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DETECTIVE

FICTION

WEEKLY

FEB. 23
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The
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HUNT CLUB**

in
**"Killer's
Last
Stand"**





NOAH WEBSTER *thought that COLDS were caused by COMETS*

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His conclusion that colds were due to the fearful plunge of meteors through the sky was far from the truth, but no less distant than that of other savants who assigned colds to the bite of bedbugs, and to "sitting in cold, damp churches." (Dr. Thomas Haynes, 1789.)

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FICTION WEEKLY



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Killer's Last Stand

*He Returns from the Dead,
the Last of the Mad
Dzambas—Returns to De-
stroy the Park Avenue
Hunt Club*

A Novelette

By Judson P. Philips

CHAPTER I

Out of the Shadows

IT was not often that Wu, Chinese servant of Major Geoffrey Saville, had a night off. Not because Geoffrey Saville was a hard taskmaster, but because there was always so much happening at the house on Park Avenue that Wu himself had no wish to be away. For this impassive-looking little

Oriental was an adventurer in his own right.

True he drew down a salary as cook and houseman for Saville and his two friends, John Jericho and Arthur Hallam, but these three men did not live ordinary lives. Under the outward guise of wealthy and indolent society bachelors they were in actuality the sole members of the notorious Park



Every step brought Wu closer
to the dark alley

Avenue Hunt Club, scourge of the criminal world, victors in a hundred encounters with murderers, thieves, and racketeers. And Wu, as deadly with a knife as the average good shot is with a revolver, played an important rôle in these adventures.

Owing to a rather grim set of cir-

tonight, for John Jericho lay in a delirious fever, his shoulder shattered by an expanding bullet. Arthur Halam had a shattered thigh bone and was likewise confined to the house. And Saville, leader and organizer of the Hunt Club, was close to exhaustion after three terrible days on the trail of



Salvatore slipped from the shadows

cumstances, however, Wu had the night off. There would be nothing doing at the Hunt Club's headquarters

the most diabolical murder gang in the history of crime — the Dzamba brothers.

Protruding from the pocket of Wu's overcoat was a newspaper, across the front page of which blared a headline in huge black letters;

**SPORTSMEN RESCUE
GOVERNOR CLIFFORD FROM
MURDEROUS DZAMBAS**

**Society Men, Deer Hunting in Catskills,
Kill Three Brothers Wanted for
Score of Murders**

Wu grinned as he recalled it. Deer hunting! The papers knew little of the truth. They did not know that the "society men" were really the Park Avenue Hunt Club. They did not know that they had been on the trail of the Dzambas, without sleep or rest, for nearly seventy hours before they arrived at the governor's hunting lodge in the nick of time. Well, it was better so. The Park Avenue Hunt Club had no desire for the world to know the identity of its members.

It had been a tough business, that battle at the mountain camp of Governor Clifford. Dangerously close to a tragic finish for the Hunt Club, with big Jericho and rotund Arthur Hallam escaping death by inches. But in the end Leonardo and Vincente Dzamba had been shot to death, and Salvatore Dzamba, mad leader of the bloodthirsty brothers, had dived through a window and over a fifty foot precipice to a rocky gorge below. True, his body had not yet been found, but no man could have survived that leap. The body must have been washed downstream—it would be found later.

Wu smiled. His idol was Geoffrey Saville—suave leader of the Hunt Club, who bore a striking resemblance to Ronald Colman, the actor. Big, red-headed John Jericho, former lion hunter, who had turned to hunting men, and little, round-faced Arthur Hallam, eyes twinkling through the lenses of steel-rimmed spectacles, gourmand extraordinary, ex-medical student, psychologist and master of intrigue—these Wu loved also. But Sa-

ville above all. Saville always prevailed against the forces of evil.

WU was a fatalist. If he was to die, he would die, and nothing could prevent it. Perhaps it was this calm philosophy that made him less cautious than any member of the Hunt Club should have been. Perhaps it kept him from having any inkling, as he walked smiling toward the house of his honorable uncle in Chinatown, that death was at that very minute stalking him. Death in the form and figure of the most diabolical murderer of all time—Salvatore Dzamba.

For behind the soft-treading little Oriental was another man—a big man, a dark man, a man with madness shining in his black, feverish eyes, who walked even more softly than the little Chinese, despite his bulk. Salvatore Dzamba, who had murdered and brutally mutilated the bodies of ten policemen to revenge the electrocution of his brother Pietro; Salvatore Dzamba, who had escaped from court where he was about to be tried for those crimes, slaughtering the judge and half a dozen others in the process; Salvatore Dzamba, who had murdered the district attorney and made an attempt on the life of the governor. Salvatore Dzamba was not dead. A miracle *had* taken place; he had survived that leap over the cliff. And now, like a monstrous shadow of evil, he tracked softly along after Wu, the servant of the three men who had killed his brothers.

If Wu had known he might have run; he might have turned and trusted to his knife to save him. But Wu did not know. He did not realize that every step that took him nearer to a dark alley in the middle of the next block was bringing him closer also to a murderous attack.

And then suddenly it happened. Out of the dark shadows slipped Salvatore, running softly. For a second the light from a street lamp glistened against steel. Then he was on Wu, crushing him down. The knife flashed high and descended only once, straight between the shoulder blades of the little Chinese.

There was scarcely a n y sound as



SALVATORE DZAMBA

Dzamba dragged the inert body of the Chinese into the dark alley. No one saw that sinister figure leaning over the body, his fingers avidly searching the pockets. No one heard the little exclamation of satisfaction as he found what he wanted. A ring of keys. Keys to the house on Park Avenue!

CHAPTER II

The Night Raid

THE telephone on the bedside table tinkled softly. Adrienne Terry reached out and switched on the lamp. She was blond, with a pale face and scarlet lips. She was a hostess at the Palace of Terpsichore, where one might hold her in one's arms for ten cents a dance. For weeks the sound of

that telephone had struck terror to Adrienne's heart, but now she was at peace. For the Dzamba brothers were dead and she was safe. Then she answered the phone and heard Salvatore Dzamba's voice.

The room whirled around before her eyes. She sank back on her pillow, gripping the telephone so tightly that her lacquered finger nails bit into the palm of her hand. Stark, hysterical fear swelled up in her throat, made her want to scream—and kept her from it at the same time. Salvatore Dzamba was chuckling.

"You are surprised, my little humming bird?" The very softness of his voice held a deadly menace. "Perhaps you are afraid, eh? And why not! My late lamented brother, Angelo, may God rest his soul, was unwise in his choice of women. But Salvatore knows, my pet. Knows that it was you who warned the police we planned an escape from court. Knows that you are a double-crossing little bum, eh, Adrienne?"

Words choked in her throat. This was a warning of death. She knew it.

"For God's sake—" she said, and did not know her own voice.

"Ah, you call upon the heavens for aid, eh, Adrienne?" he laughed. "But it is to Salvatore that you must plead for your life—because," and suddenly the voice was like chiseled steel, "I hold your miserable existence in the palm of my hand. No police will find me before I kill you, eh, Adrienne? You know that?"

"I know that," she said dully.

"But I give you a chance to live, Adrienne. Am I not kind? Am I not benevolent? Am I not, in fact, Santa Claus?" His soft laughter turned her heart to ice. "You have only to do a little service for Salvatore and he will

consider you have been paid for your treachery. One little service. And it must be done tonight. What do you say, my pet?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Listen closely, my little cheat," said Salvatore. "You will get up and get dressed. You will go downstairs and in your mail box you will find a package. In the package you will find a key ring and also a little box, filled with a harmless looking white substance like salt or sugar. You will then go to the house of one Major Geoffrey Saville on Park Avenue. One of the keys on the ring will admit you to the house. You will go to the dining room or the pantry, wherever Major Saville keeps his sugar bowl. Into that bowl you will empty the harmless looking white powder, mixing it carefully with the sugar. Then you will go away, and your account with Salvatore will be settled. Is it not simple?"

Adrienne Terry moistened her parched lips. "How do I know you will not kill me then—even if I do this for you? You have killed all your other friends?"

"You will have to run that risk, my pet. But I shall certainly kill you if you do not do what I say. Is it not worth the gamble?"

"And suppose I am caught in the house?" she asked.

"You will not be caught if you are careful. The servant," and he chuckled, "is not there. The others will be asleep. The key will admit you noiselessly and in five minutes you will be out of the house. You will do it?"

"God help me, what else can I do?"

"Splendid, splendid, my little double-crossing love. Let me point out that the package is already in your mail box. That you cannot hope to trap me by immediately phoning the police. And

I warn you that if you think you can escape by going to the police you are wrong. I will wait in hiding, for months if necessary. But I will kill you as surely as the sun rises. Remember the little bluecoats with their heads chopped off? It would be a pity to slit your white neck, but I will do it unless you follow my instructions and keep your mouth shut. That I swear!"

"I'll go, Salvatore," she said, slowly. "There must be a special hell for men like you. I hope to God—"

"There are no other men like Salvatore," he laughed. And hung up.

ADRIENNE TERRY sat very still for a moment, her face as white as the pillow slip against which it rested. She had no illusions about this mission Salvatore had arranged for her. Major Saville and his friends, she knew by the papers, were the men who had done for Salvatore's brothers, and apparently for him. She had no doubt that the "harmless looking white substance" she was to put into the sugar bowl meant death to Saville's household. She would be an accessory to a murder—a hunted woman.

Yet one thing Adrienne Terry feared more than anything was death itself. Better run any risk in order to live. Death was the end—the end of warmth, of fun, of music, of laughter. It was the end of Adrienne Terry! She must live—at any cost, at any risk, no matter what anguish of soul and body. *She must live!*

Like a sleep walker she got up and began to pull on her clothes. And always there danced before her horrible visions—visions of dead men, of bodies hacked to pieces, of Salvatore, dark, inevitable, a laughing madman with a knife in his hand. Better anything than to meet him face to face. Saville

and his friends had had their chance at Salvatore and failed. It was not her fault—it was not her fault! She clung to this notion. Their deaths would be on their own heads. They had failed and Salvatore meant them to die. She couldn't be blamed. No one would face Salvatore if there was an out. *No one!*

She went downstairs to her mail box, and there, as he had promised her, was the package containing the keys and the little box of "harmless looking white substance." It was dark in the vestibule; she felt sudden terror and literally ran out onto the street. It was three in the morning. No one about. A cab on distant Broadway—and her legs would scarcely carry her. Salvatore was nearby—he had left that package himself—he might be watching to see if she would make a false move. She ran, sobbing, toward the cab.

In the cab she struggled for composure. She must be cool now. She must steady her nerves. There could be no slip if she was careful, for the key would let her into the house, and if she made no noise she could do as Salvatore ordered. She dared not turn aside. He might be following.

And then Adrienne Terry nearly fainted. She looked at the back of the cab driver's head. It was Salvatore himself. He was looking at her in the mirror over the windshield, and his white teeth were bared in a smile. She pretended not to notice. There could be no faltering—no turning back.

The cab approached the house on Park Avenue. And then Salvatore spoke without turning.

"There is a man standing across the street from the house. You see him in that doorway, complacently smoking a pipe? It is Inspector Baird from headquarters. He is protecting our

friends. Therefore we act boldly, my little plum. I drive you straight to the front door. You get out and let yourself in. He will not suspect because he will think anyone with a key has a right to enter. If you falter he will become suspicious and then, alas, I shall have to kill you after all. You understand?"

She looked at Baird, standing across the street. It was horrible. If there were some way to let him know, he would shoot Salvatore down like a mad dog. But there was no way—no way to let him know and save her own life.

THE cab stopped in front of the house and she got out and ran up the steps. Salvatore drove away immediately. She saw Inspector Baird step forward, watching her keenly. She had the keys in her hand—fumbled with the lock—and felt relief surge over her as the first key fitted. She let herself into a dark hallway. She looked through the glass panel beside the door and saw Baird go back to his post. The key had fooled him. He was satisfied.

But the house was very dark—very dark and still. She waited a moment, trying to control her breathing. It seemed to her that it must be audible a block away. Presently she crept forward. There was a room on the left, lined with books, comfortably furnished. And on the right, obviously, the dining room. Enough illumination from a street light to show her the big center table, and a sideboard. And on the sideboard a *sugar bowl!* She fumbled for the package of "harmless looking white substance." The paper around it rattled thunderously. Her lower lip was caught so tightly between her teeth that it bled. She stepped quickly over to the sideboard and took the lid off the sugar bowl.

And then a sobbing cry escaped her. For out of the darkness came a cold, hard voice:

"I advise you to turn around very quickly with your hands up, my friend, or I shall shoot you in the stomach. It will take several days to die and you will regret every one of them!"

She spun around, dropped her package on the sideboard, and raised her hands. At the same instant the room was flooded with light. Standing in the door was a man who looked a great deal like Ronald Colman. He held a gun with deadly steadiness in his right hand.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Geoffrey Saville softly, as his eyes rested on the terrified girl.

CHAPTER III

Death Over the Threshold

FOR a moment neither of them spoke. For Adrienne Terry it was the end of the world. This meant jail, unless Salvatore killed her before they could get her there. She looked at the face of this man whom Salvatore wished to kill. It was a kindly face, but very stern, very grim, at the moment. He had slipped into the dining room and stood with his back to the wall. With his left hand he was pressing a button vigorously. When he spoke his voice was still very cold.

"Perhaps you'd better sit down, Miss Terry," he said quietly.

She gasped. "You—you know me?"

"You forget your picture has been in the papers a great deal of late. In connection with the Dzamba brothers."

"You are Major Saville?" she asked.

"I am."

"Then God help me!" She dropped into a chair beside the dining room

table, buried her face in her arms, and wept bitterly.

"You'll pardon me," said Saville dryly, "if I am not over-sympathetic until I'm sure you're not armed, Miss Terry. I should hate to be shot down simply because of a sentimental streak in my nature."

He stepped forward, gun leveled at her, and took her handbag. It contained no weapon. As he glanced at the sideboard he frowned. He went over and looked at the box containing the "harmless looking white substance." Then he went back and pressed the bell near the door of the room again. He reached into his dressing gown pocket and took out a cigarette from a loose package. He struck a match with his thumb nail to light it. Then he pressed the bell again.

"Where is that Chinese devil?" he muttered to himself. Then suddenly his lips tightened and he stepped quickly to the table and opened the girl's purse again. Out of it dropped the key ring. He examined it, and then he reached out and yanked Adrienne Terry to her feet.

"How did you come by those keys?" he demanded. "What's happened to Wun? Where is he?"

"I—I don't know!" she stammered. "I don't know who you're talking about. Somebody—somebody gave me the keys to use. I—I—" She faltered to a miserable halt.

"Is there anyone else in this house with you?" he rapped. "By God, if you don't want to get in one unholy mess, Miss Terry, you'd better do some explaining—and do it quickly." He seemed to be listening—listening.

"I'm alone," the girl said. "I—"

"Where did you get those keys?"

"I got them," she said slowly, "from Salvatore Dzamba."

"Impossible!" Saville rapped. "Dzamba is dead."

"I saw him with my own eyes not ten minutes ago," said Adrienne Terry. "He drove me to your front door in a cab. He is alive, and I—I had to do what he said."

SAVILLE was thinking fast. Dzamba alive! This girl in possession of Wu's keys. Wu would have defended those keys with his life, and there was only one terrible and bitter conclusion to draw from the fact that he had parted with them. A fierce hatred swept over Saville, a hatred which made his eyes glitter coldly. Dzamba! This one mad, bloodthirsty killer had outwitted the police, the Hunt Club; he had nearly gotten Jericho and Hallam—and now Wu.

"My God, if it's the last thing I do—" Saville said grimly. Then he grabbed the girl by the arm and literally dragged her across the hall into his study. She sank a little breathless into a leather chair while Saville talked on the telephone to Inspector James Emory Doane, chief of the homicide squad.

"I tell you he's alive," Saville repeated his news impatiently to the sleepy inspector. "Never mind how I know. I haven't the time to go into it over the phone. But he's been in this neighborhood in the last fifteen minutes. And get this, Doane. He was in possession of keys to my home—Wu's keys. I'm afraid it means the little fellow is done for. He had gone to have dinner with his uncle in Chinatown. Find him, Doane."

"I'll do my best, Saville," said Doane grimly. "I'll have the guard on your house redoubled."

"The hell with that," snapped Saville. "I want Dzamba to come back!

Don't scare him off. I have a long account to square with that red-handed devil!"

Adrienne Terry was looking steadily at Saville when he hung up the receiver and turned to face her.

"You didn't turn me in—didn't even tell them about me?" she said wonderingly.

"Listen, Adrienne Terry," said Saville, leaning forward and talking earnestly. "I know what kind of a spot you're in. I know that you tried to warn the police when the Dzambas were planning to escape from the courtroom. I know that you were in terror of your life. I know that whatever you've done tonight you've done out of fear. Now get this. I want you to tell me everything—everything that leads up to your being here. I'm going to get Salvatore Dzamba," he concluded savagely, "and I need your help. And you need mine if you ever want a moment's peace again. Now talk, and talk fast."

Her lips trembled. "If I talk—" she began.

"If you *don't* talk," said Saville grimly, "I'm not going to have you arrested. I'm going to turn you loose. Salvatore Dzamba kills people who have outlived their usefulness. He'll kill you to keep you from talking. But if you do talk to me here and now, Miss Terry, I give you my word of honor that you will be so well protected that Salvatore Dzamba will never have a chance to lay a finger on you. That is a solemn promise. Now shoot!"

HE pushed a box of cigarettes toward her, took one himself and lit them both with a lighter that stood at hand. Then he leaned back and listened—listened intently while

the girl told him briefly of her telephone conversation with Dzamba, the finding of the package in her mail box, as he had promised, her horror on discovering that he was the taxi driver.

"You may think I'm a terrible coward, Major Saville," she finished hoarsely. "But you don't know Salvatore. If I'd signaled that policeman across the way he'd have killed me right there in the cab. I know it!"

"I know it, too, Miss Terry," said Saville. "I don't blame you for anything you've done. And I'm not going to turn you over to the police. I'm going to protect you. Now a question or two. You didn't get the number of the cab Salvatore was driving?"

"I—I was too frightened when I got out," she said, "I had no reason to think about it when I got in."

"Quite," said Saville. "I'm afraid there's a dead taxi driver somewhere." He tapped restlessly on the desk with his fingers. "And you have no idea from where he phoned you?"

"None," she said.

"He made no further appointment? Gave you no instructions as to what you were to do after you poisoned the sugar in my sugar bowl?"

"No. He said if I was careful I wouldn't be caught and I could get away and that would settle his account with me."

Saville laughed grimly. "You did not have a chance, Miss Terry. I have one of the most elaborate burglar alarm systems in the world in this house. The minute you put that key in the lock I was awakened and knew something was wrong." Then he sat bolt upright, and his eyes were on a little green bulb that flashed over his desk. "There's someone at the front door right now," he said sharply. His lips tightened. "I wonder—" And he

took the gun from his dressing gown pocket. He stood up.

"Sit right here," he instructed her. "Don't leave this room till I tell you to." He stepped out into the hall.

There were many tricky devices in this home of the Park Avenue Hunt Club. Saville pressed a button just outside the study, and a set of steel shutters slid noiselessly over the glass panels on each side of the front door. Then he went quickly toward the door. That green light meant someone had rung the bell, which bell rang in Wu's quarters but also flashed a light in Saville's study and his bedroom.

It was too soon for Doane to have any report. Who could be ringing his bell at four-thirty in the morning? Had Dzamba come boldly back to find out what had happened to the girl? He offered up a profound prayer that this might be the case.

There was a little peephole in the front door, protected by thick, bullet-proof glass. He opened this and looked out. Then suddenly he wrenched open the bolts, and heedless of danger, stepped out. For lying on the doorstep was a man, a man from whose neck blood gushed horribly with each beat of his heart. Saville turned him over quickly and looked into his face.

It was Inspector Baird, who had been stationed across the way. And Saville knew that he was close to death.

CHAPTER IV

Your Days Are Numbered!

SAVILLE tried desperately to stop the flow of blood from that ghastly wound in Baird's neck—a gunshot wound. But it was hopeless. The man looked up at him with helpless, frightened eyes and tried to smile.

"I'll have you fixed up in no time, old man," Saville said. "Get your arm around my neck—got to get you inside."

Baird groaned as Saville lifted him and half dragged, half carried him to the big lounge in the entrance hall, where he stretched him out.

"Miss Terry!" he called sharply. The girl stepped out of the study. One look at Baird's face and she averted her eyes. "Upstairs—third door to the left," Saville rapped. "You'll find a trained nurse there. Tell her to come at once and bring her first aid kit." Adrienne Terry ran.

"No soap, Mr. Saville," Baird whispered, and choked horribly.

"Nonsense," said Saville. But he knew it wasn't nonsense. Baird had only a few minutes to live, and Saville was torn between the desire for information and the unwillingness to make this unhappy man's last moments any more painful than was necessary. Baird solved the problem himself, his lips moving swiftly.

"Guess I played the fool, Mr. Saville," he muttered. "Saw girl let herself into your house with a key. I was puzzled—hadn't heard about any woman in your establishment. But—then I might not have been told." He smiled feebly. "But the taxi driver hung around, down at the end of the block. I got nervous. Thought I'd come over and make sure everything was all right. The minute I started over the cab began coming back down the block." His voice was scarcely audible now.

"Don't talk unless you feel like it, old man," said Saville gently.

Baird's face twisted into a grimace.

"It makes it easier," he said. "It—it's sort of scary, Mr. Saville. Kick-in' the bucket this way. I—I guess it

don't make any difference when it happens. You're never quite ready. I—I only wish I'd got one crack at him, though."

"Who?" said Saville.

"The taxi man. He came down the block when he saw me crossing the street, like I said. Like a fool I didn't pay any attention to him. Then all of a sudden he was alongside and let me have it. I—I couldn't even get my gun out. Couldn't — couldn't — even — get — the — number — of — the—"

The trained nurse brushed Saville aside. Adrienne Terry leaned against the wall and she looked like a death's head—a death's head with scarlet lips. Saville went over to her and took her by the arm.

"You had better go back in the study," he said. "There's brandy in the decanter on the small table. Take a good slug."

"Was it Salvatore?" she asked.

Saville nodded grimly. The nurse looked up from where she was kneeling beside the couch.

"He's dead, Major Saville," she said, in a level voice.

INSPECTOR JAMES EMORY DOANE stood looking down at the dead body of Baird, his face a study as he listened to Saville. Across from them sat Arthur Hallam, crutches beside him, staring with unblinking eyes at a bare spot on the wall.

Inspector Doane was the one living man who knew the real truth about Saville, Hallam and Jericho; he had kept the secret of the Park Avenue Hunt Club to himself because he believed in them. Tall, gray, stoop-shouldered, Doane was thinner and older than he had been a month ago, before the Dzamba brothers had embarked on their bloody career.

"There can be no doubt it was Dzamba? But then you say the girl actually saw him." Doane had a strange way of answering his own questions.

"No doubt whatever," said Saville grimly. "You've got no trace of Wu?" It was six in the morning now, an hour and a half since the shooting of Baird.

"No trace as yet," said Doane. His men were scouring Chinatown; but since no one seemed to know who Wu's uncle was, and since his body had not been found, they were at a loss. One of Doane's assistants had rushed to headquarters with the little box of "harmless looking white substance" Adrienne Terry had brought to have it analyzed. They might learn something of Dzamba's stamping ground if they could locate the chemist who had sold him poison. But it was a slender hope at best.

"There's something fishy about it all," said Arthur Hallam thoughtfully. "Salvatore Dzamba isn't a poisoner. He's a bloody butcher. He has always done his own killings, yet he sends a girl to do for us—a girl so paralyzed with fright she was almost sure to bungle. Why? Why, when he could have done the job himself?" And he groaned. "What in God's name will we do without Wu? No one to get breakfast."

"Breakfast!" Saville snorted. "The poor little devil is probably floating around in the East River somewhere. Good in heaven, how could we have bungled this thing so horribly?" He looked almost resentfully at Doane. "I had a revolver trained on Salvatore once, Inspector, but I didn't kill him. I let you arrest him. Since then he has killed more than a dozen men! Don't ever talk to me about the due

course of the law. From now on I make my own laws!"

Doane's lips tightened.

"You don't have to rub it in," he said harshly.

Saville dropped a hand on his shoulder. "Sorry, old man. For the first time in my life I think I'm a little hysterical. God, when I think how close I've been to Dzamba tonight, and that he's still alive! Wu disappeared. Arthur Vare croaked up. John upstairs, tossing around in his bed. Baird and a score of other good fellows dead. And once I had that devil dead to rights! God!"

And then the telephone rang in the study and Doane went to it. He was expecting a report from headquarters. When he came back there was a baffled look on his face.

"Gentlemen," he said slowly, "this is about the craziest damn thing I ever heard. Do you know what was in that package Dzamba gave the girl to put in your sugar bowl?"

"What?" Hallam asked softly.

"Sugar," said Doane.

"What?"

"Sugar," Doane repeated. "He steals your Chink's keys so that he can send a girl to your house at three-thirty in the morning to put sugar in your sugar bowl. Now what the hell do you make of that? But then you don't make anything of it, because nobody would!"

ARTHUR HALLAM thoughtfully tapped one of his thick Turkish cigarettes on the back of his hand before he lit it. His eyes were very grave.

"I have never been afraid before," he said in a strange voice.

Saville gave him a sharp look. "Afraid of what, Arthur?"

Hallam looked at the ash on the end of his cigarette. "If it had been poison I wouldn't have been afraid. But the sugar frightens me."

"Why?" Doane snapped.

"Because it was meant to frighten me," said Hallam slowly. "It was meant to show me that Salvatore Dzamba can kill me any time he feels like it. And before God, my friends, I'm beginning to believe he can."

None of them spoke for a minute. Then the doorbell rang.

After the high tension of the last few hours the next minutes were somewhat ludicrous. It was Saville who went to the front door, gun drawn, and opened to the person who had rung the bell. Standing there, a broad grin on his face, was a little Chinese.

"Have I the honor to gaze upon features of the honorable Major Saville?" he asked.

"You have," Saville rapped.

"Ah! Greatest of pleasure. I am possessor of unworthy name of Chin Loo. I am cousin of at this moment very distracted Wu."

Saville gripped his arm. "You come from Wu? Good God, man, where is he? Is he all right?"

Chin Loo grinned. "Wu is at the home of my miserable father, who is likewise his miserable uncle. As for all right, it is not precise description. Wu has very unpleasant hole in his back where knife have pierce his epidermis. It causes him to be most unhappy. But for some reason the gods see fit that he shall remain to live."

"Thank God for that," said Saville with relief.

"It is at request of Wu I am here," said Chin Loo, "to act as pinch substitute. He have tell me that it is with difficulty that you perform task of boiling water. This I doubt to be entire

truth. More likely statement of greatly whimsical nature. But I come to offer unworthy talent as cook and house boy until Wu may return."

A mountainous sigh escaped Arthur Hallam. He seemed to have forgotten his grave statements of the moment before.

"Welcome, Chin Loo," he called



ARTHUR HALLAM

out, "and for the love of Heaven apply your unworthy talent immediately. Eggs, kippers, heated rolls, and much, much black coffee."

"I am already galloping toward completion of task," grinned Chin Loo.

DOANE had sent out a general alarm for Dzamba and there was nothing much any of them could do for the moment. Saville persuaded Adrienne Terry to retire to one of the guest rooms to get some rest. He then went to his own quarters, shaved, showered, and dressed. On his way downstairs to join Hallam and the inspector at breakfast he stopped

outside Jericho's door. The nurse answered his gentle knock.

"How is he?" Saville asked.

"The fever has broken," she told him. "He's sleeping like a child. The danger has passed, Major Saville."

Saville's relief at the knowledge that both Jericho and Wu were going to be all right was so great that he found himself with a real appetite for breakfast.

And Chin Loo proved to be an admirable substitute for his cousin. Even Hallam was forced to admit that Wu: himself could not have improved on the eggs and the coffee. He was more doubtful about the kippers.

"They should be sautéed in butter, not broiled," he told the Chinese.

"I do not patronize such an idea," said Chin Loo, and disappeared into the kitchen. In a moment he returned. "I should answer summons of front doorbell?" he asked. "It has just rung with violence."

Both Saville and Doane rose quickly.

"Leave it to me, Chin Loo," said the head of the Hunt Club, and the eyes of the little Oriental bulged when he saw Saville draw a gun from the pocket of his tweed suit. Evidently Wu had not told him of the kind of household to which he was coming.

At the front door Saville looked out through the peephole, frowning.

"No one there," he said to Doane, who stood behind him.

"Maybe the Chink made a mistake about the bells," suggested the inspector. "Might have been a bell from one of the upstairs rooms. He's strange."

"Wait," said Saville. He carefully opened the door, and lying underneath it on the door sill was a long white envelope. The two men exchanged glances. Saville then stooped and picked it up, first taking out his hand-

kerchief to be sure he would leave none of his own finger-prints on it. It was addressed in a bold, rugged hand to "Major Geoffrey Saville." There was no address on it, no stamp. Hallam was calling out anxiously from the dining room to know what was up. They rejoined him. Saville showed him the unopened envelope.

"A messenger must have brought it," he said.

"Messengers — accredited ones — wait till someone answers the doorbell," said Hallam dryly. "Well, damn it, aren't you going to open it? You needn't be so damn careful about finger-prints, Geoffrey. You can be certain there are none on there that matter."

Saville took up a knife and slit the letter open. There were several pages of big, sprawling handwriting. He looked at the bottom of the last page for the signature, and his lips tightened as he saw it. It was signed with a flourish, "Salvatore Dzamba."

"Well, for God's sake read it!" snapped Hallam. The pain in his leg, the forced inactivity, made his usually even temper ragged.

Saville sat down and began to read:

"DEAR MAJOR SAVILLE:

"Hasn't the past night been interesting? I do hope you appreciate the pains I have gone to to give it the proper bizarre touches. You have of course had the package that poor girl brought to your house analyzed. Were not the results engaging? Is it possible that you had enough imagination to realize just what it is all about, my friend? I shall explain, on the chance that you have missed the point.

"You may remember my late lamented brother Pietro? He languished in prison while the law decided what to do with him. After his conviction he had hope that his case might be appealed. Each day he had hope . . . until the very last hour of his life he had it: It was really quite ter-

rible. And so I sent the sugar. Do you understand?

"I am going to kill you, Major Saville. I have already killed your Chinese servant and I am going to kill your friends too. You killed my brothers, and the Dzambas never leave a debt unpaid. But I am going to kill you exactly when it suits me. It may be today, it may be in a week. It may be while you sleep in your bed, it may be while you lunch at a fashionable restaurant, it may be while you walk down the street.

"I sent the girl last night, knowing she would be caught. I wanted you to know that I had finished your little Chinese, and I wanted you to know that had I chosen to do the job myself you would now be dead. I killed the little policeman just to show you that guards around your house will be quite useless. When the moment comes you will die, Major Saville. But meantime I want you to sweat, to tremble, to know how terrible it is to expect death at every instant, to expect death for your friends.

"Arrange your affairs, Major Saville. Make your peace with God. For your days are numbered. Think! Every time a car passes you on the street I may be in it. Every time your doorbell rings it may be I, waiting to blow your head off. Every step you take outside or inside your house will be fraught with danger.

"I enjoy the prospect of our final meeting.

"SALVATORE DZAMBA."

Saville finished reading and put down the letter. Then he laughed.

"I wonder if Salvatore thinks this frightens me?" he said.

HALLAM looked at him gravely. "Aren't you frightened?" he drawled.

"My dear Arthur, if I quailed at every prospect of danger in my life I would be in a constant condition of St. Vitus' dance."

"But this is real danger, Geoffrey. Salvatore Dzamba is mad—mad as Nero! He counts no personal risk. He

is bold. So bold that he has left that letter under our door with every policeman for miles around on the lookout.

"We have been up against clever men, Geoffrey, and we have been up against brave men. But this man is clever, without nerves, and quite mad. And therefore he is unpredictable." Hallam's voice was somber. "I don't mind confessing that I am afraid. Afraid for you and John and for Wu—for all of us. The hunter has the advantage, Geoffrey. We've always been the hunters. But now we are being hunted, and three of us are helpless."

Saville's eyes glittered coldly. "I don't propose to be hunted, Arthur. I propose to hunt. Dzamba can't be everywhere at once. He can't shoot any quicker or more accurately than I can. He can't think any faster than I can. The odds are even, Arthur, and I couldn't ask for anything better than that."

Hallam crushed out his cigarette in the saucer of his coffee cup and for the first time there was a faint twinkle in his blue eyes.

"You don't scare worth a damn, Geoffrey," he said. "Well, maybe it's sour grapes on my part. Maybe I just regret that John and Wu and I can't be in at the finish. Because somehow, Geoffrey, I've got a notion to place a bet on you when you're in this mood. And by the way, Dzamba isn't quite as wise as he imagines. From the letter he still feels sure he's done for Wu."

"Salvatore Dzamba doesn't know one other thing," said Saville grimly. "He doesn't know that a civilized and sane person like me can go a little crazy too, if he is goaded to it. I have never had a lust for blood before, Arthur.

But I've got it now, and by God, Dzamba is going to satisfy it!"

CHAPTER V

Trap for the Hunter

TO hunt and not be hunted. That was Geoffrey's problem, and one that took considerable thought. If a thoroughly organized police net had been stretched around the city without entangling a single trace of Dzamba, how could one man, no matter how clever, hope to find one other man among millions. He had no friends. His four brothers were dead and the one outsider who had been in his confidence, Slug Mandell, a renegade cop, Salvatore had murdered with his own hand to keep him from talking.

"You've got to find out what your trump cards are, Geoffrey," Hallam told his friend thoughtfully. "Let's see. What are Dzamba's trumps? The best one is that he knows where you are, but you don't know where he is. As long as he has that one up his sleeve he has a tremendous advantage."

"Sooner or later, if he trails me," Saville said, "I'll spot him."

"And the minute you do, you're a dead man," said Hallam, with conviction.

Saville tugged savagely at his pipe.

"If the rest of you weren't laid up," he said, "we could use the old stunt of the double trail. I let Dzamba follow me and you follow him and nail him. But you can't walk, and John and Wu are in bed."

"How about the police?" suggested Hallam.

"Dzamba would spot them and lay off."

They were silent for a moment, sitting before the fire in the study. Adrienne Terry still slept. Doane had

gone back to headquarters to direct the official search.

Hallam stared thoughtfully into the blaze.

"What doesn't Dzamba know about us?" he asked.

"He doesn't know that we are the Park Avenue Hunt Club."

"That's of no use to us. If he did know, our reputation wouldn't scare him off."

"He doesn't know that Wu is alive," Saville added.

"And that doesn't help us because Wu is laid up and can't surprise him in any way."

Suddenly Saville sat forward, his eyes bright with excitement. "There's something else, Arthur! Dzamba doesn't know that I can get out of this house without him seeing me. The secret exit in the cellar! We used it to get away from the Man in the Rubber Mask when the house was surrounded."

Hallam nodded. "You mean you can get out without Dzamba being aware of it, scout around, and wait for him to show his hand."

"I've got a better idea than that, Arthur. A hell of a lot better idea!" Saville cried.

IN a dingy little office in the West Forties a man sat at a desk, feet on the blotter, reading the morning paper. He was a slender, rather clean-cut looking man about six feet tall, with unusually bright blue eyes. The office was sparsely furnished and it looked as though it had done without the services of a cleaning woman for some time. Dusty files, an empty water cooler, one rather rickety chair beside the one in which the man sat, and a cracked mirror on the wall, constituted the only furnishings. The frosted

glass door of the office bore the inscription: "*William J. Devens, private inquiry agent.*"

Mr. Devens looked up sharply as his office door opened and when he recognized his visitor he sprang up out of his chair, a broad grin on his face.

"Major Saville! Holy mackerel, I'm glad to see you, sir. Sit down. No, this one behind the desk. You're not so apt to break your neck in it."

Saville sat down. He was carrying a rather bulky package which he put down on the desk. "Nice to see you, Bill."

"Gee, it's nice to see you, sir. You been having some excitement, according to the papers. Say, I had to laugh, you and your friends shooting up those Dzambas when the whole police force had missed 'em. You'd of made a swell cop, Major."

Saville smiled dryly. His friend Bill Devens didn't realize that in a sense the Park Avenue Hunt Club were much the same thing. But of course Bill had no idea that this man who had been his commander overseas was connected with that mysterious organization.

"It's about the Dzambas I came to see you, Bill," Saville told him.

"Yeah?"

"Yes. You see, the papers are wrong on an important detail. Salvatore Dzamba, the worst of the lot, is still alive. And he's gunning for me and my friends." Briefly Saville outlined the adventures of the past night. Then he showed Devens the letter that had come from Dzamba that morning.

"**S**AY, this is bad business, Major," said the private detective gravely.

"It's very bad, Bill. I might add that I have no intention of sitting

quietly around waiting for my friend Dzamba to bump me off. I'm going to get him."

"But how are you going to do it, sir, if you don't know where he is?"

Saville smiled grimly. "I'm going to find out where he is, Bill. That's where you come into the picture."

"Me, sir? Gee, you know I'd do anything in the world for you. But it will take organization to trap that guy. He's too slippery for one fella. I admit I couldn't feel very confident about locating him for you."

"Hold your horses, Bill. I'm not asking you to do a job of detective work for me. As a matter of fact I hesitate to ask you to do what I have in mind. It's dangerous as hell!"

Devens' broad grin split his face. "I guess we don't have to worry about that, sir. There isn't a n y danger I wouldn't go into for you. I guess you weren't thinking about danger when you picked me up out of a shell hole and carried me across No Man's Land on your back."

"That was different," said Saville.

"The hell it was," said Devens.

"What's on your mind, sir?"

Saville tapped a cigarette on the edge of the desk and lit it. "Just this, Bill. I want to get on Dzamba's trail. But I can't, because I don't know where to look for him. But in a sense I know where he is."

"That sounds like a riddle," said Bill Devens.

"It's not. What I mean is, Dzamba will be following me wherever I go. Now if I could make him *think* he was following me when he *wasn't*—and I could watch the show—well, then I'd nail him."

"How are you goin' to manage that?"

"Bill, you remember when you

started in business for yourself you were kind of hard up?"

"I ain't livin' at the Ritz yet," said Devens.

"What I'm getting at, Bill, is that I gave you some clothes of mine. Remember?"

"This is one of your suits I got on now," laughed Devens.

"Right. As I recall they didn't have to be altered at all. Which means, William, that you and I have exactly the same figure—just as tall, just as broad, same shoulders."

Devens whistled. "I begin to catch on, Major."

Saville nodded toward the bundle. "In that package, Bill, is a gray tweed suit. I had two of them made exactly alike out of a piece of material I bought in London. Now here's the plan. At exactly three o'clock this afternoon you put in an appearance at Neil Baker's garage on East 47th Street. He runs a string of taxis among other things and I trust him down to the ground. You get in a cab which Neil will drive himself and at exactly three-twenty you cruise along toward the corner next to my house—only you are on the floor of the cab, Bill, out of sight."

"I get it."

"I come out of my house, dressed in the tweed suit that matches yours. I hail Neil's cab and get in. We take a quick turn around the corner and you and I change places and then another quick turn and I duck out. Dzamba, if he *does* follow, will be in such a dither to keep the cab in sight that the change can be made, I think, without his being aware of it. Neil will have a second cab waiting to pick me up, and I follow you. And then we pray to God that I spot Dzamba."

"That don't sound dangerous," said Devens.

"I'll tell you how dangerous it is, Bill. If I don't spot Dzamba he may shoot you dead where you sit."

"If I had to risk my life every day on the chance of your pickin' up a guy you're after, Major, I'd do it without a qualm. They used to say, after you was transferred to the intelligence service, that nobody ever slipped through your fingers."

"That's flattery, Bill," said Saville. "The chances are dangerously against you in this. Frankly, I wouldn't ask you to do it if I didn't think it was the only way. And there's another point. It may not work the first time we try it. As you see, from Dzamba's letter, he may not strike at the first opportunity. We might have to try a second time."

"That's okay," said Devens. "Have you thought of the chance that he may open up on you before you ever get in the cab?"

"In that case, William, I count on you to finish him off!"

"By God, you can count on that, all right!" said Devens.

CHAPTER VI

Appointment to Doom

JOHN JERICHO, pale and haggard, his right arm in a cast, looked up at Saville, who sat on the edge of his bed. The fever had gone out of his eyes, but the crow's feet around the corners were drawn together in a worried expression. It was strange to see the giant red-head, who so dearly loved action of any sort, lying helpless in his bed. He had heard the whole story from Saville and also the plan for that afternoon.

"God, it gripes me to be out of this, Geoffrey," he said. His voice was bitter. "To think that I had two shots

at him once and pumped them both into a bullet-proof vest! Can't you sit tight for a day or two, Geoffrey? I'll be up and around by then—able to help."

"Your arm will be in that cast for weeks," said Saville gently. "Don't worry, Johnny lad. I'm not going to misfire this time." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Neil Baker and Devens are just starting from the garage. I'll have to get going."

Under each arm Saville carried holstered guns. The coat of the tweed suit had been made to conceal the resultant bulges. As he took his hat from the hall closet and started for the door Adrienne Terry came out of the study.

"Hello," Saville said. "You up and around? Did you get some rest?"

She nodded impatiently. "Is there any news?"

Saville smiled. "I have hopes that this whole business will be over within the hour," he said lightly. "All you have to do is to sit tight, my dear. You're perfectly safe here."

"You—you think you know where he is?"

"I think I'm going to find out very shortly." Saville made his voice sound as reassuring as possible.

Adrienne Terry's lips trembled. "You—you've been very kind to me, Major Saville. I—I'd like to—to wish you luck. For God's sake be careful. Salvatore doesn't warn before he strikes."

"Neither shall I," said Saville grimly. "Good-by." And he opened the front door and stepped out.

S AVILLE'S right hand was slipped inside his coat, hovering close to the butt of one of his guns. He felt a strange thrill of excitement as he stepped out into the open. His keen

eyes surveyed the street sharply. There were no loiterers of any kind — not even a cab in sight on the avenue. But Dzamba might be anywhere, he knew that. In one of the houses across the way—on the roof of one of the adjoining buildings—in a doorway. And if this was the moment he meant to strike—

He began to saunter slowly toward the appointed corner where Neil Baker's cab was to meet him. He had an almost compelling urge to keep looking back over his shoulder, but he knew that he would see nothing. Wherever Dzamba was he would keep himself well hidden until it was imperative for him to move. And then as he approached the corner he saw Neil Baker's cab coming slowly up the avenue. He hailed the cab casually, caught a glimpse of Baker's strained face behind the wheel, opened the door and jumped in. And then a sharp exclamation of disappointment escaped him. Bill Devens was not on the floor of the cab where he should have been. He was not in the cab at all.

