Mont.; L. E. S., Firebaugh, Calif.; Robert Williams, Jr., Arlington, Va.

Fifteen—†Denarius, Detroit, Mich.; D. R. Eason, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Elsie, Natchez, Miss.; *Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Ore.; James H. Nelson, Providence, R. I.; Peter Penguin, Washington, D. C.; †Ruth, Lamarie, Wyo.

(Continued on page 119)

Fourteen—†Edna D. Brooks, Attleboro, Mass.; G. Carder, Seattle, Wash.; †Wash, San Diego, Calif.; W5FYL, New Orleans, La.

Twelve—Arbny, Bronx, N. Y.; E. Borrebach, Medford, Mass.; Henry F. Dolliver, Belmont, Mass.; †F. A. Gauntt, Detroit, Mich.; J. L. Harvey, Memphis, Tenn.; Hevan, Le Mars, Iowa; †D. V. J., Minneapolis, Minn.; N. A. O., Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Waltrow, Detroit, Mich.

Eleven—†I'mbak Agen, Bay Shore, N. Y.; L. A. B., Philadelphia, Pa.; †Mrs. Robert De Noyelles, Douglaston, N. Y.; Ellephes, Dorchester, Mass.; Francot, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Wm. P. Grey, Meriden, Conn.; A. B. I., Springfield, Ohio; Paul Moisan, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; †Stas, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Will Will, White Plains, N. Y.

Ten—†Aristocratic, Chicago, Ill.; Solo, Bronx, N. Y.; †Mrs. B. C. Squires, Thomaston, Conn.; Alvin Thomas, Erie, Pa.; Richard K. Trepane, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Nine—August Fromm, Elizabeth, N. J.; A. Novice II, Wallins Creek, Ky.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

By *Stookie Allen*

The ASSASSINS of the SIRDAR



IT WAS NOON AND CAIRO WAS TEEMING WITH PEDESTRIANS WHEN THE CAR OF SIR LEE STACK, SIRDAR OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY, AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE SUDAN WAS MAKING ITS WAY ALONG A CROWDED THOROUGHFARE. SUDDENLY FROM A THROG, THERE EMERGED SEVEN EGYPTIANS OF THE STUDENT CLASS. ONE HURLED A BOMB WHICH FAILED TO EXPLODE. THE SIX OTHER MEN OPENED FIRE WITH AUTOMATIC PISTOLS. GENERAL STACK, AN AIDE AND THE CHAUFFEUR FELL.

AS THE ASSAILANTS PILED INTO TWO TAXICABS AND SPED AWAY, A MOTORCYCLE POLICEMAN PURSUED THEM. A BULLET FIRED BY ONE OF THE KILLERS TOPPLED HIM OFF HIS MOUNT AND SERIOUSLY WOUNDED HIM. THE SIRDAR RECEIVED WOUNDS WHICH PROVED FATAL. THE BULLETS USED HAD BEEN MADE INTO "DUM-DUMS". SIR LEE DIED ON THE DAY FOLLOWING THE ATTACK, NOVEMBER 20, 1924. THE ASSASSINATION, OBVIOUSLY PLOTTED AND CARRIED OUT BY A POLITICAL FACTION, SHOCKED KING FUAD AND HIS MINISTRY. WEEKS PASSED WITHOUT PROGRESS IN THE INQUIRY. THEN A CHANGE IN THE MINISTRY PERMITTED THE BRITISH OFFICIALS TO TAKE A HAND.



ON A LEAD FROM A TAXI-DRIVER, OFFICIALS SEARCHED THE HOME OF MAHMUD EFFENDI ISMAL, AN EMPLOYEE OF THE MINISTER OF WAR. ISMAL HAD FLED, BUT HE WAS TRACED AND ARRESTED. THE AUTHORITIES LEARNED THE PLOT HAD BEEN HATCHED BECAUSE OF LABOR TROUBLE IN THE SUDAN. ON FURTHER INFORMATION FROM ISMAL, THE POLICE CENTERED ATTENTION ON A PAIR OF STUDENTS, WHOM THEY HAD SUSPECTED THOUGH EVIDENCE WAS LACKING.



Sir
Lee Stack

Coming Next Week—



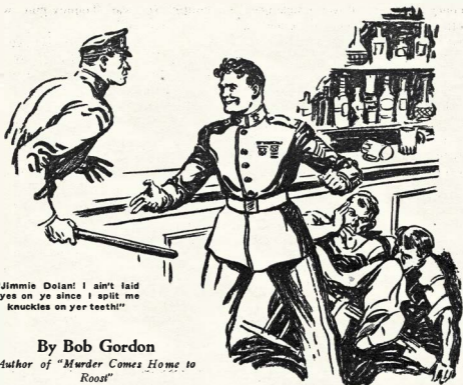
A SECRET SEARCH OF THEIR HOUSE FRIGHTENED THESE TWO INTO TAKING FLIGHT. THEY WERE SHADOWED TO ALEXANDRIA WHERE THEY DISGUISED THEMSELVES AND STARTED FOR TRIPOLI.

BEFORE THEY REACHED THE BORDER, TWO POLICE AGENTS ALSO DISGUISED AS BEDOUINS, ARRESTED THE FUGITIVES. BOTH HAD IN THEIR POSSESSION AUTOMATICS, AND CARTRIDGES NICKED TO MAKE THEM "DUM-DUMS," LIKE THE BULLETS WITH WHICH THE SIRDAR WAS SHOT.

AS A RESULT OF A GRILLING OF THESE TWO, POLICE FINALLY ROUNDED UP FIVE OF THEIR FELLOW-CONSPIRATORS

.....ALL WERE NATIONALISTIC STUDENTS AND RAIL-ROAD WORKERS. THE SEVEN WERE CONVICTED AND HANGED. THE TAXI-DRIVER INFORMER WAS SENT TO PRISON FOR TWO YEARS' HARD LABOR. A FINE OF £500,000 WAS IMPOSED ON EGYPT FOR THE ASSASSINATION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, AND £40,000 OF THE SUM WAS PAID TO THE SIRDAR'S WIDOW.

The Model Nursemaid



"Jimmie Dolan! I ain't laid eyes on ye since I split me knuckles on yer teeth!"

By Bob Gordon

Author of "Murder Comes Home to Roost"

You Can't Kill a Leatherneck

GUNNERY SERGEANT Timothy Boyle slammed shut the door of the range storeroom at Quantico and flung his cap with vehement accuracy, straight toward the hook on the opposite wall. Corporal Ralph Havik looked up from the bench, where he was swabbing cosmoline from rifles, and asked:

"What did the Old Man have to say?"

"And what d'ye suppose he had to say, young feller, me lad?" Boyle exclaimed sarcastically.

"D'ye think he was talkin' about the foine state o' the weather?"

When Death Stalks in the Gun Range Room—It's About Time to Tell It to the Marines

"I wouldn't know," was Havik's noncommittal reply.

"Wait till ye been in the Marines twinty-wan years, like I been, an' ye'll know what the Ould Man sez whin there's a Tommy-gun turns up missin', an' no mistake."

Havik scoffed: "I haven't been in twenty-one years, though, and I won't be. This is my first hitch, and my last. With guys on the outside making big dough, I'd be a sucker to hang around for forty-two bucks a month."

"I wish't I knew some of these big



money monkeys," Boyle complained. "I gotta get me hands on some dough, an' that soon."

"Don't tell me they're sticking you for the missing gun?"

Boyle's leathery face was wrapped in gloom. "They're not only aafter makin' me pay, but they'll be a court-martialin' me, if I don't find one o' Misther Thompson's stutter-guns within two days."

There was a half sneer on Havik's swarthy face as he said: "Well, the money part hadn't ought to bother you, what with second-grade pay, and never spending a nickel."

Boyle flushed to the roots of his thin, red hair. His blue eyes glittered icily.

"Ye'll be makin' a crack about me spendin' habits once too often, young feller, me lad," he warned. "Who be you to criticize, blowin' yer own pay fer gin an' blackjack, whilst I'm supportin' me widowed sister an' her foive young uns? I ain't seen fit to criticize you fer that missin' gun, fer a marine knows how to shoulder responsibility, an' I'm the one who did the signin'. But just the same . . ."

Havik's brows lowered ominously. He balled his big fists and took a step toward the sergeant.

"Are you accusing me of swiping that gun?" he demanded.

Boyle's lips curled upward in a hard smile. He advanced to meet the swarthy corporal, who was three inches taller and outbucked him twenty pounds.

"So it's threatenin' yer serjint, ye are, is it?" he asked, his voice as smooth and hard as a saber blade. "Well, get back to yer cleanin' before I knock yer big nose through the back o'yer head. I ain't accusin' ye of nothin', but ye issued that riot-trainin' detail their arms, an' ye didn't get an ac-

countin' fer wan Tommy-gun, which has disappart."

Havik's defiant glare changed to a dark sullenness as he backed away. It was a full minute before he muttered:

"So what?"

"So kape a civil tongue in yer head!"

Boyle swung on his heel and went back to his desk.

Havik's voice was a sulky growl as he said: "If you hadn't tried to make me the goat, I could have told you where you could raise the money to get out of the jam."

"Goat, is it?" Boyle grunted. "Faith an' bejapers, I ben sproutin' horns an' whiskers iver since I got me stripes. There'd been nothin' said atall, atall, if ye hadn't cracked about me spendin' habits. Now pipe down about it, and I'll do the same."

TEN minutes passed, in a silence broken only by the scratching of Boyle's pen. Then Havik asked:

"How would you like to get in the clear?"

"Shure, an' how would a corset salesman like to meet Mae West? What's on yer mind, young feller, me lad?"

Havik wiped the cosmoline from his hands and pulled up a chair, leaned toward Boyle, his voice low, confidential.

"I know a guy in Washington who will help you out."

"Money's only part of it," Boyle complained. "The old man lectured me about the governmint not wantin' machine guns fallin' into the hands o' criminals. He says he's holdin' me personally responsible to find that gun, an' I lose me stripes if I don't."

"Listen!" Havik leveled a grimy finger at the sergeant's nose. "If you've got the price, you can go up to Ban-

nington's in New York, and buy yourself a gun to replace the missing one."

"Faith an' bejabers, didn't ye ever hear about numbers?"

"Aw, get smart!" Havik exclaimed impatiently. "What's to prevent you from filing off the number and stamping the missing number in its place?"

Boyle shook his head doubtfully. "I read in a magazine where the polace can see through that trick with acid, or ultra-violent rays, or some such."

"Listen!" Havik hitched his chair a foot closer. "Captain Larkey ain't going to make no scientific investigation. All he wants is so many guns, with certain numbers, like it says on his list. You do like I'm telling you and see this guy."

"An' why should a stranger be doin' me favors?"

"It won't be a favor. It's business with him."

Schmitt's Tavern on Tenth Street was a dark, smelly place, with plywood booths along one wall, and a counter the length of the other side. Sergeant Boyle came in and seated himself at a booth. He eyed the spotted tablecloth disdainfully.

A waiter came around from behind the counter, wiping beer suds on an apron already yellow with beer.

"Waddle it be, leatherneck?"

"Wan ale in a clean glass."

Gribble put his hands on his fat hips and sneered, "Oh, a wise guy, huh?"

"Shure, an' would ye be wantin' to make somethin' of it?"

There was something about the eager grin on the sergeant's face that made the waiter turn away without a word. Boyle called to him:

"An' would ye mind fetchin' me Misther Dribble?"

The waiter snarled over his shoulder, "The name's Gribble!"

"Faith, an' what's the difference?" Boyle insisted. "Gribble or Dribble, or even Wibble, he can call himself, so long as ye tell him I'll have me a wor-rd with him at his laysure."

The waiter came back, and said, "Wadda ya want? I'm Gribble."

Entirely unabashed, Boyle explained: "A Corp'ril Havik was afther informin' me that ye could get me in touch with a Misther Martayne."

"Tony Martinez, huh?" Gribble grunted. "Wadda ya want with him?"

"A wor-rd in privut, the subject o' which is no consarn of yez."

"Who'll I say wants him?"

"Gunnery Serjint Timothy Boyle o' the United States Marines, bekownst to Corp'ril Havik. An' if that ain't credentials enough, he can go to blazes."

Gribble nodded glumly. "I'll see if he's in."

"That's downright swate o'ye," Boyle conceded.

The sergeant heard Gribble dial a number at the phone near the door, heard him mumble into the transmitter, but couldn't make out what he was saying. Presently Gribble came around with the ale, half of it foam, and announced, "Martinez will be over in a minute."

A SLIM, sleek-haired man, wearing loud clothes and a derby, came through the door a few minutes later and looked around. He approached Boyle.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Not 'specially," Boyle answered. "But if you're Misther Martayne, I did want to talk with yez."

Martinez eased himself onto the bench on the other side of the table and said, "I'm your man."

"I nade two hundred dollars quick,"

Boyle began bluntly. "Corp'ril Havik sez ye'll help me out, though why ye should is beyond me."

Martinez eyed Boyle shrewdly a moment, then waved a manicured finger at Gribble, ordered wine.

He scratched his nose and addressed the sergeant: "You're the man in charge of the guns down at Quantico?"

"More or less."

"How much more; how much less?"

"I'm in charge o' the range detail storeroom," Boyle replied. "What would that be havin' to do with it?"

"You have access to some Thompson sub-machine guns?"

"Shure, worse luck!" Boyle answered. "That's why I nade money. Some black-hearted thafe stole wan o' thim guns, an' I'm aftler havin' to pay fer it."

Martinez winked a beady eye. "I'm in the export business."

Boyle nodded politely and said nothing. He wanted to hear more.

"I have a market for some guns," Martinez explained glibly. "There's to be a revolution in Central America. With the embargo on arms, they can't be bought here legally. I'm willing to pay a good price for some Thompsons."

"Ye can get all ye want at Bannington's in New York," Boyle offered.

"They sell only on government license," Martinez contradicted. "And in my business I can't get a license."

Boyle nodded again, grimly this time. The knuckles of his big red hands were growing white. Icy glints were flashing in his eyes. He was beginning to understand.

Martinez failed to read the signs. He asked: "How many Tommys can you furnish me at half a grand each?"

The sergeant rose slowly, as far as the table would permit. His face flushed. His red hair bristled.

"So ye'd have me stale gover'mint property an' sell it to the likes of yez, would ye?" His voice was still soft.

Martinez paled, tried to edge out of the seat. Boyle stopped him by grabbing a handful of his coat.

"Don't be a sucker all your life," Martinez gulped.

"A sucker, is it?" The sergeant pulled Martinez closer. "I'll show ye who's a sucker, ye fenigglin' blaggard."

He slapped Tony's face with his open palm, sent his derby skittering over the grimy floor. Then he pushed him away, let go of his coat. Martinez staggered back and fell against a counter stool.

"If ye was my size I'd bate ye to a pulp," he said, without raising his voice.

He dusted off his hands and reached for his hat on the hook.

"I'll cut you down to my size, you overgrown boy scout," Martinez snarled as he got to his feet.

Boyle glanced at him sharply, saw his hand flash from beneath his coat, saw something glitter in it an instant. He leaped sideways as the hand flipped forward. A knife thudded into the booth partition, back of where he had stood.

A tight smile curled the corners of Boyle's mouth as he strode toward Martinez with slow deliberation.

"So ye ain't afther bein' satisfied with a slap in the puss?" he said, with that silky hardness that carried double the threat of any loud-voiced raving. "So it's some sinse ye'll be wantin' me to bate into yer head?"

Martinez retreated along the counter. Boyle followed with a slow, deadly menace. Tony swung an arm out, grabbed a ketchup bottle from the counter, raised it.

And suddenly Boyle was no longer moving slowly. He covered the distance to his opponent in one leap. As the bottle started to descend, Boyle seized the upraised wrist with his left hand, passed his right beneath, and grasped his own forearm to complete the double wrist-lock. The ketchup bottle clattered to the floor and broke. Martinez went over backwards into the crimson mess.

Boyle grabbed him by the shirt front, yanked him to his feet again. "Now we'll be afther fightin' with our fists fer a change."

BOYLE fainted with his left. Martinez ducked his head squarely into a right hook. He sat down again, wiping up most of the ketchup with his loud, checked suit. Something red was trickling from the corner of his mouth, too. It wasn't ketchup.

Boyle smiled down at him.

"Ye'll be afther settin' there a spell, Misther Martayne, until I have me another mug o' ale. Thin I'll be askin' ye where is the Tommy-gun what Corp'ril Havik stole."

Gribble was bending over the counter looking down at Martinez. Boyle failed to note the almost imperceptible nods they exchanged. He was on his way back to the table, for more ale.

Gribble seemed to take his time in serving it.

"Fighting makes a man's throat dry, so Boyle gulped the drink in one long draught. Then he made a wry face, pushed the glass away.

"'Tis a bitter brew ye be servin' in this dump," he commented.

"Why not try some beer?" Gribble suggested. "It's better'n this swill."

"It couldn't be worse!"

It seemed to be taking an awfully long time for Gribble to get that beer.

Boyle decided that the ale carried quite a kick. He was getting drowsy. He caught himself nodding, sat up with a start. Everything seemed to be so . . . far . . . away. He settled back in the corner of the booth and permitted his head to slump forward. He was sleepy . . . so sleepy.

Sergeant Boyle woke up with the sun shining in his eyes. He sat up abruptly, then grabbed his head and lay down again, stifling a groan. A thousand demons seemed to be pounding inside his skull.

"The dairty blaggards," he moaned to himself. "They slipped me a Micky Finn."

He opened his eyes slowly and focused them on the strange surroundings. He seemed to be in a cheap hotel room, though how he got there he could only guess. Whoever had deposited him on the squeaky iron bed hadn't bothered to remove his clothes. He eyed the wrinkles in his usually immaculate blue uniform with disapproval.

The cheap wrist watch, still ticking for a wonder, told him it was thirty.

The full import of that didn't dawn on him for a minute. When it did, he sat up again with a start, pressing thumbs against his temples to keep his throbbing head from flying apart.

"Thirty-thirty!" He gasped. "Faith, an' me troubles are doublin' up on me, an' no mistake. Here it is tomorrer, an' me absint without lave since reveille. Twinty-wan years I had to spend in the Corps to see the inside o' the brig."

He tottered to the wall phone and ordered ice water, aspirin, and bromo seltzer. Then he dug into his pocket to see if he would be able to pay. Apparently robbery had not been the motive for giving him knockout drops, for the

two crumpled bills—a five and a one—were still intact.

After dosing himself liberally, he found the bath down the hall. A cold shower, and he felt almost as good as new. He was ready to go out before he discovered that his cap was missing. He'd have to go back to the tavern to see if he could recover that. A marine in uniform can't be running around bareheaded.

Down in the dingy lobby he paid his bill. The day clerk, a spectacled old gent, answered gruffly that he didn't know who brought Boyle to the hotel. His tone indicated that, since the modest bill was paid, he didn't greatly care.

"The night clerk," he conceded, "said you was sleepin' off a drunk, and not to disturb you."

The single negro bellhop gave him a more pleasant response, but was of no more help.

Outside, he noted that the hotel was on Ninth Street, near "H". It couldn't be far from Schmitt's Tavern. He bought a paper, then entered a cheap cafe for a late breakfast. After ordering he spread the paper on the counter, and almost fell off the stool when he found himself staring at a two-column cut of his own likeness.

The headline read:

MARINE HUNTED IN MURDER OF CAPTAIN

There was some more below that—two columns of it, carrying over to the next page. The gist of the story was that Captain Larkey had been found, shot to death, in the range storeroom at Quantico.

THE murder having taken place on government property, investigation of the crime had been promptly

turned over to the Department of Justice.

G-Men announced that two bullets from a service .45 had caused the death; that the motive was robbery, five Thompson sub-machine guns, six automatics, and more than a thousand rounds of ammunition having been stolen.

The theory was that Captain Larkey had discovered someone in the storeroom late at night, had entered to investigate, and had surprised the thief at work, only to be shot. The robber had gained entrance by unlocking the door. The key, still attached to the ring, was in the lock. The Post Quartermaster stated definitely that there were only two keys that fitted that particular lock. Captain Larkey carried one—it was still in his pocket. Sergeant Timothy Boyle carried the other. It was in the lock, identified by the aluminum tag on the ring.

Sergeant Boyle's cap was on the floor of the storeroom.

Sergeant Boyle was absent without leave. A reward was offered for his arrest.

Breathless, his fingers clenching and unclenching, ripping the edges of the paper to shreds, Boyle read on. When he came to the part about the keys he slapped his pocket. Yes, his own keys were gone.

Then that sudden feeling of helplessness changed to cold fury. He left the paper on the counter and stamped out, leaving his breakfast untouched. He started up the street toward Schmitt's tavern. He'd show 'em, "The dairy blaggards!"

His stride grew slower as calculating thought replaced his rage. The sensible thing to do was to give himself up to the first policeman he met, tell what had happened. They'd believe him.

But would they understand, would they believe, without proof? Sharp fangs of doubt gnawed at his brain. What proof had he that he had been doped, that his keys had been stolen, that he had spent the night and most of the day sleeping off the effects of chloral hydrate? That cheap hotel was just another dump, of the same caliber as the place in which he had been doped. It would be easy for them to say that they had never seen him before. Why, he hadn't even registered.

"I'll get thim snakin' murderers meself," he promised, and quickened his stride.

He cut through an alley to the next street. No use taking unnecessary chances on being recognized. His photo was spread over the front page of the papers. It was an old photo, taken years before, when he was the backbone of the rifle team, but he hadn't changed much.

Louis Schmitt himself was behind the counter of his establishment when Boyle entered.

"What'll you have, marine?" he asked pleasantly.

"I'll have me a wor-rd with Misther Dribble," Boyle replied ominously as he strode past.

Andy Gribble was sloshing beer glasses in dirty water to wash them, when he saw Boyle approach. He paled. His jowls quivered. But he wiped his hands on his apron, closed his fist over the neck of a bottle, and stood his ground.

"Sumpin' I can do for you, brother?" he asked, attempting to mask his fear with a bland look of innocence.

Boyle was smiling, that tight little smile of his, more terrible than any scowl. His eyes flashed blue lights, but his voice was silky smooth.

"Ignorin' fer the moment yer own personal answerin' fer that Micky Finn, ye can inform me where I can lay me hands on Misther Martayne."

Gribble tried to brazen it out. "I'm afraid you have the wrong place, brother. I never heard tell of anyone by that name."

Boyle rested his knuckles on his white belt, stood there with arms akimbo, his feet planted wide, his head tilted.

"So that's how it is? I suppose ye don't know who I am ayther?"

"Can't say as I do, brother." Gribble's lips were blue, twisted to a sickly smile. "I don't believe we ever met before."

"The likes of you shouldn't be afther callin' me brother," Boyle warned quietly. "Me sainted mither niver raised no sich scum as yez. Now, I'll give ye just wan more chance't to tell me where I can find Martayne, before I come over that counter an' plaster ye agin' the wall."

BOYLE hadn't raised his voice, but Schmitt could smell trouble. Big, beefy, a former pug gone soft on his own beer, he came from behind the counter and approached Boyle, hands in pockets.

Boyle could picture himself being taken in flank if he waited for enemy reinforcements to arrive. Without warning, he launched himself over the counter, head first, grabbed a handful of Gribble's shirt in each fist.

The shirt tore as Gribble took a panicky step backward and raised the bottle. Boyle let go with both hands and clutched at that arm, caught it as the bottle descended toward his head. He twisted around so his back was against the counter, retaining his hold. Gribble howled and dropped the bottle

as his arm twisted in Boyle's grasp.

Schmitt yanked a whistle from his pocket, blew shrill blasts on it as he ran to join the fray. He grabbed at the sergeant's feet and missed, as Boyle doubled his legs swiftly. He grabbed again, to have those heavily-shod feet shoot through his hands, strike him full in the chest. Schmitt catapulted backward against a table, knocked it over, fell on top of it.

Still retaining his two-handed grasp on Gribble's wrist, Boyle rolled over again, got his feet on the floor. His double roll had given him a hammerlock on Gribble, who was backed up against the other side of the counter, howling in agony.

"Where's Martayne?" Boyle insisted, his voice still pitched low.

Gribble squealed: "You're breaking my arm!"

"It's yer head I'll be afther breakin' next," Boyle warned, "unless ye answer me question."

But Schmitt's whistle had been heard. The door burst open, to be filled by the giant form of a blue-clad cop.

"Ow—ow!" Gribble wailed. "Help!"

The cop took a firm grip on his club and ran toward the pair, while Schmitt scrambled to his feet, cursing. Three were too many to handle. Boyle eliminated Gribble by letting go of his arm and clouting him behind the ear. Then he wheeled around to face the policeman.

He opened his eyes wide in recognition.

"Why, Jimmie Nolan!" he greeted the cop. "I ain't laid me eyes on ye since that time I split me knuckles on yer teeth back in Port Au Prince. Do all ex-gyrenes wind up on the polace force?"

8D—22

Nolan came to a sliding stop, his face a foot from the sergeant's.

"You?" he roared.

"Shure, an' it's me!" Boyle's leathery face was split with a wide grin. "An' faith, it's glad I am to see yez comin' to me rescue. Well I remember the time I helped ye out in Shanghai, whin three limey sailors was addlin' yer brains with their fists."

"An' I'm glad to see you," Nolan answered gruffly. "The papers are full o' the news, of how ye shot poor Captain Larkey, rest his soul. I was hopin' I'd bump into you, for me an' the old lady can use the reward."

Boyle's jaw sagged. "Ye don't raley think I kilt Larkey, do yez, Jimmie, me bye?" he asked hopefully.

"I ain't paid to think," the cop retorted. "I'm paid to bring in criminals when I finds 'em, no matter who they be."

"Shure, an' ye niver did think, ye turncoat!" Boyle's voice took on that same smooth hardness. "For eight years ye was a privut in the Marines. Fer seven years ye been a patrolman on the polace, poundin' pavemints till yer fate are flatter'n a Filipino sailor's. Help me clane up this blasted joint, an' I'll get ye the rale murtherers. Thin perhaps they'll overlook yer natural-born dumbness an' make ye a serjint."

Nolan grabbed Boyle's left sleeve. "Stow the gab an' come along peaceful, before I clout ye one. Yer under arrest fer murder."

"Oh, I be?"

Boyle jerked himself free with a twist of his body and a lightning shift of feet. With the same motion he hooked his right fist to Nolan's jaw. The cop staggered back, reaching for his holster. Boyle stepped in and sprawled him full length on the floor with a left hook and a straight right.

Schmitt, still unaware of what all the excitement was about, threw a chair. Boyle ducked it, threw one in return, too low for the Dutchman to duck.

Then Boyle got out of there.

A MARINE dress uniform, with its brass buttons and white belt, is conspicuous anywhere. When adorned with scarlet-edged yellow chevrons, five hash marks on each sleeve, and a triple row of campaign ribbons, it would stand out at a fancy-dress ball. When its wearer is bare-headed, with flaming red hair, he not only attracts attention but invites comment. Sergeant Boyle felt that he was hardly attired to escape detection, with his likeness displayed on the front page of every newspaper.

He found a second-hand clothing dealer, who talked as if he couldn't read English, and convinced him that a gaudy wool uniform and four dollars was a good swap for a suit of shoddy civvies and a battered fedora.

After that he felt safer on the streets, but he still avoided all cops.

After dark he decided that it would be safe to return to the vicinity of Schmitt's Tavern. He had given up hope of getting the information he wanted from Gribble; but he remembered that it had taken Martinez only two or three minutes to respond to a phone call from the Tavern. His headquarters would have to be near here. Boyle took up his vigil in a dark doorway across the street, and waited.