Baker spoke without turning. "Your man never showed up, Major Saville," he said anxiously. "I didn't know what to do. I waited till the very last minute and then I decided to come without him. From what you told me I thought I should come anyway. You didn't want to be left standing on the corner."

"That's right, Neil," said Saville. He was scowling darkly. Bill Devens had never failed him before. He was the soul of punctuality. He felt an unpleasant misgiving for the detective. But Dzamba *couldn't* know anything about Devens. Saville had used the secret exit to get out of the house when he went to call on the detective. It must simply be some unfortunate mis-

chance. A taxi smashup—some unforeseen accident.

"What do we do?" Neil Baker asked.

Saville glanced out through the back window of the cab. There were a dozen cars filling up the avenue behind them.



JOHN JERICO

No possible way of guessing whether one of them contained Dzamba.

"Take me to the Grand Central," Saville ordered. "I can give my man the slip there and get back home on foot."

Half an hour later Saville was back in his own house, having seen nothing of the murderer he sought to trap. Before reporting to Hallam or Jericho he put through a call for Devens' office. The man would certainly be waiting there to report.

But though the telephone rang persistently Devens did not answer. For the next two hours Saville kept up his attempts to reach Devens, and then he gave up and waited, without much

hope, to hear from him. A sickening sense of alarm was beginning to creep over him. Had he bungled somehow? Had he unwittingly given away the game to Dzamba? If so, how? For the life of him he could not see how Dzamba could have got on the trail of Bill Devens. Well, if he didn't hear from Devens by dinner time he would start canvassing the hospitals.

BUT the answer to this riddle came before that. At six-thirty Saville got the second letter from Salvatore Dzamba.

This time the letter came through a normal channel. A Western Union messenger from the office at Fortieth Street and Lexington Avenue delivered it. Saville recognized the scrawling handwriting on the envelope. No use questioning the messenger, for that would be a cold trail now.

Slowly he went upstairs to Jericho's room where the two injured members of the Hunt Club waited eagerly for news. Saville simply held up the envelope without a word, and then ripped it open. As he read the contents aloud his face seemed to set itself into a gray, granite mask. His voice was hard, cold, emotionless, as he read:

"MY DEAR SAVILLE:

"You are a very clever man, my friend, but even the cleverest man in the world cannot fight against the gods, is it not so? And the gods are against you and with me. This morning I was not watching your house because I had other business. I am walking on Broadway when I suddenly see you. I follow you to the office of your detective friend who calls himself Devens. A detective should have a more private office, my friend, for from the hallway I could hear everything that passed between you and the sleuth. So now you see why you found the taxi cab empty this afternoon. I watched you get in, and I laughed very much at what I

knew must be your great disappointment.

"And now, my enemy, to business. The little sleuth is still alive, sitting opposite me now trussed up like a turkey. He is struggling quite helplessly to get out of his bonds, but he will not succeed. And unless you see fit to act according to instructions he will not see the light of another day. What a pity that a man should die because of his loyalty to you, eh?"

"That devil!" Jericho cried hoarsely.

Saville went on reading:

"I am in a house, my enemy. A house all alone with little Devens. Come and get him, my brave Major! Come and rescue your loyal friend. It is an invitation from Salvatore Dzamba. At precisely midnight I shall telephone you and give you the address of the house. And then you will come *alone* to fetch your friend, who wears your clothes so handsomely. If you do not come alone—if you bring police or friends—poor Devens! I remember, Saville, that you have seen some of my handiwork. I will do an artistic job on your friend. And, like you, Saville, I have more than one hole to my burrow. No police can trap me here.

"And so you have my proposition. If you would save your friend, come yourself and fetch him after midnight tonight. If you have not arrived, and by yourself, at one o'clock—poor Devens! He would risk anything for you, he said. Will you risk coming to meet Salvatore Dzamba alone for him? A pretty little problem in loyalties, is it not, my friend? As you said this morning, it is different than carrying a man across No Man's Land on your back. Poor Devens! He thinks so highly of you. Will you fail him, Saville? For very personal reasons, my dear Major, I hope you are fond enough of your friend Devens to come for him. It is the fervent wish of

"SALVATORE DZAMBA."

JERICHO was breathing hard and Hallam's eyes were fixed unblinkingly on Saville's face as the head of the Hunt Club carefully folded the letter and put it back in its envelope.

And then Jericho blurted out hoarsely:

"For God's sake, Geoffrey, don't be a damn fool!" He had seen the cold, glittering light in Saville's eyes — a purposeful light.

"Devens is probably as dead as a herring at this very moment," said Hallam.

"Dzamba's simply trying to trick you into suicide," Jericho cried.

"God, what foul luck his seeing you on the street this morning," said Hallam dismally. "He's right, Geoffrey. For some reason the gods have been against us since our first contact with the Dzambas."

Then Saville laughed, but it wasn't a mirthful sound.

"You birds seem to be mind readers," he said dryly.

Arthur Hallam heaved a deep sigh and reached for his cigarette case. "I suppose you've made up your mind to go?" he said.

"Yes, Arthur," said Saville softly. "I've made up my mind."

Hallam said nothing, but Jericho writhed on his bed. "Damn it, Geoffrey, it's utter madness. You know Dzamba. He hasn't been lugging Devens around alive. He's killed him hours ago. This is just a gag to get you there. You go to this house, wherever it is, you open the door, and Dzamba shoots you to death. Devens is already dead, I tell you! You know Dzamba well enough to know that!"

"I can't risk it, John," said Saville quietly. "If Bill is still alive I can't fail him!"

"You know Dzamba," Jericho rasped. "He never takes anyone alive."

"I can't risk it," Saville repeated stubbornly.

Hallam flicked the ash from his cigarette. His round face was like a pale

full moon. He glanced at his watch. "There's one thing you can do, Geoffrey. It's five hours to midnight, when Dzamba says he'll call you. Get in touch with Doane at one. Tell him to send out an alarm for Bill Devens. Have him search the hospitals, the morgues. Have every policeman on every beat search backyards and alleys. Have the river police on the lookout for bodies. If Bill Devens is dead they may find him in five hours. If he's dead there's no reason for you to walk into this trap."

"I can do that," said Saville. And he went to the telephone.

SLOWLY the clock ticked on, half hour after half hour. No report from Doane. Chin Loo served a magnificent dinner for three in Jericho's room, but only Saville ate heartily. Jericho lay on his bed, his one good hand gripping the sheet till the knuckles showed white. It was perhaps the first time in his life that Arthur Hallam had not enjoyed food. He scarcely touched the iced glass of champagne at his place.

"There is no way to dissuade you, Geoffrey?" he asked over the coffee.

Saville smiled a crooked little smile. "Arthur, if it was I that was held prisoner and you had got that message, would you hesitate?"

"No," said Hallam promptly. "But Devens is—"

"Bill is my friend," said Saville. "I got him into this. There simply aren't two ways of looking at it, Arthur. Let's talk about something else. Doane may yet have something to report."

But talk was impossible. They sat and smoked and thought in silence, these three friends. Perhaps they recalled all the adventures they'd been through together, side by side. Per-

haps they recalled The Hawk, that sinister hunchback whom they'd beaten. Perhaps they thought of the Man in the Rubber Mask, of Slick Williams and his murderous mob, of Trigger Yerkes, of Dirk Sassoon and a dozen others. They'd always fought together, shoulder to shoulder. And now Saville was going out alone to face the most dangerous of all, the most bloodthirsty, on his own ground—in a trap of his own making.

"It's quixotic, it's crazy, it's mad!" Jericho suddenly cried out.

"You'd go by yourself, wouldn't you, Johnny boy?" Saville asked.

"No, by God, I wouldn't. No, I tell you. Not for a million Bill Devenses. Not for—"

"John, you're talking through your hat," Saville said.

Five minutes to twelve. Saville got up quite casually and went out of Jericho's room and downstairs. He went to the telephone in the study and waited. He poured himself a brandy and drank it. And then the telephone rang. It was precisely twelve o'clock.

Saville picked up the receiver. "Hello," he said quietly.

"Is that you, Major Saville?"

"Yes."

The voice at the other end held a gloating note. "This is Salvatore Dzamba."

"Where are you, Dzamba?" Saville asked, quite steadily.

"You are coming alone, Major?"

"Yes."

Dzamba laughed. "Remember, if you bring friends or police it is too bad for Devens. Just to convince you I'll put him on."

Saville's hand tightened and the color drained from his face as he heard Bill Devens' hoarse voice on the wire. He realized that all along he had really

been convinced that Bill was dead. But Bill was alive—alive and in Dzamba's hands.

"Major Saville, sir?"

"Yes, Bill." It was hard to keep his voice steady now, Saville found.

"Don't come, for the love of God. I'm not afraid of this devil. But he



GEOFFREY SAVILLE

means to kill you, sir. You haven't got a chance. The hell with me, sir. If you give a damn for me—if you—"

"Hold your horses, old son," said Saville. "You know damn well nothing could keep me back. Just keep a stiff upper lip and put your friend back on the wire. I need the address, you know."

"Listen, Major, listen—" Devens' voice was desperate, but he was evidently jerked away from the phone.

"Touching, is it not?" Dzamba's voice was low, laughing. "This Anglo-Saxon loyalty, Major. And now for the address."

Saville wrote it on his pad. East Eighth Street—on the river.

"I'll be there before one," he said to Dzamba.

"You make me very happy, Major," said the murderer. That was all.

SAVILLE went back upstairs to Jericho's room.

"Bill's alive," he said. "I talked to him. So you see I have to go."

Hallam sat motionless in his chair. Jericho had pulled himself up to a sitting posture, and there were hectic spots of fever on his cheeks. He was very close to the revolver that always hung at the head of his bed.

"I haven't much time," said Saville, a little unsteadily, "so I'll just say so long to you chaps."

"Where's the house?" Jericho asked.

"I'm not going to tell you," Saville said. "You might interfere."

And then Jericho's gun was out of its holster, held in his left hand. He leveled it straight at Saville. Saville stood very still, his lips drawn tightly together.

"You're not going, Geoffrey," said Jericho hoarsely. "I'm not going to let you go. I don't give a damn for all the Devenses in the world. Do you see? You're worth a hundred of him. You can't simply commit suicide on his account."

Saville laughed, a strained, rather throaty sound. "What are you going to do, John, kill me in order to deprive Dzamba of the pleasure?"

Sweat stood out on Jericho's forehead and his voice was like nothing human. "If you take a step toward that door, Geoffrey, I'm going to wing you in the leg. You know I'm the best pistol shot in the world. I can't miss. *You can't go, Geoffrey—even if I have to cripple you.*"

For just a second Saville stood where he was. Then: "Good-by," he said. He opened the door.

There was a choking sound in Jericho's throat as he pulled the trigger. The room reverberated to the report. The moulding was splintered just beside Saville as the head of the Hunt Club stepped out into the hall. He called back, laughing:

"I've been telling you for years you ought to learn to shoot with your left hand, John."

Jericho fell back on the pillows, his great body shaking.

"The fool!" he cried "The damn chivalrous fool!" And John Jericho's cheeks were wet.

CHAPTER VII

In the House of Death

OUT on the street it was raining and Saville turned up the collar of his tweed suit. It was damp and cold enough for an overcoat, but he could not afford to encumber himself with one, armed as he was with an automatic carried in a shoulder holster. He stood for a second on the door step lighting a cigarette, and then hailed a passing taxi, giving the man an address about two blocks from the one where Dzamba waited.

There was never any question of courage or nerve in Saville's mind. He knew that he had to go after Bill, and he knew that the chances of coming back were terribly slight. For years Saville had lived a life of hair-raising adventure, and he knew that some day one of these adventures would write finis to his colorful life. It looked as though the time had come. He was ready.

But Jericho's desperate attempt to keep him from going had unnerved him a little. Jericho, shooting with his right hand, was a dead shot. But with his right arm in a cast, weak and un-

steady from illness, that left-handed shot had gone wild. Saville knew, however, what it had cost Jericho to pull that trigger. And he knew the agony of spirit the big man was suffering now, lying helpless, unable to aid his dearest friend. It was the first time in many moons Saville had faced danger without the big fellow at his side. Well, maybe it is better to go alone, he thought, when you have to go.

As the cab drew closer to their destination this nostalgia began to fade away. Geoffrey Saville had no intention of walking placidly into Dzamba's arms. When the moment came he meant to give just as much as he got. But with Dzamba on his own ground, waiting for Saville to appear, he might not have a chance to raise a hand in his defense.

The cab stopped at the corner Saville had designated and he got out and paid the driver off. For a moment he stood where he was, sucking deeply on his cigarette. Then he flicked it away into a swirl of water in the gutter and began to walk slowly toward the house where Dzamba waited.

It was a dark, lifeless neighborhood at this hour. There were few lights in the old brownstone houses on this cross street. Saville knew the neighborhood and he knew approximately where Dzamba's hideout was—one of a series of remodeled houses that backed up on the river, with little gardens running down to the water's edge.

Presently Saville stopped in the shadow of a building. He could see Dzamba's house now—number nine. It was dark—not a light coming from any window. Dark, apparently without life, and yet behind those shaded windows lurked the most bloodthirsty criminal in a decade of cold-blooded

killers. Saville glanced at his watch. Twenty-five to one—twenty-five minutes until the deadline Dzamba had set him. Unconsciously Saville loosened his gun in its holster. In less than that time he would probably feel Dzamba's steel-jacketed bullets in his flesh — a nasty thought.

"One thing is certain, Geoffrey," he said softly to himself, "we are not going to walk up to Mr. Dzamba's front door and ring the bell. That would make it too decidedly simple for the rat!"

IT was a three-story house, exactly like a half dozen on either side of the house adjoining Dzamba's. This too, was without lights, and from the shuttered windows he guessed it was untenanted.

"Maybe," he said grimly, "the gods are relenting a little."

He looked around quickly, saw no policeman, no prowlers of any kind, and then with a certain degree of agility he began to climb up the outside of the building next to Dzamba's. It was not particularly difficult, the windows had wide ledges and were placed directly above each other on each floor. A few seconds later he was lying on his stomach on the tile roof. After a moment's rest he crawled across the roof, keeping below the level of the parapet, until he reached the side next Dzamba's house. Eight feet, and the stone wall of a building separated him now from the man who meant to kill him.

He studied the situation carefully. Eight feet was not an impossible jump, but if he landed on Dzamba's roof with a great thud he would give the game away. And he noticed that it was necessary to lift a trapdoor to get down into the house. By the time

he had raised a racket and got the trapdoor open, Dzamba would be pumping him full of lead.

"It looks, my dear Geoffrey, as though you will have to emulate the daring young man on the flying trapeze," he chuckled. Now that he was in action his spirits were considerably revived.

What he had proposed to do was to jump for the other house, but catch the parapet with his hands, hanging feet downward *outside* the building. This way there would be little or no noise and he would be able to get into the house through one of the upstairs windows. He took out his handkerchief and very carefully dried his hands. A slip would probably mean a broken neck, which was not exactly the way he hoped to die tonight.

Then he got set and jumped. His hands caught the opposite parapet and there was a ghastly, sickening moment as they began to slip. Just as he despaired of saving himself, his feet found the window ledge below. He clung where he was for a moment or two, catching his breath. Then very carefully he lowered himself and peered in through the black panes of glass. He could see nothing — hear nothing. There was no sound anywhere except the steady patter of rain on the roof.

With one hand he very gently pulled up on the lower half of the window.

"By God, Geoffrey, the gods are relenting plenty!" he muttered. For the window was unlocked, and miracle of miracles, it opened almost without sound. Saville swung one leg through into the room, and straddling the window ledge, he pulled out his gun. Then he slid all the way into the house and crouched in the darkness, listening—straining to hear some sound.

IT was as still as death, and yet he had a strange feeling of life about him. His whole nervous system seemed to be charged with electrical warnings of danger—danger close at hand. The darkness was heavy, thick, like a smothering blanket. He dared not strike a light of any sort. For all he knew Dzamba might be somewhere close at hand—a few feet away—waiting for him to make a target of himself.

He stayed where he was for what seemed an eternity, and still there was no sound of any kind. He couldn't stick it any longer. Slowly he crept forward, feeling his way, testing out each board in the floor before he put his weight on it. Presently he felt himself at a doorway and he moved on through it. His fingers encountered the round rungs of a balustrade—the hall rail of a stair well. He stuck close to the wall and crept along. Then he felt the door of another room—or rather the doorjamb, for the door was open. He waited there, every muscle tense, for he could have sworn he heard breathing—s t e a d y, regular breathing!

Holding his own breath, his gun ready, he crept toward that sound. There could be no doubt about it. There was someone in the room. Saville drew closer—closer—

"Listen, you murdering devil—" A hoarse voice spoke sharply.

Quick as lightning Saville jammed a hand over the mouth of the speaker.

"Bill! For God's sake be quiet!" he whispered. He had recognized Devens' voice. The detective began to tremble under Saville's touch. "Are you all right, Bill?"

"Major Saville, sir! How did you get here? Where is he?"

"I don't know, Bill. Do you?"

"He's downstairs, sir—or was. Waiting for you."

Saville's fingers examined the cruelly tight bonds that held the detective. He struggled desperately with the knots.

"I wasn't for walking in like a lamb to the slaughter, William," he said. "I came over the roof. And that's the way we're going out if I can get these damn knots undone."

Devens' breath seemed to catch in his throat. "It's been awful, sir—knowing you were coming—waiting for him to do for you."

"We're not out of this yet, my lad. When I get you unfastened you crawl to the door of this room, turn left at the hall, and then left into an adjoining room. In there there's an open window and you go out and down the side of the building as tight as you can make it. I've only got one gun so I'll bring up the rear. There! I've got the damn thing undone. You'll have to wait a minute for your circulation to get going normally."

They lay there on the floor, perfectly still, listening. Not a sound from below.

"Think you can make it now, William?" Saville asked.

"Okay, sir."

"Then get going!"

Devens began to crawl noiseless toward the door. Then came catastrophe. Somehow the detective managed to bump into a chair and knock it over. It sounded thunderous to Saville. Came a shout from below and they heard Dzamba come tearing up the stairs.

"Run, Bill, for God's sake run!" Saville shouted.

But Devens stood up and blocked the doorway. Something happened then. Saville dared not fire for the moment, because he knew Devens was directly in front of him.

"So you wriggle out of your bonds, my friend?" Dzamba snarled. "It is unfortunate."

Bill Devens screamed. There was a thud as he fell. And then Saville fired. For just a second the flash from his gun showed him the giant figure of the mad Dzamba standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER VIII

A Debt Is Paid

Saville fired again, but instinctively he knew he had missed.

Dzamba was out in the hall—laughing. It was a horrible, blood-curdling sound:

"You are always so clever, my dear Major," he called out in a taunting voice.

Saville had moved quickly away from the position he had been in when he fired. Only just in time, too, for Dzamba fired twice from around the corner of the door. And then silence except for the groaning of Bill Devens. Saville guessed that he had been knifed. The knife was Dzamba's instinctive weapon. What was the next move? To wait for Dzamba to attack, or to attack himself?

He slid along the wall, noiseless as a wraith, toward the door. He could hear Dzamba's heavy breathing. Desperately he strained his senses in an effort to locate it. Was Dzamba to the right or left of the door out there? A mistake would be fatal. After a long moment of hesitation he decided that it was the right. Very slowly he drew himself together, and then sprang for the door. He fired once—twice—saw Dzamba's grinning face—felt the scorch of the return fire on his cheek. Then both guns clicked empty and Dzamba sprang at him.

A searing pain ran down Saville's left arm—a knife slash! An arm like steel closed around his neck, choking, smothering him. In another second that terrible knife would descend again and that would be the end. Somehow Saville managed to writhe his body to one side and both his hands caught Dzamba's right wrist as it descended. The knife bit into his shoulder, but not deeply. He had checked the blow, which would certainly have killed him otherwise.

Dark—dark—and Dzamba's hot breath on his face. Then teeth like the ragged edge of a saw bit into the soft flesh of Saville's neck. It was the most agonizing pain he had ever felt, but he clung to that wrist—the wrist of the hand that clutched the knife. Dzamba crushed him back against the wall, jamming the full weight of his body against him.

Saville knew one thing and knew it well from experience. When a man is fighting to kill you you can only win if you fight to kill him. There are no Marquis of Queensbury rules in a death struggle of this sort. And that knife was the difference between Saville's having some chance and no chance.

Still clutching the wrist with both hands he managed to sink his own teeth into the back of Dzamba's hand. At the same moment he brought his knees up fiercely into Dzamba's stomach.

With a groan the murderer staggered back, his hand opened, and the knife clattered to the floor—to the floor and through the stair rail. Saville heard it drop on the landing below. But now, bellowing like a wounded animal, Dzamba was on him again—flailing at him with iron fists, kicking, clawing, tearing. A chance blow caught

Saville squarely on the jaw. He staggered—fog in his head.

Dark—dark. Those murderous hands fumbling at his throat. He tried to shake his head clear—tried desperately. He closed with Dzamba, forcing his head in close under Dzamba's chin. Blows rained on the back of his neck, on his head. Time after time Dzamba jammed him back against the wall, forcing every ounce of breath out of his body.

Saville felt himself slipping—fading away—fog—fog before his eyes—fog and a myriad of flashing lights. He knew he could not hold on much longer. Devens—Devens must be badly hurt or he'd be helping. Smashed back against the wall again with sickening, bone-crushing force. His head under Dzamba's chin—under Dzamba's chin. Then with one last effort Saville brought his bruised, bloody head up—up with stunning force against that chin. They fell back—back against the stair rail, with Dzamba clutching him in an embrace of steel—wood splintered—gave way. They fell. Saville wondered dizzily if this was the old nightmare he'd known as a child. Falling—falling through space. Then there was a terrible thud—a thud that seemed to break every bone in his body. And he knew no more.

TWO floors they had fallen down that stair well. But Dzamba struggled to his feet. His face was smeared with blood. He spat out broken teeth and foam from between his swollen lips. There was a terrible, raging, mad fury in his eyes. He seemed to be looking for the knife, but it was nowhere in sight. He muttered horribly, thickly.

"So you came, Major, eh? Well,

now you are finished. Now I carry you out to the black waters of the river. You float away amongst the sewage. Dog!"

In an uncontrollable rage he kicked savagely at Saville's limp form. Then he stooped and picked up the head of the Hunt Club as though he were a child. Across the room to a door leading out to the garden to the water's edge. Dzamba was laughing.

"They will find you with your face eaten away by the fish!" he shouted, as if trying to make the unconscious man hear. "They will find you swollen, and bloated and blue. And later they will find your friends the same way. Salvatore Dzamba pays his debts!"

He kicked open the door that opened into the garden, and stepped out. And then things happened—things strange and unexpected and terrible in their speed and justice.

"Throw up your hands, Dzamba!" a stern voice ordered.

At the same instant, a brilliant, blinding light flashed in Dzamba's bloodshot eyes. With a cry the murderer dropped Saville's body to the ground and turned away. Then hell broke loose. A rapid fire gun spat flame—revolvers cracked. Dzamba's body was hurled against the building, buffeted like a sawdust dummy, spurted blood. And the rapid fire gun tore flame into the night, riddling the murderer's body to an unshapen hulk.

GEOFFREY SAVILLE opened his eyes and looked up into the face of Inspector James Emory Doane of the Homicide Squad. The inspector's eyes were anxious. Beside him was the white-coated figure of a police surgeon. A faint smile twisted Saville's lips. "I rather expected the next person I saw would be wearing

a halo," he said, almost in a whisper.

"You damn fool!" Doane's voice was hoarse, tender.

Saville's eyes clouded. "Dzamba?"

"Dead as hell," said the inspector grimly.

"I won't believe it until I see him," Saville said.

"You wouldn't know him if you did," said Doane. "Some of my boys had friends that Dzamba manhandled. They kept on shooting for quite a while."

"Did you find Devens?"

"Bad knife wound," said Doane, "but he'll do."

Saville took a deep breath. "Would you mind telling me what the hell you're doing here, Doane?"

"Your friend Hallam sent me," said Doane.

"He couldn't," Saville objected.

"He didn't know where I was going."

"Then he's psychic," said Doane.

Saville fainted.

When he opened his eyes he was in his own bed at home. Jericho was sitting on the edge of his bed; Hallam

sat close by in a chair, crutches across his knees, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"You old son of a gun," Jericho murmured softly as Saville opened his eyes. "You old son of a gun!"

Saville grinned at him. "From the way I feel, John, I wish you hadn't missed earlier tonight." He looked over at Hallam. "Would you mind explaining how you knew where to send Doane? By God, he arrived at a propitious moment. It seems friend Dzamba was about to dump me in the river."

Hallam chuckled. "When Dzamba telephoned you, you wrote down the address on your desk pad."

"But I tore off the sheet. Had it with me," Saville protested.

"You bore down plenty hard with your pencil, Geoffrey. The impression was quite clear on the next sheet. When I found it—well, John and I wanted to be sure Dzamba didn't get away, even if you missed him."

Saville leaned back with a little sigh. "Well, I guess we can turn this place into a hospital now in peace!"

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CHAPTER I

Du Puis, alias Castro

IT was frequently Riley Dillon's custom, of an afternoon or evening, to stand in pleasant talk with the house officers or the assistant managers of the Waldorf, which sometimes

put surprising information in his way. Not only was he a permanent guest of the hotel, but his friendly, whimsical air, his charming personality, had made him a universal favorite.

No one suspected that he was not a retired lawyer, or perhaps a lucky broker who had got out ahead of the crash. Not a soul in New York, indeed, was aware of his actual occupation. Even Philp, the stolid private detective who transacted so many orders for him, was quite unaware that Riley Dillon was what is popularly termed an enemy of society, or that his chief interest in life was precious stones.

At three-thirty of Monday afternoon, December 24th, Riley Dillon was chatting with one of the house officers

near the elevators, when he noticed two people who left a car and paused for a word before separating.

The face of the man jerked astonished recognition into him—half recognition, that is. Riley Dillon never forgot a face, even if it had changed greatly. But the face of the woman positively made his heart skip a beat, so lovely was it with its indefinite sadness, yet so filled with animation and sheer beauty.

A young face, with a hint of loneliness, of inner agitation, that instantly fired his imagination.

Riley Dillon had an eye for a beautiful woman, but he was never deluded by mere surface beauty. This girl, he knew, had the intangible allure more powerful than all else in the world, the beauty of personality.

"D'ye know that man, McCabe?" Dillon asked. The house officer nodded.

"As it happens, I do, Mr. Dillon. Not twenty minutes ago the floor clerk sent down a red ticket on him."

"Which means—"

"That he was entertaining yonder lady in his room. I investigated and found the door open; it was quite all right. He's a gentleman named Castro, from Buenos Aires."

Dillon, who knew the gentleman was nothing of the sort, smiled a little.

"D'you mean, McCabe, that I couldn't have a lady visitor in my room?"

"Being what you are, sir, you'd arrange beforehand at the desk, or you'd leave the door open. Strait-laced? We are, for a fact. This is the most careful hotel on earth, Mr. Dillon. We have to be, with our clientele—"

A bellboy came up to them. "Telephone, Mr. Dillon. On the floor extension."

Dillon went to the phone rack near

the desk, striding blithely along. He had the feel of great things in the air this crisp December day. He could sense an electric alertness which hinted at impending events. When he had picked up the telephone, he was certain of it.

"Philp speaking, Mr. Dillon. If you want that report on the Paik Av'noo Martyns—"

"By all means. Go ahead."

"Well, this dame is French, from the name. Homer Martyn married her last year, abroad. He inherited that tobacco fortune a couple of years back, and has been raising hell on the money. They don't get on. No children. Frankly, he's a bad egg. A week or so ago Winchell's column predicted a separation very soon—"

"Never mind all that," cut in Dillon. "I wanted detailed information on their movements."

"I got it. Can't you leave a man speak?" wailed Philp indignantly. "It cost me money, but I got it. Tonight they're dining alone at your hotel, on the roof. That means sloppy weather because he hits the liquor hard. Tomorrow night, a Christmas dinner with the Van Beurens in 56th Street. Wednesday night they entertain, and fly to Miami next day."

"Fine," Dillon responded. "That's all I need to know. Send in your bill as usual, and a merry Christmas to you, Philp."

"Same to you, sir, and many of them."

Whistling a cheerful air, Riley Dillon betook himself to the elevators and caught an express to the Starlight Roof. Here there was a great bustle going on, and decorations for the evening were being installed. The genial master of ceremonies approached and greeted Riley Dillon in French.

"I'd like a table tonight for myself alone, René," Dillon said. "I think the Homer Martyns have a reservation?"

"For nine-thirty, m'sieur. Everything is taken already, but for Mr. Dillon we can always make an exception. I can give you a table near the Martyns, if you like."

The matter arranged, Dillon took the down elevator to the fifteenth floor and sought his own room.

HIS campaign to secure the Martyn emeralds had opened.

As to later details, he was supremely unworried; Riley Dillon never let the forelock of Opportunity slip his grasp. If this French girl who had married the dissolute heir to the Martyn millions wore those gleaming green stones tonight, Dillon meant to get them before the dawn.

First, however, came something else. From his trunk he took a fat volume of clippings, turning over the pages with his deft, nervous fingers. Suddenly he paused. A newspaper clipping, three years old and from a French paper, stared up at him. The text proclaimed that here was a picture of Raoul Du Puis, the most famous jewel thief in Europe. Convicted of a clever robbery in Marseilles, Du Puis had slipped out of the country and escaped.

Dillon took a pencil and sketched in a beard and mustache on the portrait of Du Puis.

Now the face became that of Mr. Castro from Buenos Aires.

"Faith, I thought as much!" muttered Dillon. "He couldn't change the eyes."

The lean, mobile features of Riley Dillon, which could beam with such warm friendliness, now became harshly

alert. The gray eyes beneath his black brows, which could flash so gaily, now narrowed in suspicion. Riley Dillon did not believe in coincidence. That the cleverest jewel thief in Europe should be stopping at the Waldorf just at the time the Martyn emeralds were coming here to dine—no, no! That was not coincidence.

Mr. Dillon had no interest in protecting the Martyn emeralds for their owner, but he had a vital interest in protecting them for himself.

He collected jewels; not ordinary stones, but gems that were famous or of fabulous worth. Their value did not concern him. He loved them for themselves. His life was wrapped up in them. The whole background of his existence was a mosaic of precious stones.

He was one of the greatest experts in jewels extant, but not a soul suspected it.

Dillon did not gather gems by commercial methods. He was, in simple words, a thief; but he had his own rigid code of ethics. He never stole for profit. With him it was a game, a jaunty, keen pitting of wits and deft skill against all the world. This was why he lived in the Waldorf, the most carefully policed hostelry on earth, whose entire staff could sniff a scoundrel under a hundred layers of rank, social position or wealth. It spoke volumes for Riley Dillon that he was the most valued and popular of all the hotel's patrons.

Sitting down to his telephone, he called the French consulate. There was delay; an affair three years old is not easily brought to light. Finally Dillon had the right party.

"I believe," he said, "that here in New York I have seen the man Du Puis. In case I make certain of the

identification, what action should I take?"

"May I call you back in an hour, Mr. Dillon?" was the reply. "I believe the police department here have certain papers regarding this man, who is a Belgian. There would be the matter of extradition and so forth. I can give you full details a little later. At the moment, I recall that the man can be identified by a blue dagger tattooed upon his left wrist, and a large reward is offered for him in France. Say, in an hour?"

"Thank you," said Dillon, and hung up.

He was satisfied that he could have Castro ejected from the hotel in ten minutes. Otherwise, he was not yet certain of his ground; besides, there was a reason for hesitation. And then—there was the face of that girl. Riley Dillon was an incorrigible sentimentalist where a woman of striking and delicate beauty was involved.

He juggled the facts mentally. The Martyns would arrive this evening at nine-thirty. Homer Martyn was a dissolute waster; his wife was an unknown quantity. They were on the ragged verge of separation. Castro had entertained a lady this afternoon, a woman too lovely to be associated with such a rascal. Had this any connection?

With a sigh, Riley Dillon opened his rosewood humidior, selected one of his special Havanas, and trimmed it. He lit it with his accustomed care. To ruin the aroma of such a weed by overheating, would have been no less than sacrilege.

He phoned the desk and inquired the number of Castro's room. He was well aware that each telephone call in this hotel was recorded, that every detail of action or of conversation was filed

with the minute precision of a detective headquarters. To his quick astonishment, he found that Castro's room was upon this very floor, the fifteenth. Like his own, it was on the east side of the building.



RILEY DILLON

Going to his dresser, he selected a gold-rimmed monocle having a thick glass, and looped the black ribbon about his neck. He picked up his hat and green ebony stick, and next moment was en route to 1542—occupied by Mr. Castro of Buenos Aires. Riley Dillon believed in removing possible rivals in person, and painlessly.

"And faith," he murmured, almost regretfully, "I'd remove him entirely if it weren't for what I saw in Paris

three years ago today! I'll just remind him of that."

CHAPTER II

Three Rooms on Floor Fifteen

COMING to Castro's door, Riley Dillon tried it and then entered without knocking. Castro, who was in the act of trimming his beard, whirled and stared blankly. Into the dark eyes came a flicker of uneasiness.

"Well, M. Du Puis," said Riley Dillon in French, "shall we talk about things?"

Under the clipped, pointed beard, Castro's face became livid; then he pulled himself together quickly.

"Will you be seated, m'sieur, and tell me who you are?"

"No. You shouldn't roll up your sleeves—that left wrist tells me who you are."

Dillon screwed the monocle into his eye. It shoved up his black brow, enlarged the eye, and lent him a slightly grotesque appearance of cold dignity. In fact, it converted him into a very different man from his usual genial self.

"You may guess as to my identity," he went on. Castro, who had glanced at the blue dagger tattooed on his wrist, was facing him defiantly. "I prefer to keep you on the uncertain edge of doubt. I desire to inquire as to your business here in New York."

"It—it is entirely private," faltered Castro. "A family matter."

"Oh, of course! By the way, do you remember a certain Christmas Eve in Paris, three years ago?" said Dillon calmly. "I saw you on that occasion; rather, you were pointed out to me. Judge of my astonishment, my dear chap! A man of your reputation, a clever rascal of a jewel thief, enter-

taining a dozen urchins from that orphan establishment in the Bois de Boulogne! It has always left me with a friendly feeling toward you, upon my word."

A strangled cry broke from the other man.

"If you intend to arrest me, get it over! You are from the police?"

"Guess. I know everything you have done here in New York. I know that this afternoon, for example, you had a visitor—"

An expression of anguish crossed the bearded features of Castro; anguish, so poignant and genuine as to leave Dillon startled.

"Do not drag her into it, I implore you! With all my heart, I beseech you to show mercy to her, this day before Christmas! Take me, but do not let it become public. This is all I ask."

"It's a good deal." Dillon regarded him curiously. "You're a criminal."

"You think so?" said Castro bitterly. "I was once a criminal, true. Since then I have gone straight; I have become an honest man. I made money in South America and repaid all those whom I defrauded in France. But you will not believe this."

"The law won't believe it," said Dillon calmly. Yet in his heart he was tempted to believe it. The tragedy in those dark, steady eyes told more than the spoken word.

"I'll give you a chance," he went on. "No one else knows your record. I shall say nothing of it, unless you make one step over the line. If you make one attempt at jewel-lifting, you're sunk. Understand? Don't try to be clever; instead, be wise. I'm giving you this chance—well, let's say because of those orphans back in Paris. That's all."

And turning, he left the room.

Well, he had warned the fellow off;

that should be enough. After all, it was Christmas Eve, and something in the man's appeal had touched him. Gone straight, eh? Not very likely. They all said that, when they were nipped.

He regretted that Castro had said no more about the girl with the lovely, sad eyes. Riley Dillon was curious about that girl. She was worth while. And why had Castro displayed such agitation at mention of her? It was hardly a love affair. With a shrug, Riley Dillon went his way. The incident was closed.

Not quite closed. At five that afternoon he received a letter by messenger from the French consulate in regard to Raoul Du Puis. A reward of one thousand dollars was outstanding for information that would lead to the man's arrest. It could be effected by a word to the lieutenant in charge of such matters at headquarters; the requisite papers had long since been filed with the police here, in case Du Puis should flee to America. Oddly enough, the letter said nothing about fingerprints. The one complete and certain means of identification was the blue dagger tattooed on the left wrist of Du Puis. With a careless laugh, Riley Dillon pocketed the letter. By this time, he reflected, Mr. Castro of Buenos Aires was no doubt packing and on his way.

Thus Dillon dismissed the whole affair. He had the Homer Martyns to think about now. And the glorious Martyn emeralds—the two most perfectly matched bits of green corundum in existence!

WHEN nine-thirty arrived that evening, Riley Dillon was seated in the lobby. He occupied one of the big chairs near the desk, biding his time over the evening

papers. He was at ease and unhurried. There was plenty of time to go to the roof.

As has been mentioned, Mr. Dillon did not believe in coincidences. His disbelief was positive and logical. He had written what he thought about it in that anonymous but extraordinary monograph entitled, "The Fine Art of Theft," whose ironical pages had left the police of two continents gasping and infuriated.

"What we term coincidence is merely an effect," he had written. "For every effect there must be a cause. As a rule the cause is human. Therefore the effect is the result of a finite human purpose which must be discovered or at least taken for granted. Look always for the design, the agent, the cause, the human equation—but never assign it to chance."

So, when he glanced up from his paper and caught sight of the same girl who had been with Castro that afternoon, he did not assign it to coincidence. Instead, he caught his breath at sight of her, transfixed.

She was now regally attired in evening wear, jewels sparkling in her hair, a sable coat about her shoulders. Beneath her arm the girl carried a small leather case, which to Dillon's knowing eye looked remarkably like a jewel-case. She swept past Dillon and went to the desk, which was behind him.

"I want a room on the fifteenth floor, please," she said abruptly. Her voice was very clear and ringing, with a faintly foreign accent. "I'll register for it myself; it is just for the night. I'm to meet my husband here, and if he decides to remain, he can then register for himself. Meantime, I may have visitors. I suppose that's all right?"

"Absolutely, Mrs. Martyn," re-

sponded the desk clerk. "I can give you the suite 15 H on the east side, if that'll be all right. Do you wish to go up now?"

"No. When my husband comes, we're going to the roof."

"Then I'll phone the floor clerk, and you can pick up the key there until one o'clock. After that, all keys are sent to the desk."

Martyn! Riley Dillon sat staring blankly at nothing. Mrs. Homer Martyn. This was the girl with the sad, lovely eyes who had visited Castro that afternoon. And now she had demanded a room on the same floor Castro occupied. Coincidence? Devil a bit of it. Dillon himself was on the fifteenth floor; but that was different.

Abruptly, her ringing voice came to him again. She was directly behind him.

"Will you have this case sent to Mr. Castro, please? See that it's delivered to him in person."

"At once, Mrs. Martyn."

She was evidently well known at the hotel. Now she passed in front of Dillon again, crossed the lobby, and took one of the couches there. After a few moments, a young man came hurriedly into the lobby, looked around, and hastened to join her. Their greeting was not cordial. At least on his part; it was irritated. Dillon surveyed him critically.

Homer Martyn was heavy-jawed, his features were flushed, sullen, and puffed by dissipation; his eyes were arrogant and brutal. The girl rose, refused his arm, and departed a little ahead of him, head high, level gaze sweeping about. Martyn followed her.

So she had taken a room here for the night. Why? Domestic trouble, of course. She must be on the very brink of leaving her husband; affairs

between them must have come to a crisis. And Castro had somehow caught her in his outspread net. The rascal had victimized her with his smooth ways. She must have sent jewels in that case to Castro. Were the two great emeralds, owned for a century and more by the Martyn family, in that case?

A soft whistle broke from Riley Dillon as he came out of his chair. Had the wily Castro tricked him?

"Faith, there's only one real coincidence in all this affair," he thought with a whimsical smile. "And that's the one that puts me on the fifteenth floor also. And unless I miss my guess, it'll be a damned unlucky coincidence for Mr. Castro this night!"

CHAPTER III

The Rascal and the Brute

WHEN, a little later, Riley Dillon made his entrance upon the Starlight Roof, his gray eyes swept around and found what they sought. Castro was alone at a table, in the far corner.

Dillon went to his own table, which adjoined that of the Martyns, well back from the dance floor and near the corner window. Once seated, Riley Dillon handed his waiter an envelope.

"A bit of a Christmas present for you, me lad," he said cheerfully. "Also to make you remember that I'm keeping this table for the entire evening. I may be called away from time to time, but I'll be back. Now, don't be bothering me with any menu, but bring me a good dinner. No wine, thanks."

If he were to become possessed of the Martyn emeralds this night, he could not afford to dull the fine edge of his brain with alcohol.

Unobtrusively, he concentrated his attention upon the couple at the next table. At all events, the Martyn emeralds were not yet in Castro's hands. They were worth getting, those stones; Riley Dillon eyed them a little hungrily as they glimmered on the white breast of the girl. Two huge, pear-shaped emeralds of deepest green. They were hung upon a flimsy, lace-like necklace of platinum and gold, hand worked, but far too frail a thing to carry such massive stones. Old and flawed as they were, they were wonderful. Probably Castro meant to have them cut up into smaller stones, flawless and far beyond diamonds in commercial value.

Homer Martyn was drinking, and no doubt had been drinking before coming here. His wife drank nothing. The tension between them was quite evident, and Riley Dillon appraised them both very easily. The girl was aristocratic, highstrung, lovely. She would shrink from any public scene. The man was, very simply, a brute. She was no doubt in actual fear of him; he wore a vicious air as he eyed her.

Dillon rose, with a word to his waiter to delay his dinner. He had the situation in hand; he knew now exactly what must be done. First of all, cheat Castro, keep the rascal from tricking this girl. Noting that Castro was apparently quite engaged with his meal, Dillon strode out of the place.

Five minutes later, he was downstairs in his own room.

Riley Dillon at work was no longer the sauntering, whimsical, negligent gentleman of leisure. Now he was like some efficient machine, keenly alert, every movement deft and accurate.

From his suitcase he took what seemed a fountain pen. He unscrewed it. On the desk fell a metal shank and

a number of metal segments which fitted together cunningly. By means of these bits of metal he could duplicate any key which he desired—an invention of his own, albeit for obvious reasons unpatented.

He already knew the exact pattern of the pass-key of the hotel. In fifteen seconds he had fitted together a key to serve the same purpose. He tried it on his own door to make sure, then slipped out of the room.

Here on the east side there was no floor clerk; that was one less item to worry about. Fifteen forty-two was down the next angling corridor. There was no one in sight as he came to it, inserted his key, and entered. The door closed behind him.

Dillon knew already every detail of the room. The case set up by the girl, if not in sight, would be in the steamer trunk in one corner of the room—a trunk of transparent leather such as one finds abroad. Within thirty seconds Dillon had satisfied himself that the jewel case had been carefully stowed away. He knelt before the trunk. It was locked.