He didn't see Martinez, but he did recognize Corporal Havik, in spite of his civilian clothes, as he turned the corner and strode down the block. Boyle followed on the other side of the street, keeping in the shadows, or behind parked cars.

Havik entered a doorway at the next corner. Boyle sized up the building as he strolled across the street. It was an old, two-story, brick affair, the ground floor being occupied by a chain grocery, now closed. Upstairs there seemed to be living quarters. Suffused light glowed around the edges of drawn window shades.

Boyle tried the door through which Havik had passed. It was unlocked. He entered, not noticing a policeman on the opposite corner, who had been watching and who now approached.

The door opened into a narrow vestibule, about twelve feet long. There was another door at the other end, but it was locked. There was a misshapen mailbox on the wall, with no name in the card-holder. Beside it was the pushbutton of a single bell, and the brass mouthpiece of a speaking tube. Boyle had left the outer door open so he could see all this.

He was still debating his next move when he noticed a slow-moving shadow, which the corner street light cast on the sidewalk outside.

A cop! Boyle could tell that by the shape of the shadow, could tell that he was cautiously approaching the door.

Boyle withdrew silently to the edge of the door, pressed himself against the wall, and waited.

The peak of a policeman's cap appeared cautiously at the edge of the door jamb. Risking an eye in an attempt to see into the darkness, the cop thrust a handful of revolver inside.

Raising an arm silently, Boyle struck downward sharply with the edge of his open palm, connecting with the policeman's wrist precisely at that little hollow between the end of the long forearm bone and the thumb.

That blow, delivered sharply and

precisely, paralyzes the hand momentarily. The cop had no power, even to pull the trigger. The hand simply went limp, released the revolver. Boyle's hand was there to receive it.

Before the cop realized what had happened, he was looking into the muzzle of his own gun.

"COME inside!" Boyle whispered. "Keep yer hands up an' yer mouth shut."

The cop, a giant of a fellow, obeyed. Boyle had no idea of using the gun, but the officer had no way of knowing.

Boyle suppressed a chuckle. "So it's you, is it? Me ol' pal, Jimmie Nolan! Ye ain't niver see'd the day, Jimmie, me bye, whin ye could get the better o' Tim Boyle."

"Nuts!" Nolan growled. "Ye'll pay for this day's devilment, mark my words."

"What would they be doin' to a cop," Boyle taunted, "who went back to the station house an' told the serjint that a bad man had swiped his gun? They can't put ye to poundin' a bate, 'cause ye ain't niver done nothin' else."

"Nuts!"

"I ain't inquirin' as to the state o' yer mentality," Boyle went on, "so ye'll get nowhere at all, at all, by tellin' me what the squirrels had for breakfast."

"Nuts!" Nolan still insisted.

Boyle sighed. "I'm afraid ye are, at that. I was hopin' ye'd gather yer wits, long enough fer me to be makin' a serjint of yez."

"They'll make me a sergeant quick enough," Nolan retorted testily, "when I run ye in fer murder."

"Thin it's a rear-rank privet ye'll be all yer life, 'cause I get pinched too infrequent fer the likes of yez."

Nolan opened his mouth to speak. Boyle beat him to it.

"Some more nuts, ye'll be givin' us, is it? Now I'm goin' to win ye a promotion in spite o' yerself."

"Meaning which?"

"Who does the papers say murdered Captain Larkey an' swiped them guns?"

Nolan knew the answer to that. "Why, yerself, Timothy Boyle!"

"An' suppose ye proved that Tim had nought to do with it; and that ye brought in the rale murderers, with the stolen property to prove it?"

"Why, then I'd have stripes on my arms, and be parkin' myself in one o' them prowling cars, listenin' to the radio."

"But it's a man's size job, Mистер Nolan," Boyle taunted. "An' ye got nayther the sinse nor the guts to tackle it."

"I got plenty of both."

"Shure, ye have," Boyle soothed, having gained his point. "Now, here's the layout. A corp'rill what wor-rks fer me just went through that door. He's the black-hearted thafe that tricked me into seein' a feller, who wanted me to stale guns fer him, an' who put knockout drops in me beer and stole me kays an' cap whin I punched his head fer his insolence."

Nolan was only half convinced. "You expect me to believe that?"

"Ayther belave me, or toddle back to the pracinct an' tell yer serjint the bad man swiped yer pop-gun. I'm afther raidin' this place, ayther with ye or agin' ye, so make up that bowl o' tripe ye use fer a mind."

"Ignorin' the insult for the moment," Nolan agreed, "I'll be playin' your hunch with you. But if things ain't the way you say, then you promise to let me arrest you for the murder?"

"It's a bet. Go call Headquarters, tell them you've located Larkey's murderers, and that to come prepared—they're armed with machine guns. I'll be gettin' inside by some trick. If me hunch is wrong, ye can pinch me anyway, so ye'll be in the clear."

"I'll call no riot squad on a wild goose chase," Nolan demurred. "I'll go up with you. The two of us can handle what we find. Give me back my gun."

Boyle handed the weapon over. Against his better judgment, he agreed to act without reinforcements. His thumb pressed against the bell.

A ghostly voice came down the speaking tube: "Who's there?"

"Gribble!" The excitement in Boyle's tone wasn't entirely simulated. "Hurry, open up!"

IT semed like hours before footsteps were heard coming down the stairs. There was the sound of a bolt being shot back, the rattle of a latch.

The instant the door moved, Boyle slammed against it, spilling the man who had opened it. It was Martinez.

Martinez tried to shout, but could only gurgle, with Boyle's hand pressing against his windpipe. Nolan stepped inside quietly and closed the door. Boyle reached under Martinez' coat and found the knife.

"Kape yer mouth shut: an' lead the way upstairs," Boyle ordered Martinez as he released him. "Wan pape out'n ye, an' I'll tickle yer liver with this toothpick. If anywan asks 'who is it,' ye'll say 'Gribble.'"

Martinez led the way toward the light at the top of the steps. Nolan came last, walking on the toes of his broad brogans, his revolver thrust out past Boyle's elbow.

It was strangely quiet upstairs—too

quiet. The sound of their feet on the creaky steps sent tingles of apprehension scampering down Boyle's spine.

The door at the top of the steps gave entrance to a large dining room. Boyle expected bullets as he entered. He took a half nelson on Martinez so he could swing him around to use him as a shield. No one was in sight. He motioned to Nolan to cover the door behind them to the left. He kept his own eyes on the door to the left front, apparently the entrance to the kitchen.

He heard a voice behind him say: "Reach, copper!"

He swung his head to see Nolan covered by a man in the doorway. He was short and thick-set and dark. His finger twitched at the trigger of a Tommy-gun.

Nolan had his hands up. His revolver had fallen to the floor. The gunman kicked it into a corner.

A figure rose up now from behind an overstuffed chair in the corner, levelling another machine gun. It was Corporal Havik, in well-cut civilian clothes.

Another figure came through the kitchen door, similarly armed. Boyle's practiced eye noticed that the action of his gun was on semi-automatic. The fellow had tow-colored hair, close-set, beady eyes, and a peculiarly twisted mouth in which gold-tipped buck teeth flashed. Boyle had seen his picture many times, recognized him instantly as Whitey Wick, the much-sought after public menace who had escaped from the death-house itself at Richmond. That short fellow back there, then, must be Mike Arsotti, who had escaped with him.

Martinez was trying to get away now. Boyle slipped the knife up his own sleeve, and let him go.

Wick snarled: "All right, you dopes!

Up against the wall, there. Keep your hands up!"

Boyle and Nolan obeyed, backed up against the wall near the door. There was an old-fashioned phone on the wall. Without appearing to notice it, Boyle moved to stand near it. He lowered his elbow a trifle, pushed it back against the receiver, then raised his arm until the weight of the receiver was off the hook.

He turned his head toward Nolan, as if speaking to him; but really to get his face as close as possible to the transmitter behind him. When he spoke, it was not in his subdued, silky voice, but in a loud, harsh tone.

"If the polace get up here quick enough they might pravint a couple o' murthers. But they better watch their step, fer Whitey Wick and Arsotti have got thim machine guns which was swiped. . . ."

NOLAN looked at him in puzzled wonder.

Wick barked, "Shut up! What t'hell are you talking about?"

"Just commentin' to me pal on the state of affairs."

Wick turned to Martinez. "Tony, you and Havik take these two mugs out in the country and shut 'em up for good. We can't plug 'em here. We gotta lay low until we stick up that bank tomorrow."

Havik looked at Whitey uncertainly. He was new to the gang, had only been admitted after his part the night before in obtaining the coveted weapons.

Wick said, "Go on! What are you waiting for? And get a rod. You'll be too close in the car to use a chopper. Make them walk down to the car, then sap 'em on the head to keep 'em quiet. Shoot 'em when you get where it's

nice and quiet. Do a complete job."

Havik put the Tommy-gun on the table and asked, "Where are the auto-matics?"

Wick pointed toward the door: "In there."

Boyle spoke to Havik as he started to pass. "You'll niver take me fer no ride, young feller, me lad."

"No?" Havik stopped and turned savagely. "That's what you think."

Boyle could see the corporal was nervous, and he egged him on.

"Ye think we was so dumb as to come bustin' up here on our own? The strate outside, an' the alley behind, are lousy with cops."

Havik's eyes grew wide. Wick's narrowed. All four exchanged trapped, hunted glances.

Wick was the first to speak: "He's bluffing!"

Boyle chuckled. "Shure, an' would ye be afther callin' that bluff?"

Wick ordered: "You fellows take a look-see on all sides. I'll cover these monkeys. If there's cops outside, we'll blast our way out, and these babies will get blasted first."

The three left abruptly, to peer out windows on different sides of the apartment. Only Wick, and his machine gun, remained.

Boyle nudged Nolan's toe, hoped he would understand the signal.

"I don't see anything out here," Havik called from the front room.

Wick flicked his eyes ever so slightly toward the other door and called, "How about that side, Mike?"

Boyle acted on the flick of those eyes. His right arm came forward suddenly, and the keen-bladed knife sped straight toward Wick's face.

Wick ducked and pulled the trigger at the same instant. The dodging prevented aiming. The single bullet ripped

through Boyle's flying coat tail as he leaped sideways, then toward Wick.

He shouted to Nolan, "Get the gun on the table!"

Wick swung the muzzle of the Tommy and pulled the trigger again, flustered to find the action was not on full automatic, too busy to change the action. He got off one more shot at Boyle—a shot that drew blood as it nicked the sergeant's ribs.

Then Boyle was on top of Wick, had the muzzle in his hand, twisted it toward the ceiling as he brought his knee up to Wick's stomach.

Wick's breath went out of him in a grunt. He fell over backward, still clutching the gun, as Boyle fell on top of him, close, so that the long weapon would be useless.

Wick continued to press the trigger spasmodically. The .45 caliber slugs knocked plaster from the ceiling.

Then stuttering hell ripped from the gun in Nolan's hand, firing bursts as Havik and Arsotti rushed to the doors, returned the fire until they dropped.

Arsotti writhed a moment on the floor, then lay still. Havik lay groaning, both thighs shattered by Nolan's fire.

And Boyle had both his fists under Wick's collar, was bouncing his head on the hardwood floor. After a while Wick ceased to struggle.

In the distance sounded the wail of sirens. The telephone operator *had* known what to do.

BOYLE got to his feet. He called: "Ye can be comin' out now, Martayne. The shootin's all over, unless ye want some fer yersilf, privut."

There was no answer from the other room. Nolan barged in, the Tommy thrust before him, sweat and the joy of battle gleaming on his face.

He came out a moment later with the cringing Martinez.

"I didn't have anything to do with killin' Captain Larkey," Martinez whimpered. "I'm only the mouthpiece for this mob."

"Then talk, now!" Nolan bellowed. "Who did kill him?"

"Havik," Martinez said pointing a finger at the groaning corporal. "He agreed to get the guns if we'd let him join the gang. Wick and Arsotti needed guns for bank jobs—had to have them. They were desperate after their escape.

"Havik thought maybe we could buy Boyle, here, out. When I found we couldn't, I doped you, took your keys so Havik could get the stuff. We planted your hat to throw the blame on you. Havik had to shoot Larkey when the captain surprised him."

Havik snarled up from the floor, "You sniveling little dago! You were there. You're as guilty as me."

But Boyle wasn't paying any attention. He was searching for something. Let them talk to the cops. There were more coming up the stairs now—the riot squad—the homicide squad—an inspector. Boyle knew what had happened, knew it was the only way it could have happened. Let the cops hear what was news to them.

He came back into the dining room. The inspector was beaming at Nolan, telling him he'd be made a sergeant for this night's work. Nolan was looking pleased and important.

But Boyle ignored them. He was carrying still another Tommy-gun, moving his lips as he read the numbers. It was the first gun that had been stolen.

"The Ould Man says I had to find this baby," he beamed, "an' bejabbers, here it is."

Blood on a Rose

By Dugal O'Liam

Author of "Death Signs Its Name," etc.



Eventhoughed, Pedro Franco was attempting a dash to freedom

High in the Ecuadorian Andes, Captain Lucio Terreros Follows the Trail of a Blood-Dipped Rose to Uncover a Murder. . . .

THE midday sun tilted mercilessly at the flat roofs of the mountain town of Salitre in Southern Ecuador. It was a sleepy town, little more than a village, with a fair plaza ringed about by a polyglot frame of adobe huts and kilned-brick public buildings.

Suddenly, out of the enervating silence, came the

excited clattering of horses' hoofs as one or two horses galloping headlong into the somnolence that immediately precedes the siesta hour.

But the clattering produced little excitement in Salitre. Madly careening mounts and excited horsemen were no uncommon thing in southern Ecuador that hectic day in 1930 when bitter political disputes rent the little nation internally and guerilla warfare went on daily with the Bolivians to the south-east. Salitre, like all that section of Ecuador, expected almost anything.

Directly to the headquarters of the rural police lunged the horse. Its rider huddled low over its neck and his hands seemed to be clutching at the disheveled mane, as if



to retain, at all hazards, his position. Before the headquarters, the rider spoke in a weak guttural and the horse came to a sudden stop as the rider slid off its back and fell in a huddle, like a bag of old clothes, before the door. He lay there stunned. Two men rushed out to pick him up, lean men in sombreros and drab mountain clothing.

"Inspector Calderón—I must see Inspector Calderón at once!" the fallen man managed to gasp. "Hurry before it's too late!"

The two men stood the fallen one on his feet. Blood stained the front of his khaki shirt and ran in a steady, sickening rivulet down his face, on the left side. In the edge of his matted black hair was a purple wound. The swelling medallion of blood on his chest, above the heart, indicated that there was another wound there.

Inside, Inspector Calderón, a tall man, dark visaged and with grave eyes—one who might not have been considered quick witted, but whose gravity betokened a great determination—looked at the trio from behind his narrow desk and opened his mouth as if to speak.

"They have killed him—on the Road of the Crosses—they have carried him away and I, wretched one, have fled from the danger. Hurry, Señor Inspector, before it is too late—too late—"

The man, a grizzled mountain peasant, slid down between the two gendarmes who supported him and again found relief in unconsciousness. Inspector Calderón was on his feet, staring at the fallen man uncertainly.

"Does either of you know him?" he demanded. "And who is he referring to? He spoke only of someone unnamed being killed, then of his having been carried away—on the Road of the Crosses."

"I believe he works for Don Victor Eguez over on General Eguez's plantation at La Palmira," one of the gendarmes announced. "It seems I have seen him ride into Salitre with Fermin Escalante, as bodyguards to the young Don Victor and sometimes to the old General, too."

Inspector Calderón paled slightly. "He has said on the Road of the Crosses," he said. "You will get a doctor for this man quickly, then get a dozen men together. Send two men to La Palmira and two more to the plantation of Don José Feire. He is the father of young Don Victor's sister's husband. He may know something of what has gone on at La Palmira.

"Then send the others down the Road of the Crosses and try to pick up the trail. If there has been a murder, you will find signs of it. If there has been a kidnaping, you must find the trail. This is a very serious matter and no time must be lost. In the meantime, we may be able to question this man after he has had a doctor's attention. Get my horse ready now and collect the troop."

Five minutes later, the doctor bent above the wounded man, stretched on a cot in the rural police headquarters. A restorative brought the man back to consciousness. As he opened his eyes, the doctor turned to Inspector Calderón.

"Fortunately," he said, "both wounds are comparatively minor, but they are the type of flesh wounds that induce excessive bleeding and great subsequent weakness. You may talk to him now, since I have given him a stimulant. After that, he will have to rest—or complications may result."

The man on the cot heard the verdict and struggled to sit up. The doc-

tor held him back. "You may talk as you are if you wish," he said. "But do not sit up. You only waste energy."

"I am Francisco Castro," the peasant said without waiting for questioning. "This morning, Don Victor's sister and her husband started for the village on the Guayas river to catch the steamer to Guayaquil. They went by launch, but Don Victor wished to ride over some of the La Palmira acres and he took me and Fermin Escalante for his bodyguard. Fermin Escalante rode ahead some hundred feet and I rode a hundred feet behind.

"Suddenly, on the Road of the Crosses, a squad of men appeared from nowhere. I don't know how many there were, but they swooped down upon Don Victor and fired at me. I saw Don Victor fall from his horse and they leaped upon him. Then I saw them fire at Fermin Escalante and I fear he may have fallen also. They fired at me and one bullet struck me here"—he indicated his shoulder—"and the other here—on the head.

"I am an old man, Señor Inspector, and there was nothing I could do when Don Victor had fallen but hurry away for help. I am sure he was slain, but when I looked back, they seemed to be carrying him off across the saddle of his horse. Because I wanted to be certain where we were, I rode close to the trees on the roadside as I fled and slashed at them with my machete to make a trail so that when you went back, you would find no difficulty."

HE closed his eyes momentarily, then spoke again, weakly: "The exertion of slashing the trees made my blood run and I am weak. But I forgot to say that Don Victor had planned to take the steamer, too, joining his sister there."

Again the wounded peasant was silent. The doctor, awe-struck, leaned over him again. There was a quick commotion at the door and two gendarmes ran into the street. Presently they reappeared and between them stood a mountain Indian, his long, wiry black hair hanging in his eyes, his hands trembling from fatigue. He looked at the inspector and the uniforms and the fallen man on the cot and quailed even more. Then he found voice with a single word. "Uruburu!" he said, then repeated, "Uruburu!"

He held one hand aloft and with it described circles, fluttering his hands occasionally as he did, then allowing it to circle motionless, or to dip quickly.

"Buzzards," Calderón said. "He has seen the vultures somewhere. The Indians know that when you see vultures, there is death at hand. Maybe this man has found the body of Don Victor."

"Uruburu, uruburu!" the man exclaimed again, nodding his head vigorously and waving his hand some more. Then he pointed toward the north, into the Lomas hills region at the foot of the Andes. "Many Uruburu!"

As Inspector Calderón and his men completed their preparations for following the Indian into the mountains, the two gendarmes who had been dispatched to the plantation of Don José Feire pushed open the door. Behind them strode a heavy man with white hair and beady black eyes and drooping moustache. It was a face familiar to all Ecuadorians, the face of the most powerful political force in Ecuador and one of the wealthiest men in the little republic—if not, indeed, the wealthiest.

"This story of Don Victor's kidnap-

ing?" he began, addressing Calderón aggressively. "What is the meaning of it?"

"I fear it is more than kidnaping now, Don José," said Calderón humbly. "We have reason to believe that his body has been found and we are just setting out to confirm our suspicions."

"What reason have you to believe he is dead?" Don José asked and Calderón told the Indian's story.

Don José paled and nodded his head silently. Then he spoke, slowly: "It is undoubtedly true. I shall go at once to Guayaquil to take the news to his father, my dearest friend. I can take a fast launch to Duale and then go down on the steamer. In the meantime, you can wire me at Duale, or in Guayaquil, when you have discovered the truth. I shall make no report until I have your confirmation, but in the interim I will have reached Guayaquil and can start immediate police work."

He strode out then, his head bowed on his fat chest, and two peasants helped him into his saddle. He rode off at a quick gallop, sitting his horse lightly despite his great weight, his swarthy face dark with a weighty problem while Calderón prepared one squad of men to follow him and the Indian and another to take the road to the spot on the Road of the Crosses where Don Victor had been seized.

"We are unfortunate—doubly unfortunate," Calderón said as he led his squad out of the town. "This is a case that needs the skill of Captain Lucio Terreros and he has, I understand, only begun a vacation which will take him to Antofagasta and other Chilean cities."

THERE was no telegram for Don José Feire at Duale, but at Guayaquil, when he left the boat, he found a

messenger awaiting him. The boy handed him a telegram and Don José tore it open eagerly, his fat hands trembling a little. His eyes narrowed as he scanned it and once more the color drained from his dark face.

"Have found body," the telegram read. "My deepest sympathy."

He threw the messenger a coin and took a taxicab to the offices of the departmental police. Within a few minutes, he faced Major Jorge Quintana, superintendent of the department. Between the two men, polite suspicion played. Major Quintana had been appointed to his post against the wishes of Don José Feire. It was one of Don José's first political defeats and he was not the type to take such a defeat gracefully.

Quickly he told of Don Victor's kidnaping and of the discovery of the body. Then, without waiting for Major Quintana to comment, he shouted: "This is political assassination of the worst type and the police have been lax or it couldn't have happened."

"Why do you say it is political assassination?"

"Because, as you know, General Eguez, while he may be more or less in retirement now, has been responsible for much fear among certain opposing political factions, a faction of reckless, headstrong, ruthless young upstarts who would stop at nothing."

"But Don Victor Eguez? He had no political aspirations."

"It is revenge. General Eguez is an old man. His son is his pride and joy. They strike at him through his son. They want to hurt him, to break him down and weaken him. His son is easy to reach. He himself is more or less constantly under guard. So what better way to hurt him than to murder his beloved son?"

Major Quintana nodded slowly. "What you say undoubtedly has its merits," he said, "but there is another side. Don Victor was quite a gay youth. He had many affairs of the heart. He was inclined to be reckless in that way. Is it not possible that some jealousy of his superior position and attractions came up in the breast of a beaten suitor and that Don Victor paid with his life?"

"Storybook police work!" Don José scoffed. "Youthful indulgences do not go that far, Major Quintana. Jealousy is one thing and murder is something entirely different. Especially in Don Victor's station."

Major Quintana was silent. Don José rose. "I have learned, on my way here, that your ablest officer, Captain Lucio Terreros, is on vacation. It seems to me that, in such troubled times, it is poor department efficiency to allow a man so indispensable to go on vacation."

Major Quintana stood and bowed slightly. "I accept your rebuke, Don José, but I am confident I can recall Captain Terreros as he has not yet left Guayaquil."

Don José looked startled, then said, quickly, "Are you sure regulations will allow that? If you aren't, I'd advise you not to do it. In the meantime, I shall go to acquaint General Eguez with the news of the tragedy."

"Good day, Don José," said Quintana, "and you may go with the assurance that I will have Captain Terreros for this most deplorable case."

As Don José quit his office, Major Quintana called a retainer and sent him to find Captain Terreros. Within fifteen minutes, Terreros, tall, hawk-faced, sharp-eyed, vitally alert, stood before his chief.

"Don José seems determined to put

the onus for this murder on our department," Major Quintana explained. "Certainly, if we fail to clear it up to his satisfaction, we are going to be in a pretty hot spot. What he says about this being a political job probably is true. The more I consider it, the more likely it seems. In the meantime, I want you to see General Eguez. Then go up to Salitre and work the case from there. I will not be idle, but will check all the movements, especially those pertaining to his favorite diversion—romance—of Don Victor here."

GENERAL EGUEZ stood in his study above the thick-set form of Don José, idling in a huge chair, as Captain Terreros entered. He was a wide-shouldered, stern-visaged man with a closely cropped gray mustache and the aggressive manner of the man who has spent his life in the military. Jealous of his honors, even though in semi-retirement, he wore an immaculate uniform with service breeches and campaign boots laced tightly about his strong legs. Across his chest were two and a half lines of service citation bars.

The interview was a brief one. Even Don José deferred to the grief and agitation of General Eguez and made no effort to precede him in addressing Terreros.

"I am convinced this is a political assassination," General Eguez said. "I believe you will find the slayers in Guayaquil or Quito and it is there that I would suggest you hunt for them."

"I am indebted to you," Terreros said, "but of course I must first examine the actual scene of the crime. I could not go far without all the primary facts."

"It is useless to go to the Salitre

country," Don José said. "Such tactics would be a typical departmental waste of time."

"I have faith in Captain Terreros," General Eguez said suddenly. "Let him begin as he likes. I am convinced he will ultimately arrive in Guayaquil or Quito, so let him build his structure as he sees fit. Only he must not fail. That is all."

It was a six-hour ride by boat to Duale. There Terreros questioned Francisco Castro, who had been taken to the government hospital on the harbor. Castro told him the same story as he had managed to tell Calderón. There were no changes in it, no additional clues. He had been riding with Don Victor, the attack had occurred, he had seen Don Victor carried off and now, because Calderón had been to see him again, he had learned that no sign of the body of Fermin Escalante had been found.

As he rode out the Road of the Crosses, Terreros pondered the disappearance of Fermin Escalante and the failure to find his body. Having found the body of Don Victor, it seemed to him that finding Escalante's body would have been as simple. The vultures never failed in that part of the world. It was because of them that murders there always have their *corpus delicti*. Even burial will not completely thwart them. Always they come to circle above the spot of burial, even though they cannot reach their prey. But there had been no further reports of the uruburu circling. Or, at least, not up to the time Calderón had last visited Castro at Duale.

A few miles out on the Road of the Crosses, Terreros came upon the notched trees Castro had told him about. He had half a dozen gendarmes from Duale with him now, but he

sensed some danger and reined in his horse, slowing it down to a cautious walk. One never knew, in that country, when pursued bandits would turn and ambush their pursuers.

A few minutes later, hoofbeats sounded beyond a curve in the road screened by heavy underbrush. Terreros reined in and the gendarmes deployed on either side of the road, pistols drawn, bodies strained forward.

The hoofbeats came on, as if of a small squadron. Terreros and his men sat their mounts with bated breath, peering through the foliage. Then a sigh of quick relief broke on the fetid air. Inspector Calderón and four men rode around the corner of the bend, reined their horses up shortly.

Calderón swung off his horse and advanced. Terreros and his men rode back onto the open trail and advanced to meet the Inspector. Saluting, Calderón announced that he had been at the kidnaping site and had decided to leave men there on watch while he rode out to meet Terreros, whom he had been expecting for some hours.

"I stopped at Duale to interview Francisco Castro," Terreros said. "He told me you had been there. Have you found Fermin Escalante?"

"No trace of him. It is most puzzling."

They rode, then, to the site from which Don Victor had been kidnaped. Only the broken grass and shrubbery of trampling horses' hoofs remained there to give clues to the assault. Terreros turned to Calderón.

"Did any one, save Don Victor's sister and brother-in-law and these guards of his, know he was riding here?" he asked.

"None so far as I know."

"In that case, the murder had to be committed by someone already in this

area who had known of the projected ride in advance or learned of it by accident or design almost immediately after it began."

"That seems most likely, Captain Terreros."

"It would have been impossible for professional political killers to have come here from the city after the ride began. If any strangers had been waiting in the vicinity—say those who would have known he was coming here for the week-end and would have followed to lie in wait—your men would most certainly have known it," Terreros went on.

"There can be little doubt of that," Calderón agreed.