A French lock, of course, in which the tumblers were turned twice instead of once. From his pocket, Dillon took another of those singular fountain pens, and opened it up. This one contained tiny segments, intended for small locks. He fitted a few together; made a key that turned the lock.

The lid of the trunk came up. There before him was the leather case. Dillon caught at it and sprang the lid. Jewels glittered in the light, a profusion of jewels of all sorts, such as a woman might acquire from the check-book of a wealthy husband. A very handsome little fortune was here.

"Such a fool!" muttered Dillon angrily. "After I warned him, too!

Well, I've saved these for her, at all events."

He poured everything into his handkerchief, knotted the corners, pocketed it. The jewel case he returned to the trunk, which he then locked. Next minute he had switched off the lights and was sauntering along the corridor.

Back in his own room now. Swiftly, he deposited the loot in a bureau drawer, then returned to the elevators and so to the Starlight Roof. He came back to his table without a glance at Castro's corner, but was aware of the man there.

"The entrée now, sir?" murmured his waiter, and Riley Dillon nodded.

THE Martyns, he noticed, were still quarreling. The girl's eyes were angry, the man was flushed and jeering. That he was in very ugly mood was clear, yet the woman's restraint was still in force. Possibly they were appearing here for some social reason.

Riley Dillon's interest grew with his curiosity. He could well imagine what tumult occupied her heart, and with all his soul he admired her fine spirit. She spoke little. Only when her gaze met the eyes of her husband did a glint of scorn and contempt flash into them. And to think that this splendid creature should be caught in the crafty net of that scoundrel Castro!

"It's a fool I am," Riley Dillon told himself, "but she'll be needing a helping hand before this night's gone, I'm thinking. And now I'm in position to give it."

Perhaps she sensed his interest. Her eyes rested lightly upon him, dwelt for one cool instant, then roved away. Riley Dillon was more guarded after this warning. Knowing she was caught between two fires, his heart went out to

the girl. On the one hand, this drunken brute of a husband, and on the other the crafty rascal who was looting her.

Suddenly the floor was cleared, the lights were dimmed. Veloz the dancer was about to do her act.

There was a burst of applause, a whirl of riotous color beneath the spotlight, and every eye was fastened upon the moving figure of grace in the white radiance. Every eye save that of Riley Dillon. He, and he alone, sensed the explosion at the next table, saw the swift movement.

Homer Martyn lurched forward. His arm shot out, and from his wife's neck he tore the flimsy chain of platinum and gold with its pendant emeralds.

"They belong to the Martyn family, not to you!"

His voice came through the crashing music, followed by a volley of abuse. He stuffed the necklace into his waistcoat pocket. In the dimmed light, Dillon could not see the face of the girl. She rose, disdainful and cold, and made her way from the room, the jeering laughter of her husband following her.

Presently the lights flashed up again. Homer Martyn was muttering loudly to himself, so loudly that in the silence Riley Dillon caught his words.

"So that's the end, is it? I'll show her—damn her!"

That's the end! She must have uttered these words as she rose and departed. Martyn staggered to his feet, waved aside the waiter, and made his way among the tables. Riley Dillon cast one glance across the room. Castro had disappeared.

After a moment Dillon, too, rose and strode out of the place. He was in time to pick up Martyn as the latter lurched into a down elevator, mum-

bling to himself. The man had drunk hard and deep this night. Riley Dillon stepped in after him.

"Lobby floor," grunted Martyn, flushed and ugly.

They left the car together. Martyn headed straight for the desk, and Dillon strolled slowly after, coming to the desk alongside him as Martyn spoke with the clerk.

"Gimme a key to my wife's suite. Yes, I'll register—sure. Sign anything. I'm the one paying for the damned suite. Put it to my charge account."

The desk clerk turned to Dillon, inquiringly. Riley Dillon smiled.

"I must have left my key in the room, and the door's locked. Will you kindly give me the spare key?"

He tucked it into his pocket with a word of thanks, passed on to the mail desk, and there inquired for mail. There was none. He produced a cigarette, lit it. By this time Homer Martyn was heading away from the desk for the east elevators. Dillon followed him carelessly. Once out of that car, in the corridor, he might have a chance at the necklace. Right waistcoat pocket. He could see a glint there as the necklace was half-exposed.

The two men entered the car.

"Fifteenth," growled Martyn, on whom his last drink had told strongly.

"Same for me." Riley Dillon said pleasantly.

The car stopped. Martyn stepped out. Dillon delayed; he never neglected such trifling details as alibis. He could always catch up with this staggering drunk. He exchanged a smiling word with the elevator operator, put a Christmas tip in the man's hand, then left the car. The door clanged behind him.

Straight down the corridor was Riley Dillon's room. Martyn was heading

past it, lurching as he walked. Another figure appeared unexpectedly. The two men halted. Dillon, in astonishment, stepped into the alcove of the stairs to remain unseen. He heard a gust of voices—Castro! This other man was Castro! Why, the slick devil!

SUDDENLY there was a scuffle. An oath exploded from Martyn; for an instant the two figures were as one. Then Martyn staggered across the corridor, brought up against the wall, and sank down. Castro turned and strode rapidly away. Not toward his own room, as Riley Dillon noted. He was going toward Mrs. Martyn's suite. His figure disappeared.

Dillon darted forward, then came to a halt. Martyn was close to his own door, and was struggling to gain his feet. Castro must have knocked him down.

"Help me!" gasped Homer Martyn, aware of Dillon. "For God's sake—a lift—"

After all, the man was better out of it; a drunk would only complicate matters now. Riley Dillon turned, unlocked the door of his room, then took Martyn by the arm and got him on his feet. A groan came from Martyn. He clutched Riley Dillon's arm, and somehow stumbled forward into the room.

Dillon tried to get him into the arm-chair near the bed. The drunken man missed the chair. He came to his knees and pitched forward, caught at the bedside, saved himself. Rather disgusted, Dillon aided him to rise, then forced him abruptly into the chair.

"Sit there," he said. "Take it easy. You're all right."

Homer Martyn peered up at him, then his head fell forward on his breast. Suddenly Riley Dillon came alert. He stooped, reached forward.

For the first time, he recollected what he was after. Then he straightened up, his gray eyes cold.

The necklace was gone from Martyn's waistcoat pocket.

"So that was it, eh?" Dillon was out in the corridor in ten seconds, leaving his room door closed but unlocked. "Frisked him and knocked him down, eh? Well, Castro me lad, I warned you! Now you'll take your medicine."

The letter from the consulate was in Dillon's pocket. Castro was with Mrs. Martyn; he had the rascal where he wanted him. Dillon himself might lose the Martyn emeralds—for this time—but he would save that lovely girl, at least. He would save her jewels from Castro, and unmask the rogue to his face.

He came to 15 H, then checked himself abruptly. The door was open an inch or so. From within the room came the voice of Castro.

"Where are the emeralds? You should add them to the rest."

"No, no!" It was the clear, ringing voice of the girl. "He—he tore them from my neck, upstairs. That was the last straw. That was why I left him, told him everything was ended. But the emeralds aren't mine, you see. They belong to his family. That was really why he tore them from me—an insult, a final indignity. No, let them go. I have enough without them to live on."

Riley Dillon smiled to himself. Thanks to him, she would have enough! He rapped at the door sharply, then thrust it open and stepped into the room. He closed the door behind him and stood looking at the two. His monocle was in his eye; his look was cold, dignified.

They sat by the center table. The girl stared at him, startled, wide-eyed,

a hint of recognition in her look. Castro was as though petrified. Pallor crept into his bearded features.

Riley Dillon saw the telephone on the desk and stepped toward it.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Martyn," he said crisply. "I'm a stranger to you; but not to this man here. I have to warn you that he's a well-known jewel thief and confidence man, with a record against him and a conviction in France. The police are now awaiting a call from me in order to arrest him. I have the proof in my pocket if you wish to see it."

From Castro broke a low groan. Again his eyes became haunted, tragic, as he stared at Dillon. The girl was white-faced; she seemed incapable of speech, of movement.

Riley Dillon laid his hand on the telephone. "Du Puis," he said, "I gave you fair warning. You disregarded it. You played your dirty game with this young woman. You got her into your net. You tricked her into sending you her jewels. Well, me lad, you're sunk. You don't leave this room until the police arrive."

He lifted the telephone receiver.

Suddenly the girl shot from her chair. Like a flash she was upon Dillon, catching his hand, thrusting down the receiver on its rack, staring into his face.

"No, no!" she gasped out. "You don't understand—you don't understand! He is my father!"

CHAPTER IV

The Hatless Man

IT was Riley Dillon's turn to be frozen speechless. From the girl, still clinging to his arm, was pouring an impassioned, frantic torrent of words. Her father! No one suspected

it, no one knew it; her father was supposed to be dead. But she knew of her father's past. He, from afar, had always watched over her. If Homer Martyn learned this secret he would not hesitate to use it against her, bring her into public disrepute, make life a living hell for her.

Riley Dillon swallowed hard. Now he understood Castro's terrible agitation at the mention of this girl.

"I sent for him," she hurried on in agonized, pleading words. "I had him come here to New York, to help me. I am afraid of my husband. He—he is a brute! I had no one else. And he came, my father came, although it meant danger for him. He was safe, in South America. But he came here to help me."

Now Castro came forward and took the arm of his daughter. A strange, helpless dignity sat upon him, as he drew her from Dillon.

"It is no use, my little one," he said. "This man is a detective, and detectives have no heart. Well, m'sieur, take me if you wish, but leave her alone, spare her—"

"Good God!" exclaimed Riley Dillon, taking a step backward. The monocle fell from his eye. "Detective? I'm no such thing. No, no. Why, I never dreamed this, man—I never suspected it!"

"I thought you knew everything?" said Castro, with a trace of disdain. "I told you the truth this afternoon, m'sieur. All those whom I defrauded have been repaid. In Buenos Aires I am a man of reputation, I have position, money. The future lies before me. The past, alas, cannot be denied! And the law has no mercy. Look!" He stretched out his left arm to show the tattoo mark there. "Here is something that can never be removed, and it

damns me. This thing stands ever between me and my daughter, m'sieur. It is my punishment for the past. You understand?"

"I understand," murmured Riley Dillon.

"Ah, have pity upon him!" exclaimed the girl suddenly. "Look! I gave him my jewels, everything I could lay hold upon. He was to sell them for me. I shall divorce this brute to whom I am bound, and go to South America. And you would call the police—"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Riley Dillon devoutly, and gathered himself together. The test of a gentleman comes in such an instant as this; and Riley Dillon met it in his own fashion. That charming, warm smile of his leaped out, transfiguring his face. He put forth his hand impulsively to the man before him.

"Castro, forgive me! I apologize to you; by gad, you're a better man than I am! Give me your hand on it."

"With all my heart, m'sieur." The strained, haggard man suddenly relaxed in a beaming smile as he gripped hands. "Thank the good God! After all, it is the eve of Noël—"

"Yes, Christmas Eve, begad!" Dillon exclaimed.

Then he checked himself. A terrible thought flashed into his mind—those jewels he had abstracted from the trunk! He could not hand them over now. He could not let these people know what he was himself. No, his one way out was to replace them and let the matter be closed.

He thought fast as he introduced himself to the pair, told them he was living here in the hotel. He painted for them a word-picture of an amateur detective and did not spare himself in the painting.

"Will you wait here for me,

please?" he hurried on, eagerly. "I have done you a great wrong, Castro; I'm as glad as you are to have discovered it! It's close to midnight now. We must have a bottle of champagne together—perhaps we may return to the roof. But first I must visit my room and pick up a telegram that's waiting for me there. Will you wait here?"

They would. Castro was suddenly alight with gaiety, with friendliness, in the reaction to his terrific strain. His daughter, with tears in her eyes, thanked Dillon; and Riley Dillon bent over her fingers and kissed them, with his old-fashioned courtesy.

"Back in ten minutes!" he exclaimed gaily from the doorway, and left the room.

As he strode along the corridor, he cursed himself for a fool; yet he was amazed at the situation he had uncovered. Now he could understand why Castro, meeting Homer Martyn in the corridor and hearing the man's mumbled threats, had lost his temper and struck the fellow down. Martyn, of course, had not known him from Adam.

There was an element of ironic humor about the whole thing that brought a twinkle to Riley Dillon's gray eyes, a laugh to his lips, as he thrust open the door of his own room. Homer Martyn still sat in the chair, chin sunk on breast, his heavy, stertorous breathing filling the room with rasping sound.

IT was the work of a moment for Dillon to prepare the two keys he needed. Then he took out the handkerchief stuffed with jewels, swiftly made it into two smaller parcels in case he encountered anyone in the hall, and pocketed these. Next instant

he was on his way again to Castro's room.

He came to the door. At this instant—he remembered it ever afterward with silent thanks—a chambermaid came out of a room down the hall. Instead of using his key, Riley Dillon rapped at the door, lest the maid recognize him and know that he had no business here.

Then he took hold of the door handle. To his astonishment the door opened. He stepped into the room—and it was lighted. Three men stood there, facing him.

"Why, it's Mr. Dillon, of all people!"

The night manager of the hotel, a genial Irishman whom he knew well. And with him, two other men. In a flash, Dillon knew them for what they were. Detectives.

"Hello!" His brows lifted, and a whimsical smile came into his face. "I was looking for Castro, but this seems to be a reception committee. What's up, Killackey?"

The hotel man threw up his hands. "Looking for Castro, eh? So are these birds from headquarters. Boys, this is Mr. Dillon, who sent in the tipoff about Castro."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Dillon," said one of the two detectives, stepping forward. "You see, we got tipped off by the French consulate about your message, and we came up to collect this guy Castro, as he calls himself."

Riley Dillon sparred for time, perceiving the gulf that had opened under his feet. For a moment he was absolutely aghast.

"But I said nothing about Castro!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Oh, it wasn't hard to run down which guy you referred to." The detective chuckled. "Ain't many speak-

ing French with the help around this hotel. We couldn't locate you—"

"You didn't try very hard," snapped Dillon. "I've been on the roof all evening. I suppose you wanted to collar the reward yourself, eh?"

The shot went home. "Well, when it comes to that," blustered the detective, "how come you're so thick with this guy as to walk into his room?"

"Because I made an engagement with him for the shank of the evening, me lad," responded Dillon blithely. "We had a drink or so, and I've been feeling him out to see if he's the man you're after. Upon my word—"

"One look at his wrist will tell quick enough," said the other.

"Finger-prints?"

"Nope. This guy Du Puis got away from the Frog police in Marseilles before they had a chance to mug him or print him. But the tattoo-mark is all we need."

"You see, Mr. Dillon," intervened the night manager, "the best way to avoid trouble and publicity was for these boys to wait here until Castro shows up. We don't want any fuss around the hotel. So I'm waiting with them."

"So I observe," said Dillon cheerfully. His brain was racing fast. He was up against it now and no mistake. Let Castro be caught by these dicks? Never!

"Look here!" he exclaimed abruptly. "Why can't I give you chaps a hand? I know Castro. I can look about the place and fetch him here."

"Swell idea," said one of the detectives. "We're liable to be here all night, and I got to fill my kid's stocking sometime before morning."

"Good!" Dillon nodded. "I'll do it. But first I'll have to call Mrs. Homer Martyn. Let's see! She's in Suite

15 H. I'll have to postpone our dance. We were going up to the roof."

He went to the telephone and sat down to the instrument, his gray eyes dancing, a merry devil of delight in his laughing face.

To pull the thing off right before these men, right under the noses of the two dicks—what could more delight Riley Dillon's heart?

The three men sank back into their chairs as he called the suite. The voice of the girl answered. He sent up a mental prayer that her wits might be quick and sharp.

"Hello! This is Mr. Dillon speaking. Please give me Mrs. Martyn—no, no, I want Mrs. Martyn!"

"But this is she—"

"No, no! Give me Mrs. Martyn. Faith, have ye had too much champagne to hear me?"

He glanced at the detectives and winked, shaking his head significantly. Then, to his untold relief, came the voice of Castro.

"Hello! This is Mr. Dillon. Like a good soul, will ye let me beg off that dance for a matter of ten minutes or so? I'll have to be going to the lobby floor and seeing a man who's asking for me there. What's that? Going right up to the roof now, are you? Then I'll meet you at the elevator in two minutes. Yes, by the floor clerk's desk."

"Very well, m'sieur," came the low, controlled voice of Castro. "I comprehend."

Dillon slapped down the receiver and rose with a laugh.

"Now, me lads—" and he looked hard at the two headquarters men—"I'll split the reward with ye, half and half; mind that. And my half of it, Killackey, goes to whatever charity you care to name; remember it. I'll be see-

ing you as soon as I can locate the rascal."

And he strode out of the room.

THANK the Lord for Castro's sharp wits! The man had to be saved now at all costs. Riley Dillon felt a cold chill at thought of what must have happened had he not returned to the man's room. There was not a minute to waste. Yes, it could be worked perfectly. The whole scheme flashed across his agile brain, complete in every detail.

As he walked rapidly along, he took out the letter from the consulate, produced a pencil, and quickly scribbled on the back of the letter. He was making for the west wing now, and the lighted widening of the floor clerk's space came into sight before him. Ah, the floor clerk! Later, she might report his meeting with Castro—well, he must risk this. No way of avoiding it. And at best, it was a long, slim chance.

Castro was waiting, and under the eyes of the floor clerk, turned. Dillon greeted him, took his arm, and led him over to the elevators, pressing a down button. Under his breath he spoke rapidly.

"Two detectives in your room. Not an instant to waste. Do as I say."

Castro nodded, his eyes suddenly alight and feverish. The elevator door clanged open, and Dillon thrust him in.

They emerged on the lobby floor. Here, as Dillon knew, was the desperate gamble. If another dick were waiting here all was lost. Luckily, neither a dick nor a hotel man was in sight at the moment. Dillon whisked his companion around the corner into the lounge, plumped down on a sofa, and drew the other down beside him.

"Listen hard, now," he said rapidly.

"You'll have to walk out of here as you are, and do it on the jump. Drop everything and go. Have you money?"

Castro nodded. "But—"

"No buts, me lad. Skip from the hotel. Go to the drug store on the corner opposite, telephone back to your daughter and explain to her. Take a taxicab down to the vicinity of the Pennsylvania Station. You can get a suitcase and some clothes easily in that neighborhood. From the station, you can get either a late train or connections for the airport at Newark. Take either a plane or a train to Chicago—to Chicago, d'ye hear?"

Into Castro's hand he thrust the letter from the consulate.

"They've no finger-prints on you, thank the Lord! But that mark on your wrist—the letter makes it clear. And on the back, I've written the name and address of a doctor in Chicago who can remove that tattoo-mark."

Castro, who had followed him alertly, suddenly slumped.

"M'sieur, it is useless," he said quietly. "Such marks cannot be removed. I have tried the best doctors. It is possible to remove the skin, yes, but then a scar remains."

"Devil take you, will ye listen to me?" broke in Riley Dillon. "This Chicago man can do it; he uses the Variot process, which not one man in a million knows about. It'll cost you pain, begad! The design is pricked, nitrate of silver is rubbed in, and tannin then follows. When the job's done, there's hardly a scar."

"Here!" Dillon pulled out the two handkerchief-bundles. "Here are your daughter's jewels. I got 'em out of your trunk. How? Never mind that; faith, I had to lie to those detectives! But I got 'em. Take 'em along."

"God bless you!" said Castro

simply, then started. "But you—you will get into trouble over this."

"Devil a bit of it," Riley Dillon laughed. "No listen: before your plane or train goes, whichever you can grab first, send the hotel a wire. State that you've been called unexpectedly to Washington, tell them to hold your baggage, that you'll be back in three weeks. That'll throw them off the Chicago trip."

"Eh? But—"

"Shut up. At the end of three weeks, your wrist will be healed. Come back here, come openly, face the music! When they find that tattoo mark is gone, that you're really from Buenos Aires, that Mrs. Homer Martyn knows you and vouches for you—why, devil and all! You can laugh at the lot of 'em. D'ye understand?"

Castro drew a deep breath, his eyes like stars.

"If this is so, if the work can be done—yes! Ah, m'sieur, you have given me new life, new hope—"

"Stop your gab and get out of here on the jump." Dillon leaped up and put out his hand. "And don't thank me. Thank those poor little devils of orphans back in Paris, three years ago. Off with you, and a Merry Christmas!"

CASTRO departed, hatless, coatless, as he was. Riley Dillon turned back to the elevators, and found one of the house officers standing there. He produced cigarettes and asked for a match.

"I suppose you haven't seen Mr. Castro about?" he asked idly. "Or do you know him?"

"Yes, I know him by sight, Mr. Dillon. Haven't seen him, though. I just got a call from the night manager to pick him up and send him to his

room, if I did. Someone there is waiting for him."

Dillon, with a nod, stepped into the elevator.

He was elated, joyous, keyed up to a pinnacle of alert gaiety. He had just managed the impossible, as only Riley Dillon could manage it, and he laughed again to think of the detectives waiting there in Castro's room. As for Castro, he had sketched a perfect campaign, which the man was fully capable of following to the letter. For Castro the future was clear, and deserved to be.

Then, abruptly, Riley Dillon remembered the Martyn emeralds.

At the thought, he shrugged. Castro had taken them from Homer Martyn, no doubt thinking to add them to his daughter's jewels. Well, that matter could take care of itself. The emeralds were gone, that was all there was to it.

"Better luck next time!" thought Riley Dillon, leaving the car on the fifteenth floor. With a nod and a cheerful greeting to the floor clerk, who would be on duty clear into Christmas morning, he turned toward his own room.

What next? To get rid of Homer Martyn, of course; and see that he did not molest his wife. Give her a chance to receive that call from her father and be set at ease. It were best, perhaps, to take one of the hotel managers into consultation. If Martyn were drunk and incapable of making trouble, he could be put to bed and left to himself in another room.

Dillon pushed open his door and switched on the lights. Martyn was slumped down in the chair. Startled, Riley Dillon suddenly stopped short, staring at the man. Then he took a quick step forward. That stertorous breathing was hushed. There was no sound in the silent room. Dillon

reached forward and touched the slumped figure.

Homer Martyn was dead.

CHAPTER V

Payment

THERE was a troubled gathering of hotel officials, and at Dillon's suggestion one of the headquarters men was summoned from Castro's room.

"Mr. Dillon," explained one of the house officers, "found a drunk unable to navigate, just outside his door, and it being Christmas Eve and all, brought him into the room and plopped him into a chair. Now the man's dead and turns out to be Mr. Homer Martyn of Park Avenue. There's no earthly reason to doubt Mr. Dillon's story—"

There was none, as the house physician stated. That Martyn had died from acute alcoholism, and possibly heart failure, was fairly obvious and would be confirmed by an autopsy.

Riley Dillon, with a sigh of relief, found himself alone in his room and everything clear sailing. He called the roof, ordered the check charged to his account and his table given up, and undressed. He was ready for bed.

"Faith, it's been a busy night!" he reflected, as he stepped to arrange the

pillows to his liking. "And so far as I'm concerned, an empty night—except for the thought of a bit of good work well done. If we—ouch!"

His foot had struck something under the bed. He stooped, and then a sharp exclamation broke from him. He remembered all of a sudden how Homer Martyn had plumped down, had clutched at the bedside to save himself.

Dillon rose, holding up the necklace with the pendant emeralds. It must have slipped from Martyn's pocket, unobserved, in that fall.

He held the emeralds to the light. Green and lovely, they shimmered like living things.

"Payment!" he murmured. Then he slowly shook his head. "Payment! And would I be taking payment for what I've done this night?" he went on, with a touch of scorn. "Ye brought mortal peril to a poor man this night, and ye pulled him out of it again. If ye took payment for that deed, it's a sorry fellow you'd be."

He lifted the receiver. A twinkle came into his eye.

"Besides," he added, "there might be questions asked as to what became of the necklace, if that girl remembers about it. Hello! Give me the night manager, please. I want to report something I've found."

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An animal cry tore
up from his throat

*The Next Word to Come
from the Radio Would
Brand One Man in that
Lonely Cabin a Murderer
—and Make His Rival Rich*

By Herman Landon

THE last silk-hatted gentleman and the last ermine-wrapped lady had departed. The wheels had ceased spinning and the ivory balls had stopped clicking. The entire staff, from the liveried flunkies who emptied the ashtrays to the sleek croupiers who presided over the green altars of Chance, had gone home for the night.

D 4—23

The Club Golconda, occupying an innocent-looking building on a quiet side street, was silent.

It was four o'clock in the morning, and death was lurking just around the corner. But Peter Fowler, proprietor of the small but elegant gambling casino, could not know that.

His collar loosened, he sat in his shirt sleeves in his private office and smoked a pipe before going to bed in his apartment over the gaming rooms. Out West he had been known as Faro

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Pete, and it was his boast that he had never run a crooked game in his life. A broad, rugged man of sixty with bristly gray hair and features hewn on rough lines. He smoked vile tobacco and wore an enormous diamond stud in his dress shirt. Bad taste; but Peter Fowler didn't give a damn.

The telephone rang. Fowler lifted his shaggy brows. Who but Andy Cleeve could be calling at this hour—Andy Cleeve, his rapsallion nephew, who was always broke and always getting into jams and who sometimes slept in one of the upstairs rooms?

But the person calling was not Andy Cleeve. It was Tom Chanler, Fowler's engaging young manager. Fowler did not entirely approve of his suave and elegant airs, but the young man had the social gifts that drew the right people to a gambling casino. What was more, he was the son of John Chanler, who had been Peter Fowler's partner and best friend out in Arizona.

The older Chanler had been a hard drinker, a hard fighter, and a hell-raiser, but no finer man had ever lived. It was Peter Fowler's firm opinion that, despite frills and occasional escapades, the son of old John Chanler must be all right.

"I've got to see you," said Tom Chanler in a nervous voice, that sounded no farther away than the all-night drug store around the corner.

"All right," said Fowler. "I'll be here."

He hung up with a grunt and scowled at his foul-smelling pipe. The hot Chanler blood must have gone on a rampage in Tom. It was a mystery, though, how anybody, even a Chanler, could get into trouble in the depths of the Maine woods. That's where he had supposed Tom to be. Fowler owned a small hunting camp on Crooked Ar-

row River, and ten days ago he had sent Tom Chanler up there, thinking that a month of the simple life might be good for him.

TOM walked excitedly into the office, a black suitcase in his hand, his gray tweeds looking as if he had slept in them. He was slim-waisted and six feet tall and had a dark, handsome face, but he lacked the iron stamina and the hard recklessness of the older Chanler. Dropping the suitcase, he sank into a chair opposite his employer. His nicely manicured fingers shook as he lighted a cigarette.

"I just got into town," he said breathlessly. "Been driving since six o'clock. I need a drink."

Without taking his eyes from him, Fowler produced a bottle and a glass. Tom poured out a snifter and gulped it down.

"Why didn't you stay where I sent you?" Fowler growled. "What's the trouble? Women?"

"No—a woman."

"That's a damned sight worse. What did you do? Take a shine to a farmer's daughter? Is her old man tryin' to force you into a shotgun marriage? But, hell, you've only been up there ten days. Not even a Chanler can work that fast."

"No, it isn't that." Tom took another drink. "I didn't see anybody up there except a couple of hunters, a game warden who dropped in to say hello one day, and a boy who came over from the village store late yesterday afternoon to tell me I was wanted on the long distance. It was Hazel West."

"And who th' hell is Hazel West?"

"A nice girl, Mr. Fowler. I've fallen for her hard. It's the real thing. We want to get married."

"Good Lord!" Peter Fowler looked stunned.

"But there's the rub," Tom pursued. "Hazel's parents are in high society. Ritzy as the devil. They say they won't have their daughter marry a man who works in a gambling house."

"What?" Fowler roared. His face carrot-red, he slammed his fist down on the desk. "So an honest gambler ain't good enough for 'em, eh? The damned snobs turnin' up their snivelin' blue noses at old John Chanler's son! Of all the rotten, flea-bitten lick-spittles—"

He spluttered, choked, then leaned across the desk and glared at his young manager.

"Listen, you! Are you old John Chanler's son, or ain't you! Have you got red blood in your veins or only lemon juice? Are you goin' to take it layin' down like a licked mongrel, or are you—"

"Wait," Tom interrupted. "Let me tell you how it is. A lot of times I've asked Hazel to run away and marry me. She's refused. Wanted to wait a while. Thought maybe her parents would change their minds. But yesterday afternoon, when she called me up, she said she's just had another row with the folks and was ready to marry me right away. I jumped in the car and stepped on the gas all the way—five hundred miles. A few minutes ago I phoned Hazel. She's waiting for me. We'll run across the river and rout a magistrate out of bed."

Fowler's rage oozed out of him. He beamed, and heaved his powerful body out of the chair. A mighty slap on the shoulder made Tom wince.

"You're all right, son. It's the Chanler blood. And the girl is swell. She's got spunk. Now you two beat it over to the magistrate and get

hitched." He gave a loud, crackling laugh. "Won't it give those stuffed dummies an awful pain in the neck?" Again his huge paw descended on the young man's shoulder.

"Broke, I s'pose?" he growled.

"Yes," Tom confessed. "That's why I wanted to see you. I'd like to take Hazel away on a little honeymoon as soon as we're married. If you could let me have two or three hundred—"

"Chicken feed!" Fowler snorted. "I'm goin' to blow you to a real honeymoon. Catch the first boat for Europe. Stay a couple of months. I'll give you some money now. When you need more, you can send me a cable."

He wheeled around and lunged across the room.

"Damned stuffed dummies!" he chuckled. "Give 'em a pain in the neck!"

Tom, his lips twitching nervously, rose to his feet. As if too restive to remain still, he moved down the room a little distance. Fowler, standing with his broad back to him, touched a point on the handsomely wrought paneling that extended all the way to the ceiling. The wall parted, revealing a massive safe of the strongest and most modern type. After a lively night at the tables, its contents usually ran well into six figures. No one knew the combination except Fowler himself.

His face very pale, Tom drew a little closer. He dropped his hand into his pocket. As if fascinated, he watched the big man turn the combination knob, twisting it with an impetuous hand, as if still gloating over the pending discomfiture of stuffed dummies.

Tom advanced a few more steps, the heavy Persian carpet muffing his approach. His hand came out of his pocket, and a revolver barrel caught the lights that glowed in silver fixtures

along the four walls. He crouched, shoulders hunched up.

The heavy metal door swung open. Tom took a deep breath. A corner of his mouth was pulled down. For an instant he shuddered, then lifted the revolver and aimed it at the big man's back, in a line that he thought would reach straight to the heart. Three shots went crashing through the silence. Fowler gave a little bounce, uttered a fragmentary grunt, teetered grotesquely, and sank to the floor.

II

TOM stood motionless, staring at the big gambler until he stopped twitching. Mechanically he dropped the revolver into his pocket. The walls were heavy, and there was no danger that the shots had been heard in the street or in the adjoining houses. A morbid aversion hampered his feet as he drew closer to the body. He had an irrational feeling that the dead eyes might suddenly look up and fix him with an accusing stare. It took all his nerve to kneel beside the body and feel for the pulse. He could detect not even the faintest flutter.

He straightened up. He was shaken and unstrung. His jangling nerves made his whole body squirm. He went to the desk and took a stiff drink from the bottle. He shook and grimaced, but instantly he felt better. He could even smile as he remembered how easily and completely Fowler had fallen for his yarn about Hazel West and her haughty parents. He had worked the big man exactly right, touching him in his most sensitive spot.

His mind sharpened by the drink, he carefully wiped the bottle and the glass, the only things his fingers had touched. Then he drew a pair of light suede gloves on his hands. But his

nerves turned on edge again as, with the black suitcase in his hand, he stepped over the body to reach the safe. Then, as he saw stacks and stacks of currency, all neatly arranged by the cashiers after closing time, he forgot all about the body, forgot that he was a murderer.

His heart throbbed chokingly as he pushed bales of money into the suitcase. It had been a big night for the Club Golconda, and his haul was bigger than he had expected. There were a great many checks, some of them for large amounts, and these he threw carelessly aside. The cash alone was enough to satisfy him. At a rough guess, it totalled something like one hundred thousand.

He closed and strapped the suitcase and cast a searching glance over the office to make sure he had forgotten nothing. The way out led through the baccarat and the roulette rooms, then through a foyer to the stairs. The suitcase was fairly heavy, but his exultation lightened the load. As he started down the broad, heavily carpeted stairs to the street door that had been imported from a castle on the Rhine, his heart sang a triumphant tune.

Suddenly, half way down the stairs, he jerked to a stop. A twinge of apprehension went through him. What was that? A key scraping in the lock? Somebody about to enter? His heart froze into a lump. If he should be caught now, with the suitcase in his hand and Fowler's dead body lying in front of the open safe, all would be lost.

The desperateness of the situation steadied him considerably. Like a rat he scurried down the remaining steps and wedged into the corner. The entrance hall was dark save for a small frosted

bulb burning at the head of the stairs. Clutching the suitcase to him, he held his breath and waited.

Cold shivers jogged up and down his spine. The door was pushed open. Someone entered, pushed the door to behind him, and started up the carpeted stairs. In the dim light Tom could distinguish nothing but a dark, slightly staggering shape.

Tom stifled an impulse to laugh. Probably it was only Andy Cleeve, the dead gamblers nephew, who sometimes slept in one of the rooms over the gaming establishment. Just a harmless, blithering simpleton who, because of his scarcity of brains, was familiarly and disparagingly called "Sappy" Cleeve. Tom watched him until he reached the top of the stairs and disappeared around the angle of the foyer. Evidently Sappy was drunk again, but he would probably sober very quickly when he found the dead body and the rifled safe.

Opening the door a crack, Tom looked out. Except for a milk wagon, a passing taxi, and two hilarious pedestrians on the opposite sidewalk, the street was dead. He stepped out and walked briskly to the end of the block, then swung around the corner to where he had parked his car. With the suitcase beside him, he turned the ignition switch and was off.

The tires seemed to sing under him, but Tom kept his head. A less prudent individual might have sought to disappear with his loot, which would have made him a hunted fugitive for the rest of his days. Tom was wiser; and he wanted to enjoy his treasure in peace. That was why he was on his way back to the lonely cabin on Crooked Arrow River. Several members of the Club Golconda's staff knew that he was spending a month's vaca-

tion there. None would ever know that he had made a flying visit to the big town.

EVENING shadows were creeping up on the little hunting cabin. Menacing shadows, Tom Chandler felt, but a moment later he laughed at the fancy. Ever since he killed Peter Fowler, just a little less than thirteen hours ago, he had been imagining morbid and ridiculous things.

He stood on the porch and watched the approaching gloom blot out the pale November sunshine. It had been raining dismally when he reached the camp an hour ago, after a non-stop drive, except for gas and water, of five hundred miles. Immediately he had searched the soggy ground for strange foot-prints, but there had been none, satisfying him that no chance visitors had called and found him absent. Now there was a frosty nip in the pine-scented air. It would probably snow before morning.

Tom shivered inside the woolen sweater and corduroy knickers he had put on after his arrival. The wooded solitude was a little depressing. Though the main highway and the nearest village were only three miles distant, he seemed to be in the midst of a dead and boundless wilderness. The only sounds were a faint whispering in the tree tops, a rustling in the dead leaves, an occasional animal call. That was all. An ominous sort of half-stillness.

He gave a shrug of annoyance with himself. The isolation was his friendly refuge; the whispering stillness was his safety. The suitcase containing his loot was hidden under the cabin, beneath four inches of dirt. He had buried it shortly after his return. A rather needless precaution, it seemed, since it

was not likely that his name would ever be connected with the murder, but Tom Chanler was taking no chances.

The thought of the money filled him with a glow, a warmth. The money was the open gateway to all the things he wanted, soft living, pleasures, pretty girls. Very soon he would be able to enjoy it all. He would have to return for the funeral, of course, after being duly notified of Peter Fowler's tragic death. He would wear a mournful expression and a black ribbon on his sleeve. He might even squeeze out a few tears.

After a sweeping glance that probed the oncreeping dusk, he went inside and lighted the oil lamp, then stirred up the languishing fire and piled birch wood on top of it. There was nothing pretentious about the one-room log cabin. Though wealthy, Peter Fowler had been a man of simple tastes. Usually accompanied by a friend, he had been in the habit of escaping to this desolate spot for two or three weeks each year.

Dropping into a wicker chair before the fire, Tom lighted a cigarette. He wondered how the investigation into Peter Fowler's death was going on, and he almost regretted that he had not stopped somewhere to buy a newspaper. Now he felt a morbid curiosity to know what was happening.

Then his eyes fell on the radio. It was a simple affair running on a storage battery, but it had helped him to while away many a lonely hour during the ten days he had spent on Crooked Arrow River. He had discovered that news bulletins were sent out from Portland and Boston several times a day. A glance at his watch told him that he had only a few minutes to wait for the next broadcast.

Moving his chair over to the radio

set, he tuned in on the Pilgrim network. After a brief wait a voice came squawking over the wire. He adjusted the finder and the volume control. Without knowing why, he trembled as the sound grew clearer. The voice rolling through the silent wilderness had an uncanny quality.

Sports, stock market news, politics, a kidnaping and a murder. Then, suddenly, he stiffened in his chair. Cigarette ash spilled on the home-woven rug. The announcer had come to the Peter Fowler murder, and the very first words sent a cold stab to Tom's marrow.

"Peter Fowler, proprietor of the fashionable Club Golconda, who was shot and perhaps fatally wounded at an early hour this morning, is lying close to death at the Fordhaven Hospital."

Tom stared in horror at the instrument. Peter Fowler not dead? Dying, but still alive? It was incredible, terrifying. The three bullets, the glassy look in Fowler's eyes, the dewy film of death on his brow—evidently they had meant nothing. Fowler alive!

Tom shuddered. The announcer was still speaking, but his brain could scarcely take in the words. Fowler alive!

"After a consultation, the attending physicians decided that it would not be advisable to probe for the three bullets that entered Fowler's back and apparently just missed the heart and the coronary arteries."

"According to the police theory, Fowler was compelled at the point of a gun to open the safe, after which the intruder shot him. The haul is believed to exceed one hundred thousand dollars."

Tom could smile at that, despite his consternation. Neither torture nor threat of death could ever have com-

pelled Fowler to open his safe for a robber. Tom had used the one and only effective means of persuasion.

"Though the police are not communicative, it is known that no clues of importance have been found, also that the detectives at work on the case are leaning strongly toward the idea that the crime was an inside job."

Tom could smile at that, too. He was certain that he had not left a single clue behind him, and it did not worry him that the detectives were looking for an insider as the guilty one. But in a moment the smile vanished. Every trace of color drained from his face. What in heaven's name was this?

"Though the police are maintaining the strictest secrecy, it is known that a stenographer and two detectives are in constant attendance outside the sick room. It is hoped that the dying man may recover consciousness for a brief period and give some clue to the identity of the person who shot him."

Silence—an awful, frozen silence—followed. Then:

"This concludes the present broadcast. Further news bulletins will come to you over the Pilgrim Network at eight o'clock this evening."

III

ANOTHER nerve-tearing hush. Then a sprightly musical number, a comedy sketch, something about Gumjoy's toothpaste. With a vicious twist Tom quickly silenced the instrument. His fevered imagination pictured the scene. Fowler lying unconscious on his hospital bed. A stenographer, pencil and notebook ready, waiting outside. Waiting for Fowler's lips to open and name his murderer.

Horror lay like cold steel clamps on Tom's chest. A dying man naming his

murderer! True, Fowler hadn't seen him when he fired the three bullets into his back. But Fowler had known that they were alone in the office, that no one but Tom could have done it. Unless stunned into immediate unconsciousness by the bullets, he must have realized, as he sank to the floor, how he had been hoaxed to his death.

Tom flung himself out of the chair. With a shaking hand he took the whiskey bottle he had brought with him, poured out half a tumbler, and threw it down his throat. Smoldering eyes wandering in space, he pictured a dying man whose lips might open and speak before he died.

A hoarse, sardonical laugh rumbled up from his chest. He had considered himself a very clever man. He had planned everything to perfection, taken every precaution, covered his tracks completely, even arranging an unbreakable alibi. Yet he had made the proverbial slip that every criminal is supposed to make. And such an idiotic slip!

His hot, haunted eyes fixed on the floor. Directly under his feet, beneath four inches of dirt, was his loot. Easily one hundred thousand dollars. It meant a gay, glamorous future. But if the man on the hospital bed should speak . . .

He groaned wretchedly. Then a calculating gleam entered his eyes. They were still fixed to the floor, as if held by a magnetic power. He could take his loot, skip over the border into Canada, and catch a steamer for Europe. But that would be flight, and flight meant confession of guilt. Better wait. Fowler had not spoken yet. Perhaps he never would.

In a torment of suspense he watched the clock. The minutes dragged as if to torture him. At length eight o'clock

arrived and the news bulletins started pouring in. There were war rumblings in Europe. A prince assassinated. Strikes, hunger parades and revolutions. All trivial stuff, utterly unimportant in comparison with his mental vision of a dying man whose lips might open any moment. A gruesome vision, an appalling vision!

He jerked in every muscle. Suddenly he felt as if the announcer were addressing him personally, pointing a menacing finger at him as he spoke. But the bulletin was brief. Nothing sensational had happened so far. Fowler, still unconscious, was sinking rapidly. Yet there was a great possibility, the doctors thought, that his brain would clear for a few moments. Such things often happened.

Tom stood as if turned to stone. But the stone breathed and agonized. Vaguely he heard that there would be another series of news bulletins at half past ten. Again he thought of flight, of escape. But a force apart from himself seemed to take his head and shake it in negation.

It was as if someone were whispering reassuring thoughts in his brain. There was no certainty that Fowler would speak. Even if he did, his utterances might be incoherent and meaningless. And even if he should name his murderer, Tom was five hundred miles away from his crime and in an isolated section besides, so there would still be time for flight. Anyway, he must *know*.

Over two hours to wait for the next bulletins. More than one hundred and twenty minutes of chills and fevers and visions. Suddenly a clear thought struck him. It might be well to bury the suitcase far back in the woods, where it would not be so easily found as under the house. He reached for

his cap, then jerked up his head with a startled mutter. Out of a deep stillness came a sound that scraped harshly on his nerves.

His heart turned over and stood still. He stared at one of the windows, the one looking out toward the driveway. He had neglected to pull down the shade. Someone's feet creaked over the freezing ground, moving toward the window.

Tom sucked in his breath and held it. The footsteps came closer. Too late now to remove his loot to a safer hiding place. Mechanically he moved his hand to his pocket. Then he remembered that his revolver, which he had cleaned and oiled since he used it, was in his suitcase with the loot. Innocent men did not usually carry revolvers, and Tom had striven for every semblance of innocence.

A half-stifled squeal broke from his lips. A face had suddenly appeared outside the dark window pane. In a moment it was gone, but he could still see the whiteness of it, the staring eyes.

FOOTSTEPS again, then a knock on the door. Tom mopped the gluey sweat from his forehead and moved forward. Whoever the visitor might be, nothing could be gained by refusing to open the door.