Terreros said no more. Castro had told him that the men looked like mountain peasants to him. Their faces, he said, had been the faces of highland men and so had their actions. The fact that they wore the clothing of peasants meant little. They could have been disguised. But their actions and their faces were those of the mountaineers.

CONCLUDING thus, Terreros turned to Calderón again. "What was the condition of the body?" he asked.

"It was cruelly tortured and mutilated, Captain," Calderón said with an involuntary shudder. "He had been tied to a tree bole and used as a target for pistol shots. But before that, he had been slashed with machetes—not deeply, but in such a manner as to bring bitter suffering. He also had been disfigured and horribly mutilated and then the shots had been sent into his legs, breaking the bones and finally, apparently, after as much pain as possible had been inflicted, two had been fired into the stomach to guarantee a

very slow and intensely painful death."

Terreros swung his mount about. Sharply he ordered Calderón to mount his men and lead the way to the spot where Don Victor's body had been found. There was nothing more left to be seen at the site of the abduction. Only the ground about the murder tree could help him now.

"If the body was tortured as you have told me," Terreros surmised, "the last faint possibility of political assassination to spite the father is virtually eliminated. Such assassins would have nothing against Don Victor Eguez and thus, feeling they must kill him, they would spare him as much suffering as possible. But a rival, crazed by jealousy and a sense of wrong to himself through some woman, would have done all these things to vent his own twisted spleen on his enemy."

The troop rode into Salitre and there they picked up additional gendarmes and began the journey to the spot where the body had been found. Beyond Salitre, looming portentously against the background of snow-capped Andes peaks further to the south, rose the green-skirted bulk of Black Mountain of the Lomas range. Somewhere on that mountainside, in the emerald skirting below the barren torso above the timber line, was the spot where Don Victor had been tortured to his death.

They rode in silence and presently the trail became so tortuous that they were forced to slow their mounts to a walk. Ultimately they were forced to dismount and proceed the last few score yards on foot. A hundred feet beyond the spot where they had dismounted, they came to fresh machete marks on the trees, made by Calderón's first searching party, and eventually they reached a small clearing in

the center of which was a huge old tree.

In the bole of the tree were unmistakable marks of deep machete cuts, as if the huge, deep-bladed or sword-like knives had been hurled at a target. In the bole, too, were marks of many bullets and all about these and the machete scars were the red badges of splashing blood.

"We dug the bullets out of the tree bole and saved the rope with which he had been trussed," Calderón explained.

Terreros made no reply, but began slowly to circle the tree, his eyes fixed on the matted grass at his feet, freshly trampled and bruised. He kicked the grass back and forth as he circled, widening the arc of his course as he went. Presently he stooped and picked something from the grass. It was a square bottle of the type in which cheap brandy may be purchased, largely by the mountain peasants. The sole identification on the bottle was a segment of a local excise stamp on which the broken device — a *Tuza* were visible. Pointing to the stamp, he said to Calderón: "Do these letters mean anything to you? Any village near here?"

"It's undoubtedly La Tuza," Calderón answered. "That is the only nearby village having such a combination of letters."

"Good. We will ride on to La Tuza."

Calderón was thoughtful. "We will have to have more men or it will be dangerous," he said. "La Tuza is a wild and lawless district and the districts beyond it are peopled with wild mountaineers who spend more of their time acting as bandits than as farmers and they all stick together against the common enemy, the police."

"Send for additional men to meet us on the road to La Tuza," Terreros said. "There is no time to be lost."

Once more he stooped, this time at the foot of the tree, and now he picked up a crushed flower, the bloom held to a dying stem by a mere thread. He studied it and discovered it was a rose of a most unusual type, seemingly a cross between a small, red variety and the pure yellow.

THE body of the petals was a soft, velvet yellow and the edges, to a depth of perhaps a sixteenth of an inch, were a vivid red, as if each flower had been dipped in a bowl of blood. There were lighter red veins running up from the center of the petals almost to the edges and neither Terreros nor Calderón had seen its like before.

"Do you know," Terreros said, "if the Eguez family raised such roses on their La Palmira estate?"

"I am positive they did not," Calderón said. "I have covered their gardens from one end to the other many times and I saw no specimen."

"Then," Terreros said, "Don Victor didn't pluck it in his own place. That being the case, and since it is too fresh, despite its crushing, to have been brought from Guayaquil when he left the city, it must have been given him by someone he had met out here. And who, Inspector Calderón, would give a gay young one such as Don Victor a rose except a lady love?"

"No one, I am quite sure, Captain," Calderón said.

"I'm glad you see my point. There is another angle to the rose's presence here. The rose has been crushed, but not under foot. There are no signs of dirt on it as would be made by boots. Thus it either has been crushed in someone's hand, or by being driven into the face of a helpless victim by a heavy and angry hand. I prefer the latter hypothesis. It fits this case better.

Do you recall, on examination of Don Victor's body, if there were any signs of stains on his face that might have been made by this crushed flower?"

"I'm afraid not," Calderón said, slowly. "You see, the face was so smeared with blood that it would have been impossible to detect any other, or minor stains."

"Quite so," Terreros said. "I am convinced, however, that when we find the one who grows these roses, we will find the one who can tell us the story of Don Victor's assassination. I would like to ride to La Palmira and inspect the garden, but since you say it is useless, I will take your word for it."

"I would not be so certain," Calderón said, "if it were not for the fact that I am a great amateur gardening enthusiast myself. For that reason, I would miss nothing and I was always welcome at the La Palmira gardens, if not in many others round about."

Terreros and the troop rode on toward La Tuza then. At a junction of roads seven miles above Salitre in the foothills they met the fresh men from Salitre. La Tuza lay beyond the jungle that fringed Black Mountain and they rode around the mountain rather than over it, thinking to save their mounts. They rode hard and clouds of mosquitos beat against their faces, so that half the time they rode almost blind in their efforts to keep the stinging insects out of their eyes.

Their horses were spent and white with lathering foam when they emerged from the steaming jungle and entered the clearing in which stood the dozen low-lying adobe and thatched houses that were the village of La Tuza—a mean little settlement, as sinister looking as the jungle itself. In almost the center of the grouped huts stood one larger than the others. There, Cal-

derón said, would be found Don Falquez, the wealthy and powerful man of the town who, alone, sold liquor such as had been in the square bottle.

Captain Terreros entered the inn of Don Falquez, Calderón following him closely. It was a big room, square and with small windows and a hard clay floor. There were half-dozen rough, wooden tables with equally rough benches about the walls of the room, leaving the center open for dancing to the tunes given off by an ancient player piano. At the far end of the room, opposite the entrance, was a bar of rough wood worn smooth by the contact of many knees and elbows and the sliding of many tin receptacles along its heavy grained surface.

Two men loafed at the corner table to the left, poorly dressed men with disheveled clothing and big hands. Their hats were pulled low over their faces and they stared out from under the loose brims with eyes filled with suspicion. Behind the bar a big chested, squat man with a huge head and a thick mane of matted hair which hung down to his piggish eyes stared malevolently at the new comers with that suspicion with which the mountain peasant regards all strangers. Not even the sight of Calderón, whom Don Falquez—for it was he behind the bar—must have known, tended to allay the suspicion in his tiny eyes. On the contrary, it seemed only to heighten it and this Terreros noted as a sign of some guilt somewhere within the room.

AS Terreros sat down at the table nearest the two men in the corner, he threw back his tunic so that his badge of office showed and also the pair of heavy service revolvers he wore at his waist. Calderón, noting his gesture, likewise threw back his tunic and

his pistols glistened in the thin shaft of light that slanted down from the dull windows. Don Falquez's suspicion developed now into a touch of fear and apprehension and he waited, as if poised to spring, behind his bar, his big hands supporting the weight of his powerful body as he leaned forward over his bar.

The two men slouching at the corner table noticed the display of force, too, and they, too, seemed to tense and their hands were seen to wander to their waists where Terreros caught sight of long knives, gleaming wickedly in the half light. In the midst of this human electricity, Terreros threw back his head and laughed suddenly. The two men half rose to their feet and stared at him evilly, only to drop back and slink again into their old positions at a quick look from Don Falquez.

"Bring me brandy, please," Terreros called to Don Falquez. "And may it be your own very excellent brand, of which I have heard so often."

"I'll have brandy, too. The square-bottle kind, I believe is most famous," Calderón said, quickly picking up his superior's cue.

Don Falquez stooped to pick up a bottle and started to pour the portions into a pair of tin cups. Terreros quickly stopped him, however.

"Bring the bottle, Don Falquez," he said. "We shall want more and we shall feel happy, too, if you will join us."

Don Falquez, his eyes still sharp and suspicious, waddled from behind the bar and it was seen that had he been placed on some mystic anvil somewhere and his legs hammered out straight, he would have been a very tall man. But his legs were so grotesquely bowed, although still indicative of great physical strength, that he waddled absurdly

when he walked and seemed to swing across the floor step by step as if his great body were on a spit extending directly down through the top of his head to the floor.

He reached the table and placed the bottle before Terreros. Then he set two cups on the table, one before Terreros and one before Calderón. Having set the cups down, he stood uncertainly aside, but Terreros waved a friendly hand.

"Bring a third cup, Don Falquez: have we not asked you to drink with us?" he said.

"I am honored, Señor Capitán," said Falquez, "but you must not call me Don Falquez. It is only the poor peasant here whom I insist call me Don Falquez. To you gentlemen I am but humble Sebastiano Falquez."

"We shall not embarrass you, Don Falquez," Terreros said, craftily. "If you are Don to these humble folk here, then you shall be Don Falquez to us. Indeed, you are the biggest man of La Tuza, so why should you not be called Don Falquez?"

Falquez thanked Terreros profusely and swung back across the floor with his peculiar rotary gait to bring another cup. Then he sat down timidly and would not touch the brandy until Terreros gaily poured for him, then examined the bottle closely. Together the three drank and then again and each time the portion of Falquez was twice as great as that of Terreros and Calderón, a fact he could not determine because the opaque tin cups securely hid their content. And to be certain he did not see, Terreros and Calderón, immediately Terreros had poured their stints, raised their cups high and pretended to drink deeply and Falquez, overwhelmed by the honor that had come to him and wishing to be thought

comradely with these impressive men before his own lowly associates, quaffed his brandy with deep-throated rumbles of pride and satisfaction.

An hour of this and Falquez, who had twice managed to waddle back to his bar and bring a second and a third flask of brandy, was mellow and susceptible. It was then that Terreros drew from his pocket the flask he had found at the murder scene and presented it to Falquez's view. As he did the peasants at the corner table started perceptibly and looked at each other. But Falquez saw none of this.

"This is a bottle that once contained your most excellent brandy, is it not?" Terreros asked.

"Indeed it is, Señor Capitán," Falquez admitted, proudly. Then, forgetting his humility of an hour before in his artificial gaiety, continued; "Don Falquez's brandy is the finest in this part of Ecuador and while it may be humble as compared to the fine vintages of your city, it is pure and inspiring."

"You don't often sell flasks to be taken out, do you, Don Falquez?" Terreros asked.

"To you gentlemen, I will gladly sell, because even though you are of the police, you are gentlemen and would overlook a small infraction of the law in the doing of a favor," Falquez said, preening himself handsomely after this speech.

"Have you sold it to others?"

"You would not involve me in an infraction of our foolish liquor laws, would you, Señor Capitán?" Falquez said.

"Not at all," Terreros assured him. "I merely want to know who purchased this bottle, which probably was taken out some time the day before yesterday."

FALQUEZ smiled fatuously and swayed in his chair, then his face paled suddenly and he straightened with an effort. He looked narrowly at Terreros and his pig eyes were hazy, but there leaped into them once more, behind the film of alcohol, the old suspicion and wariness.

"I would not know, Señor Capitán, who took out this flask so long ago." He smiled wanly and looked hopefully at Terreros as if trusting the inquisition would end with this.

"Then you sell so many illegally that you do not recall to whom you sell?" Terreros returned. "Even though you are my friend, I am afraid I, as an officer in the rural police, cannot overlook this infraction. It is too frequent."

"No, no, Señor Capitán," Falquez exclaimed quickly. "Do not do that. It would take away from me my sole livelihood. I would be sent to jail for doing favors to my friends. Indeed, I have sold but this single bottle to be taken outside in many, many months. Surely you will not prosecute me for that?"

"I am afraid I have my duty," Terreros said, slowly. "However, I do not like to prosecute where I have drunk, so that if you can from somewhere back in your memory find a means of identifying the purchasers of this flask, I shall be inclined to forget your delinquencies."

New terror now seized Falquez. He shot a quick glance at the mountain men in the corner and saw their leering faces and their dark eyes gleaming beneath the ragged brims of their hats. He nodded his head slowly toward them while looking at Terreros and Terreros addressed Calderón.

"Summon four of our men," he said. "I believe the chaps at the corner table have had too much to drink. They

seem to be disturbing Don Falquez's peace of mind."

"Surely," said Calderón. "I had noticed that Don Falquez was far from his old joyous self."

He rose and stepped toward the door and as he disappeared beyond its frame, the mountaineers leaped suddenly to their feet. But as suddenly as they leaped, even more suddenly did Terreros draw his pistols and snap, through clenched teeth:

"Stand where you are or I'll shoot you both down!"

As the pair hesitated, Calderón and four of his men came through the door and charged down on them. They made them secure with handcuffs as Falquez stood by, his face a study in terror and relief. As they passed him, they threw him vengeful glances and the big man who had terrorized and oppressed all the peasants of the Black Mountain region cringed a little and looked apprehensively toward Terreros.

Once they were outside, he sank into the chair once more. He stretched his big hands toward Terreros, palms up, and his voice was tremulous with fear.

"They were not the ones," he said, "but all poor folk in this section are united against the strength of the police. They will tell the others that I have told you. When they do, I shall be fiendishly tortured and drawn and quartered."

"Just as poor Don Victor Eguez was tortured, no doubt?" Terreros queried.

"I know not how he was tortured, but I have heard and it was a great pity," Falquez said. "But please do not make me tell the names of those who bought this bottle. Not until you tell me where you found it."

"I found it where Don Victor's body was found," Terreros said quickly.

"Ah, I was afraid of it!" Falquez

said. "Even a bandit as cunning as the Brothers Franco makes sad mistakes when he is in liquor."

"The Franco brothers? Who are they?"

"They are the notorious twins, Gregorio and Pedro," Falquez said. "If they know I have told you, they will pin me to the walls with knives and cut my tongue out and feed it to the vultures."

"Did they purchase the brandy from you, Don Falquez?"

"They will disembowel me and let the vultures feed upon my viscera!" moaned Falquez. "But I must tell you they were the ones. They came here with two others and beyond the town. I am told, they met even others and that was only a short time before Don Victor was taken."

"Who were the others?"

"That I could not say, save for that Fermin Escalante. He came with them, but departed even before they bought the brandy."

"Escalante?" Terreros' eyes narrowed. "Fermin Escalante?"

"Yes, Fermin Escalante."

"Why, he was the manservant of Don Victor! Could he have been a traitor?"

"Fermin Escalante is a very wicked man," Falquez said. "Even while he worked for Don José Feire, before Don José presented his services to Don Victor at his coming of age, he was a wicked devil who toiled honestly by day that he might rob his master's friends and guests by night."

"Then he could have led the Franco brothers and their band to Don Victor, knowing that Don Victor intended to ride to the river?"

"If that is what happened, he might easily have done it, but they will filet my flesh with sharp knives and saw my

jugular in two with a toothed machete," Falquez moaned, his fear seizing him again.

"Have no fear on that score. We will protect you. Now tell me who the fourth member of this party was."

"I did not know him at all. He was a stranger to me and he seemed very dark, as if he had stained his face with some sort of nut oil for a disguise. He was a powerful man and one who seemed accustomed to giving orders, but his face was so stained that I could not make out his identity."

TERREROS put his hand on Falquez's shoulder. "I will leave two of my men here to protect you until these scoundrels are caught," he said. "I can get more men at Soledad."

"Soledad? Then you know the habitat of the Franco brothers?"

"No, but I know Soledad is the county seat of the Manabi jungle country and I know that all the mountain bandits from this section hide in the Manabi when they seek to avoid arrest. You wait here in safety with my men."

Terreros summoned Calderón and ordered the printing of a score of reward cards. He would offer one hundred sucres for the apprehension of the Franco brothers. That was approximately \$20 in American money and, while the mountaineers would remain loyal to their own against threats of the law, no matter how malign, they would do anything up to and including taking lives for such a sum.

One of the police was dispatched to Salitre to have the cards printed and to send telegrams to Soledad and other nearby villages asking that similar cards be printed in each of them and nailed up in the most conspicuous places.

Night had impaled itself like some cimmerian monster on the jagged peak of Black Mountain when the gendarme returned from Salitre with two messages for Terreros, one from Guayaquil, the other from Soledad. The one from Soledad merely mentioned that the Manabi division of the rural police would ride out the trail between La Tuza and Soledad to meet the oncoming Terreros and Calderón detachment, but the Guayaquil message was infinitely more revealing.

It was from Major Quintana and it said that Detective Francisco Mera had discovered that young Victor Eguez, while he had often made violent love to a dancer in a Guayaquil restaurant and was known to be engaged to Doña Teresa Rubira, even then a guest in his parents' home, had been making week-end trips to La Palmira because he had there "a señorita more beautiful than any woman of Guayaquil and so adventurously romantic." The description had been offered by a close friend of Don Victor, but he was unable to give the name of the charmer, or her place of residence because Don Victor had been highly secretive.

Terreros and Calderón rode toward Soledad at the head of their depleted force. Two men had been left to guard the quaking Falquez. The trail was dark and the jungle hedged them in closely and the trees bowed overhead to form a thick canopy that all but excluded even the feeble light of the stars. Silently the men rode their mounts, picking their way carefully because the trail was a poor one and the dangers many.

"This country sweetheart," Calderón asked softly. "Do you believe it likely she holds the secret?"

"I have no doubt about it," Terreros said.

"But the Franco brothers? Surely you do not assume Don Victor, for all his susceptibility to feminine charms, would be so base as to be intrigued by a woman such as might be claimed by a cheap mountain bandit?"

"Of course not. The presence of this rare flower we found would alone disabuse my mind of any thought of them in connection with the woman."

"Then what is the explanation?" Calderón insisted.

"The explanation is that some wealthy man had his sweetheart stolen by a younger man. The wealthy man was the one Falquez could not identify for us because he had his face stained with nut oil. And that wealthy man was the one who raised the rare flower which he found on his suspected rival when he was kidnaped and which drove him to a rage that led to Don Victor's cruel torturing during which the jealous one, so furious was he and so consumed by jealousy, mockingly ground the token of young love into his helpless rival's face."

Calderón was silent. They spoke no more until they reached Soledad. So deliberate had been their progress that it was midnight when they rode into the square at Soledad and were shown to the barracks of the rural police. There they were met by Inspector Ramírez and told that already his men had placarded the countryside with the reward offers.

"Would you continue your search tonight?" Ramírez asked. "I, personally, would not advise it as there is little to be accomplished."

"I agree with you, sir," Terreros said. "Let us put up at the barracks for the night and by morning something may have come of our posters."

Terreros, weary from his long day of riding, went to bed with plans for

the discovery of the country sweetheart swirling in his head. But first, he was certain, he would have to find the actual killers of Don Victor. They might, when arrested and faced with police methods, reveal the name of the jealous, but deceived lover who had exacted death as the price of his jealousy.

MORNING broke unevenly along the serrated tips of the distant Andes, seemed to flow down, like glistening lava, over the mountainsides and into the foothills. Out of the jungle that hemmed in the town of Soledad, as the sun bathed the gray, shale road in a quickening brilliance, trudged a tiny old man, his back bent and his face wan from weariness. His long, gray hair hung over his ears and down into his tired eyes, but he pressed forward until he gained the plaza and then turned off into a side street and stopped before the police barracks.

There, hesitating briefly, he finally braced his thin shoulders and knocked weakly at the big door. There was no answer and he knocked again and even again. Finally the door opened and a gendarme, standing before the old man, demanded to know what one would want so early.

"I would speak only with Señor Capitán Terreros—he who offers the reward," the old man said. "I will speak with no other."

The gendarme asked him inside, but he refused, as if fearing a trick. Once more he repeated his desire to speak only with Señor Capitán Terreros and the gendarme knocked on Terreros's door. Instantly Terreros was up and dressing and a few minutes later the ancient peasant, the suspicion of a weak senility still apparent in his sad and hunted eyes, stood before the police captain.

"I want no other to hear, honorable Capitán," he said, "because what I am about to tell you brings me great grief and bows me even deeper in sorrow than I am already."

"You may speak freely," Terreros said. "There is none to hear you and I will keep your confidence."

"It is not a confidence, but rather that I cannot bear to have anyone hear my perfidy," the old man explained. "I, sir, am Panteleón Franco, the father of Pedro and Gregorio Franco."

Terreros sat up suddenly, staring at the old man. He said nothing and the old man, fumbling with his battered hat and with his gray lips moving in grotesque nothingness, stared back fearfully. Finally he found speech again.

"I have not come to beg for their lives," he said. "They have been wicked sons, but only because we were so poor. They were high-spirited and handsome and they wanted the riches of other young men. For that reason they turned to banditry, but I do not believe they are murderers."

"Then what would you have me do?" Terreros said.

"Arrest them," the old man said. "I will take you to them. But arrest them and imprison them for banditry, for which I, alone, can give you adequate proof. But do not let them be slain as murderers because that, I am convinced, they are not."

"Where are your sons, then?" Terreros demanded.

The old man hesitated a moment. Once more he looked furtively around the room. Then he lowered his voice until it was a scarcely audible whisper and Terreros had to bend his head toward the seamed old face to catch the words.

"They are at El Rodadero, in the

jungle about eight or ten hours' ride from here. It is so long a ride because the jungle is thick and the mountain trails hazardous. But you will find them there and you will arrest them without bloodshed if you will but be careful. I pray that you promise me that."

Terreros took the old man's hand. "That is a promise," he said.

Terreros, Ramírez and Calderón conferred over the old man's story. They would ride to a spot near El Rodadero late in the day. Then they would stop and wait a greater part of the night out, bursting in on the hide-away just at dawn when the bandits would be heavy in sleep and the possibility of a bloodless capture most likely.

As they talked old Franco sidled up to Terreros and spoke again in his sibilant half-whisper.

"There is one with them who is called Fermin Escalante," he said. "He is a very bad man and he is one who has not been found since the murder of Don Victor, but I hope you will not blame my sons because he is with them."

"Of course not," Terreros lied for the sake of the senile father's peace of mind. "They could know nothing of his wicked doings."

"*Muchas gracias, Señor Capitán,*" the old man whispered and backed away, bowing and wringing his bony hands.

THE sun was but a broken line against the Andean peaks when Terreros led the twenty rural police with Calderón and Ramírez down the mountainside into the valley of El Rodadero. So thick was the jungle that the valley seemed no more than a rolling carpet of green from above, but as they neared the foot of the declivity Ramírez suddenly made out the gray

outline of a cabin a hundred feet from the troop. Even as he pointed it out to Terreros and they planned how to deploy their forces, a great stone was dislodged by a skidding horse's hoofs and it went bounding down the mountainside and crashed against the wall of the cabin.

Instantly there was action and lusty curses from inside the cabin and into the open, a rifle in his hand, ran a huge man, screaming "*Los rurales!* The rurals!"

Stopping suddenly, he raised the rifle and fired. One of the gendarmes looked startled, turned a pleading and then stupefied face toward Ramírez and then slid out of his saddle into a shapeless form that skittered and bounded down the declivity.

Almost instantaneously there was an answering volley of shots and the enemy hurled his rifle into the air, circled drunkenly for a second, clutching at his stomach and then at his side and finally slumped into a heap on the grass. As he fell two other men dashed out of the cabin with rifles, but as the gendarmes followed Terreros down the slope afoot, they dropped their arms and threw their hands into the air.

The Franco twins had yielded to overwhelming numbers.

As the gendarmes, supervised by Ramírez, found the bandit brothers, Calderón bent over the wounded man and at once identified him as Fermin Escalante. He felt the man's pulse, but there was no sign of life and he left him to join Terreros, who was deploying a cordon of men around the cabin. Seeing him, Gregorio Franco called out that there were no more of them and that there was no need to search the house.

"There was one with you with the stained face," Terreros said.

"Search, then, and see if you find anyone," Pedro Franco said. "He left us many hours since."

"Who was he?" Terreros demanded.

"Only a wayfarer who rode with us for a short distance," Pedro answered. "We know no more of him."

Terreros smiled. With four men he searched the house. There were no signs of the man with the stained face. They searched the premises and the nearby jungle and still there was no sign. Convinced, they bound the Franco brothers to their horses, threw the body of the slain trooper across his saddle and prepared to return to Soledad.

Half way over the mountain, there was a sudden sound of motion in the rear. The troop whirled in saddle and saw Pedro Franco galloping off down the trail, spurring his horse on at the risk of his neck, his body bent low over the saddle.

As the gendarmes looked puzzledly at Terreros, he raised his pistol, took quick aim and fired. The body of Pedro Franco slumped, then slipped down the side of his mount and was dragged by the ropes that bound it until the horse stopped in terror from the grotesque shifting of its burden.

Dazed, Gregorio Franco looked at the body of his brother and began to whimper. Terreros rode past him and he turned a tearful face toward the captain and said:

"I don't want to die like my brother. Don't shoot me and I will tell all I know."

"I don't wish to talk to you," Terreros said, shortly. "You are nobody. I only want the one who hired you."

The troop rode through Salitre and toward the pier on the Guayas river where they would take the boat for Guayaquil.

At the Road of the Crosses an open

carriage approached. In the wide rear seat sat two men and between them a dark girl, her eyes red from weeping. The man on her left was General Eguez, the one on her right Don José Feire. Terreros rode up beside the carriage and looked curiously at the girl. Don José spoke quickly:

"My ward, Doña Amanda López," he explained. "She is ill from the shock of Don Victor's slaying and we are taking her to Guayaquil for medical aid."

GENERAL EGUEZ stepped down from the carriage and Terreros slid from his saddle and faced him.

"I trust you have arrested the killers of my son?" the General said.

"One of them is there on his horse," Terreros said. "Two have been slain and I shall arrest the fourth shortly."

Don José had quit the carriage and was staring at Pedro Franco. He whirled upon Terreros, his great, sodden face gray with rage.

"How dare you arrest this man?" he exclaimed. "He was with me when Don Victor was slain, preparing to herd my sheep and cattle. This is outrageous!"

"Perhaps you and he can best talk this thing over together," Terreros said. "He seems to be under the impression that he did the slaying, with his brother and Fermin Escalante."

"Fermin Escalante!" exclaimed General Eguez.

"Yes, sir," Terreros said. "And now, Don José Feire, I arrest you for the murder of Don Victor Eguez—"

"Me? You swine! What do you mean?"

"I mean that yellow roses, especially with red petal borders, such as you are wearing in your lapel, Don José, are likely to tell many tales beside tales of love."

From his pocket, Terreros took the crushed rose and twirled it again between his thumb and forefinger. Doña Amanda, seeing the crushed rose, burst into hysterical sobbing. Two gendarmes seized Don José and manacled his wrists and Pedro Franco, seeing him helpless in the road, a beaten mass of trembling flesh, screamed from his horse:

"He paid us one hundred sucres each to kill Don Victor because his sweetheart was in love with Don Victor." He pointed a trembling finger at Doña Amanda and shouted, "She's not his ward! She's his sweetheart and he killed Don Victor because he knew she loved him."