His heart jostled his ribs as he opened it. Then he laughed in the giddiness of sudden relief. Only Sappy Cleeve, Fowler's worthless young nephew. An inconsequential young man who drank too much, ran around with girls of the wrong kind, and had never done a day's work in his life. Fowler, though he had had little use for him, had grumblingly supported him. A harmless, and yet rather likeable ass.

Tom gave him a sharp glance. It was this same Sappy Cleeve, he was

almost certain, who had entered the street door of the Club Golconda just as Tom came down the stairs. For a moment he groped for a connecting link between that circumstance and Sappy's present visit. There seemed to be none. But what could Sappy be doing here at this particular time?

"Hello," Sappy said, gazing at him as he threw off his hat and overcoat. "You here, Tom?"

"Yes, I've been here for ten days. Your uncle sent me up to this place for a rest. Didn't you know?"

"No. Uncle Peter didn't tell me. I never know what's going on at his silly old club anyway. Got a surprise when I saw a light in the window. Didn't recognize you when I looked in. Mind if I have a spot?"

He took a drink, smacked his lips. He was a lank, tow-headed fellow of about twenty-seven, with dull brown calf's eyes and a sallow complexion. He was unshaven and he looked haggard and nervous. He sat down heavily, and his fingers shook as he lighted a cigarette.

"Funny I should run into you like this," he rambled on. "Came up for a rest myself. Nerves all shot. Great little place for what ails a fellow after he's been going the pace. Spent two weeks here early last spring, before the ice was out of the river, and gained six pounds. Not bad, eh?"

He puffed his cigarette and glanced uneasily over the room. His usual friendly grin was flabby and wry, but he was doing his best to appear at peace with the world. Tom regarded him with hard, searching eyes. Not for a moment did he believe that Sappy had come up to rest his nerves.

"This is the life," Sappy drooled on. "Nothing to pester a fellow. No telephone, no letters, no newspapers. Why,

you don't even know what's going on in the world!"

He looked at Tom as he said the last, and Tom felt a fresh stab of apprehension. It was just as if Sappy had asked him if he knew what had been going on at the Club Golconda.

"There's the radio, of course," the irrepressible Sappy added, "but you don't have to listen to it unless you want to."

Tom squirmed a little. It was just as if Sappy had asked him whether he had heard the news over the air. Suddenly it occurred to him that he had never known Sappy very well. Perhaps Sappy was not quite so foolish as he looked.

"Did you drive up?" he asked, feeling he must say something and remembering that he had heard no sound of a car pulling up outside.

Sappy nodded and looked wistfully at the whisky bottle.

"When I saw the light in the window," he explained, "I stopped the car and walked ahead to investigate."

A suspicion scraped Tom's spine with chill fingers. He was certain Sappy could not have seen him, much less recognized him, when he dodged into the dim corner to avoid a meeting with the person entering the Club Golconda. For that matter, he was not absolutely sure that the shadowy figure had been Sappy. But perhaps, in some unaccountable manner, Sappy had gotten an inkling of the truth. Far-fetched, of course; but how else explain the fellow's mysterious visit to Crooked Arrow River?

Suddenly Tom wished that he had not left his revolver in the suitcase under the cabin. He might need it.

After long deliberation Sappy poured out another drink. He took only a small swallow, as if meaning to

make it last a long time. Tom glared at him obliquely, torn between rage and tormenting doubts. Why the devil didn't the fellow say something about the robbery? He pulled himself together and asked as casually as he could:

"When did you last see your uncle?"

Sappy looked deep into his glass. His hand jerked. There was a curious flicker in his dull eyes.

"Uncle Peter and I don't hit it off so well," he said, with a flat chuckle. "The old boy thinks I'm spending too much of his money."

Tom's lips tightened in a thin line. Sappy had deliberately evaded his question, and that was ominous.

"And he's damned near right," the other added, with another flat chuckle. "Guess I'm no good. Just a bum. Anyhow, that's what everybody thinks. Maybe I'll fool 'em some day."

IV

TOM stared at him. He sensed a menace between the words. If Sappy should find the robber and the loot, people would sit up and take notice of him. Perhaps he hoped to repair his tattered reputation with a single bold and dangerous stroke. Was that why he seemed so nervous and jumpy? It was an ambitious undertaking, and it would take just such a fool as Sappy Cleeve to attempt it singlehanded and unarmed.

Singlehanded and unarmed? On second thought Tom was not so sure about that. The car waiting in the driveway might contain one or more of Sappy's friends. And Sappy himself, even though there were no bulges over his pockets, might have a gun hidden somewhere about his person.

Tom turned away and gave a dis-

gusted snort. It was all rot. His imagination was running away with his better sense. No reason at all for supposing that Sappy had inside information about the robbery. And yet—well, Tom couldn't help wondering if Sappy's face did not slander his intelligence.

Sappy finished his drink, and it seemed to soothe his nerves. He yawned sleepily and leaned back at ease in his chair. Tom, watching him like a sullen hawk, noticed that the eyelids did not close. Sappy seemed to be gazing drowsily at an object in the corner of the room. The radio! In less than an hour, there would be another broadcast of news bulletins, and perhaps—

Tom shuddered at the thought. Yes, perhaps by that time the dying man would have spoken his murderer's name.

Tom dreaded to hear it. But hear it he must. His fate hung on the words Fowler might speak. Possibly Fowler's lips would never open again. If so, all would be well. But if they did, then Tom would have to reshape his plans and make a quick move. In any event, it was desperately necessary for him to hear the next news bulletin from the death-bed. But with Sappy Cleeve in the room—

He glowered at his unwelcome visitor. The confounded fool! A fool whose vapid grins and inane chuckles struck fear to his heart! It was ridiculous. It was only his morbid imagination—his murderer's conscience, perhaps—that persisted in his seeing a menace in a bumptious simpleton.

Another half hour crawled by. Tom paced the floor as if he were an animal in a cage. Sappy Cleeve, his long legs sprawled out, his mouth parted in an insipid grin, seemed to doze with his eyes half open.

Tom stopped in front of the fireplace. He looked at the top of Sappy's blond head. His eyes dwindled to hot pin-points. His mouth sagged at the corners. Instinctively his hand reached for the fire poker. A couple of hard blows on top of Sappy's head would do it, and perhaps it would be the safe thing to do. But his brain vetoed the impulse. Wouldn't do to leave more blood than necessary along his trail. Later, if worst came to worst, he might have to do it. But not now. He started walking the floor again.

"Brrrrrr." Sappy shivered, got out of the chair and stretched. "I say, old man, it's damned cold."

Sneering, Tom watched his awkward attempts to revive the fire. At length a blaze was going, and Sappy stood in front of it soaking in the heat. Tom himself had no need of it. His body was afire.

Having warmed himself, Sappy went over to the radio and twisted the knob. There were scratches and squawks. The air itself seemed turbulent, menacing. Then the sounds became clear and full. Sappy, two fingers on the knob, stood looking at Tom with his silly grin and those dull calf's eyes that yet had such a haunting and secretive quality. Damn the fellow! Was Sappy deliberately torturing him?

Cold fingers touched Tom's heart, squeezing it. There it was! The voice of fate hurtling over the air:

"After naming his murderer in a statement made to the police, Peter Fowler, proprietor of the Club Golconda, died shortly after nine o'clock this evening."

There was a moment's pause. Just one of those brief rhetorical pauses employed by orators. For Tom time seemed to stand still. The little pause

stretched interminably. Through a hot haze he stared at the instrument. Sappy stood in front of it, his lank figure terribly taut, his sallow face drained gray, his grin a frozen grimace.

Tom stretched to the tip of his toes. He wanted to hurl himself at the instrument, smash it. It had become an implement of torture. And Sappy—he wanted to smash Sappy, too. The fellow was the incarnation of menace, of malevolence.

A hoarse exclamation slipped from Tom's lips. A spasm passed over Sappy's gray face. He squared his jaw. His hand fumbled inside his coat. When it came out, a small, flat, automatic was clutched in it. Tom recognized it. Peter Fowler's gun the one he used to keep in his desk drawer. It was all clear now. Sappy had come here to catch him and hand him over to the police.

A low, mad laugh rumbled in Tom's throat, and then the announcer's voice froze him again:

"Recovering consciousness for but a few moments before he died, Fowler was barely able to speak his murderer's name. The name he spoke with his dying breath—"

A HOARSE animal cry tore up from Tom's throat. With the frenzy of a maniac, he grabbed a chair, swung it over his head, and brought it down with all his strength. The blow would have cracked Sappy's skull, but Sappy dodged just in time. Crash! The frail little radio set caught the full force of the onslaught. It howled like a mortally wounded beast, then was silent.

Tom struck again and again. There was a savagery in his blood, a lust to annihilate the thing that had been about to speak his name. Pieces flew

until only a shattered and twisted ruin remained. Tom laughed insanely. He felt as if he had killed something that had threatened him.

Dropping what was left of the chair, he whirled on Sappy. Sappy, covering him stubbornly with that flat little pistol, was gaping at him in stupefied amazement. Renewed savagery seethed in Tom's veins. He must kill Sappy too, destroy him as he had destroyed the voice in the instrument.

As if he had divined his meaning, Sappy tightened his hold on the gun. He was still gaping at Tom in his foolish way, but his aim was sure and deadly.

"Good Lord!" he said hollowly. "So you killed him!"

"As if you didn't know it all the time!" Tom snarled.

"I didn't." Sappy shook his blond head. "I had no idea you killed him until you went crazy and smashed the radio."

Tom stared at him. Something told him that Sappy was telling the truth. But it made no sense. Sappy had not come all this distance just to inhale the pine air.

"Uncle Peter must have got an awful shock," Sappy said. "Used to say the son of old John Chanler must be all right. You certainly fooled him!"

Tom glared at the gun in Sappy's hand and ground an oath between his teeth. No use trying to figure out why Sappy was here. Instead he would have to find a way out of this predicament. Fowler had died a little after nine, so the announcer had said. It was now nearly eleven. The police must have been moving fast the past hour and a half.

His eyes flew over the room, but they returned to Sappy's gun. Something told him that Sappy would shoot.

Tom's own gun was in the suitcase under the house. He chuckled dismally. Not only his gun, but his heart and his treasure, too. Somehow he must checkmate Sappy and make a dash for the suitcase. Then he would make a sudden flight.

Goaded by desperation, his mind worked in flashes. He would have to chance a bullet from Sappy's gun. The bullet might not kill, but the electric chair certainly would.

Suddenly he threw himself flat to the floor, then darted forward like an eel. He grabbed a leg, jerked hard. Sappy's long, lank body slapped the floor, and Tom flung himself on top of the half-dazed man, wresting the gun from his hand. Then he leaped to his feet.

"Got you, damn you!" he snarled, leveling the weapon at Sappy's squirming body. It would be a satisfaction to pull the trigger and see Sappy twist and kick in the agonies of death. Besides, it would not do to leave Sappy alive to tell tales.

He pushed the trigger. A click came, and nothing else. He tried again and again. Click, click, click. Sappy had held him at bay with an unloaded gun. He clutched the weapon by the barrel and drove it hard against Sappy's head. Sappy grunted, then lay motionless.

Tom threw the gun from him and ran. He crawled under the house to the point where he buried the suitcase. It was dark, but he knew the place well. With his fingers he clawed the shallow covering of dirt. In a few minutes the suitcase was uncovered, and he crawled out of the narrow quarters. Only one thing remained to do, and then he would jump in his car and speed away.

Opening the suitcase, he took out his

gun and went back inside the cabin. Evidently Sappy had been only lightly stunned. He was sitting up on his haunches, staring dazedly at the man who entered with a gun in one hand and a suitcase in the other. Suddenly he realized his peril. His dull eyes came to life.

"Tom!" he screamed. "You—you aren't going to kill me?"

"I certainly am," Tom declared. "Serves you right, you damned meddler. Somehow you found out I killed Fowler. You thought you'd play hero and capture the murderer."

"I didn't!" Sappy cried, his voice hoarse with fear. "Don't kill me! I'll tell you how it happened. I slipped into the Club Golconda at five o'clock in the morning, meaning to go upstairs and go to bed. I found Uncle Peter's body, only he wasn't dead yet. The safe door was open and I looked in. A packet of bills lay there. Must have been a couple of thousand dollars. Seems the robber must have overlooked it. I—I just couldn't resist the temptation. I knew Uncle Peter would never miss the money. So I stuck the bills in my pocket, and just then—"

Sappy shuddered. His eyes looked as if he were recalling a scene of gruesomeness.

"His eyes were open. I'll never forget the awful look he gave me. And then he spoke. Guess he was raving, out of his mind. Anyway, what he said was:

"So it was you, Sappy."

"That was all. His eyes went sort of glassy. I thought he was dead. I felt terrible, knowing he had died thinking I was the murderer. He was half crazy, you see. It never occurred to him you might have done it." Sappy screwed his lips into a sickly grin. "You were old John Chanler's son.

You couldn't do anything wrong. But I was no good—just a bum.

"GUESS I did a silly thing. I took Uncle Peter's gun, dashed out of the place, and beat it out of town. I was scared. Couldn't forget the look he gave me and what he said. Thought the police would rope me in, and what chance would I have? I came here, not knowing you were here and thinking this was a good place to hide. And tonight, when the news bulletins came on, I just had to find out what was going on. I am sure that Uncle Peter, if he spoke any name at all, would speak mine. But I felt I had to hear it. Honest, Tom, when I pulled the gun on you, I only did it because I thought you'd grab me and hand me over to the police."

Tom looked at him with hot, contemptuous eyes. Everything he had said might easily be true.

"You damned fool!" he cried, lifting the gun. "You're too big a numbskull to live. Anyhow, you'd talk."

"I won't!" Sappy screamed, edging back in horror. "I swear I won't! Tom, for God's sake don't kill me!"

A hot haze swam before Tom's eyes. He lifted the gun a little higher, until it was pointed straight at Sappy's blond, foolish head.

"Take it, damn you!"

Crash! Tom jerked back, stared at the window. For a moment his hand wavered. A head appeared through the shattered pane and a revolver was leveled at his chest.

"Hold it!" a voice barked. "And drop that gun. Quick, or I drill you!"

The gun fell from Tom's palsied hand. A stocky man climbed inside, followed by a taller and leaner one. The stocky man walked straight up to Tom.

"I heard you," he said. "Saw what you were doin', too."

He flicked back his coat lapel, exhibiting a sheriff's badge. He had hard blue eyes, and they looked keenly at the suitcase Tom was still holding. Then they moved to Sappy.

"Which one of you is called Sappy?" he demanded.

Tom could not speak, but he pointed a shaking finger at the dead man's nephew. The sheriff scratched his jaw.

"Somethin' funny about this. New York police headquarters called me up on the long distance and asked me to pinch a guy called Sappy. They said there was a chance I might find him here. This is Peter Fowler's camp, and Fowler died a couple of hours ago. Seems he spoke just one word before he kicked off."

Tom stood as in a trance. The sher-

iff glanced at the scattered fragments of the radio set, and his brow puckered. At last Tom found his voice.

"What was the—the one word he spoke?"

"Sappy," said the officer. "That was all. Just 'Sappy.' Guess he was out of his head. When a man's dyin' he gets all sorts of silly notions." Again his bleak, blue eyes fixed on the suitcase. "What have you got there?"

Tom opened his mouth, but no words came. He seemed to hear a dull crash somewhere, the crash of all his prospects. A bright gleam caught his eye. It was the sheriff's handcuffs. In another moment the links were clamped over his wrists. With a crooked grin he glanced at the fragments of the radio set. A voice seemed to rise out of the battered ruins—the voice of Fate.

THE POISON BUBBLE

PEOPLE driving home at night in coupés were victims of a peculiar death. At first the European police thought they had died of heart failure or engine fumes, but when the deaths continued the police made much more thorough examinations. In every case the victims appeared to have been robbed; but the only clue was a splash of thin glass flakes—sometimes on the floor of the automobile, sometimes on the clothes of the dead victim.

Microscopic examination showed the glass flakes to be curved, and chemical tests proved they contained arsenic. It was finally concluded that the bandit had waited till the car he had selected to rob was held up in traffic, then tossed in a small glass "bubble" of a powerful poison gas. The least shock would break the glass, and the driver would soon be unconscious, allowing the thief to work as leisurely as he pleased. Whether the victim ever woke up or not seemed to make no difference to the criminal.

Unfortunately for the crook, the scheme was too clever. No one but a chemist could have worked it out, and not many chemists have shady reputations. Suspicion fastened on one, a Polish anarchist who had once plotted a revolution. His laboratory was the scene of a violent raid in which the chemist and one of the officers were killed.

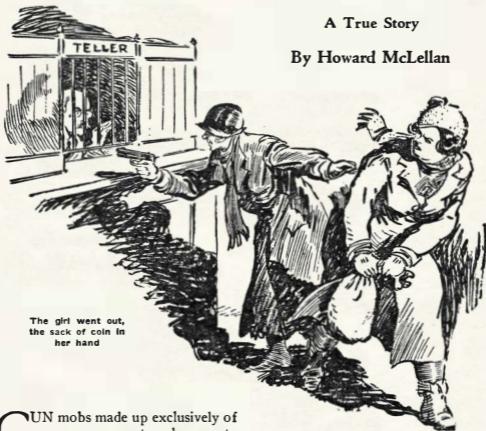
—J. W. Holden.

Mother Molls

Believe It or Not, but a Grandmother and Her Granddaughter Made So Many Stickups That They Opened Stores in Three Cities to Sell the Loot

A True Story

By Howard McLellan



The girl went out, the sack of coin in her hand

GUN mobs made up exclusively of women are not unknown to modern crime. Among the weird criminal combinations which have sprung up in the last decade and a half the weirdest are those family affairs in which sisters joined hands to work the bandit's gun, mothers teamed up with daughters on stickup expeditions and aged grandmothers sallied boldly forth with the younger generation to ply the gat in a professional way.

One of the first of these all-women family affairs proved a shock to a veteran New York policeman. It also

set the country wondering whether, after all, there wasn't more than a grain of truth in the poet's assertion that the female of the species is more deadly than the male. In the encounter which Patrolman James A. Ward had with one of the earliest all-moll family affairs there was abundant evidence that when the female of the species goes gunning she desperately ventures upon risks which no gunman would think of taking.

With the usual run of female offenders Patrolman Ward had had considerable experience. He had arrested his quota of female pickpockets and shoplifters. He believed, as most men do, that women were habitually gun-shy. He had never dreamed that he might some day face a gun moll. In fact he had never been held up by a man, for obviously no gunman in his right senses would be fool enough to come boldly up to an armed cop and proceed to take him for his valuables. Certainly no gun-shy woman would take such a risk.

In uniform, Patrolman Ward set out in his blue runabout to cruise along the heavily traveled highways which cut through Flushing, a suburban residential section of New York City. Roving gunmen had been playing havoc with motorists. Lying in ambush along wooded roads, they stalked out, held up motorists, relieved them of their valuables and often took their cars. Other gunmen worked the hitch-hiking trick. Offered a lift, they piled into cars, rode along until they came to a blind road, hauled out guns and robbed victims of valuables and cars.

Ward and scores of his fellow officers had become so conspicuous in the terrorized section that there was a salutary pause in the daily run of attacks. They were unable, however, to check the operations of a pair of bandits who struck here and there even while the cruising patrols were most active. Victims of the two marauders described them as two boys with high-pitched voices, whose faces were shielded by the turned-up collars of long blue overcoats. The fact that their voices were described as high-pitched puzzled the police.

Usually the pair stood along the curb just after dusk, thumbed for a

ride and had little difficulty in getting a hitch. Motorists not only suffered loss of money, jewelry and cars, but dozens of them were left penniless on lonely roads to get to their destinations the best way they could. Not infrequently the motor cars contained driver and guests who were hurrying on their way to spend a pleasant week-end in the country. The boyish bandits seemed to take particular delight in dumping out such parties.

ALTHOUGH the day had broken warm and bright a drizzle began to pepper the air towards evening. The streets got slippery and pedestrians began to put up umbrellas. Those who didn't have umbrellas were out of luck. Patrolman Ward was a kindly man who had been long accustomed to help women and children across the streets. As he was swinging round a corner his searching eyes encountered two young women who had been caught without umbrellas.

They stood on the curb, their hats damp, their faces dejected. One was a tall, young miss with brilliant red hair, the other a plump, chubby-cheeked blonde with a doll-like smile. The red-head put up a hand. It caught the patrolman's eye. He drew up to the curb, stopped the car, offered the unfortunate girls a ride.

"We're only going as far as Flushing Avenue," the red-head smiled.

"You'd be soaked to the skin by the time you got there walking," said the kindly cop. "Jump in. I'll get you there."

The two girls crowded into the front seat, and as Ward drove off, they said complimentary things about New York cops and their courteous service to distressed women. Patrolman Ward's chest expanded a little and a grin

spread over his weatherbeaten face.

He halted the car at Flushing Avenue and said, "Well, ladies, here's where you get out and you better run. It's beginning to come down kind of heavy."

The red-head bent and grinned into Ward's face.

"Oh, no, mister, we don't get off here. You do." And with these words, in a high-pitched voice, the red-head poked a small automatic into the patrolman's tunic and ordered him to drive on to the end of the street, where was a clump of trees. Patrolman Ward was utterly flabbergasted for a moment. Held up by two women, and held up before sunset on a well-traveled thoroughfare! And that high-pitched voice! It was another moment before he could stir. The automatic dug a little deeper into his ribs and the high-pitched voice warned him to step on it.

He drove on to the end of the road, stopped, and was ordered to hand over his gun and the keys to the car. He reached a hand for the inner pocket of his tunic, but the plump blonde caught his wrist.

"No, you don't, mister, do—"

"You asked for my keys and I'm getting them," Ward broke in. "Do you think I pack a gun in my inside coat pocket?"

"Okay then," said the blonde. "Get your keys and I'll get your gun." She reached a hand for his hip pocket. Ward slipped his hand under his tunic, gripped the hilt of his revolver and yanked it out of its spring holster, nestling under his armpit.

He brought it out with a snap, knocked down the red-head's hand and fired a shot into the air. He stuck the smoking nose of the revolver under the red-head's nose, jerked the automatic

from her limp hand. In a few minutes bluecoats were rushing up from all directions. Next morning at the nine o'clock line-up at police headquarters two crestfallen molls paced the platform under glaring white lights, while seven hundred detectives looked them over, with great curiosity.

When Deputy Inspector John J. Sullivan, standing on his platform near the line-up stage, thundered a demand for their names and histories he was treated to a surprise. In high-pitched voices they said they were sisters, May and Aileen Singleton. May was the tall red-head, aged twenty-one, and Aileen the plump, doll-faced blonde, three years older.

Sullivan stood aghast, raking a hand through his shaggy, steel-gray hair. "Sister bandit act," he finally announced. "In heaven's name, what's the world coming to when a couple of sisters take to the gun! It's gotten so that every male mob has its moll, but this is the first time in my years that I've once-overed a pair of sister molls. And the colossal nerve of them. Picking out a uniformed man to stick up. Can you beat it?"

Apparently the seven hundred dicks could not beat it. They shook their heads in silence and, after a while, brought in motorists who had suffered at the hands of the sister molls. Patrolman Ward stood near the platform as the spotlight played on the pair. May's red hair looked like a ball of fire.

Glancing down at Ward she said, "Say, you're one brave man, I'll say. But listen, it wouldn't have turned out this way if I'd known you carried your gun under your arm."

Ward looked up with a grin cracking out the side of his mouth. "If you'd been men," he said, "you would have figured that I might pack my gun there,

but being dames you didn't, see? And we men have gun tricks. You have your tricks, too. Standing in that drizzle you knew some guy'd come along and give you a lift. That's the woman part of it."

"Take 'em away," yelled Inspector Sullivan. The Singleton sisters stepped down from the stage.

One of the most singular things about this family affair was that May, the youngest of the pair, was the boss. The Singleton sisters were not the last to operate in New York City. Although they had made a complete failure of their gun affairs, they soon had imitators; and this fact led to other police observations respecting the peculiarities of molls on the make.

II

DURING the Christmas holidays of 1932 two young women made it their daily business to stroll into lingerie shops all over town and ask to see expensive silk night robes. Usually they paid their visits while the shops were crowded with women shoppers on the hunt for Christmas gifts.

While one of the pair stood engrossed in the inspection of a night robe, her companion covertly dropped a five-dollar bill on the floor. Then, picking it up, she held it out and asked aloud if any woman in the place had lost the money.

Instantly there was an opening of handbags and purses, while other hands scurried into coat pockets. As the ladies stood inventorying their Christmas exchequers the woman who had been engrossed in the examination of a night robe raised a pearl-handled revolver and commanded quiet, while her companion went from woman to woman, dredging their handbags and

purses of coins and inserting greedy fingers into coat pockets into which she had seen hands go when she had called out to ask if anyone had lost a five-dollar bill.

The stickup concluded, the pair invited their victims to sit down and take it easy. Of course some of the women fainted or became hysterical, but, notwithstanding, the skirted bandits walked out, locking the door behind them.

This family affair lasted only through the Christmas holidays, a fact which led the police to believe that it was a combination devised by two women only to gather in Christmas shopping money. The marauders were never caught, but from descriptions given by scores of lingerie shop proprietors who had been held up, the police concluded that the young women were not only sisters, but twins, and set them down in police records as the Twin Tandem Molls.

They were precisely alike in every detail—the cut and color of their dresses, their chestnut hair, which did not vary a shade, and their voices, which could not be told apart. There was no doubt, the police declared, that they had been influenced by the career of the Singleton sisters.

Nor were the Twin Tandem Molls the only pair of sisters who harried the police. The Gorafy Girls used their wiles to entice men into hotel rooms and there used automatics to stick them up. These sisters, both past 40, admitted to the police that they had gone gunning to show the Singleton sisters what poor hands they had been at the stickup.

They erred, however, in sticking up a gentleman who had far too many drinks under his belt. He was too woozy to realize the danger he faced

when the Gorafy Girls' guns were on him. He charged into the hall of a large hotel, yelled for assistance, and the sisters were trapped trying to get away in a freight elevator.

The only case on record where three sisters ventured upon gun-moll careers was that of the Spiltz sisters, of Chicago. This trio cruised about in an expensive car trying to pick up victims. One sister sat at the wheel of the car, the other sat beside her and put the come-on eye on prosperous looking gents who passed, while the third sister lay under a robe in the tonneau of the car and came to life with her automatic when the victim got in.

They pulled one job. To their great dismay a prosperous looking gent who got into their car happened to be a plainclothes flycop who didn't like the looks of the laprobe as he started to step into the tonneau. He took out his long-nosed revolver, gave the robe a poke and something under the robe giggled.

It is perhaps not singular that these sister teams in banditry sprang into action following the arrest of the Singleton sisters. One explanation of this phenomena is the one put forth by the police. It is their opinion, and likewise the opinion of a number of criminologists, that women are persistent copycats and that envy is a dominant characteristic of the feminine nature. Invariably they try to go the other one better, whether in the matter of a hat or in the coloring of their fingernails.

The Singleton sisters, whose adventures were widely recorded in newspapers, were merely patterns for the sister acts which came along later. And this is not only true of sisters, but of those reckless young women like Bonnie Parker, Kathryn Kelly and other molls who tried to outdo in daring and

cruelty, the molls who had gone before them.

THE propensity to make a family affair of banditry is more often manifested by women than by men. While it is true that there have been many instances of brothers teaming up for a career of crime, rarely has a father led son or daughter into a crime where the gun was the weapon of offense.

One of the most shocking and unnatural acts in modern crime was that of Irene Schroeder, the Iron Widow of Wheeling, W. Va., who insisted upon taking her four-year-old son, Donnie, on a wild bandit raid over the protests of her male companion, Glenn Dague. The idea of having a child along was revolting to Dague, who had children of his own. Yet the Iron Widow shot and killed a motor patrolman while the child looked on. Hers was a ghastly violation of the natural laws of mother-love. It was perhaps the working of an outraged destiny that the child innocently betrayed his mother into the hands of the police, and doomed her to die in the electric chair.

It seems incredible that a grandmother would lead her own flesh and blood into crime, but precisely that has happened. The grandmother was a bent and withered woman past seventy. Unable to get about with the sprightliness of a younger woman, she schooled her seventeen-year-old granddaughter in the use of a gun.

Then, with a shawl over her white hair and a market basket on her arm, the old woman led the girl out on the make. Here and there grandma pointed out to the child a well-dressed man or woman, and prodded her into moving on to the attack with her gun.

The heavy .45 automatic the girl carried was almost too much for her frail hand. The weight and bulk of the weapon tired her arm, but under the evil eye of her grandmother, who stood nearby watching her and keeping a lookout for the police, the girl pulled many daylight stickups.

After a day of great activity, the grandmother's market basket was filled with loot, watches and jewelry taken from victims. The old woman opened a secondhand shop and disposed of the stolen goods. When it seemed too great a risk to continue business in one city, she moved on with her granddaughter bandit first to Philadelphia, then to Detroit and Chicago, where daily raids were continued.

Grandma finally fell ill and took to her bed. The granddaughter went out alone on the stickup, but without the old lady to supervise her jobs the young bandit made a sorry showing. A male victim, observing that her hand shook as if palsied when she raised her gun, laughed at her, shamed her into giving up the gun, and led her away to the police station.

The arrest was too great a shock. Grandma, hearing of it on her sick bed, gave a cry and expired. The girl was sent to a reformatory and emerged cured of criminal tendencies, although the police were inclined to believe that she was able to forsake banditry only because her evil grandparent was not around to dominate her.

This case is the only one on record of an all-moll mob made up of grandmother and grandchild. More frequent have been those family affairs where grandmothers have taken their sons out on the stickup. Mrs. Anna Daranski, known to the Chicago police as Grandma Satan, was sixty-seven years old when she led her twenty-

two-year-old son and another man on stickup jobs.

Grandma Satan was too feeble to manage a gun herself, but she stood by, watched her son and his companion put on the gun works, and reviled them when they deviated in the slightest way from her instructions. Her contribution to the mechanics of the holdup was the "double play," whereby her son stuck his gun into the victim's stomach while his companion jabbed his gun into the victim's back.

It was only natural that the judge who sentenced this evil grandmother to twenty-five years scathingly denounced her from the bench, declaring that Grandma Satan was far too mild a monicker to apply to a woman who had plunged her own son into crime.

Mrs. Mary Ann Brood, sixty, was another aging grandparent who worked the gun with her twenty-eight-year-old son, father of her three grandchildren. However, Mrs. Brood did not stand off and watch her offspring put on a job. Armed with two guns she bossed a gang of loft raiders, her son acting as her chief of staff.

Holding up the workers in fur factories and millinery shops and sticking up trucks laden with silks and furs was all in the day's work for Grandma Brood's gang. When the outfit finally was rounded up in Philadelphia, Grandma Brood suffered a sudden heart attack, became completely paralyzed and died the day she was to have been tried.

III

THE snow-blanketed wheatfields of the Dakotas formed the setting for one of the most amazing all-moll family affairs in police annals. The Dakotas have always been fertile grounds for organized gangs of bank

yeggs. Small banks in isolated towns have for years been the targets of these professional marauders. Bank robbery in this section of the country is a man's racket, or rather it was until two women were seized by the notion that they too could horn into the dangerous game.

Mrs. Catherine Rogers, a wiry little woman of 60, whose hands bore the marks of years of toil on a farm, and her daughter, Zera, a massive girl of nineteen, lived peacefully on a small farm near Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The house they occupied was a modest affair sitting in the midst of wheat-fields.

In spring and summer the growing wheat, rippling in the wind, lay green and placid as a summer's sea. In winter it was different. From the first snowfall in November until the April thaw the country all about the little house was a vast sweep of chilly white. For months the snow lay thick about the house, sometimes banked high against its windows, shutting out the sun.

With the coming of the heavy snows Mrs. Rogers and Zera were virtually prisoners in the cottage. The only other occupant of the dwelling was Mrs. Rogers' second husband, a disabled war veteran whose wounds kept him bedridden. Aside from cooking meals, cleaning the house and ministering to the bedridden man, there was little for the women to do in winter.

Their neighbors for miles around held the family in great respect. The women were hardy specimens. They kept a neat house, paid their bills, went to the village church even when the roads were deep with snow, and seldom failed to drop in and visit with sick neighbors.

On a bitterly cold November day,

Mrs. Rogers, her arms folded across her breast, stood at a window looking out upon a vast expanse of snow. A pot of stew simmered on the kitchen stove. Zera sat in a rocker, her hands clasped over her head. Dad Rogers lay in his bed. For weeks mother and daughter had spent the afternoons in practically the same way.

"Zee," the mother finally remarked, "I'd give one of my arms to be somewhere where a body could see a bit of green and some life in the winter."

"I been laying awake nights thinking about Florida," said Zera. "Gosh, it must be grand to spend a winter where it's warm and you can swim in the sea."

"Don't speak of it," said Mrs. Rogers. "You make me want to get into the old Ford and go—go—go. Remember, I've been all my life in these parts. Sixty years of it."

Zera unclasped her hands, reached to a table and picked up a tiny diary. She opened it and glanced at the many blank pages.

"Gosh, Ma," she said, "I bought this diary thinking I could set something down every day. But whatever happens here in the winter time? Snow. Snow. Snow." Her eyes fell upon the heading which appeared on each page in the book—"Things of Paramount Importance."

Zera uttered a stiff little laugh. "Things of paramount importance," she said. "As if anything of importance could ever happen around here! Why, I haven't seen a movie in months and it'll be more months before I see one."

A long silence ensued. Mrs. Rogers suddenly turned from the window, and blurted, "It isn't right for women to be penned in like this, Zee. They've got a right to have some excitement

just as much as men have. It's always been this way with us farm women, and I don't propose to be laid in my grave without knowing what real excitement is like."

"Excitement. Oh, yes! Try and find it around here, Ma."

"Well, I've been thinking, Zee, about what you said about Florida. Now, we haven't got but little money; but if we were men we wouldn't be sticking here thinking about it. We'd go out and get what money we need."

"How?" Zee asked.

"Where's money always kept?"

"In banks, of course," said Zee.

The withered little woman parted outstretched arms. "Well, then banks are the places to go when you want money," she grinned.

Zee sat up; screwed her eyes at her mother. "You mean rob banks?"

"Wouldn't it be exciting? Wouldn't it bring in the money we need?"

"Ma, you're certainly getting strange ideas at your age!"

"No stranger than men have had in these parts."

"But I can't imagine a woman bank robber," said Zee.

"Well, whoever would have imagined a few years back that there'd be women governors and women bossing men in the big factories? Of course I'm not thinking of going it alone, Zee. But the two of us. Is there a road or a town in these parts that we don't know?"

The big girl was pensive. Her mother went on:

"I'm not afraid of any man in the world, my child, if I have a gun in my hand." She pointed at the tiny diary in her daughter's hand. "And I guess you wouldn't have something exciting to write into that little book?"

They talked on, and the plot thick-



MRS. CATHERINE ROGERS

ened even as the stew on the polished stove thickened. In another hour the stew was forgotten, likewise the invalid man lying in the bed in a back room. For Catherine Rogers and her nineteen-year-old daughter had taken the family touring car and were on the high and open road. The snow they ploughed through didn't matter. After dark they were back in the cottage, tired but nowhere near as weary as they would have been had they spent the afternoon in the dreary house.

THAT night Zee had something to jot down in her ten-cent diary.

She was able to record under the heading, "Things of Paramount Importance," that she and her mother had visited banks in Beaver Creek, Shundler, Valley Springs, Harrisburg and Renner, all small towns some thirty or forty miles from the bleak house in which they lived.

Into these banks they had gone together, had looked them over, had noted where the bills were kept and then had driven about mapping the safest routes to be taken when they at-

tacked the banks. Though the two women had had no previous experience in the dangerous enterprise of bank stickups, they had cased each bank with more thoroughness than a seasoned yegg.

In the quiet of the evening they discussed plans. Zera thought they would be able to clean up all the banks they had cased in a few weeks, and then suggested that they ought to dress as men. Mother Rogers instantly vetoed the suggestion.

She shook a finger at her daughter. "I know men better than you do, child. No, we'll wear our own clothes. Bundle up good and warm, but not too heavily, so our clothes won't interfere with our work. We'll just step into these banks, one after another, and, believe me, when they see two women with guns these men'll just cave in. Men are that way. They never know what a woman's going to do. And they'll be so dog-goned excited that they'll never remember what we look like."

By midnight they had agreed upon the First State Bank at Renner as the target for their first attack. Zera had observed in this bank that more bills were in evidence in the teller's cage. Her mother doubted that the next day would be a good time to pull off the raid.

There had been other bank robberies in the vicinity of Renner, and, as a result, the town police probably would be on guard. They had given the bank and the town a thorough casing, and had carefully charted their getaway. Finally Mrs. Rogers raised a window and looked out into the night. She closed it and turned to her daughter.

"It looks like a real freeze-up tonight," she announced. "If everything does freeze by morning we'll take on

the Renner bank. Did you notice this afternoon that the chief of police's car was standing outside the bank?"

Zera nodded.

"Well," her mother went on, "if he leaves it out tonight and we get a freeze we're all to the good. The get-away'll be easy as pie."

The big girl sat gaping at her mother, half shocked and half marveling at the shrewd way she had schemed things. Mother Rogers produced a pistol which she had found in a closet, along with an ample supply of cartridges, which she stowed in the pocket of a coat.

As she stood oiling and wiping the weapon she remarked, "It was this gun that first gave me the idea, Zee. I said to myself that it ought to be easy to get money with a gun. You just poke it at somebody and help yourself."

"But where's my gun?" Zera asked.

"You'll have one in plenty of time. I've got that all planned."

The gun was under the old woman's pillow as she slept that night. Her daughter went to sleep with the little diary in her hand, the book which now



ZERA ROGERS

contained a few notations about banks under the heading, "Things of Paramount Importance." At last the diary contained at least the promise of excitement.

Dawn brought the freeze. Mother Rogers was elated. The country was frozen tight. Even on the inside of window panes the moisture had been turned into ice. The two women prepared a hasty breakfast for themselves and the invalid, who lay in his bed unaware of the heavy scheming that had been going on about him.

A little before ten o'clock mother and daughter set out in the family car. Both wore leather jerkins under long coats. In a pocket of Mother Rogers' jerkin was the gun, ready for business. As the car chugged towards Renner the endless crust of snow crackled under its wheels.

The main street of the town was deserted when they reached it. The police chief's car stood in front of the bank. A light layer of snow lay on its hood, and this told the older woman that it had been standing there all night. She assured her daughter that everything was turning out as she had planned.

At the old lady's command, Zera swung the car in ahead of the chief's car and parked along a wooden walk which served as a sidewalk. Mother Rogers got out with a buggy robe in her hands, folded it twice, laid it over the warm hood and gave it a motherly pat with a mittened hand.

"Get out, Zee, we're about to begin the day's business," she said. She felt the gun in her pocket. They started for the bank, halted at the door.

"You ain't nervous, are you?" Mother Rogers asked her daughter.

"I'm dying to get going, Ma, but what am I to use for a gun?"

"You'll have one in your hands in a minute."

Mother Rogers drew open the door and they went in. They strode to a writing desk along the wall. The older woman picked up a blank check, and holding this in her hand, she looked at the lone teller standing in his cage. Mother Rogers led off, the daughter following. The teller smiled a greeting.

"Morning, ladies. Kind of nasty out."

"Yes, very nasty," said Mother Rogers. "Nasty out and nasty inside."

"There's the stove," said the teller, holding out a hand. "Warm yourselves."

IV

MOTHER ROGERS reached a hand into the pocket of her jerkin.

"Oh, I'm not chilly," she said. "In fact, I'm too warm." With this she brought up her pistol, thrust it through the wicket window, and pressed its blue tip against the teller's forehead. He went white.

"This is a real honest-to-God hold-up," the old woman grinned. "And don't you dare stir, because I mean business. I hate to take a life, but if I must I must."

The teller reached for a drawer under his counter, but when he heard a faint ticking sound at his brow he knew that his caller was pressing the trigger of her gun.

"Hands up high," she commanded, "or a bullet'll go singing through you." She turned to Zera. "You wanted to know where your gun was coming from. Well, just get into that cage and you'll find a gun in that drawer he was going for."

Though she weighed some two hundred pounds, Zera gripped the top of the grille work hemming in the teller, pulled herself up and clambered over, dropping beside the ashen-faced man standing inside. She grabbed the revolver in the drawer, heard her mother cackling and glanced up.

"See," said the older woman, "banks always have guns as well as cash. Now hurry and clean out the place."

As Mother Rogers stood with her gun at the teller's head, Zera stuffed bills into her pockets and picked up what loose silver lay on the counter.

"Get into the vault," her mother sang out. "And keep your gun cocked because any minute you may have to fire. Quick. Into the vault."

Hurrying into the vault, Zera grabbed all the bills in sight, stuffed them into her pockets, spotted a sack of coin lying on the floor, snatched it up and rushed out to join her mother, still standing at the teller's cage.

"It's all cleaned," she announced. Her mother nodded toward the front door. "Skin and get the engine to running."

The girl lumbered across the floor and went out, the sack of coin in her hand.

Mother Rogers, listening, heard the engine sputter and cough.

"Well," she grinned at the teller, "it's time to say good morning. And let me tell you you better stick right where you are, because if you show yourself at the door, there's a third lady outside who'll pot you the minute she sees you. When you can't hear that engine any more you can do what you like, and God help you if you ever try to find us."

She backed away, gun on the teller. She turned at the door, went out and

calmly strode up to the flivver, pulled the buggy robe from the hood and hopped into the car. Zera drove off, the old lady looking back, her eyes on the bank and the chief's car in front of it.

The flivver was several hundred yards away when Mother Rogers saw the teller appear at the bank door. He waved his hands and shouted and presently men came running from all directions.

The old lady laughed aloud. "The saps, we've got them licked three ways from the ace," she said. "The chief's car is frozen stiff, just as I thought."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when men ran to the chief's car standing before the bank. She saw them trying to crank it, saw them draw back. The frozen car would not budge. Presently a pistol cracked and a bullet flew over the flivver. The fleeing car was too far away for its number to be glimpsed.

Mother Rogers settled down into her seat and buttoned the coat about her throat.

"I wonder," she mused aloud, "if any man would have thought of that car being frozen there?"

"Not on your life," Zera laughed back. "Ma, you're a humdinger on this kind of thing."

Mother Rogers then proceeded to count the proceeds as the car crackled along the frozen road. In all there were \$1100 in bills and coins.

"Not so much," she muttered. "I thought sure there'd be more, Zera."

Zera set her lips hard and grinned to herself. There was more loot—\$300 in bills which Zera had tucked under the cushion on which she was sitting. And there was the bag she had carried out of the vault.

"There is more," she finally said.

"You haven't looked into that bag on the floor in back."