Don José, a broken man, made little effort to fight his guilt. After he and Franco had been led out of the courtroom with the jury's verdict of guilty in their ears, General Eguez sat for many minutes, pale with anger and vengeful.

Then, because the law permits, General Eguez moved to wipe out the last memory of his great sorrow. The garden in which the strange roses grew, the roses which appeared to have been gently dipped in blood so that their yellow petals were red fringed, were spaded up and the bushes burned to gray ashes.





They're Swindling You!

The Human "Test Tubes"

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the eighty-fifth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

FRANK, George and Morris are, in my opinion, the country's champion hoaxers—and they make it pay.

Frank seems to be the Munchausen-mind of the trio, but apart from causing some small annoyance to the famous Mayo Clinic, the Rockefeller Institute and the American Medical Association, it doesn't appear that the boys have been guilty of any greater crimes than occasionally forgetting a hotel bill. But here is part of Frank's hoaxing story as it appeared recently in a southern newspaper:

"Clad in summer trousers and sleeveless shirts, the trio, Frank George and Morris, roller-skated out to—Creek shortly after six o'clock yesterday morning for their daily swim, as most citizens shivered and pulled bed-clothing more tightly about them.

"The joke, however, is still on the weather, for the trio are all that is left of 600 men and 32 women who started out in April, 1928, to undergo a series of scientific tests by which they hope to win \$85,000.

"The tests are being conducted by the Mayo clinic, of Rochester, Minn.,

and the Rockefeller Institute of New York under a subsidy of \$500,000, of which \$300,000 has been spent already.

"Frank visited offices of this newspaper last night and explained some of the details of the tests, as well as some of the experiments conducted thus far. He is twenty-eight years of age and a native of California.

"The tests are due to end in 1940, and have been divided into three phases, he said.

"First was the catabolism phase, in which we underwent various tests aimed at breaking down the bodily tissues; the second was the metabolism phase, or rebuilding the body, and the third stage is the protoplasm, which will determine the after effects.

"Under our contracts, or in order to win the \$85,000, we must visit seventy-three countries of the world and travel 144,000 miles. So far, the three of us who are left of the original large group have visited seventy-two countries and have traveled 136,000 miles.

"During the tests so far we have been inoculated with 135 various diseases, such as measles, smallpox, influenza, malaria and swamp fever. Out of all these "shots," I contracted only yellow fever, malaria and swamp disease. And these were contracted in Central American countries.

"We wear the same clothing the year 'round—no underwear, but sleeveless shirts, white trousers, shoes and socks. We must swim each day, regardless of weather, and must remain on our feet eighteen hours a day.

"We have not slept in the ordinary position since we started out, but rest sitting down. We sleep in this manner from midnight until six o'clock in the morning.

"We roller-skate, bicycle or ski as mode of transportation, and each of us is on a different diet. Walton eats nothing but concentrated foods. I am on a liquid and vegetable diet, and George is on a normal diet and can eat anything.'

THE trio came here Saturday night on roller skates and are stopping at a downtown hotel, sleeping, as usual, on chairs. They will entertain at the luncheon-meeting of the Lions Club at 12:30 o'clock this afternoon.

"The coldest weather they have experienced so far was 35 degrees below zero in Fairbanks, Alaska, and the hottest, 143 degrees at seven o'clock at night at Death Valley, Cal.

"As they travel from place to place, their various tests are conducted by physicians coöperating with the sponsoring organizations. They have undergone 135 of 168 scheduled tests.

"What will they do when the prize is won? 'Well, I don't know about the other boys,' said Frank, 'but I'll eat the biggest steak and sleep in the biggest bed I can find.'"

Now it takes a person of no mean

ability to repeatedly put over such a whopping story successfully and to undergo the cross-examination in which the ever suspicious reporters are so expert. But Frank does it.

From various other cities come similar stories, but when these were checked by the National Better Business Bureau, they were branded as definitely false. All of the institutions which Frank claims are sponsoring the experiment deny that they are participating in any such "tests," and point out that they would have no scientific value whatever.

The boys acquire their spending money by means of another audacious device. Not content with putting it over on the newspapers, they also appear before Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis and other clubs, schools, civic bodies, etc., give a most entertaining account of their adventures and experiences, put on an exhibition of expert roller-skating, take up a collection and then skate blithely away to their next stop. They must have a lot of fun.

A good showman, Frank carries an electric-lighted suitcase and when he last appeared in Oklahoma City, he exhibited a rather lusty scrap-book of dazzling newspaper clippings in which he and his companions were described as the "human guinea pigs."

I don't know that all this proves anything except that individually and collectively we are a very gullible people. It is probably very fortunate for many of us that Frank doesn't decide to distribute some phony stock en route. He could!

Next Week—The "Picking Up" Game



Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAYER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

ASUGGESTION to our readers: Clip the monthly lists of new members in our *Cipher Correspondence Club*, such as that published last week, and the lists of changes in address, such as that in the ensuing paragraph, paste them in a small blank book, and thus keep your C. C. C. Directory complete and up-to-date! The following four members have reported new addresses:

Drag, Dell Wilcox—formerly, P. O. Box 161, Niles Center, Ill.; now, 506 Riverview, Wichita, Kans. *Mono Verde*, Thomas T. Vail—formerly, 1204 Dupont Ave. N., Minneapolis, Minn.; now, 2557 Dupont Ave. S., Minneapolis, Minn. *Opkwins*, William A. Quinn—formerly, 91 Fort Ave., Roxbury, Mass.; now, 2090 Dorchester Ave., Dorchester, Mass. *Lethargic*, W. F. Byrne—formerly, 222 Union Oil Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif.; now, 8429 Spruce St., New Orleans, La.

How did you make out with *Dick Tate's No. X-36, the cryptic square root of two weeks ago? This problem is reprinted herewith, including the key-phrase and the answer in plain figures. Solution of this cipher could hinge upon the multiplication $R \times R = R$, which, as here used, limits R to 5 or 6, with the sequence RS (2nd subtraction) thus following as 56 or 67, the former being eliminated by $A \times A = SE$, where obviously S could not be 7. An interesting puzzle with an appropriate key!

AMOTDH(A Y R + 801273(895+
SE 64

OSY)OSOT	169)1612
ORTO	1521
ODAR) YODH	1785) 9173
AYTR	8925
TEA	248

Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
MOTHER'S DAY

To start you with this week's puzzles, W. A. Deen contributes a division problem using the conventional 10-letter key, numbered 01234 56789. Note AL - AC for the value of C; $D \times I = D$ for I; etc. Skeezi provides the short words BKK, VU, and UHVY for entry to his crypt. Having guessed these, try for BHR, FTR, SX, and FTRSH. J. L. T. Waltz offers a clever pangrammatic construction wherein HUV, HAS, and SRSAE are leading clues. Incidentally, fans, let's make a collection of short pangrammatic phrases, etc. Send them in and we'll print 'em!

Gregory's message presents seven alliterative sections. Running through the alphabet should help with the distinctively patterned HSHH. Pierrette's message may be approached through the suffixes -EB, -EBBV, -POD, -ENPTOEB, etc. Spot your own clues in †Waltraw's Inner Circle cipher, and look for the answers to all of this week's puzzles in next week's issue. Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

No. 121—Cryptic Division. By W. A. Deen.

AND)EMDNIL(IDR
EEID

ALSI
ACER

LNEL
LMLE

ECS

No. 122—What's in a Name? By Skeezix.

FTR *TVFFRXFVFG, *GVEFT *BUHSNBX HBNR, BHR GV
NBZZRK UHVV FTR UHRLERXF EGR VU FTR GDZZBAZRG
"TVF" BXK "FVF" SX FTRSH ZBXPEBPR.

No. 123—Comprehensive Brevity. By J. L. T. Waltz.

"ZABCME IGHDJK LFNOPX, RST, HUV WGQY" NK XPS
KPBAWSKX KSUXSUDS STXHUX DBUXHNUNUO SRSAE
FSXXSA NU XPS *SUOFNKP HFYPHLSX. BUFE "H" HUV
"G" HAS ASYSHXSV.

No. 124—Circus Side-Lights. By Gregory.

HTPB, HTLXXFY HFSLZ HSHH. RHRDRL RHRKTLG
RHRNETLGZ RLGRVGTFL. EXKR ETFVB EBRLT ESUHZ.
OSHSVRY OHSUL OETZRZ OVSUY. NROXHFTV NTVTYR;
ZFHBB ZESU.

No. 125—Inarticulate Act. By Pierrette.

*LATOH RKZZA: GSBNPXPLAENPTOEB, SYMEAUBV
LSALBPOD, BELPT-BPODSEBBV ERNPXENZU, YOZSGENPR
ERTSFNPRES YKZOTGZOTO AZDPFNZAPOD
UPFEYYATXEB; XSBDEABV NZAGZU "AEFYLAZAAV"!

No. 126—Fireside Friends. By †Waltraw.

*ZYXMVUT STRDU OPNFK XYSVARH GRYDXKNF;
USRLGKH NMHP LVUOKXEHB XYBVPNYU; BVUSRPG
RDKQ FXSETBND. JKQVYD BRUS LXPZU ARVEZ HQVS!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

115—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
PLENTY HARD

116—Jackals, nocturnal animals, conceal themselves until dusk in woody jungles and other natural places, and then sally forth in packs in search of food.

117—"If wisdom's ways ye'd wisely seek,
Five things observe with care;
Of whom you speak, to whom you
speak,
And how and when and where."

118—Mussolini, Fascist war lord, rattles his saber, eyes Europe askance, casually carves out new Italian colony in Africa.

119—Will Durant's "ten great thinkers," in order of mental rank: Confucius, Plato, Aristotle, Copernicus, Bacon, Newton, Spinoza, Voltaire, Kant, Darwin.

120—Black trombonist calmly eats jambolana under palm. Hungry lambs begin unlamblike baaing. Spasm cramps limb. Sambo jumps. Lambs gambol beyond ham-bone bombardment.

Readers who submit answers to any of this week's puzzles will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for May. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman
Police Detective
Policewoman
Fingerprint Expert
State Trooper
Crime Prevention
Investigator
Probation Officer
Criminologist
Police Radio Expert

Special Agent (G-Man)
Secret Service Operative
Post Office Inspector
Customs Patrol
Immigration Patrol
Anti-Narcotic Agent
Parole Investigator
Prison Keeper
Internal Revenue Agent
Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.



A Criminologist's Library



REQUESTS for a list of books which might be studied with advantage by candidates for law enforcement positions in federal, state, city and county service have been received from many readers, particularly from those seeking appointments on state police forces. Below appear an assortment of volumes which are required reading in most states and which have the approval of state police commanders.

Dismounted Drill, 1909 U. S. Cavalry Regulations.

Criminal Law: Cases on Criminal Procedure by Mikell; Pepper and Lewis Digest; Wharton on Criminal Law.

Criminal Evidence: Wigmore on Evidence; Greenleaf on Evidence; Stephen's Digest on the Law of Evidence.

Direct and Cross Examination of Witnesses: The Art of Cross Examination by Wellman; Cross Examination of Witnesses by Cornelius.

Physiology and Care of the Horse, U. S. Army Medical Bulletin.

Game Laws; State Penal Statutes.

Forensic Chemistry; Lucas on Forensic Chemistry; Criminal Investigation by Hans Gross.

Motor Vehicle Laws; State Statutes. Crimes and Criminals by White.

Criminal Psychology by Hans Gross. Problems of Proof by Osborn.

The Prisoner at the Bar by Arthur Train.

Murder and Its Motives by Jesse. Fingerprint Instructor by Kuhne.

Studies in Forensic Psychiatry. Criminology by Haynes.

The Scientific Detective and the Expert Witness by Mitchell.

Celebrated Trials by Barrow.

Legal History by Putney.

Justice by McKinney.

Blackstone's Commentaries on Law.

Fifty Resolutions in Regard to Professional Ethics of a Lawyer by Hoffman.

Canons of Professional Ethics of the American Bar Association by Costigan.

To study each of these prescribed books with thoroughness is a big order but no candidate is ever required to absorb every detail. To the list given above we add our own selection of important works.

Modern Criminal Investigation by Soderman and O'Connell.

What Policemen Should Know by Skehan.

First Aid by Lynch.

The Policeman by Cahalane.

Police Handbook by Gage.

Memoirs of a Murder Man by Carey.

Cryptograms: Regular Feature in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY by M. E. Ohaver.

Criminal's Methods: Picking Your Own Pocket. Regular Feature in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY by Frank Wrentmore.

The complete list as presented above by no means covers the literature of law and crime. It will suffice, however, for the beginner. The works on criminal law are to be found in local court law libraries or in the library of many lawyers; volumes on criminology are usually available in large public libraries or they may be purchased (and sometimes rented) from your local book-dealer. "G2" will be glad to advise readers where they may purchase the books if they will address this department enclosing stamped, addressed envelope.

Preliminary Test for State Police

The following sample test was given to a class of two hundred applicants for enlistment in an eastern state police training school. It is not to be assumed that the same test will be given again in exactly the form it is here given. It should be borne in mind that this is only a preliminary test and not one given to candidates at the conclusion of the regular training school course.

Q1—The Federal Bureau of Investigation is under the direction of what cabinet officer?

Q2—What governmental body has the power to establish a state police force?

Q3—What is meant by equitation?

Q4—What is meant by a Constitutional right?

Q5—What document gives women the right to vote in the United States?

Q6—What public officer has the power to grant extradition?

Q7—As a state policeman would you have the right to trail a suspect into another state, arrest him and bring him back into your own state?

Q8—What is the official title of the public officer who may grant a writ of habeas corpus?

Q9—Describe briefly a roulette wheel?

Q10—What is an arsonist?

Q11—If a lawyer asked you to arrest a person for refusing to pay a bill what action would you take?

Q12—What is meant by fetlock?

Q13—Give a brief definition of feticide?