"A bag?" cried Mother Rogers, reaching down behind. "Well, well, child," she gloated as she lifted the bag, "this feels like it was full of gold." She opened it and beheld pennies—700 of them. Her face fell.

"Pennies," she muttered. "There can't be more than six or seven hundred of them, and they're such a nuisance." She dropped the bag.

NOON found them in Sioux Falls. Mother Rogers took the bills, went into a bank and deposited them to the joint account of herself and her invalid husband. Zera rose from her seat and pocketed the \$300 hold-out. She was standing beside the car when her mother emerged with a bank book in her hand. They went off together. Mamma bought herself a hat. Zera couldn't find anything she liked in the hat line, and they trooped off to a movie.

When they came out a newsboy was crying about the Renner Bank robbery. Mamma bought a paper and read it as they walked toward the flivver. Suddenly she caught her daughter's arm.

"How come, Zee, that we have only \$1100 and \$7 in pennies, when it says in this paper that the bank was robbed of \$1400?"

"They must have made a mistake in the check-up," the girl replied.

"Well, what we've got we've got, and they'll never catch up with us."

The two got back into the car and reached home about dusk. Mother Rogers carried the sack of pennies into the house and dumped them into a salt bag. Zera dropped into a chair, picked up her little diary and under the head of Things of Paramount Importance scribbled:

*Robbed Renner Bank today.
Ma got a new hat, and we went to
the movies.*

Then she called out to her mother, "Ma, at last I've got something exciting for the diary."

Mother Rogers, busy stirring a pot of soup, laughed back, "You'll have to buy yourself a bigger book before we get through."

Zera tucked the diary between some china dishes on a whatnot and sat humming. The sweep of snow seemed not so desolate that night as mother and daughter stood looking out a window, cheerily discussing how they would enjoy life in Florida when they knocked over a few more of the banks on their list.

Next morning they went to town with the bag of pennies. A morning paper told them that the police in Sioux Falls had arrested three women for the robbery, one of them the wife of a notorious bank robber.

"Well," Mother Rogers cackled, "I guess we can get rid of these pennies now. I told the teller that there was a third woman waiting outside to pot him, and the sap police have gone and hauled in three women for our job."

In a department store Mother Rogers got rid of the pennies, making a small purchase. The clerk obliged by converting the pennies into bills and silver. The trusty flivver carried them back to the farm.

A winter's sun stood blazing in the cold sky next day when Mother Rogers, standing at a window, suddenly raised the hem of her apron to her mouth.

"Zee," she called out, "I see Sheriff Boardman and two men coming up the road. Now, what do you suppose

brings them out here in weather like this? It couldn't be the Renner job."

"They'd been here before this, if it was that," said Zera.

A moment later Mother Rogers cried, "They're turning in our yard. Well, I'm ready for them."

She was at the door when the sheriff knocked. He walked in with two men.

"Howdy, Mrs. Rogers? How's your husband?" he asked.

"Very poor, Sheriff. He's in his bed and some boys from the American Legion are in with him. You and your friends sit down, Sheriff. I'll stir the fire."

"It's quite warm enough," said the sheriff. "And we got a little business we want to get through with. Mrs. Rogers, do you happen to know anything about the Renner bank robbery?"

"I read about it in the papers," she replied. "That's as much as I know about it."

The sheriff raised a foot to a kitchen chair, bent and looked Mother Rogers straight in the eye. "Mind telling me, Mrs. Rogers, where you got those pennies you changed at the store in Sioux Falls?"

Zera stifled a gasp. Her mother smiled.

"Mind telling you about those, Sheriff? Why, not at all. I been saving those pennies since Zera here was a little girl. A-saving them for a nest-egg for her when she meets a fellow she likes and gets married."

"Why did you happen to change them for bigger coins just at this time?" the sheriff asked.

"The copper was getting kind of green with age," she answered with a grin. "I thought maybe they'll just keep on getting greener and greener and after a while there wouldn't be any

pennies. So I took them to town and changed them."

The sheriff pinched his mustache and looked sharply at his two companions as if to say they were all in the wrong place. Detective Walter S. Gordon, a noted Northwest manhunter, was one of the men in the sheriff's party. He spoke up.

"Perhaps Mrs. Rogers wouldn't object to our searching the premises."

"Not at all," Mother Rogers put in.

The three callers searched the house from cellar to garret, and found nothing which had the slightest bearing on the Renner bank job. At last they assembled in the warm living room, crestfallen. The sheriff put on his great-coat and started to button it. Detective Gordon stood stock still, his eyes riveted on the whatnot standing in a corner. Presently he walked over to it, reached out a hand and picked up the ten cent diary.

"Say, that's personal. Give that to me!" Zera cried. She reached for the book. Gordon stepped away. He had opened the book and his eyes were as large and glossy as agate marbles as he studies the writing in it. Finally he glanced down at the big girl. He asked, "How come, miss, that it says here under the heading, 'Things of Paramount Importance,' 'Robbed Renner bank today. Ma got a new hat and we went to the movies'?"

The girl's lips did not move.

Gordon tapped the open book with his knuckles.

"I'm asking you, miss, how you come to write this down?"

It was Mother Rogers who answered.

"Why, there ain't nothing to that, Sheriff. Zera, here, is a kind of a peculiar child. She read about that robbery and, being alone so much in this God forsaken neck of the woods, she just—

she just wanted to put down something exciting in her book and she put down that about the bank."

The sheriff cleared his throat and resumed buttoning his coat. While the explanation given by the old lady might be phony it was at least an explanation that a jury of farmers might believe. He was about ready to go when Gordon stepped close to Mother Rogers. He stood staring at her.

Gordon is one of the country's greatest experts on bank robberies. He has been dealing with professional yeggs and thieves for years. He knew that it is not an uncommon practice among thieves to cheat each other when it comes to razoring the loot. He would shoot one last question at the old woman and see what effect it had upon her. So he remarked:

"I'm sorry to have bothered you, Mrs. Rogers, but exactly \$1,307 was stolen from the Renner bank, and the Bankers' Association'll never stop till the thieves are found."

Mother Rogers began to bite her thin, tight lips. Gordon winked an eye at the sheriff. For a moment the old woman stood thinking. Finally she looked up at Gordon.

"Are you sure that amount was taken?" she asked.

"Thirteen hundred and seven dollars including the pennies, madam. I've got the exact figures with me."

Mother Rogers riveted blazing eyes on her daughter, who was now biting her lip. At last the old lady sank into a chair. For a quarter of an hour she talked as fast as her tongue could manipulate words. She revealed the entire story of the looting of the Renner

bank, and glaring at her daughter, wound up with:

"I never in the world dreamed that my own flesh and blood would try and cheat her mother out of three hundred dollars!"

Zera sat up, glaring at her mother. "Did you expect I'd be honest with a mother like you? You got me into this and you never gave a thought to the risk I was taking with my own life. You've ruined my life, that's what you've done. Of course I held out on you. I'm glad I did."

The sheriff and Gordon grinned at each other. It was the old story of double-crossing among thieves, with this difference: a daughter had cheated her mother on one hand, while the mother had doomed her daughter by confessing.

After a long silence the sheriff spoke.

"Never heard of a thing like this in all my days. Mother and daughter in a bank mob. Catherine Rogers, I've known you all my life, and like everybody around these parts, I believed you respectable. But you're the most unnatural mother I have ever heard about and you deserve every bit of what the law'll give you for this."

Detective Gordon held up the diary.

"Only a woman would keep a thing like this," he remarked. "Not a man's trick. No, sir. It's one of those little habits a woman can't get away from. And saving those pennies. Another woman trick. No yegg would have bothered with pennies."

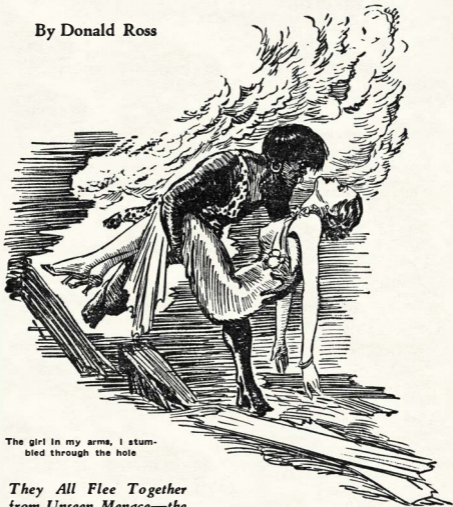
Not long afterward prison gates opened to receive the only mother-and-daughter team of bank bandits known to police annals.

Next week—"15 YEARS IN THE UNDERWORLD"

The true story of the life of a big-time crook

Bring Him Back Alive!

By Donald Ross



The girl in my arms, I stumbled through the hole

*They All Flee Together
from Unseen Menace—the
Painted Savage, the Jewel
Thief, and the Lady Who
Dances the Cooch*

**DON'T MISS THIS STORY—
BEGIN HERE**

WHEN Jack Laurence went to England, it was on a strange assignment. His orders were: "Find the man who calls himself Sir Ronald Enescro. Get him—and bring him back alive!"

Enescro, the man who had backed Red

riots in the United States, was a neighbor of Arthur Ainsworth, who had gone to school with Jack, and the latter was only too glad to accept an invitation to Oswald Manor, Ainsworth's home.

Just then Ray Bronson, a jewel thief, made Laurence a strange proposition. Enescro, he said, had stolen from an Indian rajah one of the famous gems of history—the diamond called the Moon of Monabar. Bronson proposed that he accompany Laurence, posing as his valet. He, Bron-

This story began in **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY** for February 9

son, could get the diamond and sell it back to the English government. Laurence at the same time could turn up Enescro as a bona fide criminal, thus making extradition easy.

Meanwhile tragedy had struck Oswald Abbey. Upstairs was the body of the village constable, garrotted. And the very night Laurence arrived the assassins struck again. As Jack dozed in the terrace, watching Sir Ronald leave the Abbey, a turbaned shape, knife in hand, crept over the wall. Jack managed to frighten the intruder away, but the mystery began to assume a more menacing tone.

The next morning Jack was told curtly by Ainsworth that he was no longer welcome as a guest. In spite of the protestations of Theodora, Ainsworth's beautiful sister, Jack is ejected, goes back to London.

What was the reason for this sudden change of front? It could mean but one thing—Enescro had been informed of Jack's real mission in England.

Quickly disaster struck again. An immigration officer called, told Jack he was to be deported at once as an undesirable alien.

Furious, Jack overpowered the inspector and escaped—a hunted man. While fleeing he met Sadie, a coochie dancer, who offered him a way out. Ignominious as it is, he takes it—and becomes the Wild Man in a sideshow. Blacked up, he performs—and meanwhile watches daily for a chance to fight against his unseen foes.

CHAPTER XV

Ray Muscles In

INSTANTLY Sadie was in front of me.

"You're wrong, wise guy," she said stridently. "This is my husband—Cecil Follingsby, he is. Be off about your business."

"It's all right, Sadie," I told her. "How are you, Ray?"

"I seen you in Lyons'. Didn't want to tackle you there," he explained, "so I ducked to give you a chance to fade. I seen the dame with her eyes on me."

"Who's this guy?" demanded Sadie.

"Friend of mine," I assured her. "Let's go inside, Ray."

He got rid of his taxi and followed us up the high steps. I saw him gazing admiringly at Sadie. I believe I've mentioned that her figure was exceptional.

We had two rooms on the third floor. We encountered nobody on our way up, and I unlocked my door and turned on the light. After closing it I introduced Ray to Sadie as Miss Green. She eyed him with disfavor.

"You may think he's a pal," she told me to his face, "but he don't look good to me."

"Kid," said Ray, "I love Jack like a brother. Jack, did you bring this doll over with you? If you didn't you're a fast worker."

"Let's get things straight," I said. "Sadie is an American girl who is—er—entertaining over here. She recognized me from the picture in the papers yesterday and, instead of turning me in, she's fixed it up so I get a break." I explained briefly our arrangement.

"Shake, baby," said Ray. "You didn't make any mistake. How are you two fixed for dough?"

"You mean you'd give us money?" demanded Sadie. "Say, you're O.K. at that."

"I'll put five pounds on the table if you'll do your dance for me here and now," he proposed.

"You go to hell," cried Sadie, blushing.

Ray chuckled. "And I'd give ten pounds to see Jack as the Wild Man. Now, baby, go into the other room and close the door and don't listen at the keyhole. I want to talk private—"

Wham. Sadie's open palm cracked upon Ray's left cheek and left the mark of five fingers.

I grabbed Sadie, but Ray was laughing like a crazy man.

"Atta girl," he ejaculated. "I had it coming to me. I'm for you a hundred per cent. Just the same, we got things to talk about and it might be bad for you to listen. What you don't know ain't going to hurt you."

"Please, Sadie, leave us alone for five minutes," I pleaded.

"Oh, all right," she said sullenly, and she went through the connecting door into the other bedroom.

"NOW tell me the whole story," said the thief. He lighted himself a cigar, offered me one which I accepted and we sat down. I told him how I left Ainsworth unexpectedly and the incident of Inspector Gaddish. He looked very thoughtful.

"They haven't my finger-prints at Scotland Yard," he said, "and they haven't got a picture of me. I'm here on a fake passport. They know, all right, about Ray Bronson, but they'd have trouble identifying me if they took me down to the Yard. Inspector Good, who only got a glimpse of me, might have thought I was suspicious looking, but he didn't know who I was. I ducked so he wouldn't get another gander at me. What happened to you had nothing to do with me, Jack."

"Then I don't know—"

He grinned wisely. "The heck you don't. That old ostrich, Tom Keefe, thinks nobody knows about his Security Service. I bet Enescro has photographs of every member. It's a ten to one shot he got a cable that Jack Laurence was on his way over to put a finger on him. So he made arrangements to ship you right home."

"Why should Enescro be interested in me?"

Ray grinned and put one finger on the side of his big nose.

"You trying to kid me?" he inquired sarcastically. "Enescro's the head of the outfit that's financing the revolutionists in the U. S. A. He had a couple of bomb throwers at the Castle yesterday. What were you sent over for—to bump him off?"

"Are you crazy? I'm no assassin."

"What else can you do? Suppose you got evidence against him? Can you try him in America? No, you got to take it to the British government and some of his pals there will drop it down a hole. You may be all right at a union meeting in Frisco, but you're just a sucker over here."

"You seem to be pretty well informed, Ray."

"Did I say no? I got to be in on everything. You figured to double-cross me on the Moon of Monabar. Thought you'd tip the government and trim poor Ray. Say, I knew when you agreed to my proposition what was in your mind. No hard feelings. I needed to get down to Ainsworth's place with you. Just to show I'm yer friend, I'll smuggle you over to France, and you can fix it by cable to get transportation home from there."

"Thanks, Ray. I'm sticking."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"No brains, but lots of guts," he commented. "You're going to do Enescro a lot of harm blacked up in that cage."

"I've got to hide out for a week or two. I might as well have let them deport me as sneak home from France."

Ray jerked his thumb toward the door.

"You stuck on the doll?"

"Certainly not. She's a good little kid, and we're pals."

"You figger on keeping that door closed?"

"Of course. I tell you—"

"Well, lock it on this side," he said grinning. "I was married to a blonde once and next time I'd like a brunette about her size. Mind my dropping round to call?"

"I'd be glad to see you any time, Ray."

He rose and put out his hand.

"I'm a good American, Jack," he said. "I got to get the Moon. After that I may show you how to sink Enesco. You go right on being a Wild Man."

He tiptoed to the connecting door, pulled it open suddenly. Sadie was lying on her back on the bed smoking a cigarette. She removed the cigarette and stuck out her tongue at him. Ray laughed loudly.

"One on me, baby," he admitted. "I figured you to have a pretty ear glued to the keyhole. The boy friend says I can come around any time. Mind if I bring you an orchid?"

Sadie bounced up.

"Bring an orchid and a can of beer," she smiled.

"You don't care for champagne?"

"Jack," she inquired, "he wouldn't be making a play for me, would he?"

"Sounds like it."

"Well," said Sadie, "maybe the second or third time you bring up champagne I'll get used to your face."

"Oi," ejaculated Ray with a grimace.

CHAPTER XVI

Exposed

FOR three days I played Wild Man from Africa from eleven until ten-thirty, supped at hide-aways with Sadie, played black jack with her for an hour after we got home and escorted her to the connecting door about one A.M. I tried to be cheerful, but the

grind was getting me down, and my inability to do anything about my job was hard on my nerves. Ray did not put in an appearance, rather to the disappointment of Sadie, who had been intrigued by his suggestion of orchids and champagne.

The fourth day was Saturday. It started like every other day, save that the crowds were bigger. In the afternoon well-dressed Londoners mingled with the yeomanry, which paid sixpence for the privilege of viewing the freaks.

Contrary to Ray's suspicions, Sadie made no effort to take my mind off business. I believe the poor little thing had been fond of her worthless husband and desolated at his desertion. She was a girl who couldn't bear solitude—she babbled continuously and had to have an audience. I was repaying her for refuge by serving as the audience.

It came to be nine-thirty Saturday night. I was dog tired and my howls grew more savage because that's the way I felt.

It was a hot night for London; the ventilation in the building was bad and the crowd was dense. My damned wig had given me a headache. Tonight we would keep open as long as people were willing to buy tickets—it might be midnight before I could escape from my cage. I scowled at women in evening gowns and escorts with white ties and tail coats who peered at me and laughed derisively at my antics. On Saturday nights, as Robbins had informed me, lots of "toffs" came down from dining at the swank hotels. While they refused to take the show seriously, their money was as good as that of anybody else.

Although there were "No Smoking" signs everywhere, lots of people

were smoking, and the "toffs" were the worst offenders. There was a haze of cigarette and cigar smoke which caused halos to form around the electric light bulbs.

Sadie was doing her dance; the crowd surged in that direction, so for the moment nobody was watching me. I took advantage of the opportunity to stop howling and shaking the bars of my cage and squatted sullenly on the straw. I'd had enough of this. I'd tell Sadie I'd quit tonight and I'd move out on her too. I was fed up with everything, including my benefactress. I was gazing dully toward the entrance when a party of six persons in evening dress entered. I stared. I gasped and I cowered down into the straw.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Ainsworth had come in, with Theodora, Lady Eleanor Lynn, Lord Hosmer and a young man unknown to me. The men were laughing loudly and Lady Eleanor was cackling shrilly. Even Theodora had a merry light in her eyes and a broad smile upon her lips. The whole outfit had dined well and the spirit of adventure had come upon them. Instead of going on to a theater they had ventured down to Bright City to mingle with the mob. No doubt they had never been here before and would never come again. They had to choose a time when Ainsworth's recent house guest was prancing in a cage as a wild man.

I HAD stage fright, buck fever, chills and delirium tremens rolled into one. I threw myself on my face, burying it in the straw.

They were moving directly toward my cage. They stopped in front of it.

"I say," called Hosmer. "The African Wild Man—that's a juicy one, eh?"

"He doesn't seem very wild," said Lady Eleanor shrilly.

"What a life!" commented Theodora. "Why, the poor fellow actually is trembling. Perhaps crowds frighten him. Maybe he really is wild."

"Don't be a goose," said Mrs. Ainsworth contemptuously. "All these freaks are fakes. Everybody knows that."

The Great Robbin suddenly appeared in front of the cage, rubbing his hands like a butler.

"Pardon me, meledy," he said earnestly, but most respectfully. "H'everything in this h'establishment is h'authentic. Now tyke this 'ere Wild Man. It was up at the Falls of Victoria Nyanza that they caught 'um. The savages worshiped 'im, they did. 'Cause why? 'Cause he would plunge into the river, grab a crocodile, turn 'im h'over and sink 'is fangs in 'is stomach, he would. Look at the teeth of 'im."

There was a burst of laughter. With a thump the curtain of Sadie's little stage dropped. Her performance was over. Robbin lifted his voice. He was swelling with importance.

"Step this way, lydies and gentlemen," he shouted. "I will next show you the ferocious H'African Wild Man. Adored as a god by the native savages of the jungle of the Victoria Nyanza. Now don't crowd; there's room h'enough for h'all." He turned.

"Psst," he hissed. "Up with her. What's ailing yer?"

It didn't seem as if I could move a limb. I lay there helpless.

"Wild as a barnyard chicken!" exclaimed Arthur Ainsworth. There was a burst of laughter.

Robbin stuck his riding crop through the bars of my cage and jabbed me in the ribs.

"Something he ate, maybe," he said apologetically.

"Let's get out of this," I heard Theodora say. "It's positively disgusting."

I MANAGED to rise. I remembered my wig, my tusks, my coat of black paint. Of course she couldn't possibly recognize me. Yet the humiliation of appearing before her in my degrading rôle, even if she couldn't penetrate my disguise, was horrible. I grasped the bars of the cage and shook them feebly. I tried to howl, but the tin whistle had got twisted in my mouth and wouldn't work. I tried to get it in position with my tongue.

"Forty men with rifles and a battery of cannon they 'ad to have to capture 'im," bellowed Robbin. "Eh?"

There was a howl of derision mingled with anger from the crowd.

Lord Hosmer had flipped a cigarette butt at my face. I dodged it. A strand of the horsehair of my wig had caught on a nail in the wooden framework of the cage; as I pulled myself suddenly to one side my wig was jerked off.

You can imagine the effect of my gleaming white skull—where there had been a huge Zulu mane—in contrast to my black face. Losing my presence of mind, I yanked at the wig, pulled it loose and replaced it, but I had been exposed.

Now an American crowd would have been so delighted and entertained by the incident that they would have laughed gleefully and taken no umbrage, but in this British mob was a percentage of persons of stern character who considered that they had been personally outraged by the imposition.

"Smash the beggar," shouted some malicious person.

"Smash the bally show," cried somebody else with larger vision. "It's all a fake."

"Let's get out of here," I heard Ainsworth say. He began to elbow his way—Theodora and her crowd had been in the front rank—but the crowd behind was pushing forward.

A mob mutter was rising and above it shrill threats and hoarse curses. Robbin, who recognized trouble when it arose, dove under the canvas drop from the floor of my platform to the ground.

"Beat the life out of 'im," came from a dozen sides. There was no escape for me. I glanced to right and left and behind me, then my eyes dilated.

And then a woman screamed, "Fire!"

The straw at the rear of the cage had been smouldering and suddenly burst into red flame. Hosmer's cigarette had dropped in the straw when I had dodged it.

A tongue of flame leaped out of the back of the cage, caught a drape of red cheesecloth which hung from floor to ceiling and licked at it viciously. And the fire was spreading in the straw. The interior of the cage would be in flames in a few seconds.

CHAPTER XVII

Panic

I MIGHT be roasted to death, but I was in no more danger from the multitude, which was rushing for the exit.

There were three or four hundred people in the building and the exit was only four feet wide. Already the van of the crowd was jammed against it.

I moved toward the cage door. Already the straw in front of it was blazing. I turned. I was ringed with flame except in front, and there the iron bars blocked egress.

I hesitated, drew back and then hurled myself with all my force against the front of the cage. It quivered, shook but held. Again. A third time—

And this time the wooden framework gave way and I plunged forward and down to the ground, four feet below. I landed on my head and went out cold. Probably I wasn't unconscious half a minute, but when I came to I gazed upon a horrible spectacle.

The whole building was on fire. Flames were eating up the cheesecloth drapes on all sides and communicating themselves to the woodwork. And the building was still half full of people who were hitting, scratching, kicking and trampling upon one another in an insane frenzy to force their way through an opening already choked with human beings.

I staggered to my feet and looked around. There, twenty feet from me, stood Theodora, alone. Her gown was in tatters. Her shoulders were bleeding and she was covering her face with her hands.

"Theodora," I shouted. She turned, stared at me and I rushed toward her with arms outstretched.

With a shriek of mortal agony, Theodora fell forward. Fainted. I had forgotten my hideous tusks, my coat of black paint and the frightful wig which had saved me from cracking my skull when I hit the ground. Theodora thought that the African Wild Man was coming for her or that, in the middle of the conflagration, I was an imp from hell.

I picked her up in my arms. The mob was massed in front of us. Roaring flames blocked the exit to the dressing rooms and dining room, which were located in a section of the building behind my cage. But as I

gazed wildly around a cheesecloth drape fell from its fastenings, entirely consumed, and left bare and unburned a section of the wall against which it had hung.

I put Theodora down—there was nobody left to trample upon her in this part of the structure—wrenched away



"SADIE"

one of the iron bars from the framework of the cage; then, picking her up again and carrying her with my left arm, I ran to the back wall. With the iron bar I smashed at the wall savagely. I knew the construction of the building was frail—and that the wall was built of thin, soft planks.

The din from the trapped and frenzied people was frightful. If they had massed against the side of the building their weight would have driven them through it; but, as people always do in panics, they were using their strength against one another.

With a few blows of the iron bar I had smashed a hole through the wall big enough to serve as an exit. Then, Theodora in my arms, I stumbled through it to safety.

As I staggered clear of the smoke the girl stirred in my arms. I saw that

her eyes were open, and they weren't scared any more. I put her on her feet. She wobbled a little, then stood erect.

"I was a fool to faint," she said with a brave smile. "Especially when I knew you weren't really an African wild man."

THEN, as we stood outside, under the glare of the electric lights, the roof of Robbin's Side Show fell in. And the scream which went up from those still in the building I don't expect ever to forget.

"My brother, my sister!" cried Theodora. "Oh, God! Were they in there?"

I didn't say anything. I stood beside her silently.

Suddenly Theodora rushed around the corner of the building. I followed slowly.

If Arthur Ainsworth had got out and left his sister inside, I wondered what he would say to her. If he hadn't, well she would grieve for a man whose death would cause me no sorrow.

When I arrived at the front of the building I discovered why the roof had collapsed.

The fire department had come upon the scene and had pulled down the wall on either side of the door to facilitate exit. This had shaken the supports of the already weakened roof, but it had enabled half of those still trapped in the building to make their escape.

It turned out that more people had been injured by being trampled upon than by the flames; no one, as far as they could ascertain, had been killed. But for a long time they didn't know that. There were, however, a hundred persons who had burns, broken bones or internal injuries, and ambulances were busy carrying away victims for an hour.

I FORCED my way through the crowd in hope of finding Theodora.

It was impossible to locate her and impossible to discover if the members of her party had escaped. After fifteen minutes of fruitless search a hand was thrust into mine and a woman's voice exclaimed:

"Jack! Thank God!"

It was Sadie, wearing a kimono over her dancing costume.

"I was afraid you were dead," she said with a sigh. "Oh, Jack, wasn't it awful!"

"As bad as it could be. I have to find out if she found her family—"

"Who?"

"Theodora."

"Who's Theodora?" she asked sharply.

"Oh! Why, a girl I used to know. I saw her in the crowd."

"Whether she did or didn't, you can't do anything about it." She pulled at me and I let her drag me to the outskirts of the mob.

"Don't you see you've got to get out of here?" she demanded.

"Why?"

"There'll be an investigation. The fire started in your cage. You'll have to give testimony and they'll find out about you."

"I know what started the fire," I said excitedly. "That fool Hosmer threw a cigarette in the straw—"

"It was an accident. You don't suppose you're going to give testimony, do you? Get wise. They're liable to claim you set the straw on fire because a crowd was going to beat you up," she said excitedly. "Let's be on our way. Take them tusks out of your mouth. You're not going to need them any more. Robbin has lost his show and we've lost our jobs."

In addition to the excitement of the fire, it must be remembered I had gone through a shocking emotional experience; I was weak from reaction and not hitting on all six cylinders. Sadie brought me to my senses. Under no circumstances could I risk being questioned by the police.

Theodora was safe. If her relatives had been killed or injured, they were not friends of mine and no better than others who had been caught in the trap. When I had come upon Theodora she was alone in the rear of the insane mob. "Every man for himself" had been the slogan of Arthur Ainsworth and his male companions.

"Let's go," I said. "You're dead right, Sadie."

CHAPTER XVIII

Split-Up

THE sideshow building was a heap of smoking timbers. Police were on all sides keeping spectators back. Ambulances were arriving. Officials were taking names of survivors, and firemen were poking in the ruins for bodies. I was terribly nauseated and bewildered and wouldn't have found my way out of the place except for Sadie.

She led me swiftly toward a rear gate, the keeper of which had abandoned his post to watch the conflagration. Ten minutes later there would have been a police cordon around the Bright City and performers from Robbin's would not have been permitted to depart. Once again the little coochie dancer was my guardian.

We picked up a taxi in the street outside. The driver grinned at our bizarre appearance.

"What's burning up in there?" he demanded.

"Robbin's," I told him.

"I heard people got burned to death."

"I heard so too."

"You a real wild 'un?"

"Do you want to take us to our residence or ask questions?" demanded Sadie.

"Well, cawn't I find out what's going on in there?"

"Read the morning papers," she said sharply. "Go to Bloomsbury Street, number 164."

"Just the syme," remarked the Cockney, "you're a rum looking couple."

After a few blocks he turned his head.

"You two work for Robbin?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"I suppose yer clothes got burned up?"

"Yes," said Sadie. "Watch where yer going, will yer?"

There was no more conversation until we reached our lodgings. Sadie, who had had presence of mind enough to rescue her satchel and hand bag, paid him off and we went up to our rooms.

SHE threw herself on my bed and burst into hysterical tears. Her cries became louder and louder, and I didn't know what to do about them. I finally took her in my arms and soothed her and she snapped out of it.

"In another hour Robbin would have paid off," she said. "It's a cinch we'll never get our money now."

"Do you mean to say, with all those people hurt—"

"I don't want to think of them. I can't stand it," she cried. "Besides, we got to think of ourselves. Nobody else will. First thing in the morning the

cops will call and ask questions. I reckon we have to split up."

"Of course. I don't want to get you into trouble."

"I'm not thinking of that. I mean they'll be looking for both of us. I saw Robbin outside the building, so he knows I got out. If you fade away I'll say you were my husband and I haven't seen you and I'm afraid you got burned up."

"You're right," I said. "I'll pull out now. The taxi driver will tell the police—"

"I forgot him. Well, hardly anybody knows what you look like without your make-up. I'll say you were scared you'd get in trouble and ran out on me. I'd better get busy taking that black off you."

She scrubbed me for an hour. I had lost my street clothes and my money had been in my trousers pocket, but I didn't tell her that—she had troubles enough of her own.

In my bags was another sack suit, linen and my evening clothes. I dressed rapidly.

"Good-by," I said. I sort of choked up. The poor little thing had been good to me. "If you move leave your address."

"You bet I will," she assured me. "What's that?"

"That" was a handful of dirt which came flying through our open window, striking down the curtain and dropping in a mess on the floor.

SHE rushed to the window and looked out.

"It's your friend Ray," she said after withdrawing her head. "I'll go down and let him in."

She returned in a few minutes followed by the jewel thief. I was never so glad to see anybody in my life.

"Ray," I exclaimed eagerly. "I've known to get away from here. Do you know a hideaway—"

"I'll say you have to scam," he said grinning. "I got an earful of what happened on the radio. You're supposed to have started that fire, kid. The word is out to bring you in, and those babies are good at it."

I was absolutely dumbfounded.

"I started the fire?" I gasped. "Why, Lord Hosmer did it. He threw a cigarette into my cage."

Ray chuckled and sat down. "Nobody saw that. Yer wig came off and they were going to mob you, so you set the straw on fire. A hundred people injured. Maybe some dead—"

"It's a lie," cried Sadie. "It's a dirty filthy lie!"

"Well, they'll be here for you any minute. Sadie, you can keep your mouth shut, can't yer?"

"You bet," she said grimly.

Ray rose. "Let's be on our way. Kiss Sadie good-by, Jack."

Sadie leaped upon my neck and pressed her lips to mine.

"How about kissing Uncle Ray?" he asked wistfully.

"I will," declared Sadie. "You'll see that they don't get him, won't you, Ray?"

"Sure," he declared. "I know my way round this burg."

Sadie put up her lips. Ray kissed them. I was waiting with my bags in my hands. Ray made the most of the kiss.

"I'll tip you how the boy is getting along," said Bronson. "You're sitting pretty, Sadie. They can't do anything to you."

"You bet they can't," she said stoutly. Then she dissolved into tears.

"I'll go out first," he said. "You walk down to the corner of Oxford.

"I'll be waiting and we'll take another cab from there."

He had a cab waiting, jumped into it and was off. At Oxford Street we changed cabs. Presently we were skirting Regent Park and then entered a suburb called St. John's Wood because there was a forest there five or six hundred years ago. It's now a region of upper middle class homes and apartments. We left the cab in front of a neat brick house in a block of neat brick houses, went up stone steps and Ray let himself in with a latchkey.

I followed him up a flight of stairs and into a large chamber at the rear of the house.

"You camp here," said the jewel thief. "Make yerself at home."

"Do you live here?"

"Sure."

"Ray, you're taking a risk, you know."

He grinned. "Not much. An Englishman's home is his castle and that goes for them he rents his home to."

"Why are you so good to me?" I asked quite seriously.

The little man chuckled. "Maybe I figger I can use you. Seeing that you're two fugitives from justice—"

"What's that?"

"Jack Laurence, wanted for assaulting an officer of His Majesty's Immigration Service — and Cecil, the African Wild Man that set fire to Robbin's and burned up a lot of people."

"I'm plural at that," I admitted mournfully.

"So you can't object to picking a pocket or robbing a jewelry store—"

"Confound you, if you've any such notion—"

"Aw, dry up," commanded Ray. "You're so dumb that somebody has to take care of you. Go to bed and

get a night's sleep. I'll see you in the morning."

I WAS awakened in the morning by a maid servant, who brought in my breakfast on a tray. She said good morning cheerily, set down the tray and informed me that the bathroom was at the end of the hall. In St. John's Wood, rooms with baths are still rare.

On the tray was a folded copy of the *Times*. I grasped it eagerly. Not a word on the front page of the holocaust—American papers would have used eight column heads. The story appeared in the middle of the second page, under a headline which was singularly devoid of news: "Lamentable Affair at Bright City."

In precise, crisp reportorial style it told of the breaking out of a fire in Robbin's sideshow, a fire which caught in the straw of the cage of the African wild man. It ineptly described the speed with which the fire spread, the panic and the final collapse of the burning building.

"The African Wild Man," said the reporter, "while giving his performance was exposed as a white man blacked up. This enraged the patrons, who would have dealt severely with him had the fire not broken out. It is charged that the fellow, whose name is given as Cecil Follingsby, deliberately set the straw afire to enable himself to escape.

"It appears that during the panic this impostor behaved with extraordinary heroism. Miss Theodora Ainsworth, sister of Mr. Arthur Ainsworth, the American tenant of Oswald Manor, Bennington, Devon, had entered the side show for a lark. Becoming separated from her party, she was knocked down in the mad rush for the

only exit. She might have lost her life had not the African Wild Man, oblivious of his own peril, secured an axe, cut a hole in the wall of the building and conveyed Miss Ainsworth to safety.

"While Follingsby undoubtedly must stand trial on a charge of arson, his subsequent heroism may be considered to mitigate the crime—assuming he actually set the fire. Mr. Arthur Ainsworth, who fortunately escaped with the others of his party, speaks very feelingly of the poor creature and declares he will engage a barrister to defend him and will reward him munificently for his service to Miss Ainsworth."

I gnashed my teeth with rage at the condescension of the little bounder, whose eagerness to save his own life had caused him to forget his sister. The rest of the article gave me much concern. Ray and Sadie had been right in thinking that I'd be arrested and put on trial. And then I'd be identified as John Laurence, the man who had assaulted the king's immigration inspector.

When I had finished my breakfast, Ray sauntered in. He was wearing a vivid red satin dressing gown over violet satin pyjamas. He looked like an organ grinder's monkey in full regalia.

"You read the bad news, eh?" he inquired.

I nodded sullenly. He chuckled.

"You stand all right with Ainsworth, I see."

"Go to the devil."

Ray sat down, whistling cheerfully. "Item on page eight that ought to interest you. Here, I'll find it."

He ran his finger down a column of social notes and called my attention to a paragraph.

Mr. Arthur Ainsworth, of Oswald Abbey, Bennington, Devon, announces the engagement of his sister, Miss Theodora Ainsworth, to Sir Ronald Enescro, Baronet, of London and Dunhold Castle, Rippingham, Devon.

I suppose I turned pale. Ray grinned.

"Pearls before swine," he commented. "She's a pippin, that gal."

CHAPTER XIX

Rendezvous

I THREW off the bedclothes.

"I've got things to do," I said fiercely. "Much obliged for the night's lodgings, Ray. I'll take myself off your hands."

His eyes narrowed. "Yeah?"

"I'm leaving right now."

Ray lighted a cigarette and offered one to me. I refused it with a brusque gesture.

"You'll be jailed in twenty-four hours."

"She can't marry this scoundrel," I cried wildly.

"You and her got an understanding, eh?"

"No-o—" I sat down sullenly. What could I do? We weren't even good friends and I'd seen that he had her fascinated down at Oswald Manor. But there was something — if I could only talk with her—

"Got a telephone in the house?" I demanded.

"Yes, but you're not going to use it to call Oswald Manor. It could be traced."

"Do you suppose I'm going to hide in this house?"

"Look here, Jack," he said sharply. "What does Tom Keefe want of Enescro?"

I grew cautious. "Nothing."

"You lie. He sent you over to get next to him. Swell job you made of it."

"I'm not through yet," I said sullenly.

"Does Tom think he has anything on Enescro?"

"I should take you into my confidence," I said scornfully.

Ray had an unpleasant habit of whistling through his teeth.

"Where would you be now if it wasn't for me?"

"I appreciate that—I'm sorry, Ray."

"O.K., feller. Tomorrow night I'm going to be inside his castle. Enescro's going to Paris for a conference to-night. Coast clear—maybe—Would it do you any good to go along?"

"And help you steal this diamond?"

He grinned. "Sure. Why not? You're a wanted criminal anyway."

To get inside his castle, to get at his papers—there might be finger-prints on some of them, or letters which would establish his identity as the man wanted in America.

"I'm a lone wolf," said Ray. "That's why you fellows back home never laid a finger on me. I should trust any crook that lives. You ain't a crook. You had some notion of double-crossing me and getting Enescro caught with the Moon of Monabar when you agreed to take money for passing me off as your valet. You haven't got that idea any more."

"Yes," I said frankly. "I have it, but I don't think I could get away with it."

"I'm a good American," said Ray. "I fought in the war, even if the draft did have to pull me out from under the bed. I got my business to attend to, but if I can help Uncle Sam clip the claws of this dirty Mex—"

"What's that? You said Mex?"

"I mean Roumanian," he said quickly.

"You mean Mexican. Come through, Ray."

HE shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "He's no more Roumanian than I'm Irish," he stated.

"I've had dealings with him off and on for ten years. Once when I was hiding out over here I got in with a Spanish dame that had been his girl friend until he got sick of her. She told me that he talked Spanish with a Mexican accent—he couldn't fool her, you know.

"She says he has the lisp like the real Spaniards, but his foot slips now and then and he pronounces "s" like the Mexicans do. And he uses words that ain't in modern Spanish, but are still used in the Spanish-American countries."

"That's interesting. Ever meet him in the United States before the war?"

"Nope. First time I ever run across him was in 1920. He's never been to America, so he claims."

"Can he talk Roumanian?"

"Oh, sure. I've heard him sling that lingo to regular Roumanians. He has them fooled."

"He might have been born in Roumania as a child and his family emigrated to Mexico—"

"Well, what do we care what he is?"

"If he's a Mexican, Tom Keefe has something on him. Ray, I'll go with you. Question is, why do you want me?"

"You're a big, two-fisted guy and it's a cinch the joint isn't left unguarded. You want to remember, if we have to fight our way out that you'll go to jail for about thirty years for a

job like this—will you use your gun if you have to?"

"Yes," I said quickly. I lied, but if I didn't lie, Ray wouldn't give me what might be my opportunity. "If I can get his finger-prints I don't care what you do with the Moon of Monabar."

To my surprise the eyes of the little thief filled with tears.

"Atta boy," he said emotionally. "Jack, you're the only guy alive I'd take with me on a job. I gotta go now."

I DRESSED and took a stroll through the house. It was a somewhat furnished and gloomy house, like a hundred thousand others in London. I encountered an English man servant on the ground floor who asked me if I wanted a drink and seemed surprised that I didn't. On the drawing room table were copies of *The Tatler* and *Illustrated London News*. There was also an extension telephone on the table and as my eyes fell upon it I had an inspiration.

It was unlikely that the Ainsworths had gone home after the dreadful experience of last night. I had first met them at the Savoy. Suppose Theodora was stopping there now? I could call the hotel and ask to be connected. If Arthur or Mrs. Ainsworth answered the phone I could hang up, but if Theodora—I didn't know what I would say to her, but I was already violating Ray's prohibition and asking for the hotel.

"Yes," said the operator. "Miss Ainsworth is here."

"Kindly call her."

"What name, please, sir?"

I hesitated. I took a chance. Even in England Laurence is a common name.

"Mr. Laurence."

"A moment, thank you." English menials thank you for everything—

And suddenly Theodora spoke. She said, "What is it?"

And I couldn't speak for a second.

"It's John Laurence," I finally ejaculated.

"Oh, how dare you—"

"I'm the African wild man, Miss Ainsworth," I said eagerly.

"Oh," she gasped. "I don't understand. I know your voice—how can you be—"

"You know the police are after me, don't you?"

"Yes, but last night, that hideous creature—"

"Jack Laurence, at your service."

I heard a sob on the other end of the phone. "How—how can I thank you—what can I say?"

"Can I see you somewhere?"

"I shouldn't—I don't know—Jack, I'm engaged to Sir Ronald."

"I wish you every happiness," I said stiffly.

"Wait," she cried. "I do want to see you. I will. I don't understand. I'm alone just now—can you come here?"

"Can't you slip out and meet me somewhere—the lounge at the Regent Palace, in half an hour?"

"I'll be there," she said firmly. "I owe you that, at least."

She hung up before I could thank her. What a girl! What a marvelous girl! I rushed up to my room, fixed my tie, brushed my hair and in a state of intense excitement, ran out of the house.

Of course, I was taking a great risk in meeting Theodora in a public place like the vast room at the Regent Palace, but it seemed to me to be worth it. I'd have risked my neck. The engagement was such a final sort of

thing—if I missed this appointment I might never see her again.

I WAS sitting at a little table when she entered the lounge and she spotted me immediately and came directly to me. She looked startled at the sight of my shaven head—you bet the beads weren't in my nose any more, but the loss of my hair did change my appearance.

"Jack," she said simply and gave me both her hands.

I pulled out a chair and she sat down. She looked at me with limpid eyes.

"You saved my life, you know," she said in a low tone. "I'll be grateful as long as I live. Sir Ronald is combing London for the Wild Man. He says he'll prevent any prosecution. It happens that both Arthur and I saw that wretched Lord Hosmer throw a lighted cigarette into the cage. Jack, please tell me what brought you to such an appalling plight."

"I thought it the last place in the world the Bobbies would look for me."

"But why did you assault and tie up that government inspector?"