Q14—What is the best legal test to establish drunkenness?

Q15—What is the difference between a suspect and a defendant?

Q16—What is the meaning of forensic?

Q17—What is a teletype?

Q18—"Inasmuch as crime prevention cannot be caried on to the extent that would make it effective, investigation of crimes perpetrated becomes a most important duty, the percentage of convictions secured indicating the thoroughness of this work." This statement means most nearly that (a) crime preventions is a failure; (b) crime prevention will never be made effective; (c) the number of convictions procured is the test of good work in the investigation of crime. (Indicate your answer by letter.)

Q19—Under no circumstances may a state policeman arrest a man in the uniform of the U. S. Army. Is this statement true or false?

Q20—Assume that you are a state policeman. You are summoned to a house where it is believed a murder has been committed. On the floor of the kitchen of this house is the body of a dead man. A cloth cap lies on the floor about two feet from the corpse. A man enters the kitchen, declares that the cap is his and reaches to pick it up. Would you permit him to do so?

Q21—In writing a report would you describe as a revolver a .45 automatic?

Q22—In writing a report on stolen property which includes a watch, would you describe the watch as gold because the owner declares it to be gold? If not, what terms would you use?

Q23—What is meant by the expression "true bill"?

Q24—If summoned into court to testify in a criminal case would you deem it proper to ask your superior officer how you should testify?

Q25—What is meant by ballistics?

Q26—If a question of veracity arose between two men, one a native-born American citizen, the other an alien Italian, would you refuse to believe the Italian because he is not a citizen of the United States?

Q27—If you arrested a 12-year-old boy for driving a motor vehicle without a

license would you put him in a cell with men convicted of crime?

Q28—All persons arrested are presumed to be guilty until proven innocent? Is this a true or false statement as it applies to persons in the United States?

Q29—In speaking of crime what is meant by accomplice?

Q30—If a politician promised to secure promotion for you, a state policeman, if you would agree to turn a certain suspect loose, what action would you take?

Key answers to the above: Q1—Attorney General of the United States. Q2—State Legislature. Q3—Horsemanship. Q4—A right granted by a constitution. Q5—Constitution of the United States, as amended. Q6—Governor of the state. Q7—No. Q8—Judge. Q9—A device used in gambling. It consists of a wheel divided into numbered niches of various colors, a small ball which is spun around the revolving wheel, and a numbered chart upon which are numbers and colors corresponding with the numbered niches on the wheel. Q10—One who commits the crime of arson. Q11—Refuse to comply with his request. Q12—A tuft of hair above a horse's hoof. Q13—The felonious killing of an unborn child. Q14—Medical test. Q15—A suspect is merely suspected of a crime, a defendant is one actually accused of crime in a regular proceeding. Q16—Pertaining to courts of justice or to public disputation. Q17—An electrical typewriting device by which messages are typed from one typewriter to another. Q18—(c). Q19—False. Q20—No. Q21—No. Q22—No. I would call it a yellow metal watch. Q23—A grand jury indictment. Q24—No. Q25—The science of projectiles. Q26—No. Q27—No. Q28—False. Q29—An associate who aids or abets in the commission of crime. Q30—Immediately report the matter to my superior officer.

The Q. & A. Box

Questions pertaining to civil service examinations will be answered without charge. If a personal answer is desired enclose stamped, addressed envelope.

Andrew Forman, Savannah, Ga. The U. S. Civil Service Commission has no power to remove or appoint civil service employees. Such power is in the hands of

the President and the heads of departments. The appointment procedure is this: Upon the requisition of an appointing officer, the Commission provides eligibles secured as the result of competitive examinations. From the eligibles provided the appointing officer makes selection and appointment. When the Commission certifies three eligibles for any particular position, the appointing officer has absolute discretion in making selection and appointment from such eligibles, except that the rules require that selection shall be made without regard to political or religious considerations. When certification is made by the Commission its duty ends insofar as an appointment is concerned, except to require, if an appointment is made, that it be made in accordance with the rule regarding selection. However, the Commission is charged with investigating and reporting any irregularity in appointment or removal.

Boris Veit, Los Angeles and others. Included in the classified service of the Federal government (over which the Civil Service Commission has jurisdiction) are positions in the departments and independent officers at Washington, D. C. and in the field branches among which latter are the Indian Service, the Reclamation Service, National Park Service, Geological Survey, Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection, Lighthouse Service, Coast and Geodetic Survey, Immigration and Naturalization Services, Public Health Service, Veterans' Administration, Mint and Assay Service, Custodian Service, Customs, Immigration and Internal Revenue Services, Engineer Department at large, Ordnance Department at large, Quartermaster Corps, Signal Service, Air Service, Navy Yard Service, Bureau of Animal and Plant Industries, Forest Service, Weather Bureau Service, Penitentiary Service, Panama Canal Service, Railway Mail Service, Post Office Service, Rural Delivery Service and certain postmasters except in Alaska, Guam, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Samoa and the Virgin Islands. Positions under the government of the District of Columbia are not a part of Federal Service yet. The U. S. Civil Service Commission (when practicable) holds the necessary competitive examinations in different locales.



YOU have your own opinion of this issue if you have read most of the stories and features before this department and it is hardly necessary to tell you how good it is. We are quite sure that, if you are seeking the best in mystery stories, you will not pass up the opportunity to read Max Brand's short novel *The Face and the Doctor* and that, if you want to see a he-man detective in action, you will read Hugh B. Cave's *The Smoke of Vengeance*.

Therefore, we will take time only to look over the outstanding feature of next week's issue. Undoubtedly you are a follower of the adventures of that wise-cracking reporter, *Daffy Dill*, and look forward to the next story in which that red-headed, gun-shooting, camera-toting detective, *Candid Jones*, takes the leading part. Hitherto these two popular characters have operated separately, but next week they join forces for the first time in one of the best novelettes ever written by their creator, Richard Sale.

Flash is the title and that is a hint to the rare story-telling technique adopted by Mr. Sale for this novelette. Together *Daffy Dill* and *Candid Jones* race across the country after the na-

tion's most desperate band of kidnapers. The letters, telegrams, and news stories that the two heroes leave in their wake reveal their breath-taking adventures and keep you in suspense until *Daffy's* last *Flash* to the tough city editor of the *New York Chronicle* discloses the thrilling finale.

SAPPER'S *Bulldog Drummond's* *Challenge* attracted new readers to DFW and we are pleased to be able to present the following letter from one of them:

DEAR EDITOR:

Even though I am not a severe critic, your magazine has started me off on a glorious career of minute criticism anyway, and I may someday go down in history as a connoisseur of literary effort.

I wish to let you know, however, that I am obeying an impulse that I have had for some time, that of writing to your *Flashes from Readers* department.

Although I've never read many magazines of this type, I really am glad that the name of Sapper and the title of his latest episode of that brilliant fighter of crime, *Bulldog Drummond*, caught my eye one day in my neighborhood drug store.

Erle Stanley Gardner, so I read in your letters printed in a few issues back, used to be one of the contributing factors in the way of authorship to your magazine. I am sorry indeed, that the lure of Hollywood has drawn him from the "legitimate stage" of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. However, we have some

interesting characters in the magazine other than *Lester Leith*.

I have just read a story in the April 10 issue entitled *The King Goes Mad*, by J. Lane Linklater, which features one Paul C. Pitt, who is a very engaging rascal, of whom I would like to read much more in the near future.

In closing, I wish you continued success. Here's hoping that the magazine with the shield may be my standby for clean interesting fiction for a long time to come.

M. EDWARD CASEY,
New Orleans, La.

NOW that we have given a new reader the floor we will call upon a veteran of many years to air his views. Here is an opportunity for the admirers of *Johnny Dolan* and *Fluffy McGoff* to come to their defense:

DEAR EDITOR:

I am a reader of your magazine for many, many years. It is a great relief and diversion, after spending many hours at the office, to be able to take my mind off my usual routine work. There is one fault however, that I find with your magazine and that is too many serials.

When I first started reading your magazine it took me just about a week to finish it and now I find that before the week is over, I am through with the magazine and am left with only a serial which I do not enjoy. Can't you do something about having complete stories in your magazine?

I enjoy very much the *Daffy Dill*, the *Candid Jones*, and *Park Avenue Hunt Club* stories. I also enjoy your G-Men stories. I think that the *Johnny Dolan* and *Fluffy McGoff* stories are silly and have no place in a real magazine, such as you publish.

HENRY SOLOMON,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Flash!

Daffy Dill and Candid Jones, demon reporter-sleuth and famed camera-dick, get together on the story of the Century—a lightning-fast, lightning-bright battle against a gang of cutthroat kidnapers!

Coming Next Week in—

**DETECTIVE
FICTION WEEKLY**

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Nearly a quarter of a million car owners have Ovrhaul their motors, saving the cost of rebore and new ring jobs with a scientific product, containing this amazing mineral, that has been awarded the Automotive Test Laboratories Seal of Approval. Nothing like it ever before perfected.

Solves a 25 Year Old Problem

Since motor cars were first invented—OIL WASTE, LOW GAS MILEAGE, LOW COMPRESSION, LOST POWER AND NOISY MOTORS, caused by worn rings and cylinders, have brought great expense to car owners. Before Ovrhaul, it was necessary to put in new rings and rebore the cylinders, costing up to \$150.00. Now—a single application of Ovrhaul quickly checks oil waste—increases gas mileage and compression and adds new power, pep, speed and quiet, all at a fraction of the cost of new rings and reboring.

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At a cost less than spark plugs and in only 30 minutes' time, you can place OVRAUL in your cylinders and start reaping the benefits of this amazing invention. No special tools needed—no car tie-up—no danger of ruining your motor by reboring the cylinder walls.

MONEY MAKING TERRITORIES OPEN

FOR SALESMEN AND DISTRIBUTORS WHO ACT QUICK!

Salemen and Distributors are cashing in Big with Ovrhaul—It is so revolutionary—so positive in its action—so new and different and saves the motorist so much money—that representatives say OVRAUL is the quickest seller and biggest profit-maker they have had in years. Not a gasoline dope, nor gadget. Does not contain graphite or harmful abrasives. 18 million car owners need Ovrhaul. If you want in on this, send the coupon opposite or a penny post card and let me help you. I built a sales organization

Testing Laboratory Report
"We hereby certify that we have tested OVRAUL UNDER WORKING CONDITIONS—1928 Pontiac driven 72,000 miles. TOTAL GAIN in compression 92 pounds (nearly normal according to manufacturer's specifications). OVRAUL does NOT scratch, abrade or otherwise injure the motor. The pick-up speed, and hill climbing performance were increased ENORMOUSLY. Car runs practically as well as when new."
Industrial Testing Laboratory, Inc.

that sold over a million automobile tires and tubes. Ovrhaul has proved the greatest possibilities for big business or anything I have ever seen. Join hands with me—Start today by mailing the coupon for Free Sample.

B. L. Mellinger

Free SAMPLE COUPON

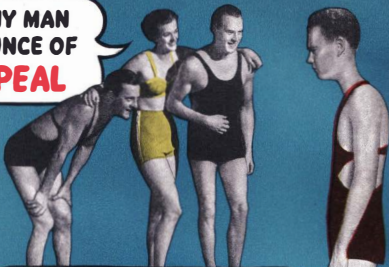
B. L. Mellinger, Pres.
Ovrhaul Co., E-920, Kansas City, Mo.
Without cost or obligation, send me at once a **FREE SAMPLE**. Also show me your big money-making plan.

Name

Address

City..... State.....

**NO SKINNY MAN
HAS AN OUNCE OF
SEX APPEAL**



**BUT SCIENCE HAS PROVED THAT
THOUSANDS DON'T HAVE TO BE
*SKINNY!***

Posed by professional models

**NEW "7-POWER" YEAST TABLETS
GIVE THOUSANDS 10 TO 25 LBS.
in just a few weeks!**

THOUSANDS of skinny people who never could gain before have quickly put on pounds of solid, naturally attractive flesh with these new "7-power" Ironized Yeast tablets. Not only that, but they've gained naturally clear skin and lovely color, new pep, new friends and popularity—in almost no time!

Scientists recently discovered that hosts of

people are thin and rundown for the simple reason that they do not get enough Vitamin B and iron in their daily food. Without these vital elements you may lack appetite, and not get the most body-building good out of what you eat.

Now one of the richest known sources of Vitamin B is cultured ale yeast. By a new process the finest imported cultured ale yeast is now concentrated 7 times, made 7 times more powerful. Then it is combined with 3 kinds of iron, pasteurized whole yeast and other valuable ingredients in pleasant tablets.

If you, too, need these vital elements to aid in building you up, get these new "7-power" Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today. Note how quickly they increase your appetite and help you get more benefit from the body-building foods that are so essential. Then, day after day, watch flat chest develop and skinny limbs round out to natural attractiveness. See better color and natural beauty come to your cheeks. Soon you feel like an entirely different person, with new charm and new personality.

Money-back guarantee

No matter how skinny and rundown you may be from lack of enough Vitamin B and iron, try these new Ironized Yeast tablets just a short time, and note the marvelous change. See if they don't aid in building you up in just a few weeks, as they have helped thousands of others. If you are not delighted with the benefits of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

Special FREE offer!

To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out seal on box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 375, Atlanta, Ga.

7 REASONS WHY

1. Rich red blood, necessary to nourish and build up the body is promoted where more iron is needed.
2. Hearty appetite to enjoy plenty of good food is assured those who specifically need Vitamin B.
3. Needed aid in getting ALL the good out of your food is supplied where Vitamin B is deficient.
4. Nerves depleted by inadequate Vitamin B, are strengthened by this special nerve-aiding vitamin.
5. Unsightly skin eruptions due to Vitamin B deficiency are corrected and natural beauty restored.
6. Growth, development and increase in weight are promoted where retarded by Vitamin B shortage.
7. New energy, strength and pep are quickly given to thousands who need both Vitamin B and iron.