I grinned. "I didn't want to go to America with you here in England."

She looked reproachful. "Please, none of that. I'm engaged to Sir Ronald."

"Well, then, I had an engagement with you—"

"Which naturally you didn't keep. Aren't you taking a risk being here?"

"You're worth it," I assured her, and I was pleased to see her color.

"I don't agree with you. Will you kindly tell me why you are in trouble? Arthur says you're a rascal, but, of course, I don't believe that."

"I'm not a rascal. I have five thousand pounds in a bank in London. I

have no enemies in England. I have met nobody except your brother and Sir Ronald Enescro. I can, or could, draw several hundred thousand from New York if need be. My passport was in order. I have influential friends in Washington. Yet, after I left you



JACK LAURENCE

that day, I found an immigration inspector in my rooms with an order for my deportation."

She looked astonished. "It's very strange, isn't it?"

"Very. I had no examination, no chance to justify myself against any charges. This man was taking me immediately to Plymouth to put me on a boat. Somebody had arranged that I was not to be allowed to use the radio either to England or America. Somebody with great political influence made those arrangements, Theodora."

"Obviously," she said with a nod. "But still I don't understand—"

"After I had knocked out the inspector, of course, I was a criminal liable to a long jail sentence, so I went into hiding. And that's how I happened to be the African Wild Man."

"Oh," she cried. "Oh." Her eyes grew darker and her lips drew into a straight line. "You married that circus woman just to avoid being arrested."

In my narrative I hadn't mentioned poor little Sadie because I had forgotten her. I blushed crimson—evidence of guilt.

"No, no, I didn't. That's not true."

"But she is the wife of the Wild Man. This Follingsby woman. She says he fled from their lodgings last night because he was afraid he would be accused of arson. Jack Laurence, she claims to be married to you—if you really were the Wild Man." Her voice rose shrilly. I glanced uneasily around, but there was nobody within earshot.

"I'm the Wild Man and I'm not married to her—"

"But you were living with her—"

"No, we had separate rooms."

Theodore picked up her purse. "I'm afraid I must leave. An engagement. Is there anything I can do for you? I'm not ungrateful." Her manner was freezing.

"You might try to figure out who, of the people I've met—I've told you who they are—which one of these fixed things to have me deported, persuaded Arthur to chuck me out of his house—"

"Jack, if you're insinuating that Sir Ronald—"

"And who had the political pull to get a respectable American visitor to London deported without cause—"

Theodora was on her feet.

"I'll listen to no more," she exclaimed.

"All right. Just try to figure out his motive."

But Theodora was walking off in high dudgeon.

I'd certainly messed up that interview.

CHAPTER XX

In the Toils

I ESCORTED her to the sidewalk, hailed a taxi and placed her in it.

She nodded curtly and drove away. It occurred to me then that Theodora had not been very furious when I had made insinuations about her fiancé; her wrath had arisen when I admitted that Sadie and I had had certain association. If she didn't like me considerably she wouldn't have cared if I had been living with Sadie Follingsby. Maybe there was hope—

"Begging your pardon, sir," said a very British voice. "Might I have a match?"

I turned and found the bland blue eyes of Inspector Good gazing into mine. There was the flicker of a smile on his homely face.

"This is a pleasure, Mr. Laurence," he said.

"How are you, Inspector?" I inquired as coolly as I could manage. "Any progress on the murder case down at Oswald Manor?"

"I was transferred to a more important matter, Mr. Laurence," he replied. "But there seems to be no question at the Yard but that the crime was committed by an East Indian or somebody who favored East Indian murder methods."

"We sort of suspected that, didn't we?" Maybe he didn't connect me with the assault on the Immigration Inspector. Maybe I had a chance—

But Inspector Good's next remark extinguished that faint ray of hope.

"I'll be arsking you to accompany me, Mr. Laurence," he said. "I may say it's on your account I was taken

off the case of the murder of the constable down in Devon. I stepped into the lounge for a gin and bitters and just happened to recognize Miss Ainsworth. I couldn't place you at first—took you for a German—weird, isn't it?"

"Oh, very," I said bitterly. "Imagine an officer of your acumen mistaking me for a German."

"Quite so. Now if you'll have the kindness to step into this cab?"

I hesitated. Should I take a crack at him and run? I wouldn't escape this time. There was a Bobbie within a dozen paces who was looking right at us. I stepped into the cab.

Good followed me and sat with a sigh of satisfaction on the cushions.

"I like to rest my feet," he stated. "I have very painful bunions."

He leaned forward and whispered into the chauffeur's ear. The car started immediately.

"Are you armed, by any chance?" he inquired.

I shook my head.

"I'm not a gunman," I replied sourly.

"I happen to have a very neat little automatic. You're rather indiscreet, Mr. Laurence."

I didn't answer the fellow.

"I understand that resisting an officer is a minor offense in the United States," he remarked. "But in England we take a very serious view of it. An officer, in a way, is the representative of His Majesty—one might refer to the offense as *lese majesty*."

"How many years do I get?" I asked gloomily.

"It depends upon circumstances, sir."

I laughed and he gazed at me curiously. I was laughing at the difference between the treatment of a pris-

oner in England and America. I was receiving from this homely but extremely efficient detective a courtesy that was most gratifying. Imagine an American dick saying "Sir" to a prisoner!

He relapsed into silence, but kept a watchful eye on me, while we moved almost imperceptibly through the dense traffic of Piccadilly Circus.

WHEN I left Ray's sanctuary to meet Theodora, I had been aware that I took a risk in making the engagement in downtown London, but I couldn't ask an engaged girl to meet me in some hole in the wall. She would have been forced to refuse. Well! I'd gambled my safety and lost. No deportation now—some highly unpleasant British prison. And no way of escape. Ray had told me not to underestimate Good's intelligence. No doubt he was very resourceful, too. Oh, I couldn't get away. I'd finish the ride in handcuffs if I started anything with this fellow.

Gradually we worked our way into the Strand, where we traveled a trifle more rapidly. Soon we were among ancient blackened buildings and we drew up to a stop in front of one of them.

I gazed curiously at Scotland Yard. I had seen pictures of the famous headquarters of the British police, but the building before us didn't resemble it.

"So this is Scotland Yard, eh?" I inquired.

"No, sir. This is the Foreign Office. You are to answer some questions here."

We went up a flight of stone steps and entered a large anteroom, at the far end of which several clerks sat on high stools and worked over ledgers on old-fashioned sloping desks.

Mr. Good motioned to a bench upon which I seated myself; then he went over and spoke to a person who was seated at a flat desk. That individual went into another room, returned in about five minutes and beckoned.

"You're to go in there," said Inspector Good.

I entered a large, comfortable room, badly lighted by small windows, in which two men were in conference. Though it was mild weather, there was a coal fire in a small fireplace. I gazed without much interest at the occupants of the room and decided that they did not look like policemen. One of them, bald, red-faced, jovial and heavily mustached, wore a frock coat and striped worsted trousers. He was about fifty years old. He was sitting on the edge of a big, flat-topped desk, dangling his legs, while a younger man, also wearing morning clothes, was seated behind the desk.

This fellow was solemn looking, with sandy hair and a lantern jaw. The older man got off his perch and both gazed at me intently.

"You may sit down, Mr. Laurence," said the younger man. "This is Sir Robert Standish. I am the Hon. Percival Brown."

"Delighted," I said untruthfully.

THE young man picked up some papers, studied them and inspected me.

"You're sure you're John Laurence?" he asked. "There's been no mistake?"

"I'm the miscreant you're looking for, gentlemen."

The young man tittered politely and the older one pulled on the end of his mustaches while his eyes twinkled.

"We find no record of an immigration hearing in your case," said Mr.

Brown. "Where were you questioned and by whom?"

"I had no hearing, gentlemen. I was questioned by nobody."

Sir Robert wagged his head at his companion.

"What did I tell you?" he demanded.

"Most peculiar, I'll admit," said Mr. Brown.

I couldn't keep my composure any longer.

"Oh, have it over with," I said testily. "How many years do I get?"

Sir Robert opened his cigarette case and offered me a fag.

"No, thanks."

"Will you kindly tell us all you know of this business?" he asked.

"I was called upon by Inspector Gaddish, who told me that I had been ordered deported and must accompany him to Plymouth immediately to be placed on a liner to New York."

"And you were not aware up to that time that you were a subject of interest to the immigration authorities?"

"Certainly not."

"There you are," said the older man. "I told you."

"Well, don't rub it in, sir. Mr. Laurence, are you an American criminal?"

"I am not," I said angrily.

"What is your occupation?"

"I have none."

"Why did you come to England?"

"For pleasure. I have plenty of money."

"Your order of deportation was illegal, Mr. Laurence," said Brown.

"Most peculiar, I say."

"We deplore your drastic method of evading it," stated Sir Robert.

"But if you hadn't floored Gaddish, you'd be in America by now, eh?"

I nodded. I began to perk up.

"As a matter of fact," said Brown, "you're the John Laurence whose testimony caused the deportation from America of a certain English anarchist last year. You're in the United States Secret Service."

"No, sir. Since you know so much, I'm a private detective—our Secret Service has authority only to chase counterfeiters and guard the President and his family."

"Came over her to see what this fellow Peter Logan was cooking up, eh?"

I laughed. "You gentleman are certainly well informed."

CHAPTER XXI

Freedom

BOTH laughed complacently.

"We endeavor to learn as much as possible regarding the march of events outside the United Kingdom," said Sir Robert. "Our attention was called to your case when Inspector Gaddish reported to his superiors that you had beaten him, gagged and bound him and thus not only evaded deportation but resisted an officer. As you were an American regarding whom we had some knowledge, we inquired discreetly regarding the order for deportation and found that it had been issued without a hearing and was therefore most irregular. We hope you can shed some light upon the reason for this irregularity."

"Somebody didn't want me in the country," I replied. "Somebody with what we call in America 'a pull.'"

Sir Robert stroked his chin.

"Whom do you suspect?" he demanded.

"I don't think it would be discreet of me to say."

"Let it pass. The British government deplures red activities in America. If your presence in London will do anything to stop them, we do not wish to interfere with your activities."

"You mean I'm not to be prosecuted or deported?" I asked incredulously.

"There was no reason for your deportation. This is a free country. It's a refuge and an asylum for persecuted from all countries. We deport only such aliens as have inimical designs against the government or the British public." He paused.

"You had no right to resist arrest," said Brown, "but if you hadn't resisted, you would have been deported."

"There is a delicate situation involved," said Sir Robert. "We wished to talk to you and had Inspector Good put on your trail, but we do not wish you apprehended and punished for the assault. It's condoning a misdemeanor, of course; but under the circumstances we prefer to condone it. This department wishes to investigate further and it would be unfortunate if you mention your suspicions—"

"I won't," I said joyfully. "I certainly appreciate the attitude you gentlemen take."

"Suppose we let the public assume that the police are still seeking you?" suggested Sir Robert. "I trust you won't go back to your rooms at the Savoy or show yourself too ostentatiously, so that a newspaper might wonder what's the matter with Scotland Yard. You need have no further fear of arrest, of course."

"Suits me."

"Give us an address where we can get in touch with you," said Brown. "It's possible that this department may be helpful to you in certain ways."

I hesitated and then scribbled the address of a quiet hotel in Bloomsbury called the Ivanhoe, determining to engage a room there and have a mailing address.

After that, we had a glass of sherry from a wall cabinet and parted on the best of terms.

About a thousand tons of lead were lifted from my shoulders as I left these two fine fellows. Inspector Good had departed from the anteroom and I walked out of the Foreign Office a free man. I walked on air.

And I marveled, as everybody does who gets a closeup of British officialdom, at the efficiency of their system. Here were a pair of Englishmen whom one would size up as tea drinkers and week-enders, but they were keen as whips and intelligent to boot.

Old Tom Keefe supposed that I could pass in London as a frivolous young American and the British Secret Service knew all about me and had a pretty fair notion of my mission abroad. Probably they even knew what my salary was.

Knowing all about me, this department had thought my attempted deportation peculiar, had inquired discreetly and found out that it was illegal. They knew who had violated the regulations and why he had done it. No doubt they knew that Enescro's finger was in the pie. And they had

turned me loose to get the goods on Enescro if I could manage it. And if they found a way to help me they'd help me.

I wasn't a forlorn hope any more. I had a chance. No wonder I walked on air. I could draw on my bank account. I could tell Theodora that I had been cleared. I could show my gratitude to Sadie. And prevent the marriage of the most wonderful girl in the world to a Mexican murderer. Well, I'd do my best to expose him and prevent it. And the British Government wouldn't feel so badly if Sir Ronald Enescro was dragged off to America to pay the penalty of his ancient crime.

Of course I'd break my connection with the jewel thief—wait a minute—to expose Enescro I'd have to get evidence and Ray knew how to get into the castle. If I went with him I was accessory in a felony—they wouldn't care for that at the Foreign Office. On the other hand, if Ray sold the Moon of Monabar back to its Rajah—why it would be doing India a service.

I kidded myself like that because I wanted to go with Ray—there might be private papers secreted with the great jewel in the hiding place of the owner of the castle. If they had no bearing on his past in America they might have finger-prints on them. Why, the next thing would be that he'd be married to Theodora. I had to work fast.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK.

OUT of Newport sailed five masked millionaires—suave twentieth century pirates, sworn to win back by murder the fortunes they had lost. Be sure to read this breath-taking short novel—

“MURDER FOR MILLIONS”

By Richard Howells Watkins

It will appear in next week's issue!

Bandit Buster

The Inside Story
of Melvin Purvis

By Dugal O'Liam

*The Worst Outlaw and a Famous Fighting Peace Officer Meet
with Flaming Guns in a Dark Chicago Alley*

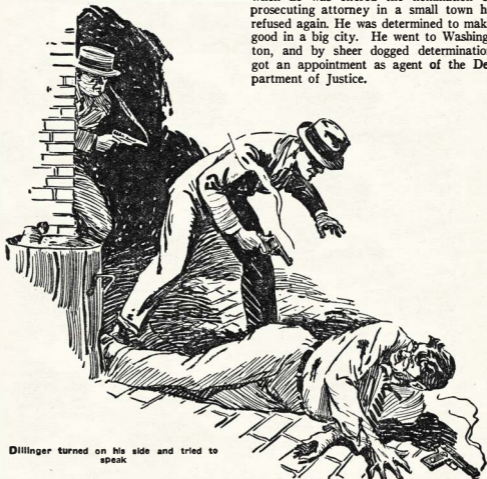
WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

MELVIN PURVIS became the greatest manhunter of the Department of Justice. He was the man who got Dillinger and broke the outlaws of the Middle West.

But he was a little, undersized kid. He was born in the little town of Timmons-

ville, South Carolina. He jerked soda in a country drug store—and he thought a town of fifty thousand was a metropolis.

He became great because he refused to stay in a small town. He was offered 500 acres of rich tobacco land if he would till it, and he refused. He studied law—and when he was offered the nomination of prosecuting attorney in a small town he refused again. He was determined to make good in a big city. He went to Washington, and by sheer dogged determination got an appointment as agent of the Department of Justice.



Dillinger turned on his side and tried to speak

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for February 9

He weighed 127 pounds—and he hadn't so much as fired a pistol half a dozen times in his life.

During the first years of his career as an agent he became known as a man who could get the facts out of the most mountainous and complicated mass of evidence. While he was building a reputation for paper work he was teaching himself to shoot with a pistol by hours of daily practice. He was sent from the Birmingham to the Chicago office to take charge of the Insull investigation.

Before this was over the kidnaping racket burst out. He smashed the Touhy gang, arrested Verne Sankey, the most redoubtable torpedo-man in the Middle West by walking up to him and laying the edge of a razor across his throat, and then was assigned to get John Dillinger.

After Dillinger had escaped several traps laid by Purvis, this little 127-pounder took the trail himself. Most people laughed, but one man said:

"Dillinger's in a spot now, with that little bobcat on his trail."

CHAPTER VIII

The Trap That Failed

THE Purvises of Timmonsville, South Carolina, were not an uncommunicative family. Milvin H. Purvis, Sr., father of Little Mel, ace of the United States Department of Justice and the most fearless and persistent manhunter since the days of Bat Masterson and Wild Bill Hickock, is a genial and expansive man. Thus it happens that he seems a strange parent for his silent, uncommunicative son.

If Melvin Horace Purvis was a human clam when he was a youngster going to high school and later in college, he is a miniature sphinx now, hiding his own feelings, the secrets of his job and his methods behind a mask of reserve that even his own father, for all his joviality and for all Little Mel's devotion to him, cannot break.

Even while Little Mel was preparing

to begin his hunt for Dillinger, far up in the bleak north woods, when he personally was preparing to walk into the most dangerous area for a police officer in the world, he kept his silence.

It was while the hunt for Dillinger was being organized that Big Mel, as Melvin H. Purvis, Sr., has now become known because of the fame of his son, went to Chicago to visit. As a boy, Little Mel had been the constant companion of his father. Always his father had been his greatest confidant. But in Chicago Little Mel said nothing.

Although the Dillinger manhunt was the greatest newspaper story of its period, although the name of the bandit was on virtually every tongue, even in Europe, and although this father who had been the youthful confidant of the man who alone in all the world knew how Dillinger was to be trapped, not once did Little Mel mention the name of Dillinger to his father.

"I wanted to ask him all about it, and intended to," the elder Purvis said, "but I couldn't do it, somehow or other. There was something about that kid of mine that made me respect his silence. I even wondered how I'd managed to wallop his secrets out of him when he was a kid. No, sir, there ain't no man going to get anything out of him any more."

THUS while his father visited him, anxious over the danger his son was about to face, Little Mel went about his preparations for trapping the fugitive bandit. Carefully he traced him across the Iron Range and over into Minnesota. He followed him to St. Paul—and there, on Summit Avenue, St. Paul's staid and conservative street of streets, he located him.

Little Mel wanted immediate action. He notified the St. Paul police and the

Federal men in the Minnesota capital of Dillinger's hide-out, and ordered them to take him at any cost—to bring him in dead or alive.

How did he locate Dillinger there, and how did he follow him? As a matter of fact Little Mel didn't follow him. He led him. Dillinger had been enamored of one Evelyn Frechette, a dark-eyed, willowy, attractive French-Indian girl. He had fascinated her with his wild adventures and his swash-buckling banditry and she had followed him from Canada into the United States, leaving a husband and grieving parents behind. At Crown Point she had appeared to visit him, and then she had gone away. Little Mel Purvis, knowing that she was a type that Dillinger could not resist, had spotted her.

Thus when Dillinger broke through the Michigan police, leaving the wounded Youngblood and the dead police officer behind him, Little Mel followed his trail into the North country only casually. He shadowed and followed Evelyn Frechette. Actually he leaped ahead of Dillinger, and in less than a week he had Dillinger located in St. Paul, on Summit Avenue, luxuriating in the arms of the pretty brunette.

Carefully Purvis laid his plan to capture the badman. Unable to reach St. Paul in time to lead the attack personally, he operated through code and by telephone to lay the trap—which appeared to be, on the face of it, unbreakable. The St. Paul police willingly joined the Federal agents, and all told a cordon of thirty men had been thrown about the Dillinger retreat when the time came to strike.

Believing himself safe, especially on a swank street which none but the most unusual of bandits would dream of invading, Dillinger walked into the trap,

the beautiful Evelyn at his side. Smiling, jaunty, the picture of the romantic desperado, he suddenly turned into the tiger he was as two Federal men and two police detectives closed about him and tried to pinion his arms as he walked toward an automobile in front of his house.

Quick as a flash he had broken



MELVIN PURVIS

away, firing as he moved, dodging between two buildings and literally smashing the line beyond the house as a football player would break through an opposing line. Before the astounded and unprepared police could untrack themselves he was gone. The Federal agents had, not the killer Dillinger, but a giggling, starry-eyed French-Indian girl fairly revelling, in spite of her predicament, in the daring and skill of the man she loved.

All the pursuing and hunting and blocking of roads and spreading of alarms the St. Paul officers could do went for naught. Dillinger had escaped again, more bloodthirsty, more cauti-

ous, more feared than ever. It was hours before the St. Paul men were willing to send the news along to the adamant, thin-lipped, square-jawed little chief waiting in Chicago for word of the success—not the failure—of the plan he had entrusted to them.

Finally they sent the word to him. He received it with his customary silence. Only his face went a little whiter. Right then Little Mel Purvis resolved that nothing would prevent him from being present the next time Dillinger was trapped.

Carefully he began to weave his net again. As Dillinger fled, the bandit left the usual trail behind him—filling stations held up, a bank looted, an automobile stolen, a farmhouse raided for food. There was money thrown here and there when Dillinger had money. When he didn't have it he left nothing but terror and dismay. As he fled his henchmen began to join him. Little Mel Purvis ordered Evelyn Frechette released, so that she might again lead the officers to the bandit.

Despite his overpowering yen for women, Dillinger deliberately avoided all the efforts made by Evelyn Frechette to reach him again. He knew, if she didn't, that she was a marked woman. Eventually, when he kept out of her reach, she was rearrested, to be held until such a time as the menace of Dillinger was stilled forever.

The trail of his desperate flight led southward and westward as far as Carthage, Missouri. Then it doubled back through Iowa and the Dakotas into Canada. Then it doubled back again, leaving the usual nondescript pattern of raided filling stations, garages, stores and even banks. Down into the United States again swept the outlaws, through Michigan and back to Indiana.

There must have been something of the wag in Dillinger's make-up, or perhaps he was trying, as others had tried before him, to ridicule the little bobcat in Chicago. Perhaps Dillinger hoped Purvis would be removed from his office by sheer public clamor.

Whatever the reason was, the bandit reached the climax of his blazing career during this final swoop into Indiana. Spring was running well along toward summer and the country was becoming more and more wrathful at this failure to capture John Dillinger. Some far removed from the danger zone laughed openly at the futile efforts of the police, and there developed a surreptitious admiration for the evil genius of the outlaw.

So greatly had this sentiment spread, in fact, that law-abiding citizens, and their wives and daughters, fascinated by the daring of the man, are known to have given him aid. In their fatuous sentimentality they forgot that he was the most sinister menace at large anywhere in the world. This may seem like a small thing, but it hampered the officers terrifically. Several times Dillinger might have been cornered had not the carefully laid plans of Little Mel and his men been crossed by the mistaken chivalry of some misguided hero worshiper—otherwise an entirely law-abiding and trustworthy citizen.

CHAPTER IX

Little Mel Whispers

IT was early in April when Dillinger reached Warsaw, Indiana, and exploded the first of his two most destructive psychological bombs. Entering the town late in the evening, he drove straight to the local police station, led two other men through its doors, held up the sergeant on duty and

his aides at the point of a machine gun, and raided the ammunition room of its entire contents.

Guns, bombs, machine guns, black-jacks and ammunition were dumped into a bag and hurried to the Dillinger automobile. Then the car went careening through the town, leaving the guardians of the public safety ignominiously tied together in the plundered prison.

Sitting in his Chicago office, frustrated by the speed with which the bandit moved, but sinking his teeth deeper and deeper into the problem with each successful coup by the man who was now his sworn personal enemy, Little Mel Purvis received word of this latest disaster. The hunt had proved to be far more arduous and discouraging than he had been willing to admit. Other outlaws had been cornered, or at least driven into hiding from whence they could not carry on their depredations, but this man Dillinger seemed to know neither caution nor fear.

Obviously Purvis had to do something and do it quickly. The repercussions throughout the country were growing louder and more forbidding by the hour. That Dillinger was making a complete chump of the Department of Justice, and especially of its vaunted Chicago office, was the firm conviction of every citizen between Pittsburgh and Denver. To make the situation worse, irresponsible newspapers were painting pictures of Dillinger collecting a great army of hungry, dissatisfied unemployed.

To many this menace grew overnight into a genuine bugaboo. The yellow press, seizing avidly upon the possibility, drew pictures of the bandits raiding banks, cities, private houses, and carrying off money and goods.

The newspapers pictured no man or woman or child of wealth as safe, and prophesied the complete overthrow of all constituted authority. Such was the temper of the Middle West that what had been a low murmur against the Chicago office of the Department of Justice grew rapidly into a thundering crescendo.

And still Dillinger was not satisfied with the havoc he had wrought and the ignominy he had brought down on the head of the little man in Chicago. Three days after the Warsaw raid, when every peace officer in the great Middle West was thinking of nothing but the bandit, word came that Dillinger had taken Sunday dinner with his father at their farm home in Mooresville, Indiana, within a short drive of Warsaw. He had even received and chatted with a number of erstwhile neighbors.

As a matter of fact, his homecoming had been in the nature of a triumphal entry, and those who should have been his sworn and relentless enemies, helping to hunt him to earth — for they were law-abiding and church-going citizens—looked upon him in awe and admiration and received him warmly.

The ignominy this reception heaped upon the police can well be imagined. There was no justification, at that hour, for leaving the Dillinger homestead unwatched for even so much as five minutes. There can be no question but that this blunder was a serious blot on the amazing record of Little Mel Purvis. Spectacular as he was, and given to the most bizarre effrontries, such a gesture on Dillinger's part was inevitable, once the opportunity presented itself.

Little Mel made no effort to justify his failure to keep the Dillinger home under surveillance. Those who were

close to him—notably his friend and roommate, Billy McSwain, whom he had succeeded in Chicago when McSwain entered a Chicago law firm—came to his defense.

“What good would it have done to have kept the place under surveillance?” McSwain demanded. “Certainly Dillinger wouldn't have gone



EVELYN FRECHETTE

there under such circumstances. As it was, he went there; and since it was his home, he did no harm, caused no trouble and succeeded in doing nothing more than leaving one more mark by which the agents could trail him.”

IN spite of the lucidity of this argument, given silent authority by

Purvis himself, the outcry against the Federal officers became more and more insistent. The impudence of Dillinger was making a department that long had been held in reverent awe as much of a laughing stock as the gawkiest of rural constabularies. And all of this ridicule descended upon the head of Little Mel Purvis.

The issue between Dillinger and Purvis, not only as a bandit and Federal agent as personalities, was clearly drawn. There developed in the soul of the Federal officer a bitter hatred of the blustering farmhand turned bandit. His feeling was deep-seated and explicit. The impersonality that is supposed to attend such manhunts was gone. Dillinger was his personal enemy, as well as the enemy of his office, his country, and the civilization and society he represented. There could be no quarter now.

Quitting Indiana on the run as Federal men swept into the Mooresville country, Dillinger once more headed north. Now Little Mel Purvis planned once more to let Dillinger trap himself—and proceeded again to anticipate him instead of trailing him.

Up in Wisconsin's north woods, Purvis had learned, there was a remote house occupied by the sister of John Hamilton and her family. John Hamilton was a minor Dillinger luminary, a gunman who carried Dillinger's rods and did his dirty work. He ran messages, procured women, foraged for food and stole automobiles, and he had but recently rejoined his chief, after having been shaken off momentarily after the St. Paul episode.

Dillinger and his mob, two more men and three women, headed for Hamilton's sister's house and spent the night of April 15th there. Less than twenty-four hours after this a score of Purvis's men, reinforced by men from the St. Paul and Detroit offices, had flown into Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and deployed into Wisconsin to await the arrival of Purvis himself.

Under ordinary procedure a Department of Justice chief would jealously guard the knowledge of his presence in a district. That would have been Pur-

vis's way in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. But when he arrived in Sault Ste. Marie he had another plan. There were certain citizens he wanted to take into his confidence, and because he has a genius for detail, he already knew which citizens he would honor—and astonish—with this confidence.

He knew this because he had figured, weeks before, by a study of all Dillinger's moves and contacts and associates, that ultimately he would have to fight it out with the bandit in the Wisconsin north woods. And he knew what every good cop knows: that informers outside your own organization are indispensable to even the canniest of manhunters. So he had checked through that entire north country and learned, through bankers and postmasters and city and county officials, which men were trustworthy and silent.

Once in the district, Purvis sent his men through the woods to interview the men he had selected as his informal aids. They were instructed to keep in close touch with Purvis at Sault Ste. Marie, but to do so by code and by word of mouth only, since to adopt any other means might result in revealing all their information to the outlaws.

Trappers, woodsmen, farmers, early summer colonists—everyone who would be likely to live in the country to which Dillinger was most likely to flee, were interviewed and given their instructions. Once Dillinger entered the north woods his presence there would be known through this organization of whisperers.

The rest would be up to Little Melvin Purvis and his picked men.

THE wait wasn't long. On the afternoon of April 22nd, one of Purvis's informants appeared in Sault Ste. Marie. He had seen Dil-

linger—he was positive of that—and two others, answering the descriptions of Tommy Carroll and Homer Van Meter, making their way toward Mercer, Wis.

At once Purvis communicated with Mercer, and before sunset he had learned that the bandits were converging on the Little Bohemia, a roadhouse in the fringe of the woods back of Mercer. The roadhouse had an evil reputation, and it was ideally suited to the purpose of the fugitive.

As the moon rose on that night of April 22nd twenty-four of Purvis's best men, with the little chieftain riding in the first car, picked their way through the woodland trails and drove into the yard of Little Bohemia, their car lights off and their motors humming softly.

For all their efforts at quiet, there was that to betray their coming. As the motors were switched off and the agents began crawling out of their cars, Purvis passed quickly among them, whispering in his soft, Southern drawl that was a little more terse than was its wont on this night:

"Spare no bullets, and keep cool."

As the men began to move across the yard toward the lodge, deploying to surround the building completely, the barking of two collie dogs shattered the stillness of the night. None of the agents saw them, nor would it have done them any good if they had. The alarm had been given. It was an even break now, with every man gripping his pistol and following his little chief in a rush upon the lodge.

Instantly there was confusion in the lodge. Out of the front door bolted three men, sprinting toward an automobile. Purvis, leading his raiders, shouted to them to halt. They ran on, shouting excitedly as they ran. Again

Purvis ordered them to halt. The agents, hearing the cries, left their posts in the rear of the lodge and ran around to the front. As they did the men leaped into a rickety, clattering car and started for the woods, forcing the car to the limit of its poor speed.

Because of the heavy pines the light was poor. There was no waiting for these men to get away. To fire was the only salvation. To a man the agents fired. Above the reports of the revolvers sounded Purvis's voice:

"The tires—aim at the tires, men!"

It was too late. The cheap car crashed into a great tree. Two of the men tumbled to the ground. One lay still, making no move or outcry. The other, whimpering, tried to crawl beneath the wreck of the car. The other had been thrown against the windshield of the wrecked machine and stunned.

The agents ran to them, covering all three. None was Dillinger or Carroll, or Van Meter or Hamilton, but one was dead and one badly wounded.

The dead man was Eugene Boisenau, a CCC worker and an innocent merry-maker at the lodge, who fled with his two equally innocent companions because they thought bandits were raiding the place.

The full import of this colossal disaster didn't have time to strike the consciousness of Little Mel and his men. From behind the house came the sound of a motor being started. The men dashed around the house, Purvis at their head.

A heavy car disappeared into the woods as they gained the rear clearing. A shattered window frame in the lodge kitchen told of Dillinger's escape.

Inside three women, half drunk and laughing wildly, had been left behind. Boldly they boasted that Dillinger and

Van Meter and Carroll had just left them, and laughed at Little Mel and his nonplussed aides.

Purvis lost no time. Save for the St. Paul fiasco, his men never had been this close to the bandit. He loaded men into cars and started them in pursuit. He organized cut-off routes and sent men along them. They circled the woods and watched all possible avenues of escape. Three hours later, at Spider Lake, Wisconsin, a carload of agents led by W. Carter Baum overtook one fugitive car and ordered a halt. The answer was a burst from a sub-machine gun. Baum dropped in his tracks, his body riddled by bullets.

The bandit car had contained Van Meter and Hamilton. Once more they made their getaway.

The following morning informants reported that Dillinger was storming down the Mississippi river bluffs, heading south from the St. Paul area. Purvis and a carload of his men dashed to the scene—and arrived just in time to chase the bandit across the river and send a bullet into his arm as he thrust it out of his car to draw a bead on Little Mel's face.

CHAPTER X

The Woman in Red

THE public clamor after the Little Bohemia débâcle was deafening. It seemed that despite a public pronouncement of entire faith and full confidence in Little Mel Purvis by both Attorney General Homer S. Cummings and Bureau Chief J. Edgar Hoover, nothing would save him from dismissal. Had not Boisenau been shot while Dillinger was escaping? Had not Baum been forced to give up his life in a desperate attempt to retrieve a blunder? Little Mel returned to Chi-

cago in a tighter spot, thanks to the unbelievable audacity and phenomenal luck of Bandit John Dillinger than ever before.

That Purvis was responsible for the Little Bohemia débâcle would be a preposterous assumption. Certainly he had planned well, and certainly his personal courage and judgment were beyond reproach. The fact that his trusted men, hearing the commotion in front of the lodge, committed the unforgivable error of all police work and abandoned their designated posts — where they had been placed to cut off all chance of retreat—was not Purvis's fault. And that Baum bravely put ill-advisedly approached a suspect car without proper safeguards certainly was not the doing of Little Mel Purvis.

Those things, however, were of no interest to the public. Dillinger had escaped, two lives had been lost, one by needless haste in opening fire on unknown parties and the other by ill-advised zeal, and someone had to be the scapegoat.

If there had been anything but steel in the soul of Melvin H. Purvis, Jr., on that April night and in the days that followed he would not have stayed on. Opprobrium fell upon his head from all sides. The press and politicians loudly berated him. Even his own agents might have been seen to lose some of the respect for and confidence in him they had had. But Cummings and J. Edgar Hoover were steadfast and he stuck on, plunging into the case with his old vigor and determination, the bitterness of his heart against John Dillinger grown to an all-consuming flame.

Little Mel Purvis permitted himself no rest after that. He drove himself until it seemed his small body could not stand the physical strain. He was more

than ever on the spot, and he knew it. Moreover, he had a sense of loyalty. There had been much criticism of his chiefs when he was given the important Chicago district. Veteran D. J. men and busy politicians had scoffed. Cummings and Hoover had stuck by him. Now he appeared about to reward them with complete failure. It went against the Purvis grain, and the only solution he saw to his problem was unrelenting personal vigilance.

For weeks Dillinger and Carroll and Van Meter kept the jump on him. He trailed them, but never was he able to close in on them. Pretty Boy Floyd, in the meantime, appeared to have dropped out of the picture, terrified, doubtless, by the commotion Dillinger was causing.

During all these weeks there were reports from throughout the Middle West of Dillinger raids. Small town banks, filling stations, garages and farmhouses continued to be the sufferers, and the rumble of fury that had materialized throughout the country turned rapidly to a national guffaw. It became the principal source of an evening's entertainment to read the newspapers and chortle at the discomfiture of the Federal men and the local police.

Then, just when it seemed that the Federal men never again would get a break, Little Mel Purvis sprang another one of his amazing anticipatory coups. Four hours before Carroll was to drive into Waterloo, Iowa, on a lone hand raid for Dillinger, and to meet a pair of women the bandit had spied and liked, the Waterloo police were waiting for him. Purvis had not time to reach the scene of action, but he wasn't needed.

When Carroll, met by the police at the entrance to a convenient alley, trusted to his luck and the audacity

taught him by his chief and snatched at his guns, the police poured three volleys into his wiry body. He fell dead in a dirty pool of water. Purvis had scored once more, but he still had a long, grim score to overcome.

The death of Carroll served a new notice on Dillinger and his bad men. The Purvis order to shoot to kill at the slightest show of resistance stood. Even the débâcle of the Little Bohemia hadn't affected the resolution of Purvis. He was ready to shoot it out with his enemies and investigate later. The Dillinger raids ceased abruptly. The trail died out. Dillinger went into complete hiding and his men hid with him. Even though he still was at large he was quiescent now, and the public wondered.

ON the night of July 20th a tall, jovial man with red face and huge hands walked into Little Mel's office, followed by an over-painted woman in red.

The man was Martin Zarkovich of the East Chicago police. He had been on special duty on the Dillinger case for weeks—since his pal had been killed in a Dillinger raid almost before his eyes. He had even been content to do without his pay if he could be permitted to track the slayer of that pal, and he had worked hand in glove with Mel Purvis in the never ending pursuit.

He had learned, by associating with the northwest Chicago hoodlums, that Dillinger often hid in that end of the city. He had learned of a Mrs. Emma Sage—this woman who was with him. He had gone to her house, bought drinks, and made himself a jovial companion. The woman, convinced that Zarkovich was the Michigan industrialist he claimed to be, had begun to drink jovially and to talk.

She had told Zarkovich that Dillinger came to her place, that he was at that very hour with a friend of hers in another part of town, and that he would move into her place again within a few days. She had told him what quarters he would occupy and what his habits were. She had told him, too, that Dillinger was now away on a very secret mission, but that he had told her he would have a great surprise for her when he got back.

With this information, Zarkovich had gone to Little Mel Purvis. Now he had brought in the woman and was ready to treat with her. Together the three of them laid their plan. They worked it out with the greatest of care, there in that skyscraper office in the dead of night.

The plan was overwhelming in its simplicity. Dillinger would be at Mrs. Sage's house on the following day. He would be allowed to remain there a day. She would see to it that he stayed. "He's just as much in love with me as I am in love with Marty," she said coyly, and Little Mel's stomach did a nip up, but he kept a poker face.

Then she got her instructions. At the Biograph Theater in Lincoln Avenue, far over in the slums of Chicago, there was showing a gangster picture.

Purvis knew Dillinger well enough to know that such fare would tempt him. It would contribute to his monumental ego because this picture made the bad man the heroic, altruistic, sacrificing one who knew no fear and was, way down in the depth of his soul, a great and good man for all his black exterior. It was a break of fate that took the melodrama to the remote Biograph Theater that night—a theater that, because of its obscurity, Dillinger would not fear to attend.

"Wear that dress you have on— it's red and we can see it a long way off," Purvis instructed, tersely, and the pair departed.

Forty hours later Purvis and his picked men waited to begin their watch upon the theater. He had called in the best men in his district, from all the outlying offices, men he knew he could trust and who would not fail him, either through excitement or over eagerness or inexperience or nervousness.

With thirty men he proceeded by automobile to the theater area. There, parked some thirty-five feet down the street from the theater in the direction from which the woman in red had promised to lead the bandit, he waited, his men mixing with the crowd or hiding in automobiles.

The woman kept her word well. The men sat with bated breath as they saw her coming along the walk, her red dress a flaming beacon under the lights. Little Mel Purvis sat stiffly in his automobile, alone, behind the wheel, so that he would attract no attention. He kept his hat pulled well down over his eyes and his car was parked halfway between street lights, so that there could be no revealing rays to betray him.

CHAPTER XI

The Man Who Got Dillinger

NOW he could see the man with Emma Sage. For a minute he stared hard as the man shuffled along, between Mrs. Sage and another woman. There was no mop of dark brown hair, no slightly bent and dished nose, no thick, cruel lips. The man's features weren't those of Dillinger at all. He was coatless and wore a straw hat pushed back on his head. From

beneath it gleamed flaming red hair. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles, and a red mustache concealed a greater part of his mouth.

His nose was straight and his eyes were bright and alertly open. There was none of the drooping left eyelid that had characterized John Dillinger. Even the mouth seemed changed, because as the man smiled he showed rows of even teeth, whereas Dillinger's teeth had been awry and fangy.

Little Mel Purvis looked hard at a photograph of Dillinger he held before him, looked at the man. Then, sensing that the bandit really had had a surprise for Mrs. Sage, a surprise in the form of a new Dillinger fresh from the scalpel and anæsthetics of the plastic surgeon, he resorted to the last resource of the detective, the man's feet.

The feet betrayed the shrewdest bandit of them all. The plastic surgeons and Dillinger himself had overlooked his telltale walk, the strange half-shuffle with the swaying shoulders of the swashbuckler. Purvis saw them at a glance and recognized them, but he made no move. Dillinger passed on into the theater, eager as a boy and laughing. Little Melvin Purvis sat still for several minutes before he left his car, and without a word to any of his men made his way to the theater front and an agent named Crowley joined him.

"I'm going inside," Purvis said, "and sit down behind him. As soon as he's engrossed in the picture I'll pinion his arms and then you and the others rush down and we'll take him. Bring half a dozen men and wait at the rear of the theater."

Purvis did not exhibit his Federal operative's badge at the ticket window. Instead, he paid his way into the theater, as he had instructed his men to do when they followed him. He

wanted to create no excitement that might give Dillinger warning. Inside the theater he waited for a few seconds to accustom his eyes to the darkness and then he went slowly down the aisle, keeping a lookout for the red dress.

He saw it and looked over the crowd. The seats directly behind Dillinger and the two women were filled. He walked back to the rear of the theater. Crowley, a huge man with powerful shoulders and arms, cornered him.

"Listen, chief, you got no business taking a chance like that—he's a big guy and he'll break away from you, sure."

Little Mel looked at the big agent quickly and his jaw set.

"He'll never break away from me, once I get my hands on him," the little man said. "You take your orders and I'll run this show."

Crowley was silent. Little Mel watched the occupants of the seats behind Dillinger's, hoping they would leave. The picture came on, the melodrama with its glorified thug. Dillinger's eyes lighted and he even applauded, so that people in the audience turned and stared. No one recognized him. Still the people behind him stuck to their seats and the picture ran out toward the end.

Sensing the end of the bill, Purvis quickly led his men outside. He returned to his car. Before he entered he passed the word of the signal around. When the time came to act he would thrust his hand out the car door, turn it downward and close it tightly.

He went to his car. The agents lolled against the front of the theater, in doorways, or behind the line of parked cars. A policeman came down from the corner and ordered two of them to

move on. They showed him their Federal badges and he went away, but watched, his hand on his gun.

Half an hour Purvis waited. Then another half hour, then another. Dillinger, fascinated by the gangster hero, had stayed for two shows. Purvis had difficulty restraining a charge on the theater by his men, or the disclosure of the trap by the curious and now overly-zealous patrolman.

Eventually the second show ended and the crowds poured out of the theater. Women came out in light summer dresses, men in their shirt sleeves, excited children. They poured onto the sidewalk in a throng. It was the last show and the theater was emptying completely. It was a bad break for the Federal men. Crowds always make a job like this more complicated, and here was a large crowd to contend with.

Finally the red dress appeared and the man with the tilted back hat and the flaming red hair and glasses. He was talking volubly and the voice, with its Indiana twang clipped from the corner of the mouth, obviously was Dillinger's.

Little Mel Purvis watched. Then, as Dillinger passed, his hand went out through the car door. It seemed that he waited an eternity, but he wanted the crowd around the man to thin out a bit. Dillinger was opposite an alley. Slowly the hand protruding from the car clenched. Then the door opened and Little Mel Purvis leaped to the sidewalk and walked quickly up behind the man with the red hair and glasses.

As he reached him, Crowley stepped up beside the fugitive. Throatily, so that none could hear save the victim, he said:

"Get 'em up, Dillinger—we've got you covered all around."

LIKE a flash Dillinger whirled and struck at the gun Crowley had pushed into his ribs. Then he darted toward the alley. A thunder of reports shattered the night air and sent the crowd scurrying in all directions. Chicago crowds are accustomed to these volleys, hangovers from the days of the Capones and O'Donnells and O'Banions, and they know all the retreats.

Dillinger staggered, regained his footing and plunged into the alley. Little Mel Purvis and Crowley ran to the head of the alley. Two pistols barked and Dillinger's knees buckled. Then came a volley and the bandit was literally smashed to the cobblestones by the concentrated force of the leaden missiles tearing into his body.

Little Mel and his men ran up. Dillinger turned over on his side, looked up, then curled his lip in a sneer and tried to speak. But he fell back. His body jerked convulsively once. Blood gushed from his mouth and the wounds in his face and body.

Little Mel Purvis stood above the dying bandit, calm and immobile. He looked at him for a few brief seconds and then turned to one of his men.

"Bring up the ambulance," he said.

The ambulance was waiting less than a block away. Little Mel had known, when he drove to Lincoln Avenue that evening, that his feud with John Dillinger was nearing an end. It may have been that he didn't know whether John Dillinger or Melvin Purvis would be carried to the morgue in that ambulance, but one thing is beyond doubt.

He knew that one of them would take the last ride. Right after he had arranged to have the ambulance on hand, he had said:

"It won't go back empty tonight—I'll see to that."

He saw to it, and the country breathed easier, Attorney General Cummings breathed easier, and J. Edgar Hoover breathed easier. But not Little Mel Purvis. Dillinger was not all. Pretty Boy Floyd, Homer Van Meter and Baby Face Nelson still lived. He was not yet ready to rest.

CHAPTER XII

Bandit Buster

LITTLE MEL concentrated on the taking of Floyd. He learned, however, that Van Meter was heading westward and he sent picked men to follow his trail. They followed it, lost it, picked it up again and lost it again.

"He's heading for Iowa," Purvis told them. As usual, he didn't tell them how he knew. They went back on the trail, and three weeks later Little Mel Purvis took out his record, checked off the name of Homer Van Meter, and turned again to his charts on Pretty Boy Floyd.

Van Meter had followed Dillinger and Carroll to a bullet-riddled death in a small town.

Little Mel Purvis's rural grapevine system had by now become a tremendous machine. It reached all over the Middle West. Everywhere the farmers were his best informants. They trusted him and looked up to him now. They admired his courage, and were confident of his honesty and perseverance. He spoke their language, and because he did he had developed them into one vast network of Federal informers.

So it was that word came up through Ohio, skipped across Indiana and reached him in Chicago that Adam Richetti, a henchman of Pretty Boy Floyd's, was terrorizing farmers and filling station owners around Wells-

vill. The encounter told Purvis that Pretty Boy Floyd was somewhere around East Liverpool, as far removed from his Osage Hills hangouts as he could get and still hide.

Purvis packed a bag and started for East Liverpool. He arrived there and began to go about among the farmers. Within ten hours four farmers had come to him with the same story. There was a stranger hiding on the farm of Mrs. Ellen Conkle in the hills just outside of town. Nobody had seen him, but the Conkles had been acting strangely.

That was enough for Little Mel. He took half a dozen men and the local sheriff and started for the Conkle farm. He took the local sheriff because he wanted to keep his organization intact and he didn't care to ignore a man who was, after all, in office because he was a friend of the man who'd been informing Purvis.

The scene at the Conkle farm has been told before. Little Mel Purvis took no chances on the escape of Pretty Boy Floyd, just as he had taken no chances on Dillinger.

He ran him to earth himself, fired the shot that brought him down, stood over him as with dying breath he admitted that he was the Oklahoma bad-man.

Then he went back to Chicago and drew a line through another name on his register of death. Charles Arthur

Floyd joined the limbo of Dillinger, Carroll, Van Meter, Sankey, *et al.*

Still Little Mel Purvis was not satisfied. Baby Face Nelson still was at large. He was not a Dillinger in daring or ferocity, nor a Floyd in ability to make friends among ordinarily law-abiding people, nor a Van Meter in resourcefulness and physical power. But he was a dangerous gunman, and he was desperate.

Once more Little Mel cast his dragnet. Again he anticipated the moves of the man he pursued. Agent Crowley fell in that battle with pistols and Tommy guns—but the next day the body of Baby Face Nelson was found by the roadside, riddled with the bullets Crowley had fired. Once again Little Mel had scored. The bandits of the Middle West were busted. Again the plain citizen had respect, confidence in the law.

Shades of great, blustering, gigantic Bill Hickok, or swashbuckling, thick-chested, bull-necked Bat Masterson, with his gun on each hip and his wide hat and his roaring voice.

The man who has outdone them both stands five feet and a little more than six inches tall, weighs 127 pounds, talks in a voice so low you can scarcely hear him, even in one of his remote moments of comparative loquacity, and learned to be a sleuth on a college campus! The country needs more like him.

THE END

Another fascinating true story of Vivian Legrand

THE LADY FROM HELL

The Episode of the Grave Robbers

Coming Next Week!



Ted clawed furiously at the little man's back

Soft Assignment

By George Harmon Cox

*It's Easy Living — and
D a m n e d Easy Dying —
When You're Nursemaid
to a Million Dollar Kid*

JIM NORDHOFF said, "I'm Nordhoff from headquarters."

George Woodward extended a firm, well-kept hand, said, "I'm glad you're here," and waved the detective to a comfortable leather-upholstered chair. He sat down behind the carved library desk, opened the center drawer and took out a sheet of paper.

He rested his forearms on the desk top and, holding the paper in both hands, studied it for a moment. In

that moment Nordhoff studied him. Although he was not a big man, Woodward made a striking figure. Somewhere around sixty, Nordhoff thought, but trim-figured, well set-up. His smooth-shaven face had a healthy, out-of-door look; his dark eyes contrasting sharply with his gray-white hair. Both his attitude and his manner were impressive, assured.

Woodward lifted his eyes from the paper. "This is the third one." He shrugged deprecatingly. "I didn't bother to keep the other two; I guess everyone who has the reputation of being rich receives crank letters now and then. However"—he tossed the sheet of paper towards Nordhoff—"the fellow is insistent. I decided it would be better to be on the safe side"

Nordhoff picked up the sheet of

cheap, yellow paper, read the crudely printed message: "This is your last chance. If you will pay the \$50,000 put an ad in the *News* addressed to Fred. We'll tell you what to do with the money later. If the ad is not in Wednesday's paper you'll take the consequences."

Nordhoff said: "Got the envelope?"

Woodward again opened the drawer, offered a plain envelope, stamped Sta. 5 11 P.M. Nordhoff pursed his lips and leaned back in his chair.

Woodward said, "I don't know whether to believe this threat or not. But if any attempt is made it will probably be on the boy. He's worth a million and a half. I'm his uncle, his guardian—and, with the Second National, co-executor of his father's estate. I went to the bank this morning with the note. We talked it over, decided to be prepared. I know Deputy Superintendent Flynn. I asked him to send up one of his best men."

Nordhoff said, "And you want me to guard the kid?"

"For a couple of weeks, at least." Woodward stood up. "I'll introduce you to the servants." There was a small house telephone on the edge of the desk. He picked it up, gave a brief order.

NORDHOFF shifted his weight awkwardly from one foot to the other as he waited. He was a lean, brown man, an inch or so over six feet, with a wide mouth and a heavy jaw. He had a stern, somber look now—because he didn't like the job assigned him. But he could, and did smile on occasion. When this happened his eyelids nearly closed and sudden, fan-like wrinkles showed at the corners, like cracks in ice. Generally the smile was infectious; some-

times it was dangerous. Then the blue eyes were very much like ice itself.

He followed Woodward out of the richly furnished library to a long hall which bisected the house. Here, at a spot opposite the main staircase, five people stood waiting in line. As Woodward mentioned a name, Nordhoff's blue eyes fastened upon the owner in a shrewd momentary appraisal.

Peel, the butler, was stiff, gray-haired, with the perpetually upturned nose of a sniffing dog. The wooden-faced Swede next to him was Arnold, the chauffeur. Nora, the cook, was fat, fifty, looked good-natured. There were two maids. Edna was thin, had a dry, colorless face. Nordhoff guessed her age as forty. Mabel was young, plump. Her sparkling black eyes kept straying towards Arnold.

Nordhoff nodded politely to each member of the household. His eyes were alert, but his square face held a sour expression. His associates had nicknamed him "Plug" Nordhoff. Because he was ambitious; because, since he had become a first grade detective, he had plugged along on each assignment, regardless of its importance, with the same obstinate desire to follow through. And for what? Nursemaid to a kid! He might be stuck here for a month—two months.

Back in the library Woodward said, "You'll be one of the family while you're here." He lifted the lid of a large teakwood humidor on the desk, took out four cigars, put three of them in a vest pocket, thrust the fourth in his mouth. He shoved the humidor towards Nordhoff. "I think you'll find them good. I have them made especially for me; in Havana."

Nordhoff murmured a polite refusal. Woodward stepped to what looked like a tea-wagon. He lifted the top, dis-

closing a half dozen cut-glass bottles, spoons, ice tongs, glasses. "Help yourself any time. There'll be ice here in the evening. If you want a drink before then Peel will take care of you."

Somewhere down the hall a telephone shrilled in subdued tones. Nordhoff's nose wrinkled as wisps of cigar smoke reached his nostrils. The smell was tantalizing. Although he did not smoke cigars he was tempted to try one.

Woodward said, "The boy's in school now. You can drive down with Arnold and get him at two o'clock." He turned as Peel stepped to the door.

"Beg pardon, sir. The call is for you."

Woodward grunted, picked up the telephone, said, "Yes."

Nordhoff watched Peel do an about-face and vanish silently down the hall. He looked idly about the room, glanced at the forbidding rows of books, the massive fireplace. His gaze swept past Woodward, jerked quickly to his face. The man's eyes were wide, he was trying to signal as he said, "Yes. I don't know—just a moment."

Woodward tossed his cigar into a bronze bowl, cupped one hand over the mouthpiece. "They're on the phone," he whispered. "What—"

Nordhoff leaped to the desk, leaned over and took the telephone from Woodward's sweaty palm. He said, "Hello—hello." He heard a faint click, knew then that the line was dead. But he jiggled the receiver arm up and down, said, "Hello—hello."

II

THREE days later Nordhoff sat in Captain Carney's office at headquarters.

A heavy mustache veiled the smile
D 6—23

on Carney's lips, but the twinkle in his gray eyes was undisguised as he looked across his desk at the glum-faced detective.

"You drive the kid in town to the private school in the morning. Then from nine o'clock until two your time is your own. What do you do after that?"

Nordhoff crossed his legs, looked sourly at the smoking end of his cigarette. "Once we went to the movies. There's a poolroom and gymnasium in the attic. Once we played pool; played handball one afternoon."

Carney made an effort to erase the smile from his weathered face. "Did he trim you?"

"Well—" Nordhoff hedged — "I was out of practice."

"I'll bet you can smack a nasty ball."

The detective growled an answer but it died in his throat.

Carney said, "A car to yourself, expense money, old Woodward's cigars and liquor, handball courts, pool tables, plenty of servants — and you crab."

Nordhoff uncrossed his legs, then stretched them out at full length. "Well, what's it get me? Fat chance I got of helping my record, stuck on a job like this. Am I a cop or a nursemaid?"

"What's the matter, don't you like the kid?"

Nordhoff's sour look vanished. He smiled sheepishly. "Sure, he's okay. My sister's got a kid about his age; kinda reminds me of him. Sure, he's okay. A regular fella, not spoiled a bit. Asks more questions in an hour than I can answer in a week. Wants to know all about the police and detectives, how many men I've arrested, what my duties are and—"

Carney grinned. "What'd you tell him?"

A scowl wiped out Nordhoff's smile. "I told him it was nothin' but legwork and civil service examinations."

Carney grew serious. "I know how you feel. You young bucks want action. I don't blame you. But don't forget there's two ways of looking at this job. You've been seeing one; here's the other—maybe you're a nursemaid; but figure out where you'll be if you fall down on the job, if something happens to that kid. Remember, Woodward's a friend of the super's." Nordhoff said, "Yeah," thoughtfully.

Carney smiled. "The boys call you Plug. I know why. You're one of the men I can depend on on any kind of assignment. That's why I put you on this. It may be too soft; it may be routine. It may be something entirely different. Don't let it throw you."

AT eight-thirty the following morning Nordhoff drove the little coupé out of the Woodward garage and down the winding, gravel driveway to the main highway. It had rained during the night, was still drizzling. The car windows were closed and the windshield wiper sang a persistent, strident song.

It was an eight-mile drive to the Chadwick Day School in town, and as the detective settled himself for the ride he sniffed suspiciously and glanced at the boy beside him.

Ted Raleigh was fourteen, and growing rapidly for his age. He was a tall, gawky boy with feet and hands too big for the rest of his body. His smooth, tanned face had a natural serious look, and the glasses he wore emphasized his seriousness. A nice kid, Nordhoff thought.

Nordhoff, still sniffing, said, "What have you got on your hair?"

Ted Raleigh, resting comfortably on his shoulders, turned his head and said, "Water."

Nordhoff sniffed again. "Don't tell me you're using perfume."

"I am not. Why?"

"I smell something funny—kinda sweet. I thought—"

Ted chuckled. "I smelled it too. I thought it was you."

"Me?" rapped Nordhoff indignantly. "What the—" he checked his reply with a growl, made noises in his throat. Then the fan-like wrinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes. The kid was a regular. The more he saw of him the more he liked him. He yawned and lapsed into silence.

He fidgeted in his seat, found a more comfortable position. He yawned again. That was the trouble with this job. Too soft. He was getting more sleep than he'd had for a year. And the more he got, the more he wanted. Right now, he felt as if he hadn't been to bed. He yawned again, tried to concentrate on the intermittent traffic that traveled the rainswept highway.

He closed his eyes. It took a tremendous mental effort to open them again. He cursed under his breath. Damn near in the ditch that time. He fought the drowsiness that assailed him for a moment. That sickish smell seemed stronger. What the hell could it be? He glanced at Ted, saw that the youth was apparently asleep. With sudden alarm he realized something was wrong, that he was on the verge of unconsciousness himself. He let his foot slip from the throttle, tried to find the brake. He slumped over on the wheel, made a desperate attempt to turn off the ignition. He found the key, turned it . . .

III

NORDHOFF was vaguely conscious of distant voices beating a jumbled message against his brain. There was a peculiar odor in his nostrils. His body seemed to be floating in air. There were more voices. That pounding against his brain grew louder. He opened his eyes.

For some minutes he lay motionless, staring through a murky half light while his senses became accustomed to a world of reality. The rumble was more distinct. He realized suddenly that it was thunder. Then he was wide awake. His head ached, his mouth and tongue seemed coated with a sickish film.

He lay, fully clothed, on a bed. The dim, half-light was genuine and not a figment of his imagination. Had he been unconscious all day or—? He turned his head, glanced towards the shuttered window. He swung his feet to the floor, fought the nausea that threatened him. Then he saw the prone figure of Ted Raleigh on the twin bed at the other side of the room.

Nordhoff forgot his own sickness immediately. He tried, as he lurched across the floor, to piece together the jumble of thoughts that whirled and eddied in his brain. Then he was looking down at the boy. Ted's eyes were open; he managed a weak grin.

Nordhoff said, "You awake? You all right?"

"I'm awake," Ted grunted, "but I'm kinda sick. I tried to get up a little while ago, thought I'd better wait. What happened?"

Nordhoff said, "We got doped some way."

"You mean, we're kidnaped?" There was no fear in the boy's voice, merely an undercurrent of excitement. "Gee—"

Nordhoff moved to the room's only window, threw up the pane. Grayish light beyond the shutters told him it would be dark before long. He put his shoulder against the shutters. They were barred from outside. He hurled his weight against them again. Then a sound of movement from the opposite end of the room stopped him. He turned as the door opened and the click of a switch bathed the room in light.

THE figure in the doorway seemed enormous. He was an inch or so taller than Nordhoff and fifty pounds heavier. His head and face were completely hidden by a hood, like an inverted black cone in which two slits had been cut for the eyes. In the man's right hand was a heavy automatic. He turned towards Ted Raleigh, said, "You'll be okay, kid." Then to Nordhoff, "Come on, you."

Nordhoff pressed his left arm tight against his side. He could feel the holster under his coat. The gun was gone, as he knew it would be. He walked across the room, allowed himself to be pushed downstairs to a large living-room on the left. The room was low-ceilinged, well-furnished. The shades had been pulled down and the only light came from a huge floor-lamp.

There were three men in the room, all hooded like the man who stood behind him with the gun. Two of the men stood near the floor-lamp; the third sat farther back in the shadows near a long bookcase. This man wore a slicker which was still wet.

The smaller of the two men beside the lamp said, "Come in." He held a half-smoked cigar in his hand; after lifting the hood so that he could take a final puff, he dropped the butt into an ashtray.

The spokesman continued as Nordhoff walked to the table: "We just wanted to tell you that we don't want any rough stuff. We're not gonna hurt the kid, or you either—if you behave. We've got a little job to do and we're doing it. On the other hand—" Nordhoff noticed the half-filled whiskey bottle on the table, the glass near each man; he watched the little man turn aside, drain his glass, set it on the table—"we know the penalty for kidnaping. We don't intend to take any chances. So behave."

The fan-like wrinkles showed at Nordhoff's eyes, eyes that were like ice. "I get it," he said easily. "Any idea how long you'll be?"

"Not long. The kid's guardian's already been to the Second National. I think they've decided to pay. So far they've obeyed instructions, haven't notified the police. We expect the money—a hundred grand—before morning, but we're moving out of here at midnight. You've got nothing to worry about."

NOTHING to worry about. The smile was fixed on Nordhoff's face, but his heart was bitter. Nothing to worry about. This was the job he had crabbled about because it was too soft. He wasn't even a good nursemaid. Nordhoff gave one fleeting, latent thought to Captain Carney's warning, then concentrated on his immediate problem. His only chance to redeem himself lay in stalling, in being agreeable until he had some sort of opening.

"Okay," he said, still smiling, "but how'd you pull it?"

The little man chuckled. "Easy. I think you'll appreciate it. It'll give you something to tell the papers."

He hesitated, said, "We installed a

tank of concentrated gas—never mind what kind—to the under side of the coupé. We put a little tube from the tank to a hole we'd bored in the floorboards. When you released the emergency brake, you automatically turned on the gas."

Nordhoff laughed. "Sounds screwy."

"Don't it?" agreed the man. "But not when you consider the details. The road you traveled carried a bit of traffic. An ordinary stickup or snatch would've been successful, but we would've been seen, our number jotted down. Whoever saw us would notify the police; they'd start making it hot."

"We knew you didn't drive fast. We took the chance that when you went out the crash wouldn't be too bad." The man laughed. "You just rolled into the ditch and turned over on your side without getting a scratch. We were right behind you. We got to you before the other cars on the road stopped. We told 'em we'd rush you to the hospital. Nothing fishy about that—good Samaritans, you know. Nobody bothered us, probably never thought of taking our numbers or reporting it. Not so screwy, eh?"

Nordhoff was vaguely conscious of the man's story as he told how Woodward had been notified, how the money was to be paid. His brain, however, whirled about his own problem. He tried to comfort himself with the thought that it was not his fault; the scheme would have worked on any one. He was not so sure. Perhaps he should have been more careful, should have stopped the car when he began to get sleepy. But that part was over. Excuses would mean nothing to Captain Carney or the super. He would be back walking a beat—Plug Nordhoff could be depended on.

Suddenly he hated himself for these thoughts of his own predicament. The kid was upstairs. His job was to see that he was safe. His mind groped for some ray of hope, some way out. He found himself thinking of the doctored coupé. The planting of the gas tank had been done at night. Someone was terribly familiar with the Woodward household. Could last night have been the chauffeur's night off? Could that hooded man in the shadows be Arnold? If he would only stand up—Nordhoff was conscious of a vicious jab in the small of his back.

The big man's growl was hoarse, low. "I said, get goin'!"

Nordhoff glanced at the small man in front of him. He saw the man in the shadows put his glass on the bookcase. Then he turned and left the room. This time the little man followed along to the upstairs bedroom.

The thunder was rolling almost continuously now, rising and falling, grumbling and roaring like the detective's own emotions. Somewhere below he heard a door slam, followed by the faint sound of an automobile engine. He glanced at the man in front of him, thought the pressure of the gun in his back had lessened.

IV

TED RALEIGH got up from the bed and lurched forward, his fists clenched. He stumbled against the small man. The fellow brushed him aside and growled, "Behave, kid!" But the boy came forward again. The little man pulled back his right fist, spat out an oath.

Nordhoff's jaws went white at the corners. He had made no plan. It is doubtful if, at that moment, he was ready for action. But the sight of the raised fist, the thought of seeing it

slapped against the tanned, serious face he had come to like so well, jerked caution from his brain. He whipped his left fist straight to the center of the hooded face, felt the welcome shock of a solid blow in his wrist. Then he dropped to his knees, twisting as he fell.

The big man's automatic whipped past his ear, glanced from his shoulder. Nordhoff came to his feet, pumped a left and a right to the fellow's stomach. He heard the savage grunt of surprise and pain, then he was twisting the automatic from the man's grasp. He jerked the gun free, dropped it in his eagerness, kicked it to one side as the man struck.

Nordhoff went back on his heels as the blow pounded against his cheekbone. He slipped a wild right, stepped in, whipped his own right to the stomach, then brought it up from his knees to the man's jaw. The fellow sagged to the floor. Then the little man was on his back.

Nordhoff turned, saw that Ted, blood streaming from a split lip, was clawing furiously at the little man's neck. His fingers caught in the black hood, ripped from a thin, white mask of hate as Nordhoff lashed out with his left.

"Up with 'em!"

Nordhoff stiffened. He knew the answer without turning. The door of the room was open. Sounds of the struggle had reached the living room. He dropped his hands, watched the little man with the thin face and the hooked nose stagger to his feet. He recognized him as Max Lehman, a gambler and book-maker. He said:

"So, it's the snatch racket now, eh, Lehman? Public picking too many winners?"

Lehman got control of his rage with

an obvious effort. He started to speak, checked himself momentarily, then said, "You asked for it, Nordhoff. Keep that gun on him, Leo."

The detective turned. The thin man in the doorway had removed his hood. He had a wedge-shaped face, accentuated by big ears. His mouth was small, pinched; his eyes pale. He was chewing gum slowly, but his manner was nervous, jerky. Nordhoff knew the type. Leo was a killer. He watched the big man push himself to a sitting position, retrieve his gun and struggle to his feet. The fellow took off his hood, revealing a thick-lipped, swarthy face.

NORDHOFF glanced at Ted Raleigh. The boy was wiping the blood from his lip. His brown eyes were wide behind his glasses, but as yet no fear filmed them. The detective said, "You all right, Ted?"

"Yes."

Nordhoff turned on Lehman. "Who're your friends, Max? I can't seem to place 'em. Imported?"

Leo said, "When do I turn on the heat?"

Lehman's thin face was thoughtful for a moment. Then a sly smile creased the corners of his dark eyes. He rubbed his lips with his thumb, shrugged and said, "It's your own fault, Nordhoff. You can identify me now; I guess you know the answer. Let's go."

Nordhoff knew the answer. Aside from the boy, he was the only witness—except the motorists who had watched them taken from the coupé. And these, not being suspicious at the time, would remember little. Aside from the boy—his face went grim. He said, "How about the kid?"

Lehman said, "We'll decide that later."

Nordhoff turned to leave the room, looked at Ted Raleigh. For the first time he saw fear in the boy's eyes. Fear, stark and undisguised in its intensity.

The boy said, "No." His voice shrilled now. "No. He won't tell on you. You can't—" He leaped forward, was caught by Joe, held like a baby.

Nordhoff felt a tightening in his throat. A warm glow, vague and indescribable, coursed through his veins. The kid really liked him, was afraid for him. He glanced over his shoulder as he went through the doorway. There were tears on the boy's cheeks, the glasses were blurred.

Nordhoff smiled, and the smile was genuine.

"These guys're probably bluffing," he lied. "Buck up, Ted."

V

THERE was a sedan parked by the side porch. Lehman was driving another car from the garage set well back in the shadows. Nordhoff got in the back seat of the first car with Leo. Joe climbed in behind the wheel. It was raining steadily now; the thunder had faded from the sky and the rap of the raindrops on the hood made a background for the purr of the motor.

Joe drove down the driveway and turned left. Nordhoff could see the road was of dirt, muddy now. He had not the slightest idea of where he was or where he was going. After a quarter of a mile the sedan turned left and was soon climbing a steady grade.

Leo kept the gun in Nordhoff's ribs, and once, when a twist of the road threw the detective to one side, Leo said, "I hope you start something, mug."

The road rapidly became little more than two tree-lined ruts. The glare of headlights through the rear window told of the following car. Nordhoff was sweating now. The car was stuffy. He tried to figure the reason for two cars, finally gave it up.

Suddenly the sedan emerged from the borders of the trees and came to a stop in a clearing at the top of a hill, the headlights shooting out over a black void Nordhoff could not identify. A red glow, bordered by twinkling lights, told him his approximate location. The city lay directly ahead, not more than fifteen miles away. Lehman was clever. He had driven south on the turnpike, turned off on a dirt road and circled below the city. At midnight he would move on to collect the ransom, or to move the boy to new and distant quarters.

Joe opened the left front door and got out. Lehman pulled his car directly behind. When he walked alongside Leo said, "Why can't I put a couple of slugs in him?"

"I don't like shooting," lipped Lehman. "We got a hot car; we got to get rid of it anyway. This quarry—"

Nordhoff failed to hear the rest. Quarry! He saw the plan now. There were a half dozen of these abandoned quarries in this section. Most of them were water-filled, deep.

Lehman was saying, "They might find the car sometime. If they find the body, they'll put a diver down. But what they find can't be traced. You can't trace a rap on the head."

NORDHOFF happened to look at Lehman at that instant. He caught the significance of the nod. He sensed rather than felt the blow coming. He did not try to duck; it was either this or a slug in his brain.

He moved his head slightly to slip the blow if he could. Then the butt of the gun crashed down on the side of his head.

For a few seconds he lost consciousness completely. Then he vaguely heard Leo climb from the car, heard Lehman say, "Shut those doors; there's sixty feet of water in that hole, the pressure'll keep 'em shut. The windows're shatterproof—the y won't break."

Nordhoff stirred on the floor of the tonneau. His head was splitting, he felt sick to his stomach. There was a slight jar. He realized Lehman's sedan was being used to push him over the brink. He reached up for the door handle, then was thrown backward as the front wheels of the car dropped. The sedan seemed to teeter while he grasped for support. There was another violent jar from the rear, then he was falling.

How far he dropped before the car struck the water, he did not know. But it was time enough for one flashing ray of hope to sear through his brain as his body bounced back and forth across the spinning car. If something broke, gave way—

The sedan hit the surface with a jarring shock and a ripping, splintering crash of wood. Nordhoff gulped air into his lungs an instant before the car filled with water. His heart leaped in hope. He had a chance now. The water would not have rushed in quite so quickly if something had not ripped away. The car must have struck, as he hoped it would, on its top, the weakest part. The shock had crumpled the wood and fabric frame like an eggshell.

The sedan was sinking rapidly now, turning drunkenly from side to side. Nordhoff's searching fingers caught

the edge of a jagged hole. He pulled his body through, fighting the relentlessly increasing pressure on his ears. He kicked his legs and feet clear of the wreck, began to fight his way to the surface. Just before his head broke water he heard, far below, the weird sound of the sedan settling on the stone bottom.

He floated on his back, with just his nose out of water, for some minutes, until the bark of an automobile motor told him it was safe to move. Then he began to swim slowly around the sides of the quarry.

Three of the sides were walls; vertical walls, affording no handhold or means of escape. The fourth side eased up gradually from a shale bottom. Nordhoff finally gained this miniature shoreline, crawled out on his hands and knees. He flopped down on his stomach with a gasping sigh of relief and rested until he had overcome the exhaustion which had threatened him.

VI

IT was perhaps twenty minutes later that Nordhoff reached the house again. He had followed the downhill road until he saw the lights, then cut across the fields, directly towards his goal. He circled the squarish house, came to a stop outside the living room. Sufficient light seeped through the translucent shades for him to see his strapwatch. It had stopped at eleven o'clock. Ten minutes to get out of the quarry, twenty minutes to reach the house. He had roughly a half hour before Lehman would move on.

A search for help would be useless. It was miles to the turnpike. The precious half hour would be gone before he reached it. Help might possibly lie in the opposite direction. But he was not sure, could not chance it.

He considered briefly a lone assault on the house, then cast this thought from his mind. He was unarmed, neither he nor the boy would stand a chance if any shooting started. His only hope lay in some surprise move, some— He checked this thought suddenly as the germ of an idea took root in his brain, blossomed there.

He cursed softly and moved towards the rear of the house. The rain was still falling, lightly, but steadily. Lehman's sedan had been returned to the garage. Nordhoff moved towards this, opened the door and edged into the warm dry blackness of the cement-block building.

His groping hands found the dash-light of the car. He turned it on. There was a robe in the tonneau which he carried to the window on the right side of the building. A further search of the shadow-filled garage revealed a workbench at the far end, a metal toolbox, a can of paint, a piece of tarpaulin, some old license plates; on the floor was a coil of garden hose. Nordhoff's brain was working with a machine-like precision now. The idea was full-grown; wild, but no wilder than the plan Lehman had used that morning.

With the help of a hammer and some nails, he tacked the robe to the window on the right; the tarpaulin he fastened to the window opposite. Light from the window at the rear would probably be undetected from the house; he would have to chance it. He snapped on the electric switch near the door. A powerful bulb in the center of the garage bathed the room with light.

NORDHOFF set to work immediately. The exhaust pipe of the sedan was round, and with the help of heavy pliers he soon

crimped the end to a cone-like shape. He had trouble cutting a piece from the coil of garden hose; he had more trouble making a round hole of the right size in the floorboards, well forward of the dash, without a brace and bit. He finally managed by driving nail holes, close together in a cricle, and chipping out the wood in the center.

He drew one end of the hose over the crimped exhaust pipe, wired it securely in place. The other end of the hose he carried under the car to the hole in the floorboards, securing it at this end by driving a nail through the hose and into the wood. He replaced his tools, turned out the dashlight and overhead light, removed the tarpaulin from the window, put the robe back in the sedan.

As he took a position outside the garage against the far wall, he considered his plan. It was no wilder than Lehman's. His idea of gas was far more deadly. It was raining, the car windows were closed. And carbon monoxide, working in that closed sedan, would act quickly. Ted Raleigh would probably be in the back seat. The gas would affect the driver first; there would be a crash when he lost control, but it was a risk worth taking.

When the car left he could run out, find a perch in the spare tire of the sedan. He could hang on there long enough for the gas to do its work. If, and when the crash came, he stood an even chance of handling the stupefied occupants.

His thoughts were jerked from his plan by the sound of a door opening. He flattened himself against the wall, glanced around the corner of the building. A man was coming down the driveway. A moment later he was opening the garage doors. There was

the grind of a starter, the quick roar of a motor. Nordhoff moved along the wall to the window, peered in. Max Lehman sat behind the wheel, lighting a cigar.

For seconds Nordhoff waited, nerves on edge, conscious of his pounding heart. Lehman turned on the headlights, drove slowly to the side porch. Nordhoff followed in the shadows. For some minutes he waited behind the car—there was apparently some delay in getting the boy ready. The side door was closed. Suddenly his brain picked up a new thought. He could handle Lehman alone. If he could get his gun before the others came, his former scheme would be unnecessary.

Nordhoff acted on the impulse immediately. With his lips drawn back against his teeth in a mirthless smile, he crouched low and dashed to the front door of the sedan. He saw, as he straightened up and jerked open the door, that Lehman seemed groggy. Reaching in, he turned off the ignition, then grabbed at the blinking Lehman. He jerked savagely; the little man tumbled into his arms and he yanked him around behind the car.

Lehman began to swear. The sudden shock stimulated his sluggish brain. He twisted, struck out blindly. The side door opened. Nordhoff hooked his right fist to Lehman's chin. The fellow crumpled, sagged to the soggy driveway without a sound. Nordhoff rolled him on his back, felt the gun in his hip pocket, yanked it free. He had time to turn towards the porch as Leo and Joe, the blindfolded boy between them, swung down the steps.

"Reach!"

Joe's thick lips parted in surprise, his eyes widened and he let go of the boy with a jerk. Leo's reaction was quite different. His surprise, tele-

graphed from his pale eyes, was as genuine as Joe's, but he recovered instantly, his right hand flashing to his slicker pocket.

Nordhoff saw the flash of blue steel in the reflected rays of the car's headlights. He hesitated, fearful of risking a shot with the boy so close. That moment of hesitation would have been fatal if he had not stepped to one side.

Leo's movement was quick, sure, as though he had rehearsed it countless times. An orange flame licked out at Nordhoff; he felt a searing burn at the side of his thigh. Then he felt the shock of recoil in his wrist, knew the second shot was his own. He need not have worried about his marksmanship. He saw Leo's body jerk sideways, saw his free hand go to his chest. The gun slipped from his fingers and he sagged to his knees at the bottom of the steps, poised there, swaying unsteadily.

Nordhoff said, "It's okay, Ted." Then, as the frightened boy whipped off his blindfold, the detective continued to Joe: "Pick up your pal; we're goin' back in the house."

Joe obeyed. Nordhoff snatched up the fallen gun, jerked the still groggy Lehman to his feet and steered him up the steps. Once inside the house Nordhoff telephoned Captain Carney.

VII

A HALF HOUR later Nordhoff was giving Captain Carney and Sergeant Trenby his story. Leo's body had been carried to another room to await the coroner. Joe and Max Lehman, glum and dejected, sat in one corner of the room. George Woodward sat with Ted Raleigh on the davenport.

Woodward's face was flushed and he puffed nervously on his cigar as he

listened. Nordhoff watched the man closely as he finished.

He said, "I wanted you to bring Woodward along, Captain, because I thought he'd want to see the boy right off. But there was something else. I wasn't sure before, I am now." He turned to Woodward. "It was a neat idea for a snatch. Dope it out all by yourself?"

"What?" Woodward was incredulous. "Why—why it's preposterous! Why should I—"

Nordhoff's smile was grim. "Because you needed the money, I suppose. You were co-executor of the estate; it wouldn't be hard to convince the bank."

"Hold on!" snapped Carney, hard-eyed, angry.

"I suppose," said Nordhoff, ignoring his superior, "you've never been here before, eh, Woodward?"

Woodward said, "Certainly not," indignantly.

"You were here tonight."

"That's a lie!" Woodward came to his feet, his face twitching.

Carney stepped toward Nordhoff. "Take it easy."

Nordhoff's nose wrinkled and he sniffed the air greedily. He had fashioned a bandage for his leg, but it was stiffening now and he limped as he moved towards Woodward.

"You've never been inside this house?" he repeated quietly.

"Never and—"

Nordhoff snatched the cigar from Woodward's fingers. "I couldn't place this smell when you first had me down here." He turned to Carney, pointing the cigar. "Woodward has these cigars made especially for him. You'll find them at his home."

Carney said, "What about it?"

Nordhoff walked to the table, picked

up a cigar stub; on the bookcase he found another. "Lehman and the fourth man in this room smoked these earlier this evening. They are the same kind as this one I just took from Woodward—I'm sure of the smell. Anyway, it won't be hard to check up."

Woodward said, "Ridiculous."

Nordhoff grunted, said, "Maybe. But this fourth masked man sat in that corner. He had a drink. The glass he used is on the bookcase. It won't be hard to find out how your finger-prints check with those on the glass."

CARNEY swore and turned on a scowling, wild-eyed Woodward, turned just in time to face a blue-steel revolver that had appeared as if by magic in the man's hand.

Ted Raleigh, his face incredulous, frightened, jumped to his feet. "Uncle George!" he gasped, "you didn't—"

Woodward slapped the boy back on the davenport, snarled an oath. Then the scowl vanished in a sly-eyed smile; his voice became thin, steady as he spoke. "I knew I shouldn't have accepted that drink." He moved forward. "My plan was clever enough—" He shrugged. "There's only one thing left to do. Put up your hands."

Nordhoff tensed. Little knots of muscle rippled under the skin of his jaws. Sergeant Trenby reached for his service revolver. He never had a chance. Woodward's shot drilled his shoulder, left his arm limp.

Woodward said, "Put 'em up! I'm rather handy with this thing."

When the command was obeyed Woodward continued, "I'm too old to go to jail. I should commit suicide, I suppose; but I'm too fond of life for that. I rather needed the money, and, fortunately, I was able to get it from the bank this afternoon. So I can

get away with that much, at least. I hate to run off, but—"

He looked at Lehman and Joe. "Come on, you two. I can still pay you off if you want to risk a getaway."

The two men stumbled to their feet. Lehman hesitated. Joe said, "Sure," eagerly.

"Good." Woodward smiled, glanced at Carney. "I'm afraid I'll have to lock you up."

Carney spoke angrily. "You'd be better off if you took your medicine. I've got two men outside."

"I know it." Woodward turned to Joe. "Get their guns, toss 'em on the table." When this had been done, he said, "Now open that hall closet." He motioned to Carney, Trenby, Nordhoff. "If you please. Take Ted with you."

Nordhoff limped to the hall, joined the others in the stuffy closet. The door shut, the key clicked in the lock.

TRENBY cursed and threw his good shoulder against the panel.

Carney said, "Let's get together."

It was nearly two minutes before the stout door gave under their combined assault. Carney said, "Get our guns, Trenby," and led Nordhoff towards the side door. The two plainclothesmen had been handcuffed together and around a pillar of the porch. It took another minute to find the keys and release them.

There were deep tire marks in the soggy lawn where the sedan, already headed in the right direction, had swept around the police touring car. The five men and the boy piled into the car. They backed down the driveway and turned towards a faint sweep of speeding headlights a mile away.

Carney said, "We'll have a hell of a time catching 'em on this road."

The plainclothesman who was driving said, "We can go as fast as they can in this mud."

Then Nordhoff remembered. In the press of the past few minutes he had forgotten the work he had done on the sedan. A clear-cut picture flashed through his brain. A glow of satisfaction warmed his spirits. It was still raining, the sedan windows would still be closed. He laughed grimly, said, "They won't go far."

"What d'ya mean?" rapped Carney.

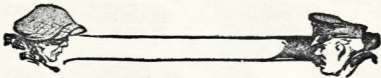
"I mean—"

They found the sedan in the ditch three miles farther on. The mud on the side of the car told how it had turned over more than once. It rested on its top now. One front wheel was still spinning.

They found Lehman and Joe still alive. Woodward was dead, his neck broken. Ted Raleigh seemed stunned by the shock and the sudden turn in affairs.

Nordhoff put his arm around the boy's shoulder, led him to the police car, helped him into the back seat. He started to speak, changed his mind. He placed a big hand on the boy's knee, gave it a quick, reassuring squeeze and went back to the sedan.

Captain Carney, helping the dazed Lehman from the wreck, glanced at Nordhoff, said, "I had an idea you'd plug along on this job till it was cleaned up." He turned back to Lehman, spoke over his shoulder, "A little more practice 'n you'd make a first-class nursemaid."



15 Years in the Underworld

By 'Frisco Jimmy Harrington

NEXT week begins an amazingly frank confession by a big-time crook. He served six and a half years before he made a dime out of crime. A few weeks later he cleaned up \$60,000. He was double-crossed by other crooks and by law officers, of course—but he also admits he did plenty of double-crossing himself when he had to.

This is a true, brutal story. Harrington, as he calls himself, was a tough guy. A stream of water from a high pressure hose that knocked out three of his front teeth while he was strapped naked to a wooden cross in a state penitentiary was one of the things that made him tough.

Above all this is an exciting and an honest story. It's the confession of *your* enemy, the crook.

Begin it next week in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



She bore the girl's body out
upon the flimsy bridge

Dumb Egg

By John H. Knox

*A Body Hurling through
a Broken Bridge, and a
Murderous Woman Skulk-
ing through the Dark
Woods . . .*

FROM her whitewashed front gate, Salina Lantry could follow the slow movements of a pigmy figure on the winding Clearwater road. "Little hussy!" the woman muttered.

Unconsciously she lifted a pudgy, ring-heavy hand to pat the coils of dark hair molded about her painted face, while her hate-filled mind evoked in detail the figure which her eyes could see only as an animated dot. Yes, it would be Ellie Birchfield—Ellie, with her blond curls and smiling face. "Little wretch!" the woman repeated. "Loitering, hoping he'll come out to meet her—brazen little wench . . ."

Her muttering broke short as the heavy tread of booted feet sounded on the packed dirt of the yard behind her.

She turned to confront the hulking form of Opie Birchfield.

"Ma'm," he said, "I've finished with the new chicken pen, all but the nests, which I can do tomorrow, if it's all right . . ."

"Yes, you can go, Opie," she said. Abstractedly she studied the great bulk of his body, the placid, guileless cast of his face.

Opie, who was Ellie Birchfield's brother, had worked for Salina ever since she came to live on the little place inherited from a dead brother. After almost a score of years with third-rate road shows she had found herself unable alone to cope with the problems of the three-acre truck patch and the flock of fine Plymouth Rocks. Opie had handled that admirably. Salina regarded him critically.

"Opie," she said aloud, "isn't that Ellie I see coming along the road there?"

He shielded his eyes with a large hand.

"Sure 'tis," he replied. "She was set on doin' a little shoppin' in town."

"It looks to me," Salina pursued, "as if she were going to Jeff Huffines' place."

"Yes'm," Opie agreed. "I reckon maybe she'll pick up a dozen eggs there."

"Eggs?" asked Salina. "I thought you had chickens."

"So we have," he answered, "but our hens ain't layin' now. These here eggs of yours bring a better price at the grocer's than we pay for them nondescript ones Jeff sells."

"Opie!" she cut him short, and the flush of angry reproach on her face startled him. "You're just a dumb egg yourself! Can't you see what's going on? Your sister only nineteen, and Jeff a man of forty! And him living alone,

and her going by there, going in his house. People are beginning to talk."

Opie's shaggy brows dipped over his mild eyes. He blinked. "But, ma'm," he protested, "I don't think nothin' wrong of it. Jeff Huffines is a honest-like sort of man. I've knowed him all my life. I . . ."

A shrill, unpleasant laugh broke in upon him. "You'll be a fool all your life, Opie," she cackled. "But if something—if something does happen, don't say I didn't tell you."

Opie Birchfield took his leave and plodded up the road into the hills. Salina's eyes followed him with anger and contempt. Then abruptly she swung about and stared again toward the valley. Salina swore then, a very ugly oath.

A second dot had joined the first one, and the two, a scarcely distinguishable blur now, were moving together toward Jeff Huffines' house. From the heights the woman watched them, as a hawk might watch the movements in a chicken yard. In her eyes the same cold and murderous light was gleaming. Presently she took a deep breath, as one does when a momentous decision has been made, and, turning away, ran quickly into the house.

"The fool!" she muttered. "The dumb egg! He'll never do anything. I'll have to do it myself!"

AN hour later Salina Lantry crouched in a wild plum thicket and watched the slow progress of two figures coming along the little path among the trees below. She had spied on them before and she was familiar with their usual procedure. After leaving Jeff Huffines' house, Ellie had taken the little trail which ran through the canyon below Salina's place in preference to the main high-

way. The Birchfield place was about a half mile farther up the road. Jeff usually walked with her to a point where a little footbridge of pine poles crossed the swift but shallow stream which ran through the ravine.

Salina, with one tense hand clutching the butt of a thirty-two revolver in the pocket of her riding breeches, watched them in breathless silence. She could hear the silvery peal of Ellie's laughter, which was like a knife being twisted in her breast. Once, with gritted teeth and tears of angry jealousy, she had snatched the pistol out and leveled it. Then, with an effort, she had put the weapon back into her pocket.

No, she would not be foolish. She was not the type of woman to resort to that sort of madness. What she did must be as cunning as it was terrible.

The two figures had now paused by the bridge. Jeff Huffines, his big face handsome in the reflected sunset, was holding the girl's slender body in his arms. Salina ground her teeth and turned away. Keeping within the shelter of the brush, she crept back into the trees.

II

WHEN Ellie, coming along the trail with her parcel from the store and her sack of eggs, and a happy smile lingering on her face, saw the figure of Salina Lantry approaching, her heart took a sudden jump of alarm. But when Salina looked up with an expression of surprise and called out, "Why, hello, dearie!" her fears faded away.

"Hello," she answered, and mustered an embarrassed smile.

"Been to the store?" Salina pursued as she strolled up, smiling. "Opie was expecting you to come along the high-

way. He was waiting to walk home with you."

The girl's eyes fell.

"Well," she stammered, "I had to go by Mr. Huffines' place for the eggs. I thought Opie knew . . ." She looked up uneasily. "Is he still there?"

"Oh, yes," Salina said. "I told him I'd stroll down here and see if you'd taken the lower trail, while he watched the highway. He didn't want you to walk home alone."

She took the girl's arm and half guided, half pushed her up the hill. A silence fell over them as they climbed, a silence punctuated only by the sound of their footsteps on the rocks and leaf mould. It seemed to Salina that she could see the girl's pulse fluttering under the soft flesh of her arm.

"A little tired, aren't you, dearie?" she inquired.

"A little," Ellie said, and laughed nervously.

"Well," Salina muttered grimly to herself, "you'll get a long rest!"

They came up behind the cow lot and rounded the corner of the wire-fenced chicken pen. Dusk was thick in the air. The girl walked a little ahead now. Salina's glance lingered on the back of her head, where the curly golden hair lay in a knotted braid. The girl was looking about.

"Where's Opie?" she asked, a little anxiously.

"Probably at the front of the house," Salina said. But her eye was on the gate of the chicken yard. Hanging in the wire mesh near the latch was a heavy iron wrecking bar, crooked like a cane. She stopped.

"Wait, dearie," she said, "and I'll show you something cute. Little chicks; the cutest little things you ever saw." She unlatched the gate, pushed it open. "They're in the incubator shed there."

"But I'd better . . ." Ellie paused uncertainly.

"No, no, just a minute. You must see them." She gave the girl a little shove.

Ellie, burdened with her bundles, stooped to enter the low gate. All was silent. A queer tingling rose up from Salina's breast into her throat. She snatched a quick breath, grasped the iron wrecking bar, lifted it . . .

FOR a long moment Salina Lantry stood above the silent figure sprawled in the dirt. Consciousness came back to her in gradual waves. What had she done? Ah, yes! The wrecking bar was still in her hand; she was shaking, yet she stared at the blurred object at her feet without horror. Silence, the stars peeping out, winking at her with infinite disregard, all were comforting. She laughed. It was a simple matter after all.

She left the body where it lay and went into the house. In the kitchen sink she washed the wrecking bar and her hands. Then she took a small flashlight and a pillow slip and went back outside.

She stooped beside the body, lifted the bloody head and thrust the pillow slip over it. Then, tentatively, she lifted the dead weight of the body. The girl was small and Salina was a powerful woman. That much would be easy. She looked at the bundle which had fallen from Ellie's hands. She would have to make two trips. Very well, she had plenty of time. She took the body up in her arms as she might have done a child, and went down the slope toward the canyon trail.

The bridge, a flimsy thing of pine poles, shivered under the double weight as she bore the girl's body out to the center. Here she laid it down and tested

the narrow rail. The strips that formed it were rotten. Bracing herself against one of the upright supports, she placed her foot against the opposite rail and pushed out. The rail broke and splintered pieces fell into the rushing stream below.

Salina flashed the light down upon the water. It was a shallow stream, plunging over a bed of jagged boulders, some of them a foot or more above the current. One, just beneath the bridge, presented a flat dry surface above the water.

She flashed off the light, removed the pillow slip from the head of the corpse and shoved it off the bridge. It struck the water with a splash.

She waited a moment, then flashed the light on again. The arrangement pleased her. The upper part of the body lay upon the flat rock, hands sprawled, just as the girl might have fallen. The legs lay in the current, between jagged outcroppings. She observed that a dry part of the big rock which had not been wet by the splash bore a stain where blood had seeped from the wounded head. It was perfect. No one could say that the battered head had not resulted from the fall.

SALINA returned to the house. The bundle lay where it had fallen; luckily there was no blood on it. The sack of eggs lay at a little distance. Two of them had rolled out and lay smashed in the dirt. Most of those in the sack were broken. Salina picked the sack up hurriedly, and kicked dirt over the broken eggs. She covered the blood spots in the dirt in the same manner, then took a rake and smoothed the ground. Was that all? A thought struck her suddenly, left her giddy with the curious sense of terror that follows a narrow escape.

Those eggs! It was all right for the eggs to be smashed. But for two of the eggs to be missing from a dozen—that was something which might be noticed, the eggs, though broken, could still be counted. Thank God, she had thought of it in time. She ducked into a hen-house and came out with two eggs in her hands. Then she thought of something else. Were these eggs the same color? Yes, Jeff Huffines had Rhode Island Reds—big tan eggs like her own Plymouth Rocks laid. She dropped the two eggs in, twisted the neck of the sack, and stood a moment longer in thought. Then, satisfied that she had overlooked nothing, she went back down to the bridge.

Salina not only had a quick mind, but a gift for thoroughness as well. Her procedure now was an example. She stood in the center of the bridge, put the bundle under her left arm and held the sack of eggs in her right hand. Then she imagined herself leaning on the rail, falling. The outflinging of the left arm would have allowed the bundle to drop straight down. She let it fall. It hit the water with a splash just a little below the body, drifted a few yards and grounded on a little shoal of gravel.

Now the eggs. Grasped in the right hand, they would have been flung out, would have landed a little above the body, likely.

She threw them. Her flashlight showed where they had landed—in a tangle of brush and driftwood just a couple of yards from the girl's outflung right arm.

Salina returned home. Again she went over the chicken yard to see if she had overlooked anything. She put the wrecking bar and the rake in their accustomed places and burned the blood-stained pillow slip. Then she drank a

cup of coffee laced with a little gin and went to bed.

III

IT was about midnight when Salina was awakened by shouts. She stared out the window and saw the glare of lantern light through the trees. She got up, threw a cloak over her nightclothes, slipped on her boots, and went down into the canyon.

Just as she had expected, Ellie Birchfield's body had been found. They were taking it out of the water when she arrived. Opie, who had come searching and had found the body, was there; also Jeff Huffines and Dr. Parlett and the sheriff.

Huffines, with hands trembling despite his efforts to keep calm, told of how Ellie had come by his house to get eggs. He did not tell that he had accompanied her a part of the way home. Salina looked at his haggard face, splashed by the lantern's glare, and a deep laughter bubbled unheard in her throat.

The doctor made his examination; the sheriff carefully scrutinized the broken rail, and the expressed opinion was that the thing had been an accident.

"Top and back of the head's pretty badly battered," the doctor ruminated, "but I reckon she must have landed head down and then rolled over."

Salina, studying the anxious mask of Huffines' face, saw the big man take a deep breath of relief.

Only Opie Birchfield had said nothing. The enormity of the blow had completely overwhelmed him. He stared dully at the corpse, dry-eyed and silent; then he wandered off into the water, carefully retrieved the sack of eggs and the parcel, and came back to the bridge. The bundle had come un-

ted, and the wet paper had fallen away, revealing the little roll of checked gingham and the odds and ends of thread and trimming which Ellie had bought for a dress. Opie stood there, a great hulking figure, unnoticed by all save Salina, and as she saw one huge, clumsy hand rub over the checked material with an abstracted, stroking gesture, she turned her head quickly away. Something like pain stabbed her heart.

FROM her window, next day, Salina Lantry watched the funeral procession wind out of the village and crawl up the hill to the cemetery. But no twinge of remorse troubled her, no fear either, for no hint of any suspicion had reached her ears.

Opie came to work as usual the next morning. Silent and moody, he went about his routine chores with the air of a man only half alive. Once Salina surprised him as he stood leaning against the cow-lot fence, staring silently down into the canyon. At first it gave her a little tremor of fear. Had some germ of suspicion crept into his simple mind?

Then she saw that he was holding in one hand a little scrap of the checked material from Ellie's bundle. When he saw her he seemed embarrassed and tried to hide it.

"What's that you have there, Opie?" she asked.

He lowered his eyes and poked in the dirt with his boot toe. "Piece of goods," he mumbled.

"Oh, I see," she said quickly, "from that package, isn't it?"

"Yes'm," he said. "I sort of like to keep it. I reckon it's the last thing Ellie touched," and he smiled shakily and put it away.

In the days that followed, the last

lingering apprehension vanished from Salina's mind. She went about her work humming, and she began to primp for an hour at a time before the mirror, dressing her lustrous black hair. Then, when a week had passed, Salina could wait no longer.

Dressed with careful negligence and with her fading beauty enhanced with just the right amount of makeup, she stole out of the house at nightfall and made for Jeff Huffines' place.

She found him alone, seated before his big fireplace, in an attitude of profound melancholy. She watched him through the window, then went to the door and knocked—two knocks, pause, one knock—a signal they had used before.

Huffines' face, when he saw her, betrayed surprise and annoyance. He was scarcely even courteous as he opened the door. There was no light except that from the fire. This flicker-splashed darkness, she felt, was a fitting frame for her charms. But Huffines was unmoved; he stared morosely into the fire and scarcely looked at her. Finally he said, "Why did you come here, Salina? You know it's all over between us."

She bit her tongue savagely, tried to repress the flush that mounted to her cheeks. Swiftly she glided to his side, laid an arm about his shoulders.

"Jeff, Jeff," she breathed, "you can't mean that. Not after all I've done for you . . . after all you've told me . . . our love . . ."

Jeff pulled away, jerked to his feet, and stood frowning at the floor.

"I do mean it," he said gruffly. "Every damned word of it! That's all over."

She stood up, a tragic figure, she fancied, arms outthrust, eyes imploring.

"Jeff," she sobbed, "Jeff . . ." Then when the man's granite face remained sulky and unmoved, a swift change came over her features, a look of infinite guile and hatred. "Then," she said softly, staring through slitted eyes, "you didn't do it for me after all, Jeff?"

He looked up quickly.

"Do what?" he barked.

She gloated on his alarm.

"You know," she said, "but no, I see it wasn't done for me. You just didn't want to marry her, I suppose . . ."

The face of Jeff Huffines was suddenly a terrible thing to see. "You—" he spat. Then, with a step toward her, and fists knotted, he added, "Get out!"

In that moment Salina could have killed him.

She backed away to the door, her eyes, like twin pits of boiling oil, flashed him a message, which, if he could have read it, would have made him tremble. Then she ducked out swiftly and closed the door behind her.

She cried a little as she climbed the slope, but by the time she had reached her house the tears had purged her of all softness. She was hard now, she told herself, harder than Jeff Huffines' face; she was a thing of steel and flint.

IV

THE Rev. Milford Gimbles often came up into the hills to visit the various members of his flock. He was a lank man, with a long, dour face and small black eyes, which looked with perpetual disapproval on a sinning world. He had often stopped at Salina's house on the pretext of getting a drink of water, but really for the purpose of finding an opportunity to prove the condition of her soul. This ambi-

tion had never been realized. He was therefore surprised when, after complying with his usual request, Salina invited him in.

He sat down and assumed his best air of severe benevolence. From the haggard, tortured lines of the woman's face, his keen sixth sense had smelled some sort of confession in the offing. He was not disappointed. He listened patiently through the slightly hysterical preliminaries, the "burdened mind, sleepless nights, tears and prayers," and so on, and encouraged the excited woman with unctuous mumbings. But when the name of Ellie Birchfield was mentioned he sat up with sudden alarm.

"You mean, Sister," he hissed, "you mean that you suspect this man Huffines?"

"Oh!" Salina sobbed, "but I'm sure he did it for me—that's the horrible part of it. Oh, I didn't know, I couldn't, that our love would lead to such . . ."

"Sister!" snapped the Rev. Gimbles, raising a large hand, "sinful you are, but the Lord will forgive. Go on with the particulars."

Salina told how she had spied on Huffines' meetings with the girl, of how she had seen them walking together toward the bridge on the evening of the crime. Finally, with tears and hand wringing, she produced her trump card. It was a silk handkerchief which Huffines had once given to her. It bore his initials in one corner, and Salina had stained it with chicken blood.

The Rev. Gimbles stared at the bloody handkerchief, speechless with horror.

"Sister," he admonished, "compose yourself. This matter is out of your hands now." Then he seized his flop-

brimmed hat, mounted his mare and galloped away.

THAT same afternoon Jeff Huffines was arrested. The sheriff called on Salina and she repeated her act for his benefit and gave him the handkerchief. He lectured her sternly on the crime of concealing evidence and left her in tears. As soon as he had gone, Salina dried her eyes and took a drink. Then she stood by the window for a long time, staring down at Jeff Huffines' house. "He turned me down!" she repeated over and over to herself through gritted teeth.

Opie Birchfield, when confronted with the news of Huffines' arrest, was incredulous.

"Ah!" he said finally. "Ah!" He thought a moment. "But I don't believe it," he added. "No, I don't believe Jeff Huffines would kill little Ellie."

"You're blind!" Salina said, and sent him off to work.

A few days later the grand jury indicted Jeff Huffines for murder in the first degree. Salina, who had sent Opie into town on some trifling errand, really for the purpose of getting the latest news, received the report with scarcely concealed satisfaction. Huffines had finally admitted his affair with the girl, but had continued to stubbornly deny the crime itself. The admission of the love affair, however, had been too strong a point against him.

"And what do they think?" Salina asked Opie. "Do the people think he's guilty?"

"Most of 'em seem to," Opie said. He said it in a way which told Salina clearly that the talk had had its influence on him too. "But some of 'em

don't," he added. "Jeff Huffines has got lots of friends."

Salina knew that this was true. It had worried her considerably. Huffines had never, by word or hint, suggested that she might have framed the evidence against him. But Salina knew that he must know it. If a jury should acquit him he might call her to a reckoning in his own way. And there was a chance that he might be acquitted.

"Opie," she said, "I've heard talk of a mobbing, in case the jury doesn't convict Huffines."

"Yes'm," Opie said, "they say that."

"And you don't approve of it?" she shrilled. "You wouldn't help lynch the murderer of your sister?"

"I don't know," Opie said miserably. "I just don't know, ma'm. Somehow it don't seem right . . ."

"Not right?" she cried. "Not right to avenge your sister's blood? Why it's not only right, it's a man's duty!"

Opie stared at his great hands. She saw the thick, muscular fingers clench and unclench, and she smiled to herself. It was planted into Opie's mind; once embedded there . . . well, if Jeff did get off it would do him little good.

v

BUT the fire which she had kindled broke into a blaze quicker than she had anticipated. She was sitting in her easy chair reading that night when heavy steps on the front porch aroused her. She thought she recognized Opie's tread. But what in the world could he want at this hour? She hurried to the door.

Opie was standing there in the light from the open doorway. His face looked drawn and old, and his mouth was a thin, grim line. In one hand he carried a double-barreled shotgun.

"What is it, Opie?" she asked.

"I got to talk to you," he muttered.

"Well, come in." She preceded him into the room. Already she had guessed the meaning of Opie's visit, and her heart was aflutter with a cruel delight. "Sit down, Opie," she invited, and she took a chair by the writing desk.

But Opie would not sit down. He stood by the table.

"No," he said, "I got to go in a minute. It won't take but a minute. I been thinkin' about what you told me about a man's duty to, to . . ."

"Why, yes, Opie," she prompted eagerly. "I repeat it. It's true."

"And if a man seen that the murderer was escapin', he ought to kill the murderer himself?"

"If he's a real man!" she said fervently.

"Then," said Opie, moving nearer to her, "get you a pen and paper there. I want you to write me something."

Her eyes narrowed now; something in his manner, the strange light in his usually dull eyes, sent a chill of alarm racing alone her spine. She stared at the great fingers gripping the gun, with something like fear.

"But what is it you want me to write, Opie?" she stammered. He was standing over her now.

"I'll tell you," he said.

"But why?" She made a start to get up. He pushed her back. "But why?" she repeated.

"Because," said Opie, "I'm going to kill you in a minnte."

FOR an instant abysmal terror froze the woman's face in a wax-like mask; then she screamed. The scream that began with fear trailed off in a moan of pain, for Opie had seized her wrist in one huge hand and was twisting it.

"Write!" he growled. "Write that you killed Ellie!"

Pain racked her body; she was like a fly in his grasp. Choking back the sobs, she nodded frantically. Anything to escape this terrific pain! He released the pressure a little. With a hand that shook she seized a fountain pen, snatched a piece of paper from the desk, and scrawled a brief confession. Opie dropped her hand.

"Now!" she sobbed, staring up at him. "Now you've made me write it! But a forced confession is no good. And you know it isn't true, you know I didn't . . ."

"I know you did it," Opie said.

"You don't!" she screamed. "You're lying. Why do you think I did it?"

"Listen," Opie said. "What kind of chickens has Jeff Huffines got?"

"Why, why, I don't know . . ." she stammered in confusion.

"Well, I do," Opie said. "He's got Rhode Island Reds, and a sprinklin' of white Leghorns. But them eggs in that sack never came from him. Somebody put them there after Ellie left his house. And I reckon I know who done it. Nobody else for a mile around has got Plymouth Rocks."

Fear clawed at her heart then, but a faint spark of hope kindled too. She had been afraid that he had seen something. This evidence was frail and slender, too slender . . .

"But, Opie," she said desperately, "you can't kill me just on a guess, just because you think you can tell the egg of a Plymouth Rock from a Rhode Island Red. Leghorns you could tell, but not those others, they're just alike, both big and tan . . ."

"I never said I could tell by lookin' at 'em," Opie replied. "You called me a dumb egg wunst. Well, an egg ain't always as dumb as it looks."

"But what on earth do you mean?"

"I'll tell you," Opie said. "You see most of them eggs in that sack was broken. But there was one good one. Well, I wanted to save it. It was, I guess, the last thing Ellie touched. But I knowed an egg would spoil." He paused, staring with grim composure at the woman's fear-wrenched face. "So I decided to hatch the egg out. Then I could name the chicken for Ellie. Well, ma'm, that egg hatched out today. And that chick was not yaller like a Leghorn, nor brownish buff like a Rhode Island Red. That there chick is black—a Plymouth Rock! So you see . . ." His speech broke off abruptly; he took a step back, started to raise the gun.

"DROPP it!" Salina was confronting him with a savage smile.

In her right hand she held the thirty-two revolver which she had succeeded in slipping from a drawer of the desk. "Now!" she grated, "do you want to get killed? Don't raise that shotgun another inch!"

Opie, gripping the gun in a tense and motionless hand, blinked at her stolidly.

"It wouldn't do no good," he said, "even if you killed me. I done wrote a

letter to the sheriff and mailed it to-night. I told him all about it. So you see that'd only make it worse on you . . ."

The sudden explosion of the pistol interrupted him. It slipped now from Salina's limp hand and clattered to the floor. Her body had sagged sidewise in the chair, now it toppled and fell. A dark stream of blood ran out from a hole in her temple and spread in a stain across the rug.

Opie stood for a moment watching the thing with an emotionless face. Then he moved toward the door. He started to put the lamp out, but decided not to touch anything. Softly, he closed the door behind him.

Outside the bright stars winked; the air was sweet and cool. The latch on the gate clicked behind him; Opie was in the road. He looked up and down, but saw no cars approaching.

"She nearly had me there," he muttered to himself. "Yes, sir, if I hadn't thought about that story of sendin' a letter to the sheriff . . ." He shifted the shotgun up under the crook of his left arm. With his right hand he reached into his pocket and fished out a little square of checked gingham. His fingers caressed it as he plodded along the dusty road.

For next week THE CRIME JURY recommends—

THE GRIFFIN'S GAMBIT

A Novelette

By J. Allan Dunn

A legless horror creeps into a guarded house
and Manning and the Griffin battle hand to hand

The Criminologist Says

By Major C. E. Russell



Consulting Criminologist for the States of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut; former Provost Marshal on the confidential staff of General Pershing for special investigating—he will help you with your problems.

Case No. 3

Recently, I have been receiving letters threatening to kidnap my daughter unless a large sum of money was paid. When I received the first one I took it up with the police and we placed a dummy package as instructed, but no one ever came for it. Shortly afterwards, I received a second letter, warning me that if I tried to trap the writer again I would never see my daughter. A third letter ordered me to place the money in a new spot secretly. I complied, but the package was not taken. Now a fourth letter has come.

Besides myself, my family consists of my daughter, a nursemaid, three servants, and my nephew by marriage. I divorced my wife three years ago, and was given the sole custody of the little girl. I am at my wits' end and have spent a large sum for a bodyguard for the girl. How can I stop this?

It is evident that there is no real plot to abduct your daughter but rather one to cause you as much worry and trouble as possible. A real gang would have collected long ago, inasmuch as you say you are willing to pay.

I believe that your former wife is the source of this annoyance. She must have a contact inside your home that is keeping her posted on your movements.

Possibly you may solve your difficulty in some way such as this: announce that you are going out of town for a week or ten days. Leave your home, take a room in a hotel and see to it that no one can reach you at your office on the phone. I believe your wife will make an attempt to spirit the girl away. Secure the services of one or two men you can trust and place a watch over your house at night. Do not be discouraged if you do not succeed in trapping anyone the first or even the second night. Persist.

Case No. 4

Four years ago our home was robbed and the insurance companies, claiming it was an inside job, have refused to pay. Our case is coming up in court very soon and unless we can find Mary Zolinski, our Polish servant at that time, we cannot collect. Unfortunately Mary has disappeared and we cannot find her. She came to us through our regular maid, who has returned to Poland. Can you assist us?

Your best hope of locating her is through some employment agency that specializes in Polish servants. All agencies are required to keep a record of each applicant. Select the agencies in your city that specialize in Polish servants. Visit each one, explain why you need to find Mary Zolinski, ask to go through their files, find Mary's card, and on it you will find listed her relatives in this country. Through these relatives you should locate the girl.

YOU MAY WRITE US YOUR PROBLEMS. Letters will be answered at the discretion of Major Russell. If you so designate, your letter will not be reprinted here. In any case your letter will be held in strict confidence and no initials or identification will appear in this column. You must attach the coupon underneath, signed, and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. This service is free.

I want guidance in the matter I have outlined in the attached letter. This is not to be regarded as legal service or investigation service and I will not hold **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY** or Major C. E. Russell responsible in any way.

Name.....

Address.....



**ILLUSTRATED
CRIMES**
by Paul Berdanier
THE LOVE SLAYER OF HOVE, ENGLAND

"Dear Chief,
I must have been very mad. I had a brainstorm and woke up in the night with war horrors. The next thing I knew I was in London. Tell the coroner financial matters did not affect me."

Such was the letter received by the Chief Constable at Hove, England, from Norman Percival Bailey, who was being sought on two continents for the murder of his wife, Margery, on the night of December 6, 1924. A second letter was received by the editor of the Staffordshire Sentinel.

"Dear Editor,
Just before I go to join my dearest Margery, I want to ask you to see that we are not wrongly judged. I must have gone completely mad, because my wife was my dearest treasure."

A dragnet was flung around London. Watch was kept at all British seaports, then at all European seaports. Months passed. The search extended to America, but there was no sign or further word from the slayer.

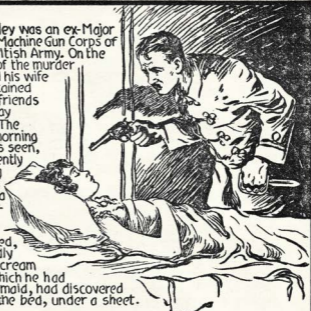
COMING NEXT WEEK—



**Mrs. NORMAN
PERCIVAL BAILEY**

Bailey was an ex-Major in the Machine Gun Corps of the British Army. On the night of the murder he and his wife entertained some friends at a gay party. The next morning he was seen, apparently leaving for his job at a motor-parts plant.

He was spruce, well-groomed, freshly shaved. He had hardly turned the corner when a scream came from his apartment which he had just left. Grace Bishop, the maid, had discovered the body of Mrs. Bailey on the bed, under a sheet.



There was a bullet hole in her head. A French trench knife, five inches long, was buried to the hilt in her breast. The bullet from an army service pistol was on the floor. A note on the bed explained that the murder had been done "just for love."

Despite the worldwide search, Major Bailey was never found alive. In May, 1925, his body was discovered floating in the Thames. It had been in the water a long time. The police theory is that Bailey committed suicide not many hours after he slew his wife. Whether he killed her "for love," or in a brainstorm induced by shell-shock, will remain a mystery forever. What induced him to write and post those strange letters as he wandered around London with the police in full cry after him will also remain a mystery.



THE DOUBLE-FACED RAIDER OF MONTREAL



Flashes From Readers

Where Readers and Editors Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

NOT so long ago a big-time crook came into the office of the Editor of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY*. He'd been known in the underworld from coast to coast. He'd pulled one of the most sensational jewel robberies on record, and broken—or gotten—himself out of some of the toughest pens. Someone remarked that hard times bred crooks.

"That's the bunk. Crooks are born. Look at me, for instance," said the ex-con. He went on to give some of the highlights of fifteen years of crime. It was mighty interesting stuff. Here

was a man who'd been a menace to society giving the lowdown on what happened to crooks and how they felt about it. It was inside stuff, frankly told. Here was the confession, and in a way, the challenge of the personal enemy of every honest man; the professional crook. He was telling it—but would he write it?

Getting stuff like this into print is one of the biggest editorial coups. A man like this won't write for money. He made plenty when he was crooking, and he has plenty since he quit the racket. And his confession wouldn't

WHAT is *your* idea of the best story (fiction or true story, regardless of length) published in *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY* since Jan. 1, 1934? For the twelve letters from readers which, in the opinion of *THE CRIME JURY*, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, we will award twelve full yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you liked best. We don't care about your literary style.

Was there some story printed in this magazine which stood out in your memory above all others? Write and tell us about that story. Tell us why you liked it, what there was about it which made it stick in your mind. It isn't necessary for you to have read every story in every issue. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions as someone who has read all the issues from cover to cover. But we must know *why* you liked your favorite story.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.

Make your comments as brief or as lengthy as you wish. But put down all your reasons. Address your letter to *THE CRIME JURY, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York City*, so that it will reach us not later than March 9th, 1935.

make him famous, for he couldn't use either the name that he is using now, or his underworld monicker, which would identify him instantly.

Readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY will remember the tremendous interest with which they followed "I Stole \$1,000,000!" the confession of a burglar; "I Looted Broadway," the confessions of a holdup man; and "To Hell and Back," the inside story of a safe-cracker. It's not every year that such a chance comes to an editor and his readers.

"Why don't you write that, Jimmy?"

"Who'd be interested?"

"Everybody."

"Well—"

In the end—he did. And he wrote it as he told it. It's brutal. It's a challenge. It's the highlights of fifteen years as a big-shot criminal. It's the confession of *your* enemy, the crook.

Next week "15 Years in the Underworld," by 'Frisco Jimmy Harrington, starts in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

SPY STORIES "JUNK"

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for many years but have never contributed to your department in that time. I rather think if you give Max Brand a vacation from writing stories for your magazine it might help, as his spy stories are junk. The "Illustrated Crimes" are O. K. Also *Dan Riddle*. Fred Maclsaac and Judson P. Philips are my favorite authors.

Yours truly,

JOHN PRIHODA,
Nowata, Okla.

SPY STORIES "EPOCHAL"

DEAR EDITOR:

Re Max Brand's two new "spy" novelettes: "The Case of the Sinister Villa" and "The Case of the Little Father of Death." These stories are simply *epochal*. This writer has created a new *motif* in the art of the spy-detective story. The style of his writing is masterful; restrained yet suspenseful, deliberate yet racing. These latest tales, related in a new way, of the most modern type of secret agent yet treated in detective fiction,

are amazing in their verisimilitude. They are the next evolution in the Art of the Detective Story.

So logical, so convincingly, seemingly true-to-real-life, so "packing of a punch," so replete with that air of "things-taking-place-on-the-spot," that one is almost tempted to believe that perhaps Mr. Brand, himself —. Who knows?

Max Brand is an old master and in these narratives he has proved himself again "still a top-notch."

At this time, Brand is the magazine's outstanding attraction. You must tell me the dates of his next offerings.

Sincerely,

WM. B. A. PERLMAN,
Baltimore, Md.

READ UNDER GUNFIRE

DEAR EDITOR:

I came from Cuba, my native country, a little more than six months ago, and I feel that I ought to tell you how much I think of your magazine, which I consider the best in its class, and is one of the most popular short story magazines in Cuba.

As you know, we haven't been very much at peace with ourselves in Habana, specially during the last three years; but during all that time, in spite of the bombs and gunfire, I managed not to miss a single copy of D. F. W., and, believe me, that reading was not only exceptionally interesting, but it gave me more practical knowledge of the English language than what I had gathered in four years of high school at Habana.

Those magazines went from hand to hand among my fellow-students of the English class, and we always got a real thrill out of its pages. Among our favorite authors were Max Brand, Allan Dunn and Ray Phelps, although lately I have missed his stories.

Since I came here, of course, I have read it every week, and I hope I'll be able to say as much many years from now.

Sincerely yours,

CHARLES IRAZOQUI,
New York City.

CRYPTOGRAM FANS!

"Solving Cipher Secrets" is a fascinating word game. Have you tried M. E. Ohaver's popular department in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY? Mr. Ohaver has prepared a book full of advice and hints as to how to play the game. Experts will find the book invaluable. Novices will find it opening up entirely new angles. Get

"CRYPTOGRAM SOLVING"

By M. E. Ohaver

Send 25¢ to DETECTIVE FICTION
WEEKLY,

280 Broadway, New York City

Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. 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.

OUR Solvers' Corps almost nicked par in their encounter with T. F. B.'s "Royal howdah" challenge cipher, No. 282 in the issue of last November 24. As you may recall, par on this construction was set at 175 correct solutions. And exactly 155 answers to the famed maharajah's luncheon difficulties found their way to this department.

A number of solvers found entry through "tiffin," as suggested by the title of the message, duly noting frequencies, etc.; and similarly with "rhubarb," which, despite its pattern, ordinarily would not be easy to guess. Another vulnerable spot was "elephant," due to the high-frequency "e"; and so on. See the current No. 48 for another challenge cipher!

Tarzan's Inner Circle cipher No. 42, published last week, provided an unusually interesting problem in separating the vowels, and in identifying them through their combinations with each other. Thus, symbol J reacted as a vowel in its contacts with low-frequency symbols in JMRYU (11-3-10-15-7), etc. Similarly, N, O, and Y could be classed as vowels.

Of these probable vowel symbols, Y suggested e by its use in the last two positions. Whereupon the vowel digraph YO (e-) could be tried as ea, the commonest divowel beginning with e. And thus to ON (a-), NO (-a), and NY (-e) as ai, ia, and ie, respectively. Using these values, and also with the finality of symbol E showing s, the solution readily followed.

For example, ZNPYXNEY (-i-e-ise), with due attention to the low-frequency P and X, would yield likewise. This word, of course, would give all but one letter of DYXONZ (-ewail), evidently bewail. Next would come: DYENKY (besi-e), beside; MNOEGJE (-ias-os), fiascos; and so on. The translation in full will be found elsewhere in the department.

This week's division puzzle by P. A. R. uses a

regulation 10-letter key word, numbered from 0 to 9. First find zero. Then separate the even and odd symbols, examining the latter for 5; etc. Note the pattern of EYXNX in the cryptogram by Hugh J. Doak, Jr., checking with EYX and YX. Follow up with EP and HYP; U and UHUK; and so on.

Comparison of GSF and GSZFF should provide entry to Mason's contribution. Next, substitute in SYTPZFP, with due attention to the three-letter word BTP. Word 15 will then complete BV, XTF, and XZ. Eibserf's construction is pangrammatic both inside and outside the quotation marks! Look for qu, and compare the endings -RDD and -DYD. Then turn to words 15 and 2.

Symbol X occurs 31 times, 7 times as a double, in Ker's 115-letter "list" message! The Captain's Inner Circle challenge carries a par of 150 solutions! The number of answers submitted will be announced soon. A solution of No. 48 and answers to all of this week's puzzles will be given next week. The asterisks in the last three ciphers indicate capitalization.

No. 43—Cryptic Division. By P. A. R.

TPY)INMPAR(NHP
IYIH

MRNA
MTOM

MANR
MATI

IP

No. 44—Between Landings. By Hugh J. Doak, Jr.

UG D HUG ZPVDSO TPHS EYX GEUDN, D VXE U VUS HYP
HUGS'E EYXNX. YX HUGS'E EYXNX UOUDS EPTUK—D
HDGY EP YXZB YX'T OP UHUK!

No. 45—Rapid Transit. By Mason.

ZBPEX DBUFV SBUF GSF VBLF UFHXNEGK BV HERSG,
GZBUFHETR BOXYG XTF SYTPZFP BTP FERSGK-VEQ
GSXYVBTP LEHFV XZ GSZFF SYTPZFP LEHHEXT LFGFZV
AFZ VFNXTP.

No. 46—A Handy Expression. By Eibserf.

XRSZPID YUAODYD VIZYOBYSR SQNOFRCYRTOYU
YJTPIHJ ETOYOMH WIPYRF GTRSL KPVIZST EPTFD:
"DJOA WIOVLZU NU RCATRDD YERMYU-GOBR KIH D PG
TRF *SQSXPM TIQ."

No. 47—Curious Collection. By Ker.

EDSQPXVROV VXUHXADSPF XDUYEVOT OGHPSAPVXD-
SPF APHZARPSBZXUSY AVVXHXOT: XXMX, BXXHXT,
VXXAVXVO, TLXXDR, *AXX, RODXX, HAPXX, YXSXTAD,
VXNX-VXNX.

No. 48—Asiatic Etude. By The Captain.

*UXGHP XGMXHNQ KUNNZDB HFNGSUNZ ZQB RLSLEPN
JXDU LEPL. HXHLSDXSLQ QLRL MQBDNZ TFXNZD;
UNSLDYRK NGZPNZ. ALGB MFNNS OLGDUYPZ ANKP,
SQXRLOXGV RNQNN.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

37—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 M O U S T A C H E D

38—A London newspaper headline read,
"India: British officer mysteriously missing;
rumored victim of terrorists; official silence."

39—Why not publish the solution of the
Inner Circle cipher in two weeks instead of
in the next issue? This would give us an
extra week to solve the tough one!

40—Judge orders lazy husband to provide
wife with greater monthly income. Loving
mate obediently secures two extra washings
per week.

41—Press paragraph proclaims: "Past poor
production periods produced pickle paucity.
Packers ponder problem; predict premium
prices."

42—Mythological romances often rival
modern marital fiascos! Heavy hearts bewail
lovely Venus yoked with fiery Vulcan; like-
wise monstrous Tityus beside chaste Latona.

Answers to any of this week's puzzles will be
credited to the solver in our February Cipher
Solvers' Club. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETEC-
TIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York,
N. Y.

How Faces Reveal Character

By WILLIAM E. BENTON



RIGHT
or Conscious Side

RAYMOND
HAMILTON

This is the same man!

To see the actual face, fold
the page and bring the right
and left sides together



LEFT
or Subconscious Side

RAYMOND HAMILTON inherited the title of Public Enemy No. 1 at the death of Baby Face Nelson. His face is typical of the most dangerous type of criminals. Note that it is not nearly so unbalanced as that of his brother, Floyd Hamilton, whom I analyzed last week. The face of this man is so nearly normal that he can deceive all except the close observer.

The outstanding physical features are the eyes. They are keen and crafty. They reveal the deceit, the cunning, and the calculated stealth of this man. The left eye is lower than the right, and is more tragic and secretive. A man with eyes like these

will sense danger to himself, and will not court publicity.

There is a close resemblance between the features of Raymond Hamilton and John Dillinger. Both possess keen intuition and a grim sense of humor.

Hamilton's ears are quite small on both sides, and out-thrust, showing a brusque assertiveness of manner. He has the flaring, open nostrils that indicate a predilection for physical action. The deep chin indicates courage, but its shape shows lack of an ability to cooperate. The face as a whole is that of the extreme individualist. The width of the upper head shows great ability to plan.

Next Week—Thomas Touhy

Let William E. Benton Analyze Your Face

FILL out the coupon at the bottom of the page, and mail it to Mr. Benton. Enclose a photograph of yourself and ten cents.

Mr. Benton will tell you what your features reveal of your character. You have qualities and talents that you don't suspect. Your face is your fortune. What is your fortune? You may be following the wrong occupation. You may be in love with the wrong person. You can send in a coupon, with a photograph of anyone you wish. Enclose one dime with each coupon to cover mailing and handling costs.

Only photographs less than three by five inches in size can be returned.

MR. WILLIAM E. BENTON,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Good for one analysis.
Expires 3-9-35.

I enclose a photograph that I want analyzed, and ten cents. Please write me what character this face reveals.

Name.....

Address.....

2-23-35

Next Week the Crime Jury Selects—!

15 YEARS IN THE UNDERWORLD

By 'Frisco Jimmy Harrington

A CONFESSION by *your* enemy, the crook. A man who was a crook for fifteen years tells his grim, dramatic story. He doesn't pull his punches. He doesn't apologize, and he doesn't whine. Men like 'Frisco Jimmy Harrington indirectly cost *you* at least a hundred dollars a year. Here's what they think about the law, and about you.

MURDER FOR MILLIONS

A Novelette

By Richard Howells Watkins

MURDER by millionaires for a stake of billions—that was Ramsay's plan. He gathered his gang, not where criminals hide, but in the castles of Newport. He enlisted the dissolute plutocracy of America to kill the only billionaire alive, to plunge Wall Street into panic, and toss the wealth of the country into Ramsay's sinewy, grasping fingers.

Also THE LADY FROM HELL, by Eugene Thomas; THE GRIF-FIN'S GAMBIT, novelette by J. Allan Dunn; stories by Donald Ross, David Crewe, Ray Cummings, and others.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, March 2 (on sale February 20)

BE A PASSENGER TRAFFIC INSPECTOR



A Real, Well-Paid Job for an Ambitious Man—**TRAINED MEN**—18 to 30—are wanted in the **Roadway and Bus Passenger Traffic Inspection Field**. You can quickly qualify by our short, home-study course and on completion we will place you in a position making up to \$150 per month, plus expense, to start, or a regular position. Rapid advancement with experience. Free Booklet Describes our 15 yr. record. Write for **Standard Business Training Institute**, Buffalo, N. Y. Dept. 5002

PANTS MATCHED TO ANY SUIT

DON'T DISCARD YOUR OLD SUIT Wear the coat and vest another year by getting new trousers to match. Tailored to your measure. With over 100,000 patterns to select from we can match almost any pattern. Send us a sample of cloth today, and we will submit FREE sample of best match obtainable.



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But you need not suffer another day from poorly functioning kidneys or bladder without the benefits of a Doctor's special prescription called Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex).



Dr. T. J. Bastelli

Dr. T. J. Bastelli, famous Doctor, Surgeon, and Scientist of London, says: "Cystex is one of the finest remedies I have ever known in my medical practice. Any doctor will recommend it for its definite benefits in the treatment of many functional kidney and bladder disorders. It is safe and harmless."

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Dr. T. A. Ellis

Dr. C. Z. Rendelle, well-known Physician and Medical Examiner of San Francisco, recently wrote: "Since the kidneys purify the blood, the poisons collect in these organs and must be promptly flushed from the system; otherwise, they re-enter the blood stream and create a toxic condition. I can truthfully commend the use of Cystex."

Because of its world-wide success, in even the most stubborn cases, the Doctor's prescription called Cystex is offered to sufferers from poorly functioning kidneys and bladder under the fair-play guarantee to fix you up to your complete satisfaction or your money back on return of empty package. Get Cystex from any druggist and try it under the money-back guarantee. See for yourself how much younger, stronger, and healthier you will feel by using this special prescription. Cystex must fix you up and do the work to your entire satisfaction in 8 days, or cost you nothing under the money-back guarantee. Beware of substitutes and remember that the kidneys are endangered by drastic irritating drugs or neglect. Cystex is the only specially-prepared Doctor's prescription guaranteed for kidney dysfunctions. Tell your druggist you must have Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). Look for it in the black and red striped package.



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March 15, 1934.

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you see fit.

You may use this letter as

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F. S. PECK INSURANCE AGENCY,

By

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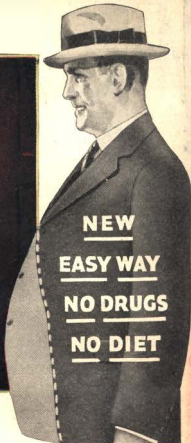
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"I received my belt last Monday," writes S. L. Brown, Trenton, N. J. "I feel 15 years younger; no more tired and bloated feelings after meals."

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"I was 44 inches around the waist—now down to 37½—feel better—constipation gone—and know the belt has added years to my life," D. W. Bilderback, Wichita, Kans.

Loose, fallen abdominal muscles go back where they belong. The gentle changing action of Director increases elimination and regularity in a normal way without the use of harsh, irritating, harmful cathartics.

"I wore the Director Belt and reduced my waistline from 42 to 33 inches. Practically all adipose tissue can surely be eliminated by its faithful use. I have recommended it to many of my patients."
 (Signed) R. A. Lowell

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I have found the Director Belt very efficient in reducing excess fat at the abdomen.

The massaging action of the belt strengthens the abdominal muscles and prevents fatty deposits in the system.

It also increases activity of the stomach and liver, increases the flow of bile and aids digestion and elimination.

This is my experience and I consider these facts important enough to be stated in your advertisements.
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